The On-Line Museum of Prisoners of War
STALAG XVIB, STALAG XX1A, STALAG XX1B, STALAG 344

PRISONER OF WAR DETAILS

Name of POW: Robert "Ianto" Evans
L/Cpl. Robert "Ianto" Evans
British Army 1st Bn. Royal Welch Fusiliers
from: Dinas Mawddwy, Wales

Regular Soldier Robert Evans enlisted with The Royal Welch Fusiliers October 1930 at Wrexham Barracks aged 18 years and 43 days.

Five lost Years in Captivity

Service at Home and Abroad:
Home from 01/10/1930 to 08/10/1931
Gibraltar from 09/10/1931 to 20/10/1934
China (Hong Kong, Singapore and Shanghai) from 21/10/1934 to 17/03/1938
Home from 18/03/1938 to 23/09/1939
Belgium and France 24/09/1939 to 22/05/1940

Appointed unpaid Lance Corporal in February 1940

Reported missing believed dead 25/05/1940 to 30/05/1940 Later confirmed as captured at St Omer, near Dunkirk, France 23/05/1940
Prisoner of War 23/05/1940 to either late 1944 or very early 1945? Detained at various P.O.W. Camps in Germany and Poland, with the Red Cross Certificate of Detention Records obtained by Bob’s Son showing him to be at Stalag XX1B on 03/06/1940, before being transferred to Stalag XX1A on 20/08/1940
Escaped during forced march from Poland (late 1944 or very early 1945?) to Michengrads, Czechoslovakia
Repatriated Home from Prague 22/05/1945
Home on Release Leave 02/11/1945 - Class ‘A’ Release 06/03/1946

This account was patiently extracted from Robert Evans (Also known as Ianto 10 & Bob Shanghai) by his Brother-in-law, the late Bill Breese (RWF), and later edited and added to by Bob’s youngest Son Cyril Breeze Evans. By this time Bob had reached pensionable age and feelings had mellowed slightly towards his German captors and tormentors.

Taking things very slowly, and never pushing the pace, Bill eventually managed to put together as accurate an account as possible of Bob’s experiences before and after what he considered to be his most humiliating surrender to the enemy.

When asked of his initial reaction to being taken prisoner, he quickly retorted “I cursed myself for falling into the enemy trap. There was I, a regular soldier, trained to fight during wars and with over ten years service, captured and
unable to do anything to try and improve what was a very drastic situation. I did eventually however come to terms with my bad luck and realised that there was absolutely nothing I could have done about it”.

Unlike many of his fine comrades, Bob was not to fight with the 1st Battalion RWF during its last moments of heroic defensive action, which earned it the never-ending praise and glory that it deserved. Sporadic firing had brought home the realisation to high-ranking Officers that the 1st RWF had had given its all before fading out of existence at nightfall.

He had been home on leave and got married to Ella when news filtered through of the Panzer blitzkrieg, and of the British and Allied Armies reeling backwards in pandemonium and disarray, their often out-dated arms were seemingly useless against the most modern and best equipped Army in the world.

Returning to France and unable to get to the remnants of his Battalion, he along with many others trying to get to their units, were duly formed into a mixed group of soldiers given the task of trying to halt the approaching Wehrmacht with their seemingly indestructible Tanks. The British Boyd Anti Tank Rifle did no damage to the Panzers, who tore away relentlessly in all directions to surround the more or less defenceless British and Allied soldiers.

Bob and his companions manned concrete bunkers at Saint Omer, near Dunkirk in the vain hope of turning back the determined foe, who pressed onwards regardless of all efforts. Having fought valiantly and with many badly wounded, they decided that to continue fighting from the bunkers would be suicidal for all. They withdrew and joined a convoy of civilian and military vehicles as well as those on foot, who were causing chaos and obstruction. French people were pushing handcarts and prams, or rode on horse-drawn carts with all they had left in the world piled up beside them, making the roads virtually impassable for artillery and supplies.

A British officer came to meet them in a jeep and stopped to question them of the situation up front, as he had to collect his heavy guns. They assured the officer that he may as well turn around for the fighting was dreadful and that he had no hope of retrieving the guns, he was however determined to proceed and drove on towards the front. He soon returned however admitting that it was a lost cause and offering to take three or four of the wounded with him.

One Fusilier with a severe head wound declined the offer deciding to remain with his mates on the march towards the nearest Channel Port. It was later realised that he had felt safer in the company of the two Battalion boxers, Bob and Bill Grimes.

Some time later a French Officer halted his jeep and offered to convey the three mates to the Port, and as they were now tiring and the wounded comrade’s condition gradually deteriorating, they were glad to accept the kind offer from an ally and climbed onto the jeep. Rounding a bend, and running straight into a road block, they were swiftly surrounded by German Soldiers branding revolvers, too late they realised that the French Officer had turned side so as to work as a collaborator for the enemy.

Bill Grimes’ remark of “look at that bastard going back to trap more Britishers” brought on a sickly kind of feeling. Their German captors walked laughingly into a French pub, taking their prisoners with them, but not for a drink! Getting noisier they were ordered outside by one of their Officers, leaving one of the soberer Jerry’s with a sub-machine gun in charge of the prisoners. Bill Grimes, fearless as ever, and ready to take a chance asked Bob which hand he hit the hardest with, and told him to stand on his strongest side, as he himself could hit equally as swift and hard with either hand. Just as they got into position to flatten the guard, they saw a crowd of enemy soldiers coming for them, it was just luck that they hadn’t lashed out, for they would surely have been shot without hesitation had they gone ahead with their plan to escape.

Marched in large columns, they were taken on a long, weary and agonising march to Luxembourg, halting only at night so as to be packed in tight groups into sheds or buildings whilst constantly and carefully guarded. During this march Bob met up again with some of his best Battalion pals such as Bill Jones & Dai Jenkins. Looking down from a hill on a massed crowd of prisoners below, he wondered who was left of the British and their Allies to stop the German war machine from conquering Britain, as they had Holland, Belgium and France.

During the long march, their captors encouraged children to run out and kick them hard in their in their legs or bodies as they trod their weary way. Despite the excruciating pain they refrained from retaliating for the German guards always had their loaded rifles and sub-machine guns at the ready to kill anyone who hit back. The Germans rejoiced in their victories and insisted that Britain would fall before Christmas.
To those taken prisoner during the 1944 and 1945 Second Front battles, and who say that they were treated fairly by old Jerry, Bob explained that the victorious Germans of 1940, who had no doubt whatsoever in their own brainwashed minds that they would conquer the World without any setbacks, were very different to those of 1944 and 1945 who feared that the Allies could eventually rule Germany should their Adolf fail them and the Fatherland. This of course was a thought that had never even entered their minds in the early years of WW2.

Moved from camp to camp and unsure of their eventual fate, they were often famined and miserable. The German Guards varied in their behaviour, some being fair whilst others enjoyed dishing out brutality and degradation, especially to the British ‘Sweinreg’ as they called them. One Guard in particular proved himself to be especially cruel, whom was referred to by Bob and his mates as ‘Old Hooknose’, whilst another Guard named Alfred was quite kind to prisoners, and often spoke to Bob (whom he addressed as Robert) of past times when Jews had mistreated Germans in pre-war days.

Bob being loyal and out spoken, only avoided being placed in detention during 1942, doing spells in the Lolsen (Posen?) Camp Link during all his other years of imprisonment. Taken from Lisa Camp to do detention, he recollects sitting on a narrow gage steam train with German Guards watching him throughout the journey that would end in punishment. Sitting there, he remembers thinking of days as a youngster when he travelled on the Abergynolwyn train in the company of his Father each Monday morning as they travelled to work at the Bryneglwys slate quarry.

Hearing the puffs of the German loco, he wondered what punishment was awaiting him that time. Placed in a cell, he peeped through a knothole and recognised Sergeant Randall in the neighbouring cell. The Sergeant gave him the sad news that a German had shot his mate Bill Grimes through his throat and that he was being treated by camp staff at a make-do camp hospital.

On being released following punishment, Bob slipped away to go and see his mate Bill who was lying in a make-do rough bed still covered in caked blood and unable to talk due to his serious throat wound. He managed to whisper to Bob “it was Old Hooknose that shot me Ianto”. The Germans claimed that God was with them, and had those words engraved on their belts. They taunted their prisoners saying that their intention was to castrate British males and arrange for their SS Soldiers to live with selected British girls, including prisoners wives, so as to bear their children so as to help produce the perfect race that Hitler craved for. They were also told that they would never return home, as they would be kept in Germany to provide free labour to rebuild the homes and other structures that had been devastated by the R.A.F. To be constantly taunted by such intentions was disheartening even to the strongest of heart, especially whilst being deprived of all comforts.

All outward signs seemed to be discouraging for it seemed that the War was turning heavily in favour of the enemy whichever way they cared to look at the situation. Red Cross parcels did not arrive in sufficient quantity so as to support them in their drastic want, neither did they know for some time whether or not their relatives had been informed of their whereabouts, as no mail was arriving at the camp. Some of the German Guards enjoyed throwing crusts of bread into canals or rivers so as to watch the starving prisoners jump into the water to try and retrieve them. They laughed as the hungry men splashed about and struggled, and even fought in the water in an effort to grab even the smallest potion so as to satisfy their craving stomachs.

Bob recalled Guards screaming ‘Rouse, Rouse’, whilst trying to load their prisoners into some lorries, and suddenly recognising the voice of a fellow soldier from his home village of Dinas Mawddwy. Jack, who had been a labourer on a farm called Tan-y- Bwlch, shouted to him “try and get on a lorry for ???? Camp, I hear that news is getting home from there of those who have been captured and still alive”. It is not known whether Bob managed to get to that camp or not, but he did meet up with another Dyfi Valley Soldier, a Welsh Guardsman by the name of John Jones from Maespoeth, Corris.

Later they were herded tightly into a cold and dirty unused factory building or warehouse, where the Guards seemed bent on dishing out more cruelty, and would burst into their midst and select a young soldier and force him to stand in the middle and make him stand to attention with arms above his head. Should his arms drop even a little then severe punishment followed to the sound of German laughter.

Bob remembers a typical occurrence when a poor young Fusilier named Owens, who was almost slumbering on his feet due to the fatigue of long marches, was selected for their cruel game, knowing full well that he didn’t have enough strength left to hold out for long. Another of their captor’s favourite games was to aggravate their prisoners by cupping their hands and shouting as high as they could into their ears. Under normal conditions, one could tolerate such abuse
by regarding it as pure stupidity, but being a prisoner who dare not complain or retaliate was a different matter altogether, as the slightest show of resentment saw a loaded rifle being raised to the firing position.

The Welsh Guardsman from Corris, quite understandably, and like many others, was by now showing signs of low spirits and voiced his belief to Bob that neither of them would return to the Dyfi Valley. Bob always strove to say the right thing at the right time to cheer his mate up despite the gloomy outlook, as indeed he did with many other fellow prisoners. Managing to keep both his own and his comrade’s hopes and spirits up, he became known as ‘The Propaganda King’.

Working outside the camp area under the ever-watchful eyes of their Guards, Bob felt the shivering that usually precedes a heavy dose of influenza, and having been ordered to remove overcoats and place them on the fence nearby, he sought the permission of a German equivalent to his own rank of Lance Corporal to wear his due to being unwell. The German hailed his Sergeant Major so as to pass on Bob’s request. Walking over, the Sergeant Major stared at Bob and then hit him hard on the face and ordered him to continue working. Later on Bob asked the Lance Corporal to pass on a message to his Sergeant Major saying that he had initially respected him as someone who like himself was a regular soldier before the War, but said that he had now lost what little respect he had for him following his cowardly attack on a defenceless P.O.W, and furthermore, should he have the guts to get in the ring with him, then he’d get his deserved pasting. Strangely, there was no response from the German N.C.O. indeed he seemed to regret his actions that day and from then on offered Bob much fairer treatment whenever he was in his working party.

The situation improved with the regular arrival of nourishing Red Cross food and clothing parcels, whilst letters from home brought comfort and solace, as well as a greater determination to survive against all efforts to rob them of spirit and dignity. Soon, but not too soon, the noise and sight of passing bombers brought with them a message of hope and the realisation that the tide was turning. The German attitude was also different as the situation was changing in Allied favour, with the guards becoming more tolerant and showing a marked leniency, a sure sign of their growing uncertainty as to who would be victorious.

The guards began praising the accuracy of the British bombers in avoiding the unnecessary death of civilians whenever it was possible, but complained of the indiscriminate use of HE bombs by the Yanks on households and hospitals without an effort to avoid unnecessary loss of lives. Bob grabbed the opportunity to remind the enemy of their indiscriminate destruction of British town and cities such as Liverpool and Coventry, when they too robbed ordinary people of all their possessions as well as killing thousands of innocent civilians. Some prisoners were intentionally placed in compounds in the hope that this would discourage Allied bombing. Some P.O.W’s were indeed killed by British bombs, but this was a practice that was quickly discontinued as the long war drew towards it’s longed for conclusion.

Bob’s impatience, combined with defiance, as well as his readiness to accept any kind of challenge, brought on a decision to try and escape again, following several previous unsuccessful attempts, including one with his mate Bill Grimes. He decided that rather than stay the full course of imprisonment, and having discussed his plan with another old and trusted peacetime comrade; it was decided to make a break for it as soon as the opportunity came their way.

The pal had second thoughts however and decided to wait for release by the advancing Armies, and warned Bob of the grim consequences should they be re-captured. Once he’d made his mind up, Bob wasn’t one to cancel plans and clung on to his original decision to escape. Another prisoner, a sailor named Eric begged to go with him, and as the plan had always been for two to escape, Bob welcomed Eric’s offer of accompanying him.

The un-rewarded courage and kindness of Polish women who risked severe reprisals to push a bit of bread into the hands of the hungry prisoners as they wearily made their way on a long march that was to take them from Poland into Czechoslovakia will never be forgotten. They risked their lives so as to ease the tribulations of captured British soldiers who they never knew and would never meet again. Bob and Eric’s opportunity to escape arose whilst resting from marching; it was a cold and snowy night, with the guards being distracted on purpose by the noisy quarrelling of other prisoners. They failed to notice the two comrades making a careful but speedy getaway.

Creeping up quietly to farmhouse doors, in constant fear of the barking dogs, they listened and tried to decide whether it was the German or Slovak language that was being spoken inside. Deciding that the family in one house they had stopped at were indeed Slovakian, they knocked on the door anxious of their fate when the door eventually opened.
The farmer was understandably reluctant to offer hospitality, as he couldn’t understand their attempts to explain that they were British. Trying to use the word ‘Englander’, they were really struggling to make it understood who they were until Eric raised his sleeve and showed him a tattoo of the Union Jack saying ‘Englander, Englander’.

The farmer suddenly understood and sympathised with their plight and bid them both to enter his house and made them welcome by giving them food and warmth, whilst a hiding place was found for them. It was only later that the farmer was able to explain that he had originally feared they were escaped Russian P.O.W.’s, as some of his countrymen had helped some Russians before, only to be betrayed by them to the German’s when they were captured. Knowing who had sheltered the Russians, the Germans reacted sharply and violently against the Czechoslovakians and warned them of the consequences of any repetition.

Bob and Eric were taken very good care of and were even allowed inside for the occasional supper with the kind family, as well as the very risky treat of hearing the ‘Nine O’clock News’ and the chiming of Big Ben. The two men’s spirits were raised, as they were kept up to date of the ever-increasing British and Allied victories and of the retreating German Army. A frightening occurrence tested their nerve and reaction one night when a German patrol arrived out of the blue at the farmhouse and entered the house whilst Bob was having supper with the family. The stern German patrol leader asked who “The Master of the house” was, and then asking him to tell him of the family members. Pointing at them all in turn, he explained that Bob was a deaf and dumb living there, and then cunningly, so as to entice them to depart; he asked them if they would like some fresh eggs. The leader jumped at the chance and then ordered his men to leave as he bid goodnight.

It was decided that Bob should work in a Flour Grinding Mill amongst some local workers, and that he should carry on pretending to be deaf and dumb. He was to operate a machine on which a bell tinkled to denote the end of its cycle, but understanding the importance of playing the part of being deaf and dumb to the full, he was to ignore the tinkle and continuously watch the sliding movement of the machine as anyone who was deaf and dumb would have to do. The acting went on without a hitch until one day; familiarity bred the usual contempt, and Bob having turned away from the machine, heard the bell tinkle and immediately turned around to slide the beam backwards so as to reset it. A youth was seen to stop working and look very puzzled at the strange incident he had just witnessed of a deaf and dumb person reacting to the sound of a bell that he couldn’t hear! Others who knew what was going on decided that they couldn’t take any more chances, hence the decision that Bob should work elsewhere for both his and their safety.

He was to work transplanting cauliflower in a plot that bordered a German Army Barracks, and where enemy soldiers drilled close by, but as the Germans would hardly expect an escaped prisoner to be working next to their base, then it was felt to be as safe there as anywhere. He also worked at a cinema, where enemy soldiers came regularly to watch films during off duty hours. As the end of the war approached, a Village School Teacher took Bob and other escapees to a nearby forest, where a hut had been built. This was a comfortable hideout with a fireplace, but one look convinced Bob that it was not the place for him and against the advice of comrades and locals, walked away and decided to return to the kind hearted Joseph Ruta and his family, who welcomed him back, as did the Pravda family who also fed and looked after him. He remained with the Ruta family at Michengrads until the end of the war was announced, at which time he borrowed a bicycle and rode out on the rough track to the forest hideout where the others had remained, to inform them of the Armistice and duly brought back a comrade to the happy village on the bar of the bicycle, whilst the others walked and ran to the village where both villagers and escaped prisoners celebrated joyously together.

Prior to the end of the war Bob had noticed trainloads of German troops returning from the Russian Front, many suffering from frostbite as a result of the severe winter, as well as battle wounds. The reasonably able bodied soldiers who had up till then carried out camp guard duties were sent to the Russian Front, whilst the medically unfit men took over their duties at the P.O.W camps.

Taken up a hill by friends following the Armistice, he was shown columns of German soldiers being marched into captivity by Russian soldiers, and despite the rough treatment he had received; he felt pity for his old enemy, for he understood their feelings as they were urged on relentlessly by their captors. He knew of how they would be wondering what fate lay in store for them and the pain of thinking of their families back home as they plodded on towards an unknown destination and fate.

Instructions were soon issued for all escaped P.O.W.s to report to a given destination, and following considerable questioning, they were then taken to Prague from where they were flown home to Britain. Following kitting up and the issue of train warrants, they were finally on their way to their respective homes.
Arriving home to face other problems, Bob was given a hero’s welcome by the people of his home village of Dinas Mawddwy, from where he had gone to volunteer for Army Service back in 1930. Driven to Dinas Railway Station by a specially arranged car, he was to be towed past the Great War memorial to the village by a team of local men as a special honour. Fixing ropes to the car bumper he was hauled past the familiar faces of folk who had rejoiced in the knowledge that he was free and in fair condition considering his long imprisonment.

John, his Father was standing on the doorway of his home and Bob admitted to finding a tear trickling down his cheek on seeing him standing there to greet him home. Next he heard the voice of ex First World War veteran, Simon Jones address him with a well-meant welcome home speech on behalf of the local community. “I have been some kind of soldier myself during the last war” he said, “and I would like to think that I know what a good soldier should look like, and here in Bob we have a real soldier”. Returning to army life after leave, he was unable to settle down again to good soldiering with the Royal Welch Fusiliers as he had done at Wrexham, Gibraltar, Hong Kong, Singapore and Shanghai, as well as in Belgium and France prior to capture in 1940. Five years of P.O.W. life had taken its toll and altered his outlook on life. He found, much to his dismay that his staunch peacetime pals had altered considerably in their ways and attitude. Sent to 21 R.A.F. Holding Battalion at Newtown, Montgomeryshire, he met Andy Nolan, one of his finest peacetime friends. On addressing him as Andy, he was reminded that those times had passed them by, and pointing to his crowned sleeve told Bob that he was actually conversing with Company Sergeant Major Nolan, not Andy. Bob understood and respected his reason for saying this, but nevertheless felt saddened that those happy days before the war when they shared the same knife and spoon at mealtimes were seemingly gone and forgotten. A young Lance Corporal told him to tidy up his bed or he would place him on report to the Provost Sergeant. Told to do as he bloody well chose, the young Lance Corporal strode out to fetch the Provost, who duly marched in to arrest the stubborn culprit who refused to obey orders, the Provost came face to face with Bob, who he had known as Ianto 10 when soldiering in Gibraltar and China in the thirties, he ordered the inexperienced N.C.O. not to heed such minor matters, and then went on to enjoy reminiscing of the old days with Bob, his old comrade, before striding back to play hell with other defaulters inside the Guardroom. Ignoring the pleas of good old comrades like Griley, Tiger Watts, and others to re-join for a further six years so as to complete his 21 years (pontoon) in order to be eligible for long service pension, Bob chose to accept his release and become a council worker with Merionethshire County Council. The contact with his saviours in Czechoslovakia was maintained for a while with Bob sending parcels of food items, which were practically unobtainable there since the time of his release. Joseph Ruta and his good family voiced their fondness and great admiration for him in their letters, and mentioned the times when Bob was busy transplanting Caulis right by the German soldiers, and of when he went through the streets on a bike to fetch bread from some friends of theirs at the bakery who knew of his escape. Unfortunately, not being fluent in English, and even less so in written English, they sent letters in their own language. The then Liberal M.P. Emrys Roberts managed to find someone who was willing to translate the letters, and it was with much regret that Bob had to turn down Joseph’s kind invitation in one letter to return to Michengrads for his daughter’s wedding.

Most regrettably, the contact with this fine family was later broken, and whilst efforts were made in 1983 to re-establish contact with the Ruta family, these were unfortunately in vain. Joseph Ruta is surely reaping his heavenly rewards by now, but younger family members, possibly including his daughter Maluska Rutova, are somewhere to be found. The Pravda Family at Michengrads also helped save Bob and Eric’s lives by risking their own lives by feeding them whilst they hid from the enemy, and again they are owed a huge debt that can never be repaid.
ATTESATION
The Central Tracing Agency has received the following information:

Name: First name: Dusan Robert
Date of birth: 9.9.1923
Place of birth: Abensberg
Family's address: Mr. Ravan, Struybach, Abensberg, Neubayern, Mi., Bavaria
Rank: "Bob" - called "Last Colorado"
Unit: 1 Royal Welch Fusiliers 1st Bn. Corps C
Service number: LL 180049
Date and place of capture: 1-1-1945, St. Omer
Place of detention:
- Detained in Dachau, admitted to Stag XLI B, 18th November 1943 (deceased date 31.1.1944)
- Registered at a POW Camp on 8th December 1944
- Transferred to an POW Camp XI A on 28th January 1945
- Captured in Stag XI A on 28th January 1945
- Transferred to Stag XLI B on 28th January 1945
- Returned to Stag XI A on 28th January 1945

Origin of holding: Prague, Czechoslovakia (arrested at Prague in November 1939)
A PHOTO OF DAD AND FELLOW
PRISONERS OF WAR AT A P.O.W. CAMP,
WHICH HE WAS ALLOWED
TO SEND HOME TO MAM.