COMINS, THOMAS BENGAMIN 402111

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OYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE

The following biographical details are required for use at R.A.A.F. Overseas Headquarters, London.

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Personal Pile

File 22/Enc.111 M.I.9/S/P.G./LIB/1468

Aus 402111 Warrent Officer Thomas Bengamin COMINS,

1 Dutton Street, Yass, New South Wales.

I was the second pilot of a Wellington detailed to lay minesin Bengheai harbour on the 1½ Jul 41. We had just dropped our mines when the sirvarst was hit by flak in the port motor. We were flying at 300 feet at the time. We wimmediately headed east but experienced difficulty in maintaining height and finally crash landed shout 50 miles 5W of EL Makil. We decided to aim for flormik but shortage of food and water forced us to seek help at Eakili and we were finelly captured by a roving patrol of Italians just before we reached there on the 19 Jul 41.

Camps in which imprisoned

	Apollonia				26 Jul 41
	Taruna	1	Aug 41	-	15 Sep 41
	Capua	19	Sep 41	-	27 Oct 41
Camp 57	Gruppigniano	28	Oct 41	-	12 Sep 43
Stalag XVIII	Market Pongau				30 Sep 43
Stalag VIIIA	Gorlitz				2 Dec 43
Stalag 344	Lamsdorf	3	Dec 43	-	31 Jan 45
On march	Lamsdorf	22	Jan 45	-	3 Apr 45

Attempted escapes .

First stempt. In May ha I, together with four others, Sgt. N.L.Seed., Sgt. A. Williams, Sgt. N.R.Ross, A.I.F., end Sgt. T.Z.Canning, RARF decided to attempt escape by tunnelling. We soon found however that the ground was too hard for our purpose and we made little headews. However, in Aug another compound wes opened up nearby and we had no difficulty in obtaining access to the new compound. We soon embiated many more helpers and although the ground here was also very hard we were able to get also with the work by digging as much as ten hoursper day. The tunnel was started under the floor about 150 feet away. We tunnelled to a depth of 12 feet. The size of the tunnel was 25% with and 35% deep thought it varied considerably throughout. During the tunnelling operations we were never suspected due probably to the fact that the Italians thought and openly housted that escape was impossible and also because the hut from which we started the tunnel was unoccupied during the first four or fire weeks of our operations.

Due to certain obstacles which we encountered it was impossible to open our tunnel exit in the corn patch as planned and we were forced to rake our exit in open ground. For this reason we decided to welt for a set night to add our escape. We were all ready to go on the 27 Oct 42 but the weather in the early part of the night was against us so we decided to welt for more favourable conditions. However, it did estually rein later in the night washing may the earth from the exit and when we examined it next day we could see deylight. So we made up our minds that we must make the ettempt that night regardless of weather.

It had been desided by general wate of the tunnellers (now 25 in all) that a total of 15 should make a break in the first attempt es of course there were many more who wanted to go. Lote were drawn for priority in leaving and the first party of two to leave ment at about 1930 hourse. Genning, Heed and I went together at about 2930 hours. Although the night was clear and atterny the break was rade undetected. All those going had assembled in the tunnel at 1930 hours and the entrance had then been closed. In order to move quietly we wore cocks over our boots and se a precaution in one dogs were used in the search we imprepared our scale with garfit of the control of the search was also also been also been also been also been also been also principally shocklet bern of which Yeed and I had down the decire we had a good the district stole. From the Italians and we had procured a compass from a min it the case who had desided not be take the attempt.

Our plan was to make for Tirano where we believed we could pick up a reliawy line, which, though numeed, could probably lead through the peeses in the Alps and into Estimation. However it was measurery to avoid thing so we beeded north-sites treaking compand then west. As we were in uniform we were forced to lie up during the day and walk at night. On the evening of 2 Nov 22 while lying in some bushes on a billaide in the cars of formoni we were discovered by some Italian Boy Scouts who were excisting the soldiers of a frontier division in eserching the errs. We were held by the unit who captured us until carabinized arrived to escont us back to prison camps. All 19 were captured and I was informed by an Italian major that three Divisions had taken part in the search, so that we had little chance of making good our escape.

I together with Cannen; and Feed eaceped the beating up which the remainder of theparty were subjected to. I think we were spared because of the intervention of the Colonel of the Unit who caught us. Be himself had eaceped from German prison camp by tunnelling in the last wer and was very kind and sympathetic to us. The guard who made me strip on return to prison made his own second effects of a besting by clepping his hands and alapping the well and rouring at me. The same form of pontonine was carried out when for two days are a punturely like the prison of the color of the days are a punturely as the color of the days and handouffed for two days are a punturely on the move in order to maintain our circulation. We were also put on helf rations.

Second attempt. While on the march from Duderstadt to Fallingbostal; I secuped with two soldiers of the A.I.F. W/O J.O.Pope and W/O A.R. Bescroft about 20 Miles N. of Duderstadt. We got sawy on the 5 Apr &5 but were picked up each on the morning of the 7 Apr. On the afternoon of the 10th we were sent to a working camp near Wernigerock where we enrived at about 1600 hours.

Liberation

At about 1930 hours on the 10 Apr we made a break from the working camp (Boye, Reservoit and I accompaniedly two Fritish Soldiers) and hid in a gremhouse on the outskirts of Wenigerode where we remained until the America

We were liberated by the 2 Armoured Division U.S. 9 Army on 10 Apr 45.

Personal fill

File 17/Enc.4 SECRET M.I.9/S/P.C./LTB/L58

The information contained in this report is to be treated as SEGRET

STATELIEUT BY

A.402111 W/O COMMIS. Thomas Benjamin. 38 Sodn., W.B.Forces.

Captured: 19 Jul 41, MEKILI.

Liberated: 10 Apr 45.

Date of Birth: 14 Jun 12 R.A.F.Service: Since 27 May 40 Peacetime Profession: Medical Student.
Private Address: 1, Dutton Street,
VASS New South Wales Australia.

1. CAPTURE

I was the second milet of a Wellington detailed to lay mines in BRUMARI harbour on 1½ vol 4½. We had just dropped our mines when the streast was hit by Takk in the part motor. We were Trying at 500 fost at the time. We inseliately headed has the tayout of the 1% of M. MRILLY in maintaining height and finally creak landed about 50 miles 5.% of M. MRILLY we decided to aim for TORKE but the corresponding to the tayout the the tayout the tayout the second that we were finally captured by a rowing patrol of Tahiana just before we resched there on 19 30 M.D.

2. CAMPS IN WHICH IMPRISONED.

ARCHOTTA 2 Jul 11 - 26 Jul 14 CARTA TARKA 1 Aug 41 - 15 Sep 14 CARTA 19 Sep 41 - 27 Oct 11 CARTA 19 Sep 41 - 27 Oct 11 CARTA 19 Sep 41 - 27 Oct 12 Sep 43 Staing WIII MARY PONSH 15 Sep 45 - 27 Sep 45 Staing WIII A COMPLEY 2 Oct 43 - 2 Dee 45 Staing WALLAMSDORF 2 Dee 45 - 22 Jun 45 - 20 CARTA 18 CARTA

3. ATTRICTORN RECADES

(a) First Attempt. In May 42 I, together with four others, Sgt. HEAD, R.L., R.

We tunnelled to a depth of 12 feet and the size of the turnel was 215° wide and 370° deep, though it waried continerably throughout. During the turnelling operations as were never suspected, due grobes by the thet that the Italians thought and openly boarded that scoops was impossible and also because the but free widely we started the turnel was unpoccupied during the first four or five weeks of our operations.

Due to certain obtacles which we encountered it was impossible to open our tunnel exit in the corn patch as planned and we were forced to sake our exit in open ground. For this reason we decided to wait for a wot night to said our enough. We were all ready to go on 27 Oct 22, but the weather in the early part of the night was against us, so we decided to wait for more favourable consistions. However, it did actually rain later in the night was say the early favour the exit and where we considered it next day actions that they have been sufficient to the action that they have been sufficient to the action that they have been sufficient to the action that they have been sufficient to the same sufficient t

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Our plan was to make for TIRAD where we believed we could pick up a realized line, which, though unused, would probably lead through the passes in the Alps and into SITIESIABID. However it was necessary to avoid NDIEs, so we headed North after breaking comp and then West. As we were in uniform we were forced to lie up during the day and walk at night. On the evening of 2 Now 42 while lying in show bushes on a hillside in the area of TERIONYI we were discovered by some Tealian boy scouts, who were assisting the solidars of the frontier division in searching the area.

We were held by the unit who captured us until cardininer arrived to escort us back to prison case. All 19 were captured and I was informed by an Italian major that 5 Divisions had taken part in the search, and that we had little chance of making good our escape.

- I, together with CATEUR and HEAD enoughed the beating up which the remainder of the purty were subjected to. I think we were spared because of the intervention of the Colonal of the unit who caught us. He, himself had scamped from a German prison camp by turnelling in the last war and was very kind and sympathatic to us. The guard who made me strip on return to provide the construction effects of a beating by clapping his hands and along the construction of the construction was carried out when CACHIG and MEAD were attributed from the construction of the cold we were unable to sleep. In fact we had to keep constantly on the move in order to maintain our circulation. We were also put on half rations.
- (b) Second Attempt. While on the march from DUERSYMP to PALLINGHOSPEL I encaped with two coldiers of the ALIF. W/O FORE, J.O. and W/O BERROFF A.R. about 20 miles N. of DUERSYADT. We get sway on J Apr 45 but were ploked up again on the morning of 7 Apr . On the afternoon of the 10th we were sent to a working camp near NEWSIGSKUDE, where we arrived at about 1600 hrs.
- (c) Third Attenut. At about 1930 hrs on 10 Apr we made a break from the working cases (FDFs, BSSAUTF and I, accommended by two British soldiers) and hid up in a greenhouse on the outskirts of WEMICEROUS, where we remained until the Americans entered the town 2h hours later.

LIBERATION. We were liberated by the 2 Armoured Division U.S.9 Army on 10 Apr 45.

TUMPOUTTERON DV. - T C O(m) - 10 7.2 15

Air Ministry News Service

Air Ministry Bulletin No. 18653

R.A.A.F. PRISONERS OF WAR MARCHED 600 MILES

Stories of two terrible morohes, one of 600 miles and the other of 445 miles, were told by R.A.A.F. prisoners of wor who have just reached England.

Three men who took part in a 600-mile march from Poland in Western Germany, 402/// 1/2, where they were liberated, were marrant Officers T.B. Comins, pilot, of Edgeoliffe, N.S.W.; J.S. Ozmeron, observer, of Burnie, Tamarda; and J.S. Holder, pilot, of Toorek, Victorias

"We started out in the heart of winter; when it was freezing cold and the annow was on the ground everywhere," said Comins. "We morohed up to 25 miles a day, but a usual day's murch was it miles. We slopt at night mainly in burns, and often in sheds or disused factories. We had no blankets, no charge of clothing, only what we stood up in, and the food was terrible."

Ormeron said their usual ration consisted of four or five ounces of bread and a little ment and choose when they were lucky. They were supposed to be on German Army field rations, and to receive scup and coffee. Office, they hardly ever saw, and soup was given them on two days out of thirteen.

Holder acid the cold did not worry them while they were morohing. At right, though they had no blankets, they were worm because they burrowed into the strew of the barns, and they were crowded close togethers.

"We thought we were being treated horsely, but we sow one terrible sight which made us think we were not so budly off," added Holder. "Our column passed a column of 500 Burgarian Jewesses who had been on the march for five months.

When were regged, dirty and weary. Most of them had lost their allothing, A blanket around the wrist was a should. Some of them were ald army boots, but many were alogs. There were others who had bound their feet with stream or pieces of blanket. We were feeling the offerts of this march, but they were wasen and had been on it for far longer than we had."

Holder dealared that the Germans mode a practice of keeping them standing in the freezing cold for three or even four hours at the end of the march before

/letting them

Tetting them into the born selected as their shelter for the night.

Warrant Officers A.K. Try, pilot, of Brockvale, New Scuth Wales;
L. James, pilot, of Bristone, Queensland, and J.F. Wood, dir gurner,
of Randwick, New South Wales, took part in a 445-mile march from Gross
Taychow in East Pomerania to Fallingboatel, in Western Germany.

That march took 53 days.

try flew with an Australian Spitfire Squadron. When he was shot down and captured in September 1941, "Paddy" Finance was a flight commander and "Bluey" Truscatt a pilot officer.

Try said that on the march their food consisted of "mil' a loof of bread every three days, four pototoes and a little margarine a days. Sametimes they had soup and twice they were given samage. Try traded him watch, valued at £15; for four loaves of bread. He started off with three shirts and finished with name. He traded the three for food on the work.

They had been at Pallingbastel only a couple of weeks when the Germans, fearing the approach of our own troops, decided to march all the aircrew and aircome men east again. But Comins, Comeron, Holder, Try, James and Wood stayed on at the comp and were liberated.

Warrant Officer T.S. Scales, pilot, of Brisbane, Queensland, who was shot down in a Hurricone in June, 1944, and taken prisoner, did not take part in the long marches, but was marched out of Fallingbostel with the athrone.

"All we had for seven eave mean and half a tin of bully beef," he said. "But I supplemented that by steeling eggs and milk on the way. I become separated from the others and was finally liberated."