

Nazi Camp Held Galaxy of U.S. Aces

Zemke and Gabreski Among Yank Fliers Found at Barth

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The greatest collection of American air aces ever assembled sat, some of them for a year and a half, in Stalagluft I, the German prison camp at Barth on the Baltic, before they were freed.

The camp was under the command of Col. Hubert Zemke, the Missoula, Mont. ace, whose 56th Fighter Group made the P47 famous. With Zemke were five other former fighter group commanders, all colonels, a full squadron of aces headed by Lt. Col. Francis S. Gabreski, of Oil City, Pa., who holds the all-time American record for German planes shot down with 28 to his credit, and approximately 1,000 other American P51, P47 and P38 pilots.

Among the best known aces at the camp were Majors Jerry Johnson, who destroyed 16 German planes before he went down, and Duane Beeson, who knocked down 18.

Few Shot Down by Luftwaffe

Few of the U.S. aces found their Luftwaffe superiors in actual air combat, but were forced down after being hit with flak on low-level strafing or bombing missions.

The 26-year-old Gabreski had a strange accident which forced him to land in Germany on July 20, 1944.

"We had been escorting bombers," Gabreski said, "and were on the way home when we strafed an airdrome near Coblenz. I was overshooting a plane on the ground. I stuck the nose down a little to get on the target and the propeller hit the ground. Oil sprayed all over my windshield and canopy. The engine was failing so I set the plane on the ground at about 200 miles an hour. It finally stopped and I got out and left it burning."

Captured After Five Days

Gabreski escaped capture for five days but finally was trapped, exhausted and hungry, by German farmers and was turned over to the Wehrmacht. He was taken to the Luftwaffe interrogation center at Dulag Luft.

"There was an interrogator there we called Stone Face Scharf," Gabreski said.

"As I opened the door and walked in the first day, he said: 'Why



Col. Hubert Zemke

Gabreski! We've been expecting you for a long time. Glad to see you."

The Germans were familiar with most of the American air aces by name, reputation and ability to outfly Luftwaffe pilots, long before they fell into their hands. German radio frequently warned the 56th Fighter Group that "the Luftwaffe is laying for Zemke's Wolf-pack."

Put in Solitary Confinement

When Zemke, one of the most colorful figures in the air force despite his reticence about publicity, was forced down, he was interrogated in a routine manner and started for a prison camp. While he was en route, German headquarters apparently came across the "Zemke" file and simultaneously a public relations information sheet was issued from Washington which stated, among other things, that Zemke had served in liaison capacity with the Russians when the U.S. first started shipping planes to Russia. Zemke's trip was interrupted, he was clapped into solitary confinement and interrogated steadily for several weeks.

The former fighter group commanders at the Barth prison camp included Col. Einar Malmstrom, of Spokane, Wash., (356th Fighter Group), Col. Henry R. Spicer, of San Antonio, Texas, (357th Fighter Group), Lt. Col. Glenn Duncan and Lt. Col. Loren G. McCollom, of Ritzville, Wash., both of whom did

Flak, Not Luftwaffe, Forced Down Most Of the Airmen

pioneer work with their fighter group experimenting with the P47 as a dive bomber. They led the first attacks in which 500-pound bombs were dropped from wing racks on P47s.

Food Was Biggest Worry

The fighter pilots confined at Barth, many of whom now are in Paris working on the evacuation of other prisoners or waiting to return to the States, said that their greatest worry at Barth was food.

The Germans gave them a loaf of bread a day to be split among seven men. They also got a bowl of dishwater stew concocted from turnips and an occasional slice of potato.

Sometimes, after a spell of cold weather when the streets were slippery with ice, or following days of American strafing attacks on roads cluttered with horse-drawn carts, the prisoners were given horsemeat as a special treat.

Prisoners defined the difference between good and bad mess sergeants thus: "A good mess manager would tell you there were worms in the food. A bad mess manager wouldn't tell you."

Gabreski Anxious to Pit Skill Against Japanese

NEW YORK, May 25 (ANS).—Lt. Col. Francis S. Gabreski, Eighth AF ace who knocked down 28 German planes before being forced down himself nearly a year ago, reported to the War Department at Washington yesterday before starting a 60-day leave.

He said he "definitely" wants to get into the Pacific war. "In fact," he declared, "all those men I talked to in the prison camp were anxious to go there. Give those men 30 days' leave and they'll be just as good as new again and ready to tackle the Japs."

Gabreski said he will spend part of his leave with his parents in Oil City, Pa., but indicated that he might get married to his fiancée, Kay Cochrane, of Prairie du Chien, Wis., whom he hasn't seen since October, 1942, a month before he left for the ETO.

Miss Cochrane told reporters there would be no wedding plans until she talked the whole thing over with him.

Army Commanding Officer of Barth