

Cottage Grove Retrospective

A look back at Sentinel stories from 60 and 70 years ago

July 5, 1945

Returning soldiers tell experiences in German prisons

Pvt. Johnnie Palmer, son of Mr. and Mrs. C.A. Palmer, was among the three returning servicemen to arrive home last week, who had been liberated from the Stalag A camp 30 miles from Berlin by the Russian army after being held a prisoner two years, two months and two days. Johnnie doesn't stutter when he tells you how long he was held prisoner. He recalls the time probably up to the minute. He was captured at Casarena pass in North Africa in February, 1943, along with two others. Total number of captured American soldiers was about four thousand against 250,000 Germans, so he figures this was a pretty good trade. The Americans were kept in North Africa only about two weeks before they were transferred to Germany and then moved to two or three separate camps.

The food was not so bad at first, but grew progressively worse. The so-called death march, where captured Americans were marched 169 miles through snow, ice and cold weather was one of the worst ordeals Johnnie and his companions went through, but even at that the Americans stood up to the march better than the German guards, even



June 30, 1955: Gus Heinrich, the oldest merchant who is still working in Cottage Grove, sits at his desk in his jewelry store, which is located next to the Arcade Theater. The 77-year-old is being honored on Tuesday, which has been proclaimed "Gus Heinrich Day" by the Chamber of Commerce.

though they were carrying their packs, etc. One American was shot when he stopped to lighten his load.

Johnnie weighed 112 pounds when he was liberated and now weighs 170.

He plans on leaving for California tomorrow and will accompany his brother. He will ask for a discharge and will enter employment at an airplane factory, where his wife is employed. His brother Linzy, also discharged, will seek employment with an airplane factory.

POLICE BLOTTER

Cottage Grove Police Department 24-Hour Anonymous Tip Line: 767-0504

June 22

Animal bite, S. 3rd St.

The Cottage Grove Hospital sent a fax regarding a dog bite that occurred in the evening on June 20. An officer contacted the victim, and also attempted to contact the owner of the dog, who was not at the location.

Criminal mischief — second degree, E. Main St.

The complainant reported damage to her personal vehicle while it was parked in the rear lot of the police station. The damage was estimated at \$1,500 and included a large dent and

scratches on the passenger side hood and fender. There was non suspect info.

June 23

Mental, N. 10th St.

The caller reported hearing voices hearing voices since the day before. She believes they were brought on by her ex boyfriend.

Unlawful entry into a motor vehicle, Village Green

The caller said his vehicle was broken into sometime during the night, and that the suspect stole camera equipment valued

at \$1,820.

June 24

Reckless driving, Walmart

The reporting person said that three subjects had taken the motorized carts out of the building and were playing in the traffic areas of the parking lot, posing a hazard to unsuspecting vehicles. The subjects were contacted and banned from the store for the rest of the night.

Animal info, East Regional Park

The caller reported seeing a cougar near the fishing pond.

June 25

Unauthorized use of a motor vehicle, The Flower Basket

The caller said that the delivery van for the business was stolen from the location sometime after June 23. Another caller reported seeing the vehicle at 18th St. and Pepper Tree Dr. in Eugene. The Eugene Police Department confirmed the location of the vehicle, and the business owners went to retrieve it.

Criminal mischief, Badoobaz

The complainant reported seeing a male subject throwing a bottle at and breaking a window

at the business. The subject then drove off, heading northbound on Highway 99.

June 26

Information, Village Dr.

The reporting person said he found a suspicious item described as a piece of PVC pipe capped on both ends near the helipad. The Eugene Police Department's bomb squad responded and rendered the item safe in their explosive unit.

June 28

Escape — third degree, Row River Rd. and I-5 overpass

During a routine patrol, the officer observed a wanted subject near the location. While the officer was securing the suspect's dog in his patrol vehicle, the suspect ran from the officer and into a truck-parking area behind the Vintage Inn. An extensive are check and K9 search was negative. The suspect, who was last seen wearing a red t-shirt, blue jeans and white Nike shoes, had an outstanding warrant for failing to appear in court on charges of possessing methamphetamine.

OFFBEAT

Continued from page 4A

was nothing out there but the ocean, right?

The captain's plan was to position the big tanker to cross the bar after dawn, at slack tide. Having deduced from the position of those two visible lights that the ship was well out to sea, and discarded or rationalized away his inability to spot the lightship, the captain held the ship's course until, around 5:15 a.m., moving into the screaming wind under a slow bell, the vessel suddenly shuddered to a stop.

And that is how Captain Johnson learned that he had misjudged the Rosecrans's position.

The exact circumstances of

what followed will never be known, because none of the officers survived. But it appears that the lights they'd been looking at were the Desdemona Sands light, and some other non-navigational light being showed on the shore nearby.

The distress call came in to Cape Disappointment at 5:15 a.m.: "Steamer Rosecrans on bar. Send assistance. Ship breaking up fast. Can stay at my station no longer."

The life station replied: "OK. Will send help. About where are you?"

The reply was chilling — and, from the standpoint of the rescuers, utterly useless: "Water washing into the cabins — can't stay much longer — hel—"

Then, silence.

Back on the Rosecrans, the situation was deteriorating rapidly. When the ship first struck, the skipper had ordered the engines fully reversed, and called for the pumps to start spewing crude oil into the sea — the idea being to lighten the load in an attempt to get the ship free.

Under ordinary circumstances, this would have worked fine. But these were not ordinary circumstances. A 60-knot gale was hammering the ship, the tide was in full ebb and the seas were piling up to Olympic proportions. Soon those seas were sweeping the decks, coming from the direction the ship was least equipped to handle: astern. One of the first of these fast-moving walls of green water burst the hatches, flooding the engine room and putting out the boiler fires, plunging the entire ship into helpless immobility and darkness.

The crew gathered together

below decks, amidships, and listened to the relentless breakers sweeping over the ship, waiting for the help they hoped was coming. By about 9 a.m. the water rose so high in the hull that they were driven out of their shelter and into the open. They struggled to make it up across the deck to the bridge, atop the wheelhouse, as colossal walls of green water pounded down on them, sweeping many away to their deaths. But a number of them made it to the bridge and huddled there, waiting and hoping and praying for help.

What they got was something else. The massive breakers had already torn the deckhouses and lifeboats off the stricken ship. Now a huge wall of water bore down on the boat — and tore the pilothouse and bridge off the ship, carrying it and all who'd sheltered there away into the sea.

One of the men on the bridge was John Slinning, one of the

three survivors. Here's his account of what happened next:

"As the big seas (waves) lifted the bridge and pilot house off, I first grabbed the exhaust pipe, held on to that for a while, then got around the after part of the smokestack," he said. "A sea struck me from there, and sent me over the rail. I held onto the rail until the sea had passed. Then another sea took me to the after rail, and I got up into the main rigging."

Only two other mariners had made it to the rigging with Slinning: carpenter Erick Lundmark and engine-room crewman S. Cagna. Every other member of the crew — with the exception of the ship's other quartermaster, Fred Peters, who made it to shore on a floating plank — was drowning around them in the icy, foaming breakers off of Peacock Spit.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Lifesaving Service crews at Point Adams and Cape Disappointment

were frantically trying to figure out where the wreck was. When they found it, around 8:30 a.m., they immediately launched a rescue effort that would go down in Coast Guard history as one of the most daring and hazardous in its history. Two of the then-new gasoline-powered lifeboats set out on the mission; both of them went to the bottom of the sea — yet every man who went out on those boats survived.

We'll talk about that rescue in next week's column.

(Sources: U.S. Coast Guard Historian's office; Gibbs, James Jr. Pacific Graveyard. Portland: Binford, 1950)

Finn J.D. John teaches at Oregon State University and writes about odd tidbits of Oregon history. For details, see <http://finn-john.com>. To contact him or suggest a topic: finn2@offbeatoregon.com or 541-357-2222.

6-day weather forecast

THURSDAY July 2 62° 102° Sunny	FRIDAY July 3 58° 98° Partly Cloudy
SATURDAY July 4 57° 97° Sunny	SUNDAY July 5 58° 97° Sunny
MONDAY July 6 56° 92° Sunny	TUESDAY July 7 58° 93° Sunny

HAPPY 4TH OF JULY!



LANDSCAPE AND BUILDING MATERIALS
Open 7 days a week!
79149 N. River Road
541-942-4664



Automotive Specialties

PRACTICING THE ART OF TRANSMISSION REPAIR SINCE 1991

- ✓ Manual & Automatic Transmission Repair
- ✓ Tune ups
- ✓ 30-60-90K Services
- ✓ Brakes, belts, hoses and cooling system services
- ✓ Mufflers & Custom Exhaust
- ✓ Drive-train repair such as clutches, u joints and differentials

All makes and models.

MAINTAINING YOUR VEHICLE AFFORDABLY

WE LIVE IN THE SAME TOWN WE WORK IN

"NO MONKEY BUSINESS!"

www.automotivespecialties.biz

DUSTIN TULLAR & RUSS OWENS
541-942-8022 • COTTAGE GROVE

LAWN BASE PLANTING SOIL

For Planting a New Lawn...
...or revitalizing an existing one!

4 CUBIC YARDS DELIVERED! \$156

SAME DAY MON-SAT

Offer Valid until 7/12/15. Cannot be combined with other offers. Additional charge to areas outside Eugene/Springfield.

Always the Best Price Around!

(541) 345-9085
2111 Prairie Rd. Eugene
820 N 42nd St. Springfield
3409 Franklin Blvd. Glenwood

LANE FOREST PRODUCTS
The company to grow with.

Dig Deeper » www.laneforest.com