

CHRISTMAS AT STALAG LUFT IV

Written by Marion Hoffman

I do not know how many more Christmas Season's we elders of this Pool may exchange our viewpoints from those days back then. I was not a POW through any Christmas Holiday, thank God. But being a Former POW and I know several of you in the 91st BG Pool also have been POW's, it is only fitting and proper to recite and write about this incident.

It is documented in history that this incident happen in Stalag Luft IV in one of the compounds. Like so many documentation's including books I have accumulated and read over the years this deserves repeating this special time of the year.

It is said:

On Sunday December 24, Christmas Eve 1944 while the rest of us of the 8th Air Force were flying that special mission for to grant Hitler a Merry Christmas. There were many of our brothers who had already been shot down and were incarcerated in Stalag Luft's and Prisoner of War Camp's across Germany and Japan.

This happened in Germany. Remember, some of these men had been incarcerated two or three Christmases before especially the RAF and some American airmen buddies. Even some of my Infantry friends who worship with Bernita and I in church each Sunday, were captured in Kasserine Pass in Africa.

So it was the usual custom with these POW's in Germany. In longing for home and family this day. Each Christmas Eve they had ask permission from the German Commandant could they as a group walk around inside the POW compound perimeter singing Christmas carols and hymns. The permission was granted.

After they had sung all the known, carols and hymns of Christmas, and someone of them suggested singing "My Country T'is Of Thee". Just remember a Choral Group of men singing.

They sang:

My country t'is of thee, Sweet land of Liberty, Of thee we sing:
Land where my fathers died, Land of the Pilgrims' pride.
From every mountain side,
Let Freedom ring!

My native country, thee,
Land if the noble, free, Thy name I love.
I love the rocks and hills, Thy woods and templed hills;
My heart with rapture thrills, Like that above.

Let music swell the breeze, And ring from all the trees, Sweet freedom's song; Let mortal tongues
awake; Let all that breathe partake; Let rocks their silence break,
The sound prolong.

Our fathers' God, to Thee, Author of liberty, To Thee we sing.
Long may our land be bright, With Freedom's holy light,
Protect us by Thy might,
Great God, our King!

What could be more appropriate than this, one of our countries most likeable patriotic songs. The Prisoner's of War determined the German Commandant and his guards did not know this was not a Christmas carol or hymn.

In our hearts we know church and state should remain separate but yet we know going hand in hand it is God and Country that made this nation strong and great as it is today. God Bless its people,

GOD BLESS AMERICA

Bernita and Marion Hoffman.

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