

If You're Captured, Button Your Lip— Stick to a Polite Dead-Pan Act

NORTH AFRICA [By Cable]—Of all the words in any language, there is one phrase that intelligence officers dread to hear from a prisoner who is brought in for questioning.

In German it is "Es tut mir leid." In Italian it is "Molte scuse." In American it is simply "I'm sorry." It is the perfect answer for any and all questions an enemy questioner may ask, according to U. S. officers who have lately interviewed a great many prisoners.

Back in training, our men saw a British orientation film entitled, "Name, Rank and Serial Number," which explained what to do and say if ever you happened to be captured. But there are any number of ways to circumvent the rules if the questioner is a good psychologist, our officers say.

Here are a few warning hints, from men who question prisoners at the front line, on how to act if captured:

Always be polite and military. This attitude is the strongest weapon for disarming the enemy questioner. If you are taken before someone who outranks you, salute even if it makes you squirm. Stand at attention until told to relax. And don't open your mouth until you are compelled to by common courtesy, then give a polite answer that says nothing.

It's best to call the enemy questioner "Sir," or name his rank if you can figure out what it is. Then when you answer "I'm sorry, sir" to his questions, there isn't much he can do about it.

A German trick employed to break down that "I'm sorry, sir" is this question: "Do you think you Americans can beat us Germans?" Any number of Yanks answer, "You're damned right we can," whereupon the German asks, "Why?" You can't very well answer that one without some proof, so you tell a few things the enemy wants to know. If you fall for that trick, the best way to answer the "Why?" question is come back fast with the stock reply, "I'm sorry, sir."

If the constant repetition of that phrase makes you feel like a parrot or a dummy, don't let it get you down; the investigator is just as frustrated as you are. If you vary your answer by saying, "I can't answer that," the questioner will whip back swiftly with the words, "You mean you can't or you won't?" and then you're in a hole again.

The Germans like to hint they'll do all sorts of things to you if you persist in saying nothing, but they won't do anything for fear we will do the same to their prisoners.

Don't try to show off if you are captured, our officers advise, because usually the men who question you are among the brainiest in the enemy army. Sometimes the college man struts his learning and lets on he's above the common run of prisoners in intelligence, which just about makes him the dumbest prisoner there is. The investigator gets that kind of soldier talking about what he did in civilian life, one question leads to another and, once you start talking, you can't stop because you can't very well refuse to answer a question after you've already answered a dozen others.

Finally, if you happen to capture prisoners yourself, don't take any souvenirs before turning the soldiers in. Investigators can learn a hell of a lot from letters and personal effects. They use them to find out who the prisoner is, and once in possession of that fact, they can often start the long chain of questions that makes the prisoner talk.

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BRITISH EDITION

YANK

THE ARMY WEEKLY



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AUG. 22

1943

VOL. 2, NO. 10

By the men . . . for the
men in the service

p. 6

OldMagazineArticles.com