

The National Ex-Prisoner of War Association

Winter 2005 Newsletter

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Stalag 21D Concert Party



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

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

This will be our last newsletter for 2005 and my first Winter Issue as your President. We decided to postpone our Autumn newsletter as our editor was moving house and have produced an enlarged Winter issue instead. We are now trying a larger type format, so please write in with your opinion. It has been a busy year for the association, what with the 60th Anniversary celebrations in London and the trip to Fallingbommel for the inauguration of the memorial at the site of Stalag XIB. This was followed by our annual pilgrimage to Belgium in September and the annual reunion at Hayling Island in October. It has been a year in which our membership has increased even though, in the great scheme of things, our numbers should be decreasing. If you come across any other former prisoners of war who are not members of our association, I hope you will do your best to recruit them without delay. I also hope that you will all renew your membership subscriptions in the New Year, to make sure you receive the Spring 2006 issue. We have decided to keep the subscription fee the same as previous years, even though everything around us appears to be going up. However, if you do have any money going spare after the cessation of festivities, do send in a few bob to our welfare fund. On behalf of the members of the committee and myself, I would like to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Raise a glass to old comrades and remember Christmas's past!

DONATIONS. We would like to thank the following for their kind donations to the welfare fund; W F Barratt £20, Mr Jack Batt £50, Bob and Sue £25, Mr Roy Child £5, R J Corbett £5, Ian Dobson £50, A Evans £15, Mrs Ann Greer £50, T Holden £10, Mrs Lamisong £10, Mr Bill Loftus (ex-Household Cavalry) £20, J Matheson £5, A Minnitt £10, Mrs M G Peachey £10, Mrs Caroline Pearse £50, Mr R J Redman £5, Kathy Salt £5, A M Simpson £5, Mr Ray Williams £5.

OBITUARIES. We regret to report the passing away of the following members; Mr Arnold John Walters on 21st March. He kindly bequeathed the sum of £250 to the association in his will and it will be put to good use. And although not a member, we should report the passing away on 20th August of Jim Almonds, one of the original members of the Special Air Service. Taken prisoner during a raid on Benghazi harbour, he was sent to an Italian POW camp in Puglia. He escaped with three others but was recaptured again. When Mussolini sued for peace Jim escaped again and made it to allied lines. He later went on to fight behind the German lines in France after D-Day. Richard Gordon Townsend passed away on 30th September in Australia at 93 years. He was taken prisoner on the way to Dunkirk while driving a medical ambulance which had the misfortune to break down. He returned on the third repatriation, looking after wounded prisoners. We will remember them.

PHOTO CAPTIONS. Lew Parsons has kindly sent in the names of the ex-POWs featured in the photo taken at the Stalag 4B Reunion that was reproduced in the last newsletter. They

are as follows; Back Row; Alex Franks, Dennis Slack, Reg Wilson, Lofty Snell, Gil Renshaw, Mac White, Gerald Giltrow, Don McGregor, Lew Parsons, Alex Wood. Front Row; Doug Gillam, Mickey Read, Harry Drewitt, Peter Liddle, Alf Lee, Chas Marshall, Hugh Moore, John Bushell, Ray Newell, George Harper, Bill Rae. Unfortunately Nat Hoffman and Bill Sparks missed the photo call. The photo opposite shows members of Arbeits Kommando A10205/GW, Stalag 18A and was sent home by Pte E T Callender, POW 7030. Do you recognise anyone?



BOOK REVIEW COMMITTED TO ESCAPE by Daniel Riddiford, MC. 'Escaping is the most exciting activity' wrote Daniel Riddiford, describing two years of his life from November 1941 when he was captured in North Africa at Sidi Rezegh, to Christmas 1943, when he finally rejoined the Allied Forces in Italy. In the interval he had been in six prison camps across three countries, changed his identity twice and made two attempted escapes. His third attempt, disguised as a Frenchman, from the Austrian camp of Spittal was successful. His subsequent adventures in the mountains of Northern Italy and at the hands of the Partisans in Yugoslavia make fascinating reading. For his part in helping to lead a large group of escaped POWs through Yugoslavia, he was awarded the Military Cross. In the remaining 17 months of the war, he rejoined the 6th Field Regiment in Italy and was wounded. He was seconded as intelligence officer to the Special Boat Service, completed his parachute training and was involved in operations with the Partisans in Istria until hostilities ended. Back in New Zealand as a Territorial, he commanded 52 Battery, 5th Light RNZA and was for many years a director of the Dominion newspaper. He practiced Law, farmed in the Wairarapa, married Yvonne Westmacott and had six children. In 1960 he entered Politics as the National Party member for Wellington Central and from 1969 served in Keith Holyoakes Cabinet as Minister of Justice, Associate Minister of Labour and Immigration and as Attorney General. He retired from Parliament in 1972 for health reasons and died in 1974 aged 60. Although Daniel wrote the manuscript in the 1940s, sixty years would pass before his wife Yvonne would finally put it into print. Softcover, 218 pages with photos and maps. ISBN No 0-476-01065-9. Published by Ruamahanga Press Ltd, PO Box 174, Martinborough, Wairarapa, New Zealand. Copies can be obtained from Jane Riddiford, The Attic, Block C, Imperial Works, Perren Street, Kentish Town, London N5 3ED at £9.99

BOOK REVIEW FOR YOU THE WAR IS OVER by Harry Buckledee. The author joined the regular army in May 1939. He was posted to the 11th Hussars (PAO) in Egypt in March 1940

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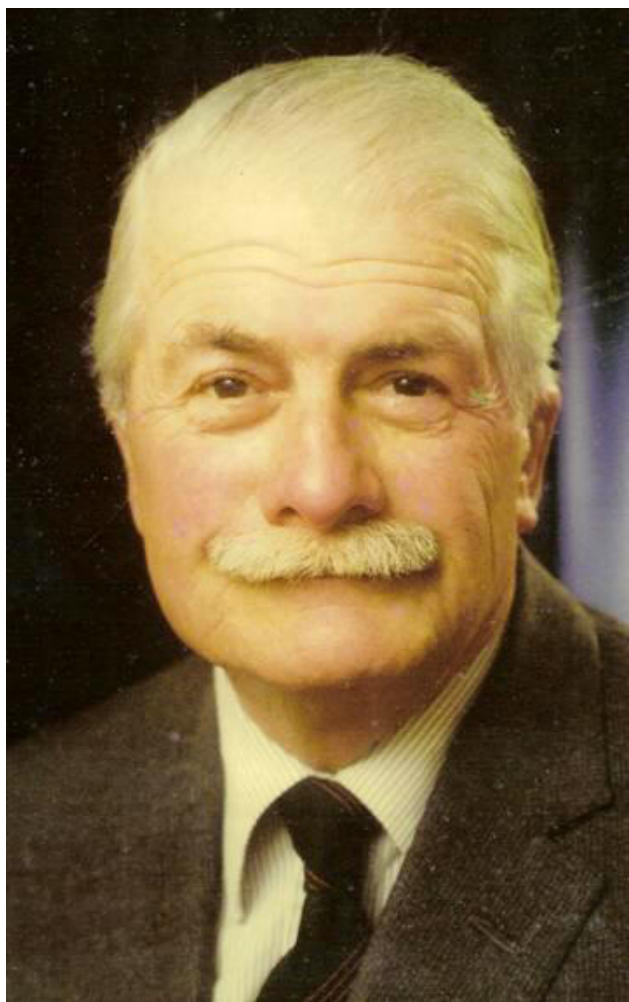
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BN No 0-9548895-1-7. The book
1 Sansom Street, Camberwell,
[barkerbooks.com](http://www.barkerbooks.com) Copies can be ordered
GL12 7EF.

Photo below; members of arbeits kommando E209, Stalag 8B. John Hetherington kneels at the left hand end.



Photo below shows a Stalag 8B football team. Do you recognise anyone?





The formidable Colditz castle

HISTORIANS NEWS by Philip Chinnery.

Change of address. I have now moved to 60, Carnarvon Drive, Hayes, Middlesex UB3 1PX. Please send any correspondence there.

Many thanks to Doug Arthur who has sent in a photocopy of The Potted History of Stalag 18A, a very fine description of life in Stalag 18A Wolfsberg, written by John Ledgerwood a New Zealand Padre, written in the camp in 1944. It has now been logged into our archives.

Many thanks also to Courtenay Smithers of Turramurra in New South Wales, Australia who has sent in a copy of his memoirs. Courtenay was in Arbeits Kommando E902, Dellbruck-Schacht, Hindenburg registered to Stalag 8B Teschen. He has found three others who were with him there and on the march to the west through Czechoslovakia. If any other members were in E902 and would like to contact Courtenay please drop me a line.

Courtenay has recorded memories of several events about which he would like to hear from others. We have listed the events below. Did you witness any of them? 1) The slow, month-long train journey from Rennes to Chalon-sur-Marne. 2) Jews, seen from the train, being made to stamp on gravel on a road to flatten it. 3) The train being attacked by French Resistance men. 4) Widespread dysentery on the train. 5) The first 36 hours of the march from Dellbruckschachte was without a stop, food or water, apart from the 'rest stops' of a few minutes every few hours. 6) Young girl hanged at Ratibor for stealing bread. 7) Shooting of a row of partisans by a German officer. 8) A 'massacre' in a small brick building by a machine-gunner who arrived on a motor bike and side car, probably at the same site as 7 above, soon after the killing by the officer. 9) POWs taken down into an old tunnel and each given two large tins of icy cold tinned vegetables by Czechs (at Litomerice?). 10) Dakota taking us from Regensburg a few days after release near Moosburg landed at Nancy? To transfer us to an RAF bomber. At the airport a French brass band played 'Marseillaise' as we walked from one plane to another.

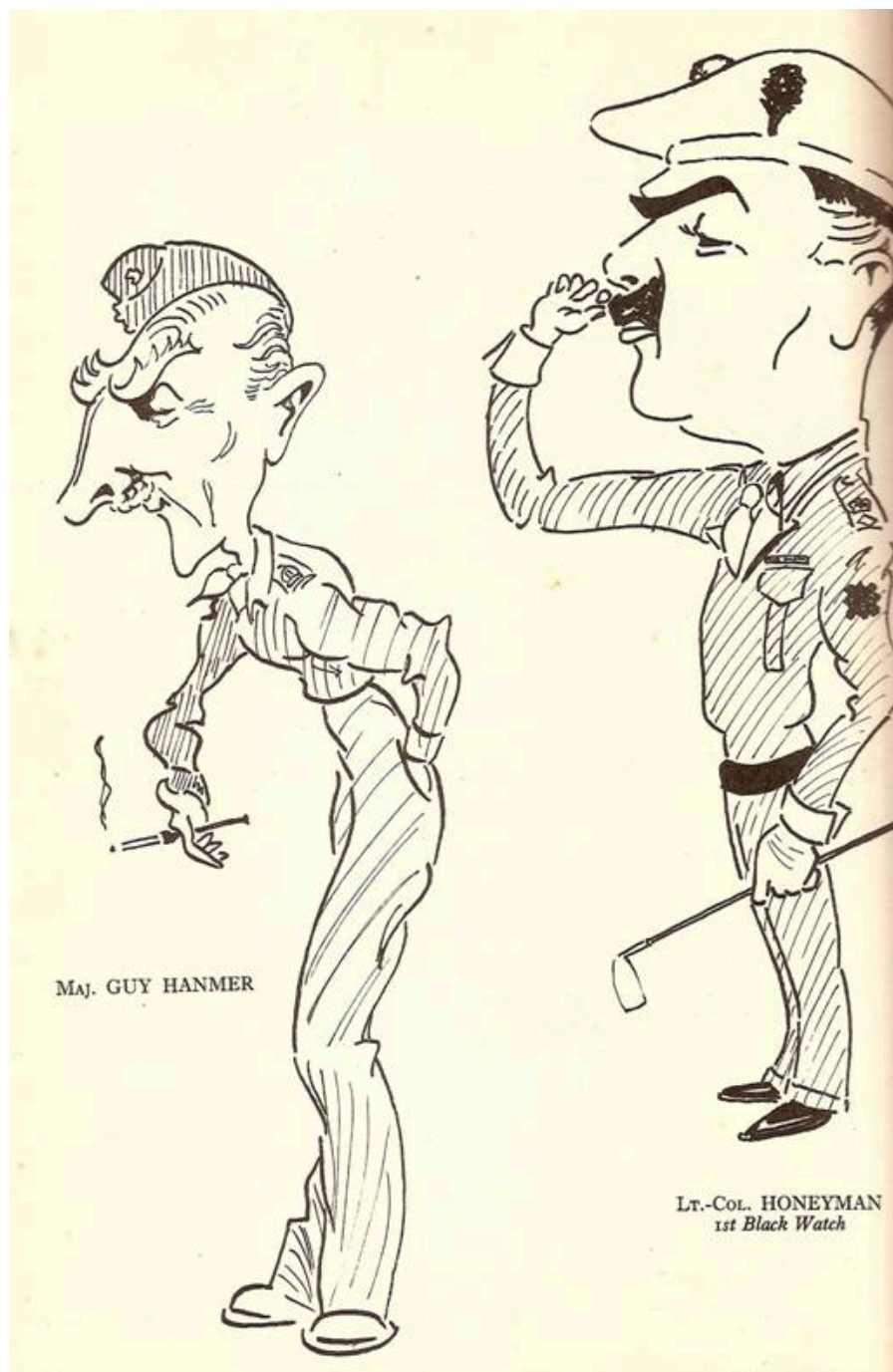
Post Traumatic Stress. We have received a report from one of our members Down Under in which he tells us that for the past 15-20 years he has been experiencing symptoms of what has only recently been diagnosed as Post-trauma Stress Disorder – shouting in his sleep, sudden pointless panic for a few minutes, occasionally not quite knowing what he is doing for a few minutes for no apparent reason etc. It did not really show up until he was 60 plus. A psychiatrist who has specialised in this field is in no doubt about the diagnosis; his symptoms are apparently very typical of what many Australian men from Vietnam are experiencing. If any of our members are experiencing similar symptoms we would like you to contact us (in confidence) in order to expand our knowledge of the effect of imprisonment on the physical and psychological well being of former POWs.

Doug Barker writes in regarding the photo of the group of men on page 7 of the Spring 2005 Newsletter. He has recognised the man standing at the right hand end of the group, with his hands on the shoulders of the man kneeling in the front row. He thinks his name was Briggs. Doug has another photo on page 156 of his book 'Another cup of tea Mr Barker' and it shows his working party. Briggs is standing next to Ted in the photo. Apparently he arrived home safely and visited Dougs friend Ted Charlwood in Eastbourne. Ted was laid up with a dodgy foot for some time. If you ever recognise anyone in any of the photos in the newsletter, please let us know.



Believed to have been taken at Stalag Luft 6. The photo below shows 'A' Lager. The mound with three vents is the potato cellar. Barracks No 1 is in the lower left corner, then the kitchen and Barracks No 10. The warning rail and the unfinished road through the camp can be seen. In the upper background is 'B' Lager where the barracks were built clear of the ground. To the upper right is the unfinished 'C' Lager.





Frank Slater produced the book 'As You Were' in 1946, subtitled 'A caricaturists anthology of Oflags VIICH, VIB and IXA/Z.' He sketched many of the characters that he met on his travels including Lt Colonel G.E.B. Honeyman of the Black Watch. Honeyman was a contributor to the 1944 book 'Backwater – Oflag IXA/H' edited by Lt Colonel D. Guy Adams of the East Surrey Regiment. Honeyman was born on 11th June 1897. A regular soldier, he was commanding the 1st Battalion of the Black Watch, part of the 51st Highland Division when taken prisoner at St Valery on 12th June 1940. He did not enjoy his 43rd birthday, which was spent in the hopeless task of denying the tiny French seaport to the Germans. In search of a hobby in captivity, he turned to Art and specialised in water colours.

OLD BOOK REVIEW A Prisoners Progress by Lt David James, MBE, DSC, RNVR. Published by William Blackwood and Sons Ltd 1947. Hardcover 164 pages. A prisoner of war in Marlag, the Naval officers camp at Marlag and Milag Nord, just north east of Bremen

in the north of Germany. The author recalls at the end of the book "How the Germans heard of my departure gave me endless pleasure. Apparently Jackson, posing as the French vet, had very bad luck; for he tripped over a wire on the Swiss frontier and was recaptured the same day as I made my break. The Germans had been getting increasingly worried about him for some days past; for with his perfect knowledge of German he was obviously a strong starter who might well blot their still clear copy-book. Next morning, therefore, the Kommandant came into the camp, all smiles, and said to Commander Lambert, our man-of-confidence; 'Good morning, Kapitan Lambert, I am sure you will be glad to see your friend, Lieutenant Jackson again. He has reported back from leave.' To which he got the reply; 'Good morning, Captain Bachausen. I'm sure you will be sorry not to see your friend Lieutenant James back again. He's just gone on leave!'"



Recognise anyone? Members of the 102nd Northumberland Hussars, Royal Horse Artillery pose for a group photograph at Stalag 18A in Austria.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

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Ben van Drogenbroek, Stadhouderslaan 32, 3417 TW Montfoort, The Netherlands would like to locate a copy of the book WIREBOUND WORLD which was published in 1946 by Alfred H Cooper and Sons Ltd, London. It contained photos and information about plays performed by POWs in the theatre of the North Compound of Stalag Luft 3.

Kathy Salt, 4 Blacksmiths Close, Glapwell, Nr Chesterfield, Derbyshire S44 5NS would like to hear from anyone who knew Jack Salt, who was in the 30 HAA. Taken prisoner in Sumatra and worked on the Burma railway he was repatriated in 1945 and sent to India (he had TB), then moved to South Africa where he died in 1946.

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Good news for Mr W Saunders of St Austell, Cornwall who asked in the summer newsletter for anyone who worked in the Dower Milch Werke, Marienburg to contact him. Bernard Hardacre was one of the 60 men working in the milk factory and he saw the request. They hope to meet up soon, for the first time since the spring of 1945. Bernard can be found in the photo below, in the front row, second from the right.



Darren Payne, 12 Bryncastell, Bow Street, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion SY24 5DE would like to trace the following friends of his grandfather (addresses are as of 1940) Mr J Waddell, 38 Beacon Road, Wylde Green, Sutton Coldfield, Warwick; Mr A E Coles, 55 Cuckoo Ave, Hanwell, London W7; Mr G D Burnett, 24 Haworth Avenue, Rawtenstall, Rossendale, Lancs.

Tania Warburton in New Zealand is trying to locate four British prisoners of war who worked with her great grandmother, a peasant farmer in Sudetenland during the war. Their names and wartime addresses are Arthur Scott, 347 Fulham Court, London; Anthony Roper, 59 Hewitt Ave, Sunderland, Durham; Leslie Morris, 42 Deptford Terrace, Sunderland, Durham; Arnold Evans, 55 East Street, Grange Villa, Chester-le-Street, Durham. If anyone has any information please contact Phil Chinnery, Newsletter Editor.

Dr Peter Stanley, the Principal Historian at the Australian War Memorial, GPO Box 345, Canberra, ACT 2601, Australia is writing a book about a group of British commandos, most of whom were either killed or captured in the raid on St Nazaire in March 1942. The seven men from No 2 Commando are Fusilier William Bell, Captain Michael Burn, Sergeant Stanley Rodd, Lance Corporal Arthur Young and Privates Peter Westlake, Fred Penfold, John Cudby and Patrick Cudby. They spent time in Lamsdorf, Luckenwalde, Mooseburg and Hohenfels. If you knew any of the men or were in any of the camps above, Peter would welcome a line from you.

BILL KAVANAGH'S DIARY. Bill was a driver in the RASC when he was taken prisoner at Tobruk. He was held in North Africa, then Italy, then Stalag 4A and 4B. Bill died in 1982, but

his daughter Julie has transcribed his diary for the last month of the war and it is reproduced here with her permission.

April 14th 1945. Left Dresden in a hell of a hurry. Rations 600 grams bread for two days. Marched 30 kilos. Slept in farm outside Dipoldswalde. Met Martin. Felt pretty fit, after a hard day, continual strafing by Anglo-Yank fighters.

15th. On the march again. Feeling hungry. Only made 20 kilos today over very mountainous country. Crossed the German – Czech border. More gunning by our own planes. Reached Zinwald feeling tired and hungry.

16th. Planned escape and left the camp with four pals at 3 o'clock heading for Chemnitz through hellish thick forest. Entire rations – potatoes. Made 10 kilos before dark. Slept in forest.

17th. On the move at 5.30 very heavy going through almost impassable forest. Chased by soldiers three times today but escaped. Saw 300 bombers. No food. Scratched badly. Progress 8 kilos. Another night in the forest.

18th. Started the day with a good wash and general clean up in a German Army Camp. Accidentally walked into police post at 3 o'clock. Caught and locked in station. Treatment very good – fed and smoke – fine.

19th. Marched by armed guard to Teplitz – 15 kilos. Interrogated and put with French POWs, they had plenty of food and smokes but hung onto them. Hungry and browned off.

20th. Marched back to Zinwald – 20 kilos. Saw two trains blown to hell. Received a parcel between 3 men. One good scoff and finish. This is a hell of a place. 900 men packed like sardines.

21st. The entire ration in this camp is half a pound of bread a day and half pint of coffee – nothing else. Sanitary and sleeping accommodation is worse than hopeless.

22nd. You can guess perhaps how I feel – positively fed up. No chance of escape – guard doubled and feel weak through lack of food, but still keeping cheerful. It can't last much longer.

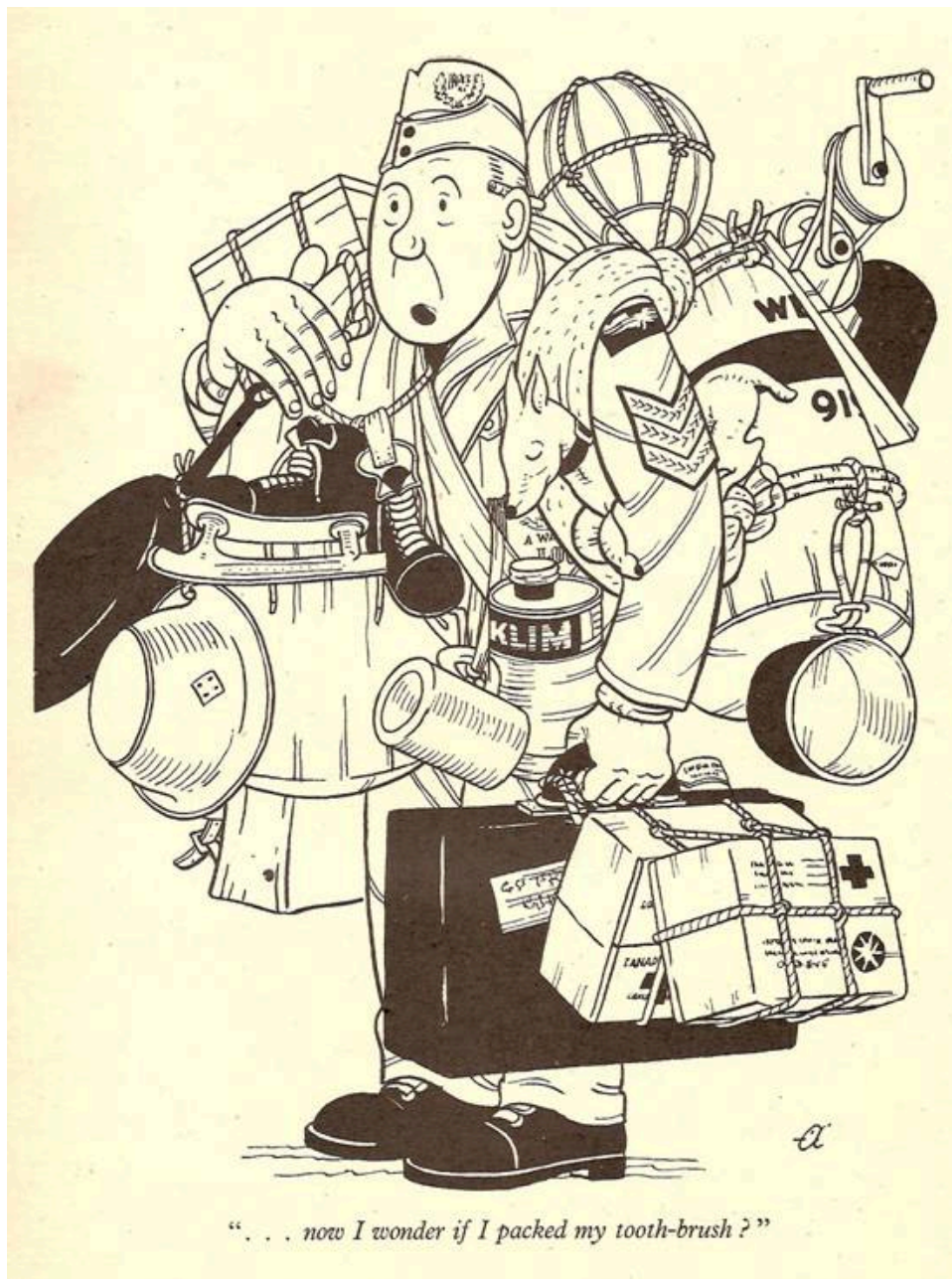
23rd. Have heard rumours of 48 hour armistice. Is it another of the millions of rumours or is it true? Phillips is out on the scrounge for parcels. Hope he succeeds.

24th. Rumour still persists – no air action. Phillips returned with enough rations for 3 thin soups. Feel bloody weak and browned off. Its times like these that make you think of good old home – how long now?

25th. Lay on my back most of the day – too weak to walk far. Its been snowing for the last 3 days, but Thank God it looks like clearing now. No war news today except Goring is in Teplitz – what a joint this is!

26th. Still no news. I'm stiff in every joint through lying on concrete. Just about managed to do my washing. The main thing in this life is to keep clean. The Yanks here are lousy already – cold wind today.

27th. We are 2,000 feet above sea level here – right on top of the mountains. The farmers are poverty stricken. Still no news. Seven more chaps escaped last night and three this afternoon. Sun but still cold wind.



28th. Am thinking about making a break if things don't improve soon. The trouble is food. You can't escape without any at all. We got our bread today at 4 o'clock. First meal in 24 hours.

29th. Every German guard has the same story – we move the day after tomorrow, to be handed over to our own troops! God if this was only true. We've been disappointed so often with these rumours.

30th. Went 30 hours without food. As yet have not heard any more about moving tomorrow. Am bloody disappointed. Rumours are the curse of this life. I think there's some queer work going on at the Western Front. Snow and freezing wind.

May 1st. Hitler is dead! Peace talks are rumoured, but can't get anything definite in this joint. Hope something happens quick as another week here will see a lot of the boys off.

2nd. Heavy snow and bitterly cold. Bread ration cut – one three pound loaf between 8 men. Nothing else. News still comes in thick and fast, but the war still seems to be on. Felt pretty rough today.

3rd. Still blasted freezing. Heard that peace has been signed but don't believe it as there's some guys outside still carrying rifles. I was just wondering how much I weigh – probably 9 stone.

4th. Managed to get out today on fatigue party. Lifted enough veg for 3 meals. Oh boy – am I sick of turnips. Still cold.

5th. Boiled up all the veg we got yesterday and had one good stew. Boy was it good! Today is Saturday and I've just been thinking of Saturday in the good old days. It's pouring down in buckets outside.

6th. Have got touch of flu. No medical attention. Feel lousy. No bread today. My stomach is one big ache. Rumours come in by the score. Been raining non-stop for two days.

7th. Hellish cold today. Feel very weak after flu. Can hear Russians guns 8 miles away. Thousands of German troops retreating past here. 5 pm ordered to move immediately. One loaf between 20 men. The Germans are in a panic. Terrific bombing and strafing over us.

8th. On the march all last night. Feet are one mass of raw blisters. Marched 30 miles. I'm all in. Arrived at Brux at 3 pm. Churchill has spoken. The war is finished Thank God, but we are right in the middle of a tank and artillery battle.

9th. Am well fixed up in British camp here. Plenty of food. The fighting is finished. The Russians are in command. Treating us like brothers, but I've witnessed the most horrible scenes with German men and women prisoners.

10th. There is wholesale looting and killing in Brux. I went out last night and came back with a brand new car. Loads of food, whisky, cigs and a pig. Having the time of my life. Oh boy.

11th. Brought back a 12 valve radio gram and sold my car for gold wrist watch, but lost the watch an hour after went swimming. The Russian troops will get us anything we ask for.

12th. Sunbathing all morning. Got some lovely silk shirts and brand new bike. The weather is scorching. Went for a swim in afternoon and a walk at night.

13th. Had a smashing find. A fifteen foot skiff. Went up the river for miles. Went for a walk in the evening to Korbitz. Big feast. Celebrations, dancing, drinking and eating.

14th. Another scorching day. This is a glorious life after three years hard living. I'm putting on weight fine. Spent the whole day in a canoe and had a picnic on the river. There's no beer here!

15th. Swimming all morning. Brought back a live bullock. Had it killed and roasted. Boy what a feast. Went for a drink in the evening and had an argument with a Russian officer. Came off worst as he had a gun.

16th. Walked about 5 miles. The country here is marvellous. Moved from here by train at 5 pm on first stage to dear old England. Oh boy! Travelled all night.

17th. Passed through Karlsbad at 9 am. Arrived Falknau at 12. At last we are in our own lines and really free men once more after three years. Plenty of food and cigs of the Yanks. Am going to the films tonight.

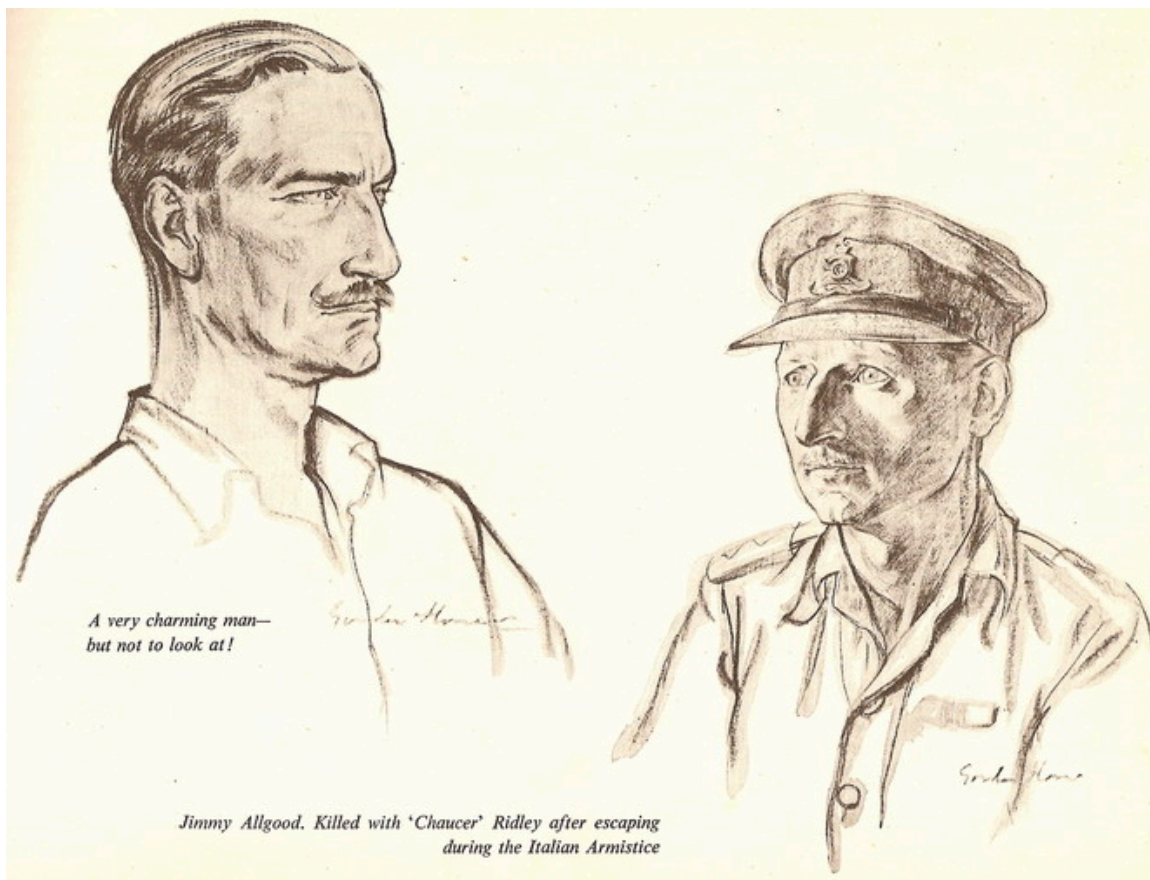
18th. Left Falknau at 10 am. Travelled by Yanks trucks to Pilsen aerodrome to await air transport. Had a terrible attack of cramping in the stomach. Thought I was going to pass out.

19th. Feel a lot better today. Sixty planes took off from here, taking the boys to Paris. I am in the next groups to go. My guts were bad again in the evening. Eight of ten men here are the same.

20th. Whit Sunday. Rained pretty heavy last night. Hope them planes roll in soon – 10 am flew from Pilsen in Douglas C-47 transport. Arrived Rheims at 2.30. Rough flight. Marvellous treatment from Yanks. Expecting to fly to England today. Very wet morning. The food etc here is amazing. [The diary ends here].



ABOVE. The first Americans, together with a French worker named Pierre, arrive to liberate Oflag 79 on 14th April 1945. From the 1948 book 'For you the war is over' by Gordon Horner.



IN MEMORIAM. We would like to remember Jimmy Allgood and 'Chaucer' Ridley who were killed after escaping during the Italian Armistice in 1943. They were sketched by Gordon Horner in his book 'For You The War Is Over'.

THE REPATRIATION OF WOUNDED PRISONERS. Mixed Medical Commissions had been formed in 1939 to assess the condition of wounded British and German prisoners of war and compile lists of those recommended for repatriation. By the end of 1940 their findings were complete and negotiations began early in 1941 to arrange the exchange. It took until September of 1941 to agree on the two ports to be used; Newhaven in the UK and Dieppe in France and two British hospital ships were to be used to transport the 150 sick and wounded German POWs and 1,500 sick and wounded British. The exchange ground to a halt however, when the Germans insisted that, due to the disparity in numbers, German civilians should be sent back as well as the German wounded. This was contrary to Article 68 of the Prisoners of War Convention, which specifically requires that repatriation should take place 'without regard to rank or numbers'.

In August 1943 an agreement was finally made proposing an exchange through Gothenburg, Smyrna and Oran. These three operations involved the exchanges of Germans held in the United Kingdom and Canada against British prisoners belonging to the UK, Canada and South Africa at Gothenburg; of Germans held in the Middle East and Egypt against British destined for India, Australia and New Zealand at Smyrna (later changed to Barcelona); and of Germans held at Tunisia at Oran.

The British supplied *The Empress of Russia* and the *Hospital Ship Atlantis* and the Swedish the vessel *Drottningholm* for the exchange at Gothenburg and from the Middle East the *Cuba* and the *Tairea* carried German prisoners of war to Barcelona and returned to Alexandria with British prisoners of war. To transport British prisoners to Gothenburg the German authorities used the Sassnitz-Trelleborg Ferry as well as the ships *Meteor* and *Ruegen* which sailed from the port of Swinemunde. For the exchange at Oran the Germans used the former Italian hospital ship *Gradisca*, which joined the two ex-French ships *Sinaia* and *Djenne* at Marseilles.

The exchanges at Gothenburg and Oran on 20th October 1943 saw over 4,000 British and nearly 5,000 German prisoners of war repatriated, while a further 1,000 British and 1,000 German prisoners were repatriated through Barcelona on 27th October. Unfortunately, some 150 British prisoners of war who had been passed for repatriation through Gothenburg did not get away due to an administrative breakdown, but they were sent home on the next exchange.

The second Anglo-German prisoner of war exchange through Barcelona took place on 18th May 1944. This involved the transportation of repatriates from German through France to Spain, for embarkation on the Italian hospital ship *Gradisca*. The allies were now preparing for D-Day and the bombing of the French railways was at its height. An added problem was that neutral ships were not being allowed into British ports at that time, so the British party had to disembark at Belfast and board a British ship for Liverpool. 375 German sick and wounded and protected personnel were sent home and 835 British and Commonwealth came home in return.

By the late summer of 1944 the only safe way of repatriating prisoners of war was through a Swedish port. On 10th September an exchange took place at Gothenburg where 845 Germans, mainly wounded from North Africa, were sent home and 1,700 British sick, wounded and protected personnel were brought back in exchange. Two escaped British prisoners of war managed to join the party of sick on one of the trains and remained undetected until they were discovered aboard the *Arundel Castle*. As the ship was sailing under safe conduct the Master was obliged to hand them over to the Swedish Authorities, who interned them until the end of the war.

One final exchange took place during the spring of 1945. It was prompted by the reports reaching London of the inadequate treatment being given to wounded taken prisoner at Arnhem. The exchange took place at Berne in Switzerland in the latter half of February

1945 and 1,259 British came home in exchange for 1,579 Germans. Four hundred of the British hospital cases later went on to India, Australia and South Africa.

OBERMASSFELD. One of the British 'protected personnel' who saw the preparations for repatriation first hand was Bert Martin. Taken prisoner with the remainder of the 21st General Hospital, RAMC at Bolougne in May 1940. On his way into captivity he came across a number of burned out British ambulances belonging to the 17th General Hospital. They had been carrying wounded into Bolougne for evacuation but had been shot up by the Germans. Eventually Bert and his group found themselves at Obermassfeld. The hospital was a large building with bars on the lower windows and a door which appeared to be electronically controlled by guards stationed in a room alongside. There was a roomy tiled hallway immediately inside which led off to the right into a vast, light and airy place filled tightly with double-stacked metal framed beds. There were no springs to the beds, but a line of boards on which rested three 'biscuits' which had no resilience but were a great improvement to lying on bare floorboards. Altogether there was room for 90 men. Dozens more beds could be found on the higher floors, complete with sheets and blankets. The building had once been an agricultural college, but now it had been converted to an emergency hospital. A cell of Abwehr, German Military Police were also stationed in the building to search and investigate anything they were interested in. Sanitaters, German medical orderlies maintained an almost constant patrol through the whole place purely to ensure that internal discipline was maintained. Those transgressing often found themselves in a stone cell for a week. Even a double amputation case once went through the punishment. The sheets were soon grey, being laundered only every six weeks. At that time an English speaking Pharmacist was responsible for the medicines, which had mainly been purloined from Allied medical stores. One day when Bert went to request his supplies the Pharmacist said to him "If you want to beg for medicines from the Germans you must beg for them in German. German is the language of the world." Bert replied "Oh, that is why you have learned English so well!"

Bert told us; "Incredible stories centred around so many of our patients were slowly revealed. Several injured survivors of what came to be known as the 'Barn Massacre' were in our midst. Charlie Daley had lost a leg yet remained a typical light hearted and ebullient cockney. Bill Evans had several injuries and perhaps was a little more affected by the horror of the incident. They and others involved had to live through the psychological repercussions of such experiences without anything approaching counselling. Uncertainty, hunger and anxiety about things back home kept them thinking more about their present than dwelling too much on their great misfortune, though naturally they had to count themselves fortunate not to have been killed. Bert Pooley was one of two who lived through the 'Le Paradis' killing in which 100 Royal Norfolks were confined to a field and shot down in cold blood after capture. For many weeks I tended his wounded leg and saw it eventually heal, but with a hole straight through his shin bone. It did not remain healed and I think in later life it had to be amputated. Not surprisingly Bert was rather morose and withdrawn; the book 'The Vengeance of Private Pooley' relates just why. We did not doubt his story, having already met the 'Barn' men and the casualties from burned out ambulances.

"The first Red Cross Commission to reach Obermassfeld was composed of senior Swiss military doctors and equally senior German counterparts. The Swiss looked as though they had stepped straight out of a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta. Their uniforms were powder blue colour with gilt braid and their caps were as high as top hats. The cases for review were presented by our own doctors and included such men as Sergeant Bill Sykes of the KOYLI. Bill had been wounded in Norway and was encased in plaster from his waist down to the toes of his injured side. It was about two years after he had been first incapacitated that I was able to get him into the upright posture which had been his dream for so long. He finally saw England again in 1943. For many there was the disappointment of the failed repatriation in 1941 when those selected travelled as far as Rouen, where they were kept in suspense

for a few days, then bluntly informed that the whole scheme was off. Both patients and medics who had assembled in France for the exchange faced the long journey back into renewed captivity thoroughly sick at heart. Colonel Newman, a surgeon, used the opportunity to slip away and managed to make his way back to England somehow.

“Eventually repatriation became a reality for some in October 1943. For the medical personnel left behind who had to bear the brunt of the preparation and transfer of patients to the local station it was an arduous and depressing task. It was even more disheartening for the medics left behind when several Guardsmen who had been ‘enrolled’ into our unit as stretcher bearers when they had been cut off from their regiment in Bolougne were amongst those fortunate to be sent off as medical personnel. I believe it posed some problems for them when they got home as they were not permitted to be returned to front line service under the Geneva Convention, yet in the eyes of their own officers were soon fit enough to do so!

“One day we received the whole crew of an American Flying Fortress suffering from various degrees of frost bite. They told us that their ‘box’ of 60 aircraft had, by some mistake, arrived in the usual tight formation over the target area at the precise time and height of another group heading in from a different direction. In the chaos which followed the nose of the aircraft in which our crew had been flying was ripped off in a collision. At 20,000 feet they had been using oxygen and the sudden cessation of the supply caused the pilots to lose consciousness and the plane dropped out of control until the thicker air was reached when the Captain recovered and fought to get the badly damaged aircraft into trim again. As I remember the story they crash landed without further injury.

“A week or two before we were finally liberated by the Americans a young and very frightened girl air attendant was brought into Obermassfeld and kept standing whilst a debate went on as to what to do with her. Her plane had been forced down on the wrong side of the line. She did not stay with us and I had no idea whether our senior officers fought to keep her or argued it was impossible for her to remain. Her appearance showed how close to the action women air-crew were carried! At least she should not have been captive for long.”

WILF SUTTON AND THE STALAG 4B EMPIRE THEATRE.

On 23rd August 1943 Wilf was the flight engineer of a Halifax of 35 Squadron, a senior Pathfinder Squadron leading 700 Bomber Command aircraft on a raid on Berlin. As they broke through the cloud east of Hannover a Luftwaffe night fighter found them and 20mm cannon shells ripped through the fuselage. With both starboard engines on fire Wilf and his fellow crew members parted company with the stricken plane and landed without injury in a potato field. It was not long before he found himself at Stammlager IVB at Muhlberg, one of 150 RAF prisoners in a camp which held at that time 16,000 prisoners, mainly Russians but sprinkled with a collection of Dutch, French, Yugoslavs, Serbs and others. Wilf told us that the camp stood out like a sore thumb some 6 kilometres from the village in the middle of desperately lonely countryside. In winter it was colder than any charity he ever encountered and even the wood behind it looked black and uninviting.

“When you arrive you go straight to the delousing hut where your head is shaved to the scalp and your clothes are taken for delousing. Then you have a shower before you redress in your clothes. Immediately after, you join the rest of your hut with some 400 Kriegies with all the lice, bed bugs and fleas that such conditions encourage. Each hut had a stove to give some heat and on which we could cook and boil water if we could get coal from the Germans. They gave us a very inadequate amount so we used to have coal foraging parties. One or two of the lads who could speak a bit of German would try bartering with the guards to keep them occupied whilst we got into the coal shed to steal a few bags. We were

never caught but a Welsh friend of mine, David (Taffy) Jones from Pontypridd, decided he could do this on his own, but he was heard by the guard who emptied his Luger into the darkness of the hut and Taffy was hit in the kidneys. It was a great tragedy and a quite unnecessary loss of life.

“My SAS chum John Gregson and one of his SAS colleagues asked Paddy Stuart and me if we could stage a fight in the middle of the compound that would last for about ten minutes. We thought we could just manage it even though we were in a fairly weak condition. They would tell us when to have a go. Between us and the outside world were two lots of barbed wire and between these the French prisoners grew food for the Germans. At about 2pm on a fine September Sunday, John gave us the wink and Paddy and I started a fight right under the sentry box near to the tomatoes. All the lads who thought it was serious crowded around and the German sentries thought it was great when two half starved RAF men were having a go. Whilst the fight was on John Gregson and his chum cut the wire and stripped some 100 pounds of tomatoes in ‘No Mans Land’ right under the sentry box. When the theft was discovered the place was swarming with military police, but no tomatoes were found. Where they were hidden I have no idea but we ate tomatoes for many months.

“Eventually our Man of Confidence and the SBO managed to persuade our captors to let us have a part of a hut to be made into a theatre. We had a stage, some property and a limited wardrobe. We also had a little bit of make up a prompt box, an orchestra and because of the talent at our disposal we were able to form a complete entertainments section. We had an orchestra, a variety group and a drama group and we each ran a two week show. The drama group would be performing one play, rehearsing a second and casting a third and every six weeks we were able to put on a play. The theatre held about 120 people and the admission fee was paid in cigarettes. It was something like 3 cigarettes in the orchestra stalls and working down to one cigarette for the back stalls.

“Our first major production was a musical revue called ‘Music in the Cage’ and it was written in Italy by Eric Hurst. The plot, such as it was, revolved about British troops on leave in Cairo. Amongst other requirements, we had to find a dozen gorgeous dancing girls. They were headed by a Canadian named Garfield Townley, who made such a super harem girl he was immediately nicknamed ‘Sugar’ which stuck with him for the rest of his days in camp. We were followed by the variety people who also were a success and they in turn were followed by the orchestra section.

“My chum Sid Emerick and I produced the American play ‘You can’t take it with you’, which was a glorious presentation of a completely mad but very happy down town family in New York; it also had an underlying class problem, as the daughter of the house and the son of a rich banker had fallen in love. The banker, obviously against the match called with his wife to meet her parents. He eventually got completely caught up in the happy go lucky atmosphere which cured him of his ulcers and the couple did marry. In one scene the girls father and one of the many old folks who just seem to cotton on to the family made fireworks in the basement. During a visit by the banker, with a host of detectives and all sorts of odd people, something went wrong in the cellar and all the fireworks went off one after another. It was very critical that this scene was really effective but you can imagine the headaches it gave us. We did in fact overcome them with a marvellous effect from the auditorium. The cellar steps were supposed to be off stage left and we rigged up a kaleidoscope of coloured papers which one of the effects men spun in front of a strong electric light. The sound effects people were making the appropriate bangs and whistles and two stage hands were lighting tapers and throwing these at each other in front of the coloured wheel, which as I said was behind a strong lamp. The effect of the sparks, the flame and the shadows together with the noise was really terrific, although a considerable fire hazard. We had to have two men standing by with buckets and sand in case of trouble but happily nothing serious happened.

“We followed ‘You can’t take it with you’ with A A Milne’s ‘Dover Road’ feeling that a gentle English comedy would be welcome and in any case we wanted a change from the American style. Our audience approved but the camp newspaper did not. It was their view

that we should not do two comedies one after another and that we should be more ambitious in our approach. We took their point, so we followed Dover Road with Sherwoods 'The Petrified Forest'. We were by this time developing a good team. We had by now one or two really good 'females' who could also act serious parts, which overcame our biggest difficulty. One of our female impersonators was a married man with a child and how his wife and family felt about him when he got back home I hardly dare to think. He had practised and developed female behaviour to an Nth degree. He had shaved under his arms, shaved his legs and forearms, sat like a woman and could have fooled anyone when he was dressed like a woman. He played the female lead in the play and Graeme Johnson, one of my chums had to play a love scene with him. It was very impressive.

"If you don't know of the story, it takes place in a bar on the outskirts of an American desert when some bandits who are on the run from the police besiege the owners and their customers. It's very tense and dramatic and because we now had some really good actors and our wardrobe and properties had expanded, we were becoming quite professional in our productions. It was at that time the best play we had offered.

"We went back to the American scripts for our next play, which to say the least was a great challenge. We decided to do Claire Booth's 'The Women' which had a cast of only females. I cannot remember how many there were, but it was far more than the female impersonators we had. Naturally some of the smaller parts left a lot to be desired for their presentation, but it was a challenge we took and as you can imagine it went down well with our audience. Even the press commended us for a valiant effort.

"Once again we went to England for next play, with a production of 'The Barretts of Wimpole Street'. This was also a considerable challenge because of the period costumes. It was a very well produced play, but so much of the credit must go to our wardrobe department for their part. They were all made from blankets and sheets and the result was quite remarkable. Then we returned to the American book and this time we took on a really ambitious play and produced George Kaufmans 'The Man Who Came To Dinner'. In my opinion this is one of the most difficult plays to achieve because the lead spends the whole of his time in a wheelchair. The lead is, of course, Sheridan Whiteside, a writer, wit and famous journalist. He visits some people for dinner and during the stay falls and breaks his leg. He has to stay with them for quite a while and appears to be the most irascible character as a guest. It's a very humorous play and the lead is a most difficult part to learn. John Eastwood produced this for us, as he did 'The Petrified Forest'. He was a marvellous producer, but prior to POW life his only connection with the Theatre was that his wife was a well known actress. We had a considerable problem in making a serviceable wheel chair that would not collapse with the weight of a man during the rehearsals and performances each day for two weeks. The chair was made from Red Cross tea chests and never let us down.

"In addition to our normal productions we wanted to try some experiments, but we had to be very careful. All plays were vetted by the German authorities to ensure that there were no political implications in the story, the characters or the script. We decided we could get away with doubtful productions provided we only gave one performance. We arranged to do this and gave one show on a Sunday. We formed the Experimental Theatre Group and did a series of plays called 'Contrasts'. They were one act plays or extracts from three acts to show the contrast. I remember we did a short version of Oedipus Rex and compared this with a modern industrial extravaganza. The most impressive was a famous American play called 'Waiting for Lefty'. The action of the play is the committee room of the New York taxi drivers union. The Union is run by the Mafia style of gang for profit. The drivers were in a rebellious state against increases in union fees with nothing coming back to them. In the audience we had a number of members of the cast and the audience were to be the taxi drivers. The cast members on cue would get up and make some adverse comment about the Union Committee who by the way were completely in the power of the gang and were scared to act on behalf of their members. In a series of Flash Backs each member of the committee revealed the circumstances which had got him into this position with the gang.

The rebel leader of the drivers was 'Lefty' who is never actually seen. The cast members of the audience wanted strike action, but people said 'lets hear what Lefty has to say' hence of course the title of the play.

"One of the gangs strong arm men stood on the side of the stage to quell any trouble that might arise. For this part we chose a man who was very enthusiastic but not very over enriched with talent. He was an ex-South African policeman named Burt Keen and he was perfect for the part on appearance and he only had three words to say. When a cast member in the audience made a caustic comment about the union he had to shout 'Sit down punk!' and although he had rehearsed his line over and over again he missed his cue and the man from the audience was left complaining about the committee for very much longer than the script called. However this play was very emotional and had a marked effect on the audience, so much so that at the end of the play a member of the cast comes running down the aisle shouting that he had found 'Lefty' their leader in his taxi with a bullet hole in his head, at which those members of the cast sitting in the audience got to their feet shouting 'Strike, Strike, Strike' and such was the power of the play that the rest of the audience got to their feet also shouting 'Strike, Strike' as though they were members of the Union. It was the most moving moment that I can remember.

"Another interesting occasion was connected with a musical we produced called 'Music in the Cage' and was another brainchild of Eric Hurst. The setting was in Bavaria at the time of the Octoberfest. The news got to the German authorities and we had from the German commanding officer a request for a Command Performance. In those days all the German theatres were closed so even when they were on leave they had no entertainment. Our CO was a man called Lt Colonel Stossier who was a professional soldier, but anti-Nazi in his outlook. On the first night he came along with his entourage and they were given the first row of the stalls for this Command Performance. I don't think we could charge them for their seats, but they had a good time and congratulated us on our efforts. It really was quite an occasion and I have never heard of such a night in all my enquiries of POW Theatre.

"By the time we got to April 1945 with the severe shortage of food and the war coming rapidly to a close it was decided to fold up the Theatre. For me and all who took part in the activities it was a sad moment. I believe we gave to our fellow Kriegies some good entertainment and we on our part enjoyed the make up, the costumes, the shows and all that the Theatre can bring. On 22nd April the Germans decided to leave the camp as the Russians were not too far away. We could have left with them but our CO decided that we would be too much of a target for the air forces, so we stayed to await the arrival of the Russians who entered the camp in the early morning of 23rd April. They were a very odd bunch, riding horses they had collected on the way. They told the Russian prisoners to walk back home and live off the land as they went. We were told to stay put, but a few of us went into the local farms and got chickens, ducks, geese, a pig and any other food we could find.

"The Americans were only about 15 kilos north at Torgau but the Russians had got their first and they controlled the pontoon bridge. They would not let us go to the Americans or vice versa. On 1st May a couple of colleagues and I decided to cross the River Elbe by climbing the wrecked steel bridge. It was like crossing a helter skelter with the girders 60 feet high in one part and in the river at the next. We were fired on by the Russians but I do not think they really meant us much harm as we were only about 200 yards away. We succeeded and joined the Americans. They took us to Halle where we met up with other Commonwealth troops waiting for an aeroplane for the UK. The officer organising this was from my old 5 Squadron and two of his crew were still in IVB. He asked me if I would guide him to the camp and I agreed if the Russians would let us over the pontoon. To my surprise they did and after collecting his crew and a few others we eventually returned to Halle after a harum scarum journey with the truck breaking down on the Russian side of the river. We got the truck repaired in Halle and my Canadian chum Eddie offered a few of us a lift to Paris. It was a most exciting trip, but we got to Paris after a night in Mainz with some Americans. I remember getting sick in these flats by drinking too much wine and eating fried chicken. I

listened to Churchills speech in the shower. We had five days in Paris and I eventually arrived in Cardiff on 16th May 1945.”



‘MUSIC IN THE CAGE’



'THE MAN WHO CAME TO DINNER'

Left to Right - Unknown Bruce Coombes, Charlie Phelps, Bernard Greenburg,
Unknown Unknown David Cleary, Unknown Unknown Unknown Wilf Sutton



ABOVE – THE STALAG 4B DANCE BAND

Below a postcard from the First World War. British POW post and parcels staff at Cottbus in 1918.



KOREA – THE SON-YI HOLE.

It was 22nd December 1952. Lance Corporal Mathews was cold and stiff as he walked out to the truck. It was time to leave the Kennel Club and begin his one-year 'jail' sentence for being a member of an escape committee. His spirits rose as his old friends Sal Conte and Richard Upjohn climbed aboard, followed by an American named Joe Hammond, one of the original reactionaries. The journey took two days and ended at Son-U, a penal camp for the worst reactionaries. The new guys were taken to a small thatched house and ordered inside. This was The Hole. Sleeping figures stirred as the newcomers stepped across the crowded floor. Old friends appeared from the darkness; Doc McCabe and surprisingly, Derek Kinne.

The next day was Christmas Day. The men were fed boiled rice and soya beans. There were seventeen men now in the hole, twelve Americans and five British, crowded into a ten by ten room with a small charcoal burner in the centre. These men were the toughest of the tough. Ed Osborne was a tough hill-billy from North Carolina who took it upon himself to re-educate those men who embraced the communist cause. He formed a one-man rock-throwing committee and found many victims among the progressives with his unerring aim, before the Chinese arrested him. Bob Shanwell and three of the others were of a similar mind and tried to beat some sense into those who were turning their coats. They eventually suffered terrible beatings themselves at the hands of the Chinese interrogators.

Life at Son-Yi was hard. The 130 men in the penal camp were there to be punished. They were beyond conversion to the communist cause. For the men in the hole, lack of food was the worst privation, with just two buckets of rice or sorghum per day between seventeen men.

In February the spectre of death hovered close again. It was the birthday of one of the Americans and the men in the hole had a sing-song to celebrate. Unfortunately they chose to include a verse along the lines of 'hanging Mao Tse-tung' and incurred the wrath of the camp commander. As a punishment their food ration was decreased and the fuel for their stove was stopped. This was serious. They were in the middle of a cold, hard winter and the

temperature at night fell as low as forty degrees below zero. Inside the hole a layer of frost built up on the inside of the walls and the men's breath froze on their beards.

Drastic steps were required and the men began to take the outside latrine apart, stick by stick, hiding the pieces of wood in their clothing. When that was nearly gone they took apart the wall which divided the two rooms in the house and some of the ceiling rafters.

Two weeks passed and the Chinese refused to reinstate the wood allowance. The men in the hole put their heads together and came up with a plan. 'Doc' Frazier thought of it first. 'If someone was really ill with pneumonia or something like that, the Chink doctor would have to tell the camp commander. If he has been ordered to keep us alive and we can scare him enough, we may get the wood back!' They decided to give it a try. John Hartigan, the first British prisoner in the hole, was selected to be the patient. He was tall and thin and after charcoal had been used to produce shadows under his eyes and DDT powder applied to his face, he looked like death itself. Soap rubbed under his armpits would produce a fever and a cigarette made out of shom, a narcotic weed, temporarily increased his heartbeat.

After the unfortunate Hartigan was shown to the guard, the camp commander and the doctor appeared, together with an interpreter. As the patient lay shivering and gurgling on the floor, Doc Frazier briefed the Chinese doctor on his symptoms. The Chinese doctor knelt down and examined Hartigan 'Severe Pleurisy' he announced. 'You must keep him warm.' Doc Frazier pointed out that it was impossible since there was no wood and when the man died it would be the fault of the Chinese Peoples Volunteers. A hasty discussion followed and the camp commander left, promising to do what he could.

Hartigan was playing cards when the doctor returned and just had time to resume his position on the floor. The doctor placed a hot water bottle at his feet and announced that the wood ration would be resumed in the morning. That evening they were given a large bucket of rice instead of the nauseating sorghum. They were even given a few apples. Life became a little more bearable as the peace talks ground slowly to their conclusion.

According to 'The British Part in the Korean War Vol II by Anthony Farrar-Hockley, a total of 978 British prisoners of war were repatriated at the end of the Korean war. A further 71 were 'known to have died as prisoners' according to fellow prisoners of war. Eleven others were 'presumed to have died' having been taken alive, but not handed back by the communists at the end of the war. One Royal Marine elected to remain with the communists but returned to the UK many years later.

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