


Prisoners of War

On-Line Memorial and Museum
HELP WITH RESEARCH

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Introduction

Currently we do not offer a personal research service although some of our members/supporters do. We do however provide this comprehensive guide to assist you in your journey of self-discovery.

We have no information about individual former prisoners of war and civilian internees apart from what is already on this website.

We regularly receive emails from people who say "Please can you give me more information about my father/grandfather/etc. who was at Lamsdorf (or some other camp)?" Regrettably the answer is "no", as we only know what people tell us or can access from public bodies; we have no other records.

We are regularly asked questions on the liberation of individuals. Documentation produced by the UK War Office clearly set out that:

- Rolls of liberated prisoners of war were to be produced progressively as liberation occurred.
 - Rolls of repatriated prisoners of war on arrival at reception camps in the UK and elsewhere.
- It is also clear that for prisoners of war liberated by the Soviet Army, rolls were produced for all ships moving them from Odessa.

While rolls with the details of the liberation of individual prisoners of war were sent to the British Government, they are not identifiable in the UK National Archives catalogue. An investigation is ongoing.

Guidance notes specific to civilian and military internees are still under development.

Where views are expressed, they are the personal views of the author alone.

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Section 12. Help with German to English Translations reflects work by Mary Cameron who reviewed and expanded her work which had previously been published on the STALAG VIII B/344 LAMSDORF PRISONERS OF WAR website.

Rick Catt and Dave Lovell for reading and commenting on the initial draft.

Any comments, errata and additional material should be submitted here:


<https://www.prisonersofwarmuseum.com/contact-us/>

You may download this entire document (54 pages) if you wish to or you can click on entries in the contents table to jump to the section of interest to you. Note carefully however that no section can stand on its own and you are encouraged to read the entire document.

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1. SCOPE.

These notes are applicable to

- World War II (1939 – 1945).
- The European, North African and Middle East theatres of the land and air war.
- The seas where German and Italian military forces conducted war.
- Prisoners of war and civilian internees held by the German and Italian authorities who were either British nationals or foreign nationals serving with British military forces. The term British here refers to both the UK and British Dominions and Colonies as existent at the time.

It should be noted that some other national 'strays' can be found in the records referred to e.g. small numbers of US, Norwegian, Dutch, Belgian and French etc. military forces and civilians whose German Record Cards have found their way into The UK National Archives Series WO 416.

It should also be noted that both military and civilian internees were also held in Europe by other belligerent Axis states in Europe i.e. Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Rumania, Slovakia as well as the neutral states of Vichy France, Spain and Portugal.

The bulk of surviving records refer to military prisoners of war. Civilian internees are much scarcer in the known record.

These notes do not concern themselves with the burgeoning numbers of books on individuals and the general WW2 prisoner experience except where it is necessary to give guidance. See

<https://www.prisonersofwarmuseum.com/books/> and please inform us of books covering other camps and POWs <https://www.prisonersofwarmuseum.com/contact-us/>

RESEARCHER BEWARE.

The British Government was given delegated authority by the Australian, Canadian, New Zealand and South African Governments as well as by the Governor-General of India to negotiate of their behalf with the individual Axis Powers (principally Germany and Italy) on all matters regarding Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees. These negotiations took place via the good offices of the Protecting Power (see section 5). As such the British Government received significant documentary records relevant to prisoners of war and civilian internees that required onward transmittal to the Australian, Canadian, New Zealand and South African Governments as well as the Federal Government of India.

IT MAY WELL BE THAT FOR DOMINION AND COLONIAL PRISONERS OF WAR AND CIVILIAN INTERNEES THE RESEARCHER NEEDS TO CONSULT UK ARCHIVED MATERIAL AS WELL AS OTHER NATIONAL RECORDS.

Significant volumes of data about prisoners of war (POWs) can now be found via the Internet including various lists and transcriptions. A number of problems have been identified:

1. Lists of individuals and data drawn from identified archive sources are often presented as transcriptions rather than scans of original documents.

The quality control of the transcriptions is often inadequate.

Where archive catalogues include data on individuals, quality control of the cataloguing is often inadequate.

WHEREVER POSSIBLE YOU SHOULD CHECK TRANSCRIPTIONS AGAINST EITHER ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS OR SCANS OF THE ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS.

ALWAYS BE PREPARED TO CONDUCT SEARCHES NOT ONLY BY NAME BUT ALSO BY SERVICE NUMBER AND BY POW NUMBER WHERE THESE ARE KNOWN.

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2. Service men may not be known by the names they were known to the family. Records are often dependent on the abilities of the recording clerk either when joining a service or becoming a prisoner of war. Spelling mistakes occur. Forenames may disappear. Men for whatever reason may change their names. Birth dates may be either deliberately given falsely or mis-recorded.
3. Records of prisoners of war captured by the Germans are generally weaker for the time period between capture and arrival at the main camp where they entered the German Prisoner of War System and were allocated a prisoner of war number which they retained throughout their imprisonment. This is not to say that records do not exist but German Record Cards (see 4.1 below) do not provide a full record of a prisoners full movements.
4. Records of prisoners of war captured by the Germans after the Allies invasion of France in June 1944 may not be found; the later the date the more likely the case. This reflects the progressive breaking down of German bureaucracy and its forwarding of information to the British Government.
5. Records of prisoners of war held in camps in the east of Germany and marched west, from January 1945, may abruptly end with the start of the marches. The same would apply to marches from camps in the west as the Germans tried to move prisoners of war from late March 1945. This is not to say that records do not exist but if they do they constitute a small minority of men.
6. All prisoners of war captured in North Africa were initially held by the Italians in North Africa and then in Italy. Records of such prisoners of war are generally weak for the time period between capture and arrival in Italy. Once in Italy the Prisoner of War bureaucracy was apparently unsophisticated compared to that used by the Germans. No POW numbers were issued by the Italians; see WO 392/21 at the UK National Archives. There is no evidence of the Italians using record cards that recorded an individual's movement through Italian prisoner of war camps before the German takeover of these camps in September 1943 following the Italian capitulation to the Allies.
It is unclear to the author as to whether any British prisoners of war captured in Greece and on Crete were moved to Italy; Greek prisoners of war certainly were including some who were eventually moved to British prisoner of war camps in Germany. If any were moved to Italy the comments made with respect to those captured in North Africa must apply.
Prisoners of war captured in Sicily and in mainland Italy by the Italians/Germans after the Allies invasions of 1943 were initially sent to Italian run prisoner of war camps. The comments made above with respect to prisoners of war captured in North Africa must again apply.
Following the Italian capitulation in September 1943 those prisoners of war unlucky enough to fall into German hands were moved to Germany and thus entered the German bureaucracy.
7. Websites listing main prisoner of war camps and their subsidiary work camps abound on the internet. There is clear evidence of data being copied from website to website perpetuating errors. As with much that appears on the internet, there is a lack of detailing of references used as data sources.

A further, perhaps underused, internet resource is the scanned copies of newspapers. While national newspapers reported stories of national importance in so far as they were allowed by government censorship control, local newspapers maintained a keen interest in reporting on local prisoners from when they went missing until their repatriation.

2. Introduction.

The record of prisoners of war and civilian internees is spread far and wide. The record is often fragmentary. Many records created by the Axis powers failed to survive the destructive chaos in Italy and Germany of 1944

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and 1945. Many records created by the western Allied powers have failed to survive a culling of records as files moved from operational to archive status. Plans for the collection of data from liberated prisoners of war could only be partially implemented because of the sheer numbers being liberated almost simultaneously and in a manner that the planners had not considered.

This page is not meant as a catch all identifying all possible sources of information but rather a guide to significant sources of information that can be used as avenues of opportunity to the story of either individual prisoners or their general experience.

This page was written over the period October-December 2022. All internet links quoted were accessed and proven during this period of time.