

Colditz was escape-proof according to the Germans. It was also in the middle of Germany and nearly 400 miles from the nearest friendly country.

The three officers entered Colditz with a feeling of doom. They had heard stories of its reputation before. It was to be reserved for only the worst trouble-makers - the persistent would-be escapers. And these three qualified! F/O Howard "Hank" D. Wardle from Walkerville-Windsor, Ontario was shot down on the 20th April 1940 and escaped from a POW-camp near Kassel. F/Lt. Don Middleton from Dauphin and Roland, Man. had been downed on the 12th April as navigator on a Hampden from No. 50 Squadron near Tregde in Norway and F/O Keith Milne from Fort Qu'Appelle, Sask. had baled out over Denmark on the 23th April 1940. Both had escaped from Oflag IXA near Kassel in early September 1940 dressed as painters, with a ladder and buckets, but were recaptured shortly after. These were the first RAF escapee officers, and on recapture they had been roughly treated by the Germans - civilian and military. Don had been married just a year when shot down. Hank was just about to be married when he never got home, and Keith was engaged to a girl from his hometown. Don Middleton and Keith Milne were POW's to the end of the war, but the determined Hank Wardle made a good escape to Switzerland in October 1942. For this he was awarded the M.C. F/Lt. Wilson Donaldson of Lethbridge was pilot on the Hampden in which Don Middleton was downed in April 1940, and he also came to Colditz.

F/Lt. Bernard W. "Haybag" Hayward from Raymore, Sask. and Dugald, Man. enlisted in February 1937. After 5 years as a POW he returned to Dugald and is still farming there.

F/Lt. Keith Milne was born at Khedive, Saskatchewan and raised at Fort Qu'Appelle. He joined the RCAF in June 1936 but in a few months transferred to the RAF. He spent 5 years as a POW, and he is now retired as a pharmacist in Vancouver.

(Les Allison, 1978: "Canadians in the Royal Air Force", pages 16-17, 150 and 173. Picture of Hayward, Donaldson, Wardle, Middleton and Milne taken in Oflag IXA in July 1940 on page 71).

(P.R. Reid: "Flugten fra Colditz", page 50)