The Last Great Escape: Recovery of 1st Lt. Edouard Sconiers, an American WWII Bomber Pilot Imprisoned at the Stalag Luft III POW Camp

Jared Banks, Ph.D. and Albert Pecora, Ph.D.
OVI, Inc., Ancro Group, Inc.
jbanks@ovaigroup.com and apecora@ovaigroup.com

Introduction

In 1943, the American POWs at Stalag Luft III were able to escape. This event remains one of the most remarkable escapes in POW history. On March 24, 1944, 50 American POWs managed to escape from Stalag Luft III POW camp in eastern Poland. One of the POWs, 1st Lt. Edouard Sconiers, fell ill during his confinement and became separated from the group. Sconiers was eventually reunited with his wife and family. However, the location of his resting place has been lost to time.

Three decades later, the American POW Association (APWA) re-established the park near the POW camp. Later, the local government built a road on land purchased by the APWA. No one remembered the location of Sconiers' grave. In 2012, a limited survey to locate Sconiers' grave led to the discovery of a set of burial records. Among the buried remains was a burial record for a 1st Lt. Sconiers. A positive identification was then confirmed by excavated DNA from Sconiers' remains. In 2012, Ewart Sconiers' remains were relocated and reburied in his hometown of DeFuniak Springs, Florida, USA.

Later Disturbance?

A backhoe was used to strip off the top 50-80 cm of soil. At about 80-100 cm below the surface, the Individual was removed. Disarticulated osseous material in top 30 cm of sediment. The backhoe excavated on this edge of the cemetery along the railroad. In the original radar data it was difficult to tell if graves were detected in the magnetic and resistance data, but the radar detected more importantly–evidence of the original gravel cemetery roads that were taken by the Germans during the burial process show small intrusive disturbance from a large post-burial excavation. This disturbance was identified and located on the trench plan views.

Trench 1 Findings

Trench 1 was located just inside the cemetery road, over graves in two areas in the west central part and far eastern part of the cemetery. No graves were detected in the magnetic and resistance data, but the radar detected graves, and–more importantly–evidence of the original gravel cemetery roads that were taken by the Germans during the burial process. Small trees parallel to the graves in three or four areas, and a stand of tall trees parallel to the northern side near the railroad.

Trench 1 Findings

Trench 1 Findings

View 2

View 1

30-49 cmbs

18

Probable Later

Tree Root Mass

PM: Padre Mac

Probable Later Disturbance

Disarticulated osseous material in top 30 cm of sediment.

Trench 1 Results

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