

The National Ex-Prisoner of War Association

Winter 2002 Newsletter

[← Back](#) [Home](#) [Next →](#)

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

WE WOULD LIKE TO WISH ALL OUR MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR!

COMMITTEE CHANGES. Charlie Jago has passed over the reins of the annual reunion organisation to our welfare officer Ken Jackson, who can be contacted at Haere-Mai, 29 Highwood Avenue, Booker, High Wycombe, HP12 4LS. Telephone 01494-436978. The 2003 reunion will again be held at Warners Lakeside Holiday Village, Hayling Island over the weekend 3rd to 6th October 2003. Members, family and friends are all welcome. Please reserve your places as soon as possible.

Graham King, our public relations officer has resigned from the post due to personal reasons and we are now looking for a volunteer to take his place. We are hoping to find either a full or associate member living within travelling distance of Slough, Berkshire who can attend some of the bi-monthly committee meetings. The job would basically involved maintaining the profile of the association in the media, compiling appropriate press releases and attempting to secure funding to enable the association to continue indefinitely. If anyone is interested please give me a ring on 01753-818308. We would like to thank both Charlie and Graham for their sterling work on behalf of the association in the past and for their continued support in the future.

SOCIAL EVENING. A Social Evening and Dance is planned for Saturday 12th April 2003 at the St Francis Sports and Social Club, Haywards Heath, Sussex to raise money for the association welfare fund. Tickets are available at £10 from Frank Goddard on 01444-415295. Numbers are limited so reserve your tickets now.

WEDDING BELLS. Our webmaster Malcolm Bamford has recently tied the knot with Annette and is now looking forward to the patter of tiny feet and the prospect of many years of D.I.Y. ahead of him. Our congratulations to Annette and Malcolm and our thanks for the many hours you spend on the internet on our behalf.

COMPUTER GREMLIN. My computer was recently invaded by a gremlin that made some of the members addresses disappear. The experts have helped recover most of the lost data, but we have delayed the donations listing and some of the new members details until the Spring issue. It would never have happened if I had kept my old typewriter. A very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to you all!

NEW MEMBERS. Mr Dennis Wright who was shot down in 1941 and became a resident of Stalag 8B. Mr Bertram Jones of The Buffs, who escaped twice in the summer of 1940 before taking up residence in Stalag 20A. (*Associate members*) Mr Robert Black whose father Ian was in the 8th Argylls and a former resident of Stalag 20A. Mr Donald Graves. Mrs Eleo Carson whose father Bill Gordon was a former resident of Campo 21 Chieti. Mr Frank Shatliff whose uncle escaped on the march in Czechoslovakia. Mr Robert H Albert, whose father was in the Durham Light Infantry and a resident of Stalag 20A. Meri-Ellen Sauberli, whose father Private E J Cruise was in Stalag 8A. Mr Neil Carpenter whose grandfather was a resident of Campo 75 and 78 and Stalags 4B and 4F.

VETERANS AGENCY NEWS. Formerly the War Pensions Agency, the Veterans Agency have reminded us that Health Service hospitals should give priority to war pensioners, both as out-patients and in-patients, for examination or treatment which relates to the condition or conditions for which they receive a pension (unless there is an emergency case or another case demands clinical priority). It is important that your GP and hospital know you are a war pensioner. You can refer them to NHS Circular HSG(97)31 and Chief Executive Bulletin 112 (April 2002) or, if you live in Scotland, to the Scottish Executive Bulletin HDL(2002)18. The agency address is Norcross, Blackpool FY5 3WP. Their Free Helpline number is 0800-1692277. Their Website can be found at www.veteransagency.mod.uk

ANNUAL REUNION PHOTO. (Hard copies of newsletter only). Taken at Hayling Island and sent in by Branch Secretary Betty Herschel. North East Branch members; Mr S Herschel (President), Mr A Aiston (Chairman), Mr E Matthews (Treasurer), Mr R Teasdale, Mr S Johnson, Mr N Alderson, Mr A Scott, Mr C Forrest, Mr N Waton, Mr W Howstan, Mr A Hunter. Not necessarily in that order!

OLD PALS MEET UP AGAIN. Ivor Gordon sent in the two photos above (Hard copies of newsletter only), showing Ivor on the right with Dennis Boden on the left. They recently met up again at the reunion of Veterans of the Greek Campaign 1940-41. It was the first time they had seen each other since their time at Stalag 18A and as you can see they have not changed at all. Dennis was the medical orderly at arbeits commando A942/GW at Schladming in Austria and he recalled how he treated Ivor for a succession of abscesses which went on for a year and the only instruments he had for lancing them were a pen knife and old dental forceps. Have you met any old pals lately?

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION. The 2003 membership subscription is 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 NEXPOWA and send to Les Allan, 99 Parlaunt Avenue, Slough, Berkshire SL3 8BE. Tel/Fax 01753-818308. Please remember to send in your membership card as well, so it can be signed and returned to you.

ANNUAL NEXPOWA PILGRIMAGE by Ken Jackson, National Welfare Officer.

Once again this year in September a party of our members and associates made the pilgrimage to Belgium to meet our friends from the VVW, the WWII volunteer fighters and members of the wartime resistance groups. Our coach was again driven by Gary Moore, our National Standard Bearer and we made Dover in good time to catch the ferry. Following a very smooth crossing we took the motorway from Calais to Belgium and arrived at the hotel in Koksydje to be greeted by Gerard Van Herck, Mike Marchal and Alphonse Brevier, members of the local 'Rebels' group.

The party settled in to the hotel and then gathered at Pats Bar for an informal meet and greet. At this party Gerard gave a briefing on the forthcoming visits and events spread over the weekend.

You could say that Friday opened with a bang as we went on an official visit to the NATO Sea Mines Warfare School, situated at Ostend, as guests of the Commandant Commander Phillip Vanderbeek and his staff. The Commander gave a welcoming address in which he briefly explained the history of the unit, which had started as a joint Belgium and Dutch school but had expanded initially to take all NATO naval officers, but now had trainees from all over the world. Our party was then given a guided tour of the school and had the exhibits explained to us. The intricacies of impact mines, magnetic mines and sonic mines were briefly explained and their history dating back to the American civil war! The tutor went on to recount the methods of dealing with laid mines, a very hazardous task indeed. He explained that one of the worlds thickest mine fields was laid off the ports of Ostend and Antwerp during WWII and as recently as five years ago a mine had been dealt with in the North Sea. Following this intensely interesting visit we were escorted to the Mess for a very good lunch. Late Friday afternoon and evening was spent exploring the De Panne and Koksydje areas and meeting some of the local residents.

Saturday proved to be a very busy and moving day, opening with a wreath laying ceremony at the RAF memorial on the outskirts of Koksydje where our party was joined by the local Burgomaster and Belgian ex-service men and women. Our General Secretary, the Burgomaster, local representatives and myself laid wreaths and, as the Last Post was played our standard bearer joined the Belgium standard bearers in the 'dip' salute. Following this short service we all moved on to the Koksydje Community War Memorial where we were joined by the town band and members of the Town Council and a number of civilians. The police stopped the traffic and a short service and wreath-laying took place before we again moved on. This time only a short distance down the road to the British Military Cemetery where once again a short service was held. Colonel Marchal, our General Secretary Les Allan, Town Council representatives and ex-servicemen laid wreaths. Standing in this beautiful and peaceful cemetery with the rain gently falling on our party, the haunting notes of the Last Post floated across the regimented rows of the war graves, reminding all of the sacrifices made for us. Eric Reeves, who is our Parade Marshall brought the short ceremony to an end by reciting the Exhortation.

Following lunch in the nearby Lieford Restaurant, we then enbussed for the journey to Ypres and the beautiful St Georges Church. This church is the memorial to all the British and Empire troops who have given their lives or have served in the Ypres area in two world wars. Looking at the vast array of regimental plaques it is almost the history of the British Army. Ray Jones, the appointed Padre gave a very moving sermon during the short service which by its very simplicity concentrated our thoughts on those who had given their all.

We then moved on to the famous Menin Gate to join in the Last Post ceremony, which has taken place, apart from a short break in WWII, every day since the 1920's. Our party, led by our standard bearer, marched to the Menin Gate to be greeted by the sight of a very large crowd! We were joined on this occasion by a contingent representing the Dublin Fusiliers who had requested permission to join us with their standard bearer. This ceremony where the Ypres firemen play the Last Post is extremely emotive and although the crowd was some 2,000 strong you could hear a pin drop. The standard bearers 'dipped' in salute as the notes of the Last Post echoed round the arched building and with the agreement of Eric Reeves the Irish spoke the Exhortation. Eric then recited the Kohima prayer and the ceremony was brought to an end with an elderly member from the Irish group singing unaccompanied the haunting song 'Oft in the Stille Night'. During this beautiful rendition with the words floating round the building and the entranced crowd there was not a whisper, not a sound from anyone other than the Irish group who softly joined in the chorus. As the song ended and the Irish gentleman said 'thank you' to the organiser the whole gathering broke into spontaneous applause.

Normally Sunday is regarded as a day of rest but not this Sunday! We were up early and heading for Oostedunkerke where a large gathering had assembled at the cemetery. This group included Belgian government ministers, ambassadors from a number of countries, Canada, New

Zealand, the USA and Australia. We were also joined by many Burgomasters from the surrounding area, members of local families whose relatives had been executed for resistance membership. Ex-service organisation, representatives of local schools and other youth organisations, together with our party and Royal British Legion members from Ypres and Brussels. Wreaths were laid on the graves of the executed resistance members who were killed literally in the last few hours of German occupation. The ladies of our party also laid Poppy crosses on these graves. Following the ceremony in front of the graves, our party with the ambassadors moved into the adjacent British Military Cemetery. Here Eric Reeves recited the Exhortation, and a trumpeter of the Town Band played the Last Post. Wreaths were laid by the representatives of the various countries and by Les Allan in a short but moving ceremony.

Everyone then moved to the local church for a service of remembrance in Flemish! The padre did at least give a welcome to our party in English. Following this service in which some 50-60 standards were paraded, the congregation moved outside to form up for the parade through the town. With 2 local bands giving support and, led by the standards of the Belgium ex-service organisations, representatives from many local groups from childrens organisations, schools, the fire service, local burgomasters and council members and many others, the parade moved up the main street to the first of two sites where local members of the WWII Resistance were executed just hours before the German army moved out. The various groups and family members of those executed laid wreaths watched by a large number of townspeople and visitors. The parade then marched to the second site where a similar ceremony took place. Following this second service the parade then marched down into the town and enroute a National Government Minister and the local burgomasters took the salute. Our members, under the control of Eric Reeves, and led by our standard bearer took a full part in these parades. Following on behind the marching groups during this final march past, came a large number of WWII vehicles that were in wonderful condition. The whole parade moved into the centre of the town and dismissed to enter the municipal centre for a reception and lunch. After lunch we had the opportunity if we wished to visit a local fisheries museum before returning rather weary to our hotel.

Monday dawned with an even earlier start, at 0700 hours. This was a chance to see the extremely large port of Antwerp, which was of huge importance during WWII and is today Europes largest port. We arrived at the Oosterweel Bridge in good time to board the motor vessel 'MS Brandon' for the trip round the harbour. The Captain and his Number One greeted us and once we had cast off gave a continuous running commentary about the port and the shipping within it. They explained the very complex working of this immense port, which takes ships from just about every maritime country in the world and in addition, receives and dispatches huge barges through the Albert Canal. This and other canals in the area is the start of a feeder network which spreads its fingers throughout Europe, joining the navigable rivers such as the Rhine in Germany, the Seine in France and even the Danube. The trip round the harbour took well over 2 hours and the light refreshments provided on board made it a very enjoyable morning. We were all invited to take lunch in the Naval Mess 'Club Antigoon' where we were made most welcome and provided with a superb meal. The day was rounded off in some style with a visit to the De Konink Brewery where we again received a very warm welcome.

On Tuesday morning it was time to say our goodbyes to our Belgian friends who had looked after us so well and, rather sadly we boarded the coach for the return journey home. Each year our hosts seem to find something new to surprise us and I know that Gerard Van Herck has already started planning the itinerary for the 2003 visit. I urge those who would like to join us for the experience of a lifetime, the chance to see the battlefields of the Ypres area and meet some wonderful people to contact our General Secretary Les Allan as soon as possible to book your seat. Early booking is essential as hotels soon fill up.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

We do not include the addresses of members on the website. If you feel you can assist with any of the requests please write to the Newsletter Editor, Mr Phil Chinnery at 10 Lambert Avenue, Langley, Berkshire SL3 7EB.

Harry Tooze in Lincoln would like to hear from anyone who was a resident of **Stalag 357** at Oerbke near Fallingbostal between 1943 and 1945. His father was in the camp at that time and he would like some general information on the set up and conditions.

Donald Graves in Canada is editing the POW diaries of **Captain M F Rodger, 8th Bn, Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders**. He was a resident of Campo 75 at Bari and Campo 21 at Chieti before going on the run from October to December 1943. From January to April 1944 he was at Stalag 7A Moosburg and from May 1944 to April 1945 at Oflag 8F/79 Braunschweig. If you knew Captain Rodger or were in any of the above camps Donald would be pleased to hear from you.

Ann Hayes would like to hear from anyone who recognises this photo (Hard copies of newsletter only). The board reads No 3 Section, XXB, Ak 139. Gunner Les Hayes is second right in the back row. He worked loading coal in railway yards and was captured in June 1940 at St Valery.

Mr Neil Carpenter in Lincolnshire would like to hear from anyone who knew his grandfather **Gunner Thomas Silman** who was in Campo 75 Bari in August 1943 and Campo 78 Sulmona (No 1 compound) then Stalag 4B and in July 1944 Stalag 4F. If you were in any of those camps perhaps you could drop him a line.

Mr Robert Black in Stirling is writing a book on the life of his father, Private **Ian Black, 8th Argylls**, prisoner in Stalag 20A Thorn. He would like to contact anyone who was in that unit or at Thorn. Also, did you know his uncle Kenneth MacKenzie, 1st Gordons who died on the march at Bayreuth in April 1945. Visit <http://schottisch.tripod.com> to see some of the photos and maps collected so far.

Mrs Eleo Carson in London would like to hear from anyone who was in **Campo 21 Chieti** or who knew her father Major W H L Gordon. 'Bill' was the Signals officer with 201 Guards Brigade and was captured at Tobruk. Just before the Armistice he and ten others vacated the premises through a tunnel they had dug and spent the next few months in the Apennines with other escapees. Eventually he made it to the coast and was evacuated back to England.

Mr Dennis Wright in Hayling Island would like to hear from any of the following who were part of the Bridge School at **Stalag 8B**; Johnny Swales, Jimmy Venables, Jimmy Norris, Duggie Maughan, Taffy Chessel, Tommy Blair, Russell Poulter, Bill McCall, Robin Murray, Bert Williams, Allen Chittenden, Dave Findlay, Felix Duncan, Bill Waite.

Mr Ted Sample in Newcastle would like to trace any of the other 18 **Fusiliers** who were taken prisoner with him in November 1941 at El Duda near the Axis Road. He left Benghazi for Italy on 8th December 1941 and the ship was torpedoed in the afternoon by one of our submarines and beached near Piraeus, Greece.

Mrs Jennifer Snell one of our associate members has found a book that belonged to 4462245 **Private J Holmes** of the Durham Light Infantry who was a resident of Stalag 8B, working camp E22. The book is dated 16th June 1944. If anyone knows either his current whereabouts or the location of any family members, please write to Phil Chinnery, Newsletter Editor.

Mr Wally Dobie in Swindon would like to trace the following mates from his marching group from **Stalag 4B**; W.Mitchell – Hereford, W.D.Dakin – Stonebridge, N.Vickery – Walton on Thames, H.Waring – Bristol, L.Thompson – New Malden, McRendall – Edinburgh, S.R.Walters and E.H.Baker – Leicester, F.H.Wooldridge – Cricklewood, H.A.Lucy – Hastings, T.Body – Herne Hill, H.E.Hammet – Brixham, W.O.Todd – Quebec, Canada, W.F.Peck – London, Jock Nichol – Shepherds Bush, T.N.Granby – Newmarket, A.M.Dickinson – Heversham, F.B. Schofield – Todmorden, T.J. Minson – Falmouth.

HISTORIANS NEWS by Philip Chinnery.

Contact address 10 Lambert Avenue, Langley, Berkshire SL3 7EB. Email PHIL@chinnery49.fsnet.co.uk

THE FORTS AT STALAG XXA THORN. I had hoped to include a full blown article on Stalag 20A but some of the material and maps have been delayed in the post. More will follow in the Spring Newsletter.

Graham King sent in some general background on the origins of the forts: “The Germans built about 20 forts after the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71, to protect the frontier against Russia. The money was raised from the French as reparations for having lost the war. I believe forts 1 to 10 were built on the north of the River Vistula and the remainder on the south, where the prison camps were. The British were mainly in Forts 13, 14 (hospital), 15 (working camp, in 1941 an Oflag and then NCO’s camp), 16 from May 1942 onwards was a remand punishment camp for minor misdemeanours and quite small, having only five standard size rooms. It lay fairly close to the river and rail bridge over the Vistula. Fort 17 was a working camp until 1941, when in July or August it became a Russian POW camp.

Nowadays Fort 15 is used as a winery and much wine is stored in the constant temperature peculiar to buildings of that nature. I did not find Fort 14 but am assured it is still there. There has been so much development that favourite landmarks have disappeared, but I did recognise some roads. Fort 13 is in the hands of the Polish Air Force and they are very interested in restoring it to its former glory, but it will take a lot of money. Sadly Fort 16, where I spent 2 years is no longer. The Russians needed building material for the restoration of Stalingrad and decided to destroy the fort and use that material. It took 10 years to reduce this tiny fort, using tons of carefully placed explosive. The remains are heavily overgrown but vestiges are still visible. A group with plans to establish a youth hostel is restoring Fort 4.”

Stan Johnson recalls; “In 1941 the Germans brought 400 officers from a castle in Bavaria to Fort 15, which is around the corner from Fort 17. There were British, Canadians and Australians and they were sent there as a punishment for something. They brought their own batmen with them;

one per 16 officers in each room. After a few days they complained that one private soldier was not enough, so the Germans rounded up a work party from Fort 17 and I was on it. We marched to Fort 15 each day and used to help the men who had come with the officers.

In the room where I worked the officers had sheets and pillow cases on their bunks and at the entrance was a little partition where their batman and I used to dish out their soup; they certainly got much better food than us. They also had nice clean officers uniforms, polished buttons as well just like in England. The Jocks had kilts and sporrans but this didn't last long when it was found they were crawling with lice. The Aussies and Canadians, all Air Force, were always trying to escape, but it was said that somewhere in the Fort there was a German spy and each attempt was found out. When they were caught they were kept in bunkers then sent to Berlin for trial, so were told by 'Scarface', the German sergeant-major in charge of the other ranks. Scarface hated all officers, German and British, but he was friendly with us and at the end of each day he used to get about 20 or 30 of us out on the bridge and make us sing 'Abide with me.' He would stand in front and wave his hands in time like a band leader.

After two weeks we no longer returned to Fort 17, but stayed at Fort 15 where the bunks and soup were much better. It was also much better than smashing rocks at the quarry. Like all good things it did not last and came to an end after 2 or 3 weeks. Three of the officers had swapped places with three of the other ranks and returned to Fort 15 with us. They managed to get on a working party, clearing snow at the airfield about 7 miles away on the other side of the River Vistula. The story goes that the three of them tried to get into a plane but were caught. They said they were officers which caused some confusion as the working party was all other ranks. Jerry brought in the Gestapo to sort it out, but by then I had been moved to Camp 13A which was across the road from Fort 13.

From Fort 13 we were sent out in the fields cutting sugar beet. I fainted one day out in the fields with pleurisy, about the time when Russia came into the war and we saw regiments of tanks and motor cycles going East. I woke up in Fort 14, which was about four miles away. This was the POW hospital and it was full of wounded men, some with only one leg, others blinded by shrapnel. Some were waiting to be repatriated. It was here I met Freddy Stott, one of my mates from the TA at Eccles. He was very ill and a week later he died."

Our apologies to the internet reader, but the many photos in this issue can only be seen in hard copies of the newsletter. To obtain a copy please contact Phil Chinnery, address above.

Right –

Camp 13A, Stalag 20A.

Building Coy

Clifford Winser

Back row second

from right

Left - **'The Romanies'** Tango band

1942 Camp 13A

Female impersonator

F. Cowburn at left

From Clifford Winser

Right – ‘**Busmans Honeymoon**’

The Cast including P McConnel,

J Hooks, G Vargas, A Durrant,

E Andrews, P Bacon, W Kersey.

Stalag XXA September 1941

From Clifford Winser

THANK YOU’S. I would like to wish all our members a Merry Christmas and a very Happy New Year. I would also like to say Thank You to **Ann Hayes** for the Stalag 20B photos. Thank You to **Frank Stapleton** who sent in 2 photos of the Stalag 8B Revier staff. Thank You also to **Bernard Hardacre** who sent in 3 photos of men at a milk factory near Stalag 20B. Thanks also to **Stanley Wood** who sent in 2 photos of men at Stalag 20A. Thank You to **June Benedict** for the photos of Stalag 21A/B. Many thanks to **Douglas Evans** who sent in a batch of photos from Stalag 21D. Thanks to **David Lidstone** for the three photos of members of working party E364 from Stalag 8B. Thanks to **Len Bunyan** for the photo of the Marlag cemetery. All will be scanned for display on our website and will possibly appear in future issues of the newsletter.

Thanks to **Syd Whyte** for the Red Cross docket from his time at Stalag 20B, working party 365.

Thanks to **Roy Cawston** for the details of his march from Stalag 8B to Stalag 8A Gorlitz. Thank you also to **Fred Sylvester** for the copy of the list of former residents of Stalag XIB Fallingbostel. Thanks also to **Cliff Morris** for the plan of Jinsen (Inchon) POW camp in Korea and details of his time in Omine camp (Fukuoka camp 8/5) on Kyushu, Japan. Any more Far East camp plans out there? Thank You to **Jim Waggott** the Secretary of the Milag Association for the material on the Merchant Navy prisoners of war and their camp in North West Germany. Thanks to **Charles Burgess** in Bonnybridge who sent in details of his time in Stalag 9C working parties 76, 435 and 737. Any more arbeits kommando stories out there?

Thank You to **Jim Sims** for the copy of the book ‘*For you the war is over*’. Does anyone have a copy of Jim’s book ‘*Arnhem Spearhead?*’. Or a copy of **Fred Gilberthorpe’s** book ‘*Footprints*’. We are looking for copies for our archives.

Thank You to **Mr E Haines** for the 25 issues of the *Prisoner of War* newspaper which will more or less complete our set. Thank You also to Mr Quartermaine who sent in issue number 38. The last few issues that we need are numbers 1, 7, 8, 10, 19, 29, 30, 31, 35, 36, 37. Does anyone have any of these issues and if so, would you like to donate them to help complete our archive set? Items from the newspapers will appear in forthcoming issues of this newsletter.

Tug Wilson wrote in regarding the top photo on the back page of the last newsletter. (Stalag 8B football team). The man at the right hand end of the front row is Doug Bryant from the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, who lived at Slinfold, near Horsham after the war.

BLECHHAMMER. We would like to hear from anyone who was in the Blechhammer area, either in E3, BAB20, 21, 40 or 48 or E711, E711A, E769 or E793 or E794. The last two being the later designations for BAB21 and 20 respectively. Many thanks to **Sydney Barthorpe** for the copy of the old E3 Reunion Committee address booklet.

More photographs;

'Ship Ahoy' at BAB20

when it was a part of

Stalag XXA.

From Ken Lock.

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BOOK REVIEWS.

Fred Kennington has sent in a copy of **FROM POMERANIA TO PONTELAND** by Rudi Lux. Subtitled 'The Youngest Prisoner of War' this 55 page softcover book tells the story of Rudi, who became a prisoner of war at 16 years old. Born in Pomerania, about 140 miles north east of Berlin Rudi was conscripted in the Spring of 1945 as the Russian advance came in his direction. For six weeks he was a private soldier in the Wehrmacht, most of that time following the same route as the Allied POWs heading for the West. Eventually he was taken prisoner by the Americans and spent a year as a prisoner of war, six months of which were at Fallingbosten. His opinion of the place is much the same as the British POWs who spent time there. In the summer of 1946, along with many other young Germans he was sent to England to work on a farm at Ponteland. When he was discharged as a POW in 1948 he had nowhere to go. His family was in what was now Communist run East Germany, so along with 40,000 other former German POWs he stayed put and became a farm worker. The book describes his new life in England and his trips back to Germany. An interesting perspective on life on the 'other side of the fence' and worth a read. Copies can be ordered from Fred Kennington at 35, Corbar Road, Stockport, Cheshire SK2 6EP. Price £5.50. ISBN 0-9526496-3-2.

THE LAST ESCAPE by John Nichol and Tony Rennell. At Last! Someone has told the story of the Great March to the West through the winter of 1944-45. Often referred to as the Death March, the result of Hitler's decision to prevent the liberation of the majority of the prisoner of war population by the Russians and at the same time to ensure a good supply of hostages should the circumstances demand it. Most of the men were ill-prepared for the evacuation, having suffered years of poor rations and wearing clothing ill-suited to the Siberian winter that enveloped them. The German organisation for once, was not up to the job and the men were forced to march long distances with little food to sustain them. Some men had marched a thousand miles by the time Spring finally came and with it, liberation by Allied forces advancing from the west. Medical care was non-existent and frost bite and dysentery was rife. Many men fell by the wayside and were despatched by a guards rifle, the snow soon covering their lifeless forms. The authors have interviewed many of those who took part in the march and pieced together the story which has waited for fifty-seven years to be told. Heartily recommended. Published by Penguin, 80 Strand, London WC2R ORL.

Hardcover, 471 pages, ISBN No 0-670-91094-5. Price £20. Purchase online from www.penguin.co.uk

THE SHADOW ON MY EVENING by Albert Miles. Retired Royal Marine Albert Cox who writes under the name Albert Miles, has penned a factual account of his time as a prisoner of war. He was captured in June 1941 in Crete, transferred to Czechoslovakia and following the Normandy Invasion was moved to Stalag 8A at Gorkov on the far eastern border of Germany. One of his most vivid memories was seeing a mass grave containing 500-600 bodies, many of them women and young children. Includes a good account of his release by the Russians and his journey back to freedom. Published by Vanguard Press, 128 pages, price £6.99. ISBN No 1-903489-22-9. Paperback. Copies can be ordered through bookshops or from the publishers online at sales@pegasuspublishers.com

PRISONERS OF WAR by Hank Nelson. Subtitled 'Australians under Nippon' the book tells the story of the 22,000 Australian service personnel, including 71 women of the Australian Army Nursing Service who became prisoners of the Japanese. They were held in more than a dozen camps scattered throughout Southeast Asia, including Timor, Ambon, Manchuria and Japan. Only 14,000 survived the brutal years at the hands of their captors. 220 pages. Softcover, ISBN No 0-7333-0070-7. Published by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and based on Tim Bowdens award-winning radio series of the same name. Available for \$35 Australian dollars from The War Bookshop, 13 Veronica Place, Loftus, New South Wales 2232, Australia. Email address warbookshop@bigpond.com

SPEEDO! SPEEDO! by Bill Spalding. Subtitled 'To the limits of endurance,' the book is a personal account of working on the Thai railway. Great value for money, with 192 pages in 17 chapters, with many photographs and maps. Softcover, ISBN No 0-9540914-0-X. Published in 2001 by Majic Ink. Copies can be purchased for £8.95 post free from MM, PO Box 66, Manchester, M12 4XJ. Cheques made payable to Sirenstorm Media. Or order on line from www.amazon.co.uk at £9.99 plus postage.

CONCERT PARTIES AND THEATRE GROUPS.

Many prisoner of war camps had their own theatres and productions were well received. This issue we begin to show some of the photos in our archives of plays and bands. But first a selection of comments from letters that appeared in the WWII Red Cross Prisoner of War newspaper.

"Genuine swords and period costumes were hired from a firm in Breslau for the production of Shakespears 'Twelfth Night' which was on tour during the winter of 1943/44 round some of Stalag 344s outlying work camps. From all accounts it met with a most appreciative reception and though the swords, as the producer commented 'must have been used in the Franco-Prussian war' they were none the less impressive for that! The actors too, seem to have thoroughly enjoyed their performance. 'Stage touring in Germany was an experience I never bargained for' remarks one of them. 'But it's a change to get away from the Stalag if only for a little time.' POW newspaper February 1944.

'Don't think theres anything scrappy or cheap about a show when we put it on' a member of Stalag 21D assures his parents. A recent show there, 'The amazing Doctor Clitterhouse' which ran for five nights with a nightly audience of 250, appears certainly to have been well presented, with furniture upholstered in dyed sack cloth that 'would have graced the most expensive flat'. The 'leading ladys' dress had also been ingeniously devised of this material, which first finds its way into camp as covering for the bundles of uniforms from home. The players were doing a pantomime for Christmas – 'Cinderella'. 'I'm an ugly sister' says the above correspondent 'so the make up man has a good start!' POW newspaper Feb 1944.

Stalag XIA. "There is a flourishing Repertory Theatre which appears to have 'Gaiety' as its motto, for all the plays produced to date have been comedies. Pee-Wees 'Tilly of Bloomsbury' which was adapted for the stage from the book, provided an hour and a half's hilarity, and Vics production of 'The man who came to dinner' was also a success. Spud has produced 'You can't take it with you' the antics of the Martin Vanderhof family kept a packed audience in hysterics. We were informed that at times the players themselves had difficulty in not laughing. Future attractions will include Vics pantomime 'Cinderella' and Terrys 'The Petrified Forest'.

The Sergeants report does not confine his praise to the stars of these entertainments. He points out 'In every walk of life there are unsung heroes. We owe a great deal to the lads who work in silence to make the entertainment what it is.' Particularly praised are 'the sterling capabilities and skill' of Harry and Lew, who backstage 'perform such miracles as you would expect of the fairy with her magic wand.' The report concludes 'Yes we spectators certainly do appreciate our luck in having such entertainment which goes a long way in relieving the barbed wire feeling.' POW newspaper Jan 1945.

Photo section.

2 photos of 'Cinderella' at Blechhammer, BAB48 in January 1943. From June Benedict.

FAR EAST NEWS.

COMPENSATION LATEST. Three Gurkhas held in Japanese prisoner of war camps won their case for compensation against the British Government on 27th November. Pahalman Gurung 81, Gaurisor Thapa 82 and Hukumsing Pun 85, launched a test case in the High Court against their exclusion from the £10,000 payout received by other prisoners of war because of their race. The case paves the way for claims for 339 other Gurkhas in Nepal. Mr Justice McCombe, sitting at the High Court in Preston, said that the decision to exclude the Gurkhas from compensation given to other prisoners of war was irrational and "inconsistent with the principle of equality that is the cornerstone of our law." Outside the Court Mr Gurung said; "I am delighted to have won. I was proud to remain loyal to my British oath and as a consequence I took severe punishment from the Japanese." The Ministry of Defence is studying the judgement before deciding whether to appeal.

Back page photo section:

Right – **'Snow White
and the Seven Dwarfs'**

Stalag 21D

From Doug Evans

Left – **'Queer Street?'**

Stalag 21A

From Doug Evans

Right – **'Bag Boys'** band

Bob Roberts with guitar

Stalag 21B

From Doug Evans

THE END. SEE YOU AGAIN AT THE END OF MARCH 2003.

[Back to Top](#)

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