



## Choose Your Own Adventure: POW Escape Edition

Decide what path you would take in the scenarios below, then compare your answers to what really happened in this historical escape attempt by looking at the answers at the bottom.

You're Corporal Heinz Schymalla, a German prisoner-of-war assigned to work the timberland of northern Minnesota near a small town called Bena. One day, you get a letter from your homeland telling you that your 60-year-old father has been drafted into the struggling Nazi army. Desperate to do something, you decide to escape with your friend Walter Mai.

### 1. What's your ultimate end game?

- A. Flee to Canada and hope the Americans give up their pursuit once they know you're out of the country.
- B. Make your way by night to the Atlantic coast and use your newly-learned English to get work as a merchant sailor headed to Denmark, and from there to Germany.
- C. Travel down the Mississippi River by boat to reach the Gulf of Mexico, where you hope to find a ship to a neutral port.

### 2. Your clothing is marked with a large black PW, which would immediately give you away to passersby. How do you fix this problem?

- A. Smuggle unmarked donated clothing out of a supply room.
- B. Wear your shirt inside-out where the marking isn't visible.
- C. Steal a coat from a kitchen helper while on work duty there.

### 3. How are you going to eat while on your journey?

- A. The foremen at the logging camp is a second-generation German immigrant, and his wife has often told you to ask for help if you ever need it. You plan to stop by their house first before journeying on.
- B. You save food from your meals, including donations from other prisoners, over a few weeks, adding up to: four loaves of bread, some butter and sugar, two pounds of sausage, and 30 slices of bacon. Also, you made a slingshot! So you're prepared.
- C. You fashion fishhooks out of safety pins and save a dozen matches offered to you by guards when striking a cigarette, planning to fish and forage, make fires, and live entirely off the land.

### 4. What are you planning to do to throw the authorities off your trail?

- A. Instruct several prisoners to start a rumor campaign after your escape, saying you drowned yourself in the nearby lake in despair because Germany is losing the war.

- B. Plant false evidence of collusion in the camp commander's office so they'll think the Americans allowed you to escape.
  - C. Have your buddy leave a note on his bunk saying that you're going to the Bering Strait to try to cross the Pacific to Japan.
5. It's a chilly November night when you make your escape. How do you get outside the prison walls?
- A. Crawling under the barbed wire fence, avoiding the guards stationed around the perimeter.
  - B. Hiding in the laundry delivery truck that leaves camp every Saturday evening.
  - C. Invent a delivery assignment to the garage outside the stockade, then slip into the woods.
6. It's important to be fully equipped for your escape attempt. Which of the following do you NOT bring with you?
- A. A chess set and a dictionary.
  - B. A cigarette-rolling machine and shoe polish.
  - C. A fountain pen and a magazine.
7. What's your ideal method of escape transportation?
- A. By foot—you've borrowed extra pairs of socks from fellow prisoners to ensure you stay warm.
  - B. In a rickety scrap lumber boat you made yourself the summer before.
  - C. Once you're out of the immediate area, by hitching a ride with farmers.
8. You're on your way, and have made good time over several days. But temperatures have gone from a balmy 70 to more typical weather for Minnesota in November, hovering around freezing. It's nearly midnight, and you are battling your way through a swirling snowstorm. What's next?
- A. You give up traveling at night and collapse to get a few hours of sleep, exhausted. You can start again tomorrow when it's warmer.
  - B. Spotting a nearby barn, you spend the night there and take some of the horse feed to supplement your rations, departing before dawn.
  - C. Instead of worrying about someone spotting the smoke, you light a fire for the first time to stay warm.
9. Around noon the Friday after your escape, you notice someone following you. How do you respond?
- A. Start a fire, roast some sausages, and act casual when he asks what you're doing.
  - B. Duck into the woods and hide in a thick patch of undergrowth.
  - C. Whistle an American song while fishing and wave at him.
10. You're already low on rations, and now you hear an automobile rumbling down the road. From a distance, you watch a police car pull up, and a sheriff gets out to search the woods. How do you respond?
- A. Climb a tree—and then react in surprise when one of the officers looks up and catches you.
  - B. Split up and have your friend run for the road in the opposite direction, picking a place to meet up at nightfall. Your friend doesn't arrive.
  - C. Hide, but then surrender so you don't get shot.

*Actual historical answers: 1C, 2A, 3B, 4C, 5A, 6C, 7B, 8A, 9A, 10C*