

# The Royal Air Force School for Prisoners of War



Stalag Luft VI      Germany



## WHERE THERE IS NO VISION THE PEOPLE PERISH

THIS PROGNOSTICUS of study from a "Raided War University" whose only qualification for entry is to have "sinned Death"—is representative of the educational treatment at work in over 50 camps in Germany, France, Denmark, etc. (and formerly in Italy and North Africa).

One R.A.F. sergeant, a prisoner since 1940, has by the aid of books and materials smuggled by the British Red Cross and St. John War Organisation (which inaugurated the educational section early in 1940) produced this beautiful illuminated report. His shortened title "British Red X" symbolises for all prisoners salvation of mind as well as body. A lapse or two from dictionary spelling reflects the harsh conditions under which educational or avocational work is undertaken. Can we visualize the surroundings—lack of space, lack of heat, lack of light, constant interruptions, no silence, no privacy?

"These schools," says a prisoner in a Stalag, "have been riddled on difficulties, and they have thrived on difficulties, in a way which it is not fantastic to say discharges the debt of a part of this generation to the nation which after knowledge was the founders of all education," and the continuation of the report can be accepted in the pattern for most camps.

"The School catering for the educational needs of nearly 4,000 men, started with two classes in one room, with no material or text books, in the depths of winter with inadequate heating. From that beginning, hopelessly discouraging to all except a prisoner of war, progress has been made on a large building, partitioned by the use of Red Cross box wood into seven rooms—roll floors, ten used from nine in the morning until nine at night by indefatigable students.

"The 54 original subjects are still on the programme, but the number of subjects taught has now risen to 64. This striking figure is due to the fact that an effort has been made to cater for the requirements of each individual prisoner, with the great emphasis laid upon the preparation for the after-war period and re-entry into civil life.

"Since from all parts of the Empire are keeping themselves up to standard—improving their knowledge in their profession, or learning a new kind of job. And as the career test of their progress must be preparing for the examinations, which thanks to the arrangements made by the Red Cross are permitted by many examining bodies to be held in P.O.W. Camps."

Most of these men had been in working parties, but on learning that examinations could be taken, they preferred to study (N.A.C.O.s can choose whether they work or not) whereupon the Germans formed a special camp for this purpose.

In this camp of 4,000 prisoners there are 4,000 in classes, and 9,000 in school, and in addition there are 17 study groups for professional examinations, as well as a number of private students.

In an officers' Air Camp the annual report reads "Over 40% are illumination-minded, and we, have maintained interest throughout all the distractions of P.O.W. life."

One of the largest Stalags reports that last year 164,393 students attended the 39 different classes, in which 72 qualified tutors teach many subjects ranging from elementary agriculture to advanced engineering. A special class is held "for the illiterate, many of whom have had no chance to study as they lived as cheap labour or boundary riders far from a school." One repatriated prisoner of war, suffering from shell-shock, described how he was taught to read again and this gradually returned to him his lost memory. Their library of 4,000 to 6,000 books is as well run that only three books have been lost in two years.

The working parties too are entered for by six visiting teams, and the German authorities,

live on six weeks before examinations allow prisoners to return to the Base camp for intensive reading. The difficulties here are the greatest, and few manage consecutive study, though one man, after working six hours in a gravel pit, returns to his tent and goes on some reading for Intermediate B.Sc., and so a Cypriot prisoner writes, "I know it is difficult to study in Prison camps but I am not losing my time in regretting what is the life."

In the Merchant Navy Camp highly organized study has been in progress for some years. The course given by the Merchant Navy Officers' Training Board covers all the officer apprentices' work, and we send these out to study two days with the necessary books. Every month tests are held, marks awarded and a report forwarded. All this supervised study will be set against their four years seagoing service by the Ministry of War Transport, who this year, have allowed the men to take the written work of the Ministry's Certificate of Competency. In April, 1940 most took their examinations (Masters, Mates, Engineers). Examinations of many other bodies have been successfully held and so the education officer says, "Every achievement has been made in written tests from purely practical subjects to literary history, art appreciation and post-war reconstruction."

In the Royal Navy Officers' Division of the Camp, the learning of languages is a favorite pursuit—in fact, throughout all camps, this study is widespread, including such unusual languages as Arabic-Coptic, Maori, Swedish, Chinese and Japanese.

Since 1940 one of the Camps has been running a University with numerous faculties, and some idea of its scope can be judged by its language faculty which teaches twenty-one languages, and its educational library which contains 30,000 volumes.

Even the wounded have made the effort of concentration necessary to take an examination. After the dire disappointment of Russia, a young teacher (wounded himself) took the situation in hand and shared sixteen hours a day to prepare these men for Matriculation. Often a wounded hand held pen or pencil, guided along by the unwounded hand, but the results on their return (for most are now repatriated) must have been good enough and ought, for their own sake, to be treasured.

In the Civilian Internment Camps (Bagh) the education is wide in range and standard. For example, in one camp thirty-two classes (all different subjects) are in full swing. As well as the British interests, there are many foreigners who are taking advantage of their confined quarters to learn English, and obtain the Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency. Schoolboys and schoolgirls devoted from the Channel Islands are preparing for School Certificate and Matriculation, and there is even a man of 40 who has consequently sat the, and passed, the former. Women as well as men are studying for examinations and so their education officer says, "It was interesting to see how the satisfactory result in the first Indian Education Examination got the camp. The candidates were a few lot, and it represented the general public to get young men putting in seven hours' class work a day even in the summer."

We must not forget that these prisoners started from nothing, without teachers, classrooms, books or writing materials, and often without chairs or tables. But with vision and courage, they improvised essential equipment, built their own class rooms, and took it upon them to induce books to be sent. Later on help came from all sides—the German authorities, the indefatigable International Red Cross Committee's Committee with its constituent societies (R.I.R.P., I.R.S., Y.M.C.A., etc.). From Sweden, Canada, the Argentine and United States came paper and pencils, while books copied in from diverse sources, the Americans, the Dominions, the United States of America and the United Kingdom.

Cooperation in a common cause brought the impossible to pass, and at this moment more than 400 examining bodies, university, professional and vocational, are holding their examinations in the prison camps. The results to-day are showing the out of 9,000 applications 3,000

prisoners have already taken their examinations for which 4,000 places have been announced and this represents 95% complete passes in all papers.

No report can adequately deal with the patience, hard work and overcoming of difficulties in a cheery spirit which has been characteristic of both the teachers and the pupils," says the Education Officer of the S.C.O.s camp and he continues, "At this stage, when many men have been over four years prisoners it does take some effort to persist in a line of study, but of course that effort when made produces remarkable benefits to the men themselves."

Some talk by the way, but the reward for teachers and students who stay the course can be gauged by looking to an extract from the School Report of the largest School: "... Very satisfactory work has been accomplished with many of our Grand Baccalaure. This has been proved by letters received from several who were repatriated. They state that, due to the school, they were able, upon their return home, to secure superior posts to those that they held prior to the war. One outstanding case is that of an S.C.O. who had lost a leg. Before the war he had been a bad carrier. He realized that whilst he was here, he would be enabled, owing to his dismemberment, to resume his penmanship work. Consequently he approached us for advice and he was advised to study building with a view to obtaining a post with an Architectural Firm. We then proceeded to train him with such satisfactory results that he was successful in passing the City and Guilds Building Examination. He now holds a good post in a building firm in the South of England. ...."

An Day Education Officer came up for us on the spirit which is keeping prisoners alive mentally as well as physically. "We try to communicate the faith that there are things of the mind unfettered by time and place and that captives may escape beyond the barbed wire into fields of knowledge and delight. Those who know this freedom of the intellect are the happier people in this camp and they will go out from here the best citizens when the gates are open."

This camp record, wrought for us in such exquisite lines, witnesses to the fact that the men during their time there were not merely preparing to play their part in the post-war world, and this is truthfully expressed by their Education Officer, "I want ... to publicize the fact that this point is not one of inactivity, it is not a hell or limbo, but an extra period of learning, of training, which the men have taken, or shall I say have had thrust upon them by force of circumstances. With the aid of your Educational Service [i.e. Red Cross Educational Books Section] it is a period of prisoners' effort in adverse conditions. If I had the power I would inform every professional body and every employer in England and the Dominions that the man F.O.W. can and often do imply an added qualification."

It is clear that more than ordinary will-power is needed to enable men to concentrate under the distracting and unnatural conditions of prison life, and those who make this effort whether they achieve success in examinations or not give proof of the strength of character and stability which, the war was, will help us to keep the peace.

*Educational Books Section, Prisoners of War Department  
War Organization of the British Red Cross Society and Order of St. John of Jerusalem,  
New Building, GENEVA*

July 1944

Buckingham Palace

June, 1944

"The King and Queen have seen the Illustrated Book from Staling Luft VI, N.C.O.s Education Committee. Their Majesties are both deeply impressed by the beautiful workmanship which has been put into the book, and by the splendid courageous spirit with which it has been completed. I am to say that The Queen hopes the booklet will meet with every success."

Signed, KATHERINE SEYMOUR

Lady-in-Waiting

## FOREWORD

**B**Y TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE FACILITIES offered through the channels of the Red Cross Society it has been possible to establish in a Prisoner of War Camp this Educational Organisation, an outline of which is given in the following pages. To convert this period of enforced military inactivity into one of further training is our final aim. The principal value of the scheme however lies in its power to provide a distraction from Boredom and an antidote to Mental Stagnation."

E. Alderton.

July, 1943

## INTRODUCTION

### FOUNDATION



## HIS UNIQUE SCHOOL

was formed to provide educational facilities for flying personnel interned in Germany. Three separate Air Force Camps were moved to form one large camp now called Stalag Luft VI

### PRESENT POSITION of the SCHOOL

There are now more than one thousand students attending lectures at the school and the majority of these are studying for examinations. Through the kind co-operation of the Red Cross Educational Section at Oxford books and equipment are provided to enable the students to carry on, and the Examinations Department at Oxford organises the despatch of

professional and academical examination papers. These examinations are held under the supervision of the Education Committee which is in constant touch with the authorities in England. \* \* \*

**T**he Educational Library, divided into two sections, Arts and Science now contains some four thousand reference books and is growing rapidly. \* \* \*

**A**s quoted in the foreword the aim of the school is to expel boredom and mental stagnation by providing educational courses which can be profitably put to use in post-war life.

**T**he school has been called "The Barbed-Wire University" and the status of Prisoner of War is the only qualification for entry. It contains students from all parts of the Empire thus giving it a cosmopolitan quality which is greatly cherished. \* \*

## OFFICERS

### EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Sgt. E. Alderton.

Sgt. G. J. Springett.

Sgt. G. Higginbotham.

The above committee is responsible for the organisation of the school and the supervision of examinations.

### EDUCATIONAL LIBRARIANS

— Chief Librarian Sgt. K.C.H. Rawlings.

— Assistant Sgt. R.M. Holder.

— Book-binder Sgt. C.R. Brown.

### FACULTIES

— Arts, Science, Medicine, Law  
— and Professional Studies.

## LECTURERS

Ball, G.	Featherstone, W.	Murrell, J. G.
Barlow, A. E.	Gardiner, J.	Niblett, G. W.
Beare, R. C. B.	Goldthorpe, C.	Oliver, M. A.
Beck, R. J.	Graham, C.	Pattinson, A.
Bonnet, J. P. A.	Handlip, R. N.	Penn, E. W.
Booth, L.	Harris, W.	Penn, F. W.
Bredin, J. C.	Hawkhead, E.	Phillips, W.
Brown, E. A.	Hilton-Jones, R.	Pitt, J. H.
Carter, J. C.	Holden, K. S.	Rawlings, K. C.
Carter, K. S.	Huckle, H. G.	Silver, J.
Clarke, G.	Hunt, H. E.	Slattery, L. J.
Clarke, R. V. F.	Jones, G. D.	Springett, G. J.
Clarke, G. B.	Jones, H. A.	Stevenson, J. G.
Clayton, G. P.	Jones, E. W.	Taylor-Gill, J. D.
Coveyduck, V.	Macdonald, A.	Utteridge, R. J.
Curties, M. C.	Macdonald, R.	Vermiglio, C. A.
Cusance, M.	McGlashan, J.	Warburton, D.
Freed, A.	McKernan, C. B.	Warren, W. K.

## LECTURES ARE HELD ON

\* THE FOLLOWING SUBJECTS \*

Mathematics	* Greek	* * * * *
Physics	* * * Spanish	* * * * *
Chemistry	* * Portuguese	* * * * *
Biology	* * * German	* * * * *
Botany	* * * Italian	* * * * *
Medicine	* * * Accountancy	* * *
Engineering	* Book-keeping	* * *
Metallurgy	* * Commerce	* * * *
Meteorology	* Secretarial Practice	
Navigation	* * Local Government	*
Geography	* * Law	* * * * *
Economics	* * Motor Trade	* * *
English	* * * Typography	* * *
History	* * * * Building	* * * * *
Art	* * * * Banking	* * * * *
French	* * * * Agriculture	* * *
Latin	* * * * Hotel Management	*

## EXAMINATIONS WHICH HAVE BEEN TAKEN OR ARE TO BE TAKEN IN THIS CAMP

Examinations already taken marked — ●

London University Matriculation	— ●
London University Diploma in Public Administration	— ●
London University Intermediate B.A.	— ●
London University Intermediate B.Sc.	— ●
Institute of Bankers England	— ●
Institute of Bankers Scotland	— ●
Institute of Chartered Accountants	— ●
Institute of Cost and Works Accountants	— ●
Association of Certified and Corporate Accountants	— ●
Society of Incorporated Accountants and Auditors	— ●
Institute of Municipal Treasurers and Accountants	— ●
Royal Agricultural Society	— ●
Royal Institute of British Architects	— ●
Royal Society of Arts	— ●

Auctioneers' and Estate Agents' Institute	— ●
Institute of Book-keepers	— ●
Building Societies Institute	— ●
City and Guilds of London Institute	— ●
Co-operative Union	— ●
Institute of Motor Trade	— ●
Institution of Electrical Engineers	— ●
Institution of Structural Engineers	— ●
Corporation of Insurance Brokers	— ●
Chartered Insurance Institute	— ●
Law Society	— ●
National Association of Local Government Officers	— ●
Association Board of the Royal Schools of Music	— ●
Pilgrims Institute	— ●
The College of Preceptors	— ●
Incorporated Sales Managers' Association	— ●
Chartered Institute of Secretaries	— ●
Institute of Chartered Shipbrokers	— ●
Institute of Transport	— ●
Incorporated Clerk of Works Association	— ●



## — ACCOMMODATION —

The classes and examinations are held in five small rooms contained in separate barrack blocks. Three of these B, C, and D are used continuously whilst the remaining lectures are carried on in the Fiction Library and the Hairdressing Shop when these places are not in use. \* \* \* \* \*

[illegible]

## CONCLUSION

### FROM THE FOREGOING

pages can be gleaned a mental picture of the Educational Organisation on

this camp. Its success cannot be gauged in terms of certificates, degrees or diplomas but its value in preserving the morale of the men is immeasurable. The Education Committee has only one hope and that is, that the work done by the prisoners here will prove of value to them in post-war life. \* \* \* \* \*

"If you can fill the unforgiving minute  
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run  
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it."

Kipling

