

Preparation for the Tunnel

[Narrator] In war the element of chance plays a pivotal role in everything. It was particularly dominant in the air war and, in turn, played a key role amongst airmen prisoners. At Stalag Luft III, chance brought together a group of American and British Commonwealth captives whose collective skills and determination led to one of the most spectacular events of the Second World War. It came to be known as *The Great Escape* and, for fifty brave RAF airmen, it was to be an unmitigated tragedy.

[Narrator] Two of the key players in this drama were squadron leader Roger Bushell and Lt Col Albert P. Clark, known to his peers as "Bud" Clark. Clark was one of the very first Americans to be shot down and was the first American officer at Stalag Luft III. He was to be behind the wire for 33 months. His British comrades liked him from the start.

[John Cordwell] "That Lt Col, when he came through Stalag Luft III, young man, very impressive, he was obviously a professional soldier – West Pointer. I knew him only peripherally, as a Brit, because he was the guy in charge of the Americans there."

[Narrator] In the years to come, Col Clark was destined to become the Superintendent of the United States Air Force Academy and retired from the Air Force as a Lt General. Clark and Roger Bushell became close associates and the best of friends – a friendship that was destined to be cut tragically short some two years later when Bushell was brutally murdered by the Gestapo.

[LtGen Clark] "Roger was a lawyer by profession and an auxiliary in the RAF. In other words, he was reserve forces, is what we would call him. But he was squadron leader in fighters and was shot over the evacuation of Dunkirk. He was a brilliant man and he was obsessed with escape. He had escaped twice before. The last time he escaped was from Barth and he got to Prague and got into the hands of the Prague underground. He stayed there a year -- they couldn't get him out of town for some reason – with a Czech family. When the Czechs assassinated Heidrich, the German High Commissioner, the Germans of course swept through Prague with a fine-toothed comb. He and his family were caught. The family of course was executed. He was taken to Berlin by the Gestapo. And he was there for some months. I was in Stalag Luft III when he finally returned to camp. He looked like he'd been beat up a bit. He had an eye that had been damaged. My guess is that the Gestapo had warned him that if he ever escaped again and was caught, it would be the end of Roger Bushell. I think that [with] the full knowledge of this, he continued his escape activities. As a matter of fact, at Stalag Luft III, he became the senior man in charge of escape activity."

[Narrator] Before anything could begin, the collective skills of the swelling American arrivals, along with the more prison-wise British, had to be organized.

[LtGen Clark] "We interviewed them, first to be sure they were legitimate prisoners of war and not scabs that the Germans were trying to send in to learn of our activities. We also interviewed them to find out what their skills and their background was as far as

things that might help us. We found people who were excellent photographers who could do beautiful printing work. We put them in the forging department, to forge day passes and travel papers and things of that sort. Some of them developed immense skill, good enough to pass the Gestapo checks, if you know what I mean. Others knew how to make maps, compasses, clothing, civilian clothes. We had people who had great skill at making a wooden gun that looked exactly like the guards would carry. We had people who could blow glass, who knew metallurgy and could take a rough piece of scrap iron and make a cutting tool that could cut barbed wire. So we were very careful to find out what the skills were and we never failed to find someone who could do the things that needed to be done."

[Narrator] Roger Bushell became the "Big X" for planning the escape and Col Clark became the "Big S" for maintaining its security. The tunnel was nearly two years in preparation.