

The National Ex-Prisoner of War Association

Summer 2001 Newsletter

[← Back](#)

ASSOCIATION NEWS by Les Allan, President & Honorary General Secretary.

I have a message from the lottery commissioners to those of you who were taken prisoner on the outskirts of Dunkirk, or in the woods around Arnhem, or while you were fighting your way through North Africa or Normandy; "You are not a good cause." Of course they have not said that to us directly, but the fact that they have rejected our application for a grant on three separate occasions speaks for itself.

I have just received a letter from Mr Gerald Oppenheim, the Director UK and Corporate Planning of the Community Fund. It went as follows; "You state in your letter of 23rd April that you have made three unsuccessful applications for Lottery funding but you do not say to which Lottery Distributor these were made. We can find no trace on our database that the National Ex-Prisoner of War Association has applied to the Community Fund, which is the new name of the National Lottery Charities Board. I can of course only speak for the Community Fund and not the other Lottery Distributors. In order to be eligible to apply to the Fund an organisation has to be established for charitable, philanthropic or benevolent purposes. As a registered charity the National Ex-Prisoner of War Association would be eligible to apply to us. However, having established eligibility, a prospective applicant will then need to consider whether the project for which it is seeking funding falls within the Community Funds current policies and criteria." I have requested another application pack and will apply for a grant to help keep our welfare projects going, including this newsletter. Watch this space. Perhaps members would like to write to Mr Oppenheim at the Community Fund Corporate Office, St Vincent House, 16 Suffolk Street, London SW1Y 4NL or the Prime Minister, Mr Tony Blair at 10, Downing Street and give your opinion as to whether or not we are a worthy cause. We are aware that some of you have written to your local MP or newspaper to draw attention to our situation. Well done - keep up the good work.

COMPENSATION.

We are no longer prepared to tolerate this governments attitude that we should not be considered for compensation for our treatment at the hands of the Germans or Italians. While we have every sympathy with the men who suffered at the hands of the Japanese, life was hardly a bed of roses for many

of us. British Governments have notoriously short and selective memories. What would Blair or Prescott know about the massacres at Wormhout or Les Paradis in May 1940? Do they know about Hitlers Kommando Order which condemned many captured SAS and Commando troops to death? Do they know that hundreds of RAF aircrew were killed after capture by German civilians, police and servicemen? Can they imagine what it was like to spend days locked in a 40 and 8 railway wagon with no food, water or medical treatment? Could they possibly know about the casualties caused by the enemies refusal to site POW camps out of harms way? The bombing of working detachment E715 at Auschwitz and the hospital at Stalag 18A in Austria springs to mind. How many hundreds of men died in hell holes such as the prisoner of war 'camp' at Benghazi or on the death march to the west during the winter of 1944/45? Our Historian is currently compiling a dossier on such breaches of the Geneva Convention and it will form the basis of our compensation claim. If anyone can remember any similar incidents please drop us a line.

We would be pleased to reply to all letters sent in to us, but please include a stamp.

2001 MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTION.

We would like to remind those of you who would like to belong to Headquarters Branch and receive the quarterly newsletters that the £5 annual subscription was due on 1st January. (Associate and overseas members £10). Associate membership is available to relatives of prisoners of war. Please make cheques out to NEXPOWA and send to Les Allan at 99, Parlaunt Road, Langley, Berkshire SL3 8BE.

ANNUAL REUNION.

The Association will hold its annual reunion between 5th and 8th October at Warners Lakeside Holiday Village, Hayling Island. Members, associates, family and friends are all welcome. Estimated cost £103 per person for three nights. Reserve your place now with Charlie Jago on 01722-333599. Both Les Allan and Phil Chinnery will be attending and look forward to meeting our readers at the bar.

WEBSITE.

Our electronic link with the outside world is coming along quite nicely. 5,000 people have visited the site via their computer and we have received over 800 queries or requests from relatives of ex-prisoners of war, researchers and other interested parties. Answering these requests by email is saving us a fortune in postage, but Phils typing fingers are now half inch shorter than last

year! Are we allowed to say 'inches' now? Perhaps I should say 12.5mm shorter. The site address is www.prisonerofwar.org.uk

BRITISH HUMOUR.

Sent in by American Jerry Collins of the 3rd Fighter Squadron, USAAF.

When the British military judges its officers, it sometimes does so with the droll humour of a Noel Coward play. Here are some excerpts taken from Royal Navy and Marine fitness reports;

1. His men would follow him anywhere, but only out of curiosity.
2. I would not breed from this officer.
3. Since my last report he has reached rock bottom, and has started to dig.
4. He sets low personal standards and then consistently fails to achieve them.
5. He has the wisdom of youth and the energy of old age.
6. This officer should go far – and the sooner he starts the better.
7. In my opinion this officer should not be authorised to fly below 250 feet.
8. When he opens his mouth it seems this is only to change whichever foot was previously in there.
9. When he joined my ship this officer was something of a granny; since then he has aged considerably.
10. This man is depriving some village of an idiot.

NEW MEMBERS.

We have found **Bert Jackson!** As mentioned in the Winter newsletter, he was on the Antiques Roadshow with a copy of 'Mein Kampf' in English which he had appropriated in Stalag 18A Wolfsberg. Bert was taken prisoner in Greece with 3 RTR and now lives in Lincolnshire. Other new members include **Mr Len Bunyan**, late of the Royal Navy and BYMS72. **Mr C Jones**, Royal Navy, sunk in a minesweeper off Leros. **Mr William MacDonald**, a former resident of Stalag 4F. **Mr Bill Winnard** a former resident of Stalag 20B and the sugar factory at Riesenberga. **Mr Robert Harding**, RAF, a former resident of Stalag 4B and author of the book 'Copper Wire'. **Mr Harry Rose**, RAF, late of Campo 59 and 66 and Stalag 4B. Crash landed near Tobruk in November 1941. **Mr L J E Kallmeier**, late of the Royal Signals and Stalag 344. **Mr Chris Ruff**. We would also like to welcome the following **Associate** members, all relatives of former prisoners of war; **Mr Harry Tooze**, son of RSM Harry Tooze of the

Welch Regiment; **Mr Tony Holden**, son of Edgar Russell Holden;. **Mrs Mary Aston**, daughter of Padre Gedge; **Mr A J Clark**, whose father was in the Northants Regiment and a resident of Stalag 8B; **Mr Ian Dobson**, son of Major E T Dobson; **Mr Jim McCloy**, son of Cpl J McCloy, DCM of 1st Bn Royal Northumberland Fusiliers; **Mrs Davina Crighton**, daughter of Ernest Algar, a member of the Lincolnshire Regiment and former resident of Stalag 8B; **Mr David Locke**, son of Sgt Charles Locke of the Royal Signals and a former resident of Campo 70, Stalag 4B and Heilag 4D/Z; **Mr Peter Lister** whose father was in Stalag 8C; **Mr Hugh Samways** whose father Oliver served in the Welsh Regiment and was taken prisoner on Crete; **Sheila Cairns** whose father was a resident of Stalag 18A; **Mrs Maureen Quinn** whose father Sgt Michael Russell, RE was captured at St Valery and was later resident at Stalag 9C, 383 and 3A; **Mr R A Morse**, whose father was taken prisoner during the Great War. **Mr Mike Marchel** of the Belgian Secret Army. Also **Mr Keith Watling**, **Mr John Morley**, **Mrs Lynette Johnson**, **Mrs Meg Parkes** and **Mr Maurice Bentley**. Welcome all of you to the association. We would also like to take the opportunity to welcome Mr Gary Moores who has kindly volunteered to take on the job of Association Standard Bearer.

DONATIONS.

We would like to thank the following for their kind donations to the Association. **Mr John Baker** £200, **Mrs Lynette Johnson** £25, **Mrs Margaret Metcalfe** £25, **Mr R A 'Tug' Wilson** £25, **Mrs A A Neal** £25, **Mr Ivor Gordon** £15, **Mr Stan Wade** £25, **Mr D P Gronow** £15, **Mr C Dick** £10, **Unknown** £17.06, **Mrs B Jackson** £5, **Mr James R Johnstone** £10, **Mr J A Sawyer** £20, **Mr John Borland** £6, **Mr N J Daniels** £10, **Mr M E Jones** £20, **Mr Patrick E Shurmer** £50, **Mr F Withey** £25, **Mr F J Vokes** £10, **Mr F G Walker** £20, **Mr Frank McGauley** £10, **Mr James Aitken** £20, **Mr F Gilberthorpe** £20, **Mr C J Duffree** £5, **Mr Jack Driscoll** £10, **Mr J F Crouch** £5, **Mr Frank Gill** £10, **Mr Maurice Bentley** £25. All contributions great or small will be gratefully received by our Treasurer. We would also like to thank those who send in **stamps**, including **Mr John Green**. Phil and Les write between 50 and 70 letters each week. Apologies to Mr Murdo Shand for mis-spelling his name last newsletter.

OBITUARIES.

We regret to report the passing away of Wynnie, the wife of member Charles Dick. Also Edward Weaver of Mitcham, Surrey; Denys Barnard of Chesterton, Newcastle and Mrs Pat Etherington, wife of the late Fred Etherington, both founder members of the Devon and Cornwall Branch. We have been notified that one or two of our members are not too well at the moment. We would like you to know that you are in our thoughts and are not alone. Lt Col Tom Jagger our Treasurer was taken ill with a stroke on his arrival on Crete and is now in a local Surrey hospital. We wish him a speedy recovery.

ROYAL AIR FORCE REPORT.

A limited edition print has been commissioned by the RCAF Prisoners of War Association in memory of the 50 prisoners of war from Stalag Luft 3 who were shot on the orders of Hitler following their escape from the camp. Of the 79 who escaped, 76 were recaptured and 50 shot, including six Canadians. Painted by Bill Holder the picture shows various scenes related to the camp and the escape and is surrounded by photographs of the 50 men. The painting will be on display at the RCAF Memorial Museum in Ontario, near the life size mock-up of the Great Escape currently at the museum. Prints can be ordered from 833335 Alberta Ltd, 203 MacEwan Ridge Villas NW, Calgary, Alberta T3K 4G3, Canada. Together with news of the print, member **Don Elliott** also enclosed a copy of the minutes of the final meeting of the Bomber Harris Trust. After their recent legal action was completed they had a surplus of some \$128,626.12 which was donated to RCAF museums across Canada and charities including \$10,000 to the Red Cross as a thank you for the food parcels which meant so much. The legal action being a class action against the CBE et al, regarding the 'Valour and the horror: Bomber Command; Death by Moonlight' programme.

Mr Ron Winton has sent in details of the next conference to be held near the site of the old RAF prisoner of war camp **Stalag Luft One at Barth**. The event commences on Friday 7th September at 10.30 hours when the party will gather at the Conference Centre. After lunch there will be a visit to the local Gymnasium where the party will be entertained by the students. There follows a visit to the Memorial at the former camp site. At 16.00 hours there will be a visit to the town church of the St Mary where there will be a short concert on the famous and old Bucholz-Organ. At 18.00 hours there will be a welcoming dinner. On Saturday 8th September at 09.00 hours the Conference commences and will continue until 12.00 hours. From 12.00 hours to 13.30 hours lunch will be served. From 13.30 hours until 15.30 hours there will be a visit to the three Memorials; Stalag Luft One, the Concentration Camp and the Soviet Army. On return to the Conference Centre coffee will be served and the conference will continue until 18.00 hours. In the evening there will be a final banquet. If any members would like to join Ron on his fifth visit to Barth since his first on 3rd January 1945, please give him a ring on 01242-231381.

BOOK REVIEW: A GALLANT COMPANY by Jonathan F Vance. On the night of 24th-25th March 1944, 79 Allied airmen clambered through a tunnel at Stalag Luft 3 in eastern Germany in the final act of what history and Hollywood have dubbed The Great Escape. The culmination of more than four years of toil, triumph and heartbreak, the escape was intended to cause as

much disruption as possible in Hitler's Europe. In this, the escapers succeeded beyond their wildest expectations, but the escape sent shock waves through the German high command that were to have tragic consequences. Sadly 50 of the escapers were later recaptured and murdered by the Gestapo. This is the story of that remarkable battle to escape from captivity. Built around a cast of colourful and engaging characters from every corner of the world, it describes their ongoing struggle to outwit their captors, the growing sophistication of their escape attempts, and their ambitious plan to construct three huge escape tunnels and scatter hundreds of airmen across occupied Europe. It is a tale of ingenuity, perseverance and courage, and a testament to what ordinary men can achieve in extraordinary circumstances. Hardcover, 329 pages with illustrations. Published by Pacifica Military History of California at \$29.95 and available in the UK from Midland Counties Publications, Watling Drive, Hinckley, LE10 3EY. Tel 01455-233747. ISBN No 0-935553-47-9.

BOOK REVIEW: CRADLE CREW by Kenneth K Blyth. For the past 50 years Ken has regaled his family and friends with many of the stories in this book. They have enjoyed the wartime personal experiences of the 'Cradle Crew' that flew the Handley Page Halifax bombers with the Royal Canadian Air Force during World War II. His close friends, Cal and Bill Ollerhead, have encouraged him to document those experiences, part of the nostalgia half a century after the Big War: training experiences, raids over enemy targets, being shot down over Germany, life in a prison camp, and finally release at war's end by the Russians. Known as the 'Cradle Crew' because of their young age, (the pilot and author Ken Blyth was 21 years old) they were one of 19 bombers shot down by the new ME-262 jet fighters of Jagdgeschwader 7 on 31st March 1945. Shipped off to Stalag Luft 1 at Barth they were fortunate in that the war had only a few weeks left to run before the camp was evacuated en-masse by a fleet of B-17s. Published by Sunflower Press, ISBN No 0-89745-217-8. Softcover 197 pages, illustrated. Signed copies are available for \$25 incl postage, from the author Ken Blyth at 2116, Imperial G C Blvd, Naples, FL 34110, USA. Email kennykeane@aol.com

-

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Addresses of those requesting information have not been included for privacy reasons. If you can assist with any enquiry please contact Phil Chinnery at the address below.

JOHN RUSSELL. The British Red Cross is trying to locate former prisoner of war John Russell, who was born in Scotland in 1919. Jacek Zakrzewski would

like to trace John, who knew his grandmother Irene Sendzicki while both were working for Max Schottke at Althausen bei Garnsee in 1944. John may have been a resident of Stalag 20A or 20B. Any information please to Phil Chinnery at 10, Lambert Avenue, Langley, Berkshire SL3 7EB.

Mr Maurice Bentley is trying to discover what happened to his brother Charles, a member of the RASC who was presumed died while evading the enemy after escaping from captivity around 24th April 1945. Charles was in work camp 51 attached to **Stalag XXB**. Were you in the same camp? Do you remember seeing him on the march? If you can help please contact Maurice.

Mr Peter Gronow of Swansea would like to trace information about 1531476 **Gunner R J Doggett**, Royal Artillery, who was a prisoner in Stalag 18A Wolfsburg, Austria. He went back to the RA after release and served in Palestine and Malaya post-war.

“Does anyone remember my father **Padre E W Gedge**, C of E? He was captured near Dunkirk on 28th May 1940 and at various times was in Oflags 7C, 7C/Z, 7D, 9A/H, Stalag 21A. In 1942 he was asked to go to Oflag 9A/H where Doctor Chanters and the Marquess of Normandy were caring for the blind and amputation cases. He helped to care for the wounded after the battle for Arnhem and was at Fallingbostal at the end of the war.” Please contact daughter Mrs Mary Aston.

Mr A J Clark of Thamesmead would like to contact anyone who knew his father **Private Alfred John Clark** of the 1st Northamptonshire Regiment (1931-46) who was captured in France in 1939 and sent to Stalag 8B.

Mr S G Cameron in Jersey would like to locate **Rifleman R J Clifton** 6846767 of the 2nd Bn KRRC, prisoner of war number 3595, who was resident in Stalag 344 Lamsdorf as at March 1945.

Mr Jim Harper in Warrington would like to make contact with **Bill Mines**, late of the Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry who lived in High Wycombe after the war. Bill was in the same Stalag 8B working party as Jim at Langendorf in Silesia. It was a cardboard factory and they both left there to march to the west but were separated enroute.

Fred Walker in Yorkshire would like to know the significance of the 'C' in **Stalag XXA C** which is the address on some of the postcards his late uncle sent home. He would also like to hear from anyone who was in the camp at Bromberg.

We have received a letter from a former German soldier now living in France. In September 1944 he transported a wounded British soldier to a German field hospital on his bicycle. The man was a flutist with the **London Symphony Orchestra** (he believes) and the two of them sang their national anthems on the journey! He would like to find him and invite him to France. Were you that man? Please contact Phil Chinnery for more details.

Do you live near 16, Maidstone Road, **Heaton Mersey**, Stockport, Cheshire? We are trying to trace the relatives of George and Nellie Poland who lived there in 1942. Their son Dennis was an RAF Flight Sgt who was killed in Java in May 1942. We have an item belonging to Dennis which we would like to return to the family. Would anyone living in the area like to make some enquiries on our behalf? Details from Phil Chinnery, Association Historian.

Mrs Davina Crighton in Ipswich would like to trace anyone who knew her father **Lance Corporal Ernest William Algar** of the Lincolnshire Regiment who was captured at Lille on 29th May 1940 and sent to Stalag 8B. Did you serve with him before the war in Ireland, Hong Kong or India?

Edith Petschnigg is an Austrian student of history who is writing a dissertation on British POWs who were force labourers in her home province of Styria, which was part of **Wehrkreis 18**. She is hoping to find ex-POWs who would agree to a personal interview or to answer written questions about their experiences. If you can help please contact Edith at Am Jagergrund 39, 8053 Graz, Austria.

[HISTORIANS NEWS by Philip Chinnery.](#)

Contact address 10, Lambert Avenue, Langley, Berkshire SL3 7EB.

PHIL@chinnery49.fsnet.co.uk

COLD WAR KIDNAPPING.

Were any readers stationed in West Germany or Berlin in the 1950s/60s? We are looking for information on British servicemen who may have been kidnapped by the KGB or STASI and held in East Germany. We are aware of at least ten such incidents.

FIRST WORLD WAR.

On 30th March I attended the document workshop on Prisoners of War from the First World War given by Mr Alan Bowgen at the Public Record Office. It was a very enlightening couple of hours where we were shown samples of the records which exist in the record office. Sadly the records only mention a small percentage of the 182,000 British and Commonwealth prisoners of war and are heavily biased towards the experiences of officers, rather than other ranks. That is hardly surprising given the attitude towards the common soldier which prevailed in those days. Although to be fair it must be admitted that most of the records of the First World War 'other ranks' were destroyed in the Blitz. At the moment I receive two or three enquiries each week from family members with relatives taken prisoner in that war and now at least I can give them some assistance.

Back from trips overseas; **Arthur Smith** who sent in a report on his trip back to Marienberg (Marlbork). For those of you planning a trip, the taxi fare from Gdansk (Danzig) to Marlboro will set you back about £100! Thank you also to **Mrs Audrey Neal** for her report, as follows; "We arranged a package deal with Polish Regency Tours, Bodgan Travel, W3, covering a weekend. Apparently if you do not stay over a weekend the fare doubles. We left Gatwick on Friday 25th May at noon, arriving in Gdansk 2 hours and 10 minutes later. A taxi from the hotel was there to transfer us. We stayed bed and breakfast at the Novotel, which was situated 5 minutes away from the old town. On Saturday at 10am as part of the package we had a guide to take us round the Old Town, giving us information on the history of Gdansk from the early 1200s to the present day. It was a very enlightening experience. The guide's father had fought for Poland in both the First and Second World Wars.

The young receptionists were unaware of Marlboro Cemetery, but from information that I had from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission they made enquiries as to its exact location. It was decided that the best way to go was by the hotel's taxi service and the driver would wait and return with us. The journey took about 40 minutes. The cemetery was off the beaten track in a quiet lane not well sign posted at all. The first impression was quite disappointing; the book of names was not in its metal container, the grass was overgrown and there were lots of weeds amongst the flowers that had been planted in between and in front of the headstones. However, on the Cross of Sacrifice, flowers, although now dead, had been placed with Polish colours on the ribbons, so obviously at certain times the cemetery is visited in some form

of remembrance. There was also a poppy wreath from the British Legion at Aylesford, Kent although no date was on it, it looked quite recent.

Of the 232 headstones, one had a small wooden cross and another had a potted plant that had been placed by someone. Once I had placed the poppy spray on my fathers grave (Cpl Richard Wallace, Royal Signals) I felt that I had to visit each and every one of the others. I have videotaped every one singly and also the overall site as well. It was a very moving experience to read all the names, ages, see the dates and realise what they had missed, as in my fathers case, not to know his daughter, son-in-law, grandson/wife, grand daughter/husband and 6 great grand children and what we as a family had also missed. The driver returned us to the hotel, the whole expedition had taken three hours.

The following day we took the boat to Westerplatte, where the hostilities started. There apart from Bronze tributes to the Polish soldiers who tried to hold off the German onslaught, is a museum complete with bullet marks, which was the original Guard House No 1. Guard House No 5, which is just a shell, is left standing as a reminder. From there on to the National Remembrance Site which is a 25 metre high monument 'Heroes of Westerplatte'. It is a really impressive statue and since 1989 an annual mass has been held on 1st September.

Gdansk was the cleanest place we have ever been to. Not a piece of paper or a cigarette end anywhere. Spotless toilets, with an attendant at each one. Polite and friendly people who did their best to make everyone welcome regardless of whether they could understand you. A very resilient people, who even under Russian rule, had rebuilt Gdansk to its former glory. The sort of pride in our history and cleanliness which is sadly lacking here and the contrast is very marked."

ARCHIVES.

Our archives have received a boost with the arrival of more memoirs, war stories and anecdotes. I would like to say Thank you to **Richard Hall** for sending in a copy of his experiences with the 4th Bn, The Green Howards. Thanks also to **Pat Shurmur** of the 'Sharpshooters' for the details of his experiences. Thank you to John Watson for the details of his experiences with the 51st Highland Division and the various working parties after capture including E365 at Gross Strelitz. Thanks to **Doug Bond** for his recollections from E715 Auschwitz. Thanks to **Harvey Newman** for the story of his time in Campo 53 and Stalags 7A and 11A. Special thanks to **Alan Carson** of Auckland, New Zealand for the back issues of POW WOW, the New Zealand Ex-POW Association newsletter. Thanks also to **Avalon Eastman** for the music score of 'The Count of Luxembourg' by Franz Lehar which was put on at Stalag 21A

RED CROSS MAGAZINES.

Bert Jackson has put me on the trail of the 39 Prisoner of War magazines that the Red Cross published during the war. Although I have some photocopies of odd pages from these magazines I would like to try to build up a complete set for our archives. If anyone has the odd copy lying around gathering dust, maybe you could consider lodging it in our archives on loan. The articles contained in the magazines are very useful for photocopying and sending to relatives when they ask for details of Stalags, working parties and the like.

HOME AT LAST.

Recollections from MAY 1945 from Harold Whiting. "I thought we were badly treated on our arrival in England. Attlee in his answer to a parliamentary question typified the official attitude. On being re-kitted the QM staff did not wish to exchange my greatcoat, even though it still had the red painted triangle on the back. The young QM who had probably never seen foreign parts before, had a bullying attitude towards the returning POWs. I had a quiet word with the officer, saying that if he didn't change when dealing with ex-Dunkirk Vets the QM could easily finish up a corpse. The War Department seemed to be unthinking people. My mother, who was living alone in 1942, received a telegram on Christmas Day to say I was missing. With any sense they could have delayed the message for 24 hours. During our time in Germany I was never in a Stalag, but always in working lagers. We received a certain amount of lager geld, which could not be spent and we understood deductions were made for laundry and German income tax. After arriving in England I was forced into long acrimonious correspondence with the War Department to have the vouchers changed into Sterling. Shortly after arriving home the neighbouring woman told my mother; "Your Harold must have had a jolly good time as a POW – look how tanned and fit he is". Not like her son who was in a mixed sex AA Battery in Hyde Park. He really had it tough. At the end of repatriation leave we were sent to a training camp where we were told to get ready to invade Japan. As I was medically C3, thinking I would be sent back to the civil service, in fact I did another stint in the Pay Corps, so that I had 6 years service in all. A final thought – I thought the Italians were bastards!"

STALAG XVIID (18D) AND XVIIB (18B) AUSTRIA. If any member was a resident of these camps, I now have a couple of Red Cross visit reports that you might like to see. This applies especially to those taken prisoner in Greece or Crete who were sent to 18D 'the worst camp in Europe' and then moved to 18B.

STALAG XVIIB KREMS-GNEIXENDORF. I have just received a copy of a very well researched book on this Austrian Stalag. The book is in German

rather than English, but if you were there you will want a copy. A review and ordering details will appear in the next newsletter.

ARBEIT KOMMANDOS. We would like to make this a regular feature in the newsletter. If you can remember any stories or anecdotes from your working party, please send them in.

Member John Watson recalls his time with **E365 Gross Strelitz**. "Life in Stalag 8B was not good. Rations were very poor and we were still crawling with lice and the conditions were getting worse. At the end of January 1942 the Jerries needed a working party of about 200 men to work in a factory in Ratibor, Silesia. I was one of those who was picked for this job and had to walk about 6 miles each day from our camp to work. Up at 5am and not getting back until 6pm. My job was keeping the roofs of the factory in good repair. It was quite high and I had to climb up iron steps to get on to the roof. There were 5 of us on this job, with a German civilian telling us what to do. You had to wear special shoes to keep you from slipping on the felt. Had my big toe nail cut off while on that working party. Had a week off work as I could not walk and it was really sore. I did not get any pain killing tablets. In July 1942, we had to leave Ratibor and were sent to another working party at a place called Tannawice. We were working on the railway lines, taking out iron sleepers and replacing them with wooden sleepers. The British POWs worked on one part of the line and on another there were Jews. They were really in a very bad way. I saw some of them throwing themselves in front of the trains. This job only lasted 6 weeks, then we were sent back to Stalag 8B. It was now September 1942 and my next working party was 15 of us sent to work in a lime quarry at a place called Gross Strelitz, well out in the country. This was E365. The quarry had three layers, the British POWs worked on the bottom and in the middle were political prisoners and at the top were Russian POWs. It was pretty hard work, but we did not mind, as we got extra food rations. Sometimes you had to work in the lime kilns which were very hot and dusty. Had to wear clogs on your feet and gloves on your hands. Had to empty 2 railway trucks of coal per week and had to barrow the coal into the lime kilns. By the summer of 1943 we got another 10 men and had to shift to another building which was bigger and better, but was surrounded with barbed wire. I stayed in this party until June 1944 when I had to go to hospital with gastric enteritis." (John was liberated by the Americans at Moosburg.)

A942 GW, Stalag 18A Austria. Ivor Gordon was taken prisoner at Kalamata, Greece in 1941 and eventually finished up at this Arbeits Kommando at Schladming in Austria. He recalls; "There was the time when one of our lads said "If the war is not over by Christmas I'll shave my head! I think this must have been in 1943. When the time came we made him keep his promise. However, he must have looked alright for most of us followed suit. Many of us had been losing our hair due to lack of vitamins, the idea was to shave our scalps several times to toughen the growth and rub in some marrow fat which was the only type of lubricant available. That winter was an extremely cold

one, so our balaclavas were worn both outdoors and indoors for many weeks. Schladming is now a well known ski resort and many of the big competitions are held there and shown on television.”

The Ice Block Job. Wally Pearce was one of the POWs who like our Founder Les Allan was employed on cutting ice blocks out of the River Vistula to provide ice for German breweries and officers messes. He recalled the last afternoon he and his ten mates worked on the job; “Up river from us were young couples, cuddling and throwing snow balls at each other and skating on the ice, something I had never seen before. They were enjoying themselves so much that I was very envious, wishing I could enjoy the fun instead of being stuck in a hole in the ice. There were also some men who had dug a hole in the ice and were fishing with rods in them. The man in charge of the working party was a German sailor on leave. We were given a pole with a spike on the end and a hook on the side, a kind of tool you see mountain climbers use. We had to spike the 18-inch thick ice into about one foot square lumps, lift it out and load it onto a cart. When we picked out a piece about 3 or 4 foot square the sailor did his nut and told us it was too large. We told him we did not understand German, we only spoke English. By this time he was standing on the block of ice which was now floating with a 10-15 miles an hour current flowing underneath. If he had fallen in he could have ended up in Sweden or the North Sea. Looking around I saw the two guards walking down the tow path and into the woods to attend to the call of nature, so I said “Lets push him out a bit”. We pushed the ice about a foot away from the edge so he could not step back on land because the block would tilt, making it dangerous. He kept shouting and slipping and in the end he had to lay down on his stomach and paddle with his hands to reach the edge, so we gave him another gentle push. This lasted about ten minutes, then we saw the guards returning so we hooked him back to land. He really lost his temper and yelled at the guards that we had tried to kill him. The guards said no, they did not – they rescued you and you should be thankful to them for saving your life! Looking at it afterwards it was a silly thing to do, but we had a good laugh about it. I made sure I did not go on that job again.”

The bombing of Auschwitz by Ron Redman. “Our working party **E715** Auschwitz came under Stalag 8B. Forty of the prisoners were killed on the first bombing raid on Auschwitz. Our camp was just off the perimeter road around the huge I G Farben industrial factory as were the Ukranian forced labour, French volunteers and the Jewish camps. This particular day was a ‘free’ day off work, when we normally washed our clothes or maybe had some recreation. It was a beautiful sunny day when the Germans suddenly lit their smoke screens when the impending news of large bombing formations leaving Italy and heading towards Silesia, the industrial heart of Poland. The balloon was going up – this literally was a red and orange basket hoisted in stages outside the tallest chimney stack to warn as to the vicinity of the planes

– if the balloon was at the chimney top the planes were overhead! This time they were American.

We had dug zig-zag trenches in the lowest part of the camp and covered them with large concrete slabs. The entrance was a concrete slope at one end. We had experienced some false alarms previously and I had noticed if one had squatted near the entrance many pools of water made it undesirable although further in the trenches it was darker, but drier. Therefore I had resolved to go deeper into the trench as the sirens were sounding. Sadly many of the lads were reluctant to go into the entrance despite the shouting of the guards – it was so fine and sunny and maybe it could be another false alarm.

I heard the ‘whoosh’ as the first stick of bombs came down and the blast blew me upside down within shelter. When we finally emerged from the rubble we learned that there was a last minute rush to enter the opening from the ramp and an estimated 40 men including one German guard were unfortunately too late. The area around the ramp was devastated. It looked like a direct hit was made and the blast had flung the bodies far and wide. I remember one guard noisily suggesting that ‘a pity it wasn’t all of us’ as we were recovering the bodies. To this day I do not know whether the bodies have been moved to a proper grave site in Poland.”

BOOK REVIEWS.

SEVEN YEARS AMONG PRISONERS OF WAR. By Chris Christiansen. Translated by Ida Egede Winther. Chris Christiansen joined the staff of the Danish YMCA in 1940 and spent the next 8 years involved in prisoner of war relief work. His book is divided into four sections; Part One describes his work among Allied prisoners of war in Germany when he lived in Berlin for four years. In November 1942 he visited Stalag 3C at Kustrin east of Berlin where 7,000 Russian POWs had just arrived. When he returned 3 months later half of them had died from starvation or neglect. The YMCA was not allowed to provide medicine, food or clothing, but they did provide musical instruments to some Russian POW camps. It is interesting to read that most of the Polish, French and Belgian POWs were released and repatriated early in the war or forced into employment as civilian workers in Germany. When the war came to an end the Russian forces arrived in Berlin and rounded up the many foreigners still in the city and shipped them eastwards into Russia. Part Two describes the year that Chris spent as a guest of the Soviets in Moscow where he staged his own hunger strike. Thereafter he was sent to Krasnogorsk outside Moscow where he spent the Christmas of 1945 in company with German POWs captured at Stalingrad. Eventually he was allowed to go home and after a short period of recuperation moved to Britain where a quarter of a million German POWs were being held in 130 POW camps. Part Three describes his work with the POWs of the defeated Third

Reich, who never had to complain to him about the food or conditions in their camps, indeed at 3,300 calories per person daily they were fed more than the civilian population. In Part Four Chris goes to Egypt where the conditions under which the German POWs were kept was causing concern amongst their own chaplains and the YMCA tried to alleviate the situation. Hardcover. Available from The University of Chicago Distribution Center, Billing Office, 11030 South Langley Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60628, USA. Tel 001-773-568-1550. Price US\$34.95 incl postage. ISBN number 0-8214-1069-5.

ARNHEM DOCTOR. By Stuart Mawson. A moving and riveting account of how a young Captain, the Regimental Medical Officer to the 11th Parachute Battalion of the 4th Brigade, 1st Airborne Division, was parachuted along with his fellow soldiers into the hell that became known as the Battle of Arnhem. There are many accounts of what it is like to be a fighting soldier in the heat of battle – but few about what it was like at the sharp end of a medical nightmare where doctors had to try and treat an endless stream of wounded men with inadequate facilities in the middle of a fierce battle. Mawson, his sergeant and batman became separated from their colleagues after they had parachuted into Holland on 18th September 1944. In the confusion they fetched up in the dressing station established in Schoonoord Hotel by Lt.Col Marrable with the 181st Field Ambulance of the glider-borne Airlanding Brigade – where the arrival of another medical officer with part of his section was more than welcome. In the ebb and flow of a battle whose ferocity, a German officer told him, had never been surpassed in his own experience even in Russia, Mawson and his colleagues were captured twice by the Germans. In the end the Germans evacuated all the wounded from the hotel and took Mawson as well as the German doctor could communicate with him in French and he needed Mawson to persuade the British wounded to accept treatment from the Germans. Published by Spellmount, The Old Rectory, Staplehurst, Kent TN12 0AZ. Price £12.99. ISBN No 1-86227-088-0. Paperback. 170 pages. Foreword by General Sir John Hackett.

FROM SICILY TO THE ALPS. Written and compiled by Glynn B Hobbs. The war in Italy has sometimes been called the 'Forgotten Front' of WWII, yet for almost a year before the D-Day landings in France the only fighting between Allied and Axis armies in Europe was in the beautiful but difficult terrain of the Italian countryside. There some of the toughest fighting of the war took place, which claimed some 250,000 lives. This book, written by those who were there, brings the Italian campaign to life. The personal accounts in this collection of 75 stories have been extracted from diaries and unpublished memoirs as well as regimental and service magazines and other publications. There is the saga of the soldier who was captured three times before finally reaching freedom. Another escape involved the hijacking of an enemy aircraft – perhaps the first hijack ever recorded. A snow patrol is described, as is the experience of a tank crew during battle. First hand accounts of the battles at

Cassino and Anzio are given, together with details of the first encounter with a jet fighter and the shooting down of fighter pilots behind enemy lines. 259 pages. Softcover, with illustrations. ISBN number 1-875076-14-X. Copies can be obtained from Mr Alan Smith, 131 Staunton Road, Headington, Oxford OX3 7TN. Price £13 including UK postage.

FAR EAST REPORT.

BOOK REVIEW: THE HEROES OF RIMAU by Lynette Ramsay Silver, from the research of Major Tom Hall. On 11th September 1944, the British submarine *Porpoise* slipped quietly from Fremantle Harbour, bound for Indonesia. It was carrying the 23 Australian and British members of Operation Rimau, who under the leadership of the remarkable Lt Col Ivan Lyon of the Gordon Highlanders, intended to repeat the successful Jaywick raid of 1943 by blowing up 60 ships in Japanese-held Singapore Harbour. None of these men returned. For 45 years the truth about the operation has been shrouded in mystery. Enmeshed in red tape, distorted by hearsay and covered up by officialdom at the highest levels, the story of Rimau and its 23 men was all but lost. According to the scant official history the mission was an utter failure. Nothing could have been further from the truth. It has taken the combined talents of writer Lynette Ramsay Silver and Major Tom Hall, who has spent 31 years in research, to overturn the official version. In so doing, they have revealed a dramatic story of unparalleled courage and amazing tenacity. *The Heroes of Rimau* is an enthralling tale of heroism and determination in the face of overwhelming odds and is undoubtedly one of the most remarkable and intriguing stories to emerge from World War II. Softcover, 314 pages with illustrations. Published by Sally Milner Publishing Ltd, 558 Darling Street, Rozelle, NSW 2039, Australia. ISBN No 1-86351-053-2.

We reviewed Lynettes book SANDAKAN – A Conspiracy of Silence, in our last newsletter. It told the story of the murder of over 2,000 British and Australian POWs by the Japs in British North Borneo. A ten day Pilgrimage has now been organised to Borneo departing 6th April 2002. This fully escorted Sandakan Revisit Tour, personalised for relatives and friends of British POWs will commence upon arrival at Kuching. It will include Services of Remembrance and there will be opportunities to make individual tributes along the Death March route. Lynette will accompany the tour which will be based on twin-share with half-board. For more details contact Worldwide Military and Cultural Tours, Cruise and Coach Corp Pty Ltd, Suite 1001A, 14 Martin Place, Sydney, NSW 2000, Australia. Tel (61 2) 9221 2300. Email CHAT.TOURS@bigpond.com

FREEDOM GATE – KOREA.

Our friends in the US National Alliance of Families For The Return of Americas Missing Servicemen have sent us an Associate Press report of 25th April by Keith Rogers. "When fighter pilot Harold Fischer was shot down by a Soviet MiG in 1953, it never dawned on him that someday he'd be having dinner at his Las Vegas home with some of the same Russian pilots who were his enemies in the Korean War. Fischer, 75 and other US pilots from the Korean War have been working with the Pentagons POW-MIA office and the US-Russian Joint Commission on POW-MIAs to pin down where some of the 77 missing Soviet pilots were killed in action. During recent exchanges that were capped with the associations meeting last week in Las Vegas, information from US pilots has helped the Russians determine the fate of 23 of those pilots. Vladimir Zolotarev, a General Major and co-chairman of the joint commission, said even small clues have helped. "There are many nuances and false leads" he said, "but our aim is to investigate all leads. Retired US Colonel Bud Mahurin praised the joint commissions effort. "They have to determine maybe from a little piece of flesh who that person was. They have done a fantastic job" said Mahurin, an ace in World War II and Korea and a former POW whose F-86 was hit by ground fire and crash-landed in North Korea. Vladimir Korochkin, a General Colonel who shot down two USAF F-86 Sabre jets in 1952, said there is no bitterness between his comrades and the US pilots. "We are all created the same way, we fighter pilots". Note from Phil Chinnery; Readers of my book '**Korean Atrocity**' will already know of Harold Fischer. He was one of a number of US pilots taken across the North Korean border into China. Months after the Korean War had come to an end, in the winter of 1953/54 Fischer dug a hole through the wall of his Peking prison and went out into the night in freezing weather. He had no plan and no provisions. He walked for several hours, wading across a small stream on his journey. With wet feet and becoming colder by the hour, he saw a guard shack on a bridge. He decided to turn himself in and was soon brought back to the prison. He was eventually released with four other pilots following a show trial on 31st May 1955, 21 months after the end of the war.

REMAINS RECOVERY OPERATIONS. On 2nd May US Department of Defence specialists arrived in North Korea to begin operations to recover the remains of servicemen missing in action from the Korean War. The 28 strong team, mainly from the US Army Central Identification Laboratory in Hawaii will operate for about 30 days in an area 60 miles north of Pyongyang, the North Korean capital. There will be ten such operations in 2001 and eight of them will be in the areas of Unsan, Kaechon and Kujang, were battles involving the US 1st Cavalry, 2nd and 25th Infantry Divisions fought in November 1950. They have recovered 107 sets of remains since these operations began in 1996.

**The National Ex-Prisoner of War Association is a member of the Council of British Service and
Ex-Service Organisations.
Code: 948, Registered Charity No 292804**
