## Wartime West Sussex 1939 - 1945 The Great Escape case study

Source M - News Chronicle report describing the escape - date unknown

## 87 STALAG MEN CREPT OUT BY 350-FT. TUNNEL From NORMAN CLARK, News Chronicle War Correspondent WITH U.S. THIRD ARMY, Central Germany, Thursday.

FOR five months 800 of 11,000 prisoners—the majority of them R.A.F. air crews—shot down during raids on Germany—dug a tunnel 350ft, long and 2ft, in diameter, through which 87 made their ill-fated attempt to escape from Stalagluft 3 on the night, of March 25-26 last year.

New details of the break out, which failed, with the subsequent murder of at least 47 R.A.F. officers and sergeants, have become known as a result of the release of a Canadian flight lieutenant from a camp overrun by the American 11th Armoured Division near Meiningen, 30 miles east of Fulda.

He was at the Stalagluft at Sagan when the escape plot

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was hatched and throughout the incident, and knew all the details. "We had the bad luck to choose the night of a great R.A.F. raid on Berlin to make the breakout," he told me. "All the lights of the camp were extinguished and the were extinguished and the guards tripled. But between midnight and 5 a.m. 87 men passed through the tunnel, crawling for nearly a quarter of a mile through a tunnel wide enough only for the body. "To avoid the Germans' seismo-graphic detection gear the tunnel went to a depth of 26ft. Less said the better "The entrance to the tunnel was beneath the floor of one barracks building and ran under another and the triple wire fences "The tunnelling was easy," the pilot said, "except that it was through sand and had to be shored up with timber every few feet.
"The hardest thing was disposal of the soil. Every ounce had to be concealed from the Germans."

When I asked him how this was done his eyes narrowed and he said: "I won't tell you. I won't tell anyone. Too much has been written about escape methods, and when you come in personal associa-tion with a bid like the Sagan one the less the Germans know the better." "But the escape attempt had the blackest luck. A police dog dis-covered the exit and the game was "None of us in camp heard the sound of a single shot. Some of the 87—but very few of them—got. away. 12 came back "The majority were rounded up and taken in April to the Gestapo prison at Goerlitz, where, hand-cuffed in fours, they were taken away for interrogation. "In the middle of April, 12 of the escapees turned up again at Sagan and told the story of what had and told the story of what had happened.

"Soon afterwards caskets containing the ashes of 47 men were brought to the camp by the Gestapo with the curt explanation that our completes had been shot attemptions to accomp ing to escape again.

"No one had the slightest doubt what had really happened"