


**Prisoners of War**  
  
*On-Line Memorial and Museum*  
**HELP WITH RESEARCH**

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## **5. The Protecting Power.**

The role of a Protecting Power was formalised in the Geneva Conventions of 1929.

The Protecting Power acted as the diplomatic intermediary between the British Government and

- The German and Italian Governments,
- Other belligerent Axis states in Europe i.e. Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Rumania, Slovakia, and
- The nominally neutral Vichy France when no diplomatic ties existed.

Protecting powers were allowed to inspect prisoner of war and internee camps, interview prisoners in private and communicate freely with prisoners.

From 1939 to December 1941, this role was undertaken by the Federal Government of the United States of America. With the entry of the United States of America into the war, the Federal Government of Switzerland took up the role of Protecting Power.

Visits were organised on a rolling basis throughout the war. Visits comprised visits to main camps plus a limited number of work camps. With the number of work camps dependent on a single main camp possibly running into the several hundred, the Protecting Power's coverage of work camps was obviously limited.

The UK National Archives collection of visit reports to prisoner of war and internee camps is incomplete. The reports are in UK National Archives catalogue reference WO 224 plus Foreign Office files in FO 916. The incompleteness is particularly acute for the early years of the war. Correspondence files relating to concerns about the treatment of prisoners of war and internees are fragmented across series FO and WO and also appear to be incomplete.

The US National Archives and Swiss Federal Archives may hold a more complete set of visit reports.

The National Archives and Records Administration

8601 Adelphi Road  
College Park, MD 20740-6001

<https://www.archives.gov/>

Swiss Federal Archives

Archivstrasse 24  
3003 Bern Switzerland

<https://www.bar.admin.ch/bar/en/home.html>


## **RESEARCHER BEWARE**

In the period up to about April 1941 the German authorities appear not to have used numbers to identify work camps. This is true for Stalag VIII B and seems likely to be the case elsewhere. This problem is compounded by reports not identifying work camp locations.

Visits always followed an application for a visit by the Protecting Power to the German authorities in Berlin providing the camp commandant with opportunity to stage manage the general inspection of the camp facilities.

Visits followed a standard format:

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- A session attended by the Protecting Power, the camp commandant and prisoner of war representatives.
- A private session with senior prisoner of war and internee representatives.

Visit reports must be treated with some circumspection as they were sent to both the British Government and the detaining power.

See The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) below for comment on the organisation of visits and content of visit reports; Protecting Power visit reports suggest that Protecting Power visits and ICRC visits operated in similar manners.

### **6. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).**

The ICRC carried out the role of a central agency of information regarding prisoners of war as set out in Geneva Conventions of 1929.

The early simplicity of reports moving between the German and British authorities via the ICRC British Section and following Italy's entry into the war the Italian and British authorities via the ICRC British Section became complicated as a result of negotiations in 1941 with the various Dominions when it was decided that the British Section of the ICRC should cable direct to the relevant department the information it received concerning the nationals of these countries.

This decision meant that the British Section of the ICRC was now communicating directly with

- The UK, Prisoners of War Information Bureau.
- Canada, Department of External Affairs, Ottawa (July 2, 1941).
- Australia, PW Information Bureau, Melbourne (Sept. 1, 1941)
- New Zealand, Prime Minister, Missing PW Enquiry Office, Wellington (Sept. 10, 1941).
- South Africa, South African Red Cross, Johannesburg (Oct. 9, 1941).
- India, Adjutant General Branches, Delhi (Nov. 10, 1941).

At the same time communications were passing to the UK, Prisoners of War Information Bureau for onward transmission to other parties.

Research may need to be carried at both UK National Archives and other national archives to locate information relevant to non-UK prisoners.

The activities of the ICRC included the reporting of individuals becoming either prisoners of war or an internee, visiting and monitoring prisoner of war and internee camps, organising relief assistance, and administering the exchange of messages regarding prisoners, internees and missing persons. By the end of the war, world-wide 179 ICRC delegates had conducted 12,750 visits to prisoner of war and internee camps in 41 countries. The Central Information Agency on Prisoners-of-War (Zentralauskunftsstelle für Kriegsgefangene) had a staff of 3,000 and their card

index tracking prisoners contained 45 million cards, and 120 million messages were exchanged by the Agency.

The ICRC in its Report Of The International Committee Of The Red Cross On Its Activities During The Second World War (September 1, 1939 - June 30, 1947) Volume 2 noted the general efficiency of the German authorities in forwarding information except during the chaos of the outcome of the Greek campaign in 1941 and the chaos in Europe in 1944-1945 but of the Italian authorities it said

*Although the telegraphic notification of capture by the Italian Official Bureau did as a rule operate normally, the notice of transfers to permanent camps was most unsatisfactory. This was due to the notorious*

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*inadequacy of the information given by the Italian military authorities to the Bureau, in spite of the praiseworthy efforts it made. In a great number of cases, it was only after considerable delay or insistent requests that the British Section was informed of the prisoners' permanent camps.*

*During the whole period, the frequent omissions in notifying deaths and the delay in the receipt of hospital returns were likewise the cause of considerable difficulties to the Section. These difficulties were all the more appreciable, since prisoners in Italian camps were, until April 1943, unable to send capture cards. It is true that from this date the Italian authorities introduced a system of cards called " initial capture cards ". These were at once established in triplicate ; one copy was sent by post to the man's relatives, the second to the Agency and the third kept by the Ufficio.*

*This interesting innovation unfortunately came too late to be of any real value.*

The ICRC knowledge of individuals centres on capture cards and movement lists to and between main camps provided to it by the detaining authorities. The ICRC in general have no knowledge of work camps.


Requests for information about people held during Spanish Civil War or Second World War.

See <https://www.icrc.org/en/archives> and <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/request-information-about-individuals-detained-during-second-world-war-or-spanish-civil-war-quota>

The application is presented as a standardised form requiring details as follows:

Person about whom information is sought:

- Surname.
- First Name.
- Gender.
- Date of birth.
- Place of birth.
- Date of death.
- Nationality.
- Place of residence at the time of the conflict.
- Father's surname and first name.
- Mother's maiden name and first name.
- Wife/Husband's name.
- Conflict.
- Status.
- Rank.
- Unit.
- Army.
- Service number.
- Date of capture.
- Place of capture.
- Prisoner of war number.
- Place(s) of detention.
- Date of release (and repatriation).
- Additional information.
- Family tie (the person about whom I am seeking information is my .....).

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- Reason for enquiry.
- Reason for enquiry
- Reason for enquiry (additional information).

While not all of this may be in the knowledge of the applicant, the applicant needs to provide sufficient information to allow the ICRC to identify the correct individual in their files. An application for a John Smith, and that alone, clearly leads to a plethora of possibilities. The progressive addition of data is essential to allow the ICRC to identify the correct John Smith.

Responses to requests for information from the ICRC summarise their knowledge of an individual in the form of an ATTESTATION statement.

### **RESEARCHER BEWARE**


Requests for copies of documentation held by the ICRC should be included either when submitting a request or on receipt of acknowledgement of the request. Submissions not requesting copies of documents may not bring forth copies of documents without a further request.

The ICRC can only provide data provided to them by the detaining authorities.

The German authorities provided lists for movement into and between main detention camps i.e, Stalags, Stalag Lufts, Marlag und Milag Nord, Ilags. They did not provide movement to and between work parties.

As outlined above the inefficiency of the Italian reporting system may mean that some moves between camps will likely be unrecorded.

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## ICRC

CIM/AIM/PTA/ICT

Geneva, 30.09.2011


### ATTESTATION

The International Committee of the Red Cross has received the following information :

Name and first name	JACKSON Harold William
Date of birth	18.04.1913
Place of birth	Woolwich
Father's first name	Edward
Mother's name	JAMESON
Rank	Private
Unit	2 <sup>nd</sup> Batt. Northamps. Regt.
Service number	5882776
Date and place of capture	28.05.1940, Lille
Prisoner of war number	15556
Places of detention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Arrived at Stalag VIII/B on 23.06 1940, coming from Stalag XII/A (according to a list dated 31.07.1940).</li></ul>
From	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>One list issued by the German authorities</li></ul>



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### Repatriation Lists.

When discussing repatriation, The Report of the International Committee of the Red Cross on its activities during the second world war (September 1, 1939 -June 30, 1947) Volume 1 (Page 397 - 382.) says in specific reference to the repatriation of 17 May 1944 that its delegates present at the exchange were to “request and obtain two copies of the nominal rolls of the PW”. These lists are likely in the ICRC Archives.

Exchanges between the Germans and Allies on repatriation were difficult and fraught with difficulty right to the moment of exchange. Numbers and lists of individuals to be exchanged were constantly moving as the moment of exchange approached. With the ICRC sitting in the middle of these government level exchanges it is hard not to think that the ICRC may well have within its archives copies of repatriation lists for the German – British/American exchanges and possibly the British/Italian exchanges.

The ICRC holds no records with regard to repatriations via Odessa in 1945. The ICRC played no part in these repatriations.

### ICRC Visit Reports

Like the Protecting Power, visits were organised on a rolling basis throughout the war. Visits comprised visits to main camps plus a limited number of work camps. With the number of work camps dependent on a single main camp possibly running into the several hundred, the ICRC's coverage of work camps was obviously limited.

The UK National Archives collection of ICRC visit reports to prisoner of war and internee camps appears incomplete; see UK National Archives catalogue reference WO 224 plus Foreign Office files in series FO. This appears particularly acute for the early years of the war.

Where an ICRC visit is either known of or suspected and not found at the UK National Archives a request should be made direct to the ICRC Archivist. The report provided will be in the original French.

### **RESEARCHER BEWARE**

In the period up to ca. April 1941 the German authorities appear not to have used numbers to identify work camps. This is true for Stalag VIII B and seems likely to be the case elsewhere. This problem is compounded by reports not identifying work camp locations.

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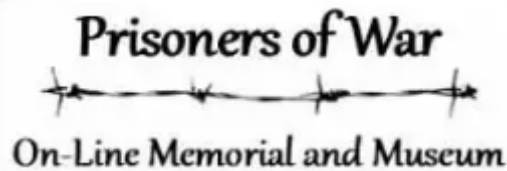
The Report of the International Committee of the Red Cross on its activities during the second world war (September 1, 1939 -June 30, 1947) can be found on line [here](#)

The process of visit and visit reports is dealt with in Volume 1 Page 228 – 246 and sets out the bureaucratic restraints on the ICRC and illustrates the formulaic nature of ICRC reports.

### **7. Commonwealth War Graves Commission**

Those who died in captivity who have a known grave/memorial are to be found on:

<https://www.cwgc.org/>



## 8. Commercial Organisations.

We are unable to offer advice as to which Commercial Organisation's offering is the best for researching British prisoners of war.

Researchers may however like to search websites and facebook pages where the topic is regularly aired. Researchers should emphasise what they seek and which commercial organisation best suits their needs when making their decision.

### 8.1 Findmypast.

Findmypast offers their Prisoners Of War 1715-1945 collection including scanned images of all source documents linked to their transcriptions. See:

<https://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-records/prisoners-of-war-1715-1945>

Scroll down to World War Two (1939-1945)-Europe-Archive References for a full listing of their offering. All records are searchable with most providing access to the relevant scan of the original document at the UK National Archives. Records can be searched by name, service number, etc but not by prisoner of war number. Names generally consist of surname and forename initials for prisoners of war held in Europe.

### 8.2 Ancestry

Ancestry offers their searchable UK, British Prisoners of War, 1939-1945 collection database.

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/1601/>

Ancestry describes it's source information as

"Ancestry.com. UK, British Prisoners of War, 1939-1945 [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2009.

Original data: Prisoner of War Collections. Sussex, England: The Naval and Military Press."

The Naval and Military Press publication depends for its validity on The National Archives WO 392 Prisoner of War Lists, which were published first by the Imperial War Museum in book form. It is not stated which of the September 1944 and April 1945 lists were used in preparing the book.

Records can be searched by name, service number, prisoner of war number etc.

Ancestry provides no scanned images of original documents.

Names generally consist of surname and forename initials for prisoners of war held in Europe.

### 8.3 Forces War Records

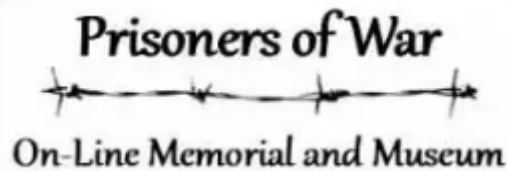
Forces War Records website was developed, owned and operated by Clever Digit Media Ltd but since May 2021 has been part of part of Ancestry.com. The website details of content on prisoners of war need to be considered alongside those of Ancestry itself.

<https://www.forces-war-records.co.uk>

### 8.3 Fold 3

Another website whose parent ownership is Ancestry.com. This website is USA orientated with some British and Commonwealth content. The website details of prisoners of war content need to be considered.

<https://www.fold3.com/?group=2>



## 9. The Internet.

An internet search for "PRISONER OF WAR WW2" in November 2022 suggested a result of about 4,420,000 results. A google search for "PRISONER OF WAR WWII" suggested a result of about 3,450,000 results.

The Researcher therefore faces a dilemma of where to start and what to believe in a world where much is published without peer review.

The sites identified below may be of use to the researcher in pointing the way to knowledge.

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 inadequate detailing of references used as data sources.

A selection of websites:

### **The Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War.**

<https://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-corpus-WH2.html>

Contains much information of general interest not just New Zealand specific interest.

### **Moosburg Online** <https://www.moosburg.org/info/stalag/indeng.html>

Including its list of POW Camps: <https://www.moosburg.org/info/stalag/laglist.html>

### **The Wartime Memories Project** <https://www.wartimememoriesproject.com/>

### **The Pegasus Archive** <https://www.pegasusarchive.org/>

The British Airborne Forces 1940-1945 including Prisoner of War <https://www.pegasusarchive.org/pow/>

### **BBC WW2 People's War Archive**

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/categories/>

### **Royal Air Force Commands** <http://www.rafcommands.com/>

Dedicated to UK and other nationals who served with the RAF, RCAF, RAAF, RNZAF. Includes databases associated with Prisoners of War, Casualty Lists. Aircraft Lists including details of their loss plus an active forum.

For prisoners of war refer to:


<http://www.rafcommands.com/database/pows/index.php>

### **Shipping Losses and Ships :**

- <https://wrecksite.eu/>
- <https://uboat.net/allies/merchants/listing.php>
- <http://www.tynebuiltships.co.uk/ShipsR.html>



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- <http://www.sunderlandships.com/>
- <https://www.clydeships.co.uk/>
- <http://shippingandshipbuilding.uk/>
- <https://www.warsailors.com/freefleet/shipindex.html>

### WWII Escape and Evasion Information Exchange

<http://www.conscript-heroes.com/escapelines/index.htm>

This website concerns itself with military escapers and evaders.

### Poland.

The Polish Central Prisoner of War Museum at Lambinowice (Lamsdorf)

Website <https://www.cmjw.pl/en/muzeum2/>

Contact details are:

Centralne Muzeum Jeńców Wojennych w Lambinowicach-Opoluul.

Muzealna 4, 48-316 Łambinowice

Email: [cmjw@cmjw.pl](mailto:cmjw@cmjw.pl)

### Arolsen Archives

<https://arolsen-archives.org/en/>

The German town of Bad Arolsen is home to the world's largest archive on the victims and survivors of the Nazi regime.

**LEXICON DER WEHRMACHT** <https://www.lexikon-der-wehrmacht.de/>

## 10. Online Discussion Groups and Forums.

### 10.1 Facebook Groups

STALAG <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1656055374652498/>

POWs Italy <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1098088790202648>

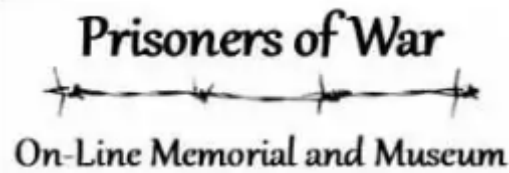
STALAG VIII B/344 LAMSDORF PRISONERS OF WAR <https://www.facebook.com/groups/828123490592144/>

South Africans in WW1, WW2 and Korean War

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/southafricansinww1ww2korea/>

UK Military History/Military Genealogy and military photography <https://www.facebook.com/groups/militarygen>

For those interested in their families military history/military genealogy. A place to post your military history questions and photos. Posts on prisoners of war are comparatively few.



## 10.2 Other Groups

WW2 Talk <http://ww2talk.com/index.php>

FORUM DER WEHRMACHT <https://www.forum-der-wehrmacht.de/>

Axis History Forum <https://forum.axishistory.com/>

An apolitical forum for discussions on the Axis nations and related topics hosted by the Axis History.

US POW's <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/series-list.jsp?cat=GP24>

Histoires de Français Libres ordinaires <http://www.francaislibres.net/>

## 11. Other.

[Researching a Prisoner of War](#) by John Jay; author of Facing Fearful Odds – My Father's Story of Captivity, Escape and Resistance, 1940-45. One man's exploration of archives in pursuit of his father. From getting started to exploring Russian archives.