

The Drawings On These Pages

REALISM is added to this account of the escape from Stalag Luft III. by the reproduction of some original drawings of the escape-tunnel by an R.A.F. officer, Flight-Lieutenant Ley Kenyon, D.F.C., made on the spot. Here is his story of the making of the drawings, of their loss and subsequent recovery:

"Prepare yourself to be down for four hours—and make your drawing-board a small one," were the orders I received from Squadron Leader B, Chief of the escape organisation at Stalag Luft III.

I had been asked by the committee, several weeks before the prearranged date for the big break, to carry out a series of drawings, which would permanently record the masterpiece of tunnel engineering that had taken hundreds of R.A.F. officers 15 months to complete.

The sketches were made under extremely difficult conditions. Sometimes I lay on my back, and I used the roof of the tunnel as a drawing desk. The heat was intense, though the air-conditioning pumps were operated throughout. I worked 30 feet underground.

The flame from a wick floating in a sardine tin fed by German margarine is not the ideal illumination for drawing, but the Germans had cut off the electric supply, making it impossible to use the unique lighting system we had installed.

Immediately after the drawings were completed they were packed away into an airtight canister made of milk tins, and hidden away in an underground dispersal chamber elsewhere in the camp, for recovery when required.

Months later — one night in January of this year — we were ordered by the Germans to quit the camp, and were given only one hour's notice; the Russians were 30 miles away. There was insufficient time to rescue the drawings and other escape material from the chamber, which we immediately flooded as a precaution against the Germans finding the documents hidden away there. So they remained there for another five months, surviving the occupation of the camp by the Germans. They used it as an advanced military depot until forced to withdraw by the Russian advance south of the Oder.

The drawings were eventually found unscathed by a British officer who was too sick to leave the camp with the main body of prisoners and remained in the hospital. After his release, he descended with other officers into the dispersal chamber. He found that the flood water had seeped away and had not damaged the escape material, which had been stored above the water level.

TRIUMPH AND TRAGEDY

War's Most Amazing Escape Story

(By Flight Lieutenant P. C. J. Brickhill, R.A.A.F.)

HERE is one of the most dramatic stories of the war, a first-hand account of the mass escape last year from Stalag III. at Saagen, near Berlin, after which, as all the world heard with horror, 50 recaptured officers were shot by the Germans. The story (broadcast recently in the BBC's Pacific Service) is told by an Australian Spitfire pilot, taken prisoner in 1943, who took part in the great adventure that ended so tragically. He describes the preparatory work, the great risks and hazards undertaken, and the excavating of the tunnel through which the prisoners escaped. We quote from "London Calling."

YES, I was in that camp, but now I find it hard to believe all the fantastic things that happened.

You see, it was no simple tunnel. It was — well, there were three tunnels, the work of what was called the "X" organisation—the work of 500 men for 15 months. We carried out the whole show in a pretty barren compound about 350 yards square, swarming with German security guards night and day, searching and snooping with probes and torches.

As well as the tunnels, we had to organise factories for mass forgery, map-and-compass making, for producing iron rations, tailoring, carpentry, and metal-work shops—all part of the scheme for the big escape.

We had to use a couple of hundred sentries to conceal our operations, and the fact that we got away with it was largely due to a genius, known as "Big X," who organised it all. He had commanded the R.A.F.'s top-scoring fighter squadron until he was shot down over the beaches of Dunkirk in 1940. He was among those whom the Gestapo shot.

The three tunnels were always called Tom, Dick, and Harry for security reasons, and Harry, our last chance, was the one that rang the bell. It was over 350 feet long, a world's prison camp record, and 30 feet deep, to evade the sound detectors sunk by the Germans around our beloved barbed wire. Eighty officers got out through Harry—another world's record, I think.

The End of Tom

We began planning the big break about Christmas, 1942. Six months later the boys had Tom, our first tunnel, about 300 feet long, and were about to dig up, out, and away, when Herman, one of the "ferrets," as we called the German security guards, accidentally dug his probe—iron spike—into the invisible edge of Tom's trap-door—and that was the end of Tom.

After that blow, we found that Dick was unsuitable because the Germans suddenly cut down the wood where it was to come up, and built another compound there; so, early in January last year, work went full steam ahead on Harry.

The entrance to Harry was a cunning trap-door in a room that the Germans searched at least six times, looking for just such trap-doors, but they never

The drawing on the right shows a trap which led out of the "workshop" to the bottom of the vertical entrance shaft.

Below: "The Working Face" is the title of this drawing. The tunnel was less than three feet square, enabling only one man at a time to operate on the working face, the sand being removed in trolleys on rails.

