

# "AP News Service" in Prisons Plagued Axis Authorities

## Germany and Italy "Glad to Be Rid" Of "Disturbing Influence"

By Larry Allen

Associated Press War Correspondent

POWER OF THE PRESS apparently was my pathway to freedom after 20 months as a prisoner of war in Italy and Germany.

No one was exchanged by the United States government for me when I returned to this country on the Gripsholm on June 6. The Department of State had requested the German government to release correspondents but state department representatives said they didn't expect the Germans to let me go. They are just as baffled over my release as I am myself. The only thing I can figure out is that the Germans, like the Italians, were glad to get rid of a "disturbing influence."

### Stayed a Reporter

I was a "disturbing influence" because from the moment of my capture on Sept. 14, 1942, I continued to be a newspaperman. Any freedom-loving American reporter would have done likewise under the same circumstances.

I started my own Associated Press news service in every concentration camp to which I was transferred.

First, in Italy, I set up my AP service, but the Italians didn't like the American way of news presentation. I translated the Italian radiocasts and newspapers but, even in 1942 and 1943, my news picture was definitely on the side of the Allies.

So I made news bulletin boards from Red Cross boxes and streamered the headlines of Italian defeats where every British, American and Italian officer could see them.

The Italian high command didn't like that, either, and my troubles began in earnest.

From Derna, the Italians had flown me to Bari in Italy. There began four months in a valley of death. I was told all Allied ships were being sunk; there were no Red Cross food parcels.

For four months I never saw a bar of soap, or had a towel or a pair of shoes, and wore only a thin khaki torn naval uniform. Chilblains swelled my fingers and toes with water. The only food was a small plate of yellowish liquid called pumpkin soup and a little roll ofhardtack bread that fitted into the palm of the hand.

I constantly protested and fought for my release.

Although my fingers were so swollen it was difficult to hold a pen I made myself a news bulletin board, read and translated Italian newspapers and ran a full-fledged AP news service for the thousands of prisoners who passed through the camp.

Next, I was transferred to Camp No. 21 at Chieti, one of Mussolini's political prisoner concentration camps, converted into use for war captives. A great 20-foot high brick wall surrounded the concentration area. Behind that were repeated strands of barbed wire and constant patrols of *carabinieri*.

### Jammed in Chieti

In Chieti, men were jammed like sardines into red brick barrack buildings, slept upon hard wooden boxslats and sackcloth filled with straw.

My AP news service went on the camp streets in Chieti the same as elsewhere. It was always first with the news as fast as I could hear it over the Italian loudspeaker. The Italians objected repeatedly to the AP style of news presentation, for in wartime fairness doesn't always appeal. They banned my news boards, so I gave the prisoners the news in a verbal newscast.

But news became so important I put my boards back on the streets. I couldn't resist playing up the purge of the Fascist Party and the last hours of the crumbling nation.

The Italian high command ordered the commandant to imprison me for seven days in a special punishment room. That was last Aug. 27. After 48 hours, I wrote the commandant, saying "it was impossible to believe that I am being punished for writing the truth in a country which especially cherishes that characteristic."

The following morning the commandant called me to his office and said that what he was about to do was no indication of weakness on his part but that I could go free. So I went back to my work and my straw bed, which I can only affectionately call a torture rack.

My AP flashes flew thick and

fast in Chieti, Bari, Bologna, and near Milan in the early days of September, for I had trained young British officers to write the American way and to carry on the AP in any camp to which they were transferred. I prepared a flash on the capitulation of Italy on Sept. 3 and wagered that it would happen within a week.

The only break and a new lease on a decent life in Italy



Larry Allen shown just after he set foot on American soil on D-Day, after his long internment in Axis prison camps.

came for five weeks in May of last year when the Italians, not yet convinced whether I was a first lieutenant or a rear admiral, sent me to a British officers' camp, No. 49 at Fontanellata near Milan. But it was too good to last. I was returned to Chieti and later transferred to Sulmona by the Germans.

The Italian armistice found me at Sulmona with about 1,200 British prisoners and five other Americans. On Sept. 28, we were ready to attempt to escape. A number got out but the German guards mowed them down with machine-gun fire. A British officer who was going through the wire just ahead of me was shot. That ended my escape there.

Those of us who remained were loaded on a train—100 to a boxcar—and shipped to Bolzano in Northern Italy. I found an opportunity to jump from a coach in which I was riding with officers and lie alongside the tracks without being seen until the train passed by. I was recaptured by the Germans after getting within 30 miles of the frontier of Switzerland.

Taken to Oflag 64, in the Polish Corridor, 100 miles south of the Baltic Sea, I again started my AP news bulletin board, flash, bulletin, feature and photo service.

The German high command objected to the headlines of German withdrawals and evac-

uations on the Eastern front. One day a delegation headed by the German mayor of a nearby Polish village read the news bulletins and remarked to the German camp command that he didn't know so much was happening to the German army on the eastern front.

The German camp command threatened me with a bread and water diet and isolation. But I proved to the Germans that the news dispatches were only a true and accurate translation of the defeats the Germans themselves admitted in their daily war communiques.

With the appearance of each bulletin the Germans sent a translator to read it and try to find some flaw in the translation.

My news service literally made life miserable for the Germans, for word of what news my AP service published was traveling into all the surrounding Polish villages.

In the meantime, as in Italy, I consistently badgered every visiting general, camp official, Y.M.C.A. representative and men representing the Swiss protecting power for my release as a civilian and non-combatant newspaperman.

### "Glad" to Release Him

Out of a clear blue sky on May 8, 1944, the German camp command told me that it had an order from the German high command directing my release and repatriation to the United States.

"We are glad to get rid of you," said the senior camp official.

Meanwhile, powerful friends in Sweden also had appealed to the German government for my release.

On May 17, I arrived with a thousand British and American sick and wounded at Barcelona, where I boarded the Gripsholm for the United States.

## Young Editor Comes Through on D-Day

John Edwin Pope was named telegraph editor of the *Athens* (Ga.) *Banner-Herald* Monday, June 5.

It is his job to edit thousands of words received by the afternoon daily from the Associated Press, write headlines and draw up a "dummy" for the front page.

On the second day of his new job, John Edwin was confronted with one of the biggest stories in modern history—the Allied invasion of Europe. He went about his business like a veteran, other editors said.

John Edwin is 16 years old.

## EDITOR & PUBLISHER CALENDAR

**June 20-22**—International Circulation Managers Association, Hotel Statler, St. Louis, Mo.

**June 22-24**—National Editorial Association, annual meeting, Schroeder Hotel, Milwaukee, Wis.

**June 23-25**—New Jersey Press Association, Stockton Hotel, Sea Girt, N. J.

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