

Phys Ed Lecturer Is Survival Expert

By THOM SHIELS

What would you do if you were stranded on a raft in the middle of the ocean?

Not too many people would be expected to know the answer, except those who have had extensive wilderness training. Don Kepler, physical education lecturer, is one of those people.

Today Kepler lives a peaceful life managing his 125-acre Centre County farm, but during World War II he was head of a program responsible for saving the lives of thousands of American servicemen.

Kepler has been an outdoor enthusiast ever since he can remember. As an agricultural student at the University he was deeply interested in nature and wildlife, and spent much of his spare time hunting and fishing.

Pitched First Night Game

When he was 18 he joined the Chicago White Sox as a pitcher and began a 14-year career in professional baseball. In baseball he holds the distinction of pitching the first professional night game. Kepler threw a 15-0 win over the Cincinnati Reds.

During the winter he was a well-known forest guide and bear hunter.

At the outset of World War II he enlisted in the Navy and was chosen to initiate a survival program because of his outdoor experience. Working with him were John and Frank Craighcad, also of the University.

At this time, the War Department was grappling with a serious problem. Of the pilots downed in unfamiliar surroundings, 75 per cent came out of the crash alive—but only five per cent survived because the remaining men could not cope with their environment.

Later research showed that after his course, every man he trained came out alive.

Sought Actual Conditions

Soon after his appointment as head of the survival program, he sought first-hand knowledge of the conditions which his pilots would undergo. He went through everything from being set adrift on the ocean in a raft to wandering in the swamps with a band of Seminole Indians.

Kepler found four definite regions where survival is most difficult—arctic, desert, jungle, and ocean. From these experiences he helped write a book, "How to Survive on Land and Sea," which has been recognized by the armed forces as the best of its kind ever written.

On one occasion he happened to be stressing to a group of newcomers the importance of making use of whatever food is in the vicinity. At this time there was a rotted palm tree behind him infested with tropical grub worms and maggots. At the end of his talk Kepler made the statement that any living animal was good food except polar bear liver and certain types of tropical fish.

Cadet Tests Him

Hearing this, a cadet scooped up a handful of squirming grub worms and jokingly asked if they could be eaten. Before Kepler could back out a crowd had gathered. The men were openly skeptical. Did he practice what he preached? It was do or die. Slowly the cadet picked out the fattest, juiciest grub worm he could find and offered it to Kepler. Needless to say, it took more than a bite and a gulp to get it down.

Near the end of the war he was in charge of 200 French cadets, among them the son of Charles de Gaulle, then premier of France. At the end of their training the cadets presented him with a basket woven of willow branches which he still treasures highly.

Toured U.S.

After the war Kepler toured the country, giving lectures on survival and physical fitness. Charley Wright, former wrestling coach at Penn State heard him speak and referred him to Ray Conger.

Currently Kepler is absorbed in his most recent project, a hunting shoe which he perfected while in the service.

During the war he was obliged to walk at least 20 miles a day in shoes he felt were not sufficient. It is said Kepler's shoe has everything a hunter needs; a

built-in steel shank arch support, a stub-proof toe cap, thick gum rubber inner layers, and removable inner soles.

Typical of Kepler was the statement he made when the shoe went on sale.

"Maybe I won't make a million," he said, "but I know I'll make walking a lot more enjoyable for hunters."

Unit Elections—

(Continued from page five)

Reimer, secretary; and Janet Ours, treasurer.

The southwest unit elected Mary Lytle, president; Mariann Moldovan, vice president; Sue James, secretary; and Anita Lora, treasurer.

Atherton's north west unit elected Betsy Witcraft, president; Ruth Johnson, vice president; and Heather Davidheiser, secretary-treasurer.

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WALLET—Important cards. Please return to Jack Lo Bue, Phi Kappa Sigma. Call AD 7-4969. Reward.

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WILL RENT 2or 1 rooms, close to campus. AD 7-4050.

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ONE-HALF DOUBLE room. Fine location. Free parking. Call HO-6-6935.

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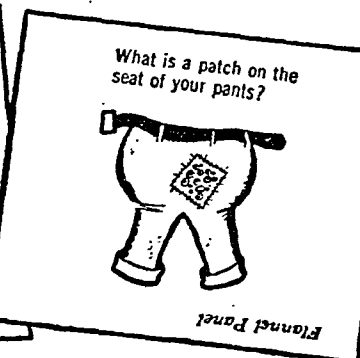
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