

# BALBOA



# ISLAND LIVING

A PRIVATE SOCIAL PUBLICATION EXCLUSIVELY FOR THE RESIDENTS OF BALBOA ISLAND • March 2021

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***Fiores!***



*Jarville*  
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# Remembering WWII Vet

# Al Larson

## Little Island Man Escaped March to Nazi Death Camp

Bill Stewart is the vet who never forgets. Stewart and the museum started the Balboa Island Veterans Project – find every military man on the island, living or dead, tell their story. “Came up with 185 vets, Stewart said. We’re not done.”

Among the most memorable was Al Larson. “One of my favorites. Al was a great guy,” Stewart said.

Al Larson died on January 5. He was 97.

Stewart and Larson forged a friendship. When Stewart was grand marshal at the 26th Balboa Island Parade in 2019, riding right behind in a WWII amphibious jeep, was Sgt. Al Larson and wife Sunny.

“I was supposed to drive in that, Stewart said. I thought no, Al should. He had the time of his life.”

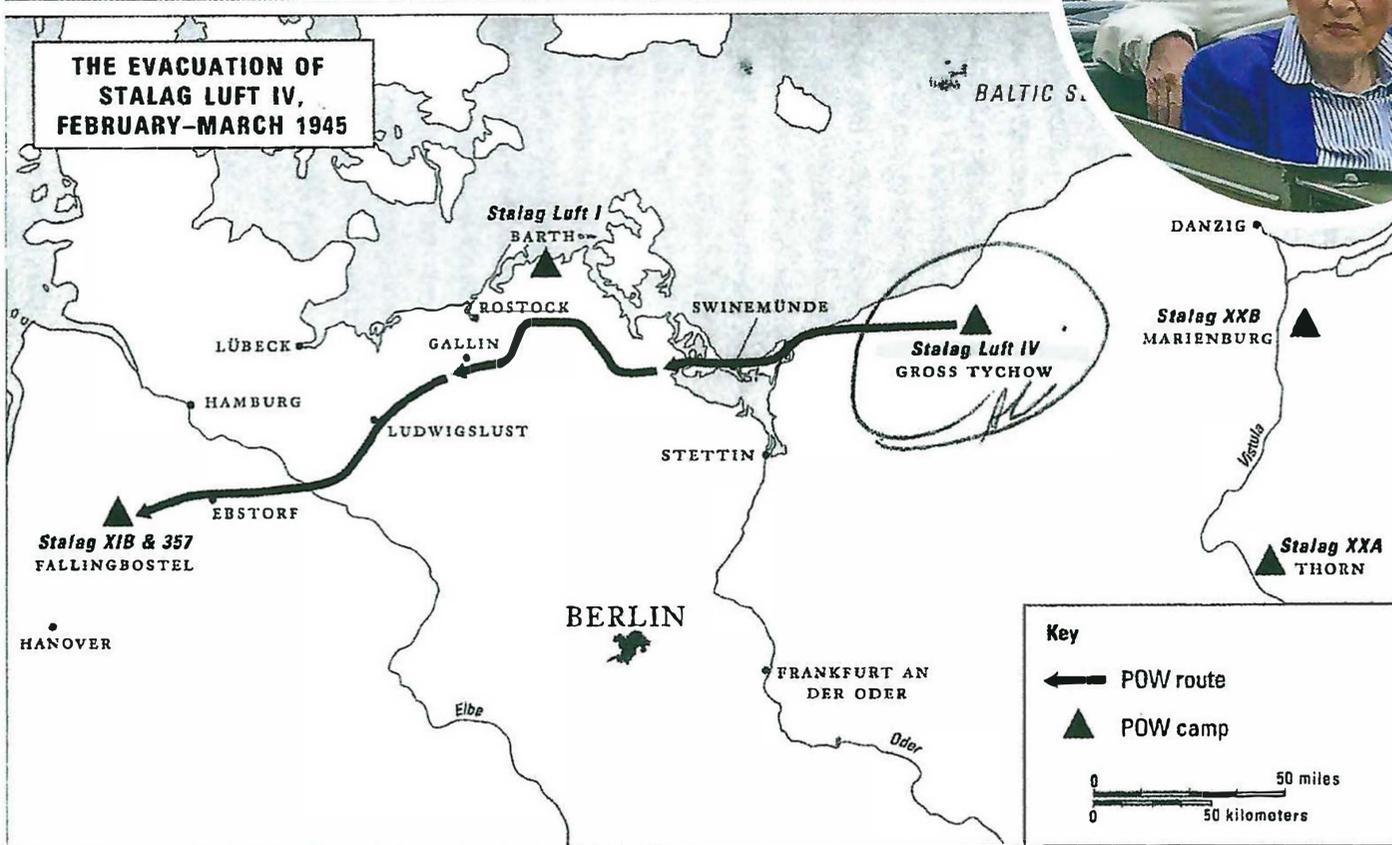
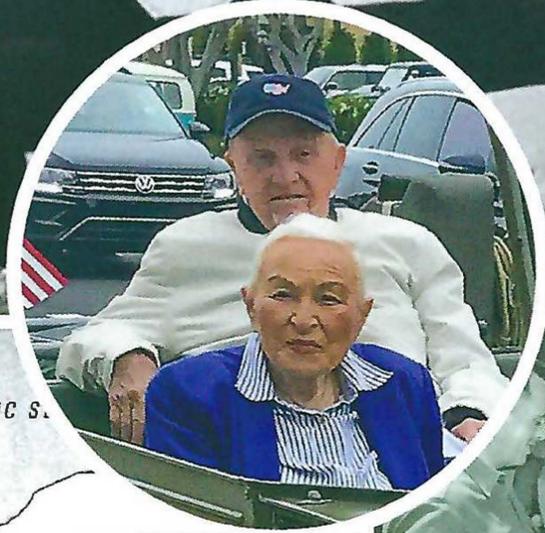
### Great Escape

Albert “Ally” Larson was a Massachusetts man, Waltham, ten miles from Boston. On August 22, 1944, 21-year-old Staff Sgt. Albert T. “Ally” Larson, left waist gunner, was aboard his B-24H Bomber when it was shot down by German fighters south of Papa, Hungary. All 10 crewmen bailed out, survived and were taken prisoners by the Germans.

Larson was shipped to Stalag Luft IV in Eastern Prussia (Poland today) – the largest prison camp, 9,000–10,000 Allied flyers. February 1945, Al and fellow flyers were evacuated from Stalag IV to a prison camp on the border of Germany and Poland. It was a well-documented “Nazi death march” – almost certain death.

Al had met Staff Sgt. Eddie Gilbert at Stalag Luft IV – Eddie Gilbert also from Waltham, MA. One night the hometown boys made their break,





a week outside of stalag - into the woods and in-between English and German tanks waging battle. The Germans retreated. Soldiers from the British Second Army rescued Al and his fellow Walthamite.

Al's first-hand account is on our website. <https://www.balboaislandmuseum.org/veteran/larson-al/>

### After War

Al Larson came west to USC and met Sunny, his bride for life. He waded into the international fishing business - Meridian Products was Al's seafood company. He grew Meridian

into one of the largest importers in Southern California.

Al and Sunny moved to Little Island in '68, East Bay Front. An inveterate golfer, he split time at his home in Rancho Mirage, the former home of singer Vic Damone.

Larson's passing reminded his friend Bill Stewart of unfinished business.

"I've contacted Waltham Museum for pictures of Al, Stewart said. There must be some pictures. It was a big deal, the two kids escaping at the same time."

The two Balboa Island vets will always have that first Sunday in June of 2019.

"Al called me that next day, to thank me, Stewart said. And he called me the day after that."

Larson died peacefully at his Little Balboa Island home. He's survived by his wife, Sunny, 97, and three daughters: Laurel, Lisa and Allyson. Al's four grand-kids are Joshua, Jennifer, Kristina and Hunter.

Visit Balboa Island Museum Newport Beach - explore the veterans' exhibit and discover Newport Harbor's rich history. Check the website for hours. Free general admission. Become a member.

[balboaislandmuseum.org/become-a-member/](https://www.balboaislandmuseum.org/become-a-member/)