

The Royal Air Force School for Prisoners of War



Stalag Luft VI Germany



WHERE THERE IS NO VISION THE PEOPLE PERISH

THIS PROSPECTUS of study from a "British War University whose only qualification for entry is to have faced Death"—is representative of the educational ferment 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 1939, has by the aid of books and materials sent out by the British Red Cross and the John War Organisation (which inaugurated the educational section early in 1940) produced this beautiful illuminated report. His illuminated title "British Red X" symbolizes for all prisoners education of mind as well as body. A lapse or two from dictionary spelling reflects the harsh conditions under which all educational or artistic efforts are undertaken. Can we visualize the surroundings—lack of space, lack of heat, lack of light, constant interruptions, no choice, no privacy?

"These schools," says a sergeant in a *Stalag*, "have been raised on difficulties, and they have flourished on difficulties, in a way which it is not fantastic to say discharges the debt of a part of this generation to the world, workers after knowledge who were the founders of all education," and the continuation of the report can be accepted as the pattern for most camps.

The school catering for the educational needs of nearly 5,000 men, started with one class in one room, with no material or text books, in the depth of winter with inadequate heating. From that beginning, hopelessly discouraging to all except a prisoner of war, progress has been made to a large building, partitioned by the use of Red Cross box wood into seven rooms—well heated, but used from nine in the morning until nine at night by inadequate students.

"The 20 original subjects are still on the programme, but the number of subjects taught has now risen to 84. 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.

"Men from all parts of the Empire are keeping themselves up to standard—improving their knowledge in their professions, or learning a new kind of job. And as the harvest test of their progress must be preparing for the examinations, which thanks to the arrangements made by the Red Cross are permitted to 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 (S.O.C.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 4,200 in classes, and 3,000 in school, and in addition there are 17 study groups for professional examinations, as well as a number of private students.

In an officers' *War Camp* the annual report reads "Over 80% are Examination-minded, and 60% have maintained interest throughout all the distractions of P.O.W. life."

One of the largest *Stalags* reports that last year 158,000 students attended the 80 different classes, in which 70 qualified men 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 read as they lived as sheep farmers or boundary riders before a school." One experienced 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 5,000 to 6,000 books is so well run that only three books have been lost in two years.

The working parties too are catered for by six evening tutors, and the German authorities,

fire on six weeks before examinations allow prisoners to return to the Base camp for intensive reading. But difficulties here are far greater, and few months consecutive study, though one man, after working ten hours in a gravel pit, returns to his tent and puts in some reading for Intermediate B.E., and so a Cypriot prisoner wrote, "I know it is difficult to study in Prison camps but I am not losing my time in stagnant water in the lake."

In the Merchant Navy Camp slightly expanded study has been in progress for some years. The courses given by the Merchant Navy Officers' Training Board covers all the officers' apprentices' work, and we read these out to every two boys 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, 148 men took five examinations (Masters, Mate, Engineer). Examinations of many other trades have been successfully held and as the education officer says, "Every endeavor has been made to widen interests from purely practical subjects to literary history, an appreciation and personal 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 subjects as Serbo-Croat, Hindi, French, Chinese and Japanese.

Since 1941 one of the Officers has been running a University with seven 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 20,000 volumes.

Even the wounded have made the effort of communication necessary to take an examination. After the fire disappointment of Kenna, a young teacher (wounded himself) took the situation in hand and shared eleven 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 furnished teachers and taught, for twelve out of the thirteen were successful.

In the British Internment Camps (Dag) the education is wide in range and standard; for example, in one camp thirty-five classes (of different subjects) are in full swing. As well as the British inmates, there are many foreigners who are taking advantage of their isolated exposure to learn English, and obtain the Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency. Schoolboys and schoolgirls deported from the Channel Islands are preparing for School Certificate and Matriculation, and there is even a man of 41 who has concurrently sat five, and passed the former. Women as well as men are studying for examinations and as their education officer says, "It was interesting to see how the satisfactory result in the first Matriculation Examination put Education on the map. The candidates were a mix lot, and it impressed the general public to see 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 lecture before the books arrived. Later on help came from all sides—the German authorities, the indefatigable International Red Cross Consecutive Committee with its constituent societies (R.S.F.P., I.R.R., Y.M.C.A., etc.). From Sweden, Canada, the Argentine and Great Britain came paper and pencils, while books stepped in from direct sources, the neutrals, the Dominions, the United States of America and the United Kingdom.

Co-operation in a common cause brought the impossible to pass, and as this moment since then 148 examining bodies, university, professional and vocational, are holding their examinations in the prison camps. The results so far are startling for out of 6,000 applicants 4,500

prisoners have already taken their examinations for which 4,000 passes have been announced and this represents 75% complete passes in all papers.

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

Some fall by the wayside, but the reward for teachers and students who stay the course can be judged by hearing to an extract from the School Report of the Inland Stage: "... Very satisfactory work has been accomplished with many of Les Grands Blooms. 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 procure superior posts to those that they held prior to the war. One outstanding case is that of an M.C.I.s who had lost a leg. Before the war he had been a food carrier. He realized that while he was here, he would be unable, owing to his disability, to continue his previous 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."

As the Education Officer sums up for us in 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 untouched 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 happy people in this camp and they will go on from here the best citizens when the gates are open."

This camp record, written for us in such exquisite form, witnesses to the fact that far from wasting their time these men are actively preparing to play their part in the post-war world, and this is abundantly expressed by their Education Officers: "I must ... to publicize the fact that this period is not one of inactivity, it is not a dull or barren, but an active 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 Service Section) it is a period of prisoner 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 Intern F.O.W. can and often does imply an added qualification."

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

Educational Study Section, Prisoners of War Detachment

*War Organisation of the British Red Cross Society and Order of St. John of Jerusalem,
New Zealand, OXFORD*

July 1944

Buckingham Palace

June, 1944

"The King and Queen have seen the Illustrated Book from Stalag 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 SETMOUR

Lady-in-Waiting

FOREWORD

BY 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

THIS 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. " " "

The Educational Library, divided into two sections, Arts and Science now contains some four thousand reference books and is growing rapidly. " " " " "

As 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.

The 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. C. 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. E. B.	Goldthorpe, C.	Oliver, M. A.
Beck, R. J.	Graham, T.	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.	MacKenzie, R.	Vermiglio, C. A.
Custance, M.	McGlashan, J.	Wartburton, 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 Clerks of Works Association	

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

1943: *Domestic Architecture*

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