

Mac Jarrell remembers

Spent 45 months as prisoner of war

By Eric Howald

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Sunday, Nov. 11, 1979 is Remembrance Day. Does it still have any significance?

To a Kincardine man who spent 45 months as a prisoner of war in Germany it does.

To some Canadians it will be a day like any other day. To Mac Jarrell it is a significant day. He has not missed a Remembrance Day service, no matter where he was, since the war. But the day, he says, has a lot more meaning to veterans than the public at large.

"The Second World War is history. It is fact. Let's not forget what happened," are Mac's feelings.

To the men who fought in two wars, many of the memories are hell. Remembering friends die, remembering friends break, remembering cruelty are not pleasant thoughts. The war took its toll both physically and mentally on many Canadian war veterans.

Mac's memories go back to May 21, 1940 when he joined the RCAF. He went overseas in January, 1941 and after 22 trips as a navigator bombardier in three months of flying with the RCAF, he was shot down over the North Sea.

Lady Luck had to smile on many men numerous times for them to make it through the war in one piece. Mac Jarrell feels he was one of those men. The first time it smiled was during his 21 1/2-month stay in a German hospital after being shot down. His doctor, who grew up in the United States, was not a willing part of the German war machine. Still having his German citizenship, he had not been allowed to return home to the U.S.A. after a visit to Germany. It meant good care for Mac who had to have plastic surgery on his face.

Once healthy, it was into a prisoner of war camp. Transferred to another shortly thereafter, he was one of 19 who escaped by a tunnel from the camp which was located between

Berlin and Dresden. After six days on the loose, he was captured, but once again he was lucky as it was the regular German army that made the capture. As punishment, he received 21 days solitary confinement with a diet of bread and water. If he had been captured by the S.S. or the Gestapo, he would not likely be here today; they had the power of life and death over everyone in Germany.

After his escape, the Germans seemed to mistrust Mac and kept him on the move, eight camps in 45 months. It also prevented him from being in on the "Great Escape", an event that has since been immortalized in book and movie form.

The 15,000 prisoners in Stalag Luft 3 had a very controlled organization. Each barrack block of 300 men had a "scrounger" who was the only one allowed to barter with the Germans for equipment and supplies to help in the planned escapes. To make a long story short, the men walked around the compound each day, dropping pocketsful of earth from the tunnel down their pant legs. Two weeks before the great escape, Mac, one of the scroungers, was transferred.

Camp life

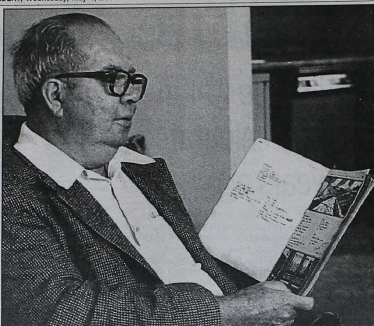
Life as a prisoner was not pleasant, although it did have its lighter moments.

One of Mac's prized possessions is a log book he carried from camp to camp. It contains cartoons, poems and other writings from his fellow prisoners. Despite the fact that pen and ink were forbidden in the camps, the book contains skilled drawings and art work. Some laugh at camp life, others show the depression.

One poem, illustrated with drawings, paints a man filled with depression. Two days after writing it, the author committed suicide.

In retrospect, Mac said, "We should have known and tried to help him."

The Germans provided the prisoners with enough food to fend off starvation, but the Red Cross bundles, five to six pounds a week when



Mac Jarrell looks at his log book from the prisoner of war camps.

the German transportation system was still working, made life more bearable. All packages from home were opened in front of a prisoner by one of the guards.

Mac remembers receiving one with 300 cigarettes from the Ontario Chinese Patriotic Federation which left the German guard with a very strange look on his face.

A letter from Mac to Ross' Poolroom in Kincardine provided two New Zealanders with packages as Ross' customers chipped in and sent parcels overseas.

The prisoners also used to receive small wind-up phonographs and records from home. One record, called *Corn Silk*, was in almost every package. It was terrible and the prisoners hated it, which was the idea. One prisoner got so mad he smashed the record, only to find a map inside.

After that, the record was treated with a little more respect.

You could tell how long a man had been in the camps by the way he talked. The first two or three months, a man talked about his girl friends; the next two or three, about food. After that, little was said, a man just tried to survive.

One of the more depressing things for many of the prisoners were the "Dear John" letters. They were letters from wives and girlfriends informing the prisoners that they now had new men.

Escape was always on the minds of the prisoners. One of the more successful ones that Mac remembers concerned an airforce man from Holland. Each evening, trainers used to bring Dobermans and Alsatian dogs to the camp to guard the prisoners at night. They returned to pick up their dogs around 5:30 a.m. the next morning.

This particular fellow asked the escape committee to come up with a set of clothes while he went about

briefing one of the guard dogs each night. One morning, he walked out with the dog at 4:30 a.m. He was never caught and walked all the way back to Holland.

Although they weren't supposed to, the prisoners always had a radio. They knew how the war was going, which made camp morale bad when the Germans were winning in Russia and North Africa.

The last six months of the war, the Germans marched the prisoners to nowhere in particular.

When liberated on May 5, 1945, three days before V-E Day, Mac was down to 118 pounds.

Heading home

Once liberated, Mac like most long-time prisoners, was taken to England and interrogated to ensure that he was not a German spy. The English had questions from his old high school principal, D.A. Sutherland, to ensure his identity.

A school teacher on the fifth of Kincardine Township, Mac couldn't face the idea of going back to teach kids once he returned home. He went to university, worked a short time at the Kincardine Creamery and finally joined the government as a tax enforcement officer in St. Catharines.

The Kincardine Township native returned this summer to a retirement home on Saugeen Street in Kincardine. Mac Jarrell seems to have weathered the war well. Although his experiences have no doubt had some effect on him, he doesn't seem scarred by his experiences. He doesn't hate; he's thankful to be alive. Others did not fare so well.

A staunch supporter of what the Royal Canadian Legion stands for, Mac will remember on Nov. 11.

Hopefully other Canadians will also remember and try to ensure that his nation does not have to go through another war.

