# ROYAL AIR FORCE

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# ROYAL AIR FORCE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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## SELECTED ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| ACSEA | Air Command Sea East Asia |
| ADI(K) | Assistant Directorate of Intelligence (Prisoner Interrogation) – originally AI(k). |
| AEW | Airborne Early Warning |
| AHB | Air Historical Branch |
| AI(k) | Air Intelligence (Prisoner Interrogation) – later ADI(K). |
| ASR | Air Staff Requirement |
| BEF | British Expeditionary Force |
| *Chi Stelle* | *Chiffrier Stelle, Oberbefehlshaber der Luftwaffe* – the German Air Force Signal Intelligence Service. |
| G4 | The Army Staff Branch concerned with Logistics |
| IS9 | Intelligence School 9 was the executive branch of MI9, tasked with assisting service personnel to evade and POWs to escape. |
| IS9(D) | The section of IS9 specifically concerned with training agents sent into occupied Europe to assist escapers and evaders. |
| 'Kriegies' | *Kriegesgefangenen* – prisoners of war. |
| LMF | Lack of Moral Fibre |
| *Milorg* | *militær organisasjon* (the Norwegian Resistance). |
| OASC | Officer and Aircrew Selection Centre. |
| OKW | *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* – Armed Forces High Command. |
| PRC | Personnel Reception Centre |
| RTO | Railway Transport Officer. |
| SD | *Sicherheitsdienst des Reichsführers-SS*, the intelligence agency of the SS and Nazi Party. |
| SEAC | South East Asia Command |
| SHAEF | Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force |
| TNA | The National Archives |

## SHOT DOWN BEHIND ENEMY LINES

## RAF MUSEUM, HENDON, 24 October 2012

### WELCOME ADDRESS BY THE SOCIETY'S CHAIRMAN

### Air Vice-Marshal Nigel Baldwin CB CBE

Ladies and gentlemen – good morning. It is a pleasure to see you all here in our usual and much appreciated venue.

Today's Chairman, Air Marshal Sir Roger Austin, has never been a prisoner of war but, like many of us, has been forced to serve in the Ministry of Defence in Whitehall. Some might feel that that bears some comparison.

But well before that he was a QFI on Jet Provosts then, in the 1960s, he flew Hunters from Tengah with No 20 Sqn during the Confrontation with Indonesia. He then commanded No 54 Sqn at West Raynham before converting to the, then new, Harrier GR1 as a Flight Commander on No 4 Sqn in Germany. Back to Wittering as the wing commander CO of the Harrier OCU before commanding RAF Chivenor with its Hawk-equipped Tactical Weapons Unit.

He subsequently filled the posts of: Gp Capt Ops at HQ Strike Command; OC RAF Stanley in the Falkland Islands immediately after the 1982 war; Air Officer in charge of the Central Tactics and Trials Organisation; Commandant of the RAF College at Cranwell and a series of ever ascending posts within the MOD Procurement Executive, eventually culminating in his appointment as Deputy Chief of Defence Procurement (Operations) from 1995 to 1996 with a seat on the Air Force Board.

Since retiring from the RAF, he has been the National President of the Royal British Legion, the President of the Victory Services Association and a trustee of the RAF Benevolent Fund. To fill in his spare time, for a decade from 1997, as a flying officer in the Voluntary Reserve, he flew with No 6 AEF at Benson, introducing more than 5,000 Air Cadets to the joys of flying.

Sir Roger – thank you for volunteering to keep today's show on the road. You have control.

## OPENING REMARKS BY SEMINAR CHAIRMAN

### Air Marshal Sir Roger Austin KCB

Thank you Nigel. I have to confess that my knowledge of escape and evasion is extremely limited, although I have had two somewhat superficial brushes with the trade. The first was during the war when a generous Ministry of Food provided three-year olds like me, and many of this audience too, I suspect, with a daily ration of orange juice and cod liver oil. If you are not familiar with the latter, just imagine a cod's liver being put through a mangle – what drips out is what it tastes like. So, whenever I saw my mother reaching for 'the spoon' I would escape and evade by taking refuge in one of my hidey holes in the garden. It wasn't a very big garden, but neither was I at the time.

My second experience occurred when I was with No 20 Sqn when it was involved in the Confrontation with Indonesia in the mid-1960s. At one stage it seemed possible that we might actually be required to do something beastly to the opposition and a man came to brief us on escape and evasion. Rule Number One was the standard mantra of, 'if you get caught stick to Number, Rank and Name.' The second bit of helpful advice was, 'Be wary of approaching the locals, but do try to get back.' Easier said than done, of course, as 'getting back' would have involved a swim of at least 30 miles, so I had been hoping for something a little more specific.

So, as you can see, I have much to learn and I am as eager as you are to hear today's' speakers, so without more ado I will introduce the first of them, Air Cdre Graham Pitchfork.

# THE ORGANISATION OF ESCAPE AND EVASION

**Air Cdre Graham Pitchfork**

*Following an initial Canberra tour in Germany, in 1965, Graham Pitchfork, a Cranwell-trained navigator, was seconded to the FAA to fly Buccaneers. Thereafter his career was inextricably linked with that aeroplane, culminating in command of No 208 Sqn. He later commanded RAF Finningley and was Commandant OASC before a final tour as Director of Operational Intelligence. Among the many aviation-related books he has written, his* Shot Down And On the Run,[1] *is particularly germane to today's proceedings.*

## Introduction

An inevitable outcome of war is that some men will be captured by the enemy and others will find themselves cut off behind enemy lines. It was just as inevitable that a few would attempt to escape from captivity and others would go to great lengths to avoid being captured. Some would succeed and this created significant military implications for all sides.

During the Second World War it was stressed to all officers and men that it was their duty to escape. The diversion of manpower to cater for prisoners of war (POWs), escapers, evaders and the underground movements that supported them was a constant problem for enemy forces, and kept many men tied down in non-operational activities away from the battlefield. In this indirect way, those who fell behind enemy lines were still able to play an important part on the path to victory.

The return of evaders and escapers provided a tremendous boost for the morale of others, demonstrating to them that the unthinkable and unknown could be mastered and lead to success and freedom. It also highlighted that those who were properly prepared, both physically and mentally, could achieve success, often against great odds. From a military standpoint there were also huge benefits, none

[1] Pitchfork, G; *Shot Down and on the Run: True Stories of RAF and Commonwealth Aircrews of WWII* (The National Archives, Kew, 2003).

more so than the return of highly-trained men who could continue to make a valuable contribution to the war effort. This was a major factor for the RAF, when the training of aircrew was both very long and expensive, and the return of those shot down reduced the need to train replacements. Many of them also returned with valuable intelligence, not least a lot of technical data about how and why aircraft had been shot down, on bomb damage assessment and the disposition of enemy forces in the areas they had travelled through.

As the war progressed, great advances were made in gathering intelligence to support POW camps and the escape organization, making it possible to establish and support escape 'lines', and some of these will be discussed in detail by Roger Stanton (*see pages 74-102*). To gather and assess the wealth of information returning evaders were able to provide, a comprehensive de-briefing system was created in order to gain a better understanding of the techniques of evasion, where the safest routes existed, and the value of previous training and the escape aids they carried. In turn, these experiences were acted upon to provide better advice and escape aids for those that followed and this information was disseminated in bulletins, lectures and briefings. At the same time, agile minds developed more sophisticated and subtle escape and survival aids to be issued to aircrew before they flew on operations. All these measures had an impact on the attitude, knowledge and ability of aircrew to avoid capture, and thus, there was an ever-changing approach to escape and evasion. Further dramatic changes occurred when the Allies landed in Italy in July 1943 and in Normandy in June 1944, creating new situations for evaders, not least the new problem of having to cross battle lines to reach safety.

After that brief introduction, I want to look in some detail at how MI9 came into being and how it developed.

**Development of MI9**

Throughout the First World War there still existed a somewhat old-fashioned notion that to be captured by the enemy was some kind of disgrace. There was, therefore, little encouragement to escape, although this did not stop some determined men from trying, and some were successful. It was not until 1917 that there was a realisation amongst the military intelligence staff that there was a potentially large untapped source of intelligence material available from returning

escapers. To exploit this opportunity the War Office established a small intelligence directorate, known as MI1a. It had little time to have any significant impact but it was at least a beginning and a realisation that specialist support for escapers and evaders was both necessary and valuable.

With the end of the ‘war to end all wars’, little attention was paid to the possibility of other major wars in the foreseeable future, least of all a need to maintain MI1a. However, by late 1938 with war looking very likely, two staff officers started to give some attention to the need for an organization similar to the old MI1a. Capt A R Rawlinson, who had been a young officer on the staff of MI1a at the end of the First World War, was mobilised in the summer of 1939 when he was tasked to review arrangements for the interrogation of enemy prisoners, and the support for escape and evasion. The other officer was Maj J C F Holland who had been appointed to a research branch, later named MIR, to study irregular warfare. Amongst the subjects he reviewed was the need to provide prisoners of war with support for escape attempts, and in October he submitted a detailed paper outlining the organization that would be needed. Others had also started to pay attention to the needs of prisoners of war and escapers, including those who had experience of such activities in the First World War, and MI1 arranged a series of conferences to discuss the way forward.

From the outset of these discussions, it was apparent that a joint service approach was necessary, and the Director of Naval Intelligence (DNI) and the Director of Intelligence (D of I) at the Air Ministry were consulted. The outcome of these various initiatives was the establishment on 23 December 1939 of a new section within the Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI), MI9, with the task of combining the work of MI1a with certain aspects of the work of MIR. The brief minute to establish MI9 was given a very limited circulation to MI5, MI6, the naval and air intelligence branches and DMI’s two deputies.

Initially, MI9 was a very minor operation sustained almost entirely by the force of personality of a very few people. As the war progressed, and more men ended up behind enemy lines, the organization expanded significantly. Understandably, by far the largest element was based in London in support of the war in north-west Europe, not least because of the increasing number of aircrew

shot down over enemy-occupied territory. In later years, MI9 established other large sections in Cairo and in Calcutta.

Placed in charge of MI9 was Maj Norman Crockatt DSO MC, who had served with distinction in the First World War, and he would provide a focused and dynamic leadership for the section for the remainder of the war. He defined his objectives as:

*Maj Norman Crockatt DSO MC, Head of MI9.*

1. To facilitate escapes by British prisoners of war, thereby getting back service personnel and containing additional enemy manpower on guard duties.
2. To facilitate the return to the United Kingdom of those who succeeded in evading capture.
3. To collect and distribute information.
4. To assist in the denial of information to the enemy.
5. To maintain the morale of British prisoners of war in enemy hands.

MI9 was accommodated in the Metropole Hotel, close to Whitehall in Northumberland Avenue. It was divided into two sections, MI9a dealing with enemy prisoners and Rawlinson was put in charge of this section. The second section, MI9b, was responsible for all aspects relating to Allied prisoners and evaders. Following the German bombing of London in September 1940, Crockatt moved his organization to a country house at Wilton Park in the Chilterns where it became known as Camp 20, Beaconsfield.

A top secret section of MI9 was formed in the spring of 1941 for the purpose of assisting evaders and escapers to avoid capture in enemy occupied Western Europe and return to the United Kingdom. It remained located in Room 900 in the War Office after the rest of MI9 moved to Beaconsfield and initially was controlled in its activities by the over-riding authority of the Special Intelligence Service (SIS),

*Lt Col Jimmy Langley MBE MC (left) and Lt Col Airey Neave DSO OBE MC joined MI9, as captains, in 1941 and 1942 respectively, and remained with the organisation for the rest of the war.*

better known as MI6.

Appointed to this section on formation was Capt Jimmy Langley MC of the Coldstream Guards who had been captured at Dunkirk after being severely wounded. Despite having his left arm amputated, he made a daring escape to Marseille, where after a few months internment by the Vichy French, he was repatriated to the United Kingdom. Unfit for combat duties, he was offered an appointment in MI6 to organise escape lines through north-west Europe. Although paid and commanded by MI6, he was nominally on Crockatt's staff in MI9 where he served with distinction throughout the war. Joining his staff in May 1942 was Capt Airey Neave DSO who had also been wounded and captured at Dunkirk before ending up in the infamous prison at Colditz Castle. He made a brilliant escape to reach Switzerland before completing his escape through France and Spain to Gibraltar. He spent the rest of the war with MI9 organising and supporting the escape lines.

In the early stages of its existence, IS9(D), as the top secret section was known, faced considerable difficulties and apathy towards its work. At the end of the war, Crockatt stated in his report on MI9

activities, 'The oft repeated statement that Nurse Edith Cavell, who apparently worked for SIS, had been discovered through assisting a prisoner of war seemed to dictate the whole attitude of SIS towards the section. They were determined to prevent evaders and escapers from involving them in any way. This attitude may have been correct from their own security aspect, but it was a terrific handicap to those trying to build up an organization.' Crockatt acknowledged that after two years MI6 had begun to recognise the need for support for IS9(D). However, he added the rider, 'this was due to their realisation that increased numbers of evaders on the Continent were coming under the orbits of their organizations and endangering their agents.'

As the establishment of MI9 increased, Crockatt soon appreciated that there was a need to prepare combatants before they went on operations. This included 'preventive training' (instruction in escape and evasion), and the issue and regular updating of a new publication, *The MI9 Bulletin*, which passed on information on all aspects of escape and evasion including sanitised reports of successful evasions.

All this added to a significant expansion of MI9's work and, in December 1941, a separate Deputy Directorate was established to deal with POWs and Rawlinson's MI9a was formed into a new section, MI19. The original MI9b became the new MI9, which was re-organized into two sub-sections. One dealt with co-ordination, the distribution of information and liaison with other services, government departments and overseas commands. The other, MI9d, was responsible for organising training for all three Services, the issue of escape and evasion equipment, and the promulgation of information to units at home and MI9 organizations overseas. Crockatt was promoted to become the Deputy Director of this new organization.

An important development stemming from these re-arrangements was the establishment of a school in Highgate, north London, which was given the non-committal title – Intelligence School 9 (IS9). Its role was to train Intelligence Officers from all three Services so that they could then brief the men in their units on the intricacies of escape and evasion.

One very important section of the school was IS9(W) responsible for the interrogation of escapers, evaders and repatriated personnel. It soon became apparent that these people had a great deal of valuable information for various organizations, and the debriefing was

structured accordingly before reports for wide distribution were compiled

Most returning escapers and evaders were interrogated in London after an initial debrief in Gibraltar. MI9 was very conscious of the welfare aspects of those returning, many of whom had been ‘on the run’ for many months, and others who had suffered particular hardship and gruelling experiences. A standard form was used for the interrogations and designed in such a way that individual annexes could be distributed to appropriate authorities without necessarily disclosing the whole report. The main report contained information on an escape or evasion up to the point where the individual passed into the hands of ‘an organization.’ No names of persons were mentioned, or any descriptions given which might have identified helpers. The main report had a fairly wide distribution. Appendix A was classified Top Secret and contained the names and addresses of helpers, the nature of the assistance that they had provided and relevant dates. This information was particularly important for IS9(D) and, eventually, the sections charged with tracing and rewarding helpers. ‘Black List’ foreigners were also included in Appendix A, which had a very limited circulation. Appendix B contained military intelligence and information and was distributed to the service departments and others that might have an interest. Appendix C was also classified Top Secret. It continued the narrative after the escaper or evader came under the control of an organization. Names and addresses of helpers, and their descriptions where necessary were included. Finally, Appendix D gave details of the use and value of the escape aids.

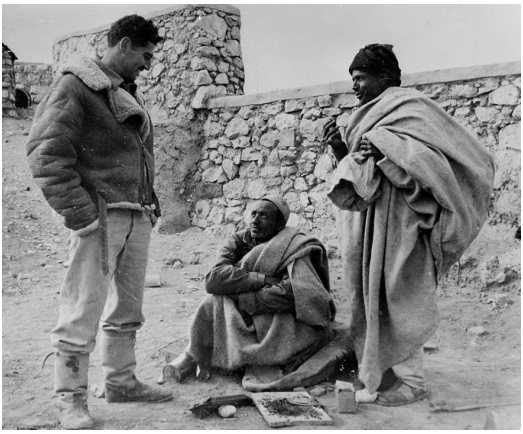
These reports had a considerable influence on future policy. Non-classified information could be incorporated into training, lectures and publications. Planning of escapes could be modified and kept up to date based on the changing situation in the theatre of operations. An important aspect was to identify individuals for awards to escapers and helpers, to settle claims for expenses incurred, and to pay compensation. The interrogation allowed MI9 to keep in touch with the progress of escape lines on the Continent. Other Government departments and the three Services could be kept informed on conditions in enemy and enemy-occupied countries and on military and specialist subjects. Finally, MI5 could be informed of matters of security interest affecting prisoners of war and evaders and to assist

them in interrogating any personnel whose cases were regarded as doubtful from the security point of view.

As the number of airmen returning after successfully escaping or avoiding capture increased, so further refinements could be made. As planning for the invasion of Normandy, Operation OVERLORD, commenced in 1943, it was realized that a new section would be required to meet the changing circumstances of the re-occupation of France, and IS9(WEA), ie Western Europe Area, was established under the command of Jimmy Langley. Some of the established escape lines would no longer be required, but new problems would arise as Allied armies advanced through the occupied countries. In particular, it was anticipated that many men shot down behind enemy lines after the invasion would remain in hiding to await liberation. The work of IS9(WEA) in establishing reception areas for these men behind enemy lines are epic stories deserving of separate accounts.

It is important to mention the close co-operation that developed with the United States. In many aspects of warfare, the Americans had their own views on how to achieve their aims, very often pursuing their own course of action. As Foot and Langley said in their history of MI9,[2] 'Escape and evasion provided a body of common predicaments for British and American fighting men, and the Americans, finding a British set-up in working order that was already producing results, were delighted to join in. Most escape and evasion training, inter-service already on the British side, became inter-Allied as well.' The Americans appointed W Stull Holt to work alongside Crockatt to establish for American aircrew guidelines based on MI9's experience. Following his report, they set up a very similar organization for dealing with escape and evasion within the US Military Intelligence Service (MIS) called MIS-X. With British and American aircrew operating in the same skies over Europe, it was manifestly sensible for MI9 and MIS-X to work in close harmony and to share knowledge on escape lines and evasion techniques. The two men formed a very close relationship and the success of MIS-X, under the excellent leadership of Lt Col Ed Johnston was assured. The return of almost 3,500 American airmen from behind enemy lines in north-

[2] Foot, M R D and Langley, J M; *MI9: Escape and Evasion 1939-1945* (Bodley Head, London, 1979).



*In North Africa many downed aircrew were assisted by Senussi tribesmen. (Air Historical Branch)*

west Europe speaks volumes for the co-operation and efficiency of the two organizations.

**Overseas Theatres**

Finally, we should not overlook the plight of those operating in other theatres of war. As early as August 1940, MI9 had established a section in the Middle East and Mediterranean area under the overall command of Col Dudley Clarke, and known under various cover names, but most frequently as 'A' Force. Many of the principles developed in London were relevant in the Mediterranean and Middle East areas and there were a number of successful escapes and evasions across the whole area particularly from Italy and the Balkans. During the North African campaign, a number of aircrew came down behind enemy lines. MI9, with the support of the Long Range Desert Group, established a network of contact points using local Senussi Arabs and they assisted in the recovery of numerous aircrew, some from as far as 450 miles behind the fluctuating front line and there are some stirring accounts of men who walked back after spending as long as 28 days in the harsh climate of the desert.

In October 1941, MI9 started work in the Far East, but it was not until the autumn of 1943 that it became a significant force when it was known as the 'E' Group. Treatment by the Japanese could be, and often was, brutal and escaping from a POW camp was virtually impossible. The evader faced significantly different problems to those in a similar situation in Europe. Just as in Europe, MI9 produced bulletins and guides to assist those who came down in the jungle but the colossal areas to be covered on foot were almost insurmountable and it was also impossible for a white-skinned escaper or evader to

*This Beaufighter crew, Wg Cdr George Nottage and Fg Off Norman Bolitho of No 177 Sqn, were in the jungle for 28 days and were helped by Chin tribesman before they were picked up by RAF light aircraft landing behind enemy lines. (N Bolitho)*

make himself look like the local population. Despite these incredible difficulties, a handful of RAF aircrew did manage to avoid capture in Burma and return to Allied lines but survival was the first priority in the jungle before attempts to evade could be considered.

**Early days in North West Europe**

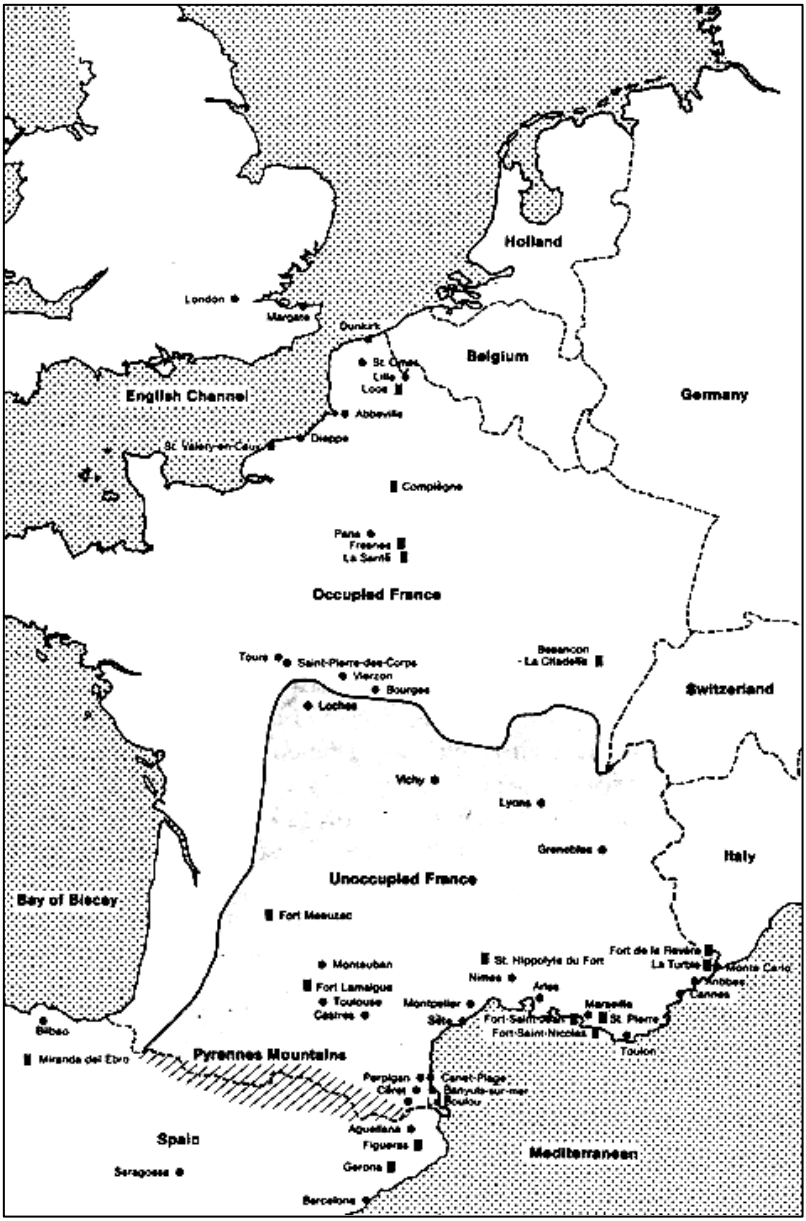
Turning now to a brief review of how the first escape lines in north-west Europe became established before Roger Stanton looks in more detail at the creation and activities of those that followed.

By June 1940, German forces occupied the whole of north-west Europe except the United Kingdom. The withdrawal from France of the BEF left some 2,000 British forces free in France. It has been estimated that about half of them managed to return, the great majority having travelled south through France and over the demarcation line set up between the German-occupied north and the Vichy-controlled unoccupied zone in the south. Once south of the demarcation line they were still liable for arrest, but the Vichy police did not hand them over to the Germans. Instead, they were lodged in a series of forts in the Marseille region. The experiences of these early evaders heading


*Shot down in May 1940, Wg Cdr Embry was being marched into captivity when he passed this roadsign. Taking it as an omen, he broke away and eventually reached Spain. This picture was taken in 1950 during a visit to France to thank those who had assisted him.*

south helped pave the way for the numerous 'escape lines' that soon developed, and which proved so successful. With virtually no ground actions over the next four years, evaders in Western Europe came almost entirely from the air forces.

We have seen how Crockatt and his staff struggled to establish MI9, and to foster interest in escape and evasion. The return of men who escaped from Dunkirk aroused some interest, but there was still a considerable degree of apathy amongst senior officers of all three Services but in particular, and very surprisingly, those of the RAF. The return of Wg Cdr (later Air Chf Mshl Sir) Basil Embry DSO, who was shot down on 28 May 1940 as he led a formation of Blenheims against a target near St Omer, suddenly alerted some elements of the RAF that it was possible for shot down aircrew to return safely to fight another day. Embry managed to escape twice before his third attempt succeeded when he made his own way home via Spain in August. He was a very charismatic and energetic officer with a very forceful personality. He had a distinguished record of service spanning




*The division of France prior to the German occupation of territory previously administered by the Vichy government in November 1942.*

many years in the RAF; he had been selected for promotion to group captain on the day he was shot down; he was well known and respected, so people listened to what he had to say. Foot and Langley commented, 'His example and his energy did much to fix evasion firmly in the heads of both MI9's staff and of the Air Ministry's, as one of the modes of war to which they would thereafter need to pay full heed.'

Following the fall of France and the chaotic arrival of men in Marseille, Claude Dansey, the highly influential deputy chief of MI6, tasked a young man, Donald Darling, to travel to Barcelona and establish routes into France using Spanish guides in order to obtain information on the situation in Vichy-held France. Darling, who assumed the codename 'Sunday', had been in Spain during the Spanish Civil War. He spoke the language fluently, and he had an excellent knowledge of the border area between Andorra and the Mediterranean coast. He immediately set to work to recruit guides to accompany agents over the Pyrenees into France. Once this was established, MI6 offered to establish an escape line in reverse, from Marseille to Barcelona.

Darling made contact with Michel Pareyre, a garage owner in Perpignan, and successfully negotiated a deal with him. The arrangement required Pareyre to provide his garage for the reception of evaders before he passed them on to Darling's Spanish guides who would take them into Spain. For each successful journey to Spain, the guides were to be paid £40[3] for each officer and £20 for other ranks. In Spain, Darling established routes from wayside railway stations to the British Consulate in Barcelona where, after some early difficulties, he was able to establish a reception system before evaders were passed to the British Embassy in Madrid, where he experienced even greater difficulties with the British Ambassador, before the evaders moved on to Gibraltar.

Darling's activities soon came to the attention of the Spanish authorities, and in May 1941 he was forced to operate from Lisbon where he remained until January 1942 when he moved permanently to Gibraltar to become MI9's chief. From this time onwards, Darling interrogated every evader before arranging his passage back to

[3] About £1750 in today's money. Ed.

England. By seeing each one, he was able to quickly identify trends, spot new opportunities, and the need to change or reinforce procedures. It also allowed him to monitor the work and assess the validity of the helpers, and he was one of the first to recognise the treachery of a British soldier who had escaped from Dunkirk, who had assumed an identity of Captain Harold 'Paul' Cole, a name that did not appear in the British Army List, and a man who would do irreparable damage to some of the escape lines resulting in the execution of many patriots before he was gunned down by the *Maquis*.

Once Darling had established the route from Perpignan through to Spain, he needed to create the link to Marseille, a city that was particularly suitable as a major reception area for clandestine activities. He made contact with Capt Ian Garrow who had escaped from Dunkirk to Marseille, and the first major escape line, later to become the famous 'Pat' Line, came into existence.

From these early beginnings, escape lines through Holland, Belgium and France developed quickly from 1940 onwards with losses increasing as the Allied bomber offensive gathered momentum, resulting in large numbers of Allied aircrew finding themselves in enemy-occupied territory.

Of the many aircrew shot down, almost all headed for Holland and Belgium en route to France as this offered the only feasible route for returning to England. Due to the heavily defended coastlines, there was virtually no opportunity to return by sea, but France had common borders with neutral Spain and Switzerland. A few in the very north of the region headed for neutral Sweden. The odds of success were heavily against an evader, but the climate and geographical environment were familiar and he could mingle with the local population, once he was properly attired, without attracting too much attention. Most importantly, the vast majority of the population of all occupied countries were anti-German, and many were prepared to offer assistance. There never seemed to be a shortage of willing helpers prepared to take the gravest risks to assist evaders, and their courage reaches heights that few of us can either attain or fully appreciate.

By 1941, the method of evasion was well defined. Having landed safely, aircrew headed for the occupied countries where the majority


*The 95 ton, 117 ft Camper & Nicholson MGB 502 at speed, one of several fast RN gunboats used to pick up evaders from the coast of Brittany (Norman Hine)*

were picked up by an 'organization' and fed into a system of 'safe houses' whose owners hid and fed them before sending them to a collecting point in the Hague, Amsterdam, Liege, Brussels, Paris, Marseille or Toulouse. They were provided with false papers and clothes before being taken by couriers on trains heading for the frontier zones where they met guides who led them over the mountains to Spain. Later in the war, a few were recovered from Brittany by Royal Navy motor torpedo boats.

The reception of evaders in the two neutral countries varied significantly. Entry into Switzerland presented no major geographical obstacles and the Swiss border police were most unlikely to return an evader once he had arrived on Swiss territory. After a brief interrogation at a police station they were handed over to the British Legation in Berne.

Crossing into Spain presented an altogether different proposition. The natural barrier of the Pyrenees provided a formidable obstacle, which was virtually impassable without a guide. The border was declared a 'Forbidden Zone' through which civilians were not allowed to travel, and it was heavily patrolled by the Germans. If an evader succeeded in crossing the mountains, the Spanish border police were likely to return him to the Germans, so it was important to treat the border area in Spain as if it were enemy territory, and to continue

evading until well clear. If the crossing had been with the aid of a guide, it was important to send him ahead to make contact with the British Consul, and await his return. Taking money or false papers into Spain was a crime that often resulted in a prison sentence and, as one Intelligence Officer used to brief the aircrew, ‘prisons in Spain are not nice places.’ Many evaders were to discover that for themselves.

The Germans soon became aware that aircrew were evading capture and must be receiving organised help. Fortunately, troops could not be on the spot whenever aircrew crash landed or arrived by parachute. Adding to the German’s problems was the ever-growing army of those willing to assist aircrew, despite the much-advertised consequences displayed on the many posters in every town outlining the penalties for ‘Aiding the Enemy’. However, the *Gestapo* made strenuous efforts to infiltrate the escape lines, and they achieved considerable successes with the help of their own men posing as Allied aircrew or by a few traitors, such as Cole, who served them. The treatment of those caught sheltering evaders was brutal. Those considered to be unimportant to their enquiries into the wider organization were executed, sometimes with their families. If the real organisers and main characters were captured, all were submitted to severe torture and incarceration in a concentration camp where many died. There was always the risk to an escape line through treachery, and Airey Neave estimated that 150 or more helpers died as result of being betrayed in addition to the hundreds captured by the *Gestapo* who never returned to their homeland.

Before I start to stray into the domain of the speakers that follow, this is an appropriate place to finish, in memory of the many hundreds of helpers who gave their lives to assist Allied military personnel to return to fight another day.

# MAPS (AND MORE) FOR THE CHAPS – ESCAPE AIDS AND TRAINING

**Peter Elliott**

*After training as a technical librarian, Peter Elliott spent six years working for the Ministry of Defence, including two years at Farnborough, before joining the RAF Museum in 1984. He is currently Senior Keeper in the Department of Research and Information Services, which manages the Museum's archive and library collections. He holds an MA in Archives and Records Management, and in January 2012 he was appointed Chairman of the Royal Aeronautical Society's Historical Group.*

'Now pay attention, 007…' How many times have we heard that phrase heralding some remarkable gadget cunningly hidden in what would seem to be a harmless everyday object? You probably know that Ian Fleming worked in Naval Intelligence and was thus likely to have seen some of the clever devices used by raiding parties and others, but did you know that Desmond Llewellyn, who played Q, spent most of the war as a POW?[1] He would probably have come across several of the escape aids produced by MI9 and smuggled into POW camps.

Some of the gadgets developed as escape aids are well known, but less is known about the way in which they were conceived, and only a little has been published on how aircrew were prepared for Escape and Evasion. The most frequently-cited sources are Hutton's *Official Secret* and Foot and Langley's *MI9: Escape and Evasion, 1939-1945*.[2] Although Christopher Clayton Hutton[3] has a strong claim to be the originator of many escape devices, my paper will show that a number of ideas came from the RAF itself. The Museum holds an extensive collection of illustrations created by or for Hutton[4], showing how his devices were hidden and used.

I will also look at the training given to aircrew to prepare them for life on the run or in camps, and describe the ways in which MI9 supplied POWs with material to help them escape.

But first, it would be wrong not to say something about Hutton. In

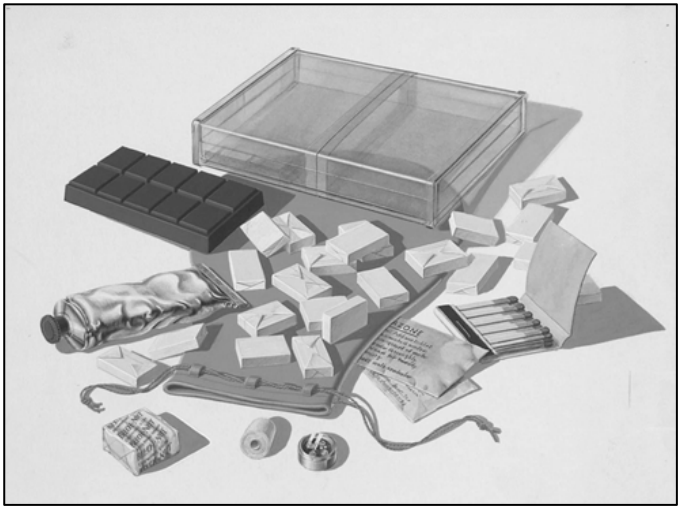
*Christopher Clayton Hutton as a Capt, RFC.*

the First World War he served in the infantry before transferring to the Royal Flying Corps, and in February 1940 he was commissioned into the Intelligence Corps and joined MI9. Foot and Langley sum him up fairly well: 'His enthusiasm was as unlimited as his ingenuity, or his capacity for getting into trouble with the staid authorities of service and civilian officialdom. At one time or another he was in difficulties with senior officers of all three services, with MI5, MI6, Scotland Yard, the Customs authorities, the Bank of England, the Ministries of Food and of Production, and several local police forces.'[5]

It is perhaps unsurprising that he left MI9 due to ill health – although a Treasury Solicitor's file[6] says that his 'methods were causing embarrassment to MI9.' He then worked as a civilian at RAF Medmenham and in January 1944 tried to join the Special Operations Executive – his file[7] was stamped 'Not To Be Employed.'

Reading Hutton's book gives the impression that he was responsible for devising all the escape aids developed for the British services, but it is evident from wider study that some of the ideas came to MI9 from the Royal Air Force. There is a very useful series of Bomber Command files in the National Archives,[8] but very little from the other commands – we do not know whether this is an indication that they were less inventive, or whether the files were simply not preserved.

It seems that the RAF recognised that war was coming: in 1936 Air Publication 1548[9] was issued, giving instructions 'regarding precautions to be taken in the event of falling into the hands of an enemy' but it was simply a rehash of a 1918 publication[10] – even the reprint issued in May 1940 talked about 'writing a note to say you are safe […] to be dropped over the lines.' Although it gave good advice regarding interrogation and the need to avoid disclosing information, the only advice regarding escape was: 'Don't be downhearted if

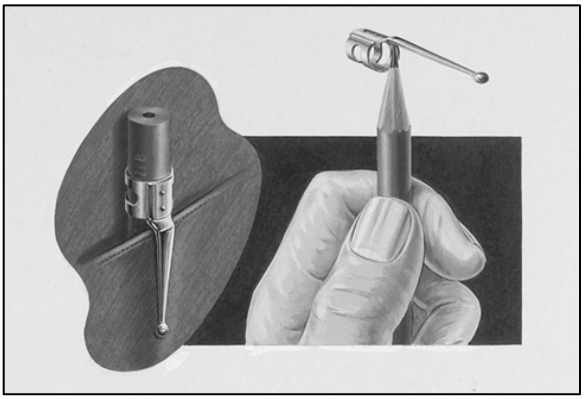


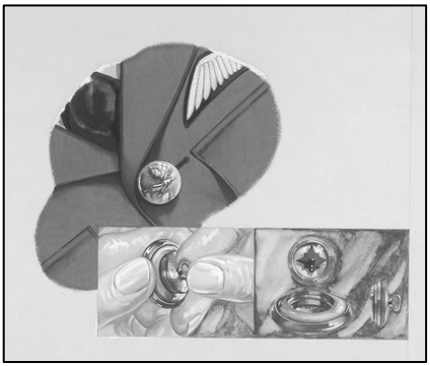
*By January 1940 crews were being provided with a small box containing chocolate, malted milk, beef extract tablets and matches. A later addition was water purifying tablets and Benzedrine, in a container that could be used as a water bottle. These illustrations are from the Museum's extensive collection of Hutton-sponsored artwork.*

captured. Opportunities for escape will present themselves. Keep your eyes and ears open for any information which you think may be of value should you succeed in escaping.' I think you could forgive any serviceman who read that for adding, 'You're on your own, chum!'

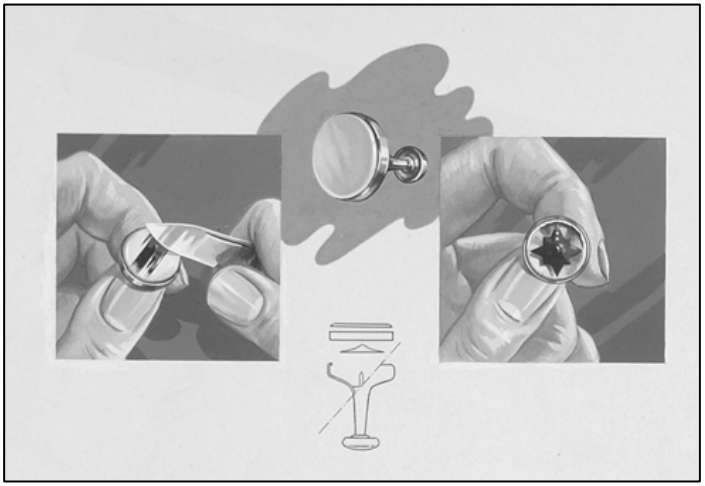
However, as early as October 1939 Bomber Command was seeking instructions for officers and other ranks in methods of escape.[11] The War Office – and we should bear in mind that this was during the Phoney War – was 'inclined to think that such instruction would be bad for morale.'[12] MI9 had determined that the three essentials for escape and evasion were a supply of food, maps and compasses.[13] A memo giving hints for travelling through Germany was issued later that month, and it mentions that all members of crews would be provided with a small map of Germany and a magnetic needle.[14] By January 1940 crews were being provided with a small box containing chocolate, malted milk and beef extract tablets, as well as maps. The escape pack was developed over time and gradually evolved to include water purifying tablets and Benzedrine, in a container that could be used as a water bottle. A supply of foreign money – obtained via the Bank of England – was also provided, initially in the pack but later in separate wallets with maps of the relevant territory.

You are probably aware that escape maps on silk were issued to aircrew; a letter dated 27 March 1940 reported that 'Sgt Hall of No 102 Squadron has made a tracing from the ¼ million map on a piece of parachute silk using Columbia non-stick carbon paper.'[15] Just over a month later MI9 issued maps on both silk and paper. Hutton had persuaded the map publishers Bartholomew and Sonss to allow their maps to be used, waiving royalties as their contribution to the war effort, and he found printers capable of producing maps on silk – a tricky process, as the ink ran and the details became blurred. The answer was to use pectin – more familiar as a setting agent in jam! – although he could have asked the Ordnance Survey.[16] They had produced silk maps of the Lake District some 50 years earlier.[17] Maps were also printed on tissue, which could be folded into a very small pack for concealment, and the quality of some of these is remarkable. The silk used was material deemed unsuitable for parachutes, but supplies of silk soon ran low, and Rayon was substituted.[18]. Those of you who were issued with cloth maps of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union may recall that such maps have a starched feel to them.





*More Hutton-sponsored illustrations showing methods of secreting a small compass or a magnetised 'needle'.*



Compasses came in a bewildering variety of forms. They could be hidden in tunic buttons, trouser buttons and collar studs. Almost anything that could be magnetised, from hacksaws to razor blades to pencil clips, could become a compass. In addition to the magnetised needle mentioned earlier, by May 1940 crews had been issued with magnetised hacksaw blades, but these were withdrawn as they affected aircraft compasses. Figure 1 provides some idea of the scale on which these items were produced.

| **Compasses:** | |
|---|---|
| Round base | 1,261,927 |
| Medium | 140,561 |
| Midget | 14,394 |
| Tunic | 65,096 |
| Pin point | 22,759 |
| Pencil | 13,242 |
| Pen nib | 1,376 |
| Comb | 18,319 |
| Pen/Pencil clip | 100,354 |
| Fly button | 359,228 |
| Pipe | 9,519 |
| Stud | 91,591 |
| Marching | 1,100 |
| Swinger | 197,067 |
| Cigarette lighter | 22,310 |
| Razor blades | |
| **Maps:** | |
| In purses | 468,524 |
| In pouches | 14,487 |
| | |
| **Hacksaws** | 743,550 |

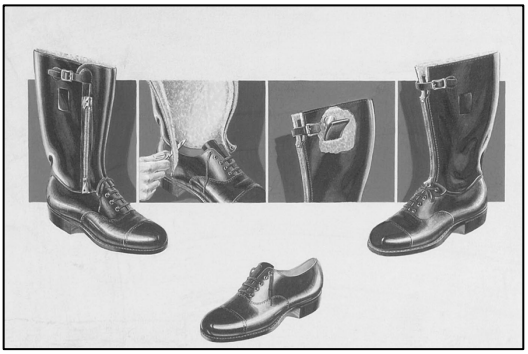
*Fig 1. Aids manufactured.*[19]

The Senior Air Staff Officer at Bomber Command decided that collar stud compasses would not be issued, citing:[20]

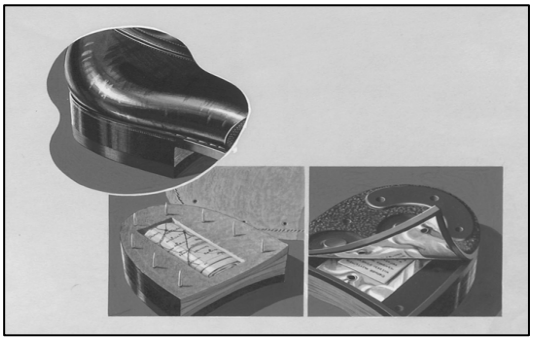
- German control of Europe, which would reduce the chances of a successful escape.
- Cost.
- If such devices were detected they would be removed from all POWs.

This last point would, in effect, deprive aircrew of their compasses so that the Germans could not take them away from POWs! Portal rapidly overturned that decision.

In October 1940 HQ 3 Group pointed out to HQ Bomber Command[21] that the button compass issued by MI9 was 'exactly similar to that invented by Plt Off C W Waitt'[22] and that he should, therefore, have the credit. HQBC replied that Waitt's design had not been forwarded to the Air Ministry or War Office, and that it was reasonable to assume that MI9 had arrived at the design



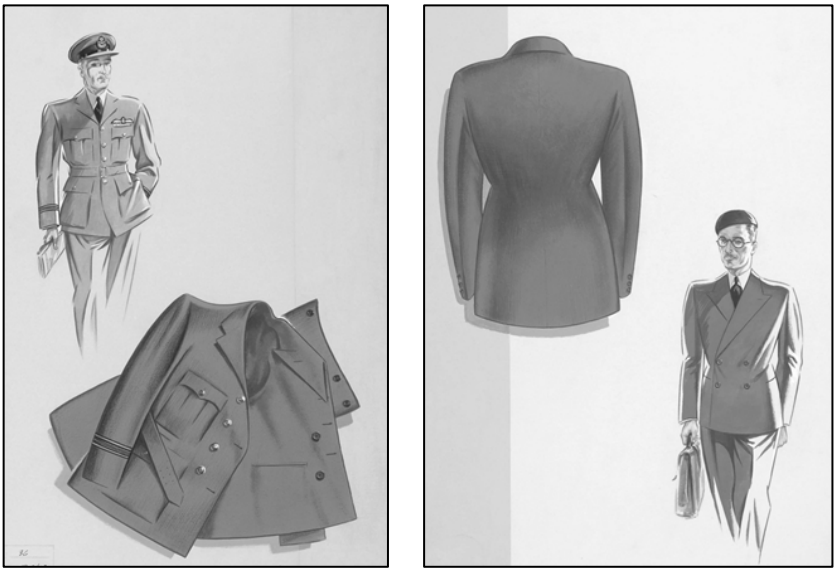
*The, not entirely successful, flying boot, with a map concealed in a heel that could be cut down to become a shoe.*



independently. The Air Ministry arranged that aircrew could have maps and compasses sewn into their tunics by a tailor in Brick Lane (Messrs Glandfield & Sons) but their premises were bombed in 1941.[23] An experiment in concealing compasses in pipes led to complaints that 'the quality of the wood was very poor and consequently smoking them produced painful results' – providing a more pleasant 'smoking experience' would make the pipes look more used and therefore less suspicious.[24]

One escape aid that is fairly well known is the flying boot which could be cut down to look more like a civilian shoe; I am told that the fur-lined leg portions could be joined together to make a body-warmer. Hutton sent a sample of his boot to HQBC in June 1941, identifying the de signer as Flt Lt Haynes of RAF Newton.[25] It was also possible to conceal a compass or map in the heel. Unfortunately it was not a success – a number of comments and criticisms were made, not least of which was that the boot was not warm enough[26] – and MI9 wrote to commands in December explaining that it was not considered serviceable for high or continuous flying. No more would be produced but stocks would be used up by Fighter Command and 2 Group.[27]

HQ 3 Group pointed out in August 1940 that a number of Imperial Airways pilots had flown on German routes and so knew German



*Another, not entirely successful, idea was a uniform that could be re-tailored to become civilian suit.*

aerodromes. They suggested that photos of the cockpits of German aircraft should be provided for use in escape.[28] This was taken forward by both MI9 and AI1(g), and MI9's version appeared around the same time as Air Ministry Pamphlet 114A was published; the MI9 document was quickly withdrawn as it contained a number of serious errors.[29] In any case, it was felt that there was only a remote possibility of using a German aircraft to escape, and that such pilot's notes might be of more use to test pilots at the research establishments who would evaluate captured aircraft.[30] In the following months notes on a number of other enemy aircraft types were produced by AI1(g). [31]

Another of Hutton's suggestions – a reversible uniform that could become a civilian suit – was initially regarded by Bomber Command's Senior Intelligence Officer as excellent, but too dangerous to adopt.[32] It seems that, after discussion with Fighter Command, the idea was taken forward, but the change from the No 1 tunic to the battledress jacket scuppered the plan. We will see later that materials were later supplied to POWs to help them make civilian clothing and foreign uniforms.

**Training**

In the early part of the war training was a little haphazard. Those who had escaped during the First World War were encouraged to give lectures, and the books they had written between the wars were a useful source for study by aircrew. Although some of the advice issued to RFC aircrew was still valid, some was rather outdated by 1940:

- Carry a cheque book with you always so that in the event of your being made prisoner of war you may be able to cash a cheque immediately. This cheque would pass through to your bank at once, and would enable the proper authorities to become acquainted with your whereabouts.
- When writing home, enumerate in detail the articles you wish sent out to you. Repeat this list in subsequent letters in case your first letter goes astray.
- Do not order parcels from neutral countries. Order your parcels either from your own relatives or through the Royal Flying Corps Aid Committee, Surrey House, Marble Arch, W.[33]

Some more helpful hints were disseminated in 1941, including: [34]

- Don't whistle while on the road.
- Don't march, but slouch along.
- If you have a meal in a café [in France] don't be too fastidious in your manners.
- To go unshaven is quite correct but NOT on Sundays.

MI9 staff travelled the country speaking to units of all three services; as the war progressed recent escapers and evaders were encouraged to talk to operational crews and trainees, and gradually the training became more formalised. The expanding size of the RAF meant that training had to be delegated, and in September 1941 the RAF Intelligence School in Harrow began running courses for unit Intelligence Officers who would then be able to train personnel on their stations.[35] The course included a visit to MI9's HQ; the comedian Michael Bentine records in his autobiography:

> 'We were taken in a special sick-making, blacked out bus to the headquarters of MI9. [...] After driving around for what seemed

> like hours, presumably to confuse us as we sat imprisoned in the bus, we arrived at a tree-lined location, somewhere in the heart of the countryside. On being gratefully released from our bus, we said in unison: "Ah, Beaconsfield."'[36]

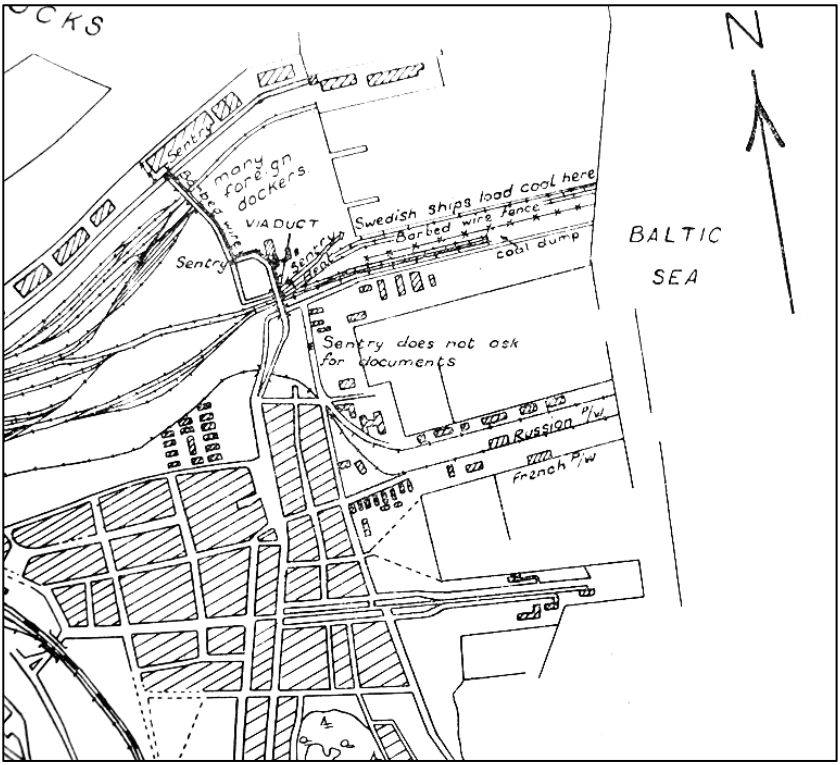
The students on the course, which lasted five days, were expected by the end to be able to give lectures on a range of topics, including evading capture, travel through Germany and occupied countries, how to contact the escape lines and how to behave if they were captured.

In general terms aircrew were introduced to escape and evasion at the Operational Training Unit level, and in Bomber Command this was then topped up on the Conversion Units. Books written by some of those who had escaped during the First World War were provided for station intelligence libraries, but a key tool for escape and evasion training was the *MI9 Bulletin*[37] – a remarkable volume with contents including:

- Escape Aids
- International Law
- POW Examination (ie Interrogation)
- Information on specific areas (Crete & the Aegean, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Eire, the Far East, Germany, Holland, Italy, Norway, Poland, Spain & Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland and Yugoslavia)
- Hints on travel – including where to look on railway wagons to find details of their destination – and 'blending in'
- Details of Frontiers
- Maps & photos
- Recent Escapers' ruses
- Food/Fieldcraft

I mentioned earlier the pilot's notes that were developed for German aircraft – the Bulletin mentions that some escape kits would include notes on starting and running Norwegian small coastal boats.

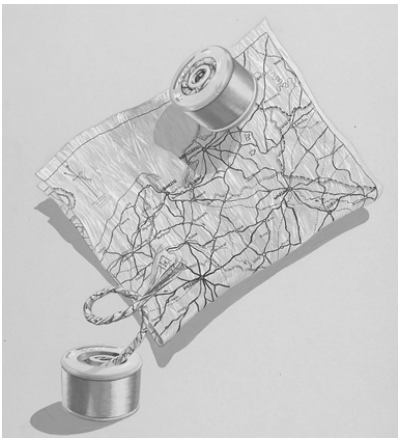
The level of detail given in the Bulletin is very impressive. There are, for instance, maps of ports intended to help escapers to get aboard ships from neutral countries. These could be surprisingly detailed, the map of Danzig, for example, is annotated, 'Avoid this gate' and 'Fence which can be crossed', while that of Gdynia notes the position




*Above – plan of the port area in Danzig with surprisingly detailed annotations and, left, the rural Swiss-German border. Both from the* MI9 Bulletin.

of a 'sentry [who] does not ask for documents'.

There are also photographs and maps of the Swiss/German border.[38] In the valley between Riedheim and Barzheim the border followed a small stream, and the caption to the



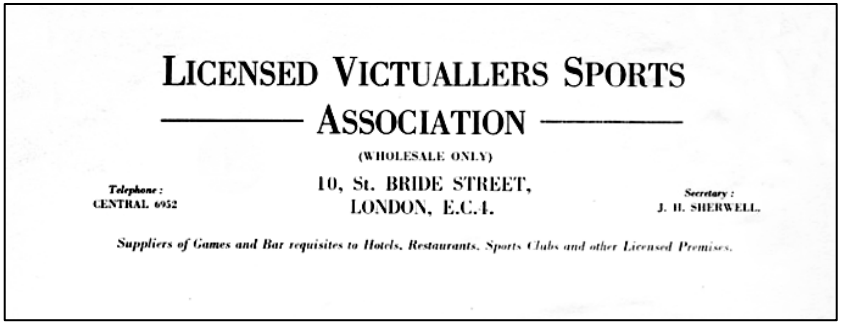

*Maps in cotton reels and cash in gramophone records.*

photograph simply notes that 'The sentry patrols the southern bank' – Steve McQueen would have had far less trouble here!

The *Bulletin* was intended as a textbook, primarily for the Intelligence Officers who would be instructing others but 'Individual members of operational air crews may have access to the *Bulletin* at the discretion and in the presence of the Commanding Officer or the Station Intelligence Officer' presumably for those who wanted to refresh their memories.[39] They were not allowed to make notes – everything had to be memorised.

I have not found much evidence to indicate that aircrew in training were subjected to the sort of evasion exercises that some of this audience will have 'enjoyed' in the post-war period, although the Canadian aircrew joining 6 Group went through a Battle School which included two such exercises, before they joined a Conversion Unit.[40]

It is clear that a great deal of effort was put into helping aircrew to evade capture, but significant efforts were also made to help those who had been captured to escape. Hutton's inventive mind ran riot, developing ways to hide escape aids in material that could be sent legally to POWs in their camps. Maps could be hidden in a variety of innocuous-looking everyday objects from pencils to tennis racquets and cotton reels, hacksaw blades in harmonicas, maps and cash in



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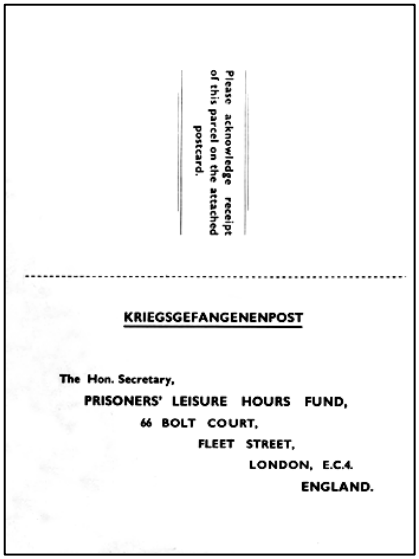


Please acknowledge receipt of this parcel on the attached postcard.

KRIEGSGEFANGENENPOST

The Hon. Secretary,
PRISONERS' LEISURE HOURS FUND,
66 BOLT COURT,
FLEET STREET,
LONDON, E.C.4.
ENGLAND.

*A letterhead and an acknowledgement note from two of the bogus welfare organisations used to smuggle material into the camps.*

gramophone records and even messages in tiddlywinks! Waddington's produced special versions of the Monopoly board with maps hidden inside – if there was a full stop after Marylebone station, the map inside was of Italy, while a full stop after 'Free Parking' denoted a map of Northern France, Germany and its frontiers.[41] MI9 took the decision not to use Red Cross parcels for such purposes, reasoning that if the Germans found escape material hidden in these, prisoners would be denied further parcels and the important welfare material that they contained. Instead MI9 set up a range of bogus welfare organisations, including:[42]

- Authors Society
- Old Ladies Knitting Committee (Reading)
- Licenced Victuallers Sports Association
- Browns Sports Shop
- Prisoners' Leisure Hours Fund

- Order of the Sacred Thoughts
- Jigsaw Puzzle Club
- Rev C O Verrall MA Fund

A camp history of *Stalag Luft III* records that 'Items sent included a few Trilby hats, a Marine officers suit, *Luftwaffe* insignia, and blankets. Blankets were sometimes sent with an overcoat design traced on, which showed up when rubbed with a damp cloth. These could be made up in twelve hours. On one occasion an RAF officer's uniform was received […] which proved on close inspection to be a complete *Luftwaffe* uniform cleverly disguised.'[43]

By 1944 the Germans had learned about most of the escape aids that could be carried by recently captured aircrew and they were certainly aware that aids were being smuggled into the camps.[44] Hutton quotes a former Commandant of *Stalag Luft III* as saying, 'This fraud was extremely well carried out, but nevertheless as each new society started to send parcels, our search staffs examined them and at last located the different escape aids that were inside the parcels… Only a few parcels in each batch from any one society contained [contraband].[45] Post-war figures show that about one parcel in three was 'special' and we should remember that many innocent items – such as pens and paper – could be put to use in forging documents.[46] Some impression of the amount of material sent to the camps is conveyed by Figure 2.

Some of the material smuggled into camps was not directly concerned with escape. Small radio receivers, for example, were used to pick up British news broadcasts and the content would then be disseminated among the prisoners to boost morale.

I am conscious that I have not said anything about MI9's work in the Far East. In many ways helping aircrew to survive in the jungle was more important than helping people to escape from Japanese POW camps, and I am sure that you will appreciate that it was virtually impossible to get escape aids into the camps. Nevertheless, the courses on jungle survival did include material from MI9. Aircrew were provided with maps, compasses and other equipment that would help them to get back to friendly territory, and the MI9 Bulletin gave advice about surviving in the jungle; this was supplemented by two booklets that could be given a wider circulation: *Under the greenwood*

| | |
|---|---|
| Maps | 9,247 |
| Compasses | 3,128 |
| Hacksaws | 1,119 |
| Wirecutters | 78 |
| Files | 78 |
| Screwdrivers | 101 |
| Passport photographs | 61 |
| Identity cards | 7 |
| Blankets | 297 |
| Dyes | 427 |
| Civilian suits | 30 |
| Rubber stamps | 120 |
| Plus: | |
| Keys | |
| Sets of drawing materials | |
| Cameras | |
| Handkerchiefs (with hidden messages) | |
| Special messages on shirts | |
| Passes, travel pages, etc. | |
| Hats | |
| Make-up boxes | |
| Composite tools | |

*Fig 2. Escape Aids despatched to POW Camps.*[47]

*tree: Or how to acquire Burm-ease* and *The Jungle Hiker*.

**Conclusions:**

- A vast effort was put into helping RAF personnel to evade capture or escape, by providing escape aids, gathering information and, of course, setting up the escape lines about which we will hear more later. All this, and the associated training, helped to tie up German resources; searching parcels for escape aids and tracking down evaders and escapers kept German troops out of the front lines.
- The need to provide escape aids involved ingenious designers, and firms who were able to work with scarce materials, under

strict security.

- Christopher Clayton Hutton was something of a maverick, a thorn in the side of a number of people, and perhaps he doesn't deserve *all* the credit that he gave himself – but he was surely the grit in the proverbial oyster that produces a pearl. He literally came up with the goods!
- RAF personnel made up some 11% of the total number of British personnel who evaded capture or escaped: thanks to the training, equipment and support provided by MI9 they were able to fight another day.

**Notes:**

[1] Desmond Llewellyn served in the Royal Welch Fusiliers, and was captured in 1940.

[2] Hutton, Christopher Clayton; *Official Secret* (London; Max Parrish; 1960) and Foot, M R D & Langley, J M; *MI9: Escape and Evasion, 1939-1945* (London; Bodley Head; 1979).

[3] Some sources use the surname Clayton Hutton and others Hutton: the 1911 Census shows that both parents had the surname Hutton, and his RAF record (TNA AIR76/247/127) also uses Hutton.

[4] RAFM X003-6003.

[5] Foot and Langley, p37.

[6] TNA TS28/581 Advice on litigation arising from publication of material detailing the invention and manufacture of gadgets to assist the escape of prisoners of war, by former intelligence officer Major Christopher Clayton Hutton.

[7] TNA HS9/771/4. SOE personnel file,.

[8] TNA AIR14/353 to 361 – RAF personnel taken prisoner of war: aids to escape, conduct, etc; also AIR14/461 to 464 – Prisoners of War: Instructions and methods of escape.

[9] RAFM R021778.

[10] FS Publication 34; RAFM R018600.

[11] TNA AIR14/353. Peirse to Ludlow-Hewitt, 9 October 1939.

[12] *Ibid*.

[13] *Official Secret*, p12.

[14] TNA AIR14/353. Enclosure 24B. Conduct of crews forced landed in hostile and neutral territories and methods of escaping, 30 November 1939.

[15] TNA AIR14/353. Enclosure 81A. HQ 4 Group to HQ Bomber Command, 27 March 1940.

[16] *Official Secret*, p24.

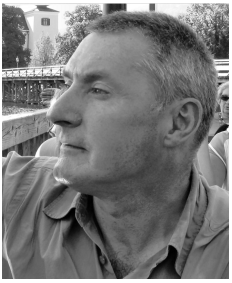
[17] Bond, Barbara; 'Silk Maps: the story of MI9's excursion into the world of cartography 1939-1945' in *The Cartographic Journal*, Vol 22(ii) (December 1984) pp141-144.

[18] *Ibid*.

[19] TNA AIR20/6805.
[20] TNA AIR14/353. 10 June 1940.
[21] TNA AIR14/354. 29 October 1940.
[22] Waitt had been awarded the Military Medal as a Sergeant in the RFC in 1916. He seems not to have transferred to the RAF in 1918, but was commissioned in January 1940 in the Administration Branch.
[23] TNA AIR14/354. MI9 to Bomber, Fighter and Coastal Commands, 10 November 1940.
[24] TNA AIR14/355. 18 October 1941.
[25] *Ibid*. Enclosure 55A. Hutton to Bomber Command, 16 June 1941.
[26] TNA AIR14/357. Minute 142.
[27] *Ibid*. Enclosure 156A. MI9 to Commands, 7 December 1941.
[28] TNA AIR14/354. Enclosure 1A. HQ 3 Group to HQBC, 27 August 1940.
[29] *Ibid*. Enclosure 118A. AI1(g) to HQ BC, 16 April 1941.
[30] *Ibid*. Enclosure 80A. AI1(g) to HQBC, 19 March 1941.
[31] AMP 114B on the He 111, AMP 114C on the Bf 110, and AMP 114D on the Ju 88.
[32] TNA AIR14/355. Enclosure 111A and Minute 113. Hutton to Bomber, Fighter and Coastal Commands, 13 August 1941.
[33] RAFM X004-1429/011. 'Things to remember should you be unfortunate enough to be taken prisoner', circa 1917.
[34] TNA AIR14/354. Enclosure 145B. Notes on avoiding capture and escaping from France, 3 May 1941.
[35] Pitchfork, Graham; *Shot Down And On The Run* (Kew; The National Archives; 2003).
[36] Bentine, Michael; *The Long Banana Skin* (London; Wolfe Publishing; 1975).
[37] TNA WO208/3268.
[38] Hutton credits these to Johnny Evans, who describes his First World War escape from Germany into Switzerland in *The Escaping Club* (London; Bodley Head; 1921).
[39] *Ibid*, preliminary pages.
[40] TNA AIR29/754.
[41] British Library; 'Wall tiles and Free Parking: Escape and evasion maps of World War II'; Handout for an exhibition, (London, April 1999).
[42] TNA AIR20/6805. Enclosure 9. Extracts from lecture notes prepared by an officer of MI9, 10 August 1949.
[43] TNA AIR40/2645 & RAFM B792. *Stalag Luft III* (Sagan) camp history: Air Force personnel, 1942-1945; Part 1, Chapter 2.
[44] RAFM B3227. US Army translation of a German document 'Means of escape of the Anglo-American flying personnel'.
[45] *Official Secret*, pp 148-149.
[46] 9,283 'straight' parcels and 3,525 'specials' TNA AIR20/6805.
[47] TNA AIR20/6805.

# AIR FORCE PRISONER-OF-WAR CAMPS IN THE THIRD REICH

**by Charles Rollings**



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People who have read only the classic accounts of Allied Air Force prisoners in the Second World War – such as *The Wooden Horse*[1] and *The Great Escape*,[2] which have been repeatedly, and recently, re-issued as well as successfully filmed – could be forgiven for assuming that there was only one prison camp for them in Nazi Germany, *Stalag Luft III*, and that this camp was in existence throughout the entire war. At a pinch, there might be some readers of *The Sergeant Escapers*,[3] published some twenty-five years later, who can remember *Stalag Lufts I* and *VI*.

In fact, *Stalag Luft I* did not open until the summer of 1940, when the war was already eight months old. This, despite Royal Air Force and Fleet Air Arm personnel having been flying on 'Ops' since the first day of the war, some being shot down and captured as early 3/4 September 1939. *Stalag Luft III* did not come into being until the end of March 1942, while *Stalag Luft VI* opened in the summer of 1943. Even then, these camps did not reach their peak of organisation until 1944.

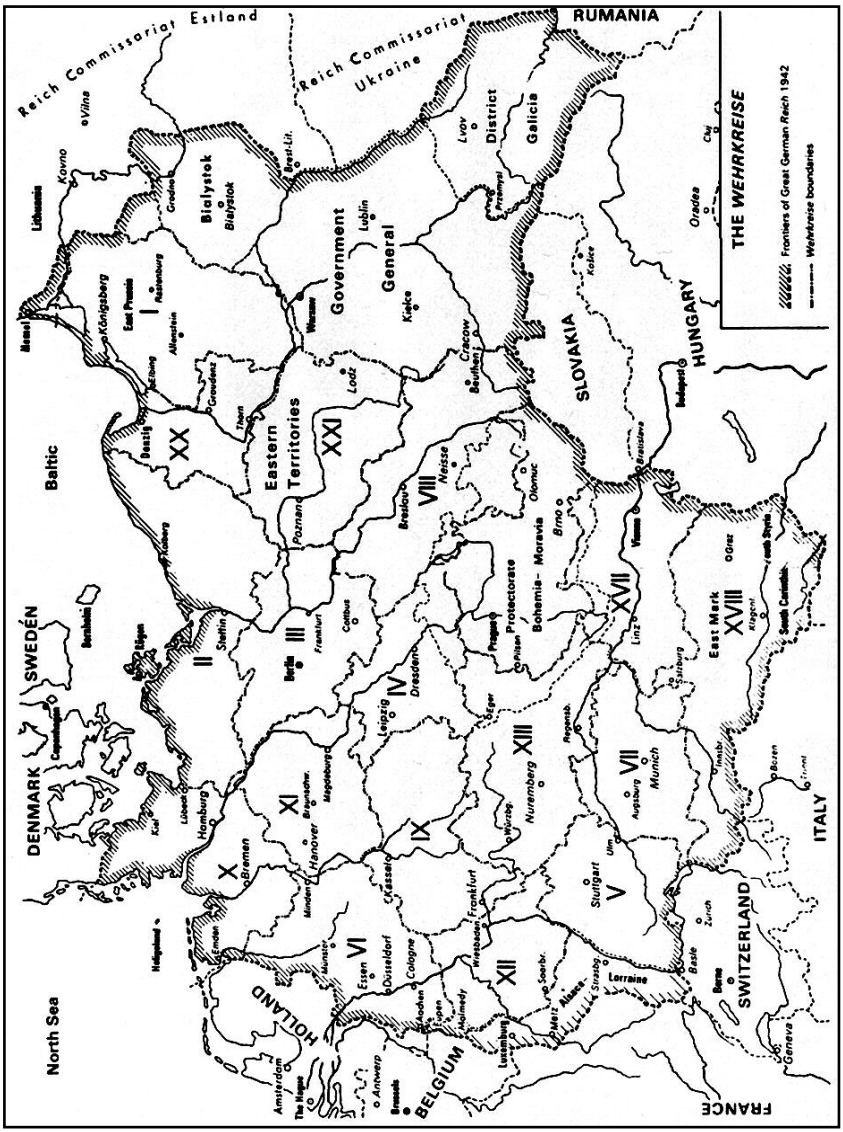
It was the avowed intention of the *Luftwaffe* to hold captured enemy airmen in camps built exclusively for them and run by the *Luftwaffe* itself. This was not a requirement of the Geneva Convention, which insisted upon segregation only by race and


*Oflag IXA, Elbersdorf, with Oflag IXA/H, Spangenberg, at 'A' above.*

nationality, but of the German POW organisation, which delegated to each of the three services responsibility for guarding prisoners of the corresponding enemy service. Aidan Crawley, in his official history of RAF[4] escape attempts during the war, *Escape from Germany*,[5] identifies no fewer than twenty-two camps in which air force POWs were held – not only does this fall far short of the actual number, but most of them were run by the army (*Das Heer*), and not by the *Luftwaffe*.

In the first eight months of the war – the so-called 'Phoney War' or 'Sitzkrieg' – the only British and Commonwealth prisoners the Germans took were aircrew, thirty-two alone in 1939, mainly RAF but also some Fleet Air Arm.[6] At this stage, the only POW camps established in Germany were for Poles captured during the *Blitzkrieg* on Poland, all run by the German Army; but in October two camps were opened for prisoners captured in the west and were the only camps for non-Poles throughout the remainder of the 'Phoney War'.

The first was in Spangenberg bei Kassell in the district of Hesse. This was in fact two camps: one, a former dowry house in the village of Elbesdorf for NCOs and other ranks; the other, for officers, a *Schloss* perched atop a conical mountain overlooking the village and the town of Spangenberg itself. Although the NCOs' camp was




*The Wehrkreis – Army administration districts.*

*Sqn Ldr S S Murray and Plt Off A B Thompson were shot down in a Whitley of No 102 Sqn on 8 September 1939*

opened first, the two camps together were designated *Offizierslager* (*Oflag) IXA*. '*Offizierslager'* stood for officers' camp, the IX was the number of the army administration district or *'Wehrkreis'* – that of Kassel – in which Spangenberg was situated; the suffix 'A' was applied because it was the first camp opened in that district (subsequent camps in that area would be IXB, IXC and so on). Once the castle was opened to POWs it became known as IXA/H, the 'H' for *'Haupt'* – not because it was higher up, but because it housed the *Kommandantur*, or headquarters, of the camp. Prisoners would generally refer to the dowry house as the 'Lower Camp' and the castle as the 'Upper Camp'.

The second camp opened was at Oberursel, where an experimental farm and model housing estate nestling in the foothills of the Taunus Mountains to the north-west of Frankfurt am Main were converted into a transit camp, initially for potential French prisoners. To begin with it was known as *Offiziersdurchgangslager* – literally, officers' through-camp; peculiarly, it was not given a number.

Neither of these camps was ready when the first RAF and Fleet Air Arm crews were captured in September. While those with wounds remained in hospital until the camps were ready to receive them, the others were sent to Polish camps – three officers (Sqn Ldr S S Murray and Plt Offs A B Thompson and L H Edwards) to *Oflag XA* at Itzehoe in Schleswig-Holstein (Hamburg *Wehrkreis*); another two officers, both from the Fleet Air Arm, to *Oflag XIB*, Braunschweig (Brunswick, in the Hannover military district); and a handful of NCOs and other ranks to *Stalag IXA*, Ziegenhain, and *Stalag VIIA*, Moosburg (München district). *Stalag VIIA* was a vast camp one kilometre north of Moosburg itself and some 130 kilometres south-east of Nürnberg. It consisted of a series of hutted compounds, each separated from the

*Harry Melville Arbuthnot 'Wings' Day as a post-war group captain.*

other by its own barbed-wire fence, surrounded by a main double-fence of barbed-wire overlooked by wooden sentry towers and illuminated at night by arc lights. Most camps for NCOs and other ranks would follow this pattern. Although the stay of the first RAF prisoners was brief, the camp – destined to become the biggest in Germany with prisoners of every Allied nationality segregated by compound – would open its gates to airmen several times in the next five and a half years.

In the last week of October the Germans had started gathering the officers in the Upper Camp at Spangenberg and the other ranks in the Lower Camp at Elbersdorf, although some of the latter were soon sent to camps further east in the former Polish territories, such as *Stalag XXID* at Posen (Poznań), the *Wehrkreis* headquarters town, and *Stalag XXA* at Thorn (now Toruń) in *Wehrkreis* Danzig (now Gdansk), where they languished in subterranean fortresses built in the Bismarck era and were put to work by the Germans.

In the meantime, the camp at Oberursel had seen its first RAF arrival, Wg Cdr H M A Day. Shot down on 13 October 1939, he was to be the senior RAF officer POW in Germany up to 6 June 1942. But he was not long at Oberursel, for on 1 November he, too, was sent to the castle at Spangenberg, along with personnel of the *Armée de l'Air*, the French Air Force.

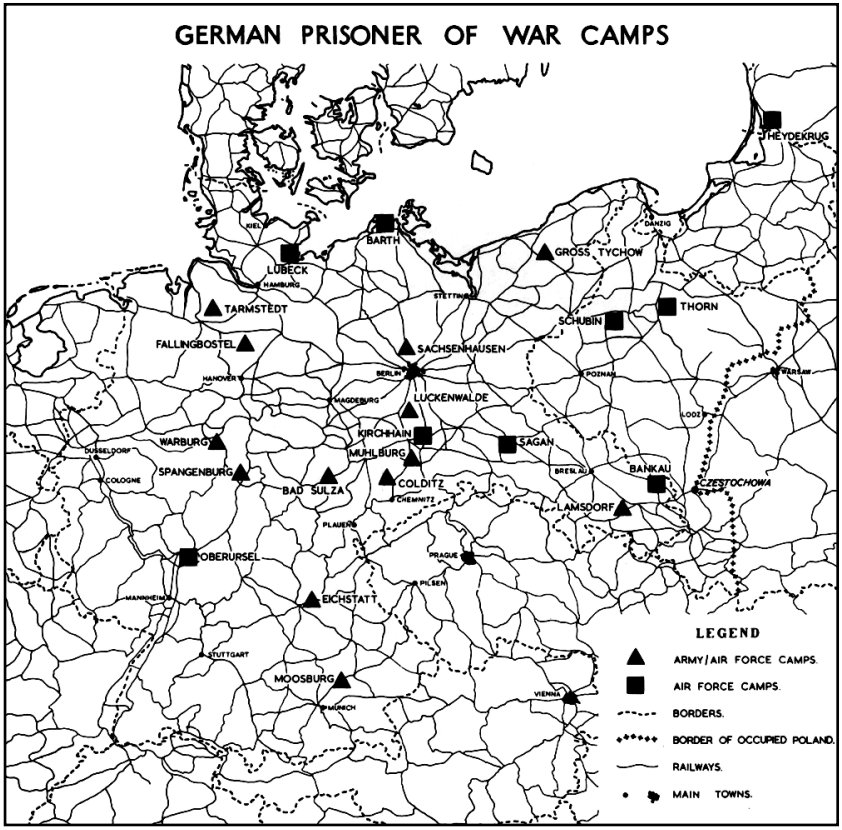
However, by December the *Luftwaffe* had taken over the facility at Oberursel, and began to convert it into an interrogation centre and transit camp, known as *Durchgangslager der Luftwaffe – Dulag Luft* for short – literally, 'through camp of the Air Force'. On 18 December they transferred a number of British and French Air Force officers from the castle to form a permanent POW staff, its purpose being to administer the prisoner side of things and to help newcomers adjust to

Dulag Luft (Auswertestelle-West), *Oberursel. Original quarters, 1939-41*

prison camp life. In practice, although *Dulag Luft* was supposed to be a transit camp, almost every officer and senior NCO captured up to the Norwegian campaign in April 1940 was retained to augment the British and French Permanent Staff.

In the first half of 1940 those RAF NCOs and other ranks not kept at *Dulag Luft* or being sent to Spangenberg, Posen or Thorn were held at *Stalag XIIA*, an army camp at Diez, near Limburg an der Lahn fifty kilometres north-west of Frankfurt am Main and some thirty-five kilometres north of Wiesbaden, the *Wehrkreis XII* headquarters. Officially opened in February, this would, four months later, become primarily a transit camp for prisoners awaiting transfer to permanent camps deeper in Germany and occupied Poland.

When the war in the west developed in May 1940 with the *Blitzkrieg* against Holland, Belgium and France, there was still no permanent prison camp exclusively for the RAF. As the German army had re-opened old First World War camps and converted army barracks, fortresses, palaces, schools and the like into camps for Polish, French and Belgian prisoners, RAF personnel were sent to these. Notable amongst them were *Oflag IIA*, Prenzlau, in Pomerania




in the military district of Stettin (now Szczecin, in Poland); *Oflag VIIC* at Laufen, down near the Austrian border; *Stalag IVB* at Mühlberg an der Elbe, some fifty kilometres north-west of Dresden, HQ of the military district; *Stalag XVIIIA* at Karnten, near Wolfsberg in the Salzburg military district; *Stalag XXIB* at Schubin, in the Posen *Wehrkries*; and, again, the camps at Posen, Thorn and Limburg. By the time France surrendered, there were at Limburg some eighty-five RAF NCOs and other ranks.

*Stalag XXIB* lay on the fringe of the village of Schubin (Szubin), formerly known as Altburgund. Schubin was some thirty kilometres south-west of Bromberg (Bydgoszcz), sixty-five west of Thorn (Toruń) and 240 south-west of Warsaw. It had once been a pleasant country residence, then a boys' school. A huge white mansion, known

*Stalag Luft I, Barth.*

unimaginatively as 'The White House', dominated the grounds, but six long brick barrack blocks had been built to the east of this to accommodate the prisoners. The number of RAF NCOs sent there in 1940 was small, but the camp would hold hundreds of RAF officers later in the war.

Shortly after the capitulation of France, the RAF prisoners in Limburg were transferred to *Stalag VIIIB*, three kilometres outside Lamsdorf in Silesia. There had been a prison camp on this site during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, and the barracks dated back to the First World War, when they had been built to house British and French prisoners. Lamsdorf (now Łambinowice) was situated within the military district of Breslau (now Wrocław, Poland), the capital of Silesia.

It was not until July that the *Luftwaffe* opened its first camp, at Barth, in the same military district as Prenzlau, but on the Baltic coast. The camp was purpose-built, with a *Vorlager* – or front compound – in which were the cookhouse, sick quarters, parcel store and prison cells (or 'cooler'), and two prisoners' compounds: a small one for officers and a slightly bigger one for NCOs and other ranks. All was surrounded by two parallel barbed-wire fences with watch-towers

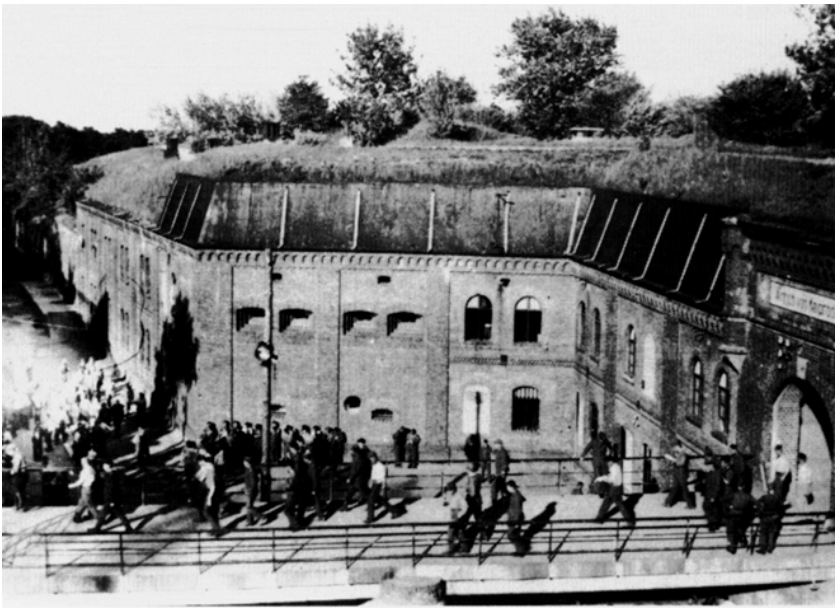
along the perimeter. German staff accommodation was outside the camp. About three-quarters of a mile away were the permanent buildings of a '*Flak*' training school. The presence of this *Flak* school had been one of the determining factors in the location of the camp, as the area was serviced by good concrete roads and the personnel under training could be called out to assist in searching for escapers.

Its official title was *Kriegsgefangenenslager der Luftwaffe*, though it was generally known as *Stalag Luft* and, after other air force camps opened, *Stalag Luft I*. *Stalag* is short for '*Mannschaftsstammlager'*, meaning 'permanent camp for common stock' – in other, words NCOs and other ranks. All *Luftwaffe* camps were known as *Stalag Lufts*, even when a large number of officers were present, because it was assumed, quite correctly, that only a fraction of the air force prisoners would be officers.

The *Luftwaffe* now started gathering British and French air force prisoners from the army camps with the intention of concentrating them all at Barth. This goal was never achieved. Although, for example, thirty officers were transferred there from *Oflag IXA/H*, the rest were left behind; the same applied to the NCOs at Lamsdorf.

On 20 February 1941 the process of gathering the RAF in *Luftwaffe* camps was reversed, with fifty officers being purged from Barth to Spangenberg. From there, on 4 March, they were sent with all the other 'Spangenbergers' to Fort 15 at Thorn, a so-called 'comparative' camp that was supposed to mirror the allegedly adverse conditions in which German prisoners lived in one particular camp in Canada. The prisoners themselves referred to Fort 15 as a '*Straflager'*, or punishment camp. When the *Strafe* came to an end on 5 June, they were all returned, not to Barth – but to Spangenberg.

By this time *Stalag Luft I* held about 250 officers and about 750 NCOs.[7] It had, however, become apparent to the *Luftwaffe* that the number of captives would soon exceed the camp's capacity, with the result that in August RAF NCOs were again being sent to Lamsdorf, which went on accepting them until 1944 (by which time it had been re-named *Stalag 344*). Neither was the castle at Spangenberg completely cleared of RAF officers, except for that brief period in March-June 1941 when they were at Fort 15. When they returned to Spangenberg they found the Lower Camp once again occupied, this time by RAF prisoners who were ill or badly wounded and were being



*Fort 15, the* ‘Straflager’*, or punishment camp attached to Stalag XXA at Thorn.*

considered for repatriation. The ‘repat’ negotiations broke down, however, and most of them were returned to their old camps.

On 29 July 1941 the German army opened another camp for officers, *Oflag XC*, outside a small, former German artillery barracks a few kilometres from the Baltic port of Lübeck, in the same military district as the camp at Itzehoe. Army officers from Greece and Crete, and up to a hundred RAF and Fleet Air Arm officers from Greece, Crete and North Africa as well as the Western theatre of war, were sent there before the camp was closed to the British on 8 October

In late July 1941 nineteen aircrew officers arrived at *Oflag VIIC* from *Dulag Luft*. On 7 August they, too, were moved to *Oflag XC*. (Laufen itself was closed at the end of September 1941 when the British Army officers were sent to *Oflag VIB* at Dössel, near Warburg. It was re-opened later as a civilian internment camp.) In addition, on 8 August, a purge of thirty officers, deemed ‘bad boys’, arrived at Lübeck from *Stalag Luft I*.

By the end of the year there were, however, approximately 230

officers at *Stalag Luft I*; but for the two large parties being purged to Spangenberg and Lübeck there would have been at least 310.

In mid-June four RAF officers captured in the Greek campaign were sent by mistake *Oflag VB* at Biberach, in the Stuttgart *Wehrkreis*; they were followed by a further ten RAF aircrew officers from *Dulag Luft* in the last two weeks in July. The latter were taken to Lübeck at the end of the month; the original four were eventually claimed by the *Luftwaffe* and sent to *Dulag Luft*, thence to Barth.

In the first week of October 1941, the German army opened yet another officers' camp, *Oflag VIB* at Dössel, and all the inmates – army, air force and Fleet Air Arm – of Spangenberg and Lübeck were transferred there, along with army officers from every other camp in Germany. The plan was to collect all officer POWs in army camps in one 'reconciliation' camp, where, presumably, conditions would be better, and to have the sick and wounded officers in one place so it would be easier to repatriate them should such negotiations be resumed.

*Oflag VIB* sprawled across an exposed plain on the western fringe of Dössel, to the north of Warburg in Westphalia (military district: Münster). But even this became overcrowded, cramming in more than 2,500 officers (the majority British Army) and 450 orderlies. Again, Spangenberg had to be re-opened. Most army officers of the rank of major or above were sent there and were *in situ* when *Dulag Luft* once again began sending air force prisoners there in February 1942.

Air force NCOs were experiencing much the same diaspora – being sent not only to Lamsdorf but also to *Stalag IXC*, Bad Sulza, and *Stalag IIIE*, Kirchhain, both opened in July 1941; and again to *Stalag VIIA* at Moosburg.

*Stalag IXC* was twenty-five kilometres north-east of Weimar, in the same military district as Spangenberg. In the summer of 1941 a hundred or so RAF POWs were sent to the camp, which was attached to a chain of hospitals and occupied by wounded British soldiers – mostly from the BEF of 1940 – and by French, Belgian and Serbian prisoners used for manual labour.

*Stalag IIIE*, in the Berlin *Wehrkreis*, lay about one and a half kilometres north of the Doberlug-Kirchhain railway junction, halfway between Leipzig and Frankfurt an der Oder. It consisted of four one-storey huts built, unusually, of brick, surrounded by the usual

*Stalag Luft III, Sagan – officers compound.*

defences. The total number of RAF prisoners would never exceed 200.

In the winter of 1941-42 a typhus epidemic swept through the camp at Lamsdorf owing to the inhumane conditions in which Soviet prisoners were forced to live. One of the consequences of this was that fifty RAF prisoners sent there from *Dulag Luft* on 12 December 1941 were diverted en route to *Stalag VIIA*. This was repeated in January 1942, bringing the RAF contingent at *Stalag VIIA* to more than one hundred.

Meanwhile, the *Luftwaffe* was building another camp, at Sagan in Lower Silesia, now famous – notorious even – as *Stalag Luft III*. As at Barth, it comprised two POW enclosures – one for officers and a bigger one for NCOs. In March, April and May 1942 air force prisoners were transferred to this new camp from Barth, Spangenberg, Warburg, Lamsdorf, Bad Sulza and Kirchhain, and from the various POW hospitals at Obermassfeld, Bad Sulza, Hildburghausen, Kloster Haina, and so on. A party of new prisoners also arrived from *Dulag Luft*, amongst them members of the British Permanent Staff whom the new Commandant, Oberst Killinger, had decided to purge because he found their presence disruptive.

However, as in 1940-41, the army camps were not cleared entirely of aircrew, who still remained in scores at Warburg, Lamsdorf and

Moosburg. Why they were not transferred immediately is not clear, as there was enough room in *Luft III* at the time.

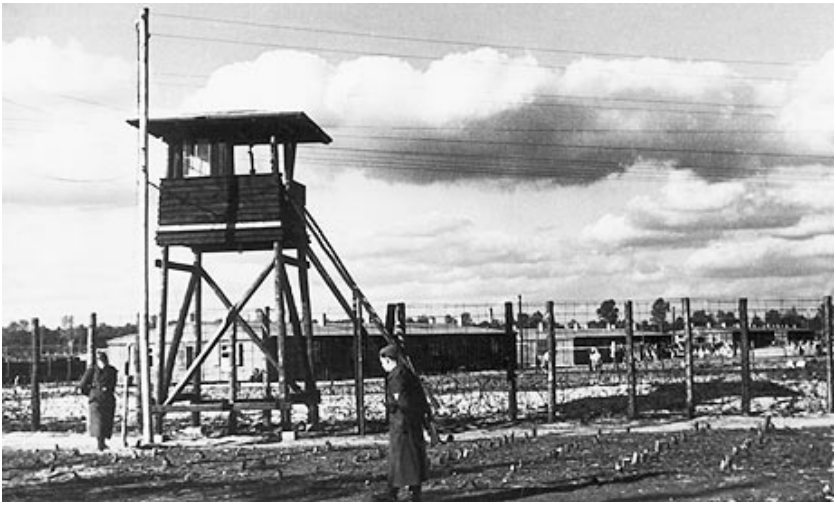
By late August, however, it would appear that the camp was over-crowded, at least by *Luftwaffe* standards, and that more space would be needed for the increasing number of survivors of the escalating air war. More than a hundred RAF men had been captured in the first quarter of 1942, nearly 600 in the second and a similar number in the third, the majority again being NCOs. A new compound for officers was planned to the west of the existing compounds, but in the meantime, the army camps again took up the surplus. In September and October some 2-300 officers and orderlies were sent in stages to the former *Stalag XXIB* at Schubin, now re-designated *Oflag XXIB*; the 200 or so RAF officers remaining at Warburg were also sent there in September, along with eighty-five army NCOs and other ranks employed as orderlies. Warburg was now – at last – cleared entirely of British prisoners.

Up to the end of December, all new aircrew prisoners – apart from some USAAF – were sent to Sagan, but from mid-January 1943 they were purged instead to Schubin. By April the latter would hold more than 600 RAF officers, as well as fifty-six NCOs and some fifty orderlies, mainly army.

In mid-September 1942 the NCOs at *Stalag VIIA* were purged to *Stalag 383* at Hohenfels in Bavaria. This had until recently been *Oflag XIIIE* and was situated in a valley some thirty kilometres north-west of Regensburg, and about ninety miles from München (Munich). New prisoners were also sent there from *Dulag Luft*.

In October, *Stalag Luft I* was re-opened, and 200 warrant officers and sergeants from Sagan were purged there to prepare for a new influx of NCOs. At first only the former officers' compound was occupied, but owing to regular purges from *Dulag Luft* the number of NCOs would reach approximately 600 by the end of the year, and in April 1943 the old NCOs' enclosure would also have to be re-opened.

At the end of March 1943 the long-awaited and much-vaunted new compound at Sagan was ready for occupation – three months behind schedule. The old officers' compound was now known as East, the NCOs' as Centre (or Middle), and the new compound – initially – as West. Almost all of the officers in East Compound – numbering about 850 – moved to their new 'home' between 27 March and 1 April, and



*Classic guard tower, at Sagan.*

were followed shortly afterwards by newcomers from *Dulag Luft*. The prisoners from Schubin – including those who had been left behind at Warburg, those who had been purged there from Sagan, and those who had come in from *Dulag Luft* from January onwards – arrived in early April and were sent to the East Compound, although some were allowed to transfer intermittently during the next eight or nine months.[8]

Soon after this the Germans at Sagan began building another compound to the south of the new West Compound, exclusively for American prisoners.

More than 2,000 British and American aircrew had been captured during the first half of 1943, forcing the Germans to open yet another camp. They chose a former military base some three to five kilometres south-east of Heydekrug railway station in *Wehrkreis I* (Königsberg – now Kaliningrad). Close to the Lithuanian border in East Prussia and barely a dozen kilometres from the Baltic coast, *Stalag Luft VI* would prove to be the most northerly as well as the most easterly of all the camps in which British prisoners were held. Like that at Sagan, it was built on sand and, like that at Barth, the surrounding countryside was flat, swampy and swept by strong winds.

In early June 1943 fifty NCOs were purged to the new camp from

*Dulag Luft*, followed by a further fifty, who arrived on the 17th. In the meantime, from the 10th to the 20th, most of the NCOs at Sagan were transferred in batches (among them one RCAF officer, Flt Lt W F Ash, who had swapped identities with a sergeant). They were accommodated in 'A' Lager, in which there were, recalls Calton Younger, a former Sagan prisoner, 'four brick barracks, each divided into nine rooms, a dozen or so wooden huts, two cookhouses, and two latrines. Two compounds adjoining were under construction . . .'

In late October 1,200 NCOs arrived from *Stalag Luft I*; they occupied '*K*' *Lager*. This doubled the population of the camp. By the beginning of November 1943 the number of prisoners had swelled to 3,000, leading to considerable overcrowding and to a severe lack of toilet facilities. Although a third *Lager*, '*E*', was opened in February 1944 for American NCOs, when a hundred new prisoners reached Heydekrug from *Dulag Luft* on 8 May they had to be accommodated in a large tent. *Stalag Luft VI* would eventually have four compounds, one of which remained unused.

In the meantime, back at Sagan, Centre Compound opened its gates to newly captured British and American officers. But on 8 September 1943 all the USAAF personnel in North, and most of those from Centre, were transferred to the new compound. This was known as South, and what was once West Compound was now called North. As for the British and Commonwealth officers in Centre Compound, some stayed, some were sent to the old East Compound, and some were sent to North. Within two months of the Americans being marched out of North Compound their place was taken not only by new purges from *Dulag Luft* but also by old lags – from Italy.

Their POW itinerary was tortuous: from northern Italy they were taken through Austria to Bavaria and gathered at *Stalag VIIA*; they were then sent to *Stalag VD*, Strasburg, then to *Oflag VA*, Weinsberg. (Some also passed through the former *Oflag XIB* at Brunswick, now re-numbered *Oflag 79*). When they finally arrived at *Stalag Luft III* at the end of October and the first week of November, most were sent to North Compound, but a small number were sent to East and an even smaller number to Centre.

Back to Centre Compound: Eventually the last of the British were moved, in January 1944, to a makeshift camp at Belaria. Centre Compound became all-American; yet another compound was then

| | East | Centre | *Vorlager* | North | South | *Vorlager* | Belaria | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Brit Off** | 618 | 2 | 2 | 1,232 | 11 | 2 | 453 | 2,320 |
| **US Off** | — | 541 | 1 | 1 | 1,018 | 1 | — | 1,562 |
| **Brit NCOs** | 67 | — | 1 | 59 | 2 | — | 72 | 201 |
| **US NCOs** | — | 123 | — | — | 143 | — | — | 266 |
| **Brit ORs** | 47 | — | — | 130 | — | — | 8 | 185 |
| **US ORs** | — | 23 | 3 | — | 22 | 3 | — | 51 |
| **Total** | **732** | **689** | **7** | **1,422** | **1,196** | **6** | **533** | **4,585** |

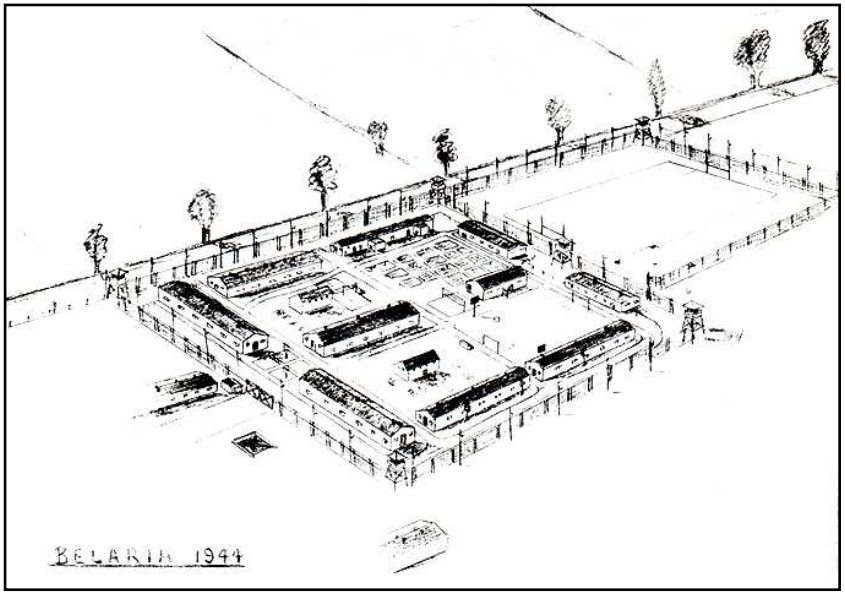
*Figure 1. The total POW strength at Stalag Luft III on 22 February, a month before 'The Great Escape'.*

built for the Americans, known – just to confuse the issue – as West Compound!

The total POW strength at *Stalag Luft III* on 22 February, a month before the famous 'Great Escape', was 4,585 prisoners, divided between the different compounds as shown at Figure 1.

RAF NCOs were now being sent not only to *Stalag Luft VI*, but also – yet again – to *Stalag IVB* at Mühlberg. The first purge of 1943 to this camp arrived on 14 August and was seventy-eight strong. At the end of the month, another 105 were transferred from *Stalag VIIA*, where they had been sent for a few weeks in July and August to avoid the typhus epidemic at Lamsdorf. By the end of the year the number of RAF POWs at Mühlberg would increase to nearly 1,500. This is without the men of the Parachute Regiment and the Glider Pilot Regiment who also found themselves living cheek by jowl with fighter pilots and Bomber and Coastal Command crews.

In the first quarter of 1944 Bomber Command alone lost 1,300 aircrew to captivity, and in the second quarter a further 865, the vast majority of them NCOs. The Americans, too, were losing hundreds of B-17 aircrew. Following Operation MARKET GARDEN in September 1944,

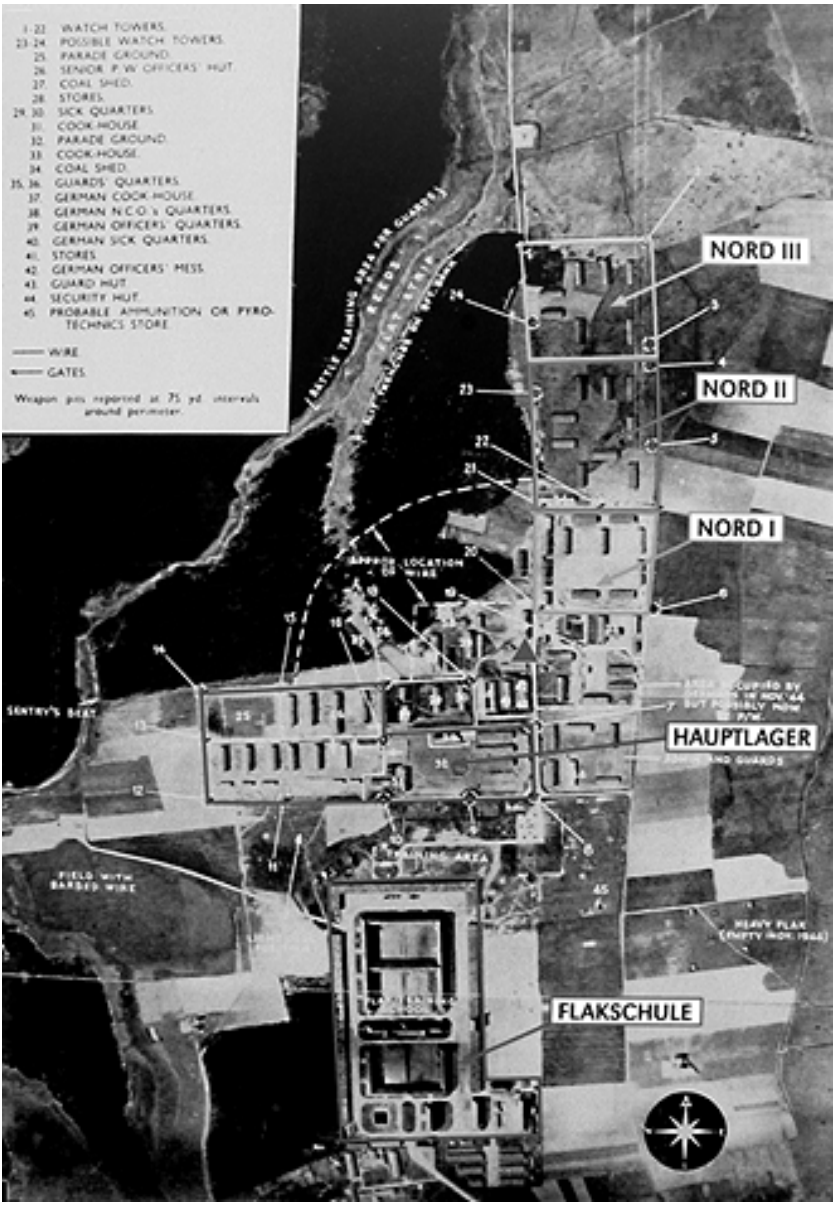



*Sketch of 'Belaria-on-the Hill', the makeshift satellite to Stalag Luft III, established in January 1944.*

more glider pilots and paratroopers turned up at Mühlberg. On 23 December 1944 many of the US Army GIs captured in the Battle of the Bulge arrived in the *Vorlager*; the following morning they were allocated to the RAF compound.

In the meantime, *Stalag Luft I* was also expanding, with separate compounds for RAF officers, RAF NCOs, USAAF officers and USAAF NCOs. At the end of October 1943, however, most of the 1,200 RAF NCOs at Barth were taken to *Stalag Luft VI*. About fifty other ranks elected to stay behind as orderlies but, when the bulk of the NCOs left, *Stalag Luft I* became predominantly an officers' camp.

A new compound, known as North, was opened in February 1944. A South-West Compound, built on what had once been the recreation field, opened in March 1944 for both British and American personnel. When another new compound was opened in October 1944, North Compound became North 1 and the new enclosure North 2. At the end of November North 3 was opened, though it was not yet ready for Habitation.




*The much-expanded site at Stalag Luft I, Barth in early 1945.*

When the Protecting Power visited on 22 February 1945 there were 8,346 prisoners in *Stalag Luft I*: 7,202 Americans and 1,144 British and Commonwealth – the latter being broken down into 759 British; 260 Canadians; 59 Australians; 49 South Africans; 30 New Zealanders; five Rhodesians; three Irish; one Liberian; and 34 'New arrivals'.

Despite the fact that the Soviet Army was rapidly advancing from the east, the *Luftwaffe* decided to open a new camp, *Stalag Luft VII*, one kilometre west of Bankau (now Bąków, Poland), which stood about halfway between Breslau and Oppeln (Opole), and directly in the path of the Russians.

Even though the accommodation barracks were still under construction, *Stalag Luft VII* accepted its first purge from *Dulag Luft* on 6 June 1944. Most of these prisoners had been shot down in May, during the build-up to D-Day. At the end of July they were joined by ninety-eight NCOs who had been transferred from *Stalag 383* at Hohenfels on the 27th, bringing the number up to 230.

For the time being they had to live in tiny, squalid wooden shacks. Some prisoners likened them to hen-huts, others to dog-kennels. Each POW was issued with a palliasse, filled with *erzatz* wool, and two blankets. The camp lacked many of the amenities found in the more established camps – such as electric light – and there was only one water pump.

In late September *Stalag Luft VII* was inundated with paratroopers and NCOs from the Glider Pilot Regiment, who had been captured a few days earlier in Operation MARKET GARDEN. Their arrival brought the prisoner complement up to 800. But at long last, on 13 October, the RAF NCOs moved into permanent quarters, consisting of eight wooden barrack blocks, each with fourteen rooms either side of a central corridor, plus a small utility room at one end for communal use. Each room was intended for twelve occupants, sleeping in double-bunks, and had a wooden table and a small heating stove. In addition, the compound now had two toilet blocks, a shower block (for occasional hot showers), an administration building, and a kitchen and storehouse. There was also an adequate water supply – and electricity. A theatre-cum-recreation hut was completed in November. By 1 January 1945, the camp held 1,578 prisoners, most of them British, Canadian, American, Russian and Polish troops.

With the Soviet advance the German POW system, never really efficient, began to fall apart, and since summer 1944 the OKW had been evacuating prisoners west to prevent them falling into Russian hands.

The evacuation of *Stalag Luft VI* at Heydekrug began on 15 July. By this time there were more than 3,900 British and Commonwealth prisoners in '*A*' and '*K*' *Lagers*, plus some 2,400 Americans. Most of them ended up at *Stalag Luft IV* and *Stalag 357*.

*Stalag Luft IV* was three kilometres from the small village of Kiefheide (now Podborsko, Poland), which lay to the west of Gross Tychow (Tychowo), and roughly halfway between Danzig and Stettin (HQ of *Wehrkreis II*). On 14 May 1944, two weeks before the camp was officially opened, sixty-four Americans arrived, and when Red Cross representatives inspected it on 29 June it already held 1,485 American (but only four RAF) NCOs. The Red Cross were told that the camp was to have four separate and equal-sized compounds, each capable of holding 1,600 men. The second compound would be ready by 15 July (presumably to coincide with the arrival of the prisoners from *Stalag Luft VI*), the third by 1 August, and the fourth by 1 September.

When the men from Heydekrug did arrive, however, the barracks were still not ready and they had to spend their first night sleeping out in '*A*' *Lager*. The next day they were given 'dog kennels' like those at Bankau. Ten men were crammed into each. '*C*' *Lager* opened (behind schedule) on 26 September for the Americans, but several more days were to pass before their barracks were ready. When '*D*' *Lager* opened for the RAF they, too, had to live in partially-completed barracks.

On a second visit to the camp, on 5-6 October, the Red Cross noted that it held 7,089 American and 886 'British' prisoners – 2,146 Americans in '*A*' *Lager*; 1,959 in 'B'; 1,913 in '*C*'; and 1,071 in '*D*' with the 'British', this contingent being made up of 606 British, 147 Canadians, 37 Australians, 22 New Zealanders, eight South Africans, five Czechs, 58 Poles, a Norwegian and two Frenchmen. The Red Cross noted, too, that 'the men are housed in 40 wooden huts, each hut containing 200 men. The huts are only partially finished.' By late December the total number of prisoners in the camp had risen to almost 10,000, of whom about 900 were 'British', and the Germans

were building two more compounds.

The camp at Thorn, to which some 3,000 of the Heydekrug veterans were sent, lay in a hilly and wooded area south of the Vistula, in between an artillery practice range and the road to the city itself to the west, and the main railway line to Bromberg and Danzig to the east. Consisting of eight compounds, it had opened at the beginning of March 1944 to take British Army prisoners from camps all over Germany and Austria, the majority of them from *Stalag 344* at Lamsdorf.

With some 7,000 soldiers already there when the Heydekrug men arrived, after a 400-mile, two-day journey by cattle-truck, the Germans had to build a new compound, and began erecting the usual barbed-wire defences. But shortage of building materials delayed the construction of new huts and in the meantime the newcomers occupied some old army barracks. They were poorly lit, had no heating, and the water supply was inadequate.

On 9 August, however, the POWs at Thorn found themselves once more on the move. (Not included in the purge was a small contingent of Polish airmen who had been moved elsewhere a few days earlier.) This time the destination was Fallingbostel.

The Army and RAF POWs from Thorn arrived on 10 or 11 August. Though loosely referred to as '*Stalag 357* (Fallingbostel)', the camp's official German designation was '*Stalag 357* (Oerbke)', to distinguish it from the Army camp *Stalag XIB* at Fallingbostel, which lay 800 metres to the north-west. They were situated in an area of flat, wooded heathland that before the war had been used as a training ground for German troops. Oerbke itself, a small farming village, was roughly two kilometres from Fallingbostel, which lay in the southern part of the Lüneburg Heath in Lower Saxony, some fifteen kilometres south-west of Soltau and fifty kilometres north of Hannover.

*Stalag 357* had been in existence since 1941 for Soviet prisoners, initially as *Stalag XID*, and contained sixteen wooden and fifteen stone barracks. These were now occupied by the airmen from *Stalag Luft VI* and by soldiers from *Stalag VIIIC* at Kunau (Kunowo). At one point there were 9,332 airmen in the camp: 7,513 British, 681 Canadian, 349 Australian, 225 New Zealand, and 464 South African.

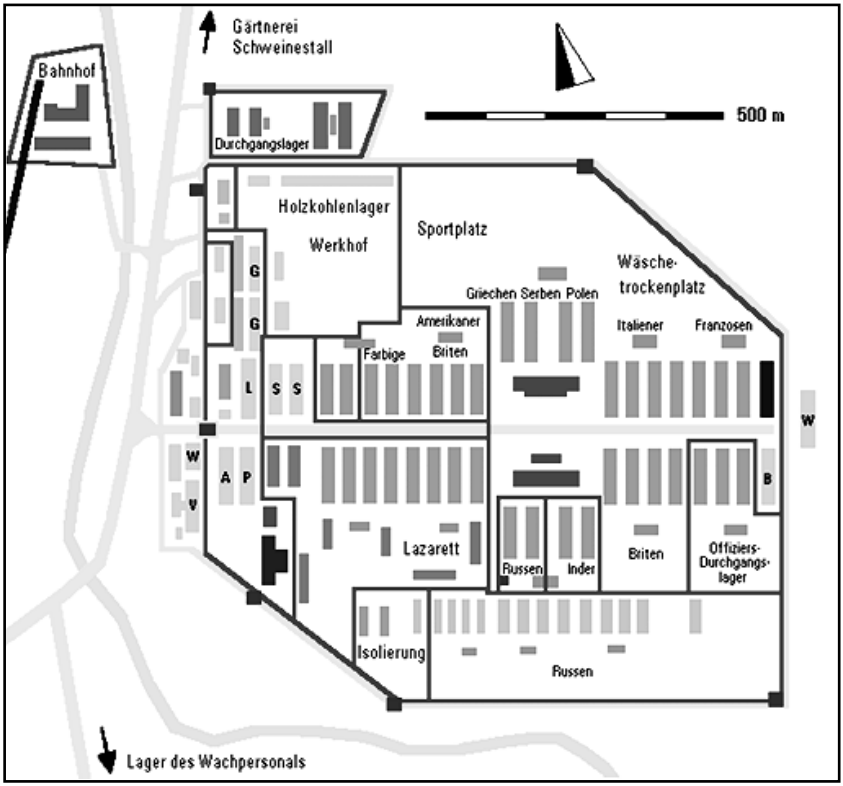
In 1945, evacuation westward began anew, with Bankau and Sagan being cleared in January, and Gross Tychow and Thorn in February.

*The camp complex at Fallingbostel.*

The Bankau evacuation began at 0330 hours on 19 January. After each prisoner had been issued with two and a half days' rations the first evacuation involving the RAF in 1945 began in sub-zero temperatures. There was no transport – for the prisoners or for the guards.

Their journey ended on 8 February 1945 when 1,493 of them arrived at *Stalag IIIA*, Luckenwalde, fifty-two kilometres south of Berlin. All were severely malnourished, and there were sixty-nine cases of dysentery; twenty of frostbite; forty of diarrhoea; eight of bronchitis and twenty-five of muscular rheumatism. Another twenty-three men had blood poisoning and a hundred and fifty were so weak that they were unable to attend roll-calls.

The prisoners at *Stalag Luft III* and the satellite camp at Belaria




*Stalag VIIA, Moosburg.*

had very little time to prepare for their departure, starting on 27 January with the Americans in South Compound, who were given barely thirty minutes' notice. Taking only what they could carry, they left Sagan at about 2300 hours and reached *Stalag VIIA* on the 31st. Next to leave, at 0300 hours on the 28th, were the Americans from the West Compound, who arrived at *Stalag XIIID* at Langwasser, near Nürnberg, on 3 February.

Some three hours after the evacuation of West Compound the 1,500 RAF and 523 Americans in North Compound were moved out, clearing the camp at 0400 hours on 28 January. The Americans joined their compatriots from the West Compound at *Stalag XIIID*. The fourth compound to leave Sagan – the Centre – was led out later on

the morning of the 28th, also bound, like the South Compound, for *Stalag VIIA.*

Turning to RAF officers, those from Belaria set off at 0500 hours. The POWs in the East Compound were the last to leave, at 0600 hours on 28 January. They met up with the POW columns from the North Compound and from Belaria. Left behind at Sagan, however, were 500 American and British hospital cases, who were moved to the empty North Compound.

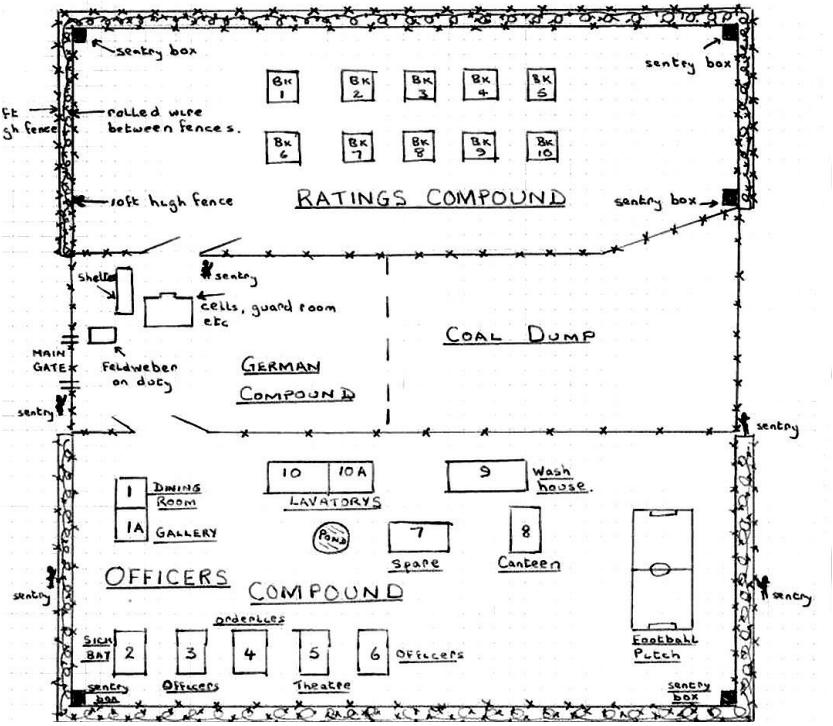
The RAF prisoners, like the Americans, were divided between two camps. Those from North Compound went to *Marlag-und-Milag Nord* at Westertimke, along with half of East Compound. The rest of the prisoners from East Compound went with the Belaria inmates to *Stalag IIIA.*

On 6 February the prisoners who had been in Sagan hospital when *Stalag Luft III* was cleared were evacuated by train. They turned up at *Stalag XIIID,* to which the Americans from North and West Compounds had been sent, on 11 February.

*Stalag XIIID* had become one of the biggest assembly points for prisoners captured in, or evacuated to, the west and already had 30,000 POWs on its nominal role, of whom 21,000 were engaged in work details. Consisting of four large compounds, each with several sub-compounds, *Stalag XIIID* was situated on the grounds of a former SS and Hitler Youth camp in a wooded area six kilometres to the south-east of Nürnberg. It was also barely three kilometres from the Maerzfeld railway marshalling yards – and close enough for two thirds of the huts to have been destroyed by RAF Bomber Command on the night of 27/28 August 1943. The huts had not been rebuilt. Others were simply falling to pieces, with gaps between the planks letting in the light and the cold.

The officers from *Stalag Luft III* were separated from the rest of the POWs in five compounds, numbers 3 to 7. There should have been twelve huts in each compound, each capable of holding 150 men, but compounds 3 and 4 had only eight or nine huts between them, the rest having been destroyed by the aforementioned RAF raid. Tents had been erected in the empty spaces in compounds 3 and 4, and these accommodated newly shot-down airmen.

*Marlag und Milag Nord*, opened in 1942, was in *Wehrkreis X* and situated on a flat, sandy plain north-west of Tarmstedt. As the name




*Marlag.*

suggests there were two camps – *Marlag* (short for *Marinelager*) for the Royal Navy, and *Milag* (*Marineinterierenlager*) *Nord*, about a mile away, for the 10,000 prisoners of the Merchant Navy. *Marlag* was itself split into two compounds – 'O' for officers (*Offiziere*), to the west, and 'M' (*Mannschaft*) for the ratings, to the east. In between the two compounds was the *Vorlager*. At the time the RAF arrived on 4 February there were still some 400 officers in 'O' and about 2,000 ratings in '*M*'. The RAF prisoners, numbering some 2,000, were housed in *Marlag* '*M*'.

The compound contained the cookhouse, the washhouse, an *Abort* (a communal lavatory), the theatre building, the sick quarters and eight barrack blocks. An adjacent compound, to the east, contained an auxiliary kitchen, another *Abort*, and five barracks. The RAF prisoners were segregated from those of the Royal Navy. Their part of the camp

had been deliberately vandalised by the previous occupants in the belief that it would be used for German soldiers.

The Belaria inmates and the rest of the East Compound prisoners reached Luckenwalde station on 4 February 1945 and entered *Stalag IIIA* at 0600 hours on 5 February. The 1,493 NCOs from *Stalag Luft VII*, Bankau, who had been moved out nine days before Sagan was evacuated, arrived a couple of days later.

The evacuation of Gross Tychow began at midday on 7 February. A new *Stalag Luft IV* was under construction at Wöbbelin bei Ludwigslust, roughly halfway between Berlin and Hamburg, but was never completed. Instead 8,561 POWs were marched to Fallingbostel, and a further 1,500 went to *Stalag Luft I*, which they reached on 14 February.

The RAF prisoners destined for Fallingbostel reached the town on 29 March 1945. Some 800 of them were directed to *Stalag 357* at Oerbke, the rest to *Stalag XIB* at Fallingbostel itself. The latter camp was re-designated *Stalag 356*, but soon afterwards merged with Oerbke, and the two camps were administered together as *Stalag 357*.

Most of the Allied airmen captured in March 1945 were sent to *Stalag XIIID*. But some were being held at *Stalag VA*, a former German cavalry barracks near the River Neckar at Ludwigsburg that had been a camp for Polish Army prisoners since October 1939. Ludwigsburg was about twelve kilometres north of Stuttgart, under which military district it came, but more importantly from the viewpoint of the prisoners, only about fifty miles from the River Rhine. Allied troops had crossed the Rhine on 24 March 1945. Hopes of an early liberation were dashed, however, when on the night of 1/2 April the camp was evacuated towards München. At last, a week later, the prisoners were liberated by the US Seventh Army; they were flown back to England from Memmingen on 8 May, the day on which the war in Europe officially ended.

Other ‘second marches’ were also taking place. On 3 April all able-bodied British and American airmen were evacuated from *Stalag XIIID*. By now the German guards were so demoralised that many POWs were able to leave the column at will. Nevertheless, most of the prisoners reached *Stalag VIIA* on 20 April. By this time there were about 100,000 prisoners at the camp. On 28 April the German Commandant handed over the internal administration to the senior

*A column of POWs on the march in April 1945.*

Allied officer, and the majority of the German guards left. The camp was liberated by men of the US Third Army's 14th Armoured Division the following day.

The sick POWs at *Stalag XIIID* left on the morning of 4 April 1945, also heading for *Stalag VIIA*. They eventually crossed the Danube on 24 April, but were never to reach the camp. They, too, were liberated by the US Third Army, but not until 29 April.

On 5 April the prisoners at Westertimke, Fallingbostel and Oerbke were told that they were to be marched to the so-called 'Northern Redoubt' in Schleswig-Holstein and Denmark.

At Fallingbostel, the first column of 1,500 prisoners was moved out at about 0500 hours on 6 April. The rest of the camp followed the next day, all 12,000 being marched in a north-easterly direction, each man carrying a loaf of bread and a kilogram of margarine. Two days later 1,500 of them were ordered to march back to the camp, as the number of prisoners on the move was blocking German lines of communication. On their return to Fallingbostel they found that thousands of prisoners from other camps had taken their place. They erected temporary shelters and awaited liberation, which happy event took place on the morning of Monday, 16 April, when a spearhead of the British 7th Armoured Division appeared at the main gate.

Those prisoners who had not been sent back to Fallingbostel

continued their north-easterly trek until, east of Lüneburg, the column split, one half going in a northerly direction to cross the River Elbe by the railway bridge at Lauenburg (forty kilometres south-east of Hamburg), the other taking an easterly route to cross it by ferry even further to the south-east at Bleckede.

With the British Army pressing from the west the time had also come for *Marlag und Milag Nord* to be evacuated. After a number of false starts the prisoners left on the morning of 10 April, finally fetching up at Lübeck on 23 April. Some occupied a former artillery school near the old *Oflag*, while others squatted in farm buildings and factories or camped out in the open.

By the last week of April the RAF from Westertimke and the majority of the former Fallingbostel prisoners were billeted or camping out about thirty kilometres from Lübeck. For most of them, liberation came on 2 May 1945 by units of the British 2nd Army's 11th Armoured Division.

A handful of RAF officers were also at *Oflag IXA/H*, which was evacuated 1 April. The prisoners from Spangenberg were liberated by the Americans three days later.

In addition to all the camps mentioned above, since the beginning of 1941 some forty RAF officers had also been sent to Colditz. This was a *Sonderlager* – or 'special camp' – run by the German army for nuisance prisoners and valuable hostages. Transferring RAF prisoners there was done on a *post hoc* basis as a deterrent to further escape attempts and was outside the normal, mass movement from camp to camp.

By VE-Day, all the prisoners in Colditz and the last camps, as well as those camping out, had been liberated and were on their way home – except for those liberated by the Russians, such as *Stalag IVB* and *Stalag IIIA*.

By mid-day on 21 April all the guards at Luckenwalde had gone. The next day the Russians arrived. The Germans guarding *Stalag IVB* left on the evening of 22 April. The Russians reached there, too, on the following day. In both cases they ordered all the prisoners to stay where they were.

Discussions were taking place at the highest level to work out the administrative details for the prompt release and return of all British and American POWs using available air or motor transport. At a

*Oflag IVC, Colditz.*

meeting in Halle with SHAEF on 16 May, the Soviet authorities prolonged the negotiations by insisting that the Western prisoners be repatriated through the Black Sea port of Odessa and by tying in the release of American, British, and other Allied POWs to the return of all Soviet prisoners and displaced persons in the West, many of whom preferred to stay put.

Some of the RAF personnel at *Stalag IIIA* lost patience, going through the wire and heading towards the American lines either on foot or on stolen bicycles. But there were still 7,000 ex-POWs at *Stalag IVB* on 18 May in need of medical supplies, medical attention and food. The actual number of British and Commonwealth Air Force NCOs in *Stalag IVB* at the time of liberation was 1,593, including thirty-three who had been commissioned but not sent to officers' camps.

Finally, on 22 May 1945, the Halle Agreement on 'the most expeditious overland delivery of Allied and Soviet ex-prisoners of war' was signed. It stipulated how and to which reception points both sides should send the former prisoners, the daily transit capacities of

each reception point, the transportation plans, and other details. However, the Luckenwalde and Mühlberg POWs were released two days before the signing and taken by road and rail to Halle. On 22 May they were flown from there to Brussels by the Americans in C-47 Dakotas. There they joined the large queue for the airlift back to England.

**Notes:**

1 Williams, Eric; *The Wooden Horse* (Collins; London; 1948).

2 Brickhill, Paul: *The Great Escape* (Faber and Faber; London; 1951).

3 Dominy, John; *The Sergeant Escapers* (London. Ian Allan. 1974).

4 For the purposes of this paper, 'RAF' can be taken to mean also RAAF, RCAF, RNZAF, SAAF and Fleet Air Arm.

**5** Crawley, Aidan; *Escape From Germany: A History of R.A.F. Escapes during the War* (London; Collins; 1956).

6 They were, in order of capture: Sgt G F Booth, AC II L J Slattery, Plt Off L H Edwards, Sqn Ldr S S Murray, Fg Off A B Thompson, Sgt C A Hill, AC I S A Burry, AC I P F Pacey, Lt R P Thurstan RN, Lt G B K Griffiths RM, Fg Off R D Baughan, Plt Off R M Coste, Sgt R L Galloway, AC I H Liggett, Sgt G J Springett, Plt Off D G Heaton-Nichols, Fg Off A C MacLachlan, Wg Cdr H M A Day AM, Fg Off J Tilsley, Cpl A R Gunton, LAC R E Fletcher, Sgt J W Lambert, Plt Off M J Casey, Sgt A G Fripp, AC I J Nelson, Plt Off H R Bewlay, Sgt S McIntyre, AC I T P Adderley, Plt Off P A Wimberley, Sgt H Ruse, Sgt T May and LAC H A Jones.

7 In June 1940 all RAF 'other ranks' – that is, aircraftmen – who carried out flying duties were promoted, literally overnight, to the rank of sergeant. For the rest of the war, the only 'other ranks' in air force camps would be those captured performing ground duties on aerodromes overrun by the Germans, such as in France, Crete and the Balkans, or accompanying Combined Operations units, for example at Dieppe

8 The camp at Schubin was re-numbered *Oflag 64* and re-opened on 6 June 1943 to take American soldiers, most of them captured in North Africa. The change from Roman to Arabic numerals to designate camps cannot be fully explained, though in view of the fact that the latter were used for *Dulags*, especially in the occupied territories, it is possible that the OKW (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* – Armed Forces High Command) now considered these camps temporary.

## MORNING DISCUSSION

**Wg Cdr Jeff Jefford**. When an evader succeeded in crossing the Pyrenees into Spain he was in a neutral, but fascist police state, which was, at least ideologically, sympathetic to Germany. How secure were they?

**Air Cdre Graham Pitchfork.** They were certainly at risk in the area close to the border, which is why the guides tried to get them 20 or 30 kms into Spain – towards Barcelona in the east or San Sebastian in the west. The privations suffered by evaders who were taken by the Spanish police could be quite significant and some of them spent several months in the Miranda Camp until their release could be negotiated by the Embassy staff. But they were not secure while they were in the immediate border area and there were certainly instances of people being taken back across the mountains and handed over to the authorities in occupied France.

**Mike Meech.** We've heard about Spain. What about Switzerland? I believe that Freddie West, the First World War VC, was involved there.

**Air Cdre Graham Pitchfork.** Yes, Freddie West was the Air Attaché and he would have been influential in these matters. It was, of course, sometimes easier for someone shot down over Germany to head for Switzerland and it could be relatively easy to cross the border. Once you were in, however, it was difficult to get out again and some people were in Switzerland for a year or two. Those who were eager to get back were fed into the French system and over the Pyrenees. The extreme south east corner of France was occupied by the Italians and the frontier could be easier to cross there.

**Gp Capt Jock Heron.** Some reference has been bade to a 'Prisoner Exchange Scheme'. Can anyone enlarge on that? For instance, how were prisoners classified as being suitable for exchange, and how were the practical political issues involved in moving people to and from a hostile Europe?

**Charles Rollings.** The camps were visited at intervals by a Mixed Medical Commission which would include one or two representatives of the Protecting Power, ie Switzerland, a German doctor and a Swiss

*Col Friedrich Von Lindeiner, Commandant, Stalag Luft III from April 1942, was relieved of his command following 'The Great Escape' of March 1944.*

doctor. They would examine prisoners who were nominated by the British Medical Officer for that camp. Suitable candidates might be those suffering from wounds sustained when they were shot down, those who had become seriously ill while in captivity and people suffering from mental illness. Some of the latter were feigned cases, of course. Even though the screening process was very thorough, some Camp Commandants were deeply suspicious about the psychiatric cases and were reluctant to endorse them. One of the worst offenders was von Lindeiner at *Stalag Luft III*. He had no time at all for the British doctors and their recommendations and he was instrumental in stopping a number of repatriations .

As to the politics, the arrangements for repatriation were negotiated between the War Offices of the governments concerned, generally through the Attachés appointed to the Protecting Power – Switzerland – and sometimes through neutral Sweden. It was generally necessary to reach some sort of parity, similar numbers from each side. The British prisoners would all be moved to one camp where they boarded a specially commissioned neutral train which took them to a Baltic port and from there by sea to Sweden. The German contingent would sail to the same port where the exchange would take place and they swapped ships for the return journeys.

That, broadly speaking, is how it worked but, as you can imagine, there was a good deal of very sensitive negotiation involved and the whole business was fraught with difficulty. The first repatriation scheme, of 1941, actually broke down because the Germans were insisting on recovering more of their prisoners than they were

prepared to release. So it was 1942 before the next exchange took place, and that involved Italy. There were no more British repatriations until September 1943.

**Heron.** Did this work in the Far East?

**Rollings.** Perhaps surprisingly, it did, but on an even smaller scale. There were a few exchanges – to America – but very few.

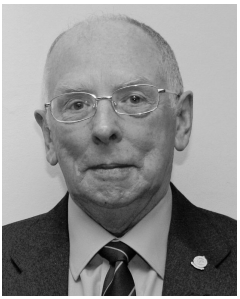
**Sir Freddie Sowrey.** Peter provided us with an excellent description of the escape aids. Do we know how effective they were in use?

**Peter Elliott.** The effectiveness was difficult to measure. We know that a lot of people did use them – and got back. We also know that the Germans knew about them. I think that some of Clayton-Hutton's designs may have been better in theory than in practice – for instance, I fancy that a magnetised pencil clip that would act as a compass if the pencil it was attached to was floated in a bowl of water might have been a bit difficult to use in practice.

**Rollings.** A couple of thoughts. One article that was mentioned was a blanket which, if rubbed, revealed a pattern permitting the blanket to be cut up and reassembled to make a suit. It turned out that the quality of the blanket was too good to be made into a suit because the clothing worn by foreign workers was of much coarser cloth. As for the compasses, at *Stalag Luft III* they did not use those provided by MI9 because the ones they made themselves were better!

# THE ESCAPE LINES OF NORTH-WEST EUROPE IN WW II

**by Roger Stanton**



*Roger Stanton spent 22 years serving with the Royal Corps of Signals and the Intelligence Corps. Post-retirement he remained with the latter for a further ten years and he has sustained his connections with the military as a contract instructor in Combat Survival Techniques. During his service he developed an interest in the work of the Intelligence Services and the Escape Lines of WW II and became associated with the, now sadly defunct, Royal Air Force Escaping Society. This led to his founding of the Escape Lines Memorial Society (ELMS) and its excellent website.*

May I first thank the organisers of this meeting for inviting me to speak to you today. Building on Graham Pitchfork's presentation on MI9, I shall attempt to provide an overview of the main escape lines in operation during WW II.

## Introduction

The nature of the 'parcels' being passed along the escape routes of Western Europe changed as the war progressed. Civilian fugitives aside, the first consignments were soldiers and airmen of the BEF who had been left behind to fight rearguard actions and were still at large or who had escaped while being marched into captivity in the summer of 1940. They were followed by downed RAF and Commonwealth aircrew who were joined, from 1942 onwards, by American flyers and in 1944 by soldiers, particularly airborne troops.

With the fall of France, stragglers from the BEF had begun to gather at the main ports, along with casualties who had escaped from hospitals. Other evaders were in hiding in Paris and Brussels while still more were lying low in the countryside, some earning their keep by working for farmers, until the situation became clearer. It was time to try to get them home.

Before being sent to Lisbon as Vice-Consul in the summer of 1940, Donald Darling was interviewed by Col Claude Dansey, the Assistant Chief of SIS, who briefed him on the need to establish covert lines of

communications with occupied France. By September Darling was stationed in Gibraltar, with offices in Madrid and Lisbon, and his agents had infiltrated into France via routes over the Pyrenees. Although he would become intimately involved with military personnel who succeeded in reaching Gibraltar, Darling was primarily an officer of SIS, rather than MI9.

While probing into France, Darling had set up a liaison with a Capt Ian Garrow of the Seaforth Highlanders. Garrow had based himself in Marseille whence he had set up evasion routes from Perpignan over the eastern Pyrenees into Spain where he had engaged reliable agents in Catalonia and the Basque region. The people who operated Garrow's network of routes, which stretched north as far as the Franco-Belgian border, came from all walks of life from peasant farmers to doctors, rich and poor alike.

While significant early progress had been made, it is worth making the point from the outset that the greatest risk to the security of any escape line was collaborators. It is generally true to say that, in any major city, it is very difficult to find someone who does not wish to be found. In many cases people involved in the escape lines who were arrested had been betrayed – not caught – and there were substantial rewards on offer to anyone who was prepared to co-operate with the occupation authorities.

For ease of reference I shall discuss the escape routes by country, running from north to south.

**Norway**

For men on the run in Norway the challenge was more often a case of survival than of evasion. Much of the country is inside the Arctic Circle; the nights are very long with inland temperatures often below -40°C. For the evader, total darkness was both an asset and a liability.

The main escape routes from Norway ran east into Sweden or west towards the North Sea. In the south east, from 1942, Oslo became the focal point for many of the organised escape lines with some 50,000 fugitives reaching freedom, most of those entering Sweden being civilians.

Most of the Norwegian population lived in the large towns and cities or in small fishing villages spread along more than 1,000 miles of rugged coastline. In the hinterland there were isolated farms and

farming communes but many of these were unoccupied during the harsh winter period. Isolated farms in the mountains were often linked to the Norwegian Resistance (*Milorg*) and it was this organisation that came to the rescue of many evaders. Whichever route to Sweden was chosen, and dependent upon how far north the evader was and/or the time of year, the weather could be extremely hostile. There was only one alternative to walking in the snow or ski-marching and that was to hitch a lift on the 'Shetland Bus', but this could only be arranged by *Milorg* in conjunction with the Special Operations Executive (SOE). MI9 had no established route structure in Norway.

When evaders made contact with the Resistance, *Milorg* informed the local SOE agent, who notified London by radio. SOE ran a delivery service of arms, ammunition and agents using a fleet of small fishing boats – the 'Shetland Bus' – from its base at Luna Voe in the Shetland Islands; on its return run the 'bus' brought back agents and other fugitives, including evaders. The 'Shetland Bus' was the most northern of all escape line routes but it was an asset of SOE not MI9.

The boats were manned by volunteer fishermen, who made up to three trips a week. The passage across the North Sea in winter is difficult enough as it is, but the hazards were amplified by the risk of interception by German gunboats. Although lightly armed, if attacked the boats stood little chance; their only cover was darkness.

Evaders bound for Sweden on foot or on skis would be passed along a chain of isolated rural communities often escorted by local folk. When a farm house was not available they were obliged to shelter in caves or woodcutters' huts. It was generally the practice to rest by day and travel at night, although it is never completely dark during the Norwegian summer. Many aircrew on the run suffered badly from foot problems as flying boots were unsuitable for mountain walking.

There were no major land operations in Norway after 1940, although a number of Commando-style sabotage raids were mounted in conjunction with *Milorg* and SOE, one of the most daring being the destruction of the heavy water plant at Vemork, near Rjukan. The plant was destroyed and the saboteurs were pursued into Sweden by over 3,000 German ski troops. Nevertheless, with one exception, the whole team eventually got back to England. The one who stayed behind was the radio operator, Knut Haugland, who spent several

months in Norway training Resistance operators before returning to the UK via the Shetland Bus.

The main organisations that assisted escapers and evaders in Norway were:

- *Milorg* (Organised by the Norwegian Military)
- *Sivorg* (Organised by civilians)
- XU (a covert intelligence agency)
- The Communist Resistance Organisation

**Denmark**

Since Denmark is flanked on three sides by the sea and shares its only land border with Germany, this imposed severe constraints on MI9's activities. As with Norway, with the exception of Commando raids, Resistance and SOE operations, there was little overt action in Denmark so very few Allied soldiers were directly involved. Since the main bomber 'corridor' to Germany ran further south, over Holland, Belgium and Northern France, this was also true of aircrew. Nevertheless Allied aircraft were occasionally brought down over Denmark and the first formal evasion route, operating out of Frederikshavn, was established in early 1943. Prior to this individual fishing boats had ferried fugitives across to Sweden or transferred them to Swedish vessels at sea. MI9 briefings to aircrew taking part in operations over Denmark and Norway recommended that if they were brought down they should keep clear of the defended west coast and head east towards Sweden. The arrangements at Frederikshavn were followed by others, all involving fishing boats.

In October 1943 the Germans began the arrest and deportation of Jews. The Danes reacted swiftly and, of a Jewish community of approximately 8,000, just over 7,500 were transported to Sweden by fishermen while others were kept in safe-houses. Altogether more than 18,000 fugitives left Denmark for Sweden during WW II, including nearly 200 aircrew.

Of the aircrew who were brought down over Denmark, many headed towards Aarhus, Aalborg and Alback; from there all routes converged on the northern fishing port of Sæby. The small, shallow draft, local boats, which were able to use waters denied to larger

enemy vessels, took their passengers as far as Gothenburg, a distance of 60 miles, or passed them on to Swedish ships in the Kattegat. A transfer at sea was the preferred option, as it permitted the whole exercise to be conducted under cover of darkness, with the fishing boats being back at Sæby before the harbour was routinely checked by the German authorities.

At Sæby, Ditlev Pederson organised vessels to sail with evaders between Sæby and Copenhagen. Small ships like the *Elsie* and the *Marie* had hidden rooms constructed for one or two fugitives. The fishing boats *Laura* and *Karen* were added to this fleet. By the summer of 1944 all the Jutland routes and their boats combined into one organisation that included the ports of Skagen, Strandby, Frederikshavn, Sæby, Aalborg, and Grenå. Many airmen who ditched were rescued by small fishing boats and taken to local ports for onward movement to safe-houses.

**The Netherlands**

The history of escape lines in the Netherlands is more complex and fragmented than those in Belgium or France for two principal reasons. First, in contrast to most of Western Europe, the Netherlands was controlled by the SS, not the German Army. As a result, life in Holland was far more tightly controlled and rules more rigidly enforced than was the case elsewhere. That said, while the SS was in overall command, it is worth noting that there were large numbers of German troops in the Netherlands because it contained a heavy concentration of anti-aircraft guns and night fighters as a counter to Bomber Command aircraft overflying on their way to Germany. Secondly, assistance provided to evaders in the Netherlands was far more localised and, with the exception of John Weidner's Dutch-Paris Line, no Dutch group sponsored a route that extended on through Belgium and France, most groups simply transferring their evaders to the *Comète* and O'Leary networks (*see below*).

Most escapers and evaders in occupied Europe headed south to cross the Pyrenees into Spain. This entailed an arduous and dangerous journey of up to 1,000 miles by train, bicycle or on foot, most of it through German-occupied territory, with the authorities often being assisted by local police and militia. The nature of the help that a downed aviator might receive – if any – was determined by the place

*Johanna Maria (Joke) Folmer was one of the leading figures in the Dutch Resistance. Not yet twenty years of age, she began acting as a courier in 1942 and before her arrest in 1944 she had assisted more than 300 men, many of them aircrew, to escape. Miraculously, she survived and subsequently received a number of decorations, including the George Medal.*

that he had been shot down. Many local folk were deterred from assisting evaders for fear of reprisals by the occupying forces and a number of evaders were simply handed over to the authorities.

There was also significant activity by the German Counter Intelligence Services, the *Abwehr*, which employed double agents with considerable success. These agents infiltrated both the SOE Sections and many of the escape line groups; as a result, many agents were compromised, often being captured on landing as they parachuted into Holland. Any evaders who were assisted were quickly transferred to organisations in Belgium and France, both for their own safety and for that of the escape lines.

Throughout WW II there were many well-organised groups in the Netherlands that gave help and assistance to Allied escapers and evaders. Some worked independently; others were associated with lines that operated in Belgium and France. The longest and most independent organisation was the so-called Dutch-Paris Line, which is believed to have been established in early 1943. Its name is said to have originated in a question put to an RAF airman when he reached Paris, 'Where did you come from?' to which he responded, 'Dutch to Paris'.

The Dutch-Paris route had been started by John Weidner who had studied at Collonges on the Franco-Swiss border where he had walked extensively and knew the area well. Many of Weidner's early couriers were known to evaders only by their code names – 'Francoise', 'Okkie',' Anne-Marie', 'Lucy', 'Simone' and 'Jaqueline'. Although

this route was successful, evaders arriving in Switzerland found themselves interned for the duration, unable to leave the country because of Swiss neutrality. Many internees then set about escaping from Switzerland into France with the assistance of the O'Leary Line (*see below*).

A new influx of fugitives arrived in September 1944 – paratroopers from the 1st Airborne Division. Following the failure of Operation MARKET GARDEN, some of the survivors were hidden in Holland pending the arrival of the Allies while others were assisted by Dutch helpers to find their way back to Allied lines.

The Biesboch area, a fresh water delta region of waterways, creeks and islands was a natural hiding place for evaders in Holland. Operations from the Biesboch resulted in large numbers of men, particularly aircrew, returning to Allied lines. The price of their freedom was high; many couriers and safe-house keepers were lost. In one incident, a young girl courier was arrested in Paris carrying an address book in her handbag which unfortunately implicated other helpers. One hundred and fifty people were arrested, forty of whom died or never returned from the concentration camps; some were from the Dutch-Paris Line, one being John Weidner's sister.

MI9's successful Operation PEGASUS I, took place on the night of the 22/23 October 1944. One hundred and thirty-eight fugitives, mainly British airborne troops together with members of the Dutch Resistance, were led through woods to the Rhine by men of the Glider Pilot Regiment. The US 506 Parachute Regiment had already established a bridgehead on the north bank where British and Canadian engineers provided boats to ferry the men across. Based on the success of PEGASUS I, a similar operation was mounted on the night of 17 November but PEGASUS II was compromised from the start and was a failure; only a handful of men made it to safety by making their own arrangements over the next few days.

**Belgium**

In May 1940 the Belgian King surrendered his armed forces and the country was occupied. Many of the BEF's wounded had been left behind in Brussels, some injured soldiers being smuggled from their hospital beds to be hidden in safe-houses. By the end of the year, others, who had escaped while being marched into captivity, were

*Pte James Cromar, the first man to reach freedom via the Comète Line.*

being hidden near the Franco-Belgian border or in Brussels, but with fuel and food becoming scarce it became increasingly difficult both to shelter and to move evaders.

What began as an informal network of friends (many of whom had been nurses and had known Edith Cavell) who were prepared to harbour evaders, now had to devise a means of getting them back to England. By the spring of 1941, Andrée '*Dédée*' de Jongh had become the main organiser in Brussels. Through a school friend, Arnold Deppé, who was working for an American film company in San Sebastian, arrangements were made to set up a route through France to the south western Pyrenees at St Jean de Luz.

Deppé organised the Spanish links with local guides and safe-houses; he also set up safe-houses in Paris while de Jongh organised the Belgian end of the network with links to Paris and on to Bayonne. The arrangements were in place by summer of 1941 when de Jongh led her first group down the route. Using false papers and travelling by train they succeeded in reaching St Jean de Luz, whence they were taken across the mountains and the River Bidassoa to reach their ultimate destination, the British Consulate in Bilbao. The first evader to reach freedom, accompanied by two Belgians, via what was initially known as the DD (Deppé-de Jongh) Line, was Pte James Cromar of the Gordon Highlanders on the 17 August 1941.

By September a second network of safe-houses had been established in the Bayonne area run by another Belgian, Elvire de Greef, from her newly acquired home at Anglet '*The Villa Voisin*'. That month more evaders, again soldiers, were moved via what, after several more changes of name, would eventually become the famous *Comète* Line. Sadly, on 19 August 1941, while making only his

*Andrée de Jongh. personally escorted more than 100 men to safety. Although she was eventually arrested and spent more than two years in captivity, the Comète Line, which she had founded, continued to function and is credited with have assisted more than 800 fugitives. Among her many international decorations, she was awarded the George Medal.*

second trip, Arnold Deppé was arrested at Lille Station.

De Jongh requested money to pay for safe-house keepers, mountain guides and trains but, suspected by the Embassy and Consulate staffs in Spain of being a *Gestapo* plant, she experienced some initial difficulty in convincing them that she really could rescue evaders. Despite their suspicions, however, she was encouraged to recover pilots. The *Comète* obliged and the first group to reach Spain was accepted as proof of her loyalty. From this point on the movement of Allied aircrew became a priority for the *Comète* Line, although de Jongh also delivered intelligence reports for London, hence her code name 'Postwoman'.

Brussels itself, and the link between there and Paris, became the most dangerous section of the Line. In February 1942, it was blown again and in August 1942 nineteen year-old Andrée 'Nadine' Dumon, the main courier organiser between Brussels and Paris, was arrested. Once more the Line was rebuilt and evaders resumed their travels to the western Pyrenees. In November 1942 two German agents posing as Americans infiltrated the line and it was blown yet again. As a result, In January 1943 three aircrew were captured along with Andrée de Jongh and safe-house keeper Francia Usandizaga at her farm in the foothills of the Pyrenees. Due to the machinations of other German agents the Paris sector was also blown. By late June 1943 Jacques Le Grelle and his associates had repaired the Line and the highest number of aircrew evaders ever was on the move. For example Micheline 'Michou' Dumon, who had replaced her younger sister, Andrée,

*Left, Andrée 'Nadine' Dumon and (right) her sister Micheline 'Michou' were both prominent members of the Comète Line. Although Michou was a year older; she was small, able to pass for sixteen and dressing as a schoolgirl helped her to avoid trouble; she was another Belgian who was awarded a George Medal.*

following her capture, is credited with having facilitated the movement of no fewer than 150 aircrew. In December 1943 a guide and an evader were tragically lost in the dangerous Bidassoa River when confronted by border guards.

In April 1944, *Comète* was back in commission following yet another infiltration of the line by a German agent. At this point in the war with D-Day approaching, it was becoming increasingly dangerous to move evaders by road or rail because of air attacks on communications links. *Comète*'s role was therefore reappraised in conjunction with MI9 and it was decided to create camps in forested regions, where aircrew could be hidden until they were liberated by the advancing Allies. This operation, MARATHON, involved evaders being held in secret in Brittany, the Belgian Ardennes and in the Fréteval Forest near Chateaudun in France. In Fréteval alone 152 evaders were hidden from May to September 1944.

**France – The Pat O'Leary Line**

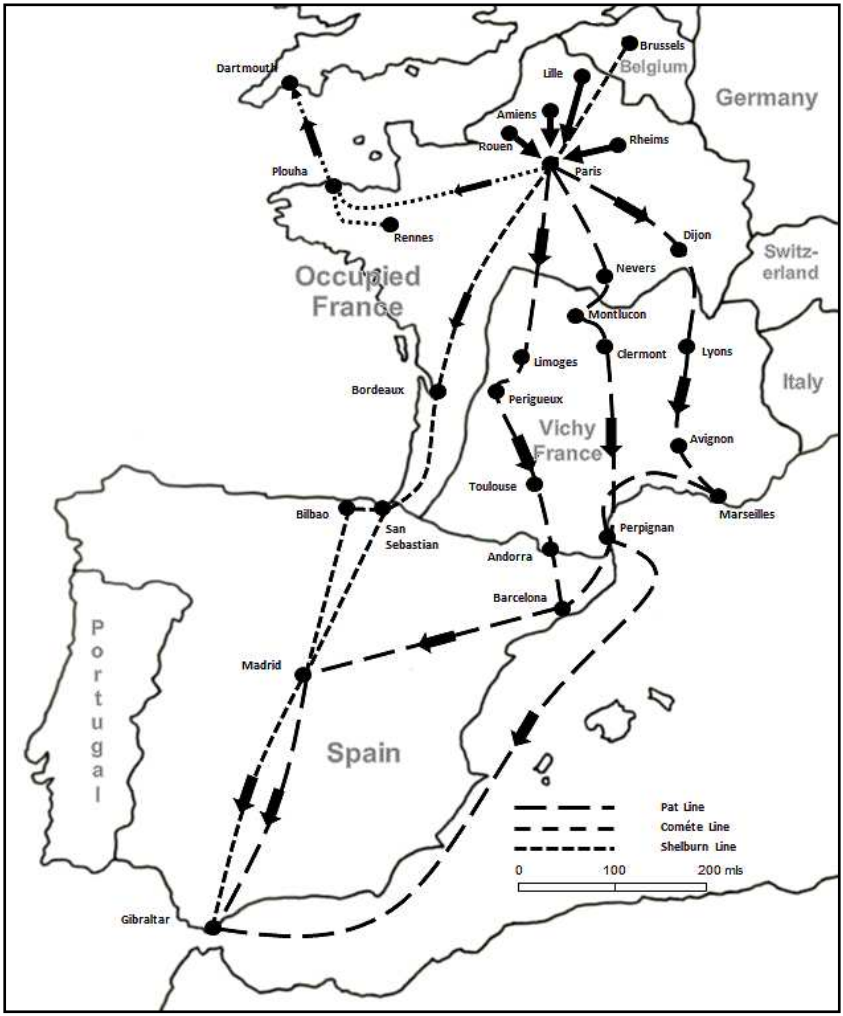
During the summer of 1940 stragglers from the BEF, all of them in need of assistance, funds and shelter had begun to congregate in Bordeaux while others had made for Marseille. Among the latter was

*Capt Ian Garrow (left) and The Rev Dr Donald Currie Caskie*
(Courtesy of www.christopherlong.co.uk)

the aforementioned Capt Ian Garrow of the Seaforths who set about finding a way to get these men out of France.

Having made contact with Capt Frederick Fitch, Lt William Sillar and Flt Lt Paddy Treacy (of No 74 Sqn), Garrow began to create an organisation based on Marseille. Treacy soon made his own way to Spain and after Fitch had followed him across the Pyrenees his place was taken by Capt Charles Murchie, who had escaped from a POW camp. Another early member of the team was Dr George 'Rodo' Rodocanachi; born in Liverpool, of Greek parentage, he had been educated in Paris and had spent his holidays in Marseille. Together with his wife, Fanny, and their elderly maid, Seraphine, Rodocanachi ran the line's main safe-house in Marseille at 21 Rue Roux de Brignoles and used his surgery as a collecting house for fugitives. Many other helpers joined the line at this stage including: Tom Kenny, a Canadian resident in Marseille; Elizabeth Haden-Guest, who had fled there from Paris; Georges Zarrifi and Louis Nouveau.

Another key player was the Rev Donald Caskie who, having




*The Main European Escape Routes.*

vacated his Scottish Church in Paris one step ahead of the Germans, had taken over the Seaman's Mission at 46 Rue de Forbin on the understanding that it was to be used only for civilian refugees. As a fellow Scot, Caskie joined forces with Garrow, to provide a very effective safe-house. Indeed, the Seaman's Mission became what may

*Albert-Marie Edmond Guérisse* aka *Pat O'Leary. After the war, Guérisse rejoined the Belgian Army. Having risen to become head of its medical branch, he retired in 1970 as a major general; among his 35 international decorations the British had conferred a KBE, the DSO and a GC.*

have been the largest safe-house in France. Food was left in the doorways of the Mission at night by well-wishers and anonymous telephone calls provided advance warning of police checks. Caskie took the soldiers' unwanted uniforms and disposed of them in the harbour at night in sacks weighted with rocks.

Meanwhile, fugitives continued to home in on Marseille, whence they were evacuated by sea or escorted across the eastern foothills of the Pyrenees and on to Gibraltar or Lisbon. The leadership of the group evolved as members of the original team moved on but by the spring of 1941 Garrow was running the line.

In May 1940, Albert-Marie Guérisse, a medical officer in the Belgian Army, had left the beaches of Dunkirk for England. As was customary, he assumed a false identity in order to protect his family and was commissioned into the RNVR as Patrick Albert O'Leary, a French Canadian. He was assigned to the *Le Rhin*, a French-crewed vessel that was being adapted for covert operations as a 'Q' ship – *HMS Fidelity*. By the spring of 1941 O'Leary was second-in-command of the SOE-sponsored *Fidelity* that was now working out of Gibraltar carrying out clandestine operations off the Mediterranean coast of France.

On the night of the 25 April 1941 O'Leary's skiff overturned and he was stranded ashore. Arrested, he was imprisoned under relatively relaxed conditions along with other captured British officers in St Hippolyte du Fort. Garrow was able to engineer his release and he was

*A 63-year old Marie Louise Dissard meeting General De Gaul after the Liberation.*

soon at the Rodocanachi safe-house where he began to work with Garrow's organisation.

Unknown to Garrow and O'Leary, a British traitor, Harold (aka 'Paul') Cole, had infiltrated the line. Cole had escorted many evaders from the north of France to Marseille and was well acquainted with all of the line's safe-houses, couriers and routes but he was now working for the *Gestapo*. The organisation was seriously compromised. In October 1941 Garrow and many helpers throughout France were arrested and O'Leary assumed command.

In November 1942 the Germans took over the unoccupied zone of France, which effectively closed O'Leary's sea routes, which had operated from beaches in the vicinity of Perpignan, and tightened security in coastal regions and the eastern Pyrenees. With the arrangements in Marseilles disrupted, O'Leary moved his headquarters to Toulouse where it resumed operations from the flat of Marie Louise 'Francoise' Dissard, evaders continuing to be moved on across the Pyrenees from there but now using higher routes.

A few weeks later Garrow was freed in an audacious operation and evacuated to Spain following his own route out of France, courtesy of the line that he had been instrumental in establishing. In March 1943 disaster struck again. A French traitor, Roger le Legionnaire, had penetrated the organisation and O'Leary and others were arrested. Once again, the line had lost its leader and many of its key figures and safe-houses. However, Francoise Dissard was still free and due to her courage and tenacity the line was rebuilt to become the Francoise Line which continued to function, albeit on a reduced scale, until the Liberation.

*Mary Ghita Lindell* aka *the Comtesse de Milleville*, aka *the Comtesse de Moncy* aka *'Marie-Claire'*.

**France – The Marie-Claire Line**

Mary Ghita Lindell was impeccably English in upbringing and manner, extremely resourceful, courageous, strong-minded and used to getting her own way. She had served as a nurse in England during WW I, later joining the *Secours aux Blesses Militaries*, a branch of the French Red Cross. Decorated for gallantry under fire, she was awarded the French *Croix de Guerre* with Star and the Russian Order of St Anne for her dedication to French and Russian wounded. After the war Mary married the Count de Milleville and lived in Paris.

In May 1940 Mary sewed her English, French, and Russian war medals onto her Red Cross uniform, ensuring that there was no doubt as to her nationality and allegiance. Together with her children, Maurice, Oky, and Barbe, she began the 'family business' of collecting army evaders and transporting them to the unoccupied zone, usually handing them over to the Marseille-based Pat O'Leary Line. Later she did the same for aircrew. The routes were initially based on the houses and farms of friends and personal contacts. Through sheer bluff Mary managed to acquire petrol and permits for a nurse and a mechanic/driver to travel freely on humanitarian missions. She had obtained these through General von Stulpnagel, the German commander in Paris, who had personally signed an order stating that the punishment for men found helping evaders would be execution and, for women, incarceration in a concentration camp. Thus Mary travelled unimpeded on her 'humanitarian missions' – she as the

nurse, accompanied by an evader masquerading as her mechanic/driver.

Despite her success, Mary had not been trained for this type of work and her activities eventually attracted the attention of the German authorities. She was arrested by the Paris SD and sentenced to nine months' solitary confinement in Fresnes Prison. Her son, Maurice, was also arrested and given eleven months for possessing an illegal firearm. On her eventual release Mary was warned that a warrant was being prepared for her re-arrest. Having made arrangements for her children to stay in a safe-house in Ruffec, she followed her own escape route to Marseille and thence over the Pyreness and on to England.

After appropriate training by MI9 she was flown back to France by Lysander, landing near Limoges on the night of 26/27 October 1942. Within 24hrs of her arrival, stranded aircrew were again moving south down her newly organised 'Marie-Claire Line' which was based on Ruffec.

Mary was injured in a traffic accident in December 1942. She was taken to hospital where she had to be hidden in a cellar to avoid the *Gestapo* search. Despite her absence, the Line continued to function.

In early January 1943, Major Haslar and Marine Sparks, the RM Commando survivors of Operation FRANKTON, the canoe raid on shipping in Bordeaux harbour, arrived in Ruffec, where they were sheltered by the Marie-Claire organisation. During a visit to Switzerland for medical treatment Mary was able to provide the British Military Attaché with an update on her activities, including the fact that Haslar and Sparks had survived. In February both men were taken across the Pyrenees; both eventually reached Gibraltar.

Money and communications were constant problems, of course, and with the coastal regions and the lower levels of the mountains becoming increasingly insecure, it became necessary to move the routes inland. Following Mary's return to Ruffec, therefore, new evaders were sent to Foix in the foothills of the Pyrenees to follow onward routes into Andorra. Wanted by the *Gestapo* as the Comtesse de Milleville, it was at about this time that Mary adopted the alias of the Comtesse de Moncy. Meanwhile, her son had been arrested again. Although badly beaten, Maurice was eventually released and when he recovered he resumed his commitments to the line.

The summer of 1943 was very busy; there were problems at the Spanish border after the Germans had declared the area a special security zone. Evader traffic was now directed towards Pau on a route organised by Maurice and it was at Pau station that the worst tragedy happened. Four airmen were caught by the *Gestapo* on the Toulouse-to-Pau train but the subsequent interrogation of the courier, nineteen-year-old 'Ginnette', revealed nothing. Unaware of the arrest, Mary was waiting for the train at Pau where she was arrested by the SD. Initially taken to Biarritz, accompanied by two guards, she was placed on a train bound for Paris. While using the toilet Mary attempted to escape by jumping from the train. The guards reacted quickly and opened fire; Mary sustained head wounds. Unconscious, she was taken to a hospital in Tours where she underwent a six-hour operation by a *Luftwaffe* surgeon, which saved her life. Six weeks later she was transferred to Dijon prison and placed in solitary confinement. Her final destination was Ravensbruck concentration camp where she was incarcerated from early September 1944. Useful employment in the camp hospital enabled her to survive until 25 April 1945 when Mary was handed over to the Swedish Red Cross and the indomitable, unbreakable lady walked free.

Mary Lindell's organisation had covered a large area, collecting evaders from all over France and moving them in stages to safe-houses in the vicinity of Paris and then Ruffec. The key player had always been Mary, and when she was taken out of the system the line was expected to go down. Many aircrew, thought to be about 160, were still in hiding in the Paris area alone when she was arrested. Maurice and Barbe had moved and gone to ground; Oky had disappeared into the concentration camp system and never returned. 'Pauline', a main courier, took on much of the work herself, recruiting new helpers and personally escorting many of the aircrew. She also collected funds from the British in Switzerland and later from the Gaullists. Many of her aircrew were passed on to the Francoise Line for the final stages of their journey to Spain. 'Pauline' and several of her couriers were eventually betrayed in Paris and arrested by the *Gestapo*; they died in concentration camps.

It is difficult to place a figure on the number of evaders who passed through the Marie Claire Line as they were also connected to other lines, but the numbers are believed to be in the hundreds. After the

war Mary Lindell became the Royal Air Forces Escaping Society's representative in France. She died in France in 1986, aged 92.

**France – The Shelburn Line**

Although Motor Gun Boats (MGBs) and Motor Torpedo Boats, together with other light craft and fishing boats, had been operating from the Helford River and the Scilly Isles since June 1940, the Royal Navy's 15th Motor Gun Boat Flotilla was not formed until 1942. Based on Dartmouth and, at times, Falmouth, it operated off the Brittany coast in conjunction with the Shelburn Line until November 1944 by which time the coast was in allied hands.

Most of the flotilla's activities were conducted in no-moon periods, with the oars of the surf-boats muffled and grass ropes being used for anchor chains (to minimise the sound and to enable them to be cut with an axe in an emergency). The north and west coasts of Brittany were mainly used by SOE and SIS to insert and extract agents but they also collected evaders and other fugitives. The Shelburn Line was created specifically for use by MI9, and was in place from December 1943 until the last evaders were picked up on the night of 23/24 July 1944.

The line was based on an earlier organisation, Oaktree, which had been compromised in 1943, many of its evaders being passed on to the Burgundy Line. The fact that the Shelburn Line was formed at all was due to the insistence of Raymond Labrosse who had been the French Canadian radio operator for Oaktree. When Oaktree was blown he joined a group of evaders and took them south over the Pyrenees then on to Gibraltar. On reaching England and being debriefed by MI9 he argued that sea evacuations from Brittany should not be abandoned, just performed in a different way.

On the 11 October 1942 a number of evaders gathered in a deserted villa at Canet Plage near Perpignan. They were waiting for an RV with a fishing boat from Gibraltar; a pick-up arranged by the Pat O'Leary Line. Amongst the evaders was a Sgt Maj Lucien Dumais, of the Canadian Fusiliers Mont-Royal. He was a Commando who had been captured at Dieppe, escaped and made his way to Marseille. Dumais was taken off the beach by the felucca *Seawolf* in Operation ROSALIND and returned to England. There he volunteered to work with MI9 but was turned down. Later, after service in North Africa, he

*Camper and Nicholson Motor Gun Boats of the 15th Flotilla with MGB 502 in the lead.* (Mike Kemble)

again applied for special duties, and this time he was accepted.

On the night of 16/17 November 1943, a Lysander flew Dumais and Raymond Labrosse across to northern France where they were to set up the Shelburn Line. By December 1943, they had safe-houses in place in Brittany and a main holding area and more safe-houses in Paris. Couriers had been recruited locally, a beach was selected at Anse Cochat and MI9 was informed that the line was ready for its first operation. The beach had been code named 'Bonaparte'.

The skill of the navigators on the Brittany run was crucial. The coast was difficult and dangerous. Currents were very strong; there were rock outcrops everywhere, hidden by the rise and fall of the tide, and the weather, especially in winter months, created further hazards.

The procedure involved evaders gathering at holding centres in Paris until a pick-up was imminent. They were then moved to safe-houses near the coast in the vicinity of Plouha and Guingamp. The pick-up was always confirmed over *Radio Londres*, the daily French language BBC transmission, using the message *'Bonjour tout le monde a la maison d'Alphonse'*. After the first operation it became clear to MI9 that the Shelburn Line was well planned, prepared and organised and had good security. At the request of Dumais, MI9 provided a mine detector which was used to clear the beach.

Most escape line couriers were accompanied by only one or two

evaders, but on Shelburn they were handled in batches of up to twenty at a time. Armed with shovels and picks, and a few memorised phrases in Polish, they were loaded into trucks and presented themselves as foreign labourers working on the coastal defences. As one courier said, 'They will shoot me with one evader and they will shoot me with twenty. What is the difference?' Evaders were provided with rations then moved from their safe-houses to the coastal cliffs where they would lie low while their courier checked the beach for mines, a white handkerchief being placed on top of each one. When the boats approached through the surf, the couriers summoned the men down to the beach. Once the 'parcels' were aboard, the courier would return to the cliffs, collecting the handkerchiefs on the way.

The first operation from Bonaparte Beach took place on the night of 28/29 January 1944, 19 evaders being picked up by MGB 503 in Op BONAPARTE. The second was on the 26/27 February with 18 evaders (MGB 503 – Op BONAPARTE II). Other operations were as follows:

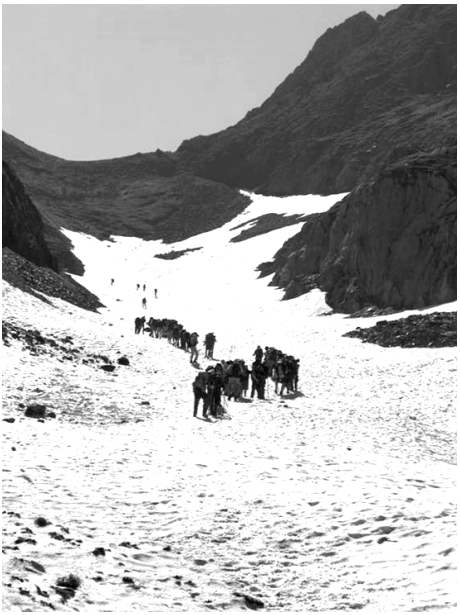
- 16/17 March with 30 evaders (MGB 502 – Op BONAPARTE III)
- 19/20 March with 26 evaders (MGB 503 – Op BONAPARTE IV)
- 23/24 March with 21 evaders (MGB 503 – Op BONAPARTE V)

Operations from Bonaparte Beach were then suspended until after the D-Day landings but commenced again on:

- 12/13 July with 18 evaders (MGB 503 – Op CROZIER) and
- 23/24 July with 6 evaders (MGB 502 – Op CROZIER II)

On 9 August a final operation took place in daylight to recover three agents (MGB 718 – Op CROZIER III).

The Shelburn Line was only active between January and August 1944 but in just eight pick-ups it had returned no fewer than 141 evaders to the UK. They were mainly USAAF (94) but also included RCAF and RAF aircrew, SAS teams, French agents and other civilians. It should also be recorded that, before the MI9-sponsored Shelburn Line became operational, earlier pick-ups had been run by SIS/SOE and they made several more, using 'non-MI9' beaches, between March and July 1944.



*The high Pyrenees.*

**Andorra**

Andorra is a tiny principality, perched in the eastern Pyrenees some 6,500 feet above sea level, although its highest peak is at more than 9,000 feet. At this altitude the weather can vary from brilliant sunshine to blizzards and travel in winter can be extremely difficult. Local guides were essential but they were not a guarantee of safety and the lives of many evaders, and their guides, were claimed by the treacherous conditions.

The Pat O'Leary, Francoise and Marie-Claire Lines all used Andorran routes, later being joined by the Dutch-Paris Line which had originally run into Switzerland. Toulouse was often used as an initial assembly point prior to an attempt on the mountain passes, a frequent venue being the *Hotel de Paris*, managed by Monsieur and Madame Montgelard. Both were eventually arrested and deported to concentration camps in Germany; only Madame Montgelard returned. Travelling onwards from Toulouse via Foix or St Girons, Andorra was the mid-point of the journey.

On their downhill approach to the city of Andorra (at a mere 3,300 feet above sea level) evaders might take refuge in farm buildings or small guest-houses, such as the *Les Escaldes*, while their guides planned the next stage of their journey into Spain. Within the city itself, there were a number of small hotels, like the *Hotel Paulet*, that were prepared to harbour fugitives.

One of the main evasion organisers in Andorra was Francesc Viadu who had been recruited in Montpellier by a British agent known as 'Mr Miller'. Viadu engaged many guides, such as Joaquim Baldrich, a young man in his twenties, who helped several hundred refugees to

enter Spain.

Nearly all of the Andorran expeditions, some of which involved quite large numbers, were led by Spanish guides, many of them professional smugglers. The evaders were often ill-equipped to take on the high mountain passes, especially in winter, but to dress more appropriately would have attracted unwelcome attention at the lower levels. If a guide had a deadline to meet, any members of his party who were unable keep up were sent back down the mountain or simply left behind to make their own way. Mountain huts were the only shelter from the hostile weather, with rain on the lower slopes often being an indication of blizzard conditions on the high peaks. Because of their inadequate footwear, by the time they reached Andorra some of the travellers would be suffering from frostbite, with the associated risk of gangrene. The local doctor, Professor Trias, usually treated them himself or arranged for them to be admitted to hospital.

Once in Spain the first stop tended to be Manresa, then on to the British Consulate in Barcelona and a selection of hotels regarded as safe-houses where evaders could recuperate. The next stop for frostbite cases might be the British/American hospital in Madrid before being transferred to the British Embassy. Once they were fit to travel all evaders were moved on to Lisbon or Gibraltar.

**Spain**

While neutral Spain was the destination for most of the European escape lines, making a successful crossing of the Pyrenees was only a beginning. There was a considerable risk that, if caught within 5km of the border, fugitives would simply be handed back to the French authorities and, even when well into Spain, there were still pitfalls to be avoided. Most significantly, Franco's fascist government was content to harbour many *Gestapo* agents who openly ran offices in Spain. As a result, evaders were still at risk of being detained, either by German agents or by the Spanish authorities. Arrest by the Spanish meant imprisonment in Lerida, Barcelona, Figueras, Zaragoza, Sort or elsewhere prior to incarceration in the concentration camp of Miranda de Ebro. Prisoners at Miranda lived in deplorable conditions, the camp being both overcrowded and filthy. Depending upon the speed with which the British Consul was able to work, prisoners could be held for

*The Spanish prison camp at Miranda de Ebro.*

months, but there was a legal loophole that could be exploited. Under International Law there was a difference between an 'evader', who, once apprehended, had to be interned for the duration of the war, and an 'escaper', who was to be regarded as a free man. Once this had been appreciated, evaders were briefed that, if arrested, they should insist that they had 'escaped' from occupied Europe, as distinct from having 'evaded capture'.

It is believed that more than 30,000 Allied troops passed covertly through Spain during WW II, many bound for North Africa. In one month alone, 93 evaders reached Gibraltar, where the main contact for British fugitives was still Donald Darling (code name 'Sunday') who debriefed/interrogated them on arrival and often accommodated them in his flat on Main Street.

Although SOE and SIS were already operating in Spain, the Ambassador, Samuel Hoare, was concerned that any covert activities should not compromise the British Government and he insisted that Spanish neutrality should be respected. Despite the strain on Anglo-Spanish diplomatic relations, Darling worked closely with Ian Garrow until the latter's arrest in October 1941. All the organisations used different routes and, for security reasons, employed different mountain guides and couriers.

Despite the Ambassador's strictures, the British Diplomatic Service made a major, often covert, contribution by facilitating the safe passage of evaders once they were in Spain. The Consulate at Figueras, for instance, was of great help to the Marseille-based O'Leary Line until it was effectively put out of action in 1943. Similarly, the Consulate at Bilbao supported the *Comète* Line. On reaching Spain, the evaders were often collected by a diplomatic car

*Sulmona POW camp.*

driven by Michael Cresswell or his chauffer Antonio Balson. Fugitives were also moved by train, using documents provided by the British Embassy, or ferried between diplomatic locations and into Gibraltar hidden in the boot of diplomatic cars. Cresswell's residence La Finca in Madrid was sometimes used to shelter evaders.

**Italy 1943/44**

Prior to the Italian surrender in September 1943 some 80,000 POWs had been incarcerated in Italy. Most, the majority of them British or Commonwealth troops, had been captured in North Africa. Escaping and evading in Italy was different from north-west Europe. It has been said that it was more difficult to escape from an Italian POW camp than a German one and it is certainly true that there were relatively few successful escapes. There were no well-organised escape lines and the Swiss border, the only one able to offer sanctuary, was mountainous and in the far north. Most movement had to be made on foot and would almost always involve mountain terrain.

It had been anticipated that a German withdrawal would follow the signing of the armistice, so POWs had been instructed to remain in their camps and await the arrival of Allied troops. Contrary to expectations, however, the Germans stood fast and took over the administration of what had been Italian-run POW camps. In the initial confusion many prisoners took the opportunity to escape, those in the north heading for Switzerland. Further south, thousands of escapers

made for the Allied lines. Especially notable was the officers camp at Fontanellato where 600 men marched out of the main gate, aided by their Italian guards, just one hour before the Germans arrived. At the same time many men escaped from the camp at Sulmona and headed south. Those who had stayed put were rounded up and put on trains destined for Germany although some escaped en route. With little specific expertise and no kit or equipment, individual escapers were left to their own devices; most simply headed south.

Under a German proclamation, the same rules applied in Italy as in the rest of occupied Europe – men caught assisting allied troops would be shot; women were to be sent to concentration camps. Those on the run soon learned that a large prosperous-looking farm would probably be run by a fascist sympathiser, while smaller properties were more likely to be in the hands of peasant farmers – the *contadini*. Once contact had been made, the *contadini* would often hide, clothe and feed the fugitives and, if necessary, provide such medical care as was available, as did charcoal burners in the woods. As repayment, some escapers joined bands of partisans or worked the land for a time before moving on. By the end of 1943 the Allied front line had settled on the Sangro River, escapers heading south from camps at Servigliano and the Tenna Valley near Pescara tending to make for the less populated, but mountainous, east coast region..

There was very little organised assistance in place to help escapers in Italy. The one notable exception, the Rome Network, was run by an Irish Priest, Monseigneur Hugh O'Flaherty. Working covertly from within the Vatican, and known as 'The Scarlet Pimpernel', he found safe-houses and distributed food and money to escapers. O'Flaherty's organisation is credited with having assisted more than 4,000 allied escapers. When he was denounced to the *Gestapo* he was obliged to remain within the bounds of the Vatican, although this did not stop his activities.

**Crete & Greece**

The German attack on Greece on 6 April 1941 soon overwhelmed both the Greek Army and the British contingent that had been sent to assist it; organised resistance was over by the end of the month. The Royal Navy evacuated more than 40,000 men but at least 14,000 were left behind. Of those who avoided becoming POWs, some remained in

Greece to work with the Resistance while others were sheltered until they were able to escape. The only way out was by sea, which involved acquiring caiques, fishing boats or small naval craft that had been abandoned, in order to sail to Turkey. Other arrangements involved the Royal Navy picking up evaders from pre-arranged RVs on the Greek coast using small vessels, typically landing craft operating from a 'mother ship'.

A month after the withdrawal from Greece, much the same happened in Crete. When the fighting ceased on 1 June the remaining troops headed for the south coast where the harbour of Hóra Sfakíon had been the Royal Navy's main evacuation point. Once again, evaders commandeered fishing boats and small craft left behind by the navy. The unlucky ones were rounded up and became POWs while others headed for the mountains to join local Resistance groups. Despite the risks inherent in harbouring fugitives in German-occupied territory, men in hiding were accommodated in the homes of the locals or in caves where they were provided with food, water and clothing until their escape could be arranged.

From August 1941 onwards, MI9 organised several pick-ups using small craft, submarines, motor boats or armed caiques operated by the Royal Navy and the Royal Hellenic Navy. There were further pick-ups later on run by the Special Boat Section using foldboats from submarines. Following the Italian armistice in September 1943, many of the small craft collecting evaders and escapers from Crete, Greece, and northern Italy were manned by Italian crews.

**The Far East**

Hong Kong. Major Leslie Ride was a doctor and the Officer Commanding the Field Ambulance Unit of the Hong Kong Volunteers. When the colony fell to the Japanese on Christmas Day 1941 Ride was incarcerated in Sham Shui Po POW Camp, formerly a British Army barracks. Exploiting his local contacts, he arranged for civilian clothing to be brought into the camp and, dressed in this, Ride and three others simply walked out of the main gate past the guards. Establishing himself in Kwantung, he began to establish a network of reliable contacts throughout Hong Kong, the New Territories and southern China. This became the British Army Aid Group and on 16 May 1942 Ride was officially appointed as the local representative

*Canadian and British POWs at Sham Shui Po, August 1945.* Jack Hawes, Dept. of National Defence. Library & Archives Canada – PA114811

of MI9. Using the organisation that he had created, he was able both to assist escapers from the camps and to send food and assistance into the camps. His efforts were not confined to Commonwealth personnel and his organisation rescued at least thirty-eight downed American aircrew.

Burma. Anyone travelling through Burma had much to contend with. Apart from the sheer physical exertion involved in moving through mountainous rainforests or jungle-covered terrain, clothing rotted in the climate and there was a variety of hostile wildlife that had to be contended with, ranging from snakes to leeches, ants and mosquitoes. Furthermore, few white men were trained in jungle survival and thus had little idea of how to obtain food and water.

Once the Japanese had established their authority, however, there were very few European-style 'escapes and evasions', not least because captivity under the Japanese meant that the combination of forced labour, minimal rations, disease and brutal treatment were so debilitating that few had the energy necessary to mount an escape attempt. As a result, the pattern in Burma was largely confined to the first half of 1942 and was more in the nature of an exodus. A handful of men took refuge in China but thousands of British servicemen, and several hundred thousand civilian refugees, embarked on a 300-mile trek, mostly on foot, with the aim of reaching India ahead of the advancing Japanese. It was an arduous journey which, apart from the jungle, could involve crossing major rivers, like the Irrawaddy,

Chindwin and Dapha. There were no ‘escape lines’ as such, indeed no need for them, although some help was forthcoming from hill tribes and native villages. That said, some remarkable initiative was shown by some long-term expatriate traders and tea planters. Notable among these were Geoff Bostock and Gyles Mackrell, both of whom used elephants to transport people out of Burma.

Java. Having been evicted from Malaya, Singapore and Sumatra, the retreating Commonwealth forces had nowhere left to go once they reached Java. Those who failed to secure a passage on one of the last troopships to leave became prisoners of the Japanese and thereafter escape was virtually impossible. The exceptions were the handful of men who avoided immediate capture and made their own way to Australia. The most well-known example is the party of twelve airmen, led by Wg Cdr John Jeudwine, who spent forty-seven days in an open boat before being picked up by a Catalina. But, as with Dunkirk, and Burma, this was more of a retreat than an escape.

**Conclusion**

At the end of WW II the courageous ‘helpers’ throughout Europe were able to stop and reflect. The appalling cost of their bravery and selflessness was now known. Across all the former occupied territories many helpers had been lost for each escaper or evader who reached freedom. Those who had not been tortured and executed had endured starvation and disease while in concentration camps. Many of those who survived this treatment were barely able to walk when they were eventually liberated. But they held their heads high! Some kept their striped pyjama-style uniform and wore it again with defiant pride. Many were taken to Sweden or Switzerland to recover both physically and mentally; others just wanted to forget, to go home, find their families and resume their lives.

After the war some of the evaders sought out the folk who had assisted them in order to thank them, to offer support, provide holidays or places to recover in England, Australia, America and New Zealand. Life-long friendships were forged. But some evaders never knew who to thank because their helpers had preferred to remain anonymous, content that they had done their duty.

**Footnote.**

Donald Darling, who had been first in the field, was still there at the end. It was thanks to his initial planning and vision that the escape lines had been created and that they subsequently continued to facilitate the return of evaders, particularly downed aircrew, and to provide a conduit for intelligence.

With the aim of rewarding French citizens who had assisted Allied troops, in the autumn of 1944 Darling was appointed to run an Awards Bureau which he set up in the *Hotel Palais Royale* in Paris. It was no small task, individuals had to be nominated, matched against the men they had helped and then tracked down and positively identified with their credentials corroborated. Darling, by now a major in the Intelligence Corps, was assisted in his endeavours by a number of notable personalities, among them Pat O'Leary, Andrée De Jongh, Nancy Wake, Lucien Dumais and Francoise Dissard.

Between 1940 and 1949 Donald Darling had devoted his life to serving his country but it showed little gratitude. Following the excitement, intrigues and responsibilities of his wartime service he became a mere Press Officer in Brazil. On his return to England the Diplomatic and Intelligence Services were seemingly unable to find any further use for him and he ended his days living in obscurity in a small room above a public house in Trafalgar Square; he died in 1980.

# OPERATIONS TO RECOVER RELEASED PRISONERS OF WAR

**Sebastian Cox**

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One of the many problems facing the Allied leadership towards the end of the war was that of Allied POWs in Axis hands. Fears were expressed that, in the case of Germany, if the Third Reich were to collapse suddenly then the many thousands of Allied POWs, 125,000 of them British, might be left to starve. There was also concern that the Nazis might deliberately target POWs in a last paroxysm of revenge before Allied troops could reach them[1]. Similar concerns were held regarding prisoners in the hands of the Japanese, with the added anxiety that the fate of many of those listed as missing was simply unknown because the contacts with the Japanese via the Red Cross were far less effective. These were not, of course, idle fears, as Hitler's reaction to the great escape shows only too clearly. In fact, following that incident, MI9 passed instructions to the camps that no more escapes were to be attempted. In the Far East it was known that conditions were so bad that many Japanese troops were literally starving and that the situation of the POWs was likely to be such that many would be in desperate straits.

It soon became clear to the planners that if Germany did collapse suddenly the Allied powers would face serious problems in trying to feed the civilian population, and the addition of many thousands of POWs would be an extra burden they could well do without. In

addition to which, of course, it was thought important on the grounds of humanity to return the men to their loved ones as soon as possible. Contingency planning for a German collapse therefore began as early as mid-1944 and detailed plans were drawn up by the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force G4 in mid-August 1944.[2] Revised instructions from SHAEF were issued in mid-September 1944, under the codename Operation ECLIPSE.[3] On 27 September Air Vice-Marshal T M Williams, Assistant Chief of Air Staff (Operations), wrote to the CinC Bomber Command informing Sir Arthur Harris that aircraft and crews not required for operations or for other tasks, 'may be called upon to assist in the maintenance or evacuation of Allied prisoners of war'.[4] ECLIPSE postulated that in the event of a precipitate collapse in the ensuing chaos, including potentially civil war, the enemy would abandon any effort to feed or care for the POWs . The outline plan therefore included provision for air-dropping both supplies and, if necessary, units of the airborne forces to protect the prisoners. Similar plans were laid in the Far East, with the additional problem that the exact whereabouts of all the prisoners was not known and they were more widely scattered than in Germany.

I shall now go on to consider the operations mounted by British and Commonwealth forces to try to address these issues. I shall deal with the case of Germany first, and then go on to the somewhat more intractable problems in the Far East.

**Operation EXODUS**

In Europe SHAEF estimated that there were some 179,700 British Commonwealth and US prisoners in Greater Germany, and, in order to relieve the strain on the immediate post-war military administration, it was decided to utilize the Allied air transport fleet together with some of the heavy bombers, to return POWs as quickly as possible to the UK. A number of planning meetings to discuss the details were held over the winter of 1944-45. HQ Bomber Command issued its first preliminary instructions regarding these operations on 1 March 1945 and trials were carried out early that year at the Air Transport Development Unit to establish the potential capabilities of heavy bombers as freight or passenger transport aircraft. Similar trials took place within Bomber Command.[5] Although seemingly a simple

operation its successful implementation required careful study. According to the Bomber Command Operations Record Book 'special loading diagrams had to be produced in order to conform with centre of gravity requirements, and the comfort of the POWs, many of whom it was expected would be sick men, had to be considered carefully.'[6] Sir Arthur Harris himself suggested that blankets, cushions, and special carbohydrate rations to ameliorate air-sickness, should be provided.[7] The loading diagrams specifying exactly where each POW should sit within the bomber were prepared and issued later with the relevant Group Operations Instructions.[8] Experiments were also conducted with free-dropping food inside sacks (there was a shortage of parachutes) from small bomb containers and this technique, whilst not utilised for POW camps was used during Operation MANNA, the operation to relieve starving Dutch civilians.

In the event, although far from ideal, conditions generally inside Germany never degenerated to the extent that there was likely to be serious loss of life amongst the POWs. Nor did any systematic attacks or serious instances of revenge killings take place against the Allied POWs in the way that they did for some concentration camp prisoners. Bomber Command only made one supply drop to a POW camp, on the night of 24 April 1945, when an urgent request for medical supplies was received from SHAEF and twenty packages were dropped that night by parachute onto a camp at Neubrandenburg in the Soviet Zone, previous Russian approval for the sortie having been sought and obtained. In addition, leaflet bombs were dropped the same night on eight camps warning of severe consequences for those responsible if there was any maltreatment or reprisals against the prisoners. The leaflets were issued over the signatures of Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin. These operations were mounted by thirty Mosquitos and four Lancasters of No 8 Group.[9]

Evacuation operations had actually started some weeks earlier when C-47s of the USAAF IX Troop Carrier Command flew 172 returning POWs into RAF Oakley on 3 April. The total, rather bizarrely, included thirteen brigadiers and one Zulu – whether the IX TCC was as thoughtful as the CinC Bomber Command, and the brigadiers and the Zulu got to sit on cushions I could not say! Over the next two weeks a steady flow of prisoners returned to the UK, often making two or more flights, as they were staged out of Germany and

*A batch of POWs awaiting instructions to board Stirlings at Melsbroek.*

Austria to Belgium and France, before flying on to England. A total of 46,713 prisoners were repatriated from German camps up to the end of hostilities on 8 May 1945. However, as more and more prisoners were released and moved to the staging areas set up by the Allied army groups, the pool of men awaiting transport at Brussels Melsbroek and other airfields was judged to be becoming excessive, and on 25 April SHAEF requested that Bomber Command make fifty aircraft available every day to assist with the lift. The following day SHAEF increased the figure required to ninety aircraft.[10]

Accordingly, the next day forty-two aircraft of 5 Group took part in what was now termed Operation EXODUS, flying 999 prisoners home, though quite why they couldn't manage a nice round thousand remains a mystery. On 27 April 5 Group were switched to dropping food supplies to the starving Dutch populace in Operation MANNA, and the EXODUS tasking devolved onto 1 Group. Forty-six aircraft took off but the weather at Brussels was poor and only twenty-two aircraft completed the operation successfully. Two aborted, and the remainder were recalled after take-off, so that the total number of prisoners returned dropped to 503. On 28 April, possibly in response to the disappointing performance on the previous day, the Group allocated seventy-six aircraft to the task, but again the weather around Brussels proved problematic, and three aircraft aborted and thirty-three were recalled. The forty aircraft which landed successfully on


*It was a common practice for aircraft engaged on EXODUS to acquire appropriate graffiti, like this Lancaster of No 463 Sqn.*

the Continent brought back 901 prisoners and considering the fact that 1 Group's entire effort in support of Operation MANNA that day was cancelled because of weather this was a creditable performance. On 29 and 30 April the starving Dutch took priority and Bomber Command was able to provide only two aircraft for EXODUS.[11]

However, the daily totals flown home rose as Bomber Command aircraft became increasingly involved as the pressure of operations eased and Op MANNA ceased with the German capitulation and the final liberation of Holland. The peak effort so far as the bombers were concerned came on 10 May 1945, when 456 aircraft of Nos 1, 3, 5, 6 and 8 Groups were involved in evacuating some 10,489 prisoners mostly from Brussels/Melsbroek and Juvincourt airfields on the Continent. This was one of three days during the operation when the total of repatriated prisoners flown home was in excess of 10,000. EXODUS continued as a regular commitment for Bomber Command

until 1 June 1945. On that day a signal from Bomber Command's Advanced Headquarters on the Continent indicated that the regular large scale commitment of aircraft was no longer required, and that only small parties would need to be repatriated on an *ad hoc* basis in future. In fact the last EXODUS sorties were flown on 4 June 1945, when 49 were returned in four Lancasters of No 3 Group.[12]

Great efforts were made to ensure that the operation went safely and smoothly. In addition to Sir Arthur Harris's imprecations about comfort, the routes and timings were planned to allow the flights to take place in good weather without flying in cloud and, as we have seen, sorties were cancelled rather than take any risks. Captains were warned that there was to be no divergence from the standard loading plan for twenty-four POWs laid down in the Bomber Command operational instruction. Great stress was laid on this as there was considerable concern that incorrect loading would affect the centre of gravity with potentially disastrous consequences. The POWs were enjoined to stay in their authorised positions during the flight and most especially during take-offs and landings. This was reinforced by a personal signal from Harris to the Group commanders on 6 May warning them that Operation EXODUS would continue for some time and emphasising that the loads carried were priceless and that the safety of the prisoners was of prime importance. He stated that he would support without question any decision the AOCs felt it necessary to take in the interests of safety.[13]

Tragically, despite all the precautions, two aircraft crashed and forty returning prisoners and aircrew lost their lives. One aircraft, a 3 Group Lancaster of No 514 Sqn crashed on 9 May and the subsequent investigation established that the bodies of twelve POWs 'were found aft of the step in the aircraft and these should not have been there.' It was thought that the aircraft would thus have been very 'tail heavy' and that the pilot decided to land, and signalled that he was making an emergency landing, but lost control and the aircraft crashed. The pilot had flown successfully some sixty miles and it is likely that a group of prisoners had simply got up and walked back down the fuselage, despite instructions to them not to move about, and in doing so upset the CofG and the pilot lost control. To add to the tragedy the pilot was an experienced Bomber Command veteran with the DSO.[14] The other aircraft was a 38 Group Hudson which attempted to return to Brussels,

*A recently liberated* Kriegie *looking well pleased with his haul of looted German miltaria.*

overshot, and opened up to 'go around' but stalled at 800 feet and crashed, killing all on board including six released POWs.

In addition to the repatriations from North West Europe undertaken as part of Operation EXODUS a separate operation was also mounted to bring back prisoners from the Mediterranean. This operation appears to have been mounted purely at the instigation of HQ Mediterranean Allied Air Forces and largely involved POWs who had been liberated by the Russians and who had been sent east and south to be shipped out of the Soviet Union via the Black Sea port of Odessa. On 27 April MAAF signalled the Air Ministry pointing out that approximately 500 prisoners were scheduled to arrive every two weeks and that they would arrive in Naples where they would sometimes have to wait up to two weeks for a convoy back to the UK. MAAF proposed flying them home in Liberators of No 205 Group. After a further nudge from MAAF on 30 April, the Air Ministry responded on 1 May agreeing to the proposal and laying down the strict criteria under which the sorties were to be flown which largely replicated those already in place for Bomber Command and laid particular stress on safety, including a stipulation that the crews involved were to fly dummy sorties back to the airfield in the UK without any passengers.[15]

A breakdown of the sorties in these operations is at Table 1.[16] Bomber Command Lancasters clearly top the table with over 74,000 men repatriated. Transport Command returned 58,012 prisoners, and the various USAAF transport and bomber units brought back 13,601 including some 2,000 men from the Mediterranean. In addition to the 146,000 men at Table 1, a further 8,669 sick and wounded prisoners of war were casevaced making a ground total of 155,104 men. Included in a bewildering array of nationalities were Americans, Spaniards,

| Command/Group | Aircraft | Sorties | No of POWs |
|---|---|---|---|
| Bomber Command | Lancasters | 3,586 | 74,195 |
| 46 Group | Dakotas | 1,620 | 46,921 |
| 38 Group | Stirlings | 406 | 9,458 |
| IX Troop Carrier Command | C-47s | 314 | 7,234 |
| VII Air Force | B-17s | 119 | 3,011 |
| MAAF | B-24s | 87 | 2,153 |
| 38 Group | Halifaxes | 108 | 1,633 |
| IX Troop Carrier Command | C-46s | 31 | 1,203 |
| Misc | Misc | 51 | 627 |
| | **Total** | 6,322 | 146,435* |

* The figures were obtained by SHAEF from a variety of sources and although the overall figures is believed to be accurate the individual figures by aircraft type are only approximate.

*Table 1. Breakdown of sorties flown in recovering POWs from the Mediterranean Theatre.*

Moroccans, Egyptians, Icelanders, Palestinians, Indians and men from every part of the West Indies, the Dominions and the nations of Europe and North America. In addition, this was not a purely one-way exercise. Between 12 and 26 May, No 3 Group squadrons engaged in Operation EXODUS flew 1,876 Belgian refugees in the opposite direction home to Belgium.[17]

Although the POWs departed from a number of airfields in Europe the two principal airheads used were Brussels Melsbroek (B58) and Juvincourt (A68). The small Bomber Command detachment at the latter airfield had originally been formed to handle the relatively limited numbers of Bomber Command aircraft making emergency landings after being damaged in raids over Germany. Between 30 April and 4 June the unit handled 1,699 aircraft and the onward movement of 41,789 POWs.[18]

At the other end of the operation the vast majority of the POWs were landed at airfields in the south of England, with Dunsfold taking pride of place with 41,129 men passing through it on their way to the reception camps. As they deplaned the POWs were usually taken to one of the hangars where they were served with tea and snacks with

*WAAFs welcoming a batch of POWs on arrival in the UK.*

the station WAAFs playing host, reputedly having being selected for their physical attributes. It had originally been intended to sort the POWs by service, nationality, etc at the holding areas on the continent and then fly them to an airfield close to the appropriate reception centre. This system never really proved practical and in the event the reception airfields were often unaware of who was arriving until the aircraft doors were opened. It says much for the flexibility and administrative abilities of the personnel concerned that the men were categorised, fed and despatched to the appropriate destination with a minimum of confusion and delay. In fact 98.8% of arrivals were sent on to the reception centres on the same day with only 1,917 men needing to be accommodated at airfields overnight.[19] That said, and creditable as the achievement was, as we shall see this sometimes created different problems a little further down the chain.

Which is an appropriate juncture at which to consider the system which was established to move the returned POWs on from the arrival airfield. In the case of the RAF the designated onward movement was to No 106 Personnel Reception Centre (PRC) at RAF Cosford which

was formed on 7 March 1945 specifically to handle the returning RAF prisoners.[20] Accordingly it had originally been intended that RAF POWs would be flown into the airfields at Seighford and Wheaton Aston. In the event, as we have seen, in the majority of cases this did not happen and instead the prisoners were mostly delivered to airfields in the home counties some distance from Cosford. Those who flew into the two nearby stations were quickly moved by lorry to No 106 PRC, and thus came in at any time from lunchtime to late evening. However, those arriving in the south were moved by train and inevitably they arrived much later in the day, and nearly always in the small hours of the morning.[21] This was the downside of the apparently laudable achievement of moving everyone rapidly on from the arrival airfields.

Furthermore, the trainloads usually arrived at Cosford one to four hours later than predicted – clearly operating to much the same standards of punctuality as today! This meant that the reception staff spent hours pacing the hangars waiting. In the words of the No 106 PRC report, 'it never seemed worthwhile going back to bed'. Gradually, however, this accumulated lack of sleep built up and eventually it was found better to wait until the last moment before calling the reception staff from their beds to meet the arrivals. It was also a case of all hands to the pump and the Station Commander and other senior officers were to be seen sitting at tables in the wee small hours performing the duties more normally associated with a WAAF Clerk GD. Similar problems of fatigue affected the catering staff in the later stages of the operation and here too all ranks from AC2 to officers were drafted in to assist in the cookhouses at odd times, particularly fetching and carrying food to the prisoners.[22]

Not all those arriving were quite what was expected. Among those processed by No 106 PRC, theoretically remember the RAF's receiving centre, were members of the Canadian Army, Palestinians, Poles, Dutch, Czechs, the mysterious but apparently ubiquitous Zulus, Frenchmen many of whom spoke no English (or perhaps, being French, merely pretended), not to mention Maltese, a sprinkling of Cypriots and Hindus. When three Indian Hindus arrived at Cosford at 0530 one morning they had no documents, spoke no English, knew not from whence they came nor their intended destination, and were shivering, miserable and bewildered. But the Royal Air Force is

nothing if not resourceful and, *Per Ardua Ad Astra*, a senior officer was persuaded to dredge his memory banks for the smattering of Hindustani he had learnt as a flight lieutenant in India. As the meal that morning was steak, arrangements were also made to give them a more religiously appropriate meal.[23]

After undergoing basic administrative processing on arrival, the POWs underwent a two-phase process. In phase one, they were divided into groups of twenty-five men. They were given the opportunity to send a free telegram to their family, given an immediate advance of pay – £2 for airmen and £10 for officers. After undergoing disinfestation, they were fed a hot meal and sent to bed. On arrival at their designated hut they were met by a medical officer and nursing orderly. On their bed, which they were not permitted to touch, was a kit bag which contained fresh hospital clothes which they emptied on to their bed. They stripped and placed all the clothes they wished to keep in the kitbag; any clothing they wished to discard was placed in bins in the centre of their hut. The kitbags were labelled and collected and sent for fumigation and returned the next day. Each man was then given a brief Free From Infection (FFI) examination and, if he was free of infestation or infection, he had a shower and went to bed. On rising the next day he donned the fresh hospital clothes. An assessment was also made as to whether any arrivals required immediate hospitalisation. Phase two, usually but not invariably, the next day, consisted of completing a medical form followed by a thorough and detailed medical examination. If they were passed fit by the doctors they were then issued with fresh clothes, a further advance of pay and travel warrants, and sent on 28 days leave.[24]

The very first trainload of prisoners arrived at Cosford at 0340 hrs on 10 April. The station had not expected them for another 48 hours and only discovered they were on their way because of a chance conversation just after midnight between Cosford staff and a porter at Cosford railway station. The staff were rapidly summoned from their beds, the cookhouse opened and food prepared. The despatch officer at RAF Wing told Cosford that the prisoners were in good physical condition. In fact 75% of them were suffering from diarrhoea and had arrived after a two and half hour train journey on a train without corridors or toilets. They appeared dirty and exhausted and many had to be helped to their seats in the hangar. It took about twenty minutes

to process them and they then proceeded to the cookhouse where they were given a breakfast of milk, cereals, fried eggs, bacon, kidneys, bread and butter, jam and apples. Most could not finish their meal but the psychological impact of good and plentiful food was considerable. Many of this first intake had been on one of the long marches across Germany with little or no proper food and harsh conditions. Many were emaciated and suffering to varying degrees from malnutrition and the medical staff later compared their appearance with prisoners from Belsen. It was decided not to wake them until late the next morning and then examine them in their beds. Their condition gave the medical staff grave cause for concern as they were understandably shocked and fearful that this batch of prisoners represented the norm for the many thousands to follow. In fact they proved to be exceptional; presumably the despatch staff on the continent had singled out the men in the poorest physical condition for rapid transfer to the UK, though quite why the despatch officer at Wing had given such misleading information remains a mystery.[25]

Later drafts generally proved to be in much better condition, although the unaccustomed richness and plenty of the food induced diarrhoea or dyspepsia in practically every man. Once they were bedded down, therefore, the Medical Officer went round the hut offering treatment for either or both conditions. Because most were found to be free from infestation and infection, not least because delousing had been carried out first on the continent, the FFI inspection before sleep was later abandoned as an unnecessary irritant.[26] Great stress was laid on treating the returned POWs with the utmost consideration and providing them with good quality hot meals, clean bedding and fresh clothes and reducing the bureaucracy and bull to the absolute minimum.[27]

Generally speaking, and despite the inevitable hiccups along the way, Operation EXODUS was judged a great success, with General Eisenhower signalling his personal thanks to Sir Arthur Harris at Bomber Command for the efficient way in which the operation had been conducted. There were, inevitably, some problems. We have already seen that the laudable aim of moving people rapidly off the airfields in the UK meant in practice that they arrived at reception camps such as Cosford in the wee small hours. Cosford seems to have been a relatively well run and, perhaps more importantly, consciously

*In parallel to EXODUS, the very similar Operation DODGE involved the repatriation of POWs from Italy in May 1945, using Bari and Pomigliano as the main airheads. This consignment was brought home courtesy of a Lancaster of No 101 Sqn.*

humane, camp. The staff of No 106 PRC, from the Station Commander downwards, pitched in to help and to make life as comfortable as possible for the returnees as evinced by the fact that they turned out at 0340 hrs to cook food for the first arrivals. There was, inevitably, some form filling, but much of it was directed at establishing any health problems. It is clear that at Cosford the staff, harassed and fatigued though they undoubtedly were, understood the importance of presenting a smiling human face rather than a bureaucratic one. Some Army reception centres, however, appear to have taken a different attitude, with prisoners required to fall in for parades and being told on arrival that they had missed the appointed mealtime.

The chaos on the continent of Europe, with literally millions of people on the move, also seems to have had an impact on the organisation at the airheads there. Inevitably *ad hoc* in nature, the system, if such it can be called, contained a large measure of the old military adage ‘hurry up and wait’. On arrival at the airheads many

troops were simply left to wait in long queues until an aircraft turned up. Perhaps unsurprisingly no one seemed to know when the aircraft would arrive, and sometimes they did not, which led to frustration and anger. With such an informal system it seems that those at camps furthest from the airheads took the longest to reach home.

**Operation BIRDCAGE-MASTIFF**

The problems involved in mounting Operation EXODUS pale into insignificance, however, in comparison to those facing the planners in the Far East. Here the distances were vast with an estimated 70,000 POWs in an estimated 227 camps spread across the region from Malaya and Singapore to French Indo-China, Java and Sumatra, an area of some one and half million square miles.[28] Whereas the location of most of the German camps had been known, by contrast less was known about the Japanese camps which included large numbers of European internees, as in the famous *Tenko* TV series, as well as military camps. The POWs and internees were collectively referred to by the acronyms APWI – Allied Prisoners of War and Internees, or RAPWI which merely added 'Returned' to the acronym. Furthermore, planning prior to the dropping of the atomic weapons on Japan in August 1945 had assumed that military progress in the theatre would be relatively pedestrian and that there would not be a precipitate collapse, and thus the release of the APWI would proceed at a similar pace. The planners were therefore compelled to improvise to a far greater degree than those in Europe who, as we have seen, had many months to prepare. In addition the medical problems facing the RAPWIs were expected to be even more severe than those in the European theatre. Given the scale of the problem and the urgency of the situation it was only air power which could provide the necessary speed and reach to ensure the swift implementation of any relief plan. There was the added factor of the impact of tropical weather just to add that extra element of spice to the planners' deliberations.

A large scale relief operation was planned with the major RAPWI control organisation located at Kandy in Ceylon with a tri-service co-ordinating committee, and subsidiary RAPWI controls in India, Burma, Java, Sumatra, French Indo-China and Malaya, and sub-controls below these. The situation was further complicated by the fact that, unlike in Europe, the RAPWI were not all being returned over

relatively short distances to one country. Instead, the distances were vast and large numbers of the RAPWIs were headed for India and Australia as well as other nations within and outside the region. In addition the Indian RAPWI were sub-divided into those who had remained loyal to the Allied cause and those who had switched allegiance and joined the Indian National Army under Chandra Bhose to fight under the Japanese. As well as the internal security problem posed by the latter from a counter-intelligence point of view, there was in addition little love lost between the two elements of the Indian prisoner population which further highlighted the need for segregation.[29]

The problems involved in mounting Operation MASTIFF were not limited to the weather and the enormous distances and geographic spread of the operation; there were also significant political difficulties. In Indo-China nationalists, including a young communist by the name of Ho Chi Minh, were intent on preventing the return of the French colonial administration, and Indonesian nationalists had a similar aim in the Dutch colonies especially Java. British forces found themselves reluctantly but inevitably drawn into these conflicts and at times, bizarrely, resorted to using Japanese troops to help maintain order.

The expectation at first was that it would be possible to evacuate the RAPWI by air, once they had been rehabilitated. However, it was later considered that their physical condition allied to the limitations of the transit camps on the new air trunk routes made this impracticable. In the end, therefore, the air evacuation was principally limited to: moving prisoners from French Indo-China and Siam to Rangoon; evacuation of limited numbers of Australians from Singapore to Australia in Australian aircraft; and the evacuation of limited numbers from Singapore and Rangoon, to India, Ceylon and the United Kingdom. The latter were principally urgent medical or compassionate cases and APWI who were discharged from hospitals in India and Ceylon.[30]

The POW relief operations were in fact divided into two distinct operations. The first, Operation BIRDCAGE, was designed to:

1. spread the news of the Japanese surrender,
2. warn the internees and POWs of their impending liberation,

3. drop medical teams, medical supplies and W/T operators to establish contact with the APWIs,
4. air drop or airland food, clothing and other essential supplies to relieve the privation in the camps,
5. and lastly to mount an air evacuation similar to Op EXODUS, but across much greater distances.

As soon as the Japanese surrender was confirmed leaflets were prepared aimed at:

1. Japanese camp guards,
2. Japanese forces in general,
3. the prisoners themselves and
4. the local populations.

The task was made no easier by the many different languages across the region and the fact that only two printing presses were available with Japanese typeface and they were located in Colombo and Calcutta.[31]

Operation BIRDCAGE was launched by Air Command South East Asia (ACSEA) on 28 August and was completed in four days. Aircraft operating from bases in Burma, Ceylon, the Cocos Islands and Bengal made leaflet drops at 236 locations and 90 known camps in Burma, Siam, French Indo-China, Malaya and Sumatra.[32] Meteorological conditions were indifferent and many sorties were affected by poor weather and had to be repeated a number of times before they were successful. The sorties in Burma were flown by P-47 Thunderbolts which dropped more than a million leaflets, those from the Cocos Islands, Bengal and Ceylon by Liberators. Some of the Liberator sorties were very long, the equivalent to Transatlantic flights. In all 31 Liberator sorties and 27 Thunderbolt sorties were successful.[33]

The second phase of the operation was designed to bring in relief supplies and move APWI to concentration areas where their needs could be better met and they could be assembled and prepared for onward move by ship. This phase, Operation MASTIFF, commenced on 28 August and involved principally eleven Liberator squadrons supported by five Dakota squadrons and four Sunderland squadrons and an assortment of other aircraft including Catalinas, Lysanders, a York and a few Halifaxes. Three Liberator squadrons in Bengal

covered Siam and Indo-China, while the squadrons on the Cocos Islands and Ceylon covered Malaya, Java and Sumatra. The Dakota squadrons of 232 Group were principally engaged in airlifting supplies into Siam, and by 5 September they had flown some 200 sorties bringing in an estimated 400 tons of supplies and evacuated 4,422 RAPWIs.[34] Meanwhile the Burma Thunderbolts conducted visual recces which confirmed that a number of camps along the infamous death railway were empty of prisoners.

Ninety-five support personnel were safely parachuted into the camps without mishap, including sixty-five doctors and medical orderlies. At dawn on the first day of MASTIFF a Liberator dropped a medical team on Changi airfield in Singapore, a sortie which involved a round trip of 3,400 miles. Not all sorties ended happily, however, with one Thunderbolt crashing in flames in Burma whilst a Liberator engaged on low-level supply dropping in Java misjudged a turn and spun in killing all nine crew. Two thirds of the camps were supplied by the squadrons on the Cocos Islands but the supplies dropped by these units had to be flown from Ceylon utilising Liberators of the Far East Special Duties squadrons and maritime Sunderland squadrons. RAAF Liberator squadrons operating from Northern Australia also made drops to Java and Sumatra before flying on to the Cocos Islands, reloading and making another drop on the return trip to their Australian bases.

By mid-September RAPWI staffs were established in Malaya, Singapore, Bangkok, Saigon, Hong Kong and Batavia and the situation gradually became clearer.[35] At Singapore SEAC had estimated they would find some 16,000 APWI but the final figure was 37,081.[36] Of these 80% were infected with malaria, 476 were dangerously ill, 432 required local hospital treatment prior to evacuation and 7,390 were fit for hospital ship evacuation only. The facilities and British forces immediately available and the size and accessibility of the island meant the situation in Singapore was rapidly and effectively ameliorated. Elsewhere the picture was more problematic. In the Malayan peninsula the poor communications meant that the situation was more confused, with some camps difficult to locate and others found to be empty. Altogether it was estimated that some 5,256 APWI remained in camps outside Singapore itself, mostly of Indian and Chinese ethnicity (it should be remembered that

Malaya had a considerable ethnic Chinese population prior to December 1941). In Siam the situation varied from area to area but was generally worse than in Singapore. At Singorn Pass, where the POWs had been building a road, 261 had died since 1 April and of the 760 survivors 200 were not expected to live, 40% were not fit enough to be moved and 25% were walking cases. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, prisoners within the country who were under Siamese control were in far better condition than those who had been under the Japanese. In French Indo-China the death rate had been low and the conditions, including food supplies, were reported to be good.

Despite the initial difficulties, including the detention of some of the teams by nationalist forces in Indo-China, five camps were located in the Saigon area housing some 9,000 prisoners. Four Liberator sorties were flown in from Bengal carrying supplies of food and clothing and three others were sent to Phnom Penh. Three more camps further north around Hanoi and one at Mytho had been contacted. The occupation of Saigon by British troops also led to a considerable improvement in the local situation. It took time to establish the situation on Sumatra and reports from Java were scanty and there was conflict between Japanese reports of the situation, which stated that medical attention was being given to the sick and that there were no urgent requirements, and the reports of the RAF parachute teams who signalled that all was far from well.[37]

Table 2 illustrates the progress of Operation MASTIFF in its first three weeks in terms of sorties which were successful or aborted and aircraft missing.[38] From this table it is immediately apparent that the commitment to Siam and French Indo-China remained relatively constant over the first weeks, whilst that to Malaya started high and declined as time went on and Allied forces landed there in strength, and Sumatra remained a heavy commitment throughout. Java, however, was clearly poorly served receiving no aid in the first week and precious little in the second, before an intensive effort took place in the third week of the operation.

Java was in fact an unwelcome additional commitment to the operation at a late stage. The island was transferred from General MacArthur's command to become a SEAC responsibility only on 15 August, very late in the day, when much of the planning for the relief operation had already been set in train. In addition, whereas military

| | 30 Aug- 5 Sep 45 | | | 6-12 Sep 45 | | | 13-19 Sep 45 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Target Area** | Succ | Abort | Miss | Succ | Abort | Miss | Succ | Abort | Miss |
| Siam | 42 | 8 | - | 49 | - | - | 49 | 3 | - |
| F.I.C | 13 | 1 | 1 | 11 | - | - | 11 | 1 | 2 |
| Malaya | 22 | 2 | - | 10 | 2 | - | 6 | 1 | 1 |
| Sumatra | 23 | 2 | 1 | 29 | 1 | - | 33 | 4 | - |
| Java | - | - | - | 2 | - | - | 22 | 1 | - |
| **Total** | **100** | **13** | **2** | **101** | **3** | **-** | **126** | **9** | **2** |

*Table 2. The first three weeks of Op MASTIFF – successful and aborted sorties and aircraft missing.*

plans for an opposed occupation of countries such as Malaya could be utilised and adapted in planning for Operation MASTIFF, no such prior plans existed for Java which had previously been in MacArthur's operational area. The political situation was also difficult, with considerable tension on the island as Indonesian nationalists sought to prevent their previous Dutch colonial masters from re-establishing colonial rule. Java was also furthest away from the available ACSEA bases, although closer to Australian bases. In the event the increase in the effort devoted to Java came about through utilising RAAF aircraft flying from Australia and making drops on Java before flying on to the Cocos Islands, loading up with fresh supplies and repeating the drops on their way back to Australia.

Forty Australian Dakotas were also deployed to Kallang airfield in Singapore to move supplies to Sumatra and evacuate Australian POWs from Siam. However, when the Australians flew their first sorties to Sumatra they were so horrified by the pitiful condition of some of the British and other nationalities' sick in comparison to the relatively fit Australians in Bangkok that they requested permission to evacuate these urgent cases in preference to their fellow countrymen.

*Prisoners held by the Japanese were in poor physical condition, undernourished and emaciated when released.*

This noble gesture undoubtedly saved many lives as the APWI on Sumatra and Java were dying at the rate of five to seven per day. It did not, however, find favour with the Australian Air Board, who sent 'a series of niggardly messages' the gist of which were to the effect that the RAAF crews were motivated more by the desire to extend their time in Singapore than any humanitarian impulse. The AOCinC, Sir Keith Park, was prevailed upon to send a signal to Melbourne full of effusive praise and thanks for the efforts of the RAAF airmen which appeared to have the desired effect.[39] With the help of the Australians and utilising both air and sealift the number of APWI on Sumatra was reduced by 90% in just a week, from over 19,000 to 1,900 by 23 September. The RAAF Dakotas are credited with evacuating 3,730 Australian and 185 British RAPWI from Siam, and 475 Australians and 1,115 British, as well as 1,063 other nationals, from Java, a total of 6,568 souls.[40]

In fact with the increasing effectiveness of Operation MASTIFF in Sumatra it was Java which was the major problem for the RAPWI organisation, partly because of the difficulties outlined above, and partly because of the conditions on the Island itself. The Operation in Java was given a separate codename, SALEX-MASTIFF, and the

adventures of one of the principal RAF RAPWI teams under Wing Commander T S Tull, which was dropped into Java in mid-September, are worth recounting. Their Liberator suffered an engine fire on its way from China Bay to the Cocos Islands and they had to jettison the bomb bay fuel tank and most of the stores including their VHF radios, and only just made the Islands. After waiting four days for an engine change they were flown to Java on 18 September and dropped at 0800 hrs on a disused light airstrip. Tull made contact with the Japanese and the local Red Cross and soon found that the situation was highly politicised and fraught with difficulty. He nevertheless established an impressive organisation utilising not only his exiguous British resources, but also incorporating into his 'staff' Japanese, Dutch and Malayan sections with translators and interpreters. He monitored broadcasts in French, English and Indonesian and these gave him invaluable insights into the local political situation and enabled him to anticipate the likely turn of events.[41] Tull realised that the key to the situation was the remaining Japanese troops who were the only disciplined and armed force available to him in the face of what was effectively an increasingly hostile and potentially bloody local insurgency which might overwhelm all the Europeans living in the local camps. Faced with the locals' increasing hostility and pressure some of the Japanese sided with the Indonesian nationalists, whilst others remained 'loyal' to their surrender terms to the Allies. One of the latter was Major Katoh,[1] the liaison officer to Tull appointed by the Japanese CinC, General Nakamura. Tull had saved him from being beaten by an Indonesian mob and had retrieved his uniform and sword, both of considerable importance to the dignity of a Japanese officer. Katoh thereafter agreed to co-operate with Tull even when General Nakamura had ordered his troops to surrender their arms to the Indonesians.

In the first two weeks of October in central Java, where there were some 10,000 mostly civilian APWIs in a number of separate camps, the situation degenerated into near anarchy with a general uprising of

[1] This officer's name is more commonly rendered as Kido, but Katoh has been retained here to reflect Tull's account. Incidentally, such was the assistance rendered to the British by his Japanese troops that Kido was reportedly cited for a DSO. **Ed**

the Indonesian population who were hostile to any non-Indonesians who they perceived to be inimical to their nationalist aim, but who were themselves divided between militant and moderate factions. Large numbers of Dutch, Eurasian, Ambonese and indeed any non-Indonesians were rounded up and incarcerated, along with many of the Japanese troops who had surrendered their arms on the orders of their General. There was widespread looting of the food and medical supplies which had been stored in the camps, and of vehicles and other material, and Wg Cdr Tull was forced to signal RAPWI control to halt supply flights into Java since they were in effect feeding the insurgency. He strove to appear neutral politically whilst maintaining the condition of the APWIs as best he could, and he negotiated with moderate Indonesian leaders to good effect, even managing in the midst of the chaos to evacuate a certain number of APWI on several occasions to supposedly more secure parts of the island where there were allied troops. Things reached a head on about 14 October when a Japanese interpreter phoned Tull and woke him early in the morning to inform him that the staff of the RAPWI in mid-Java along with Red Cross personnel and all Europeans and Eurasians outside the camps had been arrested. At this point Tull persuaded Major Katoh to co-operate with him. Katoh and other Japanese officers duly refused to surrender their arms, despite General Nakamura's orders, and fighting broke out in several places. This distracted the Indonesians from the camps, which according to Tull may indeed have been the Japanese intention. By 19 October a small force of Ghurkas had arrived in the town of Semarang and, after a brief 'blue on green' battle with the Japanese before both sides realised who was who, the Japanese now turned defence into offence and began an attack against the Indonesians. When the Japanese took the jail in the town, where many of their disarmed troops had been incarcerated, they discovered that the Indonesians had committed atrocities and slaughtered and mutilated over one hundred of their compatriots, with many corpses hanging from roofs and windows, and at this point the incensed Japanese swept through the town and beyond, killing anyone in their path suspected of bearing arms. The Indonesians suffered over 2,000 casualties. Of this confused, not to say horrific, situation, Wg Cdr Tull later reported:

> ‘In the course of their fighting the Japanese, who fought with incredible gallantry despite losses which with most troops would have been prohibitive, in all cases protected the internment camps from molestation and released numerous Dutch and Eurasian captives from the jail. There were no casualties of any description in the camps.’

The number of troops available to Tull even after this was inadequate, often amounting to just a couple of platoons, which given his responsibility for thousands of refugees could only be utilised in his words as ‘a diplomatic force’. Essentially Tull utilised sections of troops visibly to back him up whenever he was engaged in his frequent delicate negotiations regarding releasing hostages, or arranging evacuations or food supplies. His bluffing in such situations frequently worked. Nevertheless, and despite the arrival of more troops from the Gurhka battalion, the situation remained confused and dangerous for several weeks, with the Indonesians shelling and on occasions attacking RAPWI camps and the remaining Japanese. Both, the British Commonwealth and occasionally the Japanese troops were involved in heavy fighting with the nationalists. Tull moved to concentrate many of the inmates of the camps to areas where he felt them to be safer, though safer in this context is a relative term, and there was at least one small-scale massacre of women and children in one camp which he was powerless to prevent. Eventually a relief column reached central Java on 1 December and Tull was able to evacuate nearly 10,000 RAPWI from the camps.

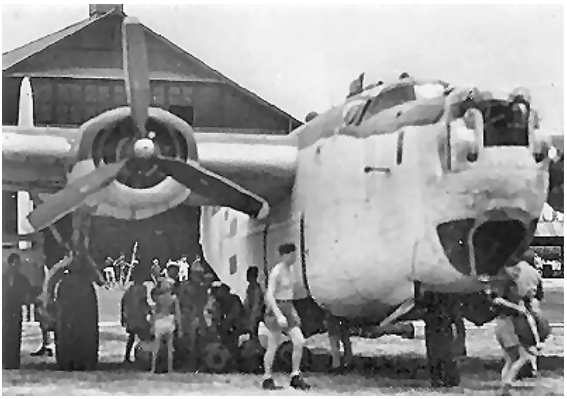
There is no doubt that Wg Cdr Tull and his team, which included two flight lieutenants and an RAF corporal signaller, performed truly remarkable feats in preserving the lives of so many in such a markedly hostile and dangerous environment over a period of two and a half months. The corporal and the junior officers assumed responsibilities far beyond their rank, constantly negotiating with extremist and moderate nationalist forces and with the Japanese. The impressive Cpl Frankish effectively found himself in command of an airfield and the Japanese units on it for extended periods. Wg Cdr Tull in his final report refers to twenty-one RAPWI being killed but it is unclear whether this refers only to the last two weeks or the whole period. If the latter it is truly remarkable and even if casualties were higher there

is little doubt that a small team of RAF officers and a junior NCO backed up occasionally by relatively small numbers of British and Japanese troops, prevented the wholesale massacre of potentially many hundreds if not thousands of individuals. Tull's achievements are even more remarkable when it is remembered that during this period the situation elsewhere in Java, and in particular in the port of Sourabaya where British Indian troops had landed in some strength, had degenerated into all-out warfare with the use of tanks, artillery, naval gunfire support and aircraft, with attendant heavy casualties. Many Dutch, Eurasian, Chinese and other nationalities there and elsewhere in Java fell victim to widespread torture and murder. Many British Commonwealth and Dutch servicemen were also killed when unable to defend themselves, including Brigadier Mallaby, commanding the 49th Infantry Brigade, who was shot dead while trying to negotiate a truce.[42]

The account of Wg Cdr Tull's No 5 RAPWI team up to mid-December has taken us ahead of ourselves, and indeed the complexities of the operations in Java meant that SALEX-MASTIFF effectively became an entirely separate operation from the original BIRDCAGE-MASTIFF operations elsewhere, which officially drew to a close in mid-October. The main MASTIFF control at HQ SEAC at Kandy closed on 19 September and the control at Supreme HQ closed on 29 September as did the sub-control at Colombo. The sub-controls at Calcutta and Singapore continued to function under HQ Allied Land Forces with the latter closing on 8 October, and on 15 October Operation MASTIFF was declared officially to have ended, with only a small maintenance commitment continuing.[43]

We shall return briefly to Java a little later but meanwhile it will be useful to attempt a summary of Operation BIRDCAGE -MASTIFF elsewhere in south east Asia. This is not easy, however, for the simple reason that a bewildering miscellany of aircraft and squadrons participated, and many of them were not formally assigned to the MASTIFF operation and did not conduct their operations under the auspices of ACSEA. Nevertheless, we can attempt some sort of summary, although the figures that follow should be treated as indicative rather than definitive.

The Liberator squadrons deployed on MASTIFF flew a total of 408 successful sorties between 28 August and 10 October 1945, of which



*Relief supplies being unloaded from a Ceylon-based Dutch Liberator VI of No 321 Sqn at Kemajoran (Batavia).*

62 were flown by the RAAF squadrons. The Dakotas and Lysanders of the Special Duties squadrons flew 140-150 successful sorties in the same period. These totals do not, however, exactly tally with those given in other reports on the operation. Added to this total there were the transport Halifaxes of 221 Group, the Dakota squadrons of 232 Group, and the Sunderlands and Catalinas from RAF, Dutch and RAAF squadrons, together with the RAAF Dakotas mentioned above. It is, however, impossible, even where the records exist, to disentangle normal supply sorties from MASTIFF sorties and indeed in many ways because of the political situation the two were, as the AHB narrative puts it, 'indissolubly fused'. Some 1,023 tons of supplies were delivered to Malaya, Sumatra, Java and Siam, but figures are not available for French Indo-China. The bulk of this tonnage was made up of food, clothing, Red Cross supplies and medical stores.[44]

The majority of air movements of RAPWI took the form of moving them from camps to concentration areas for onward shipment by air or sea. The main concentration areas were Rangoon and Singapore. A total of 19,543 RAPWI were flown into Rangoon, mainly from Siam and French Indo-China. Movements to Singapore were mostly by surface transport. By 30 September 1945 some 53,747 RAPWI had been moved out of SEAC, of whom 2,216 were moved by air. Movements on this scale in the aircraft of the era were not without cost. Sadly, up to 4 October, twelve aircraft and 59 aircrew were lost along with 64 RAPWI, about 0.3% of those carried.[45]

Mid-October may have been the official cut-off date for Operation MASTIFF but as we have already seen the situation in Java had

deteriorated with the Indonesian uprising and SALEX-MASTIFF continued. Most of the burden of supporting the operation in Java fell to the Dakotas of 31 Squadron based at Kallang airfield at Singapore, along with Dutch Dakotas, Catalinas and Mitchells, and Japanese *Hickory* aircraft. Be-cause their operations included sorties to more than one destination and efforts to support and supply British forces on Java, as well as the commitment under Op SALEX-MASTIFF, it is difficult to disentangle the one from the other. However, in the last fortnight of October they flew 248 sorties and carried 177·5 short tons of supplies for RAPWI and the RAF and transported 1,054 passengers into and out of Java, Sumatra, Borneo and Malaya. The Dutch Mitchells and Dakotas flew 123 sorties and carried 513 passengers and 43·1 short tons of supplies. The Japanese *Hickorys* worked for the Dutch and carried 19·6 short tons and 503 passengers in the course of 226 sorties. The Dutch Catalinas flew 63 sorties and carried 441 passengers. Probably the greater proportion of the total of 240·2 short tons of freight went to Java and a proportion of the passengers were RAPWI or military personnel being carried to support RAPWI.[46]

In November when the situation had degenerated into all-out warfare the Dakotas of No 31 Sqn, supported at times by those of No 215 Sqn, continued to operate, moving supplies into Java, dropping or flying in supplies to the isolated Gurkha/RAF enclave in the centre of the islands, and evacuating RAPWI whenever possible. Still based largely in Singapore its support for Java in November amounted to[47]:

| | |
|---|---|
| Total Sorties | 375 |
| Abortive Sorties | 5 |
| Tons air-dropped | 152·25 |
| Tons air-lifted | 307·25 |
| Tons extracted | 24·3 |
| Troops flown in | 1,128 |
| Ex-POWs flown out | 67 |
| RAPWI civilians flown out | 2,635 |
| Misc personnel flown out | 422 |
| Casevac (stretcher) | 187 |
| Casevac (sitting) | 317 |

Without the troops and supplies flown or dropped into the area it is certain that Wg Cdr Tull would have been unable to sustain his

position in central Java, tenuous as it was. The squadron's efforts continued in December, despite worsening Monsoon conditions. Detachments of the squadron were now based at Kemajoran on Java. The overall effort of No 31 Sqn from its first humanitarian flight on 24 September to the end of the year was crucial to the success of the effort on Java. Again it is not possible to entirely isolate the effort devoted to Java but the bulk of effort would have been flown to or from the island. In all it flew 1,326 successful sorties, carrying 4,788 passengers inbound, and 10,817 RAPWI (including 1,669 ex-POWs) and 1,323 casualties outbound, along with 2,505 other passengers. Some 2,312 short tons of supplies were airlifted in and 175·3 short tons air dropped.[48]

In the event operations to secure Java and evacuate RAPWI continued until November 1946. In all, between September 1945 and July 1946, some 86,000 souls were evacuated from Java and the RAF flew out some 60,000 of these and carried in over 30,000 tons of freight.[49] This was a monumental effort by any standards, but when allied to the horrendous politico-military difficulties that members of the RAPWI control staff such as Wg Cdr Tull faced it is all the more remarkable. It represents one of the greatest humanitarian achievements in which members of the Royal Air Force and the other services have ever been involved.

There is little doubt that without Operations MASTIFF and SALEX-MASTIFF many of the ex-POWs would have died, and indeed, sadly, deaths among prisoners weakened by severe malnutrition and disease continued even after the liberation despite the best efforts of the medical teams. It is only right to point out that the Royal Navy alongside the Army also played a significant role in MASTIFF. In fact 'mercy' ships were sent to some areas ahead of British Commonwealth forces and the supplies were distributed under the guardianship of the Japanese. Nevertheless, the initial urgent need to provide relief could only be met by the use of air power. In Java, and to a much lesser extent Sumatra, the courageous efforts of the RAPWI teams undoubtedly prevented horrendous massacres of civilians on a scale which was to become all too familiar in the Balkans and Africa later in the 20th Century. There was large scale loss of life but nothing compared to what might have taken place without the intervention of British Commonwealth forces.

In comparing Operations EXODUS and MASTIFF the difficulties of the latter loom large when compared with the relatively straightforward nature of the former. Although the health of the ex-prisoners of the Germans left much to be desired, and some men were undoubtedly malnourished, they were positively healthy in comparison to the Far East prisoners, amongst whom severe malnutrition, combined with malaria, beri beri and a host of other health problems, were endemic. In addition, in MASTIFF the operation had to be mounted across vast distances into airfields in several countries within which the political situation and the position of British forces was precarious to say the least.

Overall, despite the inevitable problems and the hiccups, both operations were remarkably successful. In the case of EXODUS in bringing prisoners home quickly, achieving the twin objectives of getting them back to their families as rapidly as possible and removing them from the chaotic and difficult situation in Germany. In the Far East it was not so much a matter of getting them home quickly as getting life-saving help to them, or them to life-saving help, in the most efficient manner possible.

These operations, which reflect great credit on the RAF and those involved in planning and executing them, remain relatively obscure and deserve to be much better known and celebrated.

**Notes:**

[1] See, for example, the note from CinC Bomber Command to his Deputy dated 27 February 1945, where he refers to the possibility of 'roving bands or even organized military formations' deciding to 'take it out of [*sic*] our prisoners of war as a final act of revenge…'. National Archives (hereinafter TNA) file AIR 14/870.

[2] TNA AIR14/870 – 'Delivery of Food and Medical Supplies to Allied Prisoners of War Post Hostilities' (SHAEF /573/5/GDS), 17 August 1944.

[3] TNA AIR 14/870, SHAEF Plan for Evacuation of Prisoners of War in Greater Germany, 15 September 1944.

[4] TNA AIR 20/3355, letter ACAS(Ops) to CinC Bomber Command, 27 September 1944.

[5] Bomber Command Operations Record Book (ORB), June 1945, Supplement on Policy and Planning Relevant to Bomber Command Operations in Support of the Allied Re-entry into the Continent, pp136-7. Air Historical Branch (AHB) copy.

[6] *Ibid*. p137.

[7] *Ibid*. Some at least of these high carbohydrate rations came from US stocks under lend-lease terms – see Signal HQ Bomber Command to HQ 5 & 6 Groups 1 May

1945 and Signal HQ Bomber Command to HQ No 8 Group 6 May 1945, on TNA AIR14/1685.

[8] See Bomber Command Operation Instruction No 81, 17 April 1945, Annexure A, on TNA AIR14/1685 and No 3 Group Operation Instruction No 77, dated 21 April 1945, and No 5 Group Operation Instruction No 40, dated 10 May 1945 both on TNA AIR 14/866.

[9] Bomber Command Operations Record Book, April 1945, AHB copy; and Signal FWD 19796, SHAEF to 30 Mission Moscow dated 23 April, and Signal MX24083 30 Mission to SHAEF (file copy is marked as received by Air Ministry on 27 April, after the mission had flown – SHAEF had presumably received a reply before the sorties took off.)

[10] Bomber Command ORB, Supplement on Policy and Planning, June 1945, p139. TNA AIR20/3355, Signal BCA120 Bomber Command Advanced HQ to HQ Bomber Command, 25 April 1945, and signal BCA123 Bomber Command Advanced HQ to HQ Bomber Command, 26 April 1945.

[11] Bomber Command and No 1 Group ORBs, April 1945, AHB copies.

[12] Bomber Command ORB, Supplement on Policy and Planning, June 1945, p139.

[13] Bomber Command ORB, Supplement on Policy and Planning, June 1945, p140, and Signal CinC Bomber Command to AOCs, 6 May 1945, TNA AIR 14/846.

[14] TNA AIR 20/3355, Preliminary Report by DBOps on Crash of Lancaster Engaged in Op EXODUS, 10 May 1945.

[15] TNA AIR20/4640, Signals AX45 and AX47 HQ MAAF to Air Ministry 30 April 1945 and Signal AX804 Air Ministry to HQ MAAF 1 May 1945.

[16] Table extracted from Sebastian Cox, 'Exodus – Repatriation of Liberated POWs'; *Air Clues*, March 1986, p108.

[17] TNA AIR 20/3355 Signal AX856 DBOps Air Ministry to Bomber Command authorising return flights to be co-ordinated with POW sorties. Bomber Command ORB, Supplement on Policy and Planning, June 1945, pp140-141. AHB copy.

[18] Bomber Command ORB, Supplement on Policy and Planning, June 1945, p140. AHB copy.

[19] Cox, 'Exodus', p108.

[20] SD155 Organisation Memorandum 514/1945. AHB copy.

[21] TNA AIR49/387 Report by Medical Section 106 PRC on Repatriated Prisoners of War at Cosford, August 1945, p2.

[22] *Ibid*. pp2-3.

[23] *Ibid*. p2.

[24] *Ibid*. pp2-5.

[25] *Ibid*. 6-7.

[26] *Ibid*. Appendix 1, p9.

[27] TNA AIR 49/386, Air Ministry Instructions for the Post-Hostilities Evacuation of Air Force Prisoners of War from Germany and the Continent – Introductory Note, 8 March 1945.

[28] TNA AIR23/1980, HQ ACSEA Report on the Recovery of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees, 28 May 1946. Other estimates of numbers of RAPWI were higher; on 21 August SEAC was planning on the basis of rescuing 98,000 prisoners and

upwards of 10,000 internees – AHB Narrative, The Maritime War, Vol VII Pt 4, The Indian Ocean Post War Operations August 1945-November 1946, p584.

[29] TNA AIR 23/1980 states that 'the spontaneous scenes of enthusiasm among the genuine PoWs when the collaborators were taken away were remarkable'.

[30] AHB Narrative, p596.

[31] TNA AIR23/1980.

[32] *Ibid*.

[33] AHB Narrative, p614-615.

[34] *Ibid*, pp609 & 618 & 626.

[35] TNA AIR 23/1980, p17.

[36] TNA AIR23/2349, Operation MASTIFF Report for week 6 to 12 September 1945. There was, however, an intercepted radio signal from a Japanese station quoting the 'Commander of Prisoners of War Singapore Island' stating that there were 31,500 prisoners of all nationalities on the island. What notice, if any, was taken of this message is not clear. TNA AIR 23/2348.

[37] AHB Narrative, pp619-626 and TNA AIR23/1980.

[38] AHB Narrative, p630.

[39] AHB Narrative, p634. TNA AIR 23/2349 Letter Gp Capt C Ryley to ACM Sir Keith Park, 8 October 1945, and Signal ACC802 personal Park to CAS RAAF 12 October 1945.

[40] AHB Narrative, pp634-7 and 651 and TNA AIR 23/2349.

[41] Report on Operation SALEX-MASTIFF by Wg Cdr T S Tull, 27 December 1945, AHB Copy. Except where indicated, the following account is based on Tull's report.

[42] On the degeneration of the situation and the large scale fighting elsewhere in Java see AHB Narrative, Chapter 7 *passim*, and S Woodburn Kirby, M R Roberts, G T Wards & N L Desoer, *The War Against Japan* (HMSO, London, 1969), Vol V, Chapters 28 & 29 *passim*..

[43] AHB Narrative, pp644-47.

[44] *Ibid*. pp679-682.

[45] *Ibid*. p682.

[46] *Ibid*. p754.

[47] *Ibid*. p840.

[48] *Ibid*. p848.

[49] *Ibid*. p900.

## A BAGHDAD PRISONER

### Sqn Ldr Bob Ankerson

*Having graduated from Loughborough with an engineering degree, Bob Ankerson joined the RAF in 1973 and trained as a navigator. After six years on the Vulcan, he converted to the Tornado, spent a tour as a Trials Officer at Boscombe Down and was on his second Tornado tour when he became a POW. He subsequently became an Arms Control Officer, which involved learning Russian. Since leaving the RAF in 2008 he has been an aircrew instructor at the Centre of Aviation Medicine at Henlow.*

When Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait on 2 August 1990 I was a Flight Commander on No 17 Sqn at RAF Brüggen. Within weeks crews were deployed to the Gulf as an immediate response to the invasion. My turn came some four months later when I deployed to Saudi Arabia on 4 January 1991. From the time I arrived in theatre until the outbreak of war I flew five training sorties by day and night at low and medium altitudes over Saudi Arabia and Oman. For the day sorties the emphasis was on operational low flying and at night we concentrated on auto terrain following and coordinated attack tactics.

The first I knew of the outbreak of war was early on the morning of 17 January when I was told that some of our crews were on their way back from their first sorties over Iraq. Later that morning I heard first hand from those crews, what it was like to go to war, flying at 150 to 300 ft above the ground, at night, at up to 600 kts over airfields putting up a wall of anti-aircraft fire. One of the first-tour pilots sat in the rest lounge in our accommodation that morning and said he never wanted to do it again – but he did, of course, and he went on to fly many more missions over the next seven weeks, as did many others.

My own war didn't start properly until a week later. Our four-ship formation had planned a number of low level missions during that first week only to have them cancelled for a variety of reasons. Following a change of tactics to medium level bombing we were tasked to fly in the early hours of 23 January. However, after our air-to-air refuelling had been completed the aircraft’s electronic warfare equipment failed

and so we returned to Dhahran without having crossed the border. It was a strange feeling, waiting for the rest of our formation to return, and I was greatly relieved when they all did. Twenty-four hours later we took off on a similar mission to attack an airfield in Iraq, about 30 nms from the Kuwait border. Our take off was planned to get us to the target just before dawn. On approaching the tanker for air-to-air refuelling, two of the four aircraft in our formation had equipment problems and turned back. That left us and Number 4 to continue with the mission, along with another Tornado four-ship, the electronic jamming aircraft and the fighter escorts.

All went well until just after weapon release when, within a matter of seconds, there was an explosion close to the aircraft. Immediately after the explosion I saw flames coming from the left wing. They spread rapidly towards the fuselage and very soon there were 6 to 8 foot flames no more than 10 feet away from the cockpit. After about a minute and a half the aircraft stopped responding to the controls and we ejected at about 14,000ft.

Simon[1] and I found out some six weeks later that our Number 4 had experienced a similar problem but were lucky enough to make it back to Dhahran with their crippled aircraft. Soon after landing, pieces of shrapnel from a 1,000lb bomb were found lodged in the fuselage of their aircraft, which established that we had both suffered fragmentation damage from premature detonation of our own weapons.

Once I was hanging under my parachute, I looked around and saw Simon about a quarter of a mile away in the early morning light. There was tracer and anti-aircraft shells exploding in the area but my descent was uneventful and I landed without any significant injury. In the dawn light I was able to make out dozens of truck tyre marks all around me. It was obvious I had not landed in the middle of nowhere; it was more like being on the desert equivalent of the M1! I began to gather up my parachute and survival pack ready to find some cover but within a few seconds I was aware of a group of ten to twelve soldiers coming towards me – shooting. At this point I stopped and put my hands in the air. All my flying equipment, jacket, gun and holster, gold and watch were taken from me. I was blindfolded; my

[1] Sqn Ldr Ankerson's pilot was Fg Off S J Burgess.

hands were tied and I was made to sit on a chair outside one of the numerous bunkers in the area.

The initial treatment by the soldiers in the field was reasonable. I was offered water and food and asked if I was injured. At this stage I was questioned briefly but my reply of name, rank and number was accepted. During these first few hours I was moved to several different bunkers and in the last of these I heard the voice of my pilot, so I knew that he too had been captured. I found out later that he had remained free for about two hours before being discovered. I was moved by road for about an hour – put in a dimly lit room with bare concrete walls and left, apparently, alone. There were then several visits at intervals with threats of what would happen if I did not answer their questions. After several sessions, the interrogator lost patience and gave me a final warning. On his return, when I still declined to answer his questions, the beatings started. How long this went on for, I have no idea. After a couple of sessions I decide to tell him things that were widely available in the western press, my aircraft base, and similar information.

It was soon after this that the first of a number of situations occurred in which my imagination caused me considerable unnecessary anxiety. At this stage I was still sat crouched on the concrete floor, blindfolded and with my hands tied behind my back. I felt someone take a hold of one of my arms and drag me a few feet across the floor. I felt him pull my arm over a concrete block and I had visions of someone smashing it or something similar. In fact, all he was doing was pulling me across to the block so that I could lean against it.

After dark we were moved again, travelling by road for some time to Baghdad. On arrival at our destination Simon and I were put in the same room, on the floor and left blindfolded and with our hands tied. In the morning the guards removed the blindfold and untied my hands so that I could have a drink of water and they gave me some bread and dates. I was able to exchange a few words with Simon before we were moved out of the building. From there we were driven to an interrogation centre, again blindfolded and bound. This was a permanent structure, rather than those that we had been in out in the desert. During the next twelve hours the interrogations continued, although the questioners never sought information that I considered to

be vital, so I feel that nothing I told them would have been of any material use to them. I still wonder how well I would have resisted if they had got on to subjects that I considered sensitive. In some ways I counted myself fortunate, as my treatment at the hands of my interrogators was nowhere near as horrific as I had expected. There was nothing sophisticated about my interrogation; I was kicked or punched and, at worst, hit by something akin to a cricket bat. Having said that, at the time it was excruciatingly painful.

Picture a group of single-storey buildings surrounding a courtyard some 100 ft by 40 ft with a corridor running all around with cells around the outer wall facing inwards to the courtyard. I was able to see a single palm tree over the roof of the cells on the far side of the courtyard and this was my contact with the world outside. There were toilets at each corner of the building, although I think the cleaner had been on holiday for some time! My cell was next to the toilets, so there was a steady stream of activity as prisoners were escorted backwards and forwards. The cell was about 8 ft square and this turned out to be the best furnished of the several cells that I was to occupy during my stay in Iraq. There was a dirty foam mattress, three blankets, a jug, a beaker, plate, knife, fork and spoon. I was fed three times a day; in the morning there was bread and thick lentil soup, around midday some rice and then in the evening some tough old goat meat. The guards passed their time playing football in the courtyard and occasionally some of the POWs were allowed out to exercise, and some more than once! This was the only time I regretted not having a better grasp of football, as I was only invited out on one occasion and they must have decided that I wasn't good enough. At this prison there was no violence from the guards – in fact they were quite amenable. They even taught us a few words of Arabic, the only one that stuck was *shuckran*, which means ‘thank you’.

During the many hours that I spent alone in this first cell I went over in my mind the last minutes of the flight, trying to analyse what happened and, in particular, trying to remember any indications on the radar warning receiver that I had not reacted to and which might have caused the loss of our aircraft. There was a sense of failure, as I could not remember having done anything positive in those last few minutes – I had not made a Mayday call or taken any other potentially useful actions – and I also felt that I had not resisted interrogation for very

long, even though none of the information that I had given was of any importance. Fortunately the squadron had been operating a strict policy of 'need to know', that is to say telling individual crews only the information necessary to conduct their own mission.

After a couple of days, I was given a yellow POW suit and a pair of plimsolls and my flying suit and boots were confiscated. I was to spend the next six weeks in that suit, a pair of long johns, flying socks, T-shirt and underpants. On the night of the 31 January I was moved from that first prison. The next one was guarded by people in civilian clothes – they were a sullen uncommunicative bunch.

The cells were stark and cold, mine was about 9 ft by 9 ft and had a toilet in one corner and a shower tray in another. However, there was no water supply to the toilet and the tap in the wall by the shower tray worked only intermittently, and only for the first couple of days. The walls were tiled and the solid steel door included a small hatch. The guards would use this to pass in food and drinking water. I was fortunate in that I did get some sunlight for a couple of hours a day through the glass blocks set high up on the external wall. That passed some time as I moved around the cell to sunbathe for as long as it lasted. This room was not as well appointed as the previous one. I had two blankets and a plastic bowl. The bowl was used for both food and drink. The food comprised a piece of pitta bread and some soup once a day. This was distributed by the guard around midday. About 20-30 minutes later, the bowl was passed back out through the hatch to receive my daily water ration, about a pint or so.

My stay in this prison was brought to an abrupt end on the evening of 23 February. I was laying wrapped in my blankets as usual when there was a shudder – we were being bombed! I stood up in the doorway and thought it was now up to God whether I was to live or die and for a few seconds I was totally calm and thought, 'Thy will be done'. The last bomb fell on my side of the building and at the same time the feeling of calm evaporated; my stomach felt knotted and I curled up in a ball with stomach cramp. A number of cells sustained holes in the wall and ceiling, although the only damage to mine was some broken glass and brick dust everywhere. Most of the doors to the cells remained intact, although many of the small hatches in the doors had been blown open. Names were being shouted up and down the corridor. The only prisoner I knew personally was Simon. We shouted

to each other and established that we were both unhurt. Some of the prisoners got out into the corridor and tried to unlock the cell doors, but they were unsuccessful as they were unable to find any keys. After a short time the guards reappeared and we were taken from the cells, through the debris in the corridors, down through the flooded cellar and out over the rubble at the end of the building to a waiting bus.

I was wedged between an American and the one Kuwaiti pilot who became a POW. It was good to be back in the company of other people again after three weeks of almost complete isolation. As we sat on the floor of the bus and wriggled to reduce the discomfort, the American and I communicated in the only way possible – we held hands! That simple action was a great morale booster to me, and I found out later that it had been the same for the American pilot. After a short drive we arrived at a new prison. It seemed derelict on our arrival and we were housed six to a cell. In the morning we found out that the prison was far from deserted as each of the other cells contained between six and eight prisoners, dressed in civilian clothes, and the whole place was alive with people soon after first light. Morale on the morning of the 24th was high; our chat during the night had made all the difference and this was followed by a sumptuous breakfast, a large bowl of thick vegetable soup, plenty of bread and a large bowl of hot sweet tea to share. There was even seconds and we decided that we would be quite content to finish the war under these circumstances.

Our luck was not to last, however, and soon after this we were led out into the courtyard and made to sit around the edge facing the wall. Gradually during the day individuals were taken from their position and led away. It was not obvious whether they all came back or not. Later on in the afternoon I was taken out of the courtyard for my last interrogation session. When it ended my interrogator said that, as I was no use to them, I would be taken out and shot. A pistol was cocked and I was bundled out of the room and for a few seconds I really did think that I was going to be executed. However, my blindfold was removed and I saw that I was back in the courtyard with the others. At this point I decided that I was going to survive and so my mood rocketed.

Earlier I had seen another prisoner ask to move into the sunshine, and so I decided to chance my luck and ask to be moved to a sunny

spot in the hope of getting warm. After the guard had wandered around the yard he came back and told me to follow him; he then pointed to a place close to a water barrel. After I had sat down I noticed a few ants in the vicinity and then realised that the guard had chosen a spot next to an ants' nest. I thought, 'Thanks very much!!' I decided that any ants that came towards me would get squashed and those that moved away would be left alone. I soon discovered that ants have a highly developed communications system. Before long the word spread and the majority of the ants that came out of the nest moved away from me, which just goes to show that there are educational opportunities in the strangest of situations.

At the end of the day we were moved into single cells again in another part of the same prison. It was back into solitary, away from the civilian prisoners into a cell 6 ft by 8 ft on the ground floor in a corner. During the evening of 28 February we were moved yet again; it was not far, but we did seem to be moving back into a military prison and again it was back into solitary. We arrived in darkness, so at this stage our new surroundings were uncertain, however, during the following days, the food improved – oranges, boiled eggs, cheese, bread and rice. On about 3 March I was taken into the corridor for a shave and later had a strip wash and was given a clean POW suit. I did not allow myself to think that this could be the beginning of the end, however – that was how I coped all along – I did not want to raise my hopes, only to have them dashed, so I took things day by day and hour by hour.

What did I do with my time? I planned what to do next; I never did anything straight away. I tried to take some exercise; I folded blankets in a variety of ways to try to get warm and comfortable; I learned the alphabet backwards; I worked out prime number series; I used a tap code to compose theoretical messages; I recalled the names of friends from school, from university, squadrons and clubs. I went through options for a motorbike that I would buy on my return home. I planned dinner party menus. Prayers were never far from my mind and there were constant thoughts of my family – I spoke to Chris and our son each evening before settling down.

My imprisonment came to an abrupt end on 5 March. The cells were visited one by one and in the end we were called out to a bus and driven through Baghdad to the Novotel. There were armed Iraqi

soldiers all around as we entered the hotel where we were handed over to the Red Cross. Our departure had been planned for about 1300 hrs, but the aircraft were unable to land, so our transfer out of Iraq was delayed to the following day. There were more delays but we eventually took off at about 1600 hrs on 6 March, bound for Saudi Arabia and then onward by VC10 to Akrotiri Hospital for medical checks, an intelligence debrief and psychological counselling. After three days in Cyprus, I returned to Brüggen on Sunday, 10 March, landing at 1300hrs to a great welcome home.

That concludes a brief outline of my Gulf War, but ponder for a moment on the effect that this six weeks had had on my family, friends and acquaintances. I am sure that I still do not fully appreciate what they all felt during this time – and do spare a thought too for the families of the thousands of service personnel deployed today who dread that knock on the door.

## AFTERNOON DISCUSSION

**Richard Bateson.** When the war ended, did the Air Ministry's intelligence collecting directorates, such as Gp Capt S D Felkin's ADI(K) organisation, study the effectiveness of the interrogation methods employed by *Dulag Luft* at Oberursal and Wetzlar? We know that a section of the *Chi Stelle*, the signals intelligence agency of the Luftwaffe High Command, carried out detailed analyses of the information obtained from allied aircrew. Were the records of *Dulag Luft* and the *Chi Stelle* ever recovered?

**Roger Stanton.** Not sure that I can shed any light on that. What I do know is that the debriefing reports written by escapers at the Great Central Hotel in Marylebone were all made available to the public about ten years ago and the annexes about five years later. But they don't deal with POWs, of course.

**Sebastian Cox.** The POWs were debriefed. MI9 had initially planned to visit each camp armed with questionnaires which all prisoners would be required to complete. The results were then to be subjected to a detailed analysis. That plan did not survive first contact with the POWs, of course. So MI9 was obliged to resort to giving them questionnaires when they got back. That produced something like a 30% return rate. Some people wrote 'one-word' answers . . . Others wrote lengthy diatribes criticising some of their colleagues whom they thought ought to be shot and so on. So, overall, I don't think that MI9 got very much out of this exercise.

What was far more useful was the debriefing of escapers and evaders, including those who had been captured or recaptured. Some of those were much better.

An attempt was made to identify individuals who had collaborated. They were really only after major offenders, like Harold Cole for example; people who had done things that resulted in the death of others. They weren't interested in folk who had simply adjusted to confinement and taken no active part in resisting or escape activities.

Were they interested in the techniques employed by the Germans? Yes, to a degree, but they really weren't that much different from those used by Felkin.

**Stef Episkopo.** My brother-in-law was a prisoner of the Japanese for

about three years. When he was repatriated they deducted from his pay all the Red Cross parcels – that he didn't receive! Was this a common practice?

**Sir Roger Austin.** Perhaps Charles Clarke could comment?

**Air Cdre Charles Clarke.** You've spoiled my day! I'm the President and Chairman of the ex-Prisoner of War Association, and I'm also ex-*Stalag Luft III*. While we were prisoners, the Government deducted part of our pay which was never repaid. The theory was that the money was deducted to pay for the necessities of life, such as toothpaste – which we never got. Some of the money was diverted to the NCO camps, which was a good thing, of course.

Over the years I have seen many Ministers in the course of appealing against this situation. At various times I've had four people working on the case, a lieutenant-colonel, a Battle of Britain veteran, a naval captain and a squadron leader Blenheim pilot. I now have two tea chests full of documents related to this issue. I haven't given up. I have three options. One – have another go at a Minister, and I have recently written again on this subject. Two – give it to a law firm that would be prepared to take it on as a *pro bono* case. Or – three – give it to a campaigning newspaper.

I am still optimistic.

**Mike Meech.** Sqn Ldr Ankerson referred to the counselling provided in Cyprus when he was freed. Were ex-POWs from WW II provided with any form of immediate or long-term assistance with psychiatric or psychological problems relating to their experiences?

**Sqn Ldr Bob Ankerson.** I am not personally ware of any but I can offer this. Because we were ex-POWs, in April 1991 Air Cdre Clarke invited the seven of us who were captured in Iraq to a reunion dinner to be held by his Association at Warwick University in the August, and six of us were able to attend. Throughout that afternoon and evening we chatted with the *Kriegies* from WW II. The interesting thing was that, the following morning, many of their wives said that they had learned more about their husband's wartime experiences than they ever had done before – which was almost half-a-century ago. It was a different era, of course; Charles, and the other ex-POWs in the audience, would be able to confirm this, but I think that in those days

such assistance as was available was pretty much on a self-help basis with perhaps some mutual support from colleagues.

It was very different for us. When we reached Cyprus each of us was paired with someone from our own squadron. Someone who had flown during the campaign and this permitted us to establish very quickly that, while our physical experiences had been very different, our emotional experiences, our periods of self-doubt and so on had been very similar. I am sure that that minimised the risk of, what could have been, years of mental anguish. That said, I can hardly compare my own relatively brief confinement with that of the veterans of WW II and the numbers involved in 1945 were, of course, immense.

**Sqn Ldr Stanley Booker.** I was a Halifax Nav, shot down just three nights before D-Day. I did all the things we were advised to do by the escapers who had come back from the 'wooden horse'. They said, 'Always look for the *madame* of a brothel or a Roman Catholic padre; they can be of great help.' They didn't tell us how to contact the Resistance, but I did eventually get to them. I was looked after very well by two dear old ladies who were very pleased with the wallet I had, full of French notes, all brand new and sequentially numbered. That was one of things that let evaders down if they were caught. How would you explain away being in civilian clothes, with false papers and a considerable sum of money? The part of the network that I got into had been penetrated by the *Gestapo* and 168 airmen who were being hidden, about forty of them RAF, were captured. We were held in Fresnes Prison, where the Germans kept members of the French Resistance, until Paris was about to be liberated when we were packed into cattle trucks and shipped to Buchenwald.

One of our main preoccupations was the lack of a toothbrush, something that Sqn Ldr Ankerson also commented on. My advice to anyone flying on operations is to carry a toothbrush – and some toilet paper – because a parachute descent can certainly loosen the bowels . .

Our main worry was whether or not our next-of-kin knew that we were alive. Since Paris had been liberated, we anticipated that our fate would soon be discovered. We heard earlier about Donald Darling. I have with me here, a copy of Darling's debriefing of Fg Off Stevenson, a Canadian pilot. One of the 168 airmen who were sent to Buchenwald, Stevenson succeeded in escaping from the train and

getting back to Paris. His debrief document was circulated to twenty-five agencies in London, so a lot of people clearly knew that we had survived. But our families were never informed that we were alive. They did get a pessimistic letter in November to say that 'we regret that your husband is still missing' and another in December. That was six months after I had been shot down. By that time the *Luftwaffe* had rescued us from the clutches of the *Gestapo* and 154 of the original 168 had been transferred to air force camps, in my case *Stalag Luft III* at Sagan. In December the only POW letter of mine that ever got through was delivered to my wife who forwarded it to the Air Ministry. The response was a letter from the Ministry saying 'We understand that your husband is a prisoner of war in Germany. There is a mess bill outstanding for £3/0/8d at RAF Melbourne.' (*Laughter*) It's true! I have the letter here, in my brief case.

The next letter announced a stoppage of pay of £5/0/8d per month for monies issued under the Geneva Convention to POWs. Unfortunately, they didn't tell the Resistance, or *Gestapo*, about that, so we never received it while we were in Paris or Buchenwald – or while we are at Luckenwalde where the Russians detained us as, what amounted to, political hostages for several weeks after VE-Day.

Once the Russians had released us, the American flew us to Brussels. From there we were flown home in a Lancaster. Twenty-four of us sat, with very green faces, until we crossed the coast when we all leapt forward to see England. The captain nearly had a fit, of course, because, as Mr Cox described, the aircraft became unstable. We landed at Dunsfold where we were met by two airmen wearing gas masks and armed with big 'Flit' guns. Having been liberally sprayed with disinfectant we were taken to a pair of tents, one for officers, one for airmen, where we were given, I think it was, £5 and a corned beef and onion sandwich.

After a two-hour wait, we were bussed down to Guildford where, as *Kriegies* with weak bladders and sundry gastric complaints, we were put aboard a train, without a corridor, for a 4½-hour journey to Cosford. You would be surprised at what can be achieved with the window down. (*Laughter*) At Cosford we were all processed within fifteen hours and we left the camp, still in our scruffy clothes, because they didn't have time to kit us out. On arrival at Wolverhampton station I was promptly arrested by the MPs because I wasn't wearing

RAF uniform. The RTO stepped in and rescued me and I was put on a train to Sheffield on which I had to stand the whole way – again, no one would give up a seat because I wasn't in uniform.

Apart from that, we had a very good homecoming. (*Laughter – Applause*)

**Sqn Ldr Bob Ankerson.** I can't cap that, of course, but it would seem that some things never change. When I was shot down, forty-six years after Stanley's stoppage of pay, my CO was obliged to call on my wife to tell her that, because they didn't know whether I was alive or not, the MOD had stopped my flying pay, because it wasn't clear whether I was still available for flying duties. Fortunately, CAS got wind of this and interceded to have the ruling reversed. I would like to think that that sort of thing has been sorted out by now – but, who knows?

**Sir Roger Austin.** Well, at least you didn't have to choose between the *madame* of a brothel and a padre – that was a tricky one. (*Laugher*)

I just want to wind up the day by offering some thanks, on behalf of the audience, to Nigel and his Committee who have arranged today for us. A lot of hard work goes into it, and there is more to be done yet, because someone has to turn the proceedings into a publication. So we are grateful to them and to our six speakers who have provided us with such a fascinating series of presentations. So please join me in a round of applause.

## A SUPPLEMENTARY PAPER

# THE INTERNAL ADMINISTRATION AND ORGANISATION OF ESCAPE ATTEMPTS WITHIN AIR FORCE PRISONER-OF-WAR CAMPS IN THE THIRD REICH, 1939-45

**By Charles Rollings**

### Camp Administration

In the first ten months of the war the organisation for POWs was poor on both the German and the British side because there simply were not many prisoners – and because prisoners are, to be brutally honest, of only marginal interest in any conflict.

It was not until the fall of France in May-June 1940, when the Germans found themselves lumbered with thousands of British and French – as well as colonial – prisoners that both sides, forced by sheer weight of numbers, began to get their act together.

German camps for prisoners of war were run by the Prisoner-of-War Department of the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* – or OKW – the High Command of the Armed Forces under *Feldmarschall* Wilhelm Keitel. They were numbered according to their *Wehrkreis* (military district) and suffixed by a letter of the alphabet according to the order in which they were opened. With the exception of *Dulag Luft*, which from December 1939 was commanded by a *Luftwaffe* major and run by *Luftwaffe* personnel, all camp commandants were army reserve officers and their personnel drawn from the army reserve. However, after the fall of France, each of the three armed forces – the army (*Das Heer*), the air force (*Luftwaffe*) and the navy (*Kriegsmarine*) – assumed responsibility for prisoners of the corresponding enemy armed forces. So while the OKW remained in overall charge, the OKH, OKL and OKM each had a separate organisation for its own camps, designating them according to army, air force or naval districts and drawing the personnel for these camps from members of its own service. The POW Department of OKW made the rules and disseminated them to the POW Departments of the OKH, OKL and OKM, who sent them to the *Wehrkreis*, *Luftgau* and naval district commanders, who sent them to the camp commandants, who had to implement them.

The OKW made up new rules every day, *ad hoc* and *post hoc*,

ranging from the important to the petty, and sent them off every two weeks, right up to the end of the war. They were largely concerned with interpreting the numerous articles of the 1929 Geneva Convention, to which, to its credit, the OKW tried to adhere. The same cannot be said of all camp commandants, some of whom took the view that the Geneva Convention was written by 'a bunch of old women'. But those commandants who did abide by the Convention and helped better the lot of their prisoners were not necessarily 'good Germans'. The OKW was making the rules – not the commandants.

By and large, apart from having to get out of bed when the guards said so, attend roll-call two or three times a day, go to bed when the lights went out and, of course, not stray beyond the confines of the camp, prisoners were left to their own devices. Thus, within their own domain, they created their own administration, which ran things in co-operation with the Germans. It was necessary for there to be some form of POW administration for two reasons. Firstly, because civilised standards had to be maintained and, secondly, because if there were no camp administration, there could be no escape organisation. The first was a *sine qua non* for the latter.

The early prisoners at Spangenberg, Elbersdorf and Oberursel were on the whole treated well, although they lived in cramped conditions, did not get enough fresh-air exercise, were not properly fed and in winter were very cold. They were fortunate, however, in that two relatively senior officers were captured very early in the war – Sqn Ldr Sydney Stewart Murray and Wg Cdr Harry Melville Arbuthnot 'Wings' Day. Murray, who had a flair for languages, made it his business to learn German, and in Spangenberg and subsequent camps, when not the Senior British Officer himself, he was either his representative or his interpreter. Both he and Day made themselves familiar with the Geneva Convention from the very beginning and believed that observing appropriate military courtesies when dealing with the enemy would oil the wheels of diplomacy.

This was very much in evidence at *Dulag Luft*, where the rudiments of RAF POW administration were established by the British Permanent Staff. The first Senior British Officer (SBO), Wg Cdr H M A Day, was succeeded in June 1941 by Sqn Ldr E D Elliott, who held the post until 10 March 1944. When Lt-Cdr J B Buckley

RN[1] arrived from Laufen on 3August 1940, Day appointed him Adjutant, a post he held until June 1941. In time various other post were created: Messing Officer – Fg Off J A Gillies, from May 1940 to June 1941; Gardens Officer – Plt Off A H Gould, from July to October 1940; Entertainments Officer – Buckley again; and so on.

The administrative set-up at *Dulag Luft* was replicated at Barth, where the SBOs were:

Lt R G Wood RN, June-July 1940.
Sqn Ldr B Paddon, from 12 July 1940 to 20 February 1941.
Sqn Ldr G D Stephenson, from 20 February to 7 June 1941.
Wg Cdr H M A Day, from 6 June 1941 to March 1942.
Sqn Ldr A Abels, South Compound from November to December 1943.
Sqn Ldr M J Harris, West Compound who was succeeded by
Wg Cdr J A Lee-Evans who was succeeded by
Wg Cdr F W Hilton
Gp Capt N W D Marwood-Elton, all British Compounds April-August 1944.
Wg Cdr F W Hilton, all British Compounds August-December 1944.

Gp Capt C T 'Ginger' Weir, who had been Station Commander at Fulbeck when shot down in a No 49 Sqn Lancaster on 21 November 1944, became SBO in December 1944. Col Hubert 'Hub' Zemke USAAF became Senior Allied Officer in November 1944.

Perhaps the best-known Adjutant at Barth was Sqn Ldr A R D MacDonell, a Battle of Britain pilot, who held the post from 27 March 1941 to April 1942.

Other officers were made responsible for compound-wide distribution of food, coal or wood, Red Cross and personal parcels, clothes and mail, plus officers to organise laundry, showers, gardening, entertainments and sport and run the camp library. The first Parcels Officer was Fg Off H N Fowler, who held the post until he was sent to Colditz at the end of 1941 after an escape attempt. (In September 1942 he made a 'home run' from Colditz.) Plt Off (later Flt Lt) L Reavell-Carter then took over as distributor of Red Cross

[1] The post-nominals RN or RNVR identify Fleet Air Arm personnel.

parcels, a job he combined with overseeing the communal cookhouse.

In each of the barracks there was an officer in charge, known as a '*Blockführer*', and under him was an officer responsible for food, fuel, parcels, clothes, laundry, showers, gardening and mail for that barrack.

Each room in the barrack had a 'room senior', or '*Stubeführer*', who saw to it that the room was kept clean, that meals arrived at the appointed times, and that the orders passed down by the block leader were carried out.

As the war progressed and more senior officers were made captive, it became customary to have squadron leaders as *Blockführers* and organisers of camp activities, flight lieutenants as *Stubeführers*, and at least flight lieutenants, and often squadron leaders, in charge of the various activities at block level. Sqn Ldr M L McColm, an Australian, was the CO of West Block until he was purged to Lübeck in August 1941 following an escape attempt.

By general agreement the NCOs elected a committee to run their compound with, initially, FSgt E L G Hall as chairman or, as the Germans called it, *Vertrauensmann* (spokesman or intermediary). From September 1940 until the camp closed in April 1942 this post was filled by Sgt J A G 'Dixie' Deans. A young pilot with a very wise head on his shoulders, Deans, through force of personality, carried on in this capacity in various camps until the end of the war.

When *Stalag Luft I* re-opened in October 1942 the *Vertrauensmann* was WO T K May. He was superseded in January 1943 by WO J G Barnes RNZAF until the arrival of Gp Capt J C MacDonald and Sqn Ldr W H N Turner from *Stalag Luft III* on 21 January. Barnes then became Macdonald's assistant. In July 1943 MacDonald and Turner were both removed from the camp and WO Barnes was obliged to resume as Compound Leader, remaining in post until he was purged to *Stalag Luft VI* in November 1943.

When the officers moved from Barth to *Stalag Luft III* at the end of March 1942 Wg Cdr Day naturally carried on as SBO until 17 June when Gp Capt H M Massey arrived. He was SBO of the camp until 27 March 1943 when the new West Compound was opened. He then became SBO of the new compound and of the entire *Stalag Luft III* complex, with Gp Capt R Kellett as SBO of the older officers enclosure. From June to October 1943, when Massey was having

treatment at Obermassfeld hospital, Gp Capt Kellett was in charge of the whole camp with 'Wings' Day as SBO of West Compound, which in September was renamed 'North'. Massey assumed command of the complex upon his return in October, but the recently arrived Gp Capt D E L Wilson RAAF assumed command of North Compound, and remained in charge until the compound was evacuated in January 1945. On 11 April 1944 Massey was repatriated and Gp Capt L E Wray RCAF became overall SBO.

During this period the old East Compound had two SBOs: Gp Capt Kellett from 27 March 1943 until September 1943; then Gp Capt A H Willetts until January 1945.

For a brief period when Centre Compound was occupied by officers, the SBO was Sqn Ldr L W V Jennens; he was succeeded by Gp Capt MacDonald, who subsequently became the SBO at Belaria. East Compound had three Adjutants during its lifetime: Sqn Ldr MacDonell from April 1943 until June 1942; Sqn Ldr Jennens from June 1942 until April 1943; Sqn Ldr D C Torrens from April to October 1943, and Sqn Ldr MacDonell again from October 1943 to January 1945. Apart from his time in Centre Compound, Jennens was also the Adjutant for West/North Compound from 27 March 1943 to 27 January 1945. The adjutant at Belaria was Sqn Ldr D M Strong.

At *Stalag Luft VI*, by popular consent, the Camp Leader was Sgt – now WO – Deans. The *'Kriegies'* appointed FSgt R P L Mogg as Deans's deputy. The *Vertrauensmann* in 'K' Lager was WO V R 'Vic' Clarke. After 'E' Lager was opened for the Americans, the Compound Leader was Tech Sgt F S Paules of the USAAF.

At *Stalag Luft IV*, Gross Tychow, the Camp Leaders were Tech Sgt Richard M Chapman USAAF and WO V R Clarke.

In the Army officers' camps the SBOs were, obviously, the higher-ranking army officers. At Laufen in 1940-41, for instance, the SBO was no less a personage than Maj-Gen V M Fortune, Commander of the 51st Highland Division at St Valéry-en-Caux in June 1940. He was also the senior officer at Thorn from March to June 1941. The RAF administration, such as it was, was subordinate to his. The Senior RAF Officer at Thorn was Sqn Ldr Paddon, as at Barth.

At Lübeck in September 1941 the Senior RAF Officer was Wg Cdr N C ('Hetty') Hyde; his adjutant was Sqn Ldr R J Bushell.

At Warburg Maj-Gen Fortune appointed Brig Nigel Somerset as

SBO. The Senior RAF Officer was, again, Wg Cdr Hyde. In the absence of Bushell, who had escaped en route, Sqn Ldr A J Trumble became Hyde's Adjutant.

When Maj-Gen Fortune was sent to Spangenberg he appointed Brig R L Taverner, of the King's Shropshire Light Infantry, as SBO; he was in that post in February 1942 when RAF officers again took up residence there. Wg Cdr H R Larkin RAAF was the Senior Air Force Officer.

The one exception to this hierarchy was Schubin, the only army camp since early Spangenberg days in which prisoners from the air force and Fleet Air Arm were in the majority. The SBOs there were Wg Cdr Hyde, from September to October 1942, and Wg Cdr Day, from October 1942 to April 1943.

At *Stalag Luft VII*, Bankau, the first Camp Leader was a regimental sergeant major of the Long Range Desert Group who had assumed command because of his rank. He appointed RAF WO K Lane as his deputy. When FSgt P A Thomson RAAF received news that he had been commissioned on 18 January 1944, he became SBO. As the RSM had been transferred to an army camp, WO Lane agreed to carry on as the new Compound Leader's deputy. A *Vertrauensmann*, WO R A Greene RCAF, was appointed on 21 June to act on Thomson's behalf. In December 1944 WO R Mead was elected to take his place. The official interpreter was FSgt J J Waltky RCAF. The Medical Officer was Capt D C Howatson, RAMC. The Padre was Capt Colling (C of E).

In army camps for other ranks the air force leaders or *Vertrauensmänner* were:

*Stalag XIIA*, Limburg: Sgt T K May, a prisoner since 18 December 1939, followed by FSgt E L G Hall in summer 1940;

*Stalag VIIIB*, Lamsdorf: FSgt Hall again, followed by Sgt A McG Currie RAAF from August 1943 to January 1945;

*Stalag IXC*, Bad Sulza: FSgt J A McCairns;

*Stalag IIIE*, Kirchhain: Sgt D E Bingham, from early August 1941 to 22 August 1941; FSgt R J Alexander, from 22 August 1941 to 12 May 1942;

*Stalag IVB*, Mühlberg: WO Jack Washington Meyers RCAF, who

had previously been in *Stalag IIIE, Stalag Luft VI, Stalag Luft I* and *Stalag VIIA*.

At *Stalag 357*, Thorn, the army camp leader was RSM Turner, Royal Warwickshire Regiment, with 'Dixie' Deans again in charge of the airmen. When the camp relocated to Oerbke, a mass meeting of both RAF and Army POWs elected Deans as Camp Leader. He formed a joint administrative staff of soldiers and airmen, notable among the former being Sgt Maj Tom Cameron of the First Battalion, the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders.

During the RAF's stay at *Marlag* 'M' and on the march from Westertimke to Lübeck the SBO was Gp Capt L E Wray RCAF.

At Luckenwalde, the Senior Allied Officer, in command of men of many nationalities, was the Norwegian General Otto Rüge, who was in the camp until 22 April. Gp Capt J C MacDonald acted as SBO, with Wg Cdr R C M Collard as his 2 i/c.

**Escape Committees**

The first escape attempts from both Spangenberg and Barth were trial and error efforts on an individual basis without the support of an escape committee or of MI9. In the summer of 1940, however, at the same time as MI9 was getting into its stride back home, the first escape committees in RAF camps were set up at *Dulag Luft* and at *Stalag Luft I*.

At *Dulag Luft* the first Head of Escape and Intelligence was Sqn Ldr R J Bushell. When Lt Cdr J B Buckley RN arrived from Laufen he was appointed Head of Escape by 'Wings' Day, who made Bushell Head of Intelligence and Supply. Forgery and tailoring was done by individual escapees, but in particular by Fg Off J B J Boardman (forgery) and Sub-Lt W S ('Peter') Butterworth RNVR (clothing).

Escape gear was crude by later standards, with RAF escapers removing the flying badge from their uniforms and converting them into 'civvies' by dyeing them with boot polish. Greatcoats were cut down to the three-quarter length then popular on the Continent, and replacement buttons were carved from wood or bone. Other items of civilian clothing, such as waistcoats, were roughly tailored from blankets. Knapsacks were made by adapting battledress blouses.

The British Permanent Staff had also started to perform an Intelligence function, sending information home in coded letters. The

Head of Coding was Fg Off J A Gillies.

Although letter-coding was still in its infancy, the prisoners were able to secure escape aids and advice from MI9. This included, for instance, information relating to the Schaffhausen Re-entrant, a long, narrow bulge of Swiss territory projecting north-east into Germany which was, reputedly, less well guarded than the rest of the German-Swiss frontier. Other advice concerned suggested escape routes and material items such as maps printed on rice paper and silk, and good compasses. But coded requests for false papers and for the names and addresses of contacts were refused.

When he arrived at *Stalag Luft I* in July 1942, Sqn Ldr B Paddon lost no time turning his attention to escape matters. He formed an escape committee with Sqn Ldr K C Doran, Lt P Fanshawe RN, Flt Lt D A ffrench-Mullen and Fg Off A D Panton. It was Paddon who coined the term 'X Organisation', which remained the cover-name for the escape machine in all RAF officers' camps for the remainder of the war.

The aim of the X Organisation as set up by Paddon and Co was not to arrange its own escape, but to assist the escape attempts of those who were prepared to make the effort and to ensure that schemes did not conflict. That said, it is worth noting that ffrench-Mullen already had a tunnel under way and that the next digging endeavour would be supervised by Fanshawe.

Another innovation was the appointment of an escape representative for each barrack block; this also became a permanent feature. Anyone wishing to escape put his scheme to the escape officer in his barrack, who put it to the committee. From the early days, right up to the end, this was usually a flight lieutenant.

The would-be escaper was responsible for rustling up his own paraphernalia – food, disguise, forged papers, maps, compasses and so on – but could call upon his circle of friends to assist him. Fg Offs H N Fowler and J C Milner, both excellent artists, were amongst the earliest forgers. Officers who acquired sewing skills from making theatrical costumes, such as Fg Off H E L Falkus, turned to making escape outfits.

Some of the officers at Barth had been taught a letter-code by MI9. They included Sqn Ldr Paddon, Sqn Ldr W H N Turner and Flt Lt F T Knight, who taught the code to Flt Lt K Jones. It was common

practice for initiates to pass on the code to selected personnel, each of whom had to be 'registered' as a user back in England.

In the NCOs' compound a number of abortive tunnels were attempted before Sgt Deans set up an escape organisation headed by Sgt R L Mogg and including Sgt E B Lascelles, an Australian, and Sgt J W Wootton. Two other sergeants, J Fancy and G J W Grimson, who were among the most persistent escapers, were later purged to *Stalag VIIB*, and became involved with the escape committee there (before being purged back to Barth for their misdemeanours).

Although the officers and the NCOs were in separate compounds, messages for both escape intelligence and letter-coding purposes were easily passed between them, the officer contact being Sqn Ldr Paddon. When he was sent to Spangenberg in February 1941 in readiness for the reprisal camp at Thorn, Lt Fanshawe took over. The main coding correspondents in the NCO's compound were Sgt Prendergast, FSgt E L G Hall, and Sgt Lascelles. Prendergast had taught the code to other prisoners, including officers, while at *Dulag Luft*.

Sgt J F H Bristow, a WOp/AG, designed and made the first radio receiver from parts that he and others had scrounged on working parties. A tuning condenser was made from an old French mess-tin; the transformer was hand-wound from wire filched from the German lighting system; the valves were stolen from the German radio in the *Vorlager*; smoothing condensers were made from the tin-foil seals in cigarette tins, inserted between Bible leaves, then turned over at the ends, soldered, and boiled in paraffin wax from stolen altar candles. On this contraption the first BBC news bulletins were received, to be read out daily by a team of news readers.

This led to a steady rise in morale and a greater willingness to co-operate with the Escape Committee. The NCOs were more fortunate than the officers in having a greater number of craftsmen, many of them former 'Trenchard Brats', who employed their basic skills in making compasses from Bakelite toothpaste containers, drawing maps and forging documents. One of the forgers was, in peacetime, an heraldic painter.

Sgt A G Fripp, a prisoner of October 1939 vintage, worked in the Red Cross store and handled the distribution of parcels to the British NCOs under German supervision. He smuggled items into the sergeants' compound for the Escape Committee.

Not long after 'Wings' Day arrived in the officers' enclosure with his entourage from Barth in June 1941 he supplanted Paddon's original X Organisation.

According to his biographer,[2] 'Wings' Day calculated that twenty-five per cent of the prisoners in *Luft I* were 'escape-minded'. Of these, four-fifths were hard-working escapers who kept nagging away at reasonable possibilities throughout their POW life, but were at times capable of interesting themselves in other things; the remaining one-fifth were escape fanatics who thought, dreamed and talked of nothing else, and at the slightest chance were prepared to take the most appalling risks. Another fifty per cent – himself included – would only make an escape attempt if the opportunity were handed to them on a plate. 'This attitude owed itself not to laziness or fear, but simply to the conviction that they were unlikely to get far.' But they would willingly work for the 'escape-minded' twenty-five per cent. The remainder were 'the non-escaping fraternity'. They, too, were perfectly willing to do escape work if required. But they did not want to try to escape themselves because they did not believe they had a chance of making a home-run and saw no reason to waste time just to be recaptured.

Day invited Buckley and one Barth 'old-timer' into his room, where they spent about a week interviewing everyone who had anything to do with escapes or anything to say about escaping. (This did not, however, include Peter Fanshawe, one of the original members of Paddon's organisation). As a result, Day declared 'escaping' the 'operational function' of the camp. He appointed Buckley as head of the X Organisation, and Buckley in turn selected two other officers to help him. Each barrack elected its own escape committee of three. One of the escape officers for West Block was Flt Lt R G Ker-Ramsay, who would later become one of the chief tunnelling engineers in *Stalag Luft III*.

As expressed in Day's biography,[2] The duties of Buckley's organisation were:

> '. . . to promote escaping in every way; to vet escape plans and register the originator so that he would be the user of the plan

[2] Smith, Sydney; *Wings Day* (Collins, 1968).

> when, perhaps months later, the opportunity arose to put it into action; to collect intelligence of German activities both inside and outside the camp; to provide the escaper with all he required in the way of clothes, food, maps, etc, and lastly, to provide him with any physical assistance he required, such as diversions or look-outs, stooges for his escape-work, and the escape itself. The siting and work on a tunnel became in practice a prerogative of Buckley's Escape Committee, who named the leader of the particular tunnel and provided any extra help which the leader had not been able to recruit himself.'

'Wings' was the ultimate authority for all escape plans, and he saw his own primary job as creating the sort of prisoner-German atmosphere most conducive to escapes. He also set up a new Intelligence Section, centralising the interrogation of new prisoners, intelligence-gathering and code-letter writing. He interviewed all new arrivals himself and wrote telegraphic reports on them for the Intelligence Section to render into code for the letter-writers. 'Control' at home could identify the letters that contained the coded information. Flt Lt R G Stark, a New Zealander, and a chartered accountant by profession, sat in on the interrogations and acted as the link between Day and the coders. Stark and Fg Off Gillies, who had also been purged from *Dulag Luft*, recruited the coders from among the non-escaping fraternity.

The Escape Committee had its own Intelligence section, which also covered Security. The two organisations were quite separate, but of necessity maintained a close liaison.

Another innovation was the 'ghost' system, in effect, escape *inside* the camp, aimed at never allowing the Germans to be absolutely certain of the total camp strength, or of the total missing on any given escape. As soon as an escape was about to take place one – sometimes two – 'ghosts' were detailed. If the escapers cleared the camp, the ghosts went into immediate hiding. When roll-calls took place the ghosts would be among the missing, presumably having escaped. This left two spare men inside the camp ready to escape without the alarm being raised. Ghosts were always prisoners who had planned their own solo wire or gate schemes. If a ghost escaped, another would go into hiding, and the Germans, thinking he was the escapee, would put

out his description instead.

It was also during this period that the various escape activity departments were established, each with its appointed chief. Fg Off T F Guest, a fighter pilot and pre-war tanner, was put in charge of Escape Clothing.

In the spring of 1942, as the new 'tunnelling season' approached, another escape aid was created – the 'Duty Pilot' system. 'Duty Pilot' was an extra task performed by pilots, on a rota basis, on all RAF aerodromes, and included logging all personnel in and out. At Barth the Duty Pilot sat at the window of a barrack block commanding the gate into the compound and reported the arrival and departure of every German. He had a series of skilful identity sketches of all the known camp staff, and kept a log-book showing times of entry and departure. A staff of runners followed the Germans' progress through the camp, warned the departments carrying out various illicit activities, and reported back to the Duty Pilot. This system proved effective and became a permanent institution in officers' and NCOs enclosures in all RAF prison camps.

When the officers were transferred from Barth, Spangenberg and Warburg to *Stalag Luft III* Buckley, now dubbed 'Big X', expanded the escape committee.

Three special sections were formed to deal with the three types of escape: 'Under' (tunnelling); 'Over' (wire escapes); and 'Through' (escapes through the main gate). Flt Lt Ker-Ramsay was put in charge of underground activities, and Plt Off J C Wilson in charge of wire escape schemes.

Lt D M Lubbock RNVR was another member of the committee. Back at Warburg Lubbock, a nutritionist, had worked out a formula for a concentrated escape ration that would make it possible for an escaper to keep going for a two or more weeks. There were two kinds: one made from a baked mixture of cocoa, milk powder, sugar and vitamins; the other from raisins, and dried cereal, which one mixed with water (preferably hot). They were known as Fudge and Goo respectively, and were easy to carry, simple to gnaw, and digestible.

Other members of the 'inner circle' were Lt A S Ruffel SAAF, advisor on escape schemes generally; Sqn Ldr N H J Tindal – known as 'Big I' – in charge of intelligence and the 'contact' organisation; and Flt Lt G W Walenn, in charge of forgery.

Sqn Ldr G D Craig was responsible for the custody and issue of escape equipment, but in June 1942 was replaced by Wg Cdr E N Ryder, who continued this work until the first purge to Schubin. Personnel outside the committee included an Information Officer – Flt Lt A M Crawley.

As the summer of 1942 progressed a mapping section came into being, and later a 'tin-bashing' section to make such things as cap badges, belt buckles, wire-cutters and gadgets for the tunnellers.

A special Red Cross Parcels staff worked under Flt Lt M M Marsh to identify and obtain, under the noses of the German censorship, specially marked parcels from MI9 that were known to contain escape materials.

In October 1942, with the departure of Day, Buckley and many members of the X Organisation to Schubin, the Committee was enlarged under the new leadership of Sqn Ldr Bushell. It now consisted of:

Sqn Ldr R B Abraham in charge of clothing;
Fg Off N E Canton in charge of wire-escape schemes;
Lt-Col A P Clark USAAF in charge of Security;
Flt Lt R G Ker-Ramsay in charge of Tunnels;
Fg Off D E Pinchbeck in charge of Tunnel Security;
Acting Flt Lt D L Plunkett in charge of Maps;
Sqn Ldr N H J Tindal in charge of Intelligence and 'contacts';
Flt Lt G W Walenn in charge of Forgery.

When the new West Compound (later re-named 'North') was opened at the end of March 1943, the committee consisted of officers who had previously occupied the original compound:

Wg Cdr R R S Tuck in charge of Supplies
Acting Sqn Ldr C N S Campbell in charge of Carpentry;
Fg Off N E Canton in charge of escape food and wire-escape schemes;
Lt-Col A P Clark USAAF in charge of Compound Security;
Sqn Ldr T G Kirby-Green in charge of the 'Duty-Pilot' Organisation.
Fg Off G R Harsh RCAF in charge of Tunnel Security;
Flt Lt R G Ker-Ramsay, Member of Tunnel Committee;

Plt Off C W C Floody RCAF, Member of Tunnel Committee;
Flt Lt H C Marshall, Member of Tunnel Committee;
Wg Cdr A Eyre in charge of Collation of Escape Intelligence;
Plt Off A Valenta (Czech) in charge of 'Contact' Intelligence;
Plt Off G Hill in charge of the Contacts Organisation;
Plt Off R Marcinkus (Lithuanian) in charge of Escape Intelligence from newspapers, etc;
Flt Lt G W Walenn in charge of Forgery;
Acting Flt Lt D L Plunkett in charge of Maps;
Fg Off T F Guest in charge of Escape Clothing;
Maj D Jones USAAF, American Escape Representative

Upon the return of Wg Cdr G L B Hull from Schubin, he was put in charge of organising labour. Another 'Schubinite', Lt-Cdr N R Quill RN was co-opted as an advisor to Bushell. As new prisoners came in from *Dulag Luft*, other appointments were made and some personnel dropped out, and after the 'Great Escape' in March 1944 the Escape Committee had to be re-formed owing to the loss of several key members.

In April 1943, when the old officers' compound was re-occupied by the contingent from Schubin, a new Committee was formed under the leadership of Wg Cdr J R Kayll. It consisted of:

Sqn Ldr R B Abraham in charge of clothes;
Flt Lt J F Clayton in charge of Maps;
Flt Lt A M Crawley in charge of Intelligence;
Lt D M Lubbock RNVR in charge of Food;
Sqn Ldr T W Piper in charge of Security;
Flt Lt E H L Shore in charge of Forgery;
Flt Lt P Stevens in charge of Contacts.

On August 1943 Flt Lt W F Ash RCAF was co-opted as tunnel expert. In September Sqn Ldr W D Hodgkinson replaced Piper as Compound Security Officer. He was succeeded in May 1944 by Lubbock. The East Compound Committee continued in this form until January 1945.

The NCOs' escape organisation was known as 'The Tally-Ho Club'. As in the case of the X Organisation, upon the move to Sagan it was augmented by escape veterans from other camps. Among them

were FSgt R J Alexander from *Stalag IIIE*; Sgt A C Hunter from *Stalag IXC*, and, from *Stalag VIIIB*, Sgt A Morris, who spoke fluent German. Sgt S I Harrison, from Barth, was in charge of forgery; Sgt G James, a rear gunner, produced German uniform items such as badges of rank, belts and pistol holsters; Sgts R Stewart and S H Bevan were the chief 'tin-bashers', and Sgt Fripp carried on with his covert work in the Parcels Office, identifying loaded parcels from MI9. Sgt N H Leaman, a new prisoner, was put in charge of the department responsible for suborning the enemy.

As soon as they had the radio working, Petty Officer A Brims RN was given the job of 'zogging' the BBC News to the officers' compound each day by semaphore.

When the NCOs who had been sent to Schubin returned in April 1943, Sgt Prendergast was put in charge of tunnelling.

When they moved to *Stalag Luft VI* the 'Tally-Ho' organisation in 'A' Lager was under the direction of WOs A Morris (again), J W B Snowden, J Potter, W Wood, F Webster and J F Barnes, all of whom had been sergeants when shot down. They were joined by Flt Lt Ash, the Canadian who had exchanged identity with an NCO at Sagan. He set up a tunnelling syndicate including Sgts (now WOs) J Fancy, D Flynn and W R Garrioch. WO Morris was in charge of Escape Intelligence. FSgt (now WO) G J W Grimson organised a trading system with the German guards, and soon at least three had been 'turned'. Sgt Fripp, mentioned above, was a member of this section.

Civilian clothing was made by FSgt D E Burrows and FSgt E E B Le Voi. They also made German military uniforms with the help of a new prisoner, Sgt R A Cleaver, who made belt-buckles and insignia out of melted down tin-foil. The carpentry or manufacturing department included Sgt Frank Redding, who on one occasion made a dummy rifle out of bed boards; Sgt L J Bevan, who stained and polished said rifle to look like walnut and 'blued' steel; and WO K R Coles (a former sergeant), who made five dummies to cover up for the absence of escapers.

In the course of its history, fifteen separate escape attempts were made from *Stalag Luft VI*, involving seventy-two prisoners; but only two made a home run.

In army camps the RAF escape committees, as in the case of internal camp administration, were under the army. One of the earliest

RAF representatives on the committee at Spangenberg, in 1940-41, was Plt Off H R Bewlay. From February to April 1942 the representatives were Wg Cdr H R Larkin RAAF, the Senior Officer of the air force contingent, and Flt Lt Crawley.

At Laufen in 1940 there was hardly any escape organisation at all, but Maj J S Poole of the King's Royal Rifle Corps, who had been a prisoner in the First World War, was appointed Escape Officer. However, the number of RAF and Fleet Air Arm prisoners at Laufen was small, and all were transferred to *Dulag Luft*, and then to Barth, before any escape schemes could develop.

At Warburg the air force contingent was represented by Wg Cdr N C ('Hetty') Hyde, the senior RAF officer, Lt-Cdr Quill, and Plt Off Bewlay

The one exception was Schubin, the only army camp since early Spangenberg days where the presence of army officer prisoners was minimal. After the first transfers of RAF prisoners from Sagan and Warburg in September 1942 the head of escape was Sqn Ldr B G Morris. He was superseded shortly afterwards by Wg Cdr Kayll.

When the final purge came in from Sagan the escape organisation was taken over by Jimmy Buckley and also known as 'the X Organisation', as at Barth and Sagan. The main departments and personnel were:

Wire-jobs – Lt-Cdr N RQuill.
Forgers (code-name 'Cook's Tours') – Flt Lt E H L Shore.
Tailors (code name 'Gieves') – Flt Lt J W G Paget.
Clothes dyers ('Pullar's of Perth') – Flt Lt J W G Paget.
Escape rations department ('Lyons') – Lt D M Lubbock RNVR.
Escape Intelligence – Flt Lt A M Crawley.
Outside contacts – Flt Lt J Bryks, a Czech prisoner who spoke both Polish and German.
Chief Intelligence coding officer – Sqn Ldr G D Craig.

In addition to these departments there existed a workshop or 'tin-bashing' section to produce gadgets and pipelines for air-pumps, and the Security Stores (known as 'Gamage's') whose personnel hid all illegal property down tunnels and in false ceilings, floors and walls.

Because the Germans maintained permanent armed patrols inside the grounds and the barrack blocks, there was no Duty Pilot system.

The camp was now receiving ‘escape blankets’ from MI9. These had secret markings to indicate how they could be cut to make civilian suits. They were, however, of too good a quality. The hard, almost threadbare German issue blankets made much more plausible disguises.

A radio was being built with parts smuggled in from Sagan, and a Morse procedure had been arranged with home for sending direct communications to the camp. The radio, a cumbersome affair with a condenser made of silver paper from cigarette packets, was hidden under the cement base of a tiled stove on the attic floor of the White House.

Turning to the NCOs in army camps, at *Stalag 383* tunnelling was carried out mainly by army prisoners as a number of them came from a Royal Engineers Tunnelling Company and some were former miners, while at *Stalag IVB* there were a number of extremely co-operative French prisoners, whose Escape Committees worked closely with that of the British. The chief of the French Escape Committee arranged places on French working parties for would-be escapers. He took clothing and food to a nearby farm, and when the escapers arrived they were kitted out and given extra food and railway tickets.

An RAF wireless expert, Sgt E J Gargini, built the first radio receiver in the RAF compound at Mühlberg from bits and pieces, but the vital parts – the valves – were acquired by the French. He was thus able to keep his compound up to date with the BBC News. (His nickname was ‘Marconi.)

As in the case of the RAF officers at Schubin, there was also an army camp that accommodated only air force NCOs. That was *Stalag IIIE*. The Escape Committee there was formed in September 1941 and consisted of Sgt D E Bingham (Camp Leader), Sgt E W McConchie RNZAF (No 1 Barrack), Sgt K G Lewis (No 2 Barrack) and FSgt W Menzies RCAF (No 4 Barrack).

MI9 produced a ‘model’ for a POW Camp Escape Committee, which it outlined to aircrew who attended escape and evasion lectures. The escape set-up in most prison camps conformed to this pattern, although whether this was deliberate, or whether it simply evolved out of experience is difficult to say. Few of the leaders of these committees, most of whom had been captured early in the war, had attended MI9 briefings, but the bulk of the workers who formed the

backbone of the escape organisation in each camp had attended at least one, at OTU, and sometimes another one or two on an operational squadron.

**The Home Runs**

Sadly, all this activity resulted in only thirty-three officers, NCOs and other ranks in camps holding air force personnel making home runs, or reaching neutral territory or Allied lines in the West, by the end of the war. Including one army officer and one SAS NCO who were incarcerated in *Stalag Lufts*, the list of successful escapers is as follows:

1. **17 April 1941 LAC J G Ward.** From a working party near Lissa. Stayed with Polish Underground until January 1945. Repatriated via Odessa and reached Britain 21 March 1945.

2. **26 May 1941 Flt Lt H Burton.** From *Stalag Luft I*, Barth. Boarded Swedish ship at Sassnitz. Reached Sweden. Flown back to Britain.

3. **19 October 1941 Flt Lt J T L Shore.** From *Stalag Luft I*, Barth. Boarded Swedish ship at Sassnitz. Reached Sweden. Flown back to Britain 29 October 1941.

4. **25 November 1941 Sgt D D W Nabarro**. Escaped from *Stalag IXC*, Bad Sulza, and in Vichy France interned at Fort de la Revère, Monte Carlo. Escaped 23 August 1942 and reached England via Marseilles and Gibraltar in October 1942.

5. **22 January 1942 FSgt J A McCairns.** From *Stalag IXC*, Bad Sulza. Reached England via Spain and Gibraltar in April 1942.

6. **11 June 1942 Sqn Ldr B Paddon.** Though incarcerated at *Oflag IVC*, Colditz, was on trial at *Stalag XXA*, Thorn, for an alleged offence committed there in 1941, and escaped disguised as a member of a working party. Boarded Swedish shop at Danzig 16 June. Reached England via Sweden 7 August 1942.

7. **11 August 1942 Sgt K B Chisholm RAAF.** From a *Stalag VIIIB*, Lamsdorf, working party at Gleiwitz with Sgt C E McDonald RCAF. Stayed with Underground in Poland and then in Belgium and France. Liberated in Paris by Allied Forces in August 1944.

8. **11 August 1942 Sgt C E McDonald RCAF (American).** From a *Stalag VIIIB*, Lamsdorf, working party at Gleiwitz with Sgt K B Chisholm RAAF. Reached England via France, Spain and Gibraltar on 24 July 1943.

9. **9 October 1942 Flt Lt H N Fowler.** From *Oflag IVC*, Colditz. Reached England via Switzerland, Spain and Gibraltar in March, 1943.

10. **15 October 1942 Flt Lt H D Wardle.** From *Oflag IVC*, Colditz, with Maj P R Reid RASC. Reached Switzerland four days later. Repatriated to England via France, Spain and Gibraltar on 6 February 1944.

11. **16 December 1942 Sgt P T Wareing.** From a working party at *Oflag XXIB*, Schubin. Boarded Swedish ship at Danzig. Reached Britain via Sweden on 5 January 1943.

12 & 13. **16 April 1943 Sgt M Cwiklinski (Pole) and Sgt E Pelc (Pole).** From *Arbeitkommando 579* (Niwka), attached to *Stalag VIIIB.* Stayed with Polish Resistance until January 1945. Reached Odessa 30 April 1945 and repatriated to Britain.

14. **10 May 1943 FSgt H L Brooks RCAF.** From a working party at Tost attached to *Stalag VIIIB*, Lamsdorf. Remained with Polish Underground throughout the war; repatriated via Odessa and reached Britain on 19 March 1945.

15. **10 June 1943 Sgt W Raginis (Pole).** From a working party at Jaworzne, attached to *Stalag VIIIB*, Lamsdorf. Reached England via Spain and Gibraltar in early December 1943.

16. **15 July 1943 Sgt P Bakalarski (Pole**). From a working party at Jaworzne, attached to *Stalag VIIIB*, Lamsdorf. Reached England via Spain and Gibraltar in mid-November 1943.

17. **17 July 1943 Cpl J V Byrne SAS**. From *Stalag Luft VI*, Heydekrug. Boarded Swedish ship at Danzig. Reached Britain via Sweden.

18. **29 August 1943 Sgt J P Dowd.** From a working party at Grottkau, attached to *Stalag VIIIB*, Lamsdorf. Reached Britain via Sweden in September 1943.

19. **19 September 1943 Fg Off A F McSweyn (Australian).** Exchanged identities with an orderly in East Compound, *Stalag Luft III*, Sagan, and after transfer to *Stalag VIIIB*, Lamsdorf, escaped by tunnel. Reached England via France, Spain and Gibraltar in mid-November 1943.

20. **29 September 1943 Capt R B Palm SAAF.** From *Stalag VIIA*, Moosburg. Reached England via France, Spain and Gibraltar in mid-November 1943.

21. **29 October 1943 Flt Lt O L S Philpot.** From *Stalag Luft III*, Sagan, through 'Wooden Horse' tunnel. Boarded Swedish ship at Danzig. Reached Britain via Sweden on 26 December 1943.

22 & 23. **29 October 1943 Flt Lt E E Williams and Lt R M C Codner RA.** From *Stalag Luft III*, Sagan, through 'Wooden Horse' tunnel. Reached Britain via Stettin, Denmark and Sweden on 29 December 1943.

24. **18 February 1944 WO C B Flockhart.** From *Stalag Luft VI*, Heydekrug. Boarded Swedish ship at Danzig. Reached Britain via Sweden on 9 March 1944.

25 & 26. **24 March 1944 Sgt P Bergsland (Norwegian) and Plt Of J E Muller (Norwegian).** From *Stalag Luft III*, Sagan, through tunnel 'Harry'. Boarded Swedish ship at Stettin. Reached Britain via Sweden in April 1944.

27. **24 March 1944 Flt Lt B van der Stok (Dutch)** From *Stalag Luft III*, Sagan, through tunnel 'Harry'. Reached England Gibraltar on 8 July 1944 and repatriated to England.

28. **3 April 1944 Sgt J Gewelber (Palestinian Jew aka 'Jack Gilbert').** From *Stalag Luft VI*, Heydekrug. Boarded Swedish ship at Danzig 15 April. Reached Britain via Sweden in May 1944.

29. **1 May 1944 WO J Branford.** From *Stalag IVB*, Muhlberg, with Sgt J L N Warren RCAF. Stayed in Holland until he reached Allied lines in September 1944.

30. **1 May 1944 Sgt J L N Warren RCAF.** From *Stalag IVB*, Muhlberg, with WO J Branford. Stayed in Holland until liberated by Allied troops on 16 April 1945

31. **11 July 1944 WO W G Reed RAAF.** From a working party at Beuthen, attached to *Stalag VIIB*, Lamsdorf, with Sapper H Toch RE. Boarded Swedish ship at Stettin on 14 July. Reached Britain via Sweden shortly afterwards.

32. **17 August 1944 WO G T Woodroofe RNZAF.** From working party *E381* (Olbersdorf), attached to *Stalag VIIIB*, Lamsdorf. Boarded Swedish ship at Wismar on 25 August. Reached Britain via Sweden in early September 1944.

33. **20 August 1944 WO C Rofe.** From working party at Beuthen, attached to *Stalag VIIIB*, Lamsdorf. Stayed with Polish Underground and later Russian Cossacks. Reached Britain via Moscow on 18 December 1944.

This list does not, of course, include those officers and NCOs at Sagan, Colditz and Heydekrug who worked their ticket home by feigning illness and insanity – technically not an escape – and does not at first glance appear to greatly reward the War Office's strenuous efforts to get men back. But it should be remembered that for every home run from a prison camp, almost a thousand Allied evaders were passed along the escape routes of Europe.

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Note that the prices given below are those quoted by the publishers. In most cases a better deal can be obtained by buying on-line.**

**Forming the Pathfinders – the career of Air Vice-Marshal Sydney Bufton** by Hugh Melinsky. The History Press, 2010. £14-99.

In 1927 the young Sydney Bufton, who had already qualified as an engineer, joined the RAF on a short service commission and learnt to fly in Egypt. He saw squadron service in both the Middle East and the UK and did a tour as a flying instructor, followed by a two-year course in aeronautical engineering. Granted a Permanent Commission, he served as an engineering officer and on the staff of Training Command, followed by Staff College, from which he graduated on the eve of war. Although nothing in his previous service would appear to have pre-ordained it, Bufton was destined to serve throughout the conflict as a 'bomber man'. After a salutary and sobering experience as a staff officer with the Advanced Air Striking Force in France, learning that Battles were hardly adequate for modern warfare and that the pace of battle, if not Battles, was apt to be lightning quick, he took over 10 Squadron on 19 July 1940. A full tour earned him a DFC and command of RAF Pocklington before being posted to the Directorate of Bomber Operations in the Air Ministry on 1 November 1941. Post-war he served as AOC Aden, SASO at Bomber Command, and finally as Assistant Chief of Air Staff (Intelligence).

It is, however, his service on the Air Staff which marks him out as worthy of a biography, although he never rose above the rank of air commodore during the war, and never held a command from 1941 to 1945. It is his time in the Directorate of Bomber Operations which forms the core of this book, with sixteen of its twenty-four chapters devoted to Bufton's time there. As the title suggests, Bufton is most famously associated with the formation of the Pathfinder Force in Bomber Command. It was on this very issue that Bufton quickly found himself in conflict with the formidable figure of Sir Arthur Harris, a prospect perhaps as daunting to most men as facing the *Flak* over the Ruhr.

As is well known to serious students of Bomber Command, the Directorate of Bomber Ops was almost constantly at loggerheads with

the CinC Bomber Command throughout the War and the initial falling out came over the very issue of forming the Pathfinder Force (PFF). Although the concept of the PFF (or Target-Finding Force as the Directorate of Bomber Ops would have preferred to title it) was not solely or originally Bufton's, stemming as it did from the analysis by others of operations by the *Luftwaffe's Kampfgruppe 100,* the principal credit for its introduction into Bomber Command undoubtedly belongs to him. As Melinsky shows, Bufton pulled together the previous strands of thought on the subject and produced a coherent and cogent argument for the adoption of a system which would concentrate the best crews in a few squadrons operating as an elite force, which would literally find the target and drop concentrations of flares and incendiaries to create a 'beacon conflagration' and lead the main bombing force to it, thus improving both navigation and accuracy in one fell swoop. Harris resisted, but his stated dislike for *corps d'elite* and to diluting experience across his squadrons was not quite so unreasoning as either Bufton or this biography suggest. At the time the Command was weak in both quality and quantity of aircraft, and was only able to put some 300 aircraft into the air, and both Harris and his Group Commanders believed that removing the best and most experienced crews from frontline squadrons would seriously weaken the leadership across the force. Given the size of the Command at the time, this too was a perfectly cogent and probably accurate short term view, but making the best crews from individual squadrons the 'raid leaders', as Harris suggested, would not have produced the long-term improvements that a dedicated marking force produced.

Initially rebuffed over PFF, Bufton sought to persuade the CinC by directly canvassing Squadron Commanders through a questionnaire, and then representing the results to Harris in support of the arguments he had previously deployed. It does not appear to have occurred to Bufton that going behind the back of a CinC in order to canvass evidence from his units so as to contradict him was unlikely to have particularly positive results. Melinksy also quotes, admiringly and in full, the very lengthy letter Bufton subsequently sent to Harris, not only repeating the arguments for the PFF, but also effectively accusing the CinC and his staff of being out of touch and suggesting wholesale reform of the entire command structure at Station, Group and

Command level. Being lectured in this way by a far more junior officer from the Air Staff can only have caused intense irritation at High Wycombe, and including criticisms unrelated directly to the PFF surely only detracted from Bufton's case. The PFF was finally imposed on Harris by Sir Charles Portal. With the benefit of hindsight, Bufton and Portal were correct, and Harris mistaken, but Bufton's tactics and lack of diplomacy effectively poisoned his future relationship with the CinC. This was deeply unfortunate for the Command and for the Directorate of Bomber Ops.

It is arguable that Bufton and Harris shared certain qualities which led to this conflict. Both were convinced of the rightness of their own view and were unprepared to compromise, and each suffered from a certain myopia. Harris felt that Bufton tried to force his ideas onto Bomber Command and that he was also prone to behave like a 'shadow CinC'. These criticisms are not without some foundation, since the Air Staff with DBOps in the lead, issued a stream of Directives to Bomber Command including, as Harris pointed out, during periods when such strategic direction was not formally in their gift. The fiercest dispute between DBOps and the CinC came over the attack on oil. Bufton was in part responsible for the establishment of the Combined Strategic Targets Committee (CSTC) in October 1944, and became its co-chair with an American officer. Originally, the CSTC had no representative from Bomber Command and concentrated its attention almost exclusively on oil, Bufton's favoured target system. Eventually, Sir Arthur Tedder, from his position at SHAEF and thus crucially outside the Air Staff 'bubble', forced changes to the CSTC to broaden its consideration and sub-committee structure to include transportation. Belatedly, representatives from Bomber Command and SHAEF were also included in the Committee. Tedder, echoing Harris's complaint regarding Bufton trying to direct the offensive, also criticised the CSTC for trying to define policy and not simply select targets. Bufton would have been wiser to include Bomber Command and SHAEF from the start: to exclude them initially from the CSTC was surely both short-sighted and counter-productive, making both suspicious that the Committee was simply a vehicle to enable micro-management of bombing policy from Whitehall and further poisoning the atmosphere with High Wycombe.

Bufton's achievements, including the PFF, were considerable but

this biography is determinedly uncritical as, for example, when praising Bufton's part in instigating the bombing of Caen in Normandy in early July 1944, an operation the value of which most historians, and many contemporaries, are rightly highly sceptical. The post-war chapters are decidedly thin and are padded out in parts with material of little direct relevance to Bufton or his work. There is almost no analysis beyond what Bufton himself wrote and thought, which is simply reproduced uncritically. This may in part stem from the fact that the author has apparently based the work almost exclusively on Bufton's own papers and has not consulted more widely. At the level of a straightforward narrative of Bufton's career this illustrated and indexed 192-page softback is an informative biography, but it disappoints in two significant respects – its lack of in-depth analysis when the subject almost compels it, and an excessive number of basic errors. Among the latter are: stating that Bufton attended No 3 FTS in Egypt whereas the school there was No 4 FTS; indicating that the satellite of Pocklington at Melbourne was never operational when Bufton's old squadron spent most of the War there; mis-stating the number of aircraft lost on the Dams Raid; believing that the entire bombing force circled over Dresden, not just the master-bomber; promoting Bufton to Vice Chief, not Assistant Chief, of Air Staff(Intelligence); and mis-captioning Victors as Vulcans. Regrettably, taken in the round these shortcomings mean we still await a more balanced assessment of Bufton's strengths and weaknesses.

**Sebastian Cox**

**From Auster to Apache** by Guy Warner. Pen & Sword; 2013. £25.00

The prolific Guy Warner's latest opus is a 312-page illustrated hardback history of No 656 Sqn since its formation in 1942 to date, the first fifteen years of this period having been spent as an RAF unit. That said, while the air force had elected to 'host' the AOP role, it did not afford it a particularly high priority. This is very evident from No 656 Sqn's wartime experience. The normal 'scale' for AOP units was a squadron per corps of three divisions with one flight working with each division. Despite RAF promises of additional resources, these never materialised in Burma and the squadron was obliged to spend 1943-45 as the only AOP unit fighting the Japanese, which meant that each corps had only a flight and each division a mere

section – one aeroplane, one pilot and four men. Despite being so heavily overtasked, and operating under the most demanding environmental conditions, the squadron was extremely successful. It established an enviable reputation, not least by introducing some innovative techniques to overcome practical difficulties, eg by laying up to two-miles of telephone cable by air. No 656 Sqn stayed in the Far East after the war and flew throughout the Malayan Emergency, this period also including the Korean War which Warner also covers.

What comes across throughout this period is the remarkable similarities between the activities of the Auster units and those of the corps reconnaissance squadrons of the RFC. The primary function, of course, was the registration of guns and the conduct of artillery shoots, but it also involved reconnaissance and photography, the latter particularly in Malaya, and in Burma even contact patrols with the troops using an orange umbrella to make themselves more readily visible through the dense green foliage. An Auster was only slightly more sophisticated than an RE8, of course, and that could involve some extreme operating conditions for the pilots – in the first Korean winter they were obliged to stuff their flying kit with newspaper to provide some insulation from the cold. The domestic arrangements, especially in Korea, could also sometimes resemble those of the trenches of WW I – bunkers ankle deep in water and infested with rats. All of this, and more, is described in considerable detail, amplified by frequent first-hand accounts provided by veterans.

It took time, but the lessons of WW II (and WW I) were eventually learned and the Army gained complete control of its air affairs with the establishment of the Army Air Corps in 1957. Now an army unit and, from 1964 onwards, flying helicopters, No 656 Sqn soldiered on in Borneo 1961-69, and Hong Kong 1969-77, before becoming UK-based in 1978. From there it was deployed to Rhodesia 1979-80, took part in the Falklands campaign of 1982 and flew in the Balkans between 1996 and 2002 before equipping with the fearsome Apache which it has since operated in Afghanistan and Libya.

All of this is covered in the same detail as the RAF era. My only criticism is that, while most of the complicated movements of the squadron and its many semi-autonomous sub-units (each of its Auster flights could be hundreds of miles from the HQ and then further dispersed as sections) can be reconstructed from the narrative, I would

have appreciated these being summarised in an Appendix. That is the only omission, however, and the other standard appendices – lists of COs and of honours and awards, and a roll of honour – are all provided, as is an extensive index.

*From Auster to Apache* is a well-written account of a remarkable squadron and, while only some of its history was spent as an air force unit, the book is a worthy addition to the annals of the RAF.

**CGJ**

**From Borneo To Lockerbie – Memoirs of an RAF Helicopter Pilot** by Geoffrey Leeming. Pen and Sword, 2012. £19.99.

This is the second 'helicopter book' offered for review in the last six months but this one covers a wider perspective than Roger Annett's *The Borneo Boys*. In reviewing this 220-page, illustrated (32 photographs and 8 maps) and comprehensively indexed hardback, I should declare an interest, since the author and I served together at both Tern Hill and in FEAF. Our paths then diverged but crossed again 43 years later as we both belong to a group known as 'The Old Rotors'.

This book is not a cerebral account of great strategy or moment, rather it is the straightforward story of an officer pilot typical of the period from the early 1960s. It is told in a direct and uncomplicated manner. In Leeming's account we learn something of: his childhood and ambitions to fly; his route to the cockpit, via South Cerney; thence to a Flying Training School before the fate which befell many in that era – the right hand seat in a V-bomber. The demise of the Valiant saw Leeming, and several others from that force, move to rotary wing flying. His account of grappling with the Sycamore – sometimes called the 'sick a lot' – with its single and transverse mounted, manual, collective pitch lever and throttle will stir the memory buds of many in this society. From there to the Whirlwind Mk 10 and the almost inevitable posting, regardless of being married and under 25, to the Far East. We read of Leeming's struggle with the professional and personal pressures to be faced and the clashes with some of those in authority. I thought his comments about an erstwhile Squadron Commander, however, to be far too generous from my own experiences of the man!

Following his return to the UK, Leeming recounts the twists and

turns of his career and the highs and lows which were, and probably still are, the lot of most aircrew officers. Much of Leeming's flying was associated with search and rescue and he describes in a matter of fact style the trials and tribulations of, for example, operating the Whirlwind 10 over the most inhospitable of terrain and in weather conditions when most of us would wish to stay abed. There is no false bravado or exaggeration and Leeming makes much of the essential teamwork and the close bond which exists amongst SAR crews at the sharp end.

The book concludes with the tragic aftermath of the destruction of PanAm Flight 103 at Lockerbie and the distressing affects it had and of the loss of a crewman, and close friend, in training.

In summary, this account is a good read and will interest many in this society. In the wider context, the story Leeming tells will strike a chord with many who set out on an RAF flying career in the early 1960s. In the historical arena, it will prove, in years to come, to be a valuable insight into daily life in the RAF for a typical aircrew officer.

My only real 'gripe' is the dust jacket. This shows a Whirlwind without the kink in the tail boom, no skid, an engine exhaust that would look more at home on a Morris Minor and an absence of radio aerial blades and wires. It also has no winch, although the absence of the sand filter, an enormous and useless piece of kit weighing 84 lbs and turning the nose of the aircraft into a painful looking boil, is plausible for the period.

**Colin Cummings**

**Fading Eagle** by Ian Watson. Fonthill Media; 2013. £25.00.

In *Fading Eagle* the author sets out to chronicle 'the politics and decline of Britain's post-war air force'. It is a worthy subject for study but this 256-page hardback is only partially successful. First off, there are errors of fact, which must undermine the reader's confidence. For instance: No 8 Sqn did not operate Foxes in Aden; 'Trenchard Brats' were Halton apprentices, not Cranwell cadets; the expansion approved in 1923 set out to create a balanced metropolitan air force of fifty-two squadrons, not to 'arm Fighter Command (*sic*) with a total of fifty-two fighter squadrons'; the statement that there was 'no Marshall plan to benefit from' in the early post-war years is difficult to reconcile with the fact that the UK was actually the largest beneficiary of that plan;

the RAF fielded fourteen, not seventeen, Javelin squadrons in 1960; and the routine V-Force QRA commitment was one aircraft per squadron, not four per station. There are also unsettling instances of misused terminology, as in the Secretary of State for Air being referred to as the Air Secretary (a very different beast), and there are some dodgy captions; a photograph, tentatively identified as a Bulldog, is of a Grebe and a three-ship of 'Siskins' are actually Moths.

On page 239 there is a reference to the book's 'going to proof'. Unfortunately the subsequent proof reading left a great deal to be desired. The pictures of Meteors on p73 and Hunters on p76 have both been reproduced upside down – these formations were clearly inverted at the time – and one still comes across residual duplicated words and incomplete sentences. More worryingly, however, there are some uncomfortable instances of inappropriate words being used, for example, incredulous for incredible and shear for sheer; we are told that the contribution made by female personnel 'cannot be underestimated', which it obviously can, and the 1950s surely represented the British aircraft industry at its zenith – not its nadir.

The structure of the book is wedge-shaped, which is to say that the narrative tends to become more detailed, and the writing more florid, as the account develops, punctuated by lots of specific figures relating to the projected and/or actual size of the RAF at various times. Because they are so precise, these figures have presumably been drawn from authoritative documents, the Squadron Patterns periodically produced by the Air Staff perhaps, or Defence White Papers, or the minutes of Air Force Council/Board meetings, but we are not told, because no sources are cited. Indeed, beyond a list of six books recommended as further reading, there is not even a bibliography.

Despite its limitations, the book covers most of the salient points, including the 1957 Sandys White paper, the CVA-01 debate, the TSR2/F-111/AFVG/Buccaneer saga and so on. The succession of increasingly damaging defence reviews are dealt with, each one tending to result in the air force (and the other Services) being required to do more with less and ultimately provoking a recent suggestion that the RAF should be abolished, a prospect that Watson views with horror.

He has a strong case but, unfortunately, it is weakened by the way in which he presents it. His narrative lacks discipline – a page-long digression on the handling of LMF during WW II, for instance, is quite irrelevant, as are an account of the Doolittle Raid and a comparison of the organisational structure of the UK-based American air forces of WW II, compared to that of the RAF. While such diversions distract from the main theme, the problem is exacerbated by the author's writing style. The timeframe tends to jump about a bit, which I found confusing, and there is an overindulgence in the vernacular, so we have instances of 'a hell of a lot', 'no kidding', 'for the chop' and even 'buggering about' so that some passages read more like tabloid journalism than reasoned argument. It is evident that the publisher has done this author absolutely no favours, because, apart from the previously noted failure to provide a competent proof-reader, this book really needed an editor to impose some rigour.

So – should you buy this book? Difficult. While I am obliged to be critical of it, I cannot bring myself to condemn it, because I am, of course, heavily biased in favour of what it has to say; the problem is the way in which it has been said. Watson presents his case with such passion that I felt that I was being harangued, rather than persuaded by rhetoric. I suspect that most members of this Society will feel much the same. But, if you do elect to read it, be warned that you will have to contend with convoluted sentences like this one:

> 'Now that nightmare (*ie the Cold War*) was receding fast, but despite already developing concerns about the stability of an unbridled Eastern Europe all going their separate ways and the ever-present concerns of the flashpoint that was the Middle East, with various unsympathetic countries at least as far as the West was concerned, no one was prepared to give up the opportunity to reinvest taxpayers' money in a more enlightened fashion and also, of course, convince the Russians that we were all friends now.'

This is not an isolated instance, so you will understand my observation on the need for an editor?

All of that aside, Watson's heart is in the right place. Towards the end of his book, he laments that, despite the UK's having the fourth largest national military budget, its fewer than 100,000 regular

soldiers, a mere eight combat squadrons and no aircraft carrier means that it is far from being the fourth most formidable military power. It is difficult to argue with that, which is, along with a spirited defence of the preservation of an independent RAF, the point that the author ultimately wished to get across – and, after a fashion, he does.
**CGJ**

**The Air Staff and AEW** by Chris Gibson. Blue Envoy Press; 2012. £9.95.

In describing Chris Gibson's *Battle Flight* in Journal 55 this reviewer made a passing reference to the lengthy story of the RAF's acquisition of an AEW capability. In this 50-page A4 softback Gibson amplifies that particular tale, beginning with the unarmed, AI Mk IV-equipped Turbinlite Havocs of 1941 which were intended to find and illuminate a target which would then be engaged by an accompanying Hurricane. Moving on, a 15-foot rotating Yagi aerial mounted on a Wellington and feeding an ASV Mk II radar was successfully trialled as early as 1942, although the project was not pursued. As a counter to He 111s air-launching V1s in 1944 another idea involved a Wellington fitted with ASV Mk VI being used to detect a target and vector a Mosquito night fighter onto it. In trials, 38 out of 40 intercepts were deemed to have been successful. As a result the system was deployed operationally but, unfortunately, the first patrol coincided with the last Heinkel sorties. Some space is devoted to H2S's *Fishpond* facility and to the American *Cadillac* project, which involved the installation of an AN/APS-20 radar in TBM Avengers, which was just becoming operational as the Pacific war ended.

In the UK there were some early post-war trials with an ASV Mk VI installed in, of all things, a Hamilcar X, but all work associated with what would become AEW was suspended in 1948. Fighter Command's experiments with some borrowed Neptunes (AN/APS-20 again) in 1952 is covered before the author embarks on an extensive examination of ASR387 of 1971, its successor, ASR400 of 1976, and the projects that they inspired. These were many and various, most being adaptations of the VC10, Britannia, BAC-111, Andover and/or Argosy airframes. These involved some innovative ideas on how to install the radar with the options gradually crystallising as an aerial housed in a rotating dorsal 'saucer' or

separate fore and aft scanners installed in fat noses and tails as per the eventual ‘winner’, the Comet-based Nimrod AEW3. Meanwhile, while the RAF had considered acquiring some second-hand ex-USAF EC-121s in the 1960s, ASR394 had finally produced some hardware in the form of the venerable Shackleton fitted with even more venerable, WW II-vintage, AN/APS-20s salvaged from redundant FAA Gannets. Entering service in 1972 as a short-term stop-gap, ‘short’ turned out to be nineteen years! The eventual answer – the Boeing Sentry entered service in 1991 bringing to an end a search for a practical solution that had lasted some fifty years.

All of this, and much more, is explored in some detail and at some length with the narrative being further illuminated by the many illustrations – general arrangement drawings of various projects and artist’s impressions of what some of them might have looked like had they ever entered service. Since most of them failed to materialise, however, there is inevitably a strong whiff of ‘what if’ but that only serves to add to, rather than detract from, what is a really interesting tale. Recommended

**CGJ**

## ROYAL AIR FORCE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Royal Air Force has been in existence for more than ninety years; the study of its history is deepening, and continues to be the subject of published works of consequence. Fresh attention is being given to the strategic assumptions under which military air power was first created and which largely determined policy and operations in both World Wars, the interwar period, and in the era of Cold War tension. Material dealing with post-war history is now becoming available under the 30-year rule. These studies are important to academic historians and to the present and future members of the RAF.

The RAF Historical Society was formed in 1986 to provide a focus for interest in the history of the RAF. It does so by providing a setting for lectures and seminars in which those interested in the history of the Service have the opportunity to meet those who participated in the evolution and implementation of policy. The Society believes that these events make an important contribution to the permanent record.

The Society normally holds three lectures or seminars a year in London, with occasional events in other parts of the country. Transcripts of lectures and seminars are published in the Journal of the RAF Historical Society, which is distributed free of charge to members. Individual membership is open to all with an interest in RAF history, whether or not they were in the Service. Although the Society has the approval of the Air Force Board, it is entirely self-financing.

Membership of the Society costs £18 per annum and further details may be obtained from the Membership Secretary, Dr Jack Dunham, Silverhill House, Coombe, Wotton-under-Edge, Gloucestershire. GLI2 7ND. (Tel 01453-843362)

## THE TWO AIR FORCES AWARD

In 1996 the Royal Air Force Historical Society established, in collaboration with its American sister organisation, the Air Force Historical Foundation, the *Two Air Forces Award*, which was to be presented annually on each side of the Atlantic in recognition of outstanding academic work by a serving officer or airman. The RAF winners have been:

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| 1997 | Wg Cdr M P Brzezicki MPhil MIL |
| 1998 | Wg Cdr P J Daybell MBE MA BA |
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| 2000 | Sqn Ldr A W Riches MA |
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| 2002 | Sqn Ldr S I Richards BSc |
| 2003 | Wg Cdr T M Webster MB BS MRCGP MRAeS |
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| 2008 | Wg Cdr B J Hunt MSc MBIFM MinstAM |
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| 2010 | Lt Col A M Roe YORKS |
| 2011 | Wg Cdr S J Chappell BSc |
| 2012 | Wg Cdr N A Tucker-Lowe DSO MA MCMI |

## THE AIR LEAGUE GOLD MEDAL

On 11 February 1998 the Air League presented the Royal Air Force Historical Society with a Gold Medal in recognition of the Society's achievements in recording aspects of the evolution of British air power and thus realising one of the aims of the League. The Executive Committee decided that the medal should be awarded periodically to a nominal holder (it actually resides at the Royal Air Force Club, where it is on display) who was to be an individual who had made a particularly significant contribution to the conduct of the Society's affairs. Holders to date have been:

Air Marshal Sir Frederick Sowrey KCB CBE AFC
Air Commodore H A Probert MBE MA

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