

Most people are very familiar with the movie *The Great Escape* but may not be familiar with it as a project executed in the spring of 1944. This series of articles looks at the project from a modern perspective, and part four in July looked at time management. This article looks at the fourth of the project management knowledge areas of the PMI PMBOK – cost management. This defines the estimates, develops a budget, and controls cost.

All projects depend on the trinity of cost, scope and time. In *The Great Escape* project budget, or cost management, may seem a less obvious PMBOK knowledge area for several reasons. First, on the surface there was no official monetary system in the camp and second, this was a surreptitious project, so how could it even have a budget? In this article we will see that an unofficial monetary system existed and the project not only created, but was driven by, a budget.

Cost estimating

In today's world, project costs are measured in monetary terms; for example, we measure labour in terms like 'FTE' (Full-Time Employee) that can be equated to a monetary value. In *The Great Escape* cost was measured in labour but without a monetary value. One of the assets of the escape project was the availability of human labour and the prisoners' willingness to work, almost altruistically, because it was for a cause, although it would be unfair to say there was no cost. As in all projects, 'incentives' were required to drive the project, especially in difficult areas like tunnel engineering, and in these extremely harsh conditions these were found in a number of ways:

- extra food rations
- tobacco – which became an unofficial currency of trade
- escape privileges, like priority in the escape queue. The higher the position, the greater the allocation and quality of escape resources like clothing, forged documents, and equipment.



Figure 1: A Red Cross parcel was used as a currency through the camp. Courtesy of the US Air Force Academy Library's Special Collections



Project lessons from the Great Escape

by Mark Kozak-Holland

Part 5: Project cost management

Red Cross parcels

Every week parcels arrived for the POWs, mostly from Britain, Canada, Australia, and the United States via the International Red Cross.

Individual parcels were sent and paid for by relatives for a named person, and these parcels contained a mixture of goods, as shown in the illustration (Figure 2) of a standard American food parcel from February 1944. Whether 'extra large prunes' were a welcome addition to the diet is not recorded!

Bulk parcels for general distribution were also sent and paid for by the International Red Cross, and these contained a single supply of items that were

pooled by the POWs. Thus, replacement clothing, shaving and washing kits, coffee, tea, tinned meat, jam, sugar, raisins, and other essentials were distributed equally (see Figure 3). The Red Cross also made routine inspection visits of the camps to determine the health and welfare of POWs.

These packages not only supplemented meagre camp food but also were essential to both the escape and post-escape survival outside the camp, which required survival rations for up to several weeks. Camp rations ran at 800 calories per day. This was far less than the optimum 1,200–1,600 calories recommended for a normal healthy adult.



Figure 2: Typical foodstuffs that were found in a Red Cross parcel

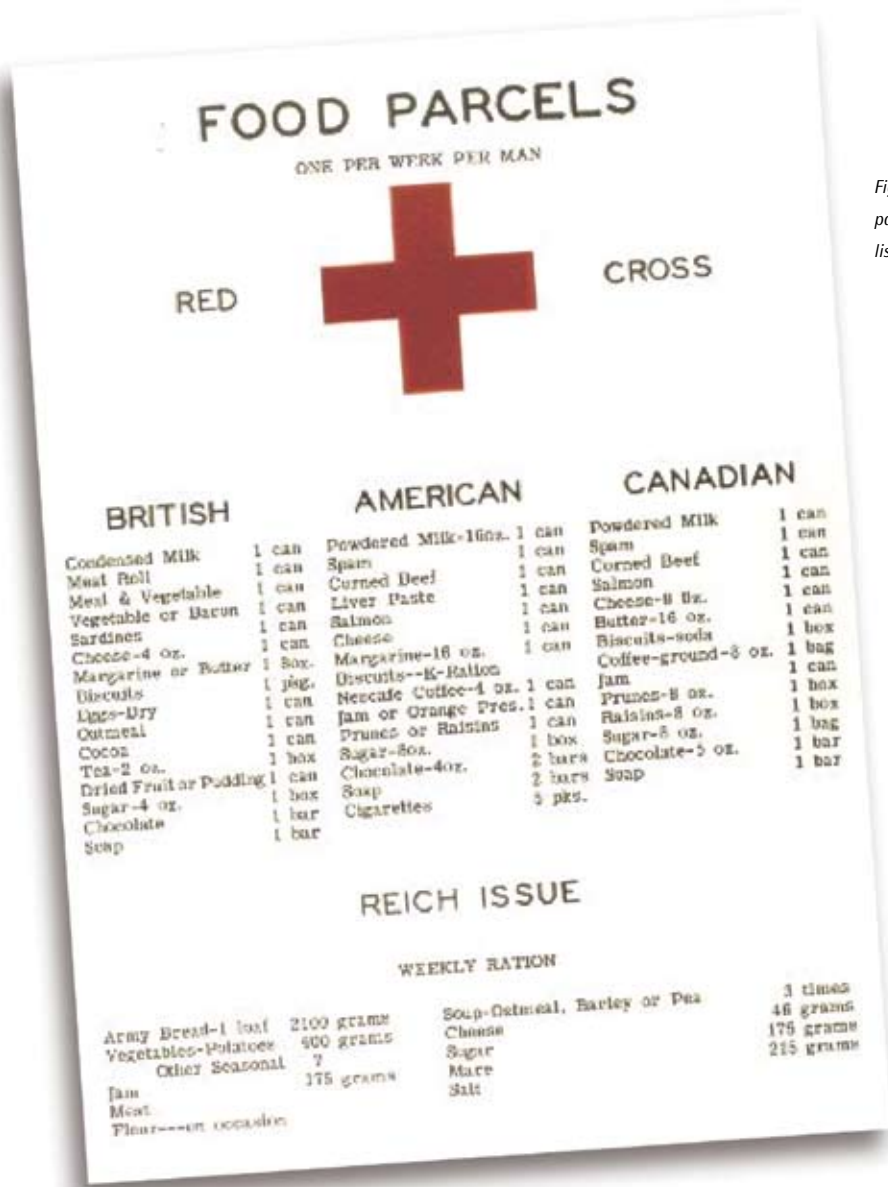


Figure 3: The content description of a Red Cross food parcel, broken down by nationality of the POWs, and a list of the weekly rations provided by the authorities

Cost budgeting

The content of Red Cross parcels was carefully managed and used as a currency to procure goods from the guards, or the content goods could be traded for local currency. Food, a precious resource, was also used to motivate the POWs. Although escape was a motivation in itself, there were periods when morale could drop considerably. Raisins and sugar were used to distil 'raisin wine,' a highly potent alcoholic beverage reserved for special occasions to raise morale. In fact, parties were thrown at every possible occasion available, mainly to keep morale high.

Cost control

Roger Bushell (the Big X or project manager) and the escape committee evaluated the available resources to the project, donated by POWs. These were then put under the control of the supplies department, which had some influence over how these could be used. For example, high-demand foodstuffs like chocolate and tobacco were used for bribery of guards, or to acquire necessary goods to the escape that could not be manufactured.

Conclusion

Bushell and the escape committee were well aware of the deficits in the project and used the known pool of supplies to drive the project forward. Effectively, the project not only developed but was driven by a budget based on unofficial currencies.

Mark Kozak-Holland's latest book in the Lessons-From-History series is titled 'Project Lessons from the Great Escape (Luft III)'. It draws parallels from this event in World War II to today's business challenges. Mark is a Senior Business Architect with HP Services and regularly writes and speaks on the subject of emerging technologies and lessons that can be learned from historical projects. He can be contacted via his website at www.lessons-from-history.com or via email to mark.kozak-holl@sympatico.ca. For more information on the Great Escape Memorial Foundation see www.thegreatescapememorialproject.com.

Subscribers can see previous articles in this series by logging on and then using the Knowledge Base on the www.pmtoday.co.uk website. His other series, on Titanic, can also be seen online.

Figure 4: POWs collected and administered Red Cross parcels, hoarding rations for the escape



Breakfast rations consisted of ersatz coffee made from acorns and dry black bread. Sauerkraut soup and a portion of mouldy potatoes followed for lunch, and dinner was some sausage or a peculiar cheese made from fish by-products.

The POWs hoarded Red Cross parcels for the escape. This was an admirable sacrifice considering

they were on half the recommended calorie intake, and literally starving to death.

In addition, Foodacco or 'food account' was a currency used for collective bargaining and bartering that allowed POWs to market surplus food for 'points' spent on other items that could be used in the camp – very useful for the escape.