

MOST SECRET
 M.I.9/S.P.G. (Poland) 1589.

ESCAPED FROM POLAND via GERMANY and FRANCE to SPAIN.
 This information contained in this report is to be treated as
MOST SECRET

ACCOUNT OF ESCAPE OF
 794268 Sgt. RAGINIS, Witold. 305 (Polish) Sqn., Bomber Command, R.A.F.

Captured: Near BREST, 21 Aug 42.
 Left: GIBRALATR, 29 Nov 43.

Escaped: JAWORZNO (Poland), 10 Jun 43
 Arrived: WHITCHURCH, 30 Nov 43.

Date of Birth: 19 Sep 23.
 R.A.F. Service: since 15 Sep 41.
 O.T.U. No. 17 (BRAMCOTE)
 Post in crew: Rear gunner.

Peacetime profession: Student.
 Private Address: 8 Citie Dienat,
 MONTLUGON,
 Department ALLIER,
 FRANCE.

<p>1942 20 Aug Came down in sea off BREST.</p> <p>21 Aug Picked by French boat</p> <p>PARIS.</p> <p>25 Aug. DULAG LUFT.</p> <p>First Interrogation.</p> <p>Second Interrogation.</p> <p>Third Interrogation. Put on bread and water.</p> <p>Fourth Interrogation.</p> <p>Fifth Interrogation.</p>	<p>Other members of crew: F/O BOROWSKI (first pilot) F/O LINTZEL (observer) Sgt. BARSZCZ (second pilot) Sgt. PELC (wireless operator) Sgt. RATAJSKI (front gunner) All the members of the crew are P/W.</p> <p>1. CAPTURE. I was a member of the crew of a Wellington aircraft which took off from HEMSWELL about 2100 hrs. on 20 Aug 42 on a mine-laying operation off BREST. Near BREST, while flying very low, we were hit by flak and lost speed and height, and eventually came down in the sea about five miles off the coast. Sgt. RATAJSKI was injured when the plane hit the sea. We all got into dinghy. We were all night at sea, and about 0600 hrs. (21 Aug) we were picked up by a French fishing boat. We asked the crew to land us in SPAIN, but they said they knew they were being watch from the shore by the Germans. They took us to a small fishing port near BREST. two Germans guards took us from the boat to a room in the village in what appeared to be a local headquarters. here we were asked our natics, ranks, personal numbers, and the number of our Squadron, which last we refused to give. We were given coffee and bread after interrogation. In the afternoon we were taken by car to a small town (no name). In the Luftwaffe headquarters here the contents of our pockets were taken from us and we were again interrogated. We were asked the same questions as before, as well as the nature of the operation on which we had been engaged. We did not tell them this, and they did not insist. The same day we were taken under the Luftwaffe escort by train to PARIS. There were six or seven man in the escort, armed with Tommy-guns and rifles. In PARIS we were kept in separate cells in the Prison de Fresnes. In prison we were separately interrogated by a Luftwaffe officer (an observer of the last war). He wanted to know about our squadron and about Polish squadrons in ENGLAND, number of aircraft in the squadron, the name of our Squadron Leader, our mission, name of our aircraft, and whether we were carrying bombs or mines. No threats or violence were used, and the interrogator adopted a kindly manner. He did not produce the Red Cross form.</p> <p>2. DULAG LUFT. About 25 Aug we were taken by train under escort to DULAG LUFT (FRANKFURT-AM-MAIN). On arrival in DULAG LUFT on the morning of 26 Aug we were put into separate cells. Oyr uniforms were taken away, and we were given foreign (probably French) Army uniforms. Our own were returned to us in a few hours, presumably after they had been searched. We had thrown all our escape kits into the sea when the crew of the French boat refused to take us to SPAIN and we realised we would be handed over to the Germans. On the day of my arrival a Luftwaffe officer, aged about 50 and in uniform, came into my cell with the Red Cross form. He told me in English that I would have to complete the form in order to let my relatives know that I was a P/W. I filled in only my name, rank, and number (as I had been told in the Squadron) and my date and place of birth, putting my pencil through the rest of the questions. The officer said it was not enough. I said it was. He shouted at me, insisting that I must complete the form, and adding that he was not a German and that the information was for the International Red Cross. I insisted that what I had written was all that was required, and the officer the left.</p>
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RAGINIS

Moved into main camp.

Journey to
LAMSDORF

1943.
STALAG VIII B
Change of identity.

Arbeitskommando.
561 TARNOWITZ.

10 Jun.
Escape from JAWORZNO.

DABROWA.
11 Jun.
SZCZAKOWA.

CRACOW.

18 Aug.
Left CRACOW
for SARREBOURG.

14 Sep.
Crossed into FRANCE.

15 Sep.
LUNEVILLE.

25 Oct.
Began to cross
PYRENEES.

After lunch the same day a younger officer came in. He sat down, gave me an English cigarette, and began talking about the weather. We then discussed the food situation in GERMANY, which he said was very good, with only a few things rationed. He asked me about food in ENGLAND, and I retorted that he should go there and see for himself, to which he replied, "We might go after a few months". He asked why I had not filled up the form. I said that as a soldier I was forbidden to give information. He said that I was now a P/W and that for me the war was finished. He asked the same questions as were contained on the form - including number of Squadron, type of aircraft, and mission. I told him there was no use asking me, as I would not answer. He then told me I must not forget I was a Pole, and that he would give me a few hours to think about it.

I knew from lectures that, even I was a Pole, the Germans could do nothing to me. When the same officer returned next day he asked if I was ready to speak. I said "No". He said, "Well, I'll show you". He went out, and for the rest of the day I received only bread and water.

The officer returned next day, and asked if I was ready to speak. I said "No". He asked me to tell him how I had got to ENGLAND - as a matter of fact. I said I would tell him nothing more than I had already done. He stamped about and said I must tell him and that from now on I must stand at attention when I speak to him. He remind another half hour, demanding that I tell what he wanted to know.

Next day he returned with the list and notebook. On the list were names of Polish R.A.F. prisoners. In the book were the numbers and locations of R.A.F. squadrons, O.T.U.s and training schools such as gunnery and pilot courses. He showed me the name of the Polish O.T.U. at BRAMCOTE, and said that 301 and 300 Squadrons were at HAMSWELL. I said, "If you know everything, why do you ask me?" He then asked if there were many American Air Force and Army units in ENGLAND, if there were U.S. bombers and fighters in ENGLAND, and if I knew their locations. I said, "For the tenth time, there is no use asking me questions". He stamped about, and insisted for 15 minutes that I must tell him. He said there was no Poland any longer and no cause for Poles to fight, as GERMANY was so strong, and that would be a good thing to answer the questions and assist a German victory. I replied, "Poland was and will be", adding that I had nothing more to say. He went out.

Next day before lunch I was taken with the others from the cells and taken into the main camp.

3. TRANSFER TO STALAG VIII B (LAMSDORF)

A few hours after being put into the main camp we were attached to a party which was leaving for STALAG VIII B (LAMSDORF) (GERMANY: 1:100,000 Sheet 117,6500.) We were given Red Cross rations for the train journey. Before we left our flying-boots were taken from us and we were given wooden shoes, in which it was very difficult to walk. The journey took three days and three nights. We had a very strong escort. There were two guards in each carriage. When we went to the lavatory the door was kept open and the window was covered by rifle.

I was six months in the main camp at STALAG VIII B, being chained for part of the time.

4. ESCAPE FROM JAWORZNO (POLAND)

At the end of six months I changed identities with 10400 Pte. Edward LEHEM, A.M.P.C., a native of ADEN, who had lived in PALESTINE and had enlisted there. He had been captured in GREECE. As LEHEM I went out to Arbeitskommando 561 at TARNOWITZ (TARNOWSKIE GORY) (N.W. of BEUTHEN in POLISH SILESIA) (GERMANY, 1:100,000, Sheet 118, 6090). Here the party worked at the railway station loading and unloading coal, stones, and sand and else on the railway track. I was here for about three months. I looked for opportunities of talking to Polish civilians in the hope of getting help to escape, but this was difficult, as we were under very strict guard.

I heard in the camp that P/W could volunteer for work in coal mines. This seemed to offer better opportunities of escape, as workers underground in the mines were not guarded and were in contact with Polish civilians; also the mines were father inside POLAND.

In TARNOWITZ I met Sgt. BAKALARSKI (S/P.G. (P)1570). He and I, as well as two Canadians (one in the R.A.F. and one in the Army who had been captured at DIEPPE) and two British R.A.F. men volunteered for work in the mines. Like myself, they had all changed identities with men who remained in STALAG VIII B. We all passed a medical commission as fit to work in the mines. We were asked why we wanted to move, and said that we had not enough food in TARNOWITZ (which was untrue) and had heard that the mineworkers got more.

In TARNOWITZ four R.A.F. men escaped and got to POLAND. One was killed by Gestapo near CRACOW about Apr 23. I do not know their names.

from TARNOWITZ we were sent to the Dachsgrube in JAWORZNO (GERMANY, 1:100,000, Sheet 128,9060), arriving in May 43. BAKALARSKI and I were there till 10 Jun.

During this first month I worked with Polish civilians and eventually made contact with a man belonging to a Polish organisation. In the second week in Jun we learned that we were shortly to be transferred to BEUTHEN, and we realised that we must act quickly. We were working on day shift, and at 2200hrs. on 10 Jun cut a hole in the wire at our camp. At 0100 hrs. the night shift returned from the mine, and when the barrack door was opened to let them in, we managed to slip out.

BAKALARSKI got out 15 minutes before me through the wire. It had been arranged that two Poles should be waiting for us a short distance from the camp. The same night the Gestapo were waiting within about 100 meters of our rendezvous from Polish partisans who hid in the woods nearby. We walked right into the Germans. BAKALARSKI and his guide were first. There was

FONTARGENTE
(Left by guide).

26 Oct.
Back in FRANCE.

Sheltered at hut.

ASTON.

URS.

MERENS-LES-VALS.

3 or 4 Nov.
Second crossing.

shooting, and his guide was killed. BAKALARSKI (as described in his report) escaped and was recaptured after two days.

I was met by the unknown Pole, who took me to a farm at DABROWA (GERMANY, 1:100,000, Sheet 128,8565). I was one night at the farm, and on 11 Jun I walked with the guide to SZCZAKOWA (Sheet 128,9065) where I stayed two or three days with a Polish family. Here I was given a railway uniform and, traveling on a railway engine as assistant to the driver, crossed the new German frontier at TRZEBINIA into POLAND and went on to CRACOW.

In CRACOW I was taken to a house where I lived for a week. I was given a Polish identity card and work card as a railwayman. I was then moved to another house in CRACOW, where I remained for about seven weeks till arrangements were made for BAKALARSKI (who had joined me after a month) and me to travel to SARREBOURG as voluntary workers.

5. JOURNEY TO SARREBOURG: ESCAPE TO FRANCE.

Various plans had been considered for getting us out of POLAND, including the journey to TURKEY or ROUMANIA or SWEDEN (via GDYNIA). Our journey to SARREBOURG was arranged at the Arbeitsamt in CRACOW, and as volunteers we were allowed to choose where we would work. We were given papers in false names.

We left CRACOW by train on 18 Aug. On arrival in SARREBOURG we wanted to get to France at once, but a Polish worker whom we consulted said the frontier was being closely guarded because of the number of Lorrainers and Alsations who were evading into FRANCE. The Arbeitsamt in SARREBOURG seemed surprised, but rather gratified to see us, and believed our story that we had wanted to leave POLAND because living was prohibitively dear there. I speak French, having lived in FRANCE from the age of four years old till I left in 1941 to come to ENGLAND to join R.A.F. (without the permission of my parents). I explained my knowledge of French to Germans by saying that my grandmother was French and that before the war I had worked in a bank as a Polish-French interpreter.

From one of the Polish girls in the camp where we were living I learned the name of a railway worker, a Lorrainer, from whom she had received food and clothing at various times. This man worked beside us on the railway. Through him we met another railway worker who enabled us to cross into FRANCE on 14 Sep (as described in Sgt. BAKALARSKI's report).

On 15 Sep we went to LUNEVILLE, where we found help which resulted in our being put in touch with an organisation. Our journey to SPAIN was arranged by this organisation.

6. CROSSING OF PYRENEES:

I began the journey across the PYRENEES at 0600 hrs. on 25 Oct. The other members of the party were: -Sgt. BAKALARSKI, Sgt. PHILO (S/P.G.(-)1580), and a New Zealand soldier named HATSON (?). As we got up the mountain we got into deep snow and it was also snowing afresh.

The guide had reckoned that we would reach the frontier of ANDORRA about 1400 hrs., but about 18 hrs. we were still about five miles from the frontier. HATSON was very weak, and had to be carried -first by Sgt. PHILO and me, and then by BAKALARSKI and me. The guide wanted to get back to FRANCE, and finally there appeared to be only one solution - for the guide and me to go on in the hope of getting help. I was stronger than the others, and the guide agreed to accompany me a certain way and then show me the route into ANDORRA. Once in ANDORRA, I hoped to get help and return to HATSON. All the party agreed to this procedure. I went off, following the guide. The guide took me as far as a lake, one of the ETANGS de FONTARGENTE, about five miles N.W. of L'HOSPITALET (EUROPE ROAD MAP, 1:200,000, Sheet 86). He then directed me along the North side of the lake instead of along the East, and, as a result of his mistake, I eventually found myself back in FRANCE. The guide left me after he had given me these directions.

I kept on walking until I got into a valley. The going was very bad in the deep snow. When it got dark I found it impossible to continue over the rocks and snow, and slept the night in the snow. In the morning (26 Oct) I continued on my way, and after five hours I saw a small hut with smoke rising from the chimney. I thought I was in ANDORRA, but, for some reason which I cannot explain, I decided to watch the door of the hut before approaching. After about 15 minutes I saw two German soldiers come from the hut to wash their dishes. I knew I was in FRANCE again.

I was too tired to return to the cel (???) at FONTARGENTE and pick up the route to ANDORRA again. I worked my way round the hat and down hill. I then followed the valley of the river ASTON. I walked for two hours and reached a roadmaking party of Spaniards and Frenchmen at work beside the river. I went to their hut and said I was a Frenchman who had just crossed into Zone Interdite Sud. I remained three nights and three days at this hut, as my feet and hands were swollen with frostbites.

When I had recovered sufficiently, the workmen gave me some bread and sardines and cigarettes, and I walked to the vicinity of the town of ASTON. Here I remained in the woods for about a week observing the roads on which German patrols passed at regular intervals.

After the week was up I walked by road into ASTON. When I joined the TARASCON-AX-LES-THERMES route nationale I stole an unattended bicycle and cycled to URS, where I knew a Spanish guide lived. (He had been with us at the start of the journey, and had handed us over to the French guide - the one who left me at FONTARGENTE). I told the guide what had happened and also wrote a letter to the chief of the organisation which had arranged the original crossing. The Spaniard took me by train to MERENS-LES-VALS. South of AX-LES-THERMES, and told me to

Sgt. SSV PHILO, 49 Sw.
15/8/43 (Museum) William 3rd

William 3rd

RAKINIS

follow the road (keeping to the fields and hills all the time) towards the frontier.

I began my second journey to the frontier on 3 or 4 Nov. I walked all day, and reached L'HOSPITALET. Here I began to climb at night, and eventually arrived in ANDORRA about 8 km. S.E. of SOLDEU. The crossing took me about five hours.

Having discovered from a man on the road that I was in ANDORRA, I waited in a wood beside the road for three hours. I then followed the road into ESCALDAS. My journey from here into SPAIN was arranged for me.

INTERVIEWED by M.I.9. and A.I.1(k) 7 Oct 42.

APPENDIX A - List of helpers

Distribution: I.S.9. M.I.6. (D).

Distribution of this report:

D.D.M.I.(P/W). M.I.9. I.S.9. (2 copies)

M.I.9. (d). M.I.6. (D). M.O.1. (S.P.)

A.I.1. (a) P.W. A.I.1 (K) M.I.19(a). File.

C.I.O., H.Q. Bomber Command, R.A.F.

" " Fighter Command, R.A.F.

" " Coastal Command, R.A.F.

" " Army Co-operation Command, R.A.F.

APPENDIX C - Escape information

Distribution: D.D.M.I.(P/W). I.S.9. M.I.6 (D)

APPENDIX D - Equipment and Training.

Distribution: M.I.9. (d). I.S.9. File.

PAGINIS

(4)