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# A “POW Rolex” Recalls the Great Escape

*by Alan Downing*

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On May 12-13<sup>th</sup>, Antiquorum Geneva will hold its second auction of 2007, in which nearly 696 watches and clocks will be auctioned off.

On this occasion, two lots, No 311 and 312 will be sold and we are proud to share with you the wonderful story of lot No. 311. We warmly thank Mr Alan Downing, who we met at our Antiquorum Office in Geneva three weeks ago, for sharing with us the exceptional story of this Pow Rolex.

Following a very interesting discussion with Mr Downing and thanks to the rich illustrative material he provided us with, we hereby present the story of this Rolex Oyster which belonged to Mr Clive James Nutting, Corporal in the Royal Corps of Signals, who was a prisoner in Stalag Luft III from 1939 to 1945. This essay written by Alan tells us the story of Clive Nutting and shows how Rolex (and other watch factories) were engaged in the regular supply of watches to men incarcerated in Prisoner of War camps like Stalag Luft III (located at Sagan, 100 miles southeast of Berlin, at present Poland). This camp is probably the most famous of all Prisoner of War Camps due to it being the scene of the great escape of march 1944 and the subsequent making of the 1962 film of the same name.

We are pleased to share this story, provided by Alan, and photos with the TimeZone community in advance of the catalog's publication.

Thanks

Sharon Kerman and Morghan Mootosamy





**Clive Nutting's POW Stalag Luft III Watch" - lot 311**

Lot 311: Ref. 3525, Stainless Steel So-Called "Monoblocco" with Exceptional Original Documentation. Rolex, "Oyster Chronograph, Antimagnetic", Ref. 3525. Case No. 185983. Made in 1941, sold "gratis" on July 8, 1943 to Corporal Clive James Nutting whilst a prisoner of War in Stalag Luft III.

Very fine, one of very few remaining, water-resistant, stainless steel gentleman's wristwatch with black dial, round button chronograph, register, tachometer, telemeter and a stainless steel Rolex Oyster buckle. Accompanied by the original numbered receipt, numbered guarantee, Rolex envelope, three letters from the Rolex Watch Co. Ltd. signed by Hans Wilsdorf, and Corporal Nutting's archives,

correspondence, and photographs relating to his time at Stalag Luft III.

C. Two-body, polished and brushed, screwed-down case back, concave lugs. D. Matte black with luminous gilt-edged Arabic numerals, outer gilt minute/seconds track, subsidiary seconds and 30-minute register dials, outermost gilt tachometer and telemeter scales. Luminous gilt "baton" hands. M. 13", rhodium-plated, 17 jewels, straight line lever escapement, monometallic balance, self-compensating Breguet balance-spring, index regulator.

Dial, case and movement signed.

Diam. 35 mm. Thickness 14 mm.

About the Ref. 3525

Ref. 3525 was one of the first Oyster Chronograph references and was available in stainless steel as well as 18K pink and yellow gold. The condition of the present watch and the rarity of the black dial make it one of the most desirable watches of this reference to appear at auction in the last decade. When this watch first appeared in the early 1940s it cost 350 Swiss Francs in stainless steel, in 18K gold it cost 935 Swiss Francs.

Adding to the desirability of this particular watch is the almost unique survival of the original receipt bearing the reference and case number of the watch and the original numbered guarantee with its postally used Rolex envelope. Historically important correspondence from the immediate post-war period between Clive James Nutting and Hans Wilsdorf himself is included with this lot and gives a fascinating insight into the business methods of the Rolex Watch Company during the Second World War.

The documents included with this lot are:

- Original order acknowledgement from Rolex Geneva to Corporal Nutting in Stalag Luft III, dated March 30, 1943. Signed by Hans Wilsdorf.
- Original dispatch note from Rolex Geneva to Corporal Nutting in Stalag Luft III, dated July 10, 1943. Signed by Hans Wilsdorf.
- Original Rolex receipt bearing the watch reference and case numbers, dated July 8, 1943.
- Original Rolex guarantee and envelope bearing the watch case number, dated July 8, 1943.
- Letter from C.J. Nutting to Hans Wilsdorf requesting that the watch is serviced and offering to pay for the watch, dated August 11, 1945.
- Letter from Hans Wilsdorf to C.J. Nutting with instructions to return the watch for servicing and discussion of payment, dated August 20, 1945. Signed by Hans

Wilsdorf.

- Letter from The Rolex Watch Co., Ltd informing C.J. Nutting that payment can now be accepted at £15, 12s & 6d, dated March 23, 1948.

- Corporal Nutting's wartime log with original drawings and photographs made in Stalag Luft III, official notices regarding his missing and prisoner status, newspaper cuttings, letter from United Artists regarding the film "The Great Escape" and Wessex Film Productions regarding the film "The Wooden Horse".

### **A Wonderful Story**

A 1940s Rolex chronograph that belonged to a British prisoner of war at the Stalag Luft III camp in Nazi Germany is coming up for sale at Antiquorum in Geneva on May 13 and 14. With it is the logbook Corporal Clive Nutting of the Royal Corps of Signals kept during his wartime captivity. It's a collection of unpublished cartoons, illustrations and photographs revealing a new insight into camp life and the mass breakout of 76 POWs made famous in the movie, *The Great Escape*.

Included in the papers is Nutting's correspondence with Rolex, confirming the remarkable marketing campaign the Geneva brand launched during World War II.

### **A Captive Market**

Swiss watch sales were badly hit by the war, especially after Germany invaded unoccupied Vichy France in November 1942, and neutral Switzerland found itself completely encircled by Axis powers. Watch companies were cut off from their best customers, the British and Americans.

Rolex, however, discovered that there were plenty of British and Americans right on Switzerland's doorstep — literally a captive market — in German prisoner-of-war camps. Stalag Luft III, for example, housed up to 10,000 Allied airmen, shot down in operations over occupied Europe. Thousands more Allied officers were interned in the various Oflag (officer's POW camps) scattered throughout the German Reich.



***Clive Nutting (at right) with his “Brothers in Arm” in Stalag Luft III***

This was evidently a booming market, judging from Rolex’s confirmation of an order for one of its more expensive watches received from prisoner No. 738 in Stalag Luft III, Sagan, Germany (now part of Poland). Hans Wilsdorf, founding director of Rolex who took personal charge of sales to POWs, warned Clive Nutting of “an unavoidable delay in the execution of your order.” The delay was due, not to wartime restrictions, “but to a large number of orders in hand for officers.”

### **Rolex’s Incredible Offer**

The large number of orders is explained by the incredible offer Rolex was making to POWs. Underlined in Wilsdorf’s letter to Nutting are the words, “...*but you must not even think of settlement* during the war.” The news that Rolex was offering watches on a buy-now- pay-whenever” basis must have spread through the camps like wildfire. More than 3,000 Rolex watches were reportedly ordered by British officers in the Oflag VII B POW camp in Bavaria alone.

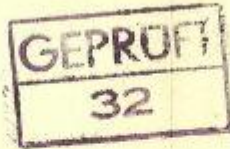
**MONTRES ROLEX S. A.**

18, RUE DU MARCHÉ

GENÈVE

Télégr.: ROLEX GENÈVE - Téléph. 50330

Rappeler réf. HW/MC



GENÈVE, le 30th of March

Cpl. C.J. Nutting  
Gef.Nr. 738  
Stalag Luft 3

Dear Sir,

We beg to acknowledge receipt of your order dated 10th March 43, and in accordance with your instructions we will supply you with 1 Chronograph Oyster No 122. This watch costs to-day in Switzerland Frs. 250,-- but you must not even think of settlement during the war.

As we have now a large number of orders in hand for officers, there will be some unavoidable delay in the execution of your order, but we will do the best we can for you.

Meanwhile, believe us to be

Yours truly,  
Montres ROLEX  
Director

*H. Wilsdorf*

*Rec'd 8-4-1943*

It meant that Wilsdorf, himself a German, was betting on an allied victory. By early 1943, this was a risk worth taking. The tide of war had turned: the Russians were on the offensive after routing the Germans at Stalingrad; German and Italian armies were being driven out of North Africa. But this expression of trust must have been a wonderful morale-booster for the POWs. Besides being a comfort in a POW camp, watches were part of an airman's kit, and many had lost theirs on capture or in trying to avoid it. Clive Nutting, as a signaller, would also have been issued with a watch as part of his equipment. For escape-minded prisoners, who could only get to the borders by public transport, a watch was as essential as a train timetable.

Wilsdorf hedged his bet further by making this offer available to British officers only, in the belief that their word was their bond. He had started his watch business in England, but moved to Switzerland after World War I for tax reasons. He was also impressed by the fact that Rolex watches were popular among British Royal Air Force pilots. But he also extended the offer to Clive Nutting, who though not an officer nor even in the air force, was gentleman enough to order a 250-franc Rolex 3525 Oyster chronograph. Most other POWs ordered the much cheaper Speed King model, popular for its small size.

The Oyster chronograph No. 122, ordered on March 10, 1943, was eventually sent

on July 10 with a gratis invoice, certificate and instructions, and it was on Nutting's wrist by August 4. As a chronograph, it could well have been useful in timing the patrols of the goons (prison guards) or the despatch of 76 escapers through tunnel "Harry" in the mass breakout of March 24-25, 1944.

TÉLÉGRAMMES : ROLEX-GENÈVE  
 TÉLÉPHONES : 5 03 35  
 5 03 36  
 CODES : A. B. G. 3<sup>ème</sup> EDIC  
 GENEVE - LE COCOT  
 UNIVERSAL TRADE MARK

# Montres ROLEX S.A.

ROLEX WATCH Co. Ltd.  
 MONTRES DE HAUTE PRÉCISION

MÉDAILLES D'OR  
 A L'EXPOSITION NATIONALE  
 SUISSE DE GENÈVE EN 1914  
 POUR RECORD DE PRÉCISION  
 DES SEULES  
 MONTRES - BRACELETS

GEPROM  
 60

GENÈVE, (SUISSE)  
 16, RUE DU MARCHÉ

8 Juillet 1943

Cpl. C. J. Nutting  
 Gef.Nr. 738  
 Stalag Luft 3 Off. Cp

Référence	Quantité	Description	PRIX			V
		1 colis postal No 698				
M 162 5525 /185983	1	Rolex Oyster Chronographe acier 13" 17R cadr. noir arabes radium avec bracelet cuir	gratis			✓
Nous certifions que la montre précitée est de fabrication suisse. MONTRES ROLEX S.A. <i>A. B. Nutting</i>						

### A Valuable Craftsman

Nutting was among a few army personnel quartered in the North camp of Stalag Luft III and, as a shoemaker by trade, was valuable both to the Germans and to the POWs. He thus had a privileged position in charge of the camp's shoemaking workshop. He received a wage from the Germans, sent remittances to his family in



England, and as an officer's promissory note testifies, had money to lend. He could evidently afford a special watch.



*Clive Nutting (at right) with his friends in the workshop*

The next we hear of the watch is on Nutting's return to his home in Acton, London, in August 1945 when he writes to Wilsdorf that although his watch served well in the cold weather during the evacuation of the camps, it was now gaining an hour a day. Where can he have it fixed? And can he have the final invoice?

Due to British currency restrictions, Rolex could only send Nutting the invoice of £15 12s 6d for his watch in 1948. The chronograph stayed with him until his death in Australia in 2001 at the age of 90.

The last record of Nutting's POW watch is a restorer's bill for AU\$2,356 (€1,400), dated March 28, 2003 — exactly 63 years after its original owner became a prisoner of war.

**TAX INVOICE\*/STATEMENT\***  
(\*delete as appropriate)

64

Date 28-3-2003

To Vino

ABN (of Recipient) \_\_\_\_\_ Order No. \_\_\_\_\_

From **MASTER WATCHMAKING P/L**

ABN 12 059 659 219

Level 5, 262 PITT STREET

SYDNEY NSW 2000

ABN (of Supplier) \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE: 9264 7769

QTY	DESCRIPTION	PRICE	G.S.T.	TOTAL
1	St. Rolex St Steel watch Chronograph on leather strap			
	Restoration of movement Balance complete 2 x jewels Dial repositioned case restoration, hand restored, etc.			1,232.00
				1,089.00
	1 leather strap			35.00

TOTAL INCLUSIVE OF G.S.T. 2,356.00

Total includes G.S.T. of 214.18

**The restorer's bill dated March 28, 2003**

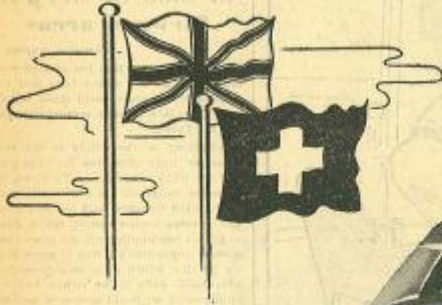
**A Souvenir to Escape For**

The Swiss watch industry also heavily promoted its watches to the estimated 5,000 allied escaped POWs in Switzerland (known as *évadés*), including more than 1,200 US airmen who had baled out of, or landed their crippled aircraft in Switzerland. The Americans, as well as British officers, stayed in luxury hotels in such Alpine resorts as Adelboden, Wengen and Davos, becoming the mainstay of the wartime tourist industry.

# RICHARD Automatic

**THE WATCH OF THE FUTURE**

**Over 17,000 Richard Automatic sold in Switzerland in the last two years.**



This is the latest Richard Automatic Model with big hand for seconds, luminous dial.  
Retail Price 109 frs.

**3 Extracts from GOLD BOON Test**

No. 221: I am about my Richard have used it under conditions and have been an enthusiastic my watch the best companion. For 11 at an altitude of 6,000 in spite of very cold never varied in the

No. 1440: W precision (reliability) really lost. For its solidity it is without other watches.

No. 1674: I find out any interrupts had to wind it up only strenuous; I watch has never other watch like it.  
N.B. Thousands be inspected in our

# MY SPECIAL OFFER TO "EVADES"

I have much pleasure in allowing to all "Evades" desirous of purchasing a RICHARD AUTOMATIC WATCH for their personal use, an exceptional rebate of 25% off Swiss Retail price.

All you need do is to fill the coupon below and post it to Morges. The selected model or models will be sent you per return on 8 DAYS FREE TRIAL.

Payment can be made in full or in weekly instalments (maximum twelve weeks).

If you wish to purchase non-automatic watches, I shall be pleased to send on request a choice of high-class watches at competitive prices. This includes models for ladies and gentlemen, with stainless steel or gold cases. Prices range from 33 frs. net.

When filling coupon, give your permanent home address. This will be registered in our records and you will be advised in due course of the nearest British office where you can apply for application of All-Risk Guarantee.

## COUPON

To RICHARD Automatic, Morges.

Please send per return on 8 days free trial with All Risk Guarantee the following RICHARD Automatic Model(s).

MODELS FOR GENTLEMEN	Richard standard Model	Fr. 98.	} Minus special 25% rebate for evadés.
	Richard De Luxe Model	Fr. 109.	
	Richard as illustrated	Fr. 109.	
MODELS FOR LADIES	Richard Lady Model	Fr. 120.	
	ditto non-waterproof	Fr. 109.	
	(Turnover tax included).		

Please send per return a choice of non-automatic high class watches on 8 days free trial, maximum price approximately .....

If I decide to purchase the watch (or watches) selected I shall pay the amount to your postal cheque account (Il. 4359) (a) in one payment (b) in ..... weekly instalments.

Otherwise I shall return the watch (or watches) by registered post within 8 days of receipt.

Signature..... Name.....

Christian Name..... Rank and No.....

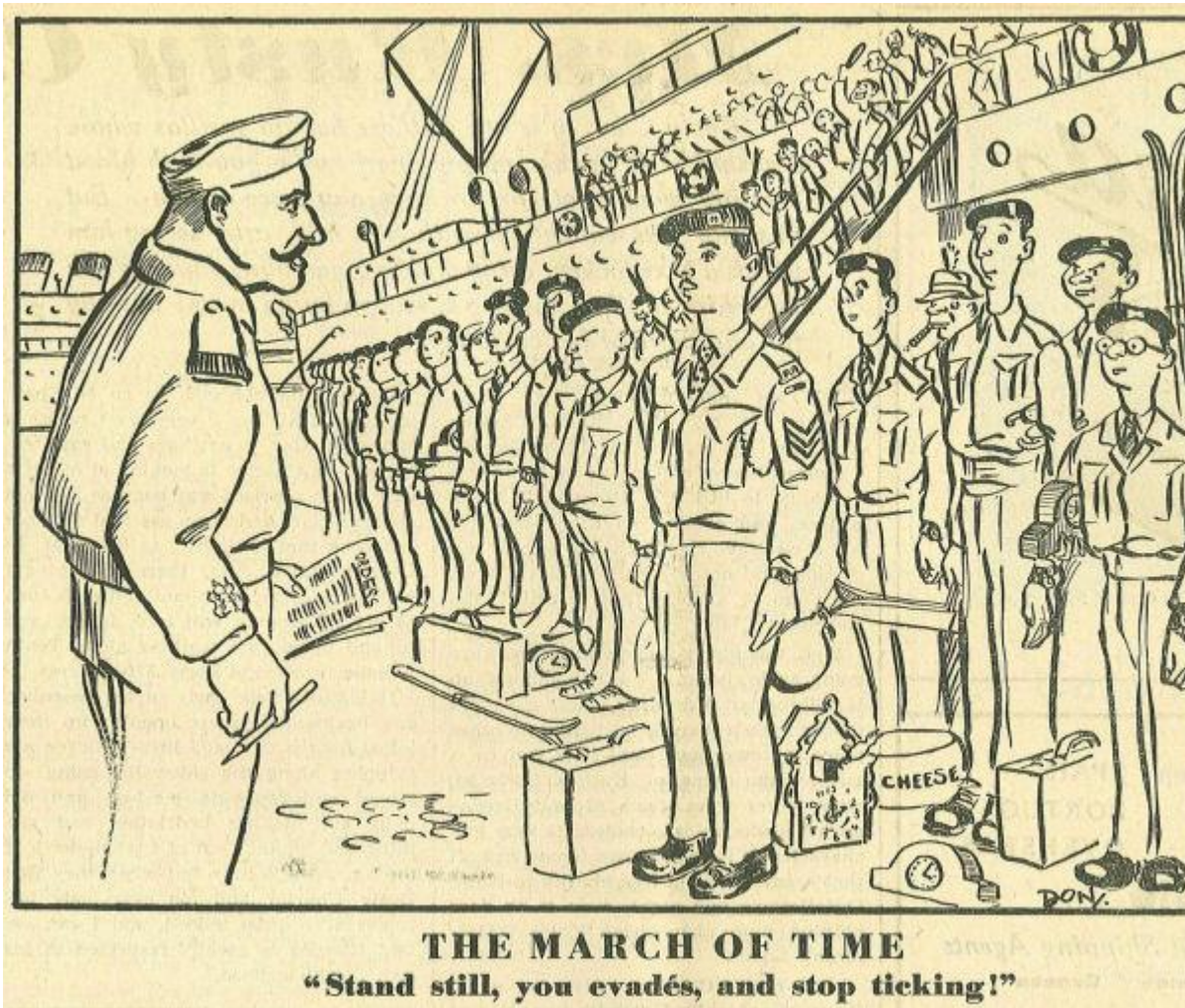
Home Address..... Swiss Address.....

N.B. Please fill coupon in ink, underlining clearly the articles selected, also if full range of non-automatic watches is requested.

Then-popular brands such as Aureole, Angelus, Cyma, Invicta, Movado, Mulco, Olma, Paul Buhré, Richard, Rodana and Pierce, advertised heavily in the *évadés*' newspaper, *Marking Time*. Richard, in particular, took out whole-page advertisements offering *évadés* a 25% discount on their 100-franc automatic model, payment in 12 weekly installments, and replacement in case of loss or theft.

Patek Philippe, more discreetly, advertised an expensive high-precision pocket-chronograph.

The Americans, with an allowance of CHF20 a day, had the most money to spend. Non-commissioned British and Dominion *évadés* had to subsist on CHF15 a week, yet most managed to save up enough to buy a watch.



The success of the campaign is shown by a cartoon in *Marking Time* of returning *evadés* parading for departure festooned with watches and clocks. The *évadés* were no doubt also motivated by the paper reporting a shortage of watches in Britain, citing a demand to the minister for economic warfare for "an aircraft full of Swiss watches to be sent to England as soon as possible" because "good cheap watches are unobtainable."

### The Historic Value of Watches

The prices quoted for watches in the 1940s converted to current values, show that watches were relatively far cheaper then than they are now. In the pre-quartz era, watches were more of a necessity than a luxury.

The CHF250 quoted for Nutting's Rolex chronograph in 1943 had the purchasing power of about USD2,500 today. Today's Rolex chronograph costs around four times as much, although, unlike the 1940s model it's automatic.

The cheapest Swiss lever watches sold for an equivalent of USD300-500 today. Automatics were at least twice as expensive.

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 Search

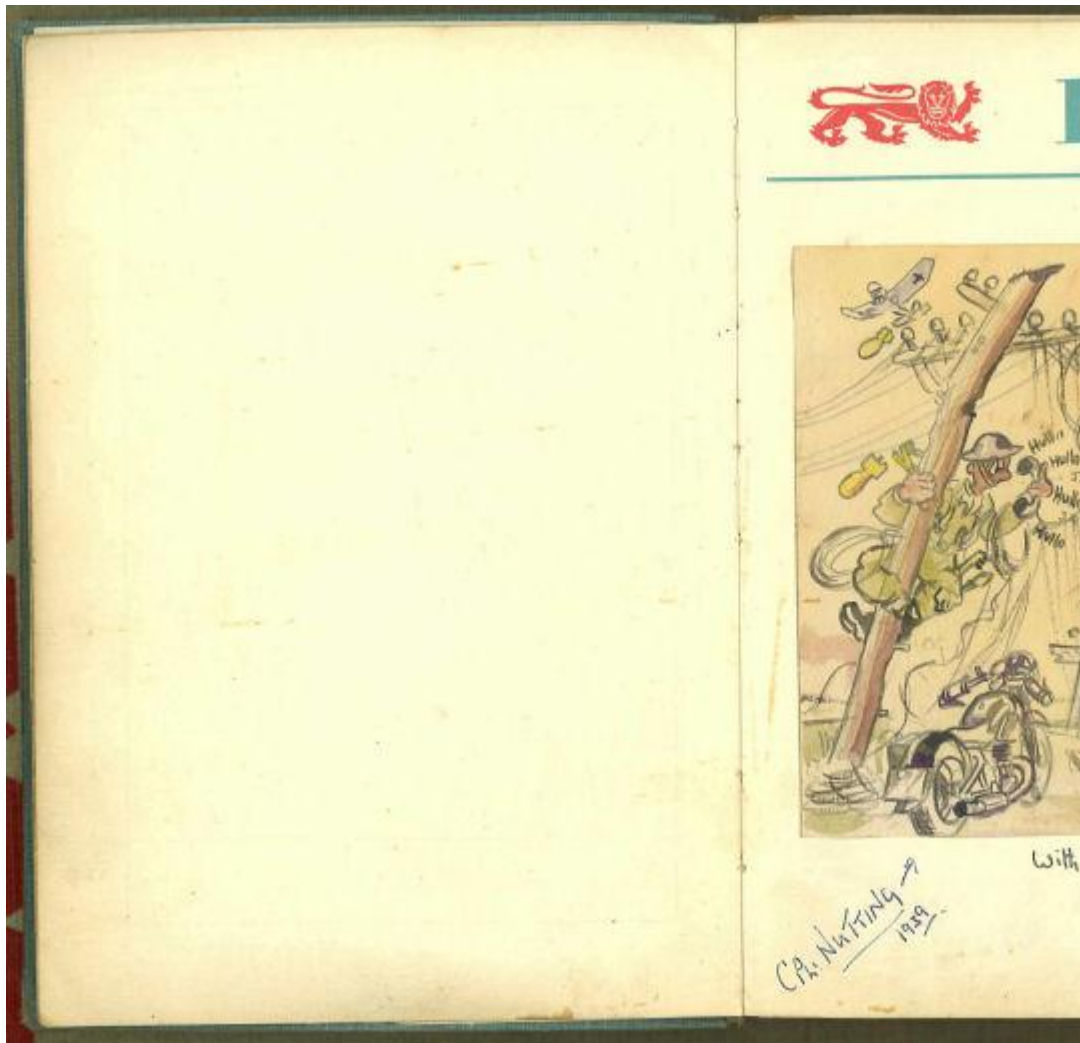
# A “POW Rolex” Recalls the Great Escape

Part 2



*Clive Nutting's POW Stalag Luft III Watch" - lot 311*

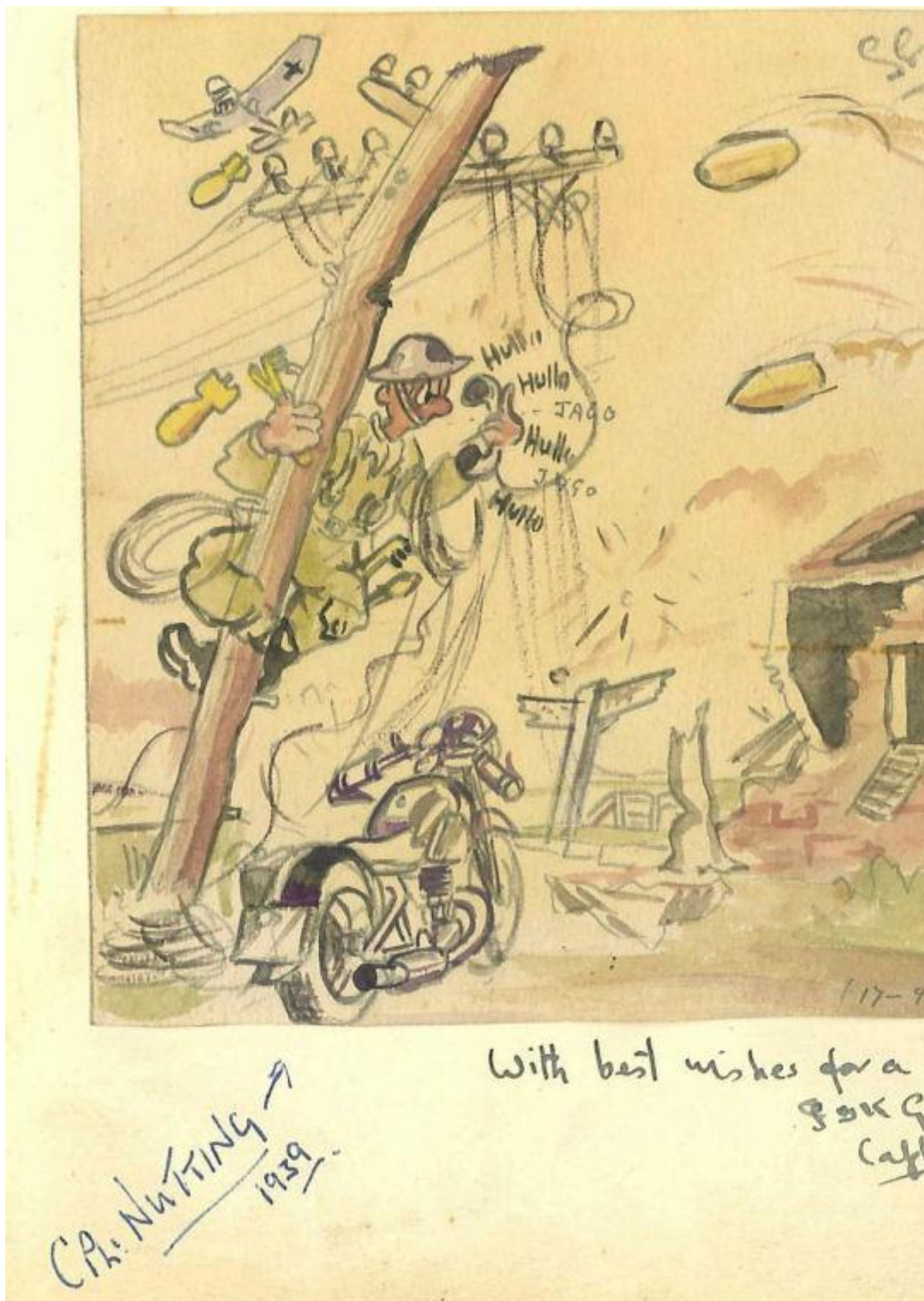
**A Treasure of Unpublished POW Mementoes**



During his five-year captivity, Clive “Nobby” Nutting kept a war log filled with drawings, cartoons and photographs depicting life in World War II’s most famous prisoner-of-war camp, Stalag Luft III — scene of the Great Escape.

He starts his scrapbook book with a coloured drawing that sums up his time in action prior to his capture on March 28, 1940, south of Dunkirk. It shows him clinging desperately to a damaged telegraph pole, trying to establish communications as bombs and shells rain down on a battle-torn landscape. A “Stuka” dive-bomber hovers menacingly overhead.





Nutting had joined the Royal Corps of Signals — the army's communications engineers — in 1935, as a part-time soldier in the reservist Territorial Army.

By April 1940, Corporal Nutting was in France with the 44<sup>th</sup> Territorial division, part of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) guarding the border

with Belgium. On March 10, the Germans attacked, splitting the French armies, encircling the BEF, and forcing it in a tighter pocket around Dunkirk — the only port of evacuation.

On March 28, the Germans overwhelmed Nutting's rearguard position near Cassel, a strategic communications centre. That night, the remnants of his 44<sup>th</sup> division managed to slip away. Some were among the 340,000 British and French troops evacuated from Dunkirk.

A series of official letters evokes the agony that Clive Nutting's parents must have felt when they discovered their son hadn't got back from Dunkirk. First he's posted missing, and it's not until September 12, 1940 that they know he's a prisoner-of-war.

We next see Nutting in a press photograph published in an American men's magazine. He's a haggard and exhausted prisoner on a cold, hungry march through Belgium and Germany to captivity. German soldiers hold their rifles at the ready. A contemporary handwritten account among his mementoes speaks of potato fields being stripped bare as the prisoners march over them, and of POWs being machine-gunned as they steal milk from a cow.



**STEEL NECKLACE**—Favorite game in Stalag VIII B was to loop rusted chain around prisoner's neck, wind it tight



**MUD GRAVEYARD**—Allied soldiers were marched till they couldn't stand, pushed into holes and covered with dirt

to his men. Half a dozen unslung their tommyguns and would have mown us down had not an elderly officer arrived in time to stop the massacre.

He spoke urgently with the non-com and pointed first at us, then down the road towards Ypres. The non-com nodded and approached us. "You will go with the officer," he snapped. "If you have any food, you will take it with you." He smiled and added, "It will have to last you a long time. You will fall in on the roadway."

We collected what little rations we still possessed, pushing them into our small packs and, escorted by a guard of four tommy-gunners, we were marched off down the road.

Five hundred yards along the road we came upon a small party of Germans, evidently belonging to a medical unit, who were grouped about a vehicle that we all recognized. It was our officers' mess truck.

The driver, Thomas, a blanket thrown over him, lay on the tail-board. He was pressing the blanket to his middle and groaning. We were halted while one of the medical orderlies spoke to the officer. Dozens of corpses, both British and German, lined the shallow ditch which bordered the road. Other casualties, badly wounded but still alive, were stretched out on the grass. Many we knew well. They were men of our 1st Battalion.

The officer addressed us in English. "The first-aid post is 50 yards farther on. You will help with the wounded. There are no stretchers, but that gate over there will serve. You will take the German wounded first. The more efficiently you co-operate, the sooner you will be able to help your own men."

He stifled a yawn and concluded, "Your friend at the back of the vehicle, for example, has been shot in the

stomach. His suffering is considerable. At the first-aid post there are drugs to alleviate his pain."

We looked across at the wounded driver's white tortured face and knew there was nothing for it but to obey. Two of us lifted the five-barred gate from off its hinges and carried it over to where a German soldier was lying, his right leg shattered at the knee. He watched us incuriously as we eased him on to the improvised stretcher. Two of the German orderlies and two of our privates, with a couple of guards in attendance, moved off at a brisk pace. Before they were back we had found another gate and had a second stretcher-party operating.

A mile or so past the first-aid post we caught up with a depressingly long column of prisoners—British, French and Belgian—trudging along under escort, heading for Ypres. We tagged on to the rear of this joyless procession. German transport roared past westwards.

With only two short halts we marched until 11:00 P.M. We were herded together in a field, warned that no lights were to be shown during the hours of darkness and left to our own devices. Our guards took up positions under the trees round the perimeter.

It was raining hard. Shrouded in gas capes, we lay on the ground, huddled together for warmth, and tried to sleep. Here and there a match flared up, but random shots from the guards quickly discouraged any smokers. For the most part we lay there, soaking wet and shivering. Once a lone plane came over. The long white fingers of searchlights stabbed at the black sky and a nearby ack-ack battery thundered into action. Although shells were bursting directly overhead, none of us moved.

At 4:00 A.M. we were again (Continued on page 72)

"Your friend in the vehicle," yawned the officer, "is shot in the stomach"

From June to September 1940, Nutting is incarcerated at Stalag VIII B in Lambsdorf. Then he's moved to Stalag Luft I at Bart on the Baltic, where he stays until 1942. He spent from 1942 to 1945 at Stalag Luft III in Upper Silesia, where he was the camp shoemaker. At the end of January, he was evacuated ahead of the advancing Russians across Germany to Westertimke on the North Sea, and spent the remaining few weeks of his

captivity at the Milag Nord camp for captured merchant seamen.

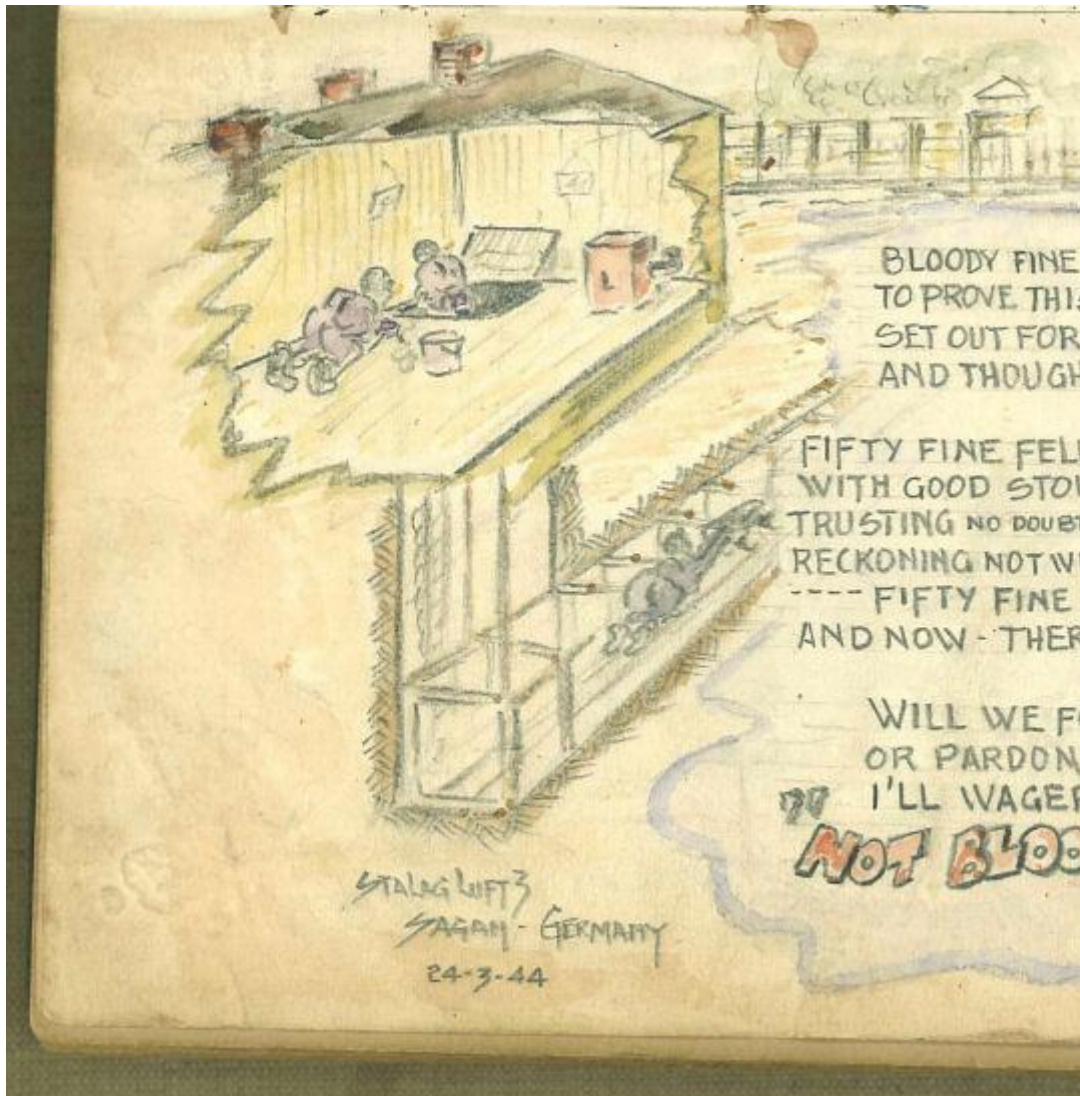
The drawings and watercolours of camp life are typical of the British serviceman's humour-in-adversity: we see Nutting distilling 100-octane hooch from marmalade, or wondering whether to make potato substitute from bread or bread substitute from potatoes. One accomplished artist contributed a cartoon of a young man hurrying upstairs, a packet of ice-cream in one hand and dragging a scantily clad lady in the other, and urging: "Hurry darling! Before it gets soft!" But there's also a grimly detailed pencil drawing of a camp watchtower, and series of watercolours of the forced march out of Stalag Luft III in midwinter 1945. First the POWs struggle through snow dragging a sled. Then the snow melts and they have to carry their loads. A dramatic drawing records an attack by a RAF Mosquito aircraft on February 22, 1945.

Apart from the unpublished collection of POW art, there are a number of photographs with Nutting and his fellow POWs behind barbed wire, standing next to their huts or at work mending shoes. Nutting was in a way better off than many POWs. His job as cobbler kept him occupied. In wartime, your boots are your best friends, gold to the prisoners and their guards alike. He was undoubtedly popular, judging from the contributions to his scrapbook, and his evident sense of humour — natural in a Londoner — would have helped keep up the morale.

### **The Great Escape — A Game Turned to Tragedy**

Of all Clive Nutting's mementoes of prisoner-of-war life, none is more poignant than an illustrated poem depicting the tragic escape from Stalag Luft III in March 1944.

The verse was penned by an Australian airman when the camp learned that the Nazis had murdered 50 of the escapers. Accompanied by a detailed drawing of the tunnel beneath the camp, it expresses the outrage and defiance of the POWs in typical Aussie style.



*“...Fifty fine fellows  
With good stout intentions  
Trusting no doubt in the Geneva Conventions  
Reckoning not with he mind of the Hun  
Fifty fine fellows — and now there are none.*

*“Will we forget — or pardon this? Might we?  
I'll wager a bet — ‘Not bloody likely!’”*

What became known as the Great Escape was an ambitious plot launched in early 1943 to get up to 250 POWs out of Stalag Luft III through tunnels beneath the wire. The mass breakout was designed to tie up as much of the German resources as possible in hunting the escapers.

Masterminded by Squadron Leader Roger Bushell, a South African, it quickly grew to a massive undertaking, employing more than 500 of the camp's artisans in the production of escape equipment — civilian clothes, German uniforms, compasses, rations and hundreds of forged documents

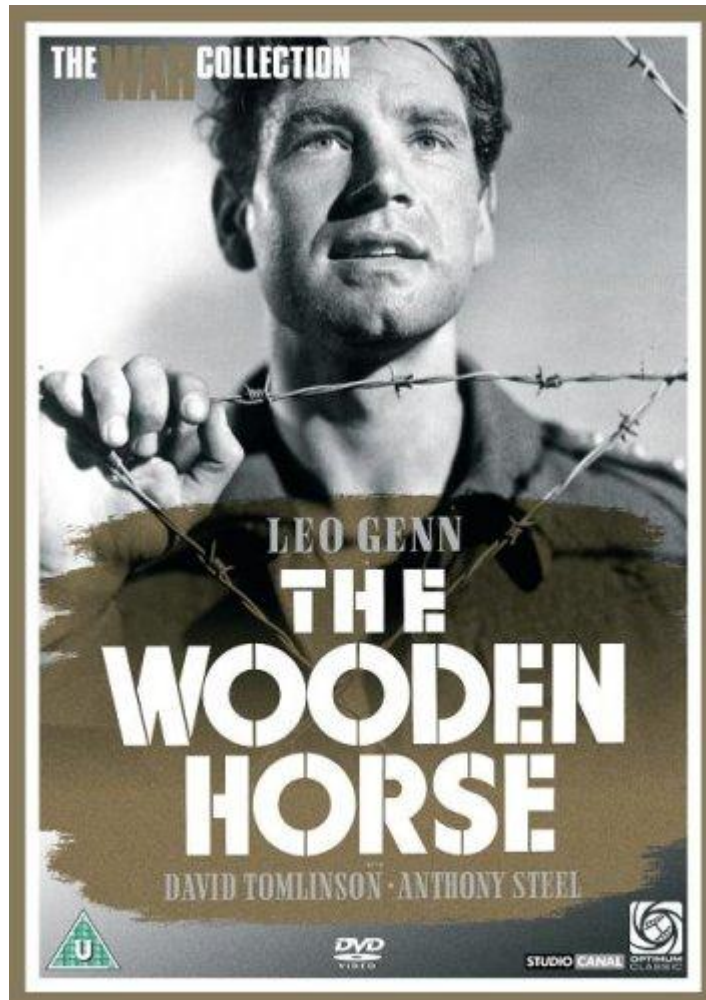
and maps.

The escape organisation built, stole or extorted tools, ventilation and lighting equipment for the tunnel engineers. The operation, under the noses of the Germans, required elaborate security and a constant monitoring of guards and patrols.

As a shoemaker with well-equipped workshops at his disposal, a specialist in signals and an experienced “Kriegie” (POW), Nutting was part of the escape organisation from the start, making civilian belts, shoes and briefcases for the escapers out of leather stolen from his German clients.

Nutting had already been involved in the ingenious “Wooden Horse” escape from Stalag Luft III in the summer of 1943. The POWs had started a tunnel from beneath a vaulting horse built out of Red Cross cases. Every day they carried the horse, with a man hidden inside it to the same spot in the prison compound near the perimeter wire. While the prisoners vaulted, the man inside dug the tunnel. Nutting was one of the “penguins” who dispersed the earth dug out of the tunnel by dropping it out of bags inside his trousers. The three escapers — F/Lt Eric Williams (who wrote a book about the escape), Lt Michael Codner and F/Lt Oliver Philpot got home via Sweden.

After the war, Nutting acted as consultant for both the 1950 *Wooden Horse* movie and the *Great Escape* of 1963.



***The Wooden Horse (1950)***

Cast: Leo Genn ; David Tomlinson ; Anthony Steel ; David Greene ; Peter Burton.



### ***The Great Escape (1963)***

Cast: Steve McQueen, James Garner, Richard Attenborough, James Donald, Charles Bronson, Donald Pleasence, and James Coburn.

The real Great Escape started with the launch of three tunnels, “Tom”, “Dick” and “Harry,” each starting in a barrack hut, through the concrete foundations of the stove or shower because the huts themselves were elevated on stilts. “Tom” was discovered, and “Dick,” abandoned and used for hiding escape kits. All energies were concentrated on “Harry,” dug 10 metres deep to avoid German tunnelling detectors and more than 100 metres long to come out in the pine forest beyond the wire.

The breakout through Harry was scheduled for the moonless night of March 24, 1944. It started with the disappointment at seeing the tunnel emerge well short of the pine forest in an open snow-covered area patrolled by German sentries. Having to wait for the sentries to pass, a power blackout and tunnel collapses slowed the throughput to barely a dozen men an hour instead of the planned one a minute.

By dawn 76 POWs had got out. The next man emerged from the tunnel under the feet of the sentry.

All but three of the 76 were recaptured. Hitler was so furious at the breakout that he ordered them all shot. Eventually, Goering, head of the *Luftwaffe* and responsible for the prisoners, persuaded him to limit the number to more than half. Thus 50 prisoners of war were handed over to the Gestapo and killed.

For the British, this had started out as a game, as the verse commemorating



the tragedy makes clear:

*“Bloody fine fellows  
To prove this was done  
Set out for freedom,  
And thought it was fun.”*

That the Germans should not play the game by the rules — in this case the Geneva Conventions — was deeply shocking to the British, who made great efforts to bring the perpetrators to justice after the war. The Royal Air Force Special Branch managed to track down 18 of the murderers: 14 were sentenced to death and one escaped the gallows by committing suicide.

The killing of the recaptured POWs was embarrassing to the *Luftwaffe*, which had meticulously respected the Geneva Conventions in the treatment of their British prisoners, mindful of the fact that many of their downed airmen were in British camps. As a gesture, the *Luftwaffe* allowed the Stalag Luft III POWs to build a memorial to their murdered comrades.

Nutting’s scrapbook contains a sensitively drawn post-card of the fine memorial to the 50 airmen, which still stands at the camp site, now in Zagan, part of Poland.

Alan Downing

***Antiquorum is proud to offer a second “POW Rolex” recalling the Great Escape. The Rolex of Major R. J. Henderson. R. J. Henderson, a Major in the Royal Canadian Air Force, was a prisoner at Stalag Luft III, and is cited in the list of camp prisoners. As such, he also took advantage of Rolex’s offer to furnish watches gratis during the war.***

  
**ROLEX**



N° 285

En raison de sa grande précision, ce chronographe est à recommander tout spécialement pour des travaux techniques et scientifiques. Il enregistre les secondes et les minutes. Le boîtier, la couronne et le verre sont, comme dans tous les modèles Rolex-Oyster, absolument étanches. Cependant, il ne faut pas nager ou se baigner avec cette montre, car l'étanchéité des deux poussoirs qui font fonctionner l'aiguille centrale est assurée par de la matière plastique et ne sont, de ce fait, pas 100 % étanches à l'eau.

Cette réserve se réfère seulement au chronographe car tous les autres modèles Oyster n'ayant pas de poussoirs, sont garantis absolument étanches à l'eau.

En acier inoxydable . . . . . Fr. 315.—  
Dito avec partie supérieure en or . . . (épuisé)  
En or massif 18 carats . . . . . Fr. 935.—







**Major R. J. Henderson's POW Stalag Luft III Watch : Lot 312**

Lot 312 "Major R. J. Henderson's POW Stalag Luft III Watch

Ref. 3525, So-Called Stainless Steel "Monoblocco"

Rolex, "Oyster Chronograph, (Anti)magnetic", case No. 128409, Ref. 3525.  
Made circa 1940.

Very fine and rare, water-resistant, stainless steel gentleman's wristwatch with black dial, round button chronograph, registers and a stainless steel Rolex buckle.

C. Two-body, polished, inclined bezel, downturned lugs, dedicated screw-down back. D. Black with applied gold baton indexes and Arabic 6 and 12, sunk guilloché subsidiary dials for the seconds and 30-minute register, outer

minute/seconds and 1/5th seconds divisions with Arabic five-minute markers. Yellow gold "feuille" hands.

M. Cal. 13", rhodium-plated, 17 jewels, straight-line lever escapement, monometallic balance, Breguet balance spring, index regulator.

Dial, case and movement signed.

Diam. 35 mm. Thickness 13 mm.

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