

The National Ex-Prisoner of War Association

Spring 2007 Newsletter

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For you
Tommy
the War is over

The experiences of
The Durham Light Infantry
Prisoners of War
during World War II

Major Ian R. English MC, TD
and Harry Moses



ASSOCIATION NEWS by Les Allan, President.



Contact details; 99 Parlaunt Road, Langley, Berkshire SL3 8BE. Tel/Fax 01753-818308.

Congratulations to our Vera Lynn. On behalf of all members I would like to wish Dame Vera Lynn, our Patron, a very happy 90th Birthday on 21st March.

Memorial latest. I am pleased to report that donations are arriving steadily for our planned memorial at the National Arboretum. The foundations have been laid and when the weather improves RSM Mark Carlisle and his men from 2nd Bn REME will be coming over to construct the memorial itself. The gates have been made, as has the brass memorial plaque and the bricks and cement acquired. Bruce McAllister has the marble slabs ready for the top of the walls. We had hoped to dedicate the memorial in June, but weather delays have lead to a postponement to later in the year, on a day still to be decided.

Memorial Fund Donations. We would like to thank the following for their kind donations to the Memorial Fund; Mr D Nelson £5, Mr D Matheson £100, Mrs Mary Aston £50, Mr C Gledhill £20, Mr D Freeman £10, Mr J Jiles £50, Mr R A Arnold and family £125, Mr Dave Welch £110, Mr Maurice Bentley £100, Mr George Wilson £50, C Symons £5, Mrs June Benedict £10, J A Procter £20, Mr R F Carr £20, Miss Moira Elliot £30, Mr A Jesson £15, Mr Ray Eaton £5, Janet Savage £100 in memory of father Private E J Rapley who died in Camp XIA and who has no known grave, Mr James Taylor £10, Mr Robert Fennell £50 in memory of his late father in law James C McCall, Mr Yves Jaulmes £20, Mr Keith May £10, Mr Harry Tooze £30, Mr Syd Whyte £20, Mrs B Harmsworth £50, Mrs Enid Holmes £10, Mr Colin Philips £25, Mr C J Adams £25, Eleo Gordon £30, Ann Hayes £10, A J Foster £15, Elizabeth Maggs c/o Douglas Evans MM, Mrs D M Cooper £20, Melinie Lansdeel and family in memory of her grandfather £25, Mr J A Griffiths £30, Mr Peter Hawkins from the Royal British Legion Cippenham branch £100 and a very generous £250 from Regimental Headquarters of the Welsh Guards at Wellington Barracks in London.

Association Welfare Fund Donations. We would like to thank the following for their kind donations to the Association Welfare Fund; J F Crouch £15, French £15, D E Boden £10, E Marshall £25, F Walker £5, B Warne £10, Elizabeth Raworth £15, H L P Martin £5, E Milner £5, M J M Orr £15, J Charters £15, C Stevens £15, T Carpenter £10, M Morecroft £15, R Lee £5, J Smart £10, N Chesterton £20, J W Greeves £5, H J Arnold £5, F McGauley £10, J H Thomas £5, Mrs Lawrence £15, L Elwood £10, T Berry £10, T East £5, R Haynes £10, A Jenkins £5, G Duffree £20, R V Allen £5, D Woolerton £5, F J Gill £10, D A Freeman £5, A Clark £15, A Robbins £10, B Buchanan £5, Mr O'Connor £10, Mrs Wildish £5, R Walsh £5, C Poffley £5, H Moore £10, C Hoare £10, R Eaton £10, H Buckledee £10, D Avey £15, W F Manley £15, J S Taylor £15, E Burke £5, J Hazell £15, E Payne £5, J Lees £15, M Shand £5, Y Jaulmes £15, K May £10, D Bond £5, A Cheyne £5, H Tooze £10, A Soloman £5, Mrs Care £10, J Batt £5, S Whyte £5, C J Quartermaine £5, T Lewis £10, C Kirby £10, F H Stapleton £20, S H Seal £10, J Cruttendon £20, F Sivewright £20, Ann Hayes £20, D Evans MM £5, S Barthorpe £5, D Arthur £10, E J Skipper £5, E Sankey £20, R Dowding £15, R J Cuff £15 and Mrs Anne Greer £100.

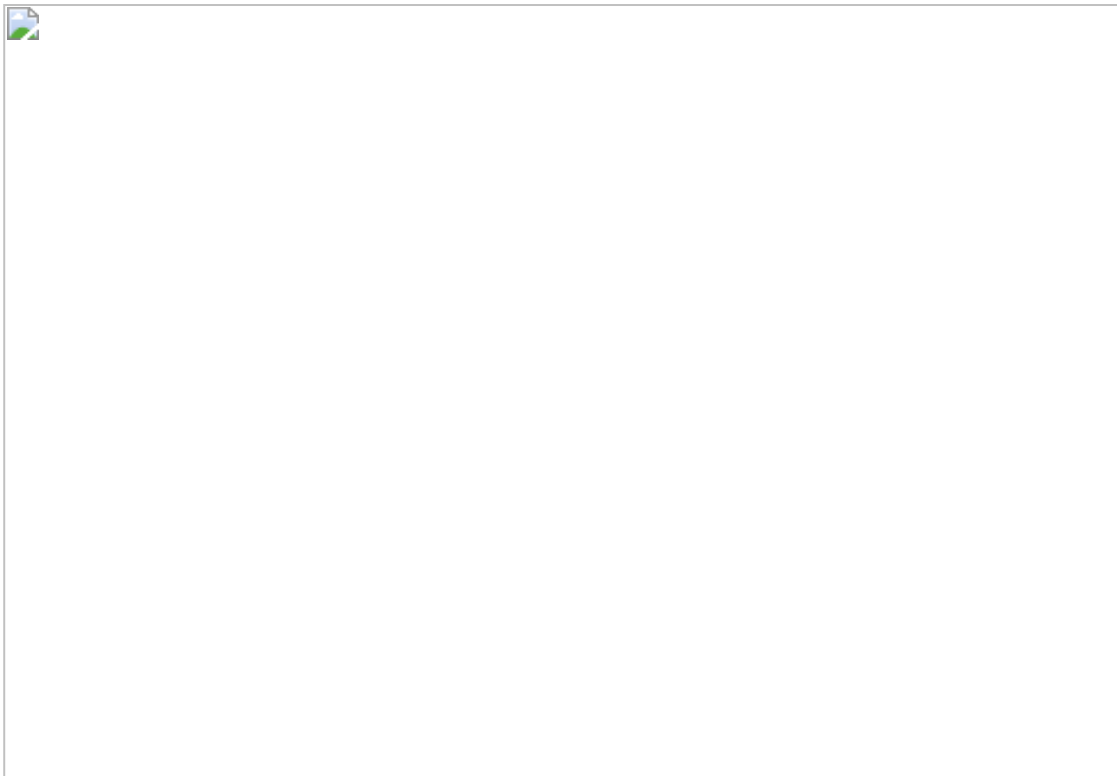
New Members. We would like to welcome Mr L A Harper whose father Henry John Musto was captured in Tunisia while serving with the 5th Hampshire Regiment.

Annual Reunion. The 2007 Annual Reunion will be held as usual at Hayling Island between Friday 5th and Monday 8th October. Booking forms and details of costs can be obtained from our Treasurer Freda Moores on 01628-473832.

Membership Renewal. It is also that time of year when we remind members that their annual subscription due was due on 1st January. The cost is £5 for former prisoners of war and £10 for family and friends and for former POWs living overseas. Please make cheques out to NEXPOWA and send to Les Allan, 99 Parlaunt Road, Langley, Berkshire SL3 8BE. For enquiries please ring or fax Les on 01753-818308. Please note that we have kept our subs the same as previous years. We have been affected though by the recent change in postal rates and will now be producing three 16 page newsletters per year, instead of four 12 page newsletters. You will still get the same number of pages, but we will drop the Autumn newsletter as it coincides with the publishing of the Annual Journal. We aim to send out the Spring Newsletter in April, the Summer Newsletter in July/August and the Winter Newsletter in December.

Obituaries. We regret the report the passing away of the following members; Mr J L Wallis who passed away peacefully on 30th October 2006 after a short illness in the Eastbourne District Hospital. We will remember them.

PHOTOGRAPH BELOW. Sent in by Len Mace in Kent, members of Arbeits Kommando 57 from Stalag 20B taken in the summer of 1943. They worked on a farm in a village near Oberausmass, close to the River Vistula. Back row left to right; 'Happy' and Newland both Green Howards, DRK Smith from New Zealand, Unknown. Front row left to right; Len Mace from 6th Bn Queens Own Royal West Kents, Henry Robson and Jack Lockwood from New Zealand, George Farmer of the Royal Artillery and Toby Saunders from New Zealand.



THE DESPERADOES OF CAMPO 54.

Maurice Newey sent in a summary of his three years as a prisoner of war. It is reproduced here with his kind permission. "At the time of being captured I was a Private 2nd Class general fitter in the workshop section of the 68th Heavy AA Regiment under Captain J Cotterill. We were defending Tobruk until its surrender on 21st June 1942. We were handed over to the Italians and taken via Derna to Benghazi, then shipped in the crowded hold of a cargo ship to Campo 66 at Capua, before going on to Compound Two in Campo 54 Farasabina, in the Sabine hills outside Rome. We were very poorly fed and

were covered in lice and we were living under starvation levels. We perked up a bit when Red Cross parcels began to arrive in dribs and drabs. We received new army clothing to replace our tattered KD and were made to sew red patches on our jackets.

“In March 1943 along with three other chaps I escaped from the compound through a trench obligingly dug by the Italians for a new sewer to connect to a new toilet block ordered by the Red Cross. Previously we had to perform our bodily functions over an open air pit, criss crossed by planks, which became very slippery. In the early days, as the camp was built on a steep hill, to get back to your tent you had to crawl up the hill on hands and knees.

“We were on the run for ten days, walking at night and hiding in the woods during the day. One day we became lost in a thick heavy mist and when it lifted we found ourselves in the middle of an airfield. We brazened it out and walked across it without being challenged, only to be spotted by a Carabinieri going off duty. He summoned others and we were surrounded in no time and didn't argue with six rifles pointed at us. After finding out at the station that we were not armed or dangerous, they treated us very kindly and fed us well.

“Three days later the army came to collect us. They took us to Campo 122 which was for the African blacks. They gave us a rousing cheer when they saw us. Here we were interrogated before being escorted back to Campo 54. We were taken to Compound 1 and sentenced to 30 days in prison. The prison consisted of a fortified barbed wire fence and a heavy padlocked gate. In the middle of the 12 yard square area was a small pavilion, open at the front. A path around this led to a toilet at the back and a tap. This was our walking area for the next 30 days. We were given two blankets and slept on bare boards. We were never allowed out, our meals and Red Cross parcels were brought to us. We were title ‘The Desperadoes’.

“Being in such close proximity was getting on my nerves, so I had been offered a place by another chap I knew. I had hardly settled when an officer and six of his men stormed into the tent with fixed bayonets and escorted me to another tent where the other three desperadoes were waiting. Once again we were altogether. We had to use the nearest bunks by the entrance. I was in one of the top bunks and that first night a shot was fired, the bullet cutting through the canvas, over my head and killed a lad on the top bunk lower down on the other side. The tent was cleared except for us and we spent the night with the dead soldier and an orderly. The explanation we received was that a sentry unloading his rifle accidentally pulled the trigger. We took that with a pinch of salt. Two or three times a night we were visited by sentries shining torches on us, making sure we were still there.

“A new compound had been built with huts and concrete floors. The wire was opened and we had to carry all our worldly goods and beds across. Jack Cairns, Horace Prosser, Eddie Milne and I were the desperadoes. Eddie

and HP asked Jack and me if we would like to join them in another escape. I asked what they planned. They were going to hide in between the inner and outer sheet of the tent. I did my best to dissuade them, pointing out the first persons they wanted to see on the roll call at the new camp would be us. Jack also thought it was stupid, but they were adamant.



A very glum looking 23 year old Maurice Newey, having just been released after 30 days in jail following his escape attempt. He and his three fellow escapees were known by their Italian captors as the Desperadoes.

“We had hardly settled in the new compound when there was a great excitement coming from the other compound. As I feared, they had been found. I can’t vouch for this because I heard it second-hand. When they were found they were marched to a tent where an officer was sitting, aiming his revolver at them. His first question; ‘Where are the other two?’ When he was satisfied that there were no more, he had them lashed with a chain. I never heard from them again.

“After a couple of weeks a rumour went round that a working party was being sent to Riga. This turned out to be true and two at the top of the list were Jack and I. It was always hard to say goodbye to friends. Cattle trucks were waiting to take us to Florence. Once there we were separated with our new mockers and checked every night. Orders came to pack and at the railway sidings were real carriages instead of cattle trucks. The train stopped and lining the sides were German guards, looking very smart instead of the scruffy Italians. An officer came into the carriage and shouted ‘Raus’ to the Italian guards and they scuttled away like frightened rabbits. Next he shouted in English ‘Anyone trying to escape will be shot. Anyone meddling with the windows will be shot.’ We were subdued and listened in silence. Not an auspicious welcome to the Fatherland.

"We arrived at Stalag 4B, stripped, showered, clothes deloused, head shorn, finger printed and chest X-rayed and given a number. Mine was 221703. Put to work digging a pool and then sent to Lamsdorf and then on to E714 at Blechamer. Five months later that camp was broken up, some went to Heyderbrek, others to Bau Battalion which was next to E3 where I was sent. Whilst in Germany I served three prison terms, one from not being where I should have been (three days bread and water) and the other for trying to hit a German civilian boss (seven days solitary, bread and water). I found three days solitary very nice. One doesn't have any privacy so it was good to be on my own for a while. Seven days would have been too much but it was enlivened by an air raid, where they let me out of the cell to go into a shelter. Needless to say I sneaked down to my hut and had a good feed and hid some chocolate for afters.

"Things were never the same after that raid. The Germans had been told that our planes could not get that far, the reason they had been here on the Polish border. Mind you we had been telling them that they would, now they believed us. We not only committed sabotage, putting all sorts of stuff in pipes through which they hoped to pump oil, but also undermining their morale.

"The air raid sirens led to a mass exodus from the building complex. It would have been easy to escape, but that would have proved very hazardous. The equivalent of our Home Guard was now on active duty but armed with rifles not pitchforks. I wouldn't trust the Russians, so it was best to return to camp. Air raids became more frequent until one day the sirens went but no AA fire. The planes flew over at a lower altitude and dropped leaflets. It was a warning that unless the Germans stopped sending V2 rockets over England, either side of the canal which ran by the side of the camp, would be bombed for a hundred miles. This was great propaganda for the Germans. They had told us about these rockets which could fly 60 miles into the atmosphere and then explode in England. Of course we thought that far fetched and just said rubbish. I wish that I had kept a leaflet.

"Having forgotten about the threat we returned to camp at Saturday dinnertime when the planes came over. Bombs dropped the other side of the canal, then it was our turn. I narrowly missed being killed, but not so lucky were about six lads in our camp and 32 in Bau Battalion when a shelter took a direct hit. There were also a couple of unexploded bombs in the camp. A gang of Jews came in and dug them up before a German came and defused them.

"Things were getting worse. The parcel delivery, now being re-routed began to suffer and it was getting colder. The heavy snowfalls and freezing temperatures were making life difficult. Christmas was not a happy time and in January we were told to pack as we were leaving camp. We formed up and marched through woods in the deep snow until we reached the River Oder. The guards at the bridge wouldn't let us cross because a General had not signed a pass to let us out of the area. What a farce! It was back to camp. We

gleefully outpaced our guards to get back and prepare a hearty meal. Then we knocked the huts to bits and made sledges to carry as much as we could. Next morning the column stretched much longer.

"We took a different route going through the village of Blechhammer. They lined up either side of the road, many in tears. They had worked side by side, many years at the complex with some of the lads and of course, they didn't know what was in store for them once the Russians arrived.

"The Death March has been well recorded, but we were lucky, because our guards were well known to us and we suffered little brutality. Only one young guard shot one of our number just before we crossed into Czechoslovakia. Mrs Roberts found his grave in Prague. We were fit young men when we started out, made to work kept us in trim, but at the end of the march about a quarter had fallen by the wayside, being left in farms or hospitals. We reached Bayreuth and had to march down to the station and fill in bomb craters. This happened two or three times. The Germans rustled up some open coal trucks to take us to Moosburg, just outside Munich, but just after passing through Nuremburg we had to detrain as the line had been blown up. The sky was full of planes flying in formation and lower level, and bombing anything they thought worthwhile with no opposition whatever. Back on the road, we marched, down at heel and covered in coal dust on a beautiful April morning and it felt good to be alive.

"Two weeks later, after a brief skirmish Patton's Third Army drove into the camp. There was great excitement from the American POWs but we didn't feel any euphoria, it just seemed inevitable. Instead we went round and helped ourselves to food being dished out and stuffed ourselves. The Americans soon evacuated their own troops, but when it came to our turn the weather closed down and flying was temporarily suspended. A terrible week ensued as everybody's nerves were on a knife edge. Best mates, who had gone through thick and thin for years, were falling out over the most trivial things. It was a great relief when flying was resumed. We were put into groups of 28 and watched as a fleet of Dakotas flew in. Harry Wetton and I had been mockers since we were in E3 and had looked after one another during the march. We were in the last group and just before we boarded the plane the pilot announced he could only take 27 men. Harry and I were the last pair. A young officer and his sergeant major were supervising the evacuation and he asked us if either of us was married. When we said 'No' he took a coin from his pocket, tossed it up and told me to call. My call was correct so I was told to get on the plane. I hesitated and the officer said slowly 'that is an order'. I shook hands with Harry and the sergeant major told me he would see that Harry would be on the first plane the next day. This did not happen as Harry came back on a ship.

"A black cloud settled over me as I felt like a traitor. We flew over ruined German cities to Rheims where the Americans provided us with a chicken dinner and ice cream, but I was in no mood for celebrations, just went to bed and slept. Next day we were taken to the airport where Lancaster bombers

were waiting and soon we were on our way to England. Near the English coast we were invited to see the white cliffs of Dover. After landing we were taken to an Army camp where I met some of my old mates from the workshop and my mood lifted. What was done was done and I couldn't do anything about it."



PHOTO ABOVE; An unidentified working party from Stalag 20A. Recognise anyone? (Don Freeman)



PHOTO ABOVE: Back row Don Freeman, Lofty Leggett, Nobby Buckle, Brian Sellman. Front row L/Bdr Bryant, George Bancroft, Frank Greening. All from Ak 52 (Stalag 20A) at Harmsdorf (Gosdorf).



PHOTO ABOVE: Arbeits Kommando 52 Don Freeman (DF) and Henry Owens (HO) marked.



PHOTO ABOVE; Back row P Nicholson, Ralph Cattermole; Front row Fred Hobbs, Alec Green, John Duffy from Arbeits Kommando 52 at Harmsdorf. (All photos sent in by Don Freeman).

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Please contact the members searching for information below or the newsletter editor – historian Phil Chinnery at 59 Pinkwell Lane, Hayes, Middlesex UB3 1PJ.
Email NEXPOWA@fsmail.net

Colin Phillips of 12 Bullockstone Road, Herne Bay, Kent CT6 7TN wrote in to say 'My father Edward Percy Phillips served in the Buff (The Royal East Kent Regiment) for thirty years until he retired in 1967. He was captured at Gazala in the North African desert in 1941 by Rommels Afrika Korps. After a spell in Italian POW camps he was sent to Stalag 8B and then Stalag XIB at **Fallingbosten** and remained there until liberated on 16th April 1945. I had always understood that XIB was liberated by Pattons 3rd (or 13th) Army but an article in 'Soldier' magazine states that the camp was liberated by the Eight Hussars. Were any readers there on liberation day who can tell me more? Did anyone know my father?' If you look at the picture opposite at the man kneeling on the right hand side giving the V for victory sign with his right hand – my father is standing immediately above his hand!

Mr Lyndon Harper, 310 Desborough Road, Eastleigh, Hants SO50 5NF would like to hear from anyone who may have known his grandfather **Henry John Musto** who served with the 5th Hampshire Regiment. He was captured in Tunisia on 26th February 1943 and spent the rest of the war in various Italian and German POW camps.

Mrs M May, 30 Darlington Drive, Minster, Sheppey, Kent ME12 3LF asks if anyone remembers her father **Ben Ward** (KOYLI) and her uncle **Leslie Little** (Queens Own Royal West Kent Regiment?) who were in Stalag 20B around 1940-45. "They did not know each other until they met in the POW camp and became good friends. My uncle saved my fathers life on the Long March as my father was too weak to carry on, so my uncle managed to get a wheel barrow and pushed my father. When they were sent home they kept in touch and my father went down to Kent to visit my uncle in Sheppey, where my father fell in love with my uncles sister (my mother) and was married for 54 years. So there was a happy ending to their time as POW. We also would like to know why my father had his prisoner number tattooed on the inside of his wrist but my uncle did not. My father told my eldest brother that the Germans put it there."

Were you a tutor in any of the POW camps, or maybe a student? If so you may be able to help with a research project. Please contact Emma Wilson, Project Manager, 150th Anniversary of the External System, University of London, Stewart House, 32 Russell Square, London WC1B 5DN. Readers may recall that we recently published a photograph of the Stalag 8B School Tutors. We have since been informed that the tutor fourth from right in the

middle row was L/Bdr Colin F M Clarke of the Surrey Sussex Yeomanry, RA. Can anyone identify any of the others in the picture?

John Lees, 53 Hardwick Road, Streetly, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands B74 3DN would like to find fellow FEPOW Albert Edward George Raven, who was in 18th Division Signals. He was married to Pamela and survived the 'Death Railway' and was last known to be alive in 1980.

Caroline Coxon of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission is creating an interactive website, aimed particularly at lads who do not do so well with traditional learning methods. The idea is to use football as a means to spark interest in the history of the two world wars, the contribution and sacrifices that so many men and women made and the importance of remembering them, which of course is what the CWGC sets out to do. They will be telling the story of some of the footballers who served and died and some football-related war stories. If you played football in any of the POW camps, have any football stories or anecdotes or have any photos showing football matches or team photos, please contact Phil Chinnery the association historian at the address above.

Maria Fairhurst, 8 Hardy Street, Garston, Liverpool L19 8LL would like to hear from anyone who knew her father Private James Fairhurst or the Royal Worcestershire Regiment who was a former resident of Stalag 4G. It is understood that he and a group of men were 'intentionally captured, to escape from the camp.' Were men sent out to be 'intentionally captured'

Mr W E Saunders, 2 Penmere Road, St Austell, Cornwall PL25 3PE would like to hear from anyone who was in the Milk Factory in East Prussia by the side of the River Vistula. He was nicknamed 'Trotters' as he was always on the trot for food, with cream and butter to be stolen whenever possible. Especially looking for pals Bill Beven, Bill Shufel and Eric Dove. The working party was about fifty strong.

HISTORIANS NEWS by Phil Chinnery, Association Historian and Newsletter Editor.

Contact details 59 Pinkwell Lane, Hayes, Middlesex UB3 1PJ. Email NEXPOWA@fsmail.net

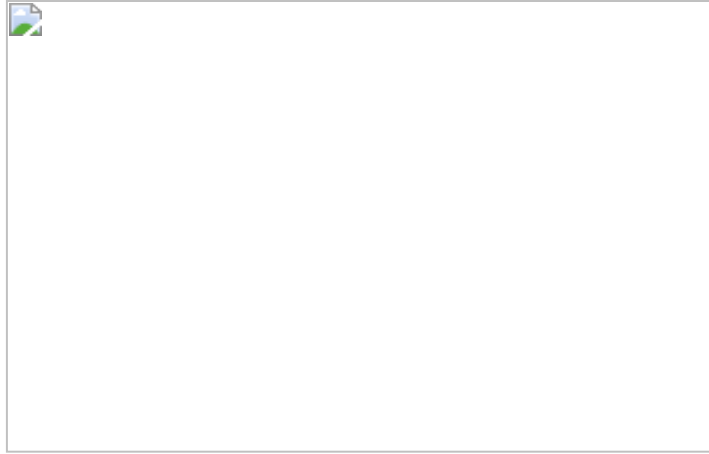
We have featured some of the Italian POW camps in this issue. We also have copies of Red Cross reports on many of the camps. If you are interested in obtaining copies please contact Phil at the address above for a list of which reports are available.

Campo PG 78 Sulmona. Bill Hayes wrote in to say "I am sending you some copies of photographs taken of Prigionieri de Guerra Campo 78 Fonte Di Amore Sulmona, where I was sojourned from 1941-43 when Italy capitulated and I was sent to Germany until 1945. The photos were taken in the camp with the help of a bribed guard for the film and developing. A group of us returned in September 2000 to revisit the camp which is now an Italian army stores. We were allowed in to look around and take photographs and found that the middle of the camp had been demolished to make way for underground petrol storage tanks. We also visited the Sulmona town hall where there is a memorial on the wall for those who did not make it back home. It is a brick from the camp with appropriate wording and we put a wreath of poppies on it. When I say 'we' we are some ex-POWs who meet every year on the nearest Saturday to the 8th April which was the date most of us were captured at Fort Mechelli in Lybia. I was an armourer to the Tower Hamlet Rifles, a TA unit of the Rifle Brigade. Most of us were captured because we were green troops fresh from England. Our division was split up between Greece and Somalia and we were the first troops to face Rommel and his battle worn veterans, where as we had never fired a shot in anger before, maybe one or two of us who had been in France with the BEF, but most of us had not."



PHOTO ABOVE “The line of snow going up the mountain is where we ran as the Germans machine gunned the hillside before I ran over the top of the mountain.” Bill Hayes.

This is how the camp was in 1941-43 but without the weeds growing.



The concert party who put on some fantastic shows. Apologies for poor quality – do any other members have any photos of Sulmona camp or the concert party?

CONTENTS OF A BRITISH RED CROSS AND ORDER OF SAINT JOHNS FOOD PARCEL by Private Stan Daines who served with both the Essex and Dorset Regiments.

A typical British Red Cross food parcel would contain 4oz margarine, 4oz tea, 1 x 8oz tin of powdered milk (klim), 4oz sugar, 1 tin of pork loaf or bully beef, 1 packet of porridge oats, 1 packet coffee, Vitamin tablets, 1 bar soap with a swan on it. (The soap floated, so when you washed in a river or stream it didn't sink – worth 1 kilo of bread). 2 tins of soup, Barley sugar sweets, 40 cigarettes (if you were lucky).

The parcel should have been a weekly issue but it was once every 5 weeks and it was shared between four men, sometimes 6. It was a great comfort to us all and a very welcome extra. You could if you were lucky get 1 kilo of bread for 10 cigarettes or 1 packet of tea, which had been brewed, dried and then put back into its packet again. Most of our parcel contents could be used to barter with if you had a good guard and things went well, like giving him a cigarette. If it had been a bad day, daylight raids for example, we were searched on entry to the camp and everything was confiscated plus a form of punishment; we knew this was solitary confinement for four days. You had a chance to barter with the German people if you went to the toilet but you were watched over by a guard.

BOOK REVIEW: *For you Tommy the war is over* by Ian English and Harry Moses. Kindly reviewed by Keith Killby, OBE. "Ian English, just before he died

had virtually finished this book which his friend Harry Moses has put in good order and published on behalf of the Durham Light Infantry, Ian's own beloved Regiment. 'Assisted Passage' Ian's first book concentrated mostly on his own escape with 600 other officers from the prison camp at Fontanellato after the Italian Armistice. He with two other officers finally made it, having walked some 500 kilometres, were the only ones to be accompanied by an Italian speaking girl. His second book 'Home by Christmas' is still available from the Monte San Martino Trust and has been reviewed in a previous newsletter. That book weaves together very many stories of those 600 officers as they made their way towards Allied lines, or were recaptured in the attempt.

"For you Tommy the war is over' gives a kaleidoscope of POW life from Dunkirk, the desert sands, Sicily and Italy and D-Day, for 3,500 members of the Durham Light Infantry taken prisoner whilst fighting in the overused work horse, the 50th Division. Having to face an indefinite future when all seemed lost after Dunkirk demanded a great deal of self endurance. In Africa they perhaps suffered the worst of prison camps – open desert surrounded by barbed wire with one area for open latrines, no tents or even blankets to provide shade against the sweltering heat or desert nights, with not enough water for drinking and weak soup for nourishment. At the other end many were on what were called the Death Marches westward, when food and shelter from the snow and biting wind had to be scrounged on the way – though obvious victory and home were on the horizon after five years for some.

"Sometimes treatment by front line captors, though terrifying at first, was better than in permanent camps, where each man had to make his own life – those keeping themselves busy fairs the best. Some spent all their waking hours conceiving ways of escape or tunnelling, some played bridge all day, many studied for chosen professions – even took exams. A few provided music or theatre for their colleagues. Those who fought boredom survived mentally and physically best. Food was the main preoccupation of all though when a parcel each week could be issued life was tolerable – without them sour bread and a bowl of skilly was the alternative.

"Though physical conditions were better for officers, all who travelled in Italy and Germany suffered the appalling conditions of 60 men to a cattle truck. If, as usual, the trucks were of wood, many being transported to Germany carved their way out and jumped to a kind of freedom. This book, with an excellent selection of photographs, gives a huge kaleidoscope of capture and its endurance and it rings very true to this reviewer who carelessly got captured four times!" ISBN No 978 1 901888 53 9. Price £12.95 plus £2.50 pp available from Business Education Publishers Ltd, The Teleport, Doxford International, Sutherland, SR3 3XD. Tel 01915-252410, email info@bepi.com

THE PG 70 WATER TOWER.

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"I was a member of the first group of prisoners to arrive in PG70 in August 1942. When we saw the impressive entrance we thought we had struck gold but the mood changed when we got inside and realised it was just a building site – a farmers co-operative still under construction. There was nothing in there but empty warehouses, a few olive trees and a lot of barbed wire.

"Everything was in short supply, even water and without water there could be no cookhouse, wash house, toilet block or even water to drink, but we were promised a proper water supply 'subito'. There was just one tap inside the wired off prison compound but Colonel Papa, the camp commandant, who fought on our side in WW1, promised there would soon be a water tower and that would be for the sole use of the prisoners and eventually, following a visit from the Red Cross representative, the work was put in hand.

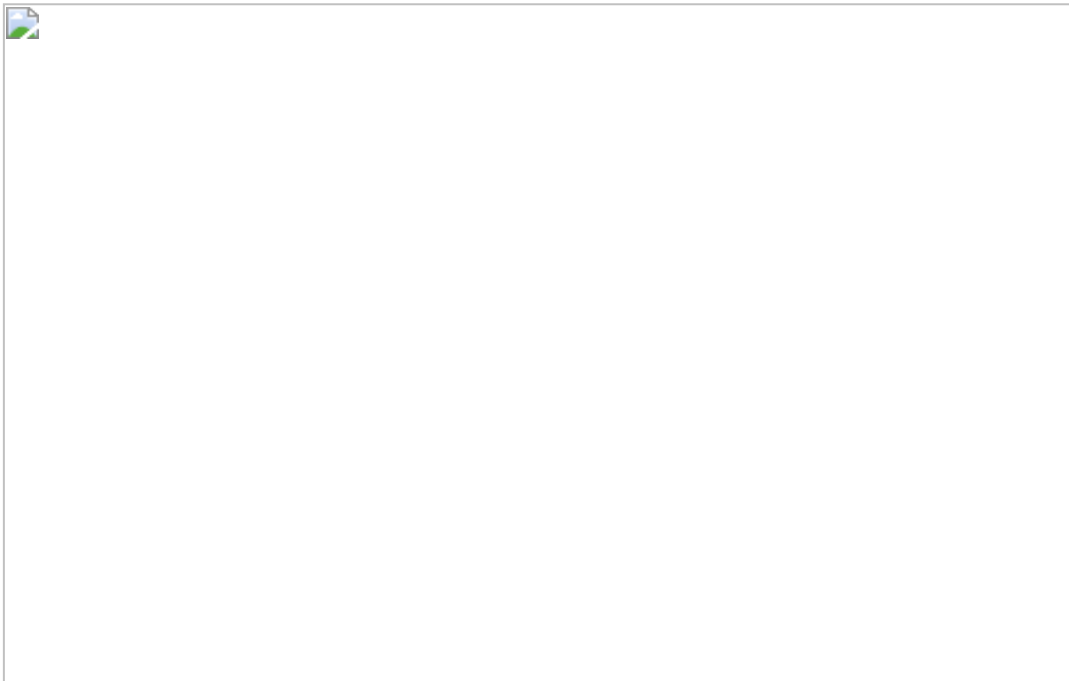
"The foundations were dug in the area grandiosely known as The Parade Ground, much of which was already occupied by the open-air skilly cooking fires, but start digging a hole in the middle of a road, or erect a fence to keep the public at bay and the busiest of people will pause for a moment to see what is going on. When they started to build our tower the scene resembled a dogfight. Everyone wanted to have a look, offer advice or laugh at the way our captors went about the job.

"Interest in the building operation wasn't limited to the workers or their manner of doing things; their tools attracted a lot of attention, and for a very good reason. We had a ration of wood for cooking purposes, but it was issued as logs and we had no tools for cutting or splitting them – but the bricklayers had. They had the tools of their trade. A 'brickie' only need lay his hammer, chisel or trowel aside for a moment for it to disappear, never to be seen again. When that happened, all work was stopped and we were all called on parade and held there while the guards searched us and our possessions but they seldom found anything. Good tools are expensive items at the best of times; in wartime Italy they must have been very expensive and most difficult to replace. The workmen soon learned to treat the tools of their trade as carefully as they would their most treasured possessions and the work slowly forged ahead.

"One Saturday morning, a railway wagon brought a load of wooden scaffolding and a gang of men spent most of the day erecting it. They sank the base of each upright pole in the ground and secured the cross members with huge metal staples where we would have used ropes or chains. By the end of the day it was ready for the bricklayers to resume operations, working well clear of the ground and with most of their tools out of reach of light fingers. But when they came back to work on Monday morning, there was quite a furore. The tower, like Old Mother Hubbards cupboard, was bare. The scaffold poles, planks and steel staples had all disappeared.

“ Such a to do! All the guards and officers, even the local police were involved in the proceedings that lasted all day. We were called on parade at 8 o'clock and were told we wouldn't be allowed to return to our billets until the missing items had been found. Apart from the chaps that fainted and were carried round to the sick bay, we stayed out in the sun for most of the day – but they had to let us go in the end for they found nothing. It was a complete mystery, to them, but a morale boost for us. Over the weekend the timber had been split, using the staples and most of it consumed on the extravagant glut of brewing fires that burned unusually brightly.

“Of course, it was really quite a blow to us too; we were really desperate for water. We were only getting enough to keep body and soul together but not enough to keep them or our clothes clean. Following what must have been a stormy meeting between the British and Italian senior personnel, a solution was reached. The building could go ahead, providing it was guarded throughout by British bobbies armed with pick shafts, and that is exactly what happened. The second lot of poles, guarded by our own MPs went unscathed and we got our water tower, lean-to kitchen, toilets of the 'stoop to conquer' variety blocks and a better supply of water for all purposes but still no showers. There never was.”



RED CROSS VISIT TO STALAG XIB FALLINGBOSTEL 9th DECEMBER 1944. We are including some details on the situation as it existed at Fallingbostel during the last winter of the war. They come from a Red Cross report sent from Berne to the Foreign Office. It appears that a Dulag holding

camp was established at the Stalag to process newly arrived prisoners from the western front and it held 6 officers, 64 British NCOs and 1567 other ranks, with 254 in the Lazaret. There was very bad overcrowding in the Stalag with some men sleeping on the floor or two in a bed. The ventilation and lighting was inadequate, there was practically no room to move and the heating was insufficient with no coal available and only a few wood gathering parties allowed out. Each prisoner only had one blanket and the majority were without mattresses. The camp commandant stated that it was impossible to cope with the situation and keep pace with the number of prisoners arriving from the East. The latrines were inadequate and there was no hot water available. There were no facilities for the men to cook their own food if they were lucky enough to receive a Red Cross food parcel. The German rations were inadequate and the Senior British Medical Officer stated that on his arrival on 9th October there was no food issued for the 440 wounded and anyone with more than one blanket had it removed. No fuel was issued for heating the hospital wards and no lighting was provided until 20th November. The patients and doctors were locked in every night and it was very difficult for the doctors to visit patients in other barracks. The Germans would only supply 50 paper bandages weekly per barrack containing 130 wounded, so regular changing of dressings was impossible. 360 wounded arrived by goods train on 6th October, with no heating or sanitary arrangements. The final sentence of the report read 'General impression camp facilities hopelessly insufficient, camp authorities facing seemingly insurmountable difficulties have done little to meet situation. OKW will be fully informed of position.' If you were in the camp around this time please drop a line to our historian with your recollections of that time period.

BOOK REVIEW: **HOME RUN 'Escape from Nazi Europe'** by John Nichol and Tony Rennell. Just days before this newsletter went to the printers we received a copy of this book from the authors, whose previous books 'The Last Escape' and 'Tail End Charlies' are well known to our members. With no time to read its 514 pages and compile an in-depth review we are including the publishers narrative from the dust jacket. "Throughout the Second World War, thousands of Allied servicemen found themselves cut off behind the lines in Nazi-occupied Europe: soldiers stranded on beaches after the chaotic evacuation of Dunkirk, airmen flying operations against the Germans blasted out of the sky by flak and fighters. Once, they had been part of units that offered camaraderie and protection, but now they were alone and on the run. Life for the evaders hung in the balance and if they were to survive they could rely only on guile and sheer luck.

"Some made solitary treks through hundreds of miles of enemy territory, dodging enemy patrols and search parties. Others attempted precarious sea-crossings in stolen boats. Many placed their lives in the hands of brave civilians who risked the wrath of a brutal regime if they dared to offer

assistance. The prospect of imprisonment and torture haunted every step the evaders and their 'helpers' took. For all involved it was a matter of life or death – make the right contacts and you might find sanctuary or secret organisations that could guide you home. Trust the wrong person and you would be in the hands of the feared Gestapo, and a concentration camp – or worse – would be your fate.”

Available in hard cover at £20 from the publisher Viking, an imprint of Penguin Books, members can quote the ISBN number 978-0-670-91603-0 to order from any bookshop.

'A riveting and revealing account of World War II bravery ...

I loved it' **Andy McNab**, author of *Bravo Two Zero*

HOME ESCAPE FROM NAZI EUROPE RUN

JOHN NICHOL &
TONY RENNELL

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