

The National Ex-Prisoner of War Association

Summer 2003 Newsletter

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

Contact address 99 Parlaunt Road, Langley, Berkshire SL3 8BE.

GOODY BOXES FOR THE GULF. Shortly after hostilities began again in the Gulf we saw a request on TVAM for 'Goody Boxes' to be sent out to servicemen and women who were living in less than ideal conditions in Iraq. Yes, we have all eaten army field rations and lived in holes in the ground so we know what it is like! Our newsletter editor and his friends at Air Canada started the ball rolling with a collection and we hastily included a note with about half of the Spring Newsletters inviting members to send in a couple of quid if they wanted to assist.

In the end we sent out about twenty five 2 kg boxes containing sweets, biscuits, toiletries, crisps, pot noodles, cup a soups, etc. They were much appreciated by the troops, especially in the early days when they were having to contend not only with Saddams Finest, but with poor equipment, boots that fell apart and guns that tended to jam. Yes, history does repeat itself! Extracts from some of the letters we received will follow, but first a Thank You to the following members who sent in donations: Mary Aston £10, Mrs June Benedict £5, Mrs Freda Clark £10, Mr Oliver Clutton-Brock £10, Mr Bill Crighton £2, Mr Oscar D'Alcorn £10, Mrs B Duffy £10, Mrs Wendy Edwards £10, Mrs J E Gillham £5, Mr C Hoare £20, Mr Alan Jesson £10, Mr Bertram Jones £10, Mrs Christine Lawrance £10, Mr David Locke £10, Mr Chas Marshall £5, E.McNulty £8, Mr Jack Nicholls, Mrs Sheila O'Connor £5, Mr Eric Reeves £5, Mrs J Wellard £10, Mr J Windsor £7, Mr Harry Tooze £5. Each parcel included a letter informing the recipient that we are not looking for new members, so 'keep your head down and come home safely!'

Lieutenant Robert Mackay of 1st Bn Parachute Regiment replied; "I would like to thank you and your association for the parcel. Its contents had disappeared before I was even aware it had arrived. It is the first parcel we have received and it brightened up our day. We have been living a troglodyte existence mainly, surfacing during the day from our trenches only because we have to and your parcel created an unprecedented flurry of activity. The blokes and myself are truly filthy! If you could possibly send some soap and shower gel it would be greatly appreciated." (We sent them two boxes – Ed).

Captain Alison Waddie, a forward observation officer with 3rd Royal Horse Artillery shared a tank with a crew of 6 men in 40-degree heat while directing fire on Iraqi positions: "I am writing to thank you and your association for the parcel I received from you. As you will appreciate, it always provides a source of morale when the post arrives and I especially enjoyed the added surprise of an unexpected parcel. The items you sent have been fairly distributed throughout my crew, although I have to admit I did eat most of the Jammy Dodgers myself!"

Lieutenant Jonathan Whelan from the Queens Dragoon Guards sent a nice reply signed by a dozen of his men and told us a bit about their activities: "We have been attached to 3 Commando Brigade and have had quite an interesting and busy time. We landed on the Al Faw Peninsula in late March and were soon south-east of Basrah, providing a screen for the Royal Marines. We were involved in the fighting for over 2 weeks before being part of the liberation of Basrah and the stabilisation that followed it. Once again many thanks from the troop and myself. I'm glad you did not have to include any application forms in your package!"

Company Sergeant Major Steward, the boss of the sniper platoon of the 1st Black Watch wrote; "I am writing to thank you for the parcel we received from your association. It was addressed to Corporal Mark Harvey, but he was unfortunately casevaced early on in the campaign, due to enemy fire (thankfully not life threatening) and in such an event we had agreed to share any parcels amongst the remainder of the platoon. I cannot tell you how much of a morale boost it is to receive such kind gifts from people who know exactly what we are going through."

Major Johnny Bowron from our editors old mob, the 1st Battalion Light Infantry received one parcel: "The crew of my warrior and I have enjoyed it very much and continue to do so. As you know it means a great deal to have support from home and as we were not certain of this when the campaign began we are very grateful for it now – and a parcel is even better. While you can survive on rations we crave variety and so your parcel was great."

Lieutenant Helena Bevan from 26th Regiment, Royal Artillery told us; "The goodies were welcomed as real treats, as we have had no fresh food since the beginning of the war, save for a few cereal bars. We have discovered that Menu D, Pork Casserole, becomes a wee bit nauseating the twelfth night in a row! Thank you once again for the greatly appreciated parcel, it brought with it many smiles."

Corporal Rich Burbidge from the 1st Royal Regiment of Fusiliers wrote: "Thank you very much for the parcel. When I opened it and saw who it was from I was absolutely speechless. It is a comfort to us that people back home are supporting us and thinking of us over here. It is more special when those people are ex-services. The parcel is excellent, full of the things we miss most and all of the crew send their gratitude."

Pictures in hard copy of the newsletter only.

Right – Captain Alison Waddie.

Below – Lt Helena Bevan.

GENERAL DONATIONS. We would like to thank the following members for their kind donations to the association welfare fund: Mr I Anderson £10, Mr John Banfield £20, Mr F Bonner £5, Mr D Courtenay £5, Mr Bill Crighton £8, Mr J Darrall £5, Mr Jerry Evans £25, Mr E J Haines £5, Mrs M H Hume £10, Mr Barry Jackson £5, Mr G M Jarman £5, Mrs D Lamisong £10, Mr W F Manley £10,

Mr Ernie Matthews £10, Dr Simon Miller £10, Mrs M Mirtle £10, Mr E Mitchell £10, Mr Doug Nelson £20, Mr Lew Parsons £5, Mr J R Reeder £5, Mr Vic Reid £5, Mr Colin Savage £5, Mr Ron Venus £5, Mr S Wade £20, Mr T W Wetton £5, Mr W Witt £5. We also received £100 from the Rotary Club of Newcastle under Lyme courtesy of Mr T Brian Lewis, President. Also £400 from John Nichol and Tony Rennall in recognition of the assistance given to them during the research for their book *'The Last Escape'*. Many thanks are due to Fred Goddard who organised a dinner and dance at Haywards Heath and raised £800 for the welfare fund. Well done and thanks to you all.

AND THERE'S MORE. Member Jack Batt informs us that the Sidi Nsir Old Comrades Association have held their final lunch and have decided to call it a day. They have kindly sent a donation of £53 for our welfare fund. Jack was a member of 155 Battery, 172 Field Regiment, RA in support of the 5th TA Battalion of the Hampshire Regiment when the battle took place at Sidi Nsir on 26th February 1943. They were dug in about 12 miles in front of the main Allied forces at Hunts Gap when the main German attack fell upon them. Tanks and aircraft attacked them and soon their 25 pounders were firing over open sights. As their positions fell one by one the few survivors broke out during darkness and made their way back to Allied lines. Only 200 men and nine gunners reached safety, the rest were killed or taken prisoner. Their fierce resistance bought time for reinforcements to reach Hunts Gap and so prevent a breakthrough. Jack went on to visit Campos 66 and 53 in Italy and Stalag 4B and 4G in Germany before he returned home.

GIFT AID. We now have stocks of Gift Aid forms, which allow us to claim a tax refund on donations sent in by anyone currently paying tax. The Gift Aid ruling allows us to claim 28p in the pound back from the inland revenue, thus converting your £5 donation into £6.40. If you send in a donation and are a tax payer please mention this and we will send you a very short form to fill out, together with an SAE. Many thanks to **Colonel P G M Callan** in Paris for his very kind standing order donation of £25 per month to the welfare fund.

ANNUAL REUNION. The association will hold its annual reunion at Warners Lakeside Holiday Village, Hayling Island between 3rd and 6th October 2003. Members, family and friends are all welcome. The cost is £109 per person half board. Upgrades to a 3-star room are available at £18 per room and to an Ambassador suite at £37.50 per room. Bookings are coming along nicely and Associate members are reminded that all former prisoners of war are prepared to tell stories all night long if there is a steady supply of beer to refresh their memories. If you would like to know what your relative got up to whilst a guest of the Germans or Italians reserve your place now with Flt Lt Ken Jackson, Haere-Mai, 29 Highwood Avenue, Booker, High Wycombe, HP12 4LS. Telephone 01494-436978.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION. The 2003 membership subscription was due on 1st January. The cost remains the same as previous years; £5 for former prisoners of war and £10 for associate members and members living overseas. Please make cheques out to NEXPWA and send to Les Allan, 99 Parlaunt Road, Langley, Berkshire SL3 8BE. Tel/Fax 01753-818308. Please include your membership card for signing. Anyone joining us half way through the year will receive the back issues they have missed so far in 2003. We also have supplies of back issues for 2001 and 2002, details on request from Phil Chinnery.

STAMPS. We would be pleased to reply to any correspondence sent in to HQ, but please send in a first or second class stamp as well. Many thanks to all members who have kindly sent in spare stamps with their correspondence, especially Bernard Hardacre and Ernie Matthews.

NAMES AND ADDRESSES. Do we have your correct name, address and postcode? Please check the label on the envelope that contained this newsletter and let us know if anything needs amending.

WEBSITE. Members are reminded that we have a website at <http://prisonerofwar.freeservers.com> Our webmaster Malcolm has begun work on the Photo Gallery. If you have any photos that we can scan and display on the website please contact Malcolm on prisonerofwar@blueyonder.co.uk or our newsletter editor Phil on PHIL@chinnery49.fsnet.co.uk The gallery is taking longer than planned due to work commitments. Both Malcolm and Phil have to work for a living to make sure we continue to receive our pensions!

USEFUL ADDRESSES. To obtain a copy of someones **service record** you will either need to be that person or his next of kin. Contact Army Personnel Centre, HQ Secretariat, Historical Disclosures, Mail Point 400, Kentigern House, 65 Brown Street, Glasgow G2 8EX. Telephone 0141-224-3303/2023. The Veterans Agency, formerly the War Pensions Agency hold most of the **German POW Record Cards** that were captured at the end of the war. They are willing to provide copies of your card if you ask them nicely. Contact the public relations office on 01253-333600. If you encounter any difficulties do let us know.

NEW MEMBERS. **Mr Vic Reid** from 4th Bn Queens Own Cameron Highlanders and a former resident of Stalag 9C and Ak137 Unterbrieszbach. **Wing Commander Ronald Wood** who was shot down over Libya and was a resident in Campo 52 and Stalag 8B. **Mr Barry Jackson** of the Glider Pilot Regiment who fell in the bag at Arnhem. **Mr Ewen J Steele** of the Cameron Highlanders who was taken prisoner at St Valery and was resident in Stalag 20B Marienburg. **Mr Ken Wall** a former resident of Stalag 20A now living in Australia.

Associate Members; **Mr William Sheridan, Mrs E Walker, Mr J Kavanagh, Mr T N Grimes, Mrs Mary Kendall, Mrs Paula Brook-Taylor. Mr Richard Budd** whose father was a resident of Stalag 4B. **Mr John Desmond** whose brother served with 15/19th Kings Royal Hussars. **Mr Jerry Evans** whose father was in Stalag 4B. **Mr George Foster** whose father Sgt Hill Foster was captured at Tobruk. **Mr Geoff Gunn** whose father was in Stalag 357. **Mr Dave Hanson** whose relative CPO Eric Scott Campbell became a resident of Campo 65 and 75 after his submarine was sunk in the Gulf of Taranto. **Mr Nick Highton** whose uncle Charles Seddon Campbell of the RA was resident in Stalag 8B. **Mr Robert Bailey**, son of Corporal Cecil Bailey who was taken prisoner at Arnhem. **Mr Tony Grant** whose father in law Flt/Sgt Thomas Trimble was a resident of Stalag Luft 7 at Bankau. **Mr Colin Savage**, son of James Savage of the Gordon Highlanders. **Mr Colin Tosh** whose grandfather Sgt Arthur Britton was a resident of Stalag 21B/D and BAB21. **Mr Doug Johnson** whose father served with the 14th London Scottish and was a former resident of Gustrow. Yes he was taken prisoner in 1914! Welcome to you all!

IN MEMORIAM. Brian Sims has sent us a photograph of the bronze memorial plaque that was placed in the Mediterranean plot in the National Memorial Arboretum at Alrewas on 13th May. A dedication service was held in the chapel together with the Africa Star Association who were laying up their Standard. The plaque remembers the 2,000 British and Commonwealth prisoners of war who died at sea in 1941-42. They were aboard six vessels that were sunk by Allied forces with great loss of life. Member Alex Franks of the South Staffords was aboard the *Ariosto* on which 138

out of 300 prisoners of war died. He told us that the code breakers at Bletchley Park knew Allied prisoners of war were being transported on the ships but the information was not passed on to the Navy.

WELFARE NOTES from Flight Lieutenant Ken Jackson our welfare officer. "We are continuing to receive many requests for assistance from our funds, which are at the moment in rather a sorry state, although we are not broke. Following my appeal at the last AGM at Hayling Island Mr Fred Goddard organised a dance in Haywards Heath and the final result was a super, and much needed, 800 pounds for the welfare fund! We receive many requests for assistance from SSAFA and other such bodies. Some of the requests cannot be met as there is no record of the requester being in the service, let alone a POW. Others are requests for equipment or services, which should be met by local authorities or other statutory bodies. With the best will in the world our organisation cannot meet every request, but we do our best to help those who NEED it.

The Disregard Campaign is still marching on and we are supporting the Royal British Legion in their fight. A number of recent successes have been achieved where the local authorities have agreed to disregard all war pensions when assessing for rent and rate rebates. Let the good fight continue.

At last the Government have seen sense and Dr Moonie announced in March that unmarried service partners will now be eligible for war pensions should their partners be killed in action. Great news but what about those who die not on active service, but while still serving. Surely they deserve the same consideration as other 'families?'"

LIBERATION RECOLLECTIONS. Following our request in the last newsletter for more recollections of liberation day, Mary Aston has sent in an extract from a letter written by Padre E W Gedge on 16th April 1945 from Fallingbostal. "I can hardly believe that we are free! Since 9am this morning when the first 4 British tanks arrived at the stalag gates. It has seemed one long glorious dream and I can hardly believe now that it is really true and that we are once more behind the British lines. We were actually liberated by the 8th Kings Own Irish Hussars, which I know will especially please you. We don't know how long it will be before we are able to start on the homeward journey, but it is sure to be soon. I expect the first news you will get will be a telegram to say we have landed. Tonight I had the tremendous thrill of hearing the BBC 9pm news through one of the Signal vans, including the commentary on this camp by the reporter who I had shown round earlier in the afternoon. He certainly did not spare the agony in his descriptions and I only hope it will not have upset folk at home. Those of us who have been in the stalag all the time and did not have to march are all perfectly fit and well, but he certainly did not exaggerate the hardships which those coming from the East have had to undergo. Its now 11.45pm and I can hear the men singing 'Roll out the Barrel!' and so on!"

HISTORIANS NEWS by Philip Chinnery.

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

First of all, some thank you's. Thank you to **Michael Booker** for the plan of Oflag VIB Warburg. Thank You to **Ernie Matthews** for the BAB20 theatrical company programme for '*You can't take it with you*' put on at Heydebreck in October 1943. Does anyone have any photos of the show or

cast? Ernie also sent in details of his route march from BAB20 Heydebreck in Upper Silesia to Winklarn in Bavaria. The march began on 22nd January and ended on 23rd April 1945.

Thank you to **Colin Tosh** for the photos of Stalag 21B/D and BAB21 at Blechammer. We will use some in the newsletter and ask our webmaster to display them all on our website photo gallery. Associate members might note that the photos include some of the men later killed in a bombing raid on the camp.

Thank You to **Frank Signal** in New Zealand for the 1942 list of NZ POWs resident in Campo 85 Tukurano.

PRISONER OF WAR NEWSPAPER. Thank You to **Mr John Pepper** in Bexhill for the 5 issues of the *Prisoner of War* newspaper that we needed to complete our full set. Well done John and many thanks. Items from the newspapers will appear in forthcoming issues of this newsletter.

Ted Burke in Queensland has sent over half a dozen back issues of the Australian Ex-POW Association newsletter *'Barbed Wire and Bamboo'*. I have begun to collect back issues for our archive set. If you are Down Under and have any old copies lying around we would be pleased to hear from you.

Thanks to **E.E. 'Brownie' Dann** in New Zealand for the half dozen copies of POW-WOW, the newsletter of the New Zealand Ex-POW Association. We understand that the association has now wound up, but we hope to maintain contact with our friends across the water through our newsletter.

STALAG 383. I have just purchased for our archives, a rather battered copy of the 1947 book *'Barbed Wire – Memories of Stalag 383'* by M N McKibbin. This scarce 128 page book is full of former residents recollections of their time at Hohenfels. If anyone would like me to search for a copy for them, please drop me a line.

STALAG 20B WAR CRIMES TRIAL. One of the Nazis to stand trial at the end of the war was Ober Leutnant Arno Heering of 610 Landesschuetzen (Home Guard) Battalion, which was tasked with providing guards for the POWs in the Stalag 20B area. When the Death March to the west began, Heering was made responsible for the evacuation of POWs from the Elbing area to Brunswick between 25th January and 26th March 1945. He was later charged with the mistreatment of the POWs in his charge, but received a derisory one days imprisonment. I have a 15 page report covering his interrogation by war crimes investigators and his own voluntary statement on the march, its route and the events that took place. If any former resident of 20B or any associate member would like a copy of the 15 A3 pages, please send a cheque for £10 made out to Mr Phil Chinnery to me at 10 Lambert Avenue, Langley, Berkshire SL3 7EB.

FIRST WORLD WAR LISTS. I have obtained for our archives a list of the men interned in Gottingen Camp, Germany together with a list of officers at Citadel Queuists and a list of Royal Flying Corps officers and men who were POW in Germany, Holland, Turkey and Bulgaria from 1914 to 1917. If any member would like a name checked against the above, just drop me a line.

STALAG 20A THORN UPDATES. **Harry McLean** writes in to correct the snippet in the Spring Newsletter regarding the fate of the commander of the submarine HMS SEAL. Lt Commander Rupert Lonsdale was not killed as reported. The SEAL was a large submarine built as a minelayer and it was while she was laying mines in the Kattegat on 5th May 1940 she was detected and 'harassed'. In manoeuvring to escape she swung and hit a mine with her stern. After lying on the bottom, trying various attempts to surface, Lonsdale called her crew together and held a prayer meeting. The last attempt was a success, but as she surfaced the enemy were waiting. Two Arado float planes began to strafe the conning tower and one landed nearby. Lonsdale was ordered to swim across and he was taken prisoner. The rest of the crew followed him into captivity. In April 1946 he was Court Martialled as is Naval Custom and was Honourably Acquitted. **Eric Reeves** recalls the names of some of the crew; 'Happy' Eckersall, 'Pedlar' Palmer and 'Ginger' Ritchie. All appear to have ended the war in Stalag 344 or Marlag and Milag Nord.

Richard Vincent met two sailors in Fort 17 around Christmas time 1940. One was Tom Crowhurst who was a Petty Officer. His ship was a small former French Navy vessel. During an encounter with the German Navy the bridge was blown away, killing all the officers and leaving Tom as the 'Captain'. Richard wonders if anyone knows the identity of the sole survivor of a British submarine that was sunk off the Dutch coast in 1940? He arrived at Stalag 20A wearing a blue Dutch 'uniform'.

New member from Down Under **Jack Wall** saw the photographs on page 7 of the Winter 2002 newsletter and recognised himself in two of them! In *'The Romanies'* Jack is the singer standing on the far right hand side of the stage and in *'Busmans Honeymoon'* he is seated in the front row, second from the right. Jack spent five years in Fort 13A and was very much involved with the camp entertainment, including a duo which was known as 'Hitchens and Wall' or 'Wall and Hitchens' depending on who won the argument for top billing. They appeared regularly at the Saturday night camp concert. Jack would like to contact Ted Hitchens, Bill Thompson, Mickey Bain, Danny Faulds, Gus Greaves, Jimmy Stooks and Phyllis (Frankie Cowburn). If you know the whereabouts of any of them can you drop Phil Chinnery a line at the address above.

Ralph Churches writes in from Australia. He is the author of the book *'A hundred miles as the crow flies'* which tells the story of the REAL great escape, of 99 men from a working detachment in Austria. Ralph recalls that Arthur Adams was an inmate of his working party, arbeids commando A/410GW Marburg (Maribor) having arrived via Campo de Prigionere de Guerra, Gruppignano, Northern Italy the previous autumn. "I seem to recall that he was a first cousin to Don Funston who gets an honourable mention in my book. For whatever reason Adams was transferred to another working party in the Marburg area some two months before my camps successful breakout.

"As my story reports, my 99 were not shipped home by sea, as were the twenty in the article in the spring newsletter. We were flown out by RAF Dakotas to Bari in Italy. I remember that, while in Italy, I heard that Adams had escaped with a group to the Slovene partisans shortly after our break. Although every POW in the Marburg area was withdrawn north in Austria proper within 24 hours of our escape, that was long enough for him to get the news via the 'bush telegraph' and join a party which 'took to the woods' and succeeded in finding partisan help. Adams was two or three years my junior and may be still around. I will see if I can round him up! Meanwhile greetings to all your great survivors from another in the Great South Land Down Under" Editor – If members would like to obtain a copy of Ralphs book, drop him a line at 6 Jordan Avenue, Fulham Gardens, South Australia 5024.

Eric Reeves writes in, in response to my request for a drawing or plan of Stalag 21B/D Warthelager. "A plan of Warthelager would be quite an achievement in so far that the camp itself, between July 1940 and June 1942 took on three different locations, although still within a couple of kilometres from the other. Remembering that Warthelager, not the POW camp was a German Army training area very similar to Bovington, the Royal Tank Regiment training area. It was situated with the River Warthe running through it and was used by the Panzer Corps and artillery regiments.

"One of our jobs was to fill in the shell craters on the Ranges and to build up the buttresses on the rifle and pistol ranges. The whole area was of sand. Back to the POW camp. Designated than as Stalag 21B C/H, later to 21D 11. Firstly, July 1940, a disused Polish cavalry stables, large, high roofed and about 30 metres by 30 metres square of which from memory there were three. Only a short stay in these, not more than a month.

"I then moved to a hutted camp on a hill, where we had to sleep on shelves almost identical to the ones you see in the concentration camps. We stayed there for the summer of 1940 and then moved back to the stable type camp. On 12th September 1940, 400 of us were sent to Wollstein, a French POW camp where we were accommodated in two marquees, 'very cold' on straw. Here we learned we have been designated as No 1 and No 2 Company, Bau und Arbeits Battalion 21. We returned to Warthelager on 25th September 1940.

"During 1941 we stayed in the stable type accommodation until toward the end of that year we transferred 'across the road' to some brand new barrack buildings which our lads had built. They were top class and needed to be, for that winter of 41-42 was really cold with lots of snow. The building contractor was Dudek.

"Around the middle of June 1942 we, as BAB21 moved to Blechammer Hydebreck. Our camp was called Kanal Lager. It was 220 yards by 220 yards square and was situated between the Oder-Donau canal and the main road, and about three quarters of a mile from the main gate of the Oberschlesische (Upper Silesia) Hydrierwerke – an oil refinery. Here we worked, were bombed and took casualties until we started what has become known as the Death March. The camp next door was E3, a working party from Stalag 8B Lamsdorf. Across the road was a camp housing the British POWs from Italy after the capitulation. Above them, perhaps 600 yards from our camp was the Jewish Concentration Camp.

"On 9th September 1944 the camp was hit by 5 or 7 bombs and we lost some of our mates. Afterwards we were permitted to leave the camp or factory area during an air raid. We gave no parole, but were threatened with reprisals if anybody tried to escape under cover of the air raids. On Boxing Day 1944 the camp was hit again, two 500 pound bombs I believe. If we were in the factory, which covered about 3 square miles, we were not permitted in any air raid shelters. In the camp itself we eventually had some rather basic shelters and one of these was hit on 9th September.

"We were able to watch the raids take place. The American B-17s and B-24s flew in waves of 27 aircraft, stepped up and back in echelon formation with one Master Bomber and they would carpet bomb the area. Even though the whole area including the camp was under a smoke screen, they always made damage.

"When I say prison camps you will understand that the oil refinery employed upwards of 48,000 slave workers, including about 4,000 Jews. Auschwitz III was at Blechammer and there were 2,000 British POWs amongst them. When a raid took place we would try to clear the smoke screen and would lay on our backs watching the 'fireworks' with some trepidation. Of course we had to clean up the mess after the raids, but I don't imagine one gallon of benzene left that factory.

"Blechammer is now Blachowia Slaska and part of Poland. Stalag 21B was at Schubin until it became Stalag 21D at Posen. Both of the towns were in the Warthe Gau.

ESCAPE FROM CAMPO 57 GRUPPIGNANO. When the subject of escapes from prisoner of war camps comes up, many people tend to concentrate on the 'Great Escape' from Stalag Luft 3. Perhaps this is understandable as the Nazis murdered 50 of the escapers after their recapture. However, escapes occurred at other camps and these events have received little coverage. When space permits I will try to describe some of these escapes and I would like to invite anyone with any knowledge of escaping to contact me.

On 13th October 1942 nineteen Australian POWs escaped from Campo 57 at Gruppignano. They began the tunnel under the floor of a disused hut, using only a steel helmet and a small pick. They dug down 16 feet and then excavated a horizontal shaft around 50 yards under the wire apron and into the maize field beyond. On the chosen night 19 men crawled through the tunnel and emerged in the moonlit field. It soon began to rain and this helped cover their escape. The alarm was raised at roll call the next morning and it was not long before the men were recaptured. Two of the men were on the run for five days, but they still shared the same fate as the others. Most were stripped naked and beaten by the Italian guards, then thrown into solitary confinement on starvation rations. The camp commandant Colonel V E Calcaterra gave the rest of the camp a hard time, even instructing the guards to puncture the Red Cross food tins so that they could not be hoarded for future escape attempts. Eventually most of the men would find themselves in Stalag 8A at Gorkitz where the harsh treatment continued. Their names are listed here for posterity: Lieutenants Leslie F Boulton and Archibald Noble, Sergeants John F O'Brien, Albert Williams, Gordon C Poidevin, Thomas E Canning, Thomas B Comins, Richard L Head, Corporals/Private John D Costello, Stanley J Lang, David King, Robert St. Q Hooper, Roy S Natusch, Hector A Brien, Kevin F O'Connell, Charles Lind, William Sloan, John A Dwyer, George Cotter. The full story can be found in the book *'Hitlers Digger Slaves'* by Alex Barnett. Available from The War Book Shop, 13 Veronica Place, Loftus, New South Wales 2322, Australia. www.warbooks.com.au.

Photographs in hard copy of newsletter only.

Right – Sent in by Bert Martin.

Doctors, nurses and medical

orderlies at Obermassfeld,

Stalag 9C, Kdo 1249. 1941-2.

The nurses are left to right Sister

Tohill, Mrs Scott-Hewitt, Sister

Patterson. Major Steel is front row

third from left and Major Chapple

third from right. Bert is fourth

from the left in the third row.

Left – Sent in by Jim Charters. The whole camp at arbeits kdo 737 registered to Stalag 9C. Workplace was a salt mine and factory at Menterode.

FAR EAST NEWS.

BOOK REVIEW **“NOT THE SLIGHTEST CHANCE”** By Tony Banham. Subtitled *‘The Defence of Hong Kong 1941’*. “Not the slightest chance” was Winston Churchill’s April 1941 estimate of Hong Kong’s prospects in the face of a Japanese attack. When the assault came in December his prediction came true as the city fell after just 18 days of brutal and confused fighting. Hong Kong resident Tony Banham tells the story of the battle hour-by-hour and at the level of the individual participants. As he names individuals and describes their fates, he presents a uniquely human view of the fighting and gives a compelling sense of chaos and the cost of battle. More than ten percent of the 14,000 defenders were killed and a further twenty percent died in captivity. After the war many of the survivors died young and few spoke of their experiences. The author cannot be praised too highly for this outstanding example of how an author should research his subject. If you had a relative in the 1st Middlesex or the 2nd Royal Scots or the Royal Rifles of Canada or the Winnipeg Grenadiers and want to know their fate, this book is for you. Highly recommended. Hardcover, 431 pages with photos. Published by Hong Kong University Press. ISBN No 962-209-615-8. www.hkupress.org Copies can be ordered from The Eurospan Group, 3 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, London WC2E 8LU. Tel 0207-240-0856. Visit their website at www.eurospan.co.uk Also available from Amazon UK. Price £30.50.

BOOK REVIEW. **“SWEET KWAI RUN SOFTLY”** by Stephen Alexander. A review of this book has been included to alert members to the fact that only 35 books of the original 1,000 print run are still available. The author was a 22 year old subaltern in the Hertfordshire Yeomanry when Singapore capitulated to the Japanese in February 1942, three weeks after his regiment had disembarked. He worked first on the ‘bridge over the river Kwai’ and later in the jungle near the Burmese border. 1943 was the worst year for the prisoners, with the Japs frantically trying to join the lines from Bangkok and Moulmein. Even survival tactics learned from old Malayan hands, Australians and Dutch colonial troops were no match for disease, starvation, brutality and exhaustion. A stiff upper lip helped and faith of some sort; so did cunning and humour; but the most important and the most unaccountable element was luck. In 1944, with the railway finished and most of the surviving prisoners back from the jungle and among friendly Thais, work lessened and rations increased. Hardcover, 266 pages with the author’s own sketches. ISBN No 0-9526763-0-3. Available for £15 from the author at 174, Long Ashton Road, Long Ashton, Bristol BS41 9LT.

BOOK REVIEW. **“ONE FOURTEENTH OF AN ELEPHANT”** by Ian Denys Peek. Just received hot off the press from Pan Macmillan, Australia. *“There are fourteen of us, all volunteers in the Singapore and various up-country Malayan units, who form the regular working party with the elephants...when the elephants approach a log they consider too heavy to tackle, they just turn and walk away, and no amount of persuasion by the mahouts will bring them back to that particular log...in such instances, Hasegawa shouts and waves to us to take over the job.....we have*

developed a certain pride in our ability to do this heavy work, and by mutual agreement we consider each one of us officially rated as 'one fourteenth of an elephant'.

Denys Peek was twenty when he and his brother Ron, were taken prisoner in the fall of Singapore in 1942. They were sent to work on the infamous Burma-Thailand Railway and from the outset conditions were deplorable. As the author takes us through the daily struggle for survival, he celebrates the little things that brought relief and helped them cling to their dignity in the absence of ordinary civilised comforts; a rare cake of soap, an enormous swarm of butterflies, the taste of stolen cattle and more importantly the ingenuity, humour and mateship of their companions. Separate chapters cover Ban Pong transit camp, Wampo camp, Tonchan camp, Kanyu and Hintok camps, Kinsayok camp and the sawmill, Tarsao and Nakhon Pathom 'hospital' camps, Tamuang camp, Nakhon Nayok camp and the long hike. Softcover, 520 pages with maps, but sadly no illustrations. ISBN No 0-7329-1168-0. Available from Pan Macmillan, Level 4, 627 Chapel Street, South Yarra, Victoria 3141, Australia. Website www.panmacmillan.com.au Cost 35 Australian dollars.

FEPOW RECORD CARDS. One source of information on prisoners of the Japanese can be found in the public record office in Kew in Document Class WO345. This group of records comprises around 57,000 cards containing information on individuals. If you plan a visit take your passport so you can get a readers card.

There does not seem to be a comprehensive list of the names of prisoners of the Japanese, although a number of separate lists do exist from various camps and in a number of books such as *'Unsung Heroes of the Royal Air Force'* by Les and Pam Stubbs. If you would like us to check a name against those lists please write in with an SAE. We understand that the Veterans Agency also have a FEPOW office with comprehensive records which were recently used to check claims for the £10,000 compensation paid to survivors.

ROYAL AIR FORCE NEWS.

BOOK REVIEW. **"WHEN SURRENDER WAS NOT AN OPTION"** by **George G Crawford.** The author had a premonition that his B-24 Liberator bomber was going to be hit on the next mission and he was correct. Someone was looking over him though and an invisible force pulled him back as the piece of flak destroyed his bomb-sight and tore off the front of his oxygen mask. He had checked the escape hatches the night before and the one in the floor worked as advertised. Sadly only half the crew got out. Soon he found himself in Stalag Luft 3 at Sagan. It was October 1944 and George only had to wait a couple of months before the evacuation to the west began. When he was taken prisoner he weighed 85 pounds, by April 1945 he would be down to 65. Two thirds of the book covers the trek of the prisoners back to the west, starting at 9pm on 27th January. At that time it was about twenty degrees below freezing and ahead of the men were long marches, overcrowded barns and insufficient food and water. I found this part of the book so interesting that I read the hundred pages without a break! A fine addition to our archives and thoroughly recommended. 154 pages, softcover. ISBN No 0-9663870-3-1. Price \$14.95 US post free. Published by Salado Press, PO Box 719, Salado, Texas 76571, USA. Copies can be ordered by credit card from their website at www.saladopress.com or by phone to 254-947-0080. The item can also be ordered on the UK Amazon website at amazon.co.uk

BOOK REVIEW. **"FOOTPRINTS ON THE SANDS OF TIME"** by Oliver Clutton-Brock. The subject of this book is RAF Bomber Command Prisoners of War in Germany 1939-45 and what an impressive tome it is at 528 pages including 16 pages of well chosen photographs. In this mammoth epic Oliver has done for the history of RAF prisoners of war, what Tony Banham has

done for the defenders of Hong Kong. The book is divided into two parts. The first, which has 18 chapters, deals with German POW camps as they were opened, in chronological order and to which the Bomber Command POWs were sent. Each chapter includes anecdotes and stories of the men in the camps – capture, escape, illness, and murder – and illustrates the awfulness of captivity even in German hands. Roughly one in every twenty captured airmen never returned home. The first part also covers subjects such as how the POWs were repatriated during the war; how they returned at wars end; the RAF traitors; the war crimes; and the vital importance of the Red Cross. The style is part reference, part gripping narrative and the book will correct many historical inaccuracies and includes previously unpublished photographs.

The second part of the book comprises an annotated list of ALL 10,995 RAF Bomber Command airmen who were taken prisoner, together with an extended introduction. The two parts are the fruit of extensive research and provide an important contribution to our knowledge of the war and a unique reference work not only for the serious RAF historian but for the ex-POWs themselves and their families and anyone with an interest in the RAF in general and captivity in particular. Very highly recommended. ISBN No 1-904010-35-0. Hard cover. Available from Grub Street Publishing, The Basement, 10 Chivalry Road, London SW11 1HT. Tel 0207-924-3966. Email milhis@grubstreet.co.uk Price £35 post paid for NEXPOWA members. (£5 saving).

Pierre Babin, 10 rue de Villemoisan, 49370 Becon les Granits, France would like to hear from the following members of **115 squadron** who were shot down close to his village in the west of France on 20th June 1943. 137108 P/O Charles Neville Pitchford, R134223 Sgt Alexander Suttie Davidson, 928308 Sgt Leonard Francis King.

School Teacher Mr Carl Rymen, Heistraat 68, 2491 Olmen, Belgium is searching for RAF members who were shot down, or evaded through his area during the war. His school will be doing a project over the next two years on the subject. Did you pass through the following villages in the **north east of Belgium** – Balen, Geel, Hechtel, Kwaadmechelen, Lommel, Meerhout, Neerpelt, Olmen, Oostham, Overpelt, Retie or Tessenderlo? Carl is also researching the history of the 6th Airborne Division and would like to hear from former members.

Jerry Evans, 1990 Gill Road, Dickinson, TX 77539, USA would like to trace some of his fathers old crew. His father was **Flight Sgt Paul Hiram Evans**, RCAF from Raymond, Alberta and he was a resident of Stalag 4B. He is seeking Sgts D F Fadden, J E Donnan, J J Sawkins and W C Gundry. They were shot down whilst flying a 550 Squadron Lancaster on 1st January 1944 bound for Berlin.

Mr Tony Grant, 56 Freelands Road, Snodland, Kent ME6 5RG would like to hear from anyone who was in **Stalag Luft 7** at Bankau, particularly if you made the walk to Luckenwalde or knew his late father in law F/Sgt Thomas Trimble.

LIST OF ITALIAN PRISONER OF WAR CAMPS AND LOCATIONS.

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We receive many requests for information on Italian prisoner of war camps. The following is a list that we have compiled showing the camp number, its location and the Public Records Office file reference number where reports of Red Cross visits to the camp can be found. The PRO is in Kew, Surrey and is worth a visit (take your passport to get a readers ticket). Alternatively our Historian

may be able to order copies of reports for you. All the file references begin WO224/ followed by the file piece number. ie WO224/**106** is the file for Campo 5 and WO224/**132** is the file for Campo 75 at Bari. Any amendments or additions would be welcomed.

* in PRO records as Reggio Nel'Emelia file WO224/**117** 1943 May.

** in PRO records as Marsciano Perugia file WO224/**141** as well as Campo 115/WO224/**142**

Members seeking information on Campo 49 at Fontanellato near Parma should obtain a copy of the book '*Home by Christmas*' edited by Ian English and published in 1997. Harder to find is '*Farewell Campo 12*' which was written by Brigadier James Hargest, one of the officers who escaped from the fortress at Castello Vincigliata, high on the hills above Florence. The book was first published in 1945, but sadly the Brigadier was not around to see it. After his escape he made his way to Switzerland and back home to England. Two months after D-Day he was killed by a shell which exploded near his jeep.

<u>Camp No</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>File Ref</u>
-		
5	Serravalle 7/42-9/43	106
10	Serravalle 9/43 -	107
12	Vincigliata, near Florence	108
17	Rezzanello	109
19	Bologna 9/43 -	110
21	Chieti (east coast)	111
27	San Romano, Pisa	No file
29	Viano, S.W.of Piacenza	112
35	Padula, near Naples	113
38	Poppi, near Arezzo	114
41	Montalbo	115
43	No information	
44	No information	
47	Modena	116
49	Fontanellato, near Parma	*
51	Altamura	118
52	Chiabari (N.W.coast)	119
53	Sforza Costa, near Macerata	120

54	Fara-in-Sabina, near Rome	121
55	Busseto, Pia, near Parma	No file
57	Gruppignano, near Udine	122
59	Servigliano, near Piceno	123
60	Servigliano Oct 1942	124
62	Grumillino, near Bergamo	125
63	Aversa, near Rome	126
65	Gravina, Altamura, nr Taranto	127
66	Capua	128
68	Vetralia	129
70	Monturano, near Fermo	130
73	Carpi, near Modena	131
75	Bari	132
77	Campello	133
78	Sulmona	134
81	No information	
82	Laterina, near Arezzo	135
85	Tuturano, near Brindisi	136
91	Avezzano	137
98	Sicily Unconfirmed	
102	L'Aquila	138
103	No information	
106	Vercelli	139
107	Terra Viscosa	140
110	Sardinia	No file
112	Work camp	No file
113	Avis, Trento **	
115	Marsciano, (Perugia)	142
118	No information.	
120	Fattoria Bianchetto, Cetona	143
122	Sinecitta/Rome	144

129	Montelupone 11/42-6/43	145
133	Montelupone 6/43 -	146
136	Bologna	No file.
145	No information.	
146	Work camp	No file.
148	Bussalenga, Verona	147

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