

I was 30 yrs old

Mission #14
(As I recall 64 years later)

By Roy A. Cheek Lawson, Mo

The mission started about 0400 on 22Feb44. This was about the time the company clerk woke us up for the mission. We dressed, shaved, then to the chow hall for our last meal, which was anything we wanted, from real eggs to steaks. Then we took sack lunches with us because we will be gone up to eight or nine hours flying time. That is if everything goes according to plan.

We then proceeded to the briefing room to learn where we were headed. This included the drawing on a map that showed the way to the target and return. Usually you heard a loud moan, especially if we were to fly to a German target, Brennen, Frankfurt, Oschersleben, or Aschersleben, or some other German target.

After briefing we went to our lockers to put on our heated suits, boots, leather helmets with radio ear phones. Then to the gun room to check out our 50 cal. machine guns (I had two) to see there wasn't too much oil. If too much, they would freeze, especially at -50 degrees C , which we sometimes encountered. The armament people would then take the guns to our plane, (to which we were assigned during briefing) and install them.

When all was loaded, the pilot and co-pilot would check out all of the instruments, then start engines to warm up. After warm up we waited for the green flair, which was the signal to start taking off. We were assigned a position in the formation to which we were to fly in the briefing. This morning we were the last to take off, which meant Tail-end Charlie or Coffin Corner. (Low plane in the lowest and last formation.)

As the ball turret gunner, I was the lowest man. I couldn't see any other plane any where, except when we were over Germany. Our mission was Aschersleben, which was approximately 120 miles west of Berlin. We had a lot of fighter escort, but they couldn't keep all the enemy planes away. Also a lot of flak. One burst hit the left wing, which carried a lot of fuel. The hole was about two feet wide. Then another burst knocked out # 2 engine. I guess this is about the time we left formation because we were attacked by a lot of enemy planes. I don't know whether I shot any down, but my buddy Ted Couch from Bosworth, MO. told me after coming home he counted a dozen.

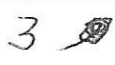
Then sometime after that a piece of flak hit the turret and barely missed my head, but did hit the outside of my left leg. It felt like my boot was filling up with blood. So I climbed out of the turret and went into the radio room where I tore open my pants to stop the bleeding, but to my surprise there was a wound about 4 inches long and an inch wide with just a few specks of blood. I wrapped a lot of gauze around my leg and was going to get back in the turret, but I hadn't shut the power off and (what we call creep) the turret door was down so far I couldn't get it open. So I locked it shut and went back to the radio room. That is when Bob Hannan told me we had left the formation and was headed for the North Sea because we didn't have enough fuel to get home or Sweden. I was looking

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out the side window when I saw a ME109 coming at us from the side and about that time a cannon shell hit around the ball turret (where I should have been). That was when Norris Williams, the waist gunner, had the same idea I had and headed for the side door. He opened it by the latch that caused the slip stream to pin him to the side of the plane. I pulled the emergency release and put my foot in his back and kicked him and the door both out. Then I jumped and as soon as I saw the plane go by, I pulled the rip cord. My chute opened and I was going forward so fast that I thought my head and feet would touch. By the time I got my head back up, I could see the top of the trees. I landed in a ditch by the side of a road and sat down on the bank. I couldn't have landed any easier except in a haystack. After the war, my pilot, Charles Crook, told me that I had jumped when we were 800 to 900 feet up. So I was lucky to land where I did without being injured. I looked around to see anyone. There was about 10 or 15 people to my left and they motioned me to come their way. I ran to them and asked if anyone spoke English. They thought I was English and pointed for me to go on past them to the back of a house. I went through two fences and sat down to take off my parachute harness and other excess clothing. After this I heard a whistle and I looked and saw a man motioning to me to come toward him. He was coming across a plowed field and he got to me just as I was going through another fence. The first thing he said was "do you have a cigarette?". I said "no" because I had noticed my leg pocket had been torn open and my extra package was gone, including my emergency package which included a map of the area that our flight was to take and also money of those countries.

My leg was hurting pretty much as I was limping. So he helped me across the field to a house and buildings. We went into a shed and he left. But a few onlookers came in to see a foreign airman and asked me where I was from. The fellow came back and took me to the house where I found out there was a doctor. He spoke good English as the wife was English. He doctored my wound with iodine (ooooo!!!) they fixed me up with civilian clothes, etc. They decided to take me to a neighbor who had several children and they thought one more wouldn't be noticed. (I was only 20 years old). Since he was a doctor he had a car and he drove to the neighbor's house and while he was inside a fellow rode up on a motorcycle. He also went in the house. A little later the two came out and we drove off following the motorcycle. The doctor told me that the cyclist was a member of the underground (and also was his helper) and he didn't know it. We drove for sometime and it was getting late. We stopped at a house and went in. An elderly couple, who didn't speak English, met us. They took me upstairs to a room that had a deep feather bed. They brought me a little supper and I went to bed and slept real sound. The next night someone came for me and took me to a house and had my picture taken for an identity card that said I was deaf and couldn't speak. Then after this was done, they took me to a church which had a school on the end. We went inside. The guide, who was a teacher, showed me the rest room (the wall of which had finger marks. Toilet paper was non-existent). In the rest room was a trap door to the attic. He got a ladder and I climbed up. He gave me a blanket, a bucket, and showed me where I could sleep. He left after telling me he would be back the next night. During the day I could watch the kids play in the yard. They also relieved themselves along a brick wall, boys on one side, girls on the other, during their recess.

I passed away the time reading the Bible my mother had given me to carry on my

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missions. This Bible has a metal front that I carried over my heart on every mission. I also explored other parts of the church above the ceiling of the church.

After two weeks, my leg had healed up enough for me to be moved. I had never learned to ride a bicycle, so I had to ride on the back. We traveled for three or four hours and came to a large castle to stay the night. The next morning someone came to wake me up and asked how I wanted my egg cooked. I had no idea and said three minutes. I went down stairs and was showed where to sit with my egg. It was in an egg cup. I watched the other people to see what to do with my egg. They took their table knife and started cracking it as they turned it. So I started the same way and to my surprise it was still raw. It splattered on me and my plate to my embarrassment.

After breakfast (we traveled in the daytime) but this time we walked. I followed some distance behind until we crossed the Nijmegen Bridge and went to the train depot. I had been given a train ticket, I got on the train and traveled with several German soldiers. I was to keep the guide in sight until we got to our destination, which was Roermond, in the SE part of Holland.

After we got off the train, we proceeded to a house about five miles from town. It was surrounded by a lot of trees and was about 300 or 400 yards from the highway. We could see and hear German troops during the day going by. There was also a small lake on the property that we sometimes rowed a boat on.

When I went in the house, I was met by a middle aged woman and her husband. Also there were other boys in the room. I found out there were English flyers, Canadians and Americans. Altogether about 10 or 15.

This was a place or stopping point where we stayed until the underground found another place for us to stay. There was also a barn where Frenchmen or other people rested the night in the hay loft, then went on their way at daylight. I never saw them, but that is what I was told. They had escaped from German labor camps and were headed to join the Free French in the south of France.

While I was at this house, someone told me I had to learn how to ride a bike. The underground guides were tired of carrying me around. So a bike was given to me. I learned how to ride among the trees and down a slope. I wonder if the bark is back on the trees yet.

The husband went to town every day on his bike and brought back groceries which were furnished by the underground.

The underground was organized into several different groups. One group was guides, another found homes for us to stay, another food stamps, sabotage, and whatever else needed to fight or harass the Germans.

I was here about ten days or two weeks when they took me to another place to stay. It was in the city of Roermond. The house was in a row, being connected to the next house, no

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space between. This was a modern house as it had the outside toilet fastened to the house, a three holer. The house on one side lived collaborators, so I had to be careful and not be seen.

I was here about a month or more. It was the Easter season. On Easter Sunday, the wife (the family included husband, wife and daughter about 8 years old) had cooked a dinner that took us about all afternoon to eat. Roast beef (could have been horse) potatoes, gravy, asparagus, wine, and I don't remember what all. If I remember well, you might say it was an eight course dinner. Delicious!

After 6 or 8 weeks they thought it was time to move me to another place before I was discovered. This time I stayed in the city of Roermond and went to a new house that was located between the junctions of two railways. The house was occupied by a husband, wife and her sister. Also this is where I met up with another American, Marion Gilmore from New York State. He was shot down on the first Berlin raid, 2 weeks after I was. The husband, I can't remember any of their names, was an overseer on the island of Sumatra of a large plantation that had a lot of workers of many nationalities. He could speak 8 or 9 languages and could understand many more. The women had been school teachers.

While I was here the invasions took place, so I saw a lot of military equipment being shipped by train. I had to laugh when I saw a lot of covered wagons and horses along with cannons, tanks and soldiers.

A little while after the invasion I could tell the soldiers were getting prepared to fight. They took over the garage by the house for their barracks. At night they would come in the house and use the dining table to write letters. Marion and I either went to the basement or into the attic. This went on for a week or two until they decided to evacuate all the houses between the railroads. We couldn't do anything but comply, so we each had a suitcase in each hand and walked through several soldiers for about a block or so. We went to a Catholic church where a priest greeted us. He left us for a while to find us a place to live, all five of us. About an hour later he came back and we followed him to a house on the outskirts where a couple lived, about the same age as our original hosts. They put Marion and me in the attic. It had a trap door out in the floor that was above the clothes closets below. It was just the right size for us to lie in head to head. This was also our bed at night if we wanted to sleep there. It got pretty hot in the attic, since it was summer.

During the day we would read books, play chess, watch dog fights in the air and see bombers fly over. At night the British bombers would go over and we could see the red glow of fires in the distance where they dropped their bombs.

One day in the fall we were told to hide because the Germans were searching houses for young men. We got in our hiding place and one of the women had a big lot of rags placed

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over the trap door. A couple of soldiers came up and walked around the room and left. I'm glad we didn't have to cough or sneeze.

During the time we were here, there was a girl or woman, maybe in her twenties, who would come about once a week and bring us books and see how we were getting along.

Some time in the fall the British 8th Army had advanced to the Maas River outside of town (Roermond was on the German side of the river) and stopped. We thought sure they would come on across, but instead they would shoot shells back and forth. One night the shells were landing fairly close. We were in the basement when one struck real close (in the lot next door). After it hit I thought I could hear someone saying "Help, Help"! That's what it sounded like. I found out the next day the shell had hit a chicken house with a goat in it, so it was saying "help"!

We would see large groups of women going by guarded by German brown coats. The brown coats were older men used as guards. We were told the women were digging tank traps & trenches around the town. There was one guard on a motorcycle with bicycle pedals following a large group of women. I guess he was saving gas.

It seemed the Dutch started observing the Christmas season about December 4th. The helper brought Marion and me each a liter of wine for Christmas. Our hosts were against it. She told us because they were afraid we would get drunk, so we just sipped it. It was sure good.

On the morning of December 31st, we were told that we would go across the river to the British Army as the Germans were searching for all men sixteen and older. So the underground got busy and found a way for us to cross.

So late in the day, almost dark, we were dressed as women and walked down the street about ¼ of a mile to a house where we were to meet our guide. We went in the house and there were three or four Russian girls that had escaped from the work gangs. They thought we really looked funny in dresses and bonnets. We exchanged our dresses for overcoats as there was snow on the ground and it was real chilly. After a while a guide came for us, a Dutch policeman, to take us to the river and float down to where the British were expecting us. There had been a light snow, maybe a couple of inches. There was a cover of thin clouds, so the moon made a soft light so we could see a ways. We came to a canal where we got in the row boat and went to the other side. We got out and followed the guide to a clearing. He told us to step in his tracks as it was a mine field. We went over some fences and came to a building that was a chicken house. There were a few Dutch boys already there. We were waiting for more to show up when we heard gun

shots from a German who was chasing someone toward us. We all scattered. I ran around the building, slid down a bank, and crossed the road into a field that had several stacks of straw mixed in with cow manure. I found out later that the stacks held vegetables (potatoes, cabbages, cheese, etc.). The manure heated and kept them from freezing. They

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were about six feet high and approximately tree feet across. I went across the field, as I thought the river was in that direction, around a barn, and through an open gate that went into a road. I could hear voices coming from in front of me that I thought were from German soldiers celebrating New Year. Just as I got to the road a German yelled "halt"! I ducked down and ran back to where I had come. He fired two or three shots at me. I outran them. I ran just past the barn. I knew the shots would bring more soldiers. I lay down in the patch of small weeds, pulled my knees up to my chest and covered up with my top coat and waited. In a few minutes a squad of soldiers came close and the leader was just behind me. I think he could have kicked me, he was so close. They then shot several rounds out through the trees. When they were coming from the house I heard a soldier going down the road, I could hear his foot steps on the ice. After they did their shooting they left. I guess to their party. I lay there until I heard the one coming back.

When I was going through the field I saw a bombed out house on the other side of the street. So I decided to go and see if I could find a place to hide in it. When I was inside, I said in a loud whisper "any one in here?" Voices said "yeah". It was Marion and another boy named John. They were behind stacks of large windows which were in the stalls. The stacks were about four feet high and fifteen or twenty long. I guess this part of a barn attached to the back of the house. There was a space of two feet to the back wall. On top of the windows was boards and straw. I crawled over on the boards and joined them. They said the Dutch policeman took them there and to stay until he came back. I was sure glad someone knew we were there.

We stayed there the rest of the night and the next day. We had no water and I had an apple. The next night Marion and John decided they were going out and find the policeman. They thought they knew where he lived. They wanted me to go along, but I said the policeman told them to stay there until he came for them and I was going to wait. They left and about five minutes later I heard a German yell "halt". The two never came back.

The next day (Jan 2nd) I was getting hungry and thirsty. I heard a man in the field out front of the house. I decided to ask him where the policeman lived. He said "Jawol" German. I went back to the hiding place ("Ja" Dutch) About half an hour later two German soldiers came in and looked around, then left.

Later that day a man was thrashing some oats outside the house or barn. So I decided to see if he would give me something to eat. He understood my motions and took me to his house and gave me syrup on two thin slices of bread and a cup of imitation coffee. Everything tasted good. I went back to my hiding place and stayed there the night and next day. I thought I would try to get something else to eat.

I got up on the windows and peeked out the door to see if the coast was clear. My heart skipped a beat when a black boot stepped in the doorway. It was the policeman. He asked me if I was alone. I told him what Marion and John did. He told me to hide again and he would come back with something to eat and drink and we would cross the river that night. It was about dark when he brought a sandwich of raw bacon and a thermos of

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coffee. It sure tasted good. He left but he said he'd be back ~~with~~ ~~us~~ to cross the river.

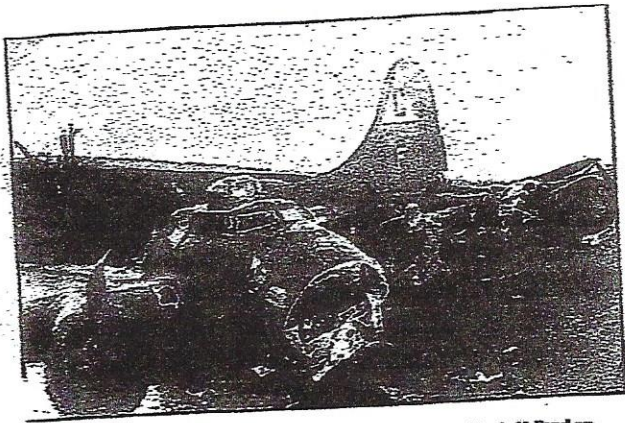
So a little after dark we went to another shed. Inside were two Dutch men that were to cross with me. They were past service men, one Navy and the other Army. When we got to the river, we got in a row boat. The policeman did not go. The location on the river where we were was on the upper curve of a "U". We floated down one side of the "U" and past a canal that cut the "U" in half. All at once a machine gun shot at us. I thought I could feel a breeze on one hip, as we were lying down. One of the Dutchmen said we had gone too far past the landing where we were expected. So he knew where this gun was located. No one was hit, so we floated to the good side and got out. I looked to see where the shot had hit the boat. It was about my hip high, so it must have ricocheted off the water. We went through some trees and into a road. We had gone a little ways when we saw a patrol coming toward us. We waved, yelled, until they started shooting at us. They were about a hundred yards away. They shot a few rounds then turned around and ran. So we thought they were a German Patrol. I wanted to go back and get in a hay stack we had passed. I was out voted, so we went across a field, crouching down as we ran across a beet field that was muddy. Then the sky lit up as search lights were turned on. We came to another straw stack and decided to spend the night there. I pulled out some bundles and got in the stack.

The next morning we decided to go looking for the British Army. We came to some farm buildings. We went into the barn and into the courtyard where I yelled that I was American. They checked my dog tags. I told them about the patrol we saw last night that I thought was German. They said it was them. They thought we were a German patrol, their Bren gun had jammed, so they went back for reinforcements.

From there they took me to Brussels to catch a plane to Paris. I was in Paris about ten days, then flew to London onto my outfit Jan 19th, three day less than eleven months MIA.



1st Lt Charles D. Crook was hit above Germany by FLAK and German fighters. It was crippled. Crook intended to surrender, but as no enemy fighter was following him, he decided trying to reach the North Sea. Above Holland the plane was discovered by 2 German fighters. Another engine was hit. Lt Crook succeeded to cross the river Rhine at low tide and made a crash landing in the outskirts of the little city Wijk bij Duurstede. He and four other crewmembers could evade escaping the enemy. One of them, the sgt Roy A. Cheek, had jumped just before the ship was near the river. Thanks to the Underground (Resistance People) he succeeded evading the Germans. As said five crewmembers were sooner or later taken POW. But all ten crewmembers survived the war. Most of them passed away in the last decades. Mr Cheek is still attending every year - despite his very high age - Memorial Day in his native town. On the picture Lt Crook and his crew. They are all heroes. Mr Cheek, I salute you. — with



A photo of the B-17 of Lt Charles Crook after the crashlanding in Holland on February 22, 1944. When the crew was leaving the plane wreck they were on fire by a German fighter plane. Fortunately nobody was hurt. Charles Crook was hurt earlier through a Zimmshell. He was helped by doctor Ingenius in nearby village Doorn. Lt Crook stayed about 6 months in Holland, hiding by the Underground from one address to another address

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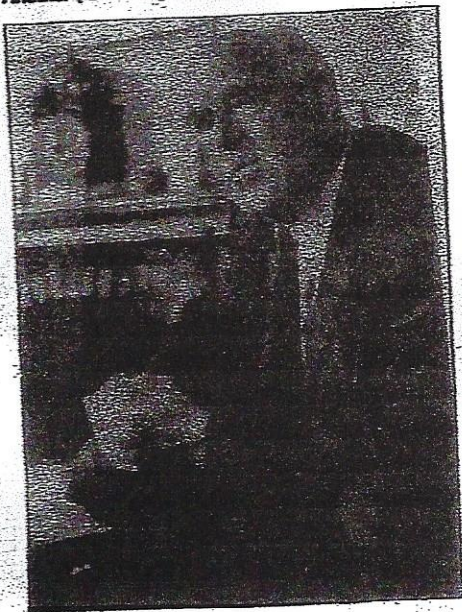
Rachel Aviza, Jennifer Drew, Nancy Lacy Kümmler and 6 others like this.

Tauria Adams Wow! I cannot imagine. Did he ever talk about it? 14 hours ago • Like • 1

Joseph Ruckman We (the American Legion/WFW Honor Guard) were just talking about your dad yesterday Barbara. What an amazing story! 9 hours ago • Like • 1

Barbara Lanning Tauria Adams he does talk a lot about it now. But I was mented with children before he ever told the whole story. I knew bits and parts of it but not a lot of the details. He has told the story to lots of people and he was taped as part of the oral history that is housed in the Missouri State Capitol. He wrote down what he could remember a few years ago but every time I hear him tell it there are more details that he recalls. He went to a reunion in Dayton, Ohio several years ago where some of the "Tulpers" and their descendants were united with some of the soldiers that were helped by those involved in the Underground. Many thanks to Leendert Smit for his research into this story. Hopefully one day he will have everything he needs to finish writing the book he has started.

Barbara Lanning shared Leendert Smit's photo.
Another part of my dad's story!



Crook crew When Roy Cheek (wounded) bailed out the plane just a few minutes before the crashlanding, he landed near a farm of the Weidmanfamily. An Underground...
See More

Crook crew When Roy Cheek (wounded) bailed out the plane just a few minutes before the crashlanding, he landed near a farm of the Weidmanfamily. An Undergroundman brought Roy then to the nextdoor doctor for medical treatment: dr Guépin. (see picture).

In the nearby village Zoelen Roy was after the medical treatment hidden a fortnight in the top of the churchtower of the Stephanuschurch. On sunday there was a service in the church and German military were joining the service. Above in the freezing cold was Roy sitting. Mixed in a hymne the organist played the Star-Spangled Banner to encourage Roy Cheek.

BTW, the doctors wife, Mrs Guépin, wrote a novel after the war for teens, in which she also wrote about Roy Cheek, when he was brought to her husband by Undergroundpeople. She mentioned his name, state and native town in the book "Roy Cheek, Lawson, Missouri, USA". In april 1950 there was a young girl (I suppose so looking at the handwriting), living in Rotterdam, named Nel Smits, who mailed a letter in Dutch to that address after reading the book Golden Horizon of Mrs Guépin, asking if he did arrive safely back in the USA. The letter arrived at the Cheeks in proper way, but Mr Cheek didn't understand the Dutch letter. A few years ago he asked me for a translation. As I was curious about that book Nel Smits mentioned, I discovered it in a second hand shop and also that it was written by the doctor's wife and I found the chapter in it about Roy Cheek. Then I understood how this young dutch girl came in the possession of Mr Cheek's address. A wonderful story.

Leendert Smit

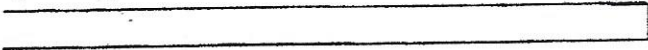
I'm still working writing a book about the events of the 10 crewmembers of the Crook crew after the crashlanding. But it's a hell of a job to get as much information as possible about everybody. Sometimes information is conflicting and then is the puzzle, which one is right? One of the pilot helpers in Wijk bij Duurstede was my uncle Wim Leeuw, who transported Louis Breitenbach, Salvador Chavez and James Hensley to Utrecht to drop them there on the escape line of his comrade in the Underground Rien van Bruggen in the southern city Eindhoven.

Last January an article of mine was published in the monthly of the (Dutch) Documentationgroup 40-45. The second part will be published next month. In both parts of the article I describe the results of my research of the killing of a traitor in Wijk bij Duurstede by the Underground. That young man was trailling to the Germans where people were hidden for the Germans (Jews, pilots or evaders for forced labour). That was all in a few months from January 1944 including April 1944 in a village in the surroundings of Eindhoven. Probably with the help of Undergroundcomrades in Eindhoven Wim Leeuw could give the evidences to the Undergroundstaff in Utrecht, which decided the traitor has to be killed because he was a danger for the hidden people in Wijk bij Duurstede and also for the Undergroundpeople. He was shot down on July 17th, 1944.

This one article is just one chapter (chapter 13) in a book I hope to finish this year about some Undergroundpeople in Wijk bij Duurstede, Eindhoven, Oisterwijk, Tilburg and Driebergen. All connected some way to the Underground affairs of my uncle Wim Leeuw. Only 3 chapters to go. :-))

After finishing that book I will continue my book about the events of the crewmembers of the Crook crew. The problem is always where to find information. If there is any.

Like • Comment • Share • 8 minutes ago near Heuten, Netherlands •



Leendert Smit

Crook-crew - On the picture mr Jan de Greef. He reacted a few years ago on my call in a regional newspaper for eyewitnesses of the crashlanding. I interviewed him at his home and had pictures and maps with me to show. Jan de Greef was ten years old in 1944 and he was eyewitness of the crashlanding. He could tell me in detail about the crashlanding.

He was outside. It was about 1 pm and suddenly he heard the noise of shooting. When looking around, where that noise came from, he saw a plane coming across the river, silver reflecting in the sun shine, flying very slowly, lopsided, while two German fighters were firing on the aircraft. Because that, he rushed to the ground, laying on his belly with his face direction Wijk bij Duurstede. The plane was passing him at a distance of about 70 yards at a height of about 30 yards. The aircraft was then hitting a thornbush and the fence of a meadow. Then it came right in a ditch of about 20 yards width, dived with the tail up, then falling back horizontal and slid then through the mud "like a sigar". It stops just next to a drinking pond for the cattle. It was february and it was freezing.

