LAMSDORF

In Their Own Words

Experiences related by
Prisoners of War at
Stalag VIIIB / 344 Lamsdorf
and its Working Parties
during the Second World War

Book 1 in the Lamsdorf Series

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www.prisonersofwarmuseum.com

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To the memory of
Charles Saunders 1917-2019
(who was the inspiration for
The On-Line Museum of Prisoners of War)
and all the prisoners of war of the camps at Lamsdorf.

Contents

Introduction

I have no family connection with prisoners of war, but I became involved with the subject of Prisoners of War because of my friend Charles Saunders.

In June 1940 Charles was in Boulogne, France, with the Welsh Guards. A French family put themselves a great risk by sheltering Charles and three of his comrades in their home. Eventually they were discovered by the Germans. The family were sent to a labour camp in Germany until the end of the war, and Charles and his comrades were sent to Stalag VIIIB Lamsdorf. Charles was eventually sent to Working Party E149 Buchenlust (Rachowice) to do forestry work. After the war Charles made contact with the French family again and they remained friends for the rest of his life.

Charles was a musician and played the double bass in a concert band, in the town where we both lived. In 2001 I was working for a major British tour operator. The leader of the concert band approached me because the band had the idea of performing a concert in Boulogne to commemorate the good citizens there who had helped British soldiers, including Charles, during the war. Having a lack of funds, they asked me whether my employers would sponsor their proposed trip. The company agreed to do this and they appointed me as the organiser of the trip. The concert took place in Boulogne in June 2001 and was a great success, and widely reported on French TV, radio and in the newspapers.

Before the trip, my employers asked me to advertise, to try to find Charles' comrades who were with him in Boulogne, and if they were found, to invite them to join us for the trip. We did not find them, regrettably, but I did receive many letters from former POWs who had been at Lamsdorf, and who wanted to share their experiences; and from people whose fathers, grandfathers or other relatives were there. As well as letters, I was sent photographs, diaries, note books, written accounts of

their time as POWs, and many other items. I didn't know what to do with all of these things and for a long time I kept them in boxes in my house. Eventually I decided to make a website to make everything available to anybody who is interested in this subject, and also as a memorial to the Lamsdorf POWs. After this, other websites were developed for other POW camps, and social media groups were set up as a means of sharing information and offering help with research.

In 2005 the first of many Lamsdorf tours took place, with Charles in the group (he took the tour again a few years later, and was then able to re-visit the place where he had spent several years with a Working Party E149). Over the years, former Lamsdorf POWs and members of their families from all around the World have taken part in these tours.

New visitors are discovering the websites and social media groups all the time, and the interest in the experiences of the POWs never wanes. 'Prisoner of War Days' and other events in the UK have continued to attract large numbers, again including people from other continents.

Something that I have discovered is that it is impossible to generalise at all about what life was like at Stalag VIIIB/344 Lamsdorf, or indeed about any POW experience anywhere. In the early days of my involvement with matters concerning Stalag VIIIB/344 Lamsdorf, and other POW camps, I was able to talk to quite a few of the former POWs who were still alive in those days. As well as this I have read many books written by ex-inmates of Lamsdorf and other camps, many other books on the same subject written by other people, and very many personal accounts sent to me by former POWs or written or told by them and sent to me by their relatives. All this comprises a vast amount of information and opinion, and this has convinced me that is very difficult to sum up the 'POW experience' briefly and to remain fair and accurate, simply because the experience was so complex and there were so many differing experiences, reactions and impressions from different people at different times. A few sentences saying that 'this camp was like this….' or 'the working parties were like that …...' or 'the guards behaved in such-and-such a way…..' cannot convey the whole truth.

In the years immediately following the Second World War, there was a plethora of POW books written by or on behalf of former POWs. A number of these gave a sensationalised version of the prisoner-of-war experience, where all Germans were jack-booted, bayonet-

wielding monsters and where the prisoners, though brave and determined to escape, were held in 'hell camps' and were in daily fear for their lives. I have also encountered 'tabloid' reporting – I have often had newspaper and magazine articles sent to me, some dating back to the 1940s – that loved to use dramatic headlines, huge generalisations and unchecked 'evidence', but that rarely convey the real truth.

In between I have encountered the accounts of the former POWs themselves, and whilst I have no doubt that they wrote honestly (though some, after the passage of many years, have understandably shown occasional uncertainty about events, dates and other information) what I have learnt most from these POW accounts is that, whatever someone said or wrote, you can usually find someone else who said or wrote either something very different, or even exactly the opposite, about the same thing.

The reasons for this are not difficult to understand:

1. Stalag VIIIB/344 was a vast camp. Just like any town, different parts of this huge camp were different in character to other parts. The perceptions and experiences of one man in one hut – perhaps with people he didn't get on with very well, perhaps miserable, bored, lonely, apathetic or depressed, or perhaps because of something else to do with his personal situation or problems, might have been hugely different to another man, even in the next hut, who was among good friends, who was involved in sporting or cultural activities and whose morale was generally higher. Multiply this by the tens of thousands of men there and you can see how the accounts of some might differ considerably to those of others.

For example: I've never personally heard anyone call Stalag VIIIB/344 Lamsdorf a 'hell camp', but perhaps some might have. One former POW whom I knew personally said to me "It wasn't too bad" and this sort of sentiment has been recorded probably as many times as the opposite opinion. Many POWs have recorded their own experiences and impressions of the camp, their fellow POWs, the German guards and so on as if these were representative of the camp as a whole, when in fact the accounts of some of their fellow POWs made the place seem quite different. There is not even any consensus about the size of the camp. Some said 8,000, some 10,000, some 20,000 or more. In fact, the highest recorded number of POWs at the camp was 31,052, reported by the Red Cross in October 1943 and mentioned by Anna Wickiewicz in her book 'Captivity in British Uniforms'. In July1940 there were 8,405 and at the

time of the evacuation of the camp in January 1945 there were about 22,000 men in the camp.

2. The camp changed very much in the course of time. For one example of this you could read 'Sojourn in Silesia' by Arthur Evans (which I highly recommend). When he arrived at Lamsdorf in 1940 he described it as a depressing place with "lads ambling about like lost souls with nothing to do all day". He subsequently spent eighteen months away on a working party, and when he returned he found that "Lamsdorf had changed beyond belief ….. it was like a small town, with institutions, a sick bay for minor ailments and an efficient organised, equipped and staffed hospital ….. there was also a school, and orchestra, various bands, concert party, drama groups and sports of all descriptions….. There was now no excuse to amble about like zombies". After a spell away at another working party, Arthur returned to Lamsdorf towards the end of the war. He could hardly believe how it had changed again: "It was like a Persian market. The enterprising had set up stalls where, for the price of cigarettes, one could obtain clothing, books, toilet requisites and items from food parcels". Arthur wrote of the more recent arrivals at the camp, with POWs from all over the World: "This cosmopolitan crowd certainly added colour and entertainment." Although Arthur did not make light of the deprivations – especially as far as food was concerned – he wrote "The majority, however, remained sanguine and cheerful." Again, not necessarily pleasant, but not exactly a 'hell camp'.

Was Stalag VIIIB/344 the worst or one of the most notorious of the German camps? It would be difficult to make such an assessment without having experienced them all – or many of them, at least. Conditions were not very good at any camp – food was inadequate, there was little comfort, poor sanitation, clothing (particularly in winter) was inadequate and there was little in the way of heating. Even without these deprivations, the fact of being a prisoner would have been bad enough. But these things in themselves do not make it the 'worst' camp.

RSM Frederick Read, who was a compound leader at Lamsdorf and later camp leader at Stalag VIIIB Teschen, was sent for a while as a punishment to Stalag 319 at Chelm in eastern Poland, which he described as much worse than Lamsdorf. In fact, when he was returned to Lamsdorf he described it in his account as a "return to Paradise"!

For Ted Lees, a Lamsdorf POW, Stalag XIID at Trier was the worst, and he did in fact call that a 'hell camp', especially for the British

"…… everything possible was done to make our lives awkward and thoroughly miserable". I have also heard Stalag IC at Heydekrug described as the 'worst'.

But in every case, it is the particular experiences of individual POWs at specified times that determined what, for them, was the 'worst'. The probability is, I think, that there was no best or worst – all the camps were different at different times and they changed, depending on the course of the war, the new intakes of prisoners, the weather, the changing nature of the guards and many other considerations.

Much of the unpleasantness of being a POW was nothing to do with the captors at all – indeed, it was undoubtedly the same for POWs held by the allies as much as those held by the Germans. Ted Lees expressed this well:

"As the months passed uneventfully, it became fairly obvious that we should in time become utterly fed up with one another's company. Week after week, month after month, the same old faces, the same mannerisms, the same conversations. All this played on one's nerves and one felt that one would go mad. I was desperate sometimes and as I gazed out of the window there was nothing to see but barbed wire. There were no prospects in the immediate future; one could see no end to the war and no end to our own captivity. What was the remedy? Just to stick it out, have a sleep and try to dispel all thoughts from one's mind. There was no other way. It was that or insanity."

Most accounts provide just a snapshot in time – a moment in an ever-changing situation, not a summing up of what the camp was like over all the years of its existence.

There are so many accounts of life in working parties. They vary enormously. In most working parties, although there were guards, the work was generally supervised by the company or organisation within which the men were working. For example, in coal mines the POWs mixed with the local miners in the mine itself and the work was supervised by the mine's foremen. Arthur Evans, who was on a mining working party for some time, picked up some German and he wrote "The miners were by no means hostile. Sometimes they sympathised with me. They were friendly and I responded likewise. Indeed, I think this manifestation of comradeship derives from the fact that, when on a coalface, the safety of each member of the team depends upon the other".

In his long chapter about his coal mine experiences, he never mentions any cruelty or terror from the guards. On one occasion, when

he refused to work on a 'matter of principle' (though he later forgot what that matter of principle was) the guard put him in a cell overnight, but nothing else happened.

Ted Lees worked in a quarry. He wrote: "Our employer, a Nazi aristocrat, was a lime manufacturer and we were allocated various jobs in the factory. Most of us were made to work on the quarry face; the rest loading stones into trucks which were taken away by means of a lift to the top of the kilns where they were tipped in. This was, of course, all very hard and unpleasant work, making us very tired indeed. Fortunately the billet itself was good. It was clean and it was warm and the food was comparatively speaking satisfactory. After what we had been accustomed to at Trier and then later at Lamsdorf, it was wonderful."

He went on: "Our manager …. was a very nice fellow and an excellent employer who always believed in fair play. He was a very human man who understood our position, realised our feelings and treated us accordingly. He never shouted at us. On the contrary, he always showed the greatest courtesy towards us. Whenever we had a complaint, which was pretty often, he listened patiently and really tried to meet us half way."

There are certainly accounts of occasions when guards intervened in a situation and behaved badly, and we know of the deaths of some POWs who were shot by guards for no defensible reason. We also know that life in some working parties was much more unpleasant than in others. They were made to work, often unwillingly, but rarely at the point of a gun or a bayonet or through the use of cruelty.

In truth the whole picture is really like a vast jigsaw and each of the many thousands of pieces is an individual, and each of these individuals has a story; and each of these stories is complicated, fascinating, perhaps distressing in parts, and many of the stories demonstrate the strength and goodness of human nature that can emerge in severe times of trial.

I am not trying to minimise the awfulness of being a prisoner-of-war, either at Lamsdorf or anywhere else. The experiences of capture and transportation to POW camps that you will read in this book are often harrowing in their descriptions of cruelty and inhumanity. The early years of the camps, the cold, the inadequate food and clothing, (particularly before the days of parcels from the Red Cross and from families back at home) not to mention the lack of anything to do most of

the time, put a tremendous strain on the inmates and reflects very badly on their captors; and despite many of the camp guards behaving reasonably well towards the prisoners, there were enough examples of atrocious behaviour by some guards to increase the unpleasantness of life. In the latter years of the camps, and especially in 1943, overcrowding became an extreme problem.

About 500 prisoners died at Stalag VIIIB/344 at Lamsdorf, mostly from illness, accidents or war wounds, probably fewer than 1% of the men who were at the camp at some time or another. Just a stone's throw away was Stalag VIIIF/344 that held mostly Soviet and Polish prisoners of war. Of the 200,000 or so prisoners who passed through that camp, about 40,000 – that's 20% - died of starvation, mistreatment and disease, and that gives some perspective to the picture (as do the experiences of the prisoners-of-war in the far east who can truly be said to have been living in a hell). The POW camp administrators and guards who demonstrated that they were capable of behaving reasonably and humanely most of the time to the inmates of Stalag VIIIB/344, the 'Britenlager', also demonstrated their capacity to behave with the utmost cruelty and inhumanity in the 'Russenlager', Stalag VIIIF/344.

I have dedicated this book to the memory of Charles Saunders, and of all the prisoners of war of the camps at Lamsdorf.

Philip Baker
January 2020

Extracts from 'Sojourn in Silesia' by Arthur Evans,
with the kind permission of Kathy Gower

List of former POWs whose words appear in this book

Col Bayliss, Royal Australian Air Force
Cyril Blackmore, New Zealand Army
Harry Buckledee, 11th Hussars
Harry Bugden, Royal Norfolk Regiment
Snow Campbell, Royal Australian Air Force
Wesley Clare, Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps
John Robert Clucas, New Zealand Army
Thomas Comins, Royal Australian Air Force
Tom (Steve) Donohoe, Royal Air Force
James Garner, Royal Lancashire Fusillers
John Alexander Gartlan, Royal Canadian Air Force
Walter Hague, Royal Artillery
Roland Hargreaves, Royal Army Service Corps
Ronald Henderson, Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
Jim Henry, Royal Australian Air Force
Jim Holliday, Royal Australian Air Force
Hilary Moreton Jarvis, Royal Air Force
Charles Keslake, Royal Artillery
Ted Lees, Royal Artillery
Bob MacKenzie, Royal Australian Air Force
Robert Matthews, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry
Murray May, Royal Australian Air Force
Stan Moss, Royal Australian Air Force
Irwin Munckton, Royal Australian Air Force
Maurice Newey, Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
John Osborne, Royal Army Medical Corps
James Peters, Borders Regiment
Peter Pickard, Royal Army Medical Corps
Jack Poolton, Royal Regiment of Canada
Dave Radke, Royal Australian Air Force
Frederick Read, Royal Engineers

Austra Llewellyn (Llew) Rogers, Royal Army Service Corps
Charles Saunders, Welsh Guards
John Shanks, Royal Air Force
Fred Sharratt, East Lancashire Regiment
Bob Stewart-Moore, Royal Australian Air Force
Brian Treloar, Royal Australian Air Force
Ronald George Walker, Rifle Brigade
Michael Whiteman, Royal Artillery
Ken Whitten, Sherwood Foresters
Peter Whitton, Rifle Brigade

Acknowledgements

This book contains extracts from first-hand accounts and diaries of men who at some time were prisoners at Stalag VIIIB / 344 Lamsdorf prisoners-of-war camp, and its Working Parties during the Second World War. Some of those named are former Lamsdorf POWs who, sadly, are no longer with us, but who sent me their stories over the years so that they might reach a wider audience. Others named are family members of former POWs who very kindly gave their permission for the material to be included. I give my grateful thanks to all for providing an opportunity to commemorate and honour those brave men. Some extracts are from published books, and these are listed on the following page.

Kim Blackmore
Elaine Brown
Harry Buckledee
Linda Chawner
Scott Clare
Doreen Cleggett
Mike Clucas
Tom (Steve) Donohoe
Chris Hague
Joyce Hargreaves
Ronald Henderson
Jan Halvorson
Jeni Kingston
Ros Lomas
Quentin Matthews
Stan Moss*
Maurice Newey
John Osborne
Alan Pearce
Robert Peters
Peter Pickard
Jayne Poolton-Turvey
Frederick Read
Charles Saunders
Rob Sharratt
David Shulver
Michael Whiteman
Ken Whitten
Ruth Wilde
Lynne Wilkinson

*The RAAF POWs of Lamsdorf

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ISBN 0 646 10228

The book of the above name was privately published in 1992. It is an amazing publication, giving so much information about life at Stalag VIIIB/344 and the Working Parties. A few years ago I tried hard to find out who owns the copyright of this book so that I could obtain permission to quote from it. A kind friend in Australia managed to get in touch with the Right Reverend Stan Moss, former Archdeacon of Melbourne, who started his studies for the Church at the Lamsdorf School (he was one of the 84 Royal Australian Air Force POWs in Lamsdorf). Stan gave his opinion that anyone could use and cite anything from the book - as long as they acknowledged where it came from in the proper manner, for which I am very grateful. Sadly, Stan died in August 2016. Stan was a prominent member of the former Lamsdorf RAAF POWs Association – perhaps the last surviving member – which owned the copyright of the book, and he contributed to it.

Of course, the main reason that the book was compiled in the first place was so that the stories of these men would be placed on permanent record for the benefit of future generations. Unfortunately the book is long out of print and very difficult to find now.

Some of their stories are included in this volume. I have no doubt that those RAAF Lamsdorf POWs would be very pleased that their stories are not going to fade into obscurity. It's one way of honouring the POWs of Lamsdorf, as well as giving valuable and fascinating information about the camp.

Harry Buckledee's book 'For You the War is Over'
is available from Amazon – ISBN 978-0952329510.

Jack Poolton's book 'Destined to Survive',
is available from Amazon - ISBN 1-55002-311-X.

Hilary Moreton Jarvis' book 'Doctor in chains' (written as George Moreton) is available from Amazon - ISBN 978-0552114561

1
Capture

1940

Calais, France May 1940
Charles Keslake
Royal Artillery

After a few days at Calais, things began to get a little warm as by now the Germans were again on top of us, so we took up a position as Infantry along the road with Bren and Anti-Tank guns. By the following day, things had got so warm that we had to leave our billets, and took up another excellent position on top of a railway embankment nearer the centre of the town.

The position comprised of some of the Rifle Brigade, Kings Royal Rifles, Queen Victoria Rifles, a few men from the Royal Corps of Signals, ourselves, and one or two odd men from various regiments.

The first time we took up this position we succeeded in putting a German tank out of action. I then had a very narrow escape. I was sent to get a lorry, which I had just placed in position, when I was told that tanks were coming up the road behind us, on which information I ran down a nearby cellar, and had just got down there when a shell blew my lorry and the house outside which it was standing out of existence. No doubt a lucky escape!

From there my troubles began! After a little more excitement, I arrived on the dock-side and then onto the beach. The railway station was a complete wreckage, and there were lorries overturned and military and civilian kit strewn everywhere. I have never seen a town such a complete wreck, as before I left, it was absolutely flat.

On reaching Calais Station, I joined up with various platoons of the infantry regiments and we slept that night in a field covered by our great-coats and gas-capes. The following morning the battle continued even more

fiercely than before. This however proved to be its last day, as at 6 o'clock that evening (Sunday May 26th 1940) I was taken prisoner of war. There was no alternative but to surrender, which was done at 1700 hours. The German officer who captured us spoke perfect English, and we were made to throw away our tin helmets, all arms, and any ammunition which we had.

Then what we termed as 'the march' began. We had to march from our place of capture, inland towards Germany. The first night of our capture, we were marched all through the night during which there was a very heavy downpour of rain in which we had to stand still for about two hours owing to an air-raid by our own planes which was then in progress.

The following morning, we were rested in an old factory but were so packed in that we could only sit with our knees under our chins. I can only remember ever being fed by the Germans about three times during the whole of the march, the food we got we had either to beg or steal. That is not a very pleasant admission to have to make, but I can assure you that hunger is not a very pleasant thing.

We were marched for three weeks, at the end of which we boarded a train comprising of cattle trucks, at Cambrai and started for Germany. While marching, the French women were very good to us giving us everything they could and welcoming us in every village and town we passed through. In several of the women's attempts to give us food or water, they were invariably hit with the butts of our guards' rifles or their buckets of water kicked over, however, in spite of these atrocities they were still determined to help us.

On the third day of the march, we were caught in another heavy downpour of rain and I can assure you I got really wet, as I only had my battle-dress on, having had the rest of my kit blown up in the lorry at Calais. That night, still very wet, we were all packed in a church in which I was fortunate enough to get myself a chair but it was most uncomfortable as my clothes were still very wet and my trousers stuck to my legs. On again during the next day until we came to a large football stadium, only to stop for a few hours during which we received a few hard biscuits and a drop of watery soup but as there were still very large puddles and the ground was very soggy, there was not much rest here. On leaving the stadium we marched twenty-five km to Doullons (Douai) where we were once again packed into an old civilian prison. As we marched so we multiplied in numbers, so that by the time we reached Doullons (we had with us some Belgians and French Moroccans).

In this prison, I picked up with two ambulance drivers, and we planned to escape shortly after leaving here. We left the prison and had marched some distance when our chance came to escape - and we took it. We ran up a narrow lane and flung ourselves in the tall grass, lying there in the blazing sun until the whole column had passed by. At last we were free! When the column had passed, we stood up in the field and were seen by an old lady who was more surprised than alarmed, but she gave us some eggs, so things turned out all right.

We intended to make for the coast, but we found that in order to reach it, we should have to go back through or around Doullons We decided to go round it! Between us we had a map, a compass and five hundred francs which enabled us to live very well, as living in France is cheaper than in England. We decided to keep to the fields, as the roads were full of German convoys.

The first person we approached for food was a boy who was working in the fields and who agreed on our production of some of the money to bring us something.

We gave him some money and telling us to wait where we were, away he went. He came back later with two bottles of home made wine, a large bottle of fresh milk, a dozen eggs, about a pound of home-made butter and some bread which, when totalled showed that we had very good value for the amount of money we had given him. After our meal, we carried on with our journey, and once missed being seen by a German Officer by the skin of our teeth.

The following evening we came to a farmhouse on the top of a hill and were carefully watching points as to who was about, when we saw a German Officer leave the house. After a little however we decided to approach the farmer for some food. One of us accordingly went carefully up to the house and we were given a good meal by the farmer's wife for a few francs. After our meal, she gave us some water in which we washed and shaved. A little later the farmer himself came out to see us and his wife brought us out some pancakes which she had cooked especially for us.

We met here a young French lad who was in the same position as us, being an escaped POW He showed us his papers and pay book which he had down the leg of his trousers.

The farmer would not allow us to sleep anywhere in his farmyard for fear of us getting caught, but gave us permission to sleep in one of his store sheds a little distance from the farmhouse where we passed a fairly

good night in the hay, (accompanied by a few rats) and left on our way early the next morning.

Later that afternoon, we crossed a main road in full view of a German convoy, after which we decided to rest for a short time.

We had not rested more than a few minutes when along came some Germans on patrol. Alas, our freedom was at an end.

Calais, France May 1940
Ronald Henderson
Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
I was with a Light Aid Detachment attached to the Rifle Brigade at Calais and was taken prisoner when Calais fell on 26th May.

Boulogne, France 21st May 1940
Charles Saunders
Welsh Guards

On 21st May 1940 I was with the 2nd Battalion of the Welsh Guards when we arrived in Boulogne with the 2nd Battalion of the Irish Guards, to evacuate the British headquarters staff (including the Duke of Gloucester, whose job was liaison with the French forces).

We landed in Boulogne harbour but found that the staff and the Duke had left the day before we arrived. Our company established a temporary headquarters, and I was one of the guards outside. We were told that we would be taken by boat back to Britain as soon as it could be arranged. There was a lot of fighting going on in the town. The next day I was sent to try and find a stretcher for a wounded soldier. I found some stretcher-bearers, but they wouldn't come with me. When I returned to the headquarters I found that everyone had gone – except the wounded soldier and two other soldiers who were looking after him. We made a stretcher from some sacks and some pieces of wood and I told the other two to take the wounded man to the hospital in the town. I then went off to find my company again. I found them elsewhere in the town. We were sent back to the harbour to get the boat back to Britain. However, there was only room on the boat for 800 men: 1,200 were left behind in Boulogne.

We were marched away from Boulogne, south along the coast. But we soon found we were marching towards a German machine gun post. We had to escape and hide. Eight of us hid in a building, and later four went off to see if they could find a way back to the harbour. We didn't see them

again. The four of us who remained (Charles, Arthur, Richard and William) spent the night in the building and in the morning we decided to go down to the harbour ourselves. As we approached the harbour someone began firing at us and we took shelter in a large building – a house - belonging to a transport firm. Fortunately the door was not locked. The house was empty. After a while we tried to leave, but we saw Germans coming around the corner. We ran back into the house and locked the doors. We expected the Germans to come after us, but nobody came.

We were in the house for about eight days. All we could find to eat and drink was sugar, some wine left in the bottoms of bottles we found, and rainwater. On the eighth day the water came on in the house. We lit a fire. Someone outside saw the smoke and knocked on the door. We saw that it was a Frenchman and we let him in. His name was Jean Abras. He had about three colleagues with him. Jean sent one of them to fetch a young schoolboy who could speak a little English. With the boy's help they told us that they would get some food and civilian clothes for us. Jean took us out of the back of the house. We walked to Le Portel and then to Outreau. In Le Portel we walked right past the German headquarters! We then arrived at Jean's mother's house. Jean's mother made us welcome. Somehow she managed to feed all of us. It must have been difficult for her as food was rationed, but she was helped in this by the great generosity of her family and friends.

Sometimes we used to walk through the fields down to the beach to collect shellfish to help with the food rations. If we saw any Germans we would walk the other way!

We stayed with the family until 8th August. It was quite a big house. Maman Abras lived there with Jean and his wife Maria and five children: Marie Christine, Jeanne, Jean, Pipette and another small child who was very ill and unfortunately died the next year, I think. There were also Jean's cousins Coco and Ninis (I think they were cousins). Downstairs were Maman Abras's niece and her two daughters.

We lived as part of the family. I used to get up first in the morning and make the coffee for everyone. The family taught us some French, and we tried to teach them a little English. We had a good time with them. Sometimes we would all sing together.

One of us would always sit near a window to watch in case any Germans came near the house. One day it was my turn to be on watch. Someone spoke to me and I looked away from the window. At that moment a German car stopped at the house. I gave the warning as soon as I realised, but it was too late. We tried to escape from the back of the house, but a

German soldier had already reached the back door. We then went up to the roof of the house and hid in a cupboard. We were there for about two hours before they found us.

We (and the Abras family) were taken to the gendarmerie as prisoners, and then we were moved to Arras. Originally we soldiers, Jean, Coco and Ninis shared the same cell, but later we had individual cells. The soldiers were taken to the German Field Police headquarters for interrogation. Each of us was questioned alone and we were not allowed to talk to each other. But when we arrived back at the gendarmerie a very friendly gendarme said "Would you like to have a conference together now?" He opened the five cells (there were five because there was another British soldier who was a prisoner there) and we could walk into one cell to talk together. The gendarme shut the door but did not lock it. He said that if he told us to come out quickly, we should go back to our own cells as quickly as we could. We could then talk about our interrogations. We made sure that we all told the same story to the Germans whenever we were interrogated.

Boulogne, France 21st May 1940
Peter Whitton
The Rifle Brigade

Arrived back at Camberley at dinner time after two days and a night of manoeuvres. Did not use capes for groundsheet or bivouacs, but slept under the trees. I was never told why we'd gone to France; we'd gone out as fresh troops because the retreating BEF were exhausted and out of ammunition and supplies. Our bunch, I think, were sent out for 3 days to hold up the German advance while the exhausted troops were getting out of Dunkirk.

We had just had a good dinner and were busy cleaning the rifles and guns when PSM *(Platoon Sergeant Major)* Bagnall came round the camp with orders to finish guns, pack all kit and be ready to leave camp by 3 o/c.

The coaches arrived soon afterwards we all piled in and arrived at Dover late in the evening. On the quay we tucked into sausage rolls, dishes of tea and bars of chocolate. Then we loaded ammunition, guns etc. aboard the Queen of the Channel and went aboard soon after dark, the air raid warnings were sounded at that time but we saw no planes and as the 'all clear' was sounded soon afterwards we concluded they must have been driven off by coastal defence planes before reaching the coast.

We made a smooth safe crossing and landed at Boulogne early the following morning. Without any delay or halt for food, we marched up through the town and by midday found that we were the advance section. We had to dig ourselves in straight away as a German mechanized unit was only about 40 miles away and advancing quickly.

By the evening we were well dug in (during air raids in which most of the barrage balloons and a British Army Co-operation plane were shot down). Just after dark we had our first (and last) meal in France: stew, biscuits and tea. Also a half litre bottle of white wine that Able, one of the Section, had brought up from the town.

While most of the section had been working on the trench, the rest, in turn, had been on the road examining all passports or identification cards (that are carried by all the French)

They were Hussars in the last war but now a mechanised unit. As soon as we came up to them I could see that we would have had a rough time if we had engaged the tanks and the Jerries in the streets; they were using a lighter rifle than us with a shorter range and a smaller bullet. Also a lot of them, in the advance sections, were carrying small Tommy guns, holding about 50 rounds of something like 22 tracer ammunition. This gun is fired from the hip and can fetch a man down long before he can reach firing position, or take aim with ordinary rifle.

Many of our comrades who gave in were shot down rather than take the trouble of capturing them, but we were lucky that far. We were stripped of all our equipment, pocket knives were taken and we were sent out, alternately running and walking, with a load of other prisoners to a large field well outside the town. On the way through the town we noticed that many of the Germans were carrying snappy little cameras and taking photographs of the line of prisoners etc, this appeared to amuse them very much and was often accompanied by jeers and shouts of "Chamberlain Tommies". The hostility of their front line troops was very pronounced but fortunately it decreased as we advanced further into German occupied territory.

When we reached the field we found about 150 British prisoners and about 2,000 French and Belgium besides about 30 officers, one of our officers, 2nd Lieut. Leslie was among them, but of all the other officers there was no sign. A few of the battalion was with us but we did not know for sure whether the rest were wiped out, still fighting, or had been able to get away by boat.

Soon after we arrived a larger fleet of German planes came over and a dog-fight started between them and about a dozen British fighters that had been harassing the Germans in the town. The British Spitfires stood no chance against such superior numbers though and soon made for home with no losses on either side. We stayed the night in the field and after Al and I had finished up the bully beef and biscuits we had a very short but sound sleep, the first since Sunday night. We were awakened at 3.30 the following morning and counted and marched off under a strong guard. All along the road from Boulogne were German tanks, cars and supply lorries, they were all under trees and well camouflaged, waiting to move into the front line, we also saw abandoned lorries and cars, many of them burnt out, at the side of the road and half buried in ditches, also plenty of clothing and household goods, presumably to lighten the loads of the refugees and enable them to get to safety in time.

The country we passed through was not very interesting, rather flat and very thinly wooded, in fact we saw no real woods until we reached Belgium. The roads were usually straight for miles, bordered by a line of trees. most of the fields were smothered in buttercups but apart from that there was no great variety of wild flowers and the commonest bird was the martin. Soon after dawn the day grew warm and as we now had no water bottles to fall back on we had to suck dewy grass and chew green corn for moisture. We had one short break during the morning, but apart from that we were on the march with no food or water, till about midday, when we reached Montreuil. There in the square, we halted and lay down for a rest.

As the afternoon wore on the French people opened up some of their shops and soldiers who had French money were allowed to buy food. Al and I had not been in France long enough to have received any pay, we had no French money, but a good French woman had started an open air kitchen and was giving away a small ladle of stew, a morsel of horse meat and two potatoes to all who had a tin to put it in. We soon found a tin each and after a long struggle with the French soldiers we secured our helping.

Ronald George Walker
The Rifle Brigade

21st May, 1940
9 pm warned standby to move 11 pm
11-30 pm moved from Bosmere-Hall, Needham Market,
Suffolk to Southampton by road.

22nd May 1940
Arrived Southampton 5-30 pm left in SS Archangel for France

23rd May 1940
Woke up early a.m. at Dover sailed and arrived midday at Calais; shelled by Germans as landing.
Enemy 7 kilos from harbour force consists of one brigade Kings Royal Rifles 2nd Btn QVR *(Queen Victoria's Rifles),* 1st Btn Rifle Brigade (1RB). No artillery support.

24th May 1940
Enemy attack continues; air and land offences. 2am heavy artillery attack. QVR badly hit during day by tanks and mobile infantry. Told that enemy force cut off from all support.

25th May 1940
Enemy now attacking on three fronts, all brigades suffer heavy losses. French still carry on unceasing retreat toward Dunkirk, heavy air attacks only defence Bren guns, mortars brought into action by enemy who have closed right in. 6pm given orders to help evacuate wounded to Dunkirk. Hospital ships can be seen but cannot approach. Left Calais by sands carrying stretcher, discarded rifle covered on flanks by `C' company 1RB. Approx 10 kilos from Calais machined gunned by, enemy.

Captured 26th May 1940
Marched as a prisoner to Le Sattque. Stayed all day at Le Sattque, camp increased during day until about 500 had arrived, mainly French. Food not bad here.

Calais, France, 26th May, 1940
Walter Hague
Royal Artillery

I remember crossing over the road at the end of the street and to my dying day I will always say I saw two tracer bullets pass just in front of me, chest high. I saw saw a couple of dead soldiers lying close to where I crossed. Slowly we kept being pushed back and I remember somebody saying that Jerry had dropped leaflets telling us to surrender. All the time we were dive

bombed by the Stuka dive bombers. Lots happened in those last couple of days, too much to remember (probably just as well).

We finally made it to the docks area. We were in another one of these cellars facing the docks, like many hundreds more. I'd say that in the cellar I was in there'd be at least 40. We couldn't cross the road – Jerry tanks at either end. Finally the officer said we were going to surrender. He told everybody to take the bolts out of their rifles and throw them in the corner of the cellar. We then stepped out onto the road with our hands on our heads. After standing there for a while we had to form a single line, run to the city square after being kicked at, running over heaps of rubble and such until we finally arrived. We stood there a long time with our hands on our heads to be searched. It was raining very hard and water was running out of our tunics at the elbows. It was almost dark when we moved off. I hadn't slept for ages and there were many more like me. I must have been walking in my sleep because this feller came up to me (Stan Morton was his name) and said "Wake up". He got hold of me and we walked together to our first stop, which was a large, open field – still raining, no overcoat, get down and sleep where you were.

First light next morning, off again and walk till dusk. No mention of food. There were thousands of prisoners and as we moved along we had to scratch the potato sets out of the fields and eat them raw. When we went through a village we would dive into a shop and take whatever we could get or carry. Stan and I managed to get a box of 'tablet sugar'.

You might say, where were the guards? They just rode up and down the line of prisoners on their bikes. They certainly had no control of us, there were just too many of them. You could have run off, but where would you have gone? Every day was the same: scrounge what you could. We took the lining out of our tin helmet – that made a drinking bowl.

Going through Belgium, passing a farm where the farmer's wife put a churn full of milk at the end of the driveway – the guard shot at it and that put paid to that. They weren't all bad, you heard all sorts of tales. We walked in columns and they said at the end of each column there was a machine gun mounted truck and if you dropped out you were put on the truck. Others said if you dropped out you'd be shot. I saw a few helped along with the aid of a German's jack boot and the butt of his rifle. I never saw anybody shot but that doesn't mean to say none were. You'd pass odd ones at the side of the road, they'd have their mates with them and you'd see a soldier being helped along by a couple, on either side.

We were lucky, Stan and I (if you can call it luck) being in one of the first hundred or so because there were thousands behind us. After the first week, when we went through a village, it was as if a plague of locusts had gone through. We left nothing that was eatable. We walked for over three weeks.

Bethune, France, 27th May 1940
James Garner
Royal Lancashire Fusillers

13th April 1940
Landed at Cherbourg 9am.

10th May 1940
March into Belgium.

12th May 1940
First action against Jerry, Wavre.

20th May 1940
Blown up by own artillery – Le Basse.

23rd May1940
Injured r. foot. Fail to report sick.

27th May 1940
3 am Trapped in sewerage ditch 4 hours by cross-fire & mortar fire. Rifle smashed by shrapnel.
9 am overpowered & taken prisoner, outskirts Bethune, France.

France, 28th May 1940
John Osborne
Royal Army Medical Corps

After being surrounded by a German Panzer unit, with bullets flying everywhere, we were ordered to stand in a line in a field with the tanks' guns trained on us. We were marched along the road, with other units to a church hall about half a mile away, where we spent the night.

Dunkirk, France, May 1940
Michael Whiteman
Royal Artillery

A creeping barrage had started by the Germans from all sides, with our battleships shelling from the sea. Suddenly a terrific flash and bang. I rolled under the Red Cross train with it rocking on top of me. Then all quiet. By this time others were coming by, shouting "Come this way". I followed.

As we went into the sand dunes, shells were falling behind us. Planes in tens were coming down the coastline, turning at the pier and bombing the town we'd just left. We fired at them with our rifles. Some of them strafed us so we got into the dunes again. Three Hurricanes came over from Dover and had a fight, one German came down in the sea with a parachute, two of ours were downed, one in the sea, one on the shore line and exploded. One Hurricane went back to Dover. Four of us in the sand dunes put our rifles over a ledge as we heard talking, thinking they were Germans. They were. They had our lads walking in front of them. Our lads shouted "don't shoot!" It was all over for us.

Dunkirk, France, 28th May 1940
Roland Hargreaves
Royal Army Service Corps

It was 28th May 1940 when I committed the cardinal sin of the Army – I volunteered. We had fallen back, tired and dispirited, to the outside of Dunkirk and an anxious officer was searching for an able-bodied dispatch rider to take an urgent message to GHQ. He seemed to be looking straight at me and before I had realised what had happened, I was astride a machine and heading in the opposite direction to everyone else.

The day was strangely tranquil as I rode along, weaving in and out of the partially demolished road blocks and shell holes. Suddenly the silence was shattered by a burst of machine-gun fire and my front wheel went into an uncontrollable wobble, throwing me off into a shallow ditch, which ran alongside the road. For the next few minutes I would gladly have changed identities with a mole, as bullets flew all around me. I tentatively risked one eye above the level of the ditch that ran alongside the road and immediately my heart sank, for about 30 metres away was a group of German soldiers, guns at the ready, steadily approaching my position.

I was taken to their font-line position and was treated with a degree of consideration as one who was facing the same dangers as themselves, but as I was passed further back from the battle area, so the attitudes and treatment worsened progressively. Eventually I was pushed into a field filled with thousands of captured allied soldiers and, as far as I could see, all the fiends around were the same. The perimeter of each field was guarded by machine-guns mounted at regular intervals and supplemented by platoons of infantry strategically positioned around the area.

We were forced to sleep overnight on the ground without cover of any kind. Early next morning we were herded into columns and marched for about 30 km. During the whole of this time German mechanised units were passing alongside, travelling in the opposite direction. Eventually we reached the next set of fields where we were to sleep overnight without cover or food. The next day was a repeat performance and I began to feel that they were using the columns of prisoners as a cover from possible air attack on the never-ending columns of vehicles.

Dunkirk, France, 29th May 1940
Fred Sharratt
East Lancashire Regiment

I was in the Territorial Army before the world war 2 broke out. We were sent for training on the Scottish Borders After training the whole division was taken to Cherbourg by the Royal Navy. We were positioned on the Belgian border and then sent to do defend the city of Lille. Then we were ordered to retreat because the Germans had taken Calais and they were about to cut us off. Then we were ordered to defend Ypres and then they repeatedly attacked us from the air they showered us with everything and after holding the German army for 3 days we were ordered to Dunkirk and told to destroy all our brand new vehicles. We used sledgehammers and hammers and smashed everything.

The East Lancashire Regiment, 127th Brigade were ordered to hold the Germans in front of Dunkirk for as long as possible which we did for nine hours until the ammunition ran out. We had no alternative but to surrender to the Germans, because we were muddy, wet and hungry. After being looked over by a German general he said "The East Lancs Regiment, you have fought very well, you are not to be ashamed, but for you the war is over." We then had to march without food and water through Lille to Cambrai where we got a bowl of soup.

Near Neuchatel-en-Bray, France, 1940
Frederick Read
Royal Engineers

Early in the New Year of 1940 we moved south to behind the Maginot Line and settled down. I was informed that I would be returned to the UK within a week to ten days to be commissioned. Seven days later, the German advance towards France began. All leave and postings were cancelled and I never did get home. My rank at the time was RSM (*Regimental Sergeant Major*) the same rank I held throughout the war until 1945, no promotions for prisoners-of-war.

We awoke one morning to the distinct sounds of firing all around us. We could hear everything from planes to tanks to artillery and here we were, stuck in some bloody wood, fully armed and equipped with rations but with no instructions whatsoever. I went across to the house to obtain some orders, only to find that the officers had left earlier, presumably to Divisional Headquarters for an update. But by now we could distinctly hear the tanks approaching our position down the road and we had been left on our own.

An enemy advance patrol spotted us and started rifle firing the position, I now had to take command and we opened fire at the patrols, in the hope of slowing down the advance, thereby giving us time to move out. I gave the order for everyone to get on the vehicles and roll out. We came to the main road and I was not sure which way to turn, so turned left to go back the way we had arrived at the wood. After about a mile following a bend in the road, we suddenly came across a German column in full force. There was nothing that could be done apart from taking the opposite side of the road and trying to force our way through by shooting at the hip. We had almost cleared the column when my driver was shot and we careered into a German vehicle, leaving me with one leg on the German vehicle, one leg on mine, with the inevitable result that my pelvis was nearly split in two.

Somehow or other we were all collected up and taken back to the assembly point where the Germans were holding prisoners. In the compound we discovered many of our divisional men who had similar stories to us and had been picked up the same way. We had no idea of what had been going on, but later heard that the division had been ordered to surrender. I couldn't walk and although we were treated fairly well, our stay here was very brief. We were moved back where we were checked over in an efficient manner, my problem was that my knee had been injured and together with my smashed pelvis. I could not walk at all, however, I

managed to get hold of two brooms and hobbled about on those as best I could.

I was next moved to a hospital at Rouen. During my stay there I had the greatest admiration for the French Salvation Army, they were marvellous despite the insults and many difficulties they had to endure from the Germans. They succeeded in entering the hospital each week to hand out a few cigarettes or bars of chocolate, whatever they had in fact. From that day onwards I have always thought the Salvation Army to be one of the best charitable organizations and try to give to them whenever I can.

Between Rouen and Dieppe, France, 9th June 1940
Ted Lees
Royal Artillery

The order to evacuate was given and we were informed that our rendezvous was to be Fécamp. But before proceeding to our port of embarkation we were allocated the task of destroying the crossroads at the village of Tote on the main Rouen/Dieppe road. With the fall of Rouen our task in blocking the Dieppe road was going to be very important, but also very dangerous and very difficult.

The lorry I was riding in brought up the rear of the convoy. We had not been travelling long before we heard a shot, our lorry stopped and the driver found the bullet lodged in one of our tyres. We hurriedly changed wheels and proceeded, but not for long. Once again the lorry stopped. I saw a flash and felt as though I had been struck on the face by a sledgehammer. There was a wild scramble out of the lorry, the spirit of self-preservation told me to take cover behind the lorry. This was certainly a tight spot we found ourselves in and there was no doubt that we had had a head-on collision with a German armoured column. I glanced up the road to see, to my horror, a never-ending column of German tanks, armoured cars, motorcyclists, cars, lorries etc; it was terrifying.

Ted and some of his comrades managed to evade capture until the following day. He then spent some time in hospital in Rouen, before being taken to Stalag XIID in Trier, and later to Lamsdorf.

Dunkirk, France, 12th June 1940
Harry Bugden
Royal Norfolk Regiment

Harry Bugden was on a small ship in Dunkirk, crowded with other soldiers, waiting for the tide to come in so that they could sail out to safety.

I walked around to see if any of my unit were there, but I was the only Royal Norfolk on board. Whether what happened next was fate or divine intervention, I know not, but just as I lay down at the far end of the hold there was a deafening explosion and the ship was filled with dense, acrid smoke and a tongue of flame. I felt a sudden jerk on my right elbow and a wet feeling down the arm. I realised that I had been wounded as my lower arm and hand were useless.

Near panic ensured as we all tried to ascend the ladder, which broke down under the weight, throwing men onto the wounded below. We then noticed with the clearing smoke that a jagged hole, some three feet square, had been blown in the ship's side. Having been sitting alongside where the shell had hit, to this day I do not know what had prompted me to move. I will not dwell on the fate of those who were nearby. It can of course be imagined.

We then, of course, climbed through the aperture created by the shell to be confronted by German soldiers in a semi-circle, rifles pointed at us. Hands in the air (hand in my case) we were herded in a group and told to wait. I must say in fairness, that the wounded were taken away with great dispatch. At this point came a little pantomime, as a German officer appeared with a revolver and said "Now you guys, walk quietly behind me and I will take you to our camp". It later transpired that he had lived in America and as none of us spoke or understood German he was very useful. We were then taken to a large meadow where I and the other walking wounded were given first aid.

The fit amongst us were marched away to camps in Germany and the wounded sent to a casino (closed of course) at Forges les Eux, some 200 km north of Paris. Having a minor arm wound I was in this contingent. At the casino we laid on straw which was strewn around the various large rooms. Because of the Germans' rapid advance through France their back-up services were some way behind the advance units. Consequently medical care was non-existent, apart from a few medical corps prisoners who had some knowledge of first aid, but no medicines or drugs. Being mobile and having already had treatment in the field, I was relatively

unaffected but some more unfortunates, I'm afraid, succumbed to their injuries.

1941

Crete May-June 1941
Cyril Blackmore
New Zealand Army

Our situation wasn't the best as we used to lie between the trees, and through the breaks in the foliage we could see Jerry planes flying above looking for us. Thank goodness they didn't machine gun the valleys otherwise hundreds for us would have been just dead meat.

A ration party of sixty was sent down to the evacuation beach a few miles along the coast to bring back any rations if possible; twenty returned, the other forty were taken off by the navy who had come in to see if there were any more to go; and then there were hundreds of us back there waiting for the boats - I believe the first night the navy came in they refused to take anyone off because the Greeks rioted in their hurry to get off. We ransacked the Greek village and found gaudy blankets and rugs which were handy for sleeping at night. A party of us went for rations in daylight and came back with a bit.

We lay under those trees and with the same old story- no more going off tonight- perhaps tomorrow night- and then the rumour that the officers were capitulating. The next morning it was time: we were ordered to pile all the rifles and tin hats out in the open. We destroyed letters, photos and other things, then the Jerries came - alpine troops. "For you Englanders the war is all over." One of the most trying moments was when trench mortars started landing lower down the valley and working up the valley towards us – I think even the Jerry soldiers who were there with us weren't too keen on things. The Jerry planes dived and swooped above.

We were put into a small enclosure in the centre of the village while our officers were received by Jerry, then later on we were marched out along the road. We were told that we were only going a few km each day and that we would be getting some rations up the road above Sparkia. We looked into all the wrecked and derelict trucks just to see if there might be a crumb or two. In the pocket of one truck we found a few small crusts of bread, hard and nearly black with age. We sucked these tasty morsels. Onion tops and orange skins that we picked up were luxuries. Once we found some tea spilt