

It wasn't heaven, but the good times are remembered

Tales of starvation and mistreatment in prisoners of war camps abound and yet three Halton Hills men say they suffered much less than the tales would lead the public to believe.

Georgetown resident Stan Swann became a Japanese prisoner of war when Singapore surrendered in February 1942. He admits that he saw men beaten and tortured during his imprisonment but says that it was not the Japanese guards who did these things. They were done by Koreans.

He says also that such treatment was used as psychological discipline to keep a camp full of prisoners in line. Only men who violated some camp rules or tried to escape were beaten with split bamboo poles or fed rice then water so that their stomachs bloated up and burst when guards jumped on them.

Since Stan had been a driver with the British Army Service Corps he volunteered to drive for the Japanese when there were taking supplies to various camps in Thailand. A special unit of PoWs was formed to move supplies and do an assortment of camp tasks. The same 75 PoWs and 50 guards worked together from that

time until their commanding officer was posted to China and they were returned to the camp in Thailand.

At one place in northern Siam the Japanese were so frightened of the natives that each night they gave six prisoners guns and ammunition to escort them back to their camp (guards and prisoners lived in separate camps) and then the PoWs went back to their own camp alone.

The prisoners were also given guns and twenty rounds of ammunition in order to hunt for camp food. They wouldn't stray far because it was so easy to get lost, Stan says.

Stan says that the guards turned a blind eye to the fact that the prisoners had a radio in their camp. When the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima guards told them about it three hours after the bombing.

When the prisoners were released there was a great deal of violence in some of the camps because the prisoners turned on their former guards looking for revenge. The 2,000 men in their camp did not join in, Stan says. In fact, they protected the 45 guards who had been with them for months and

saw to it that they were delivered to the authorities.

Roy Rudiger was a machinist in a Royal Army Service Corps mobile marching shop with a transport company. He was captured in Greece in April, 1940, when the British surrendered all forces in that country.

Since he was caught in what was termed an "honourable surrender" his pay carried on while he was in PoW Camp. He also knew he could not be court martialed as a coward when the war ended. Although it was not common any soldier surrendering individually to overwhelming odds did have that possibility to face when he was freed.

The transition period between the time they were taken in Greece until they arrived in Stalag 18A in Austria was very hard, Roy says.

Stalag 18A held 10,000 prisoners of all Allied forces. Lice was a constant problem during the trip to the Stalag, but once they received Red Cross parcels with soap, they began to get the better of the little pests.

The men were very proud of the fact that eventually there weren't any lice to be found in the camp, he says. The Red Cross parcels also

were an essential part of their food supply, too.

Roy still has a letter form prisoners used to write home. On it there is a list of items forbidden to prisoners.

The list includes: money, weapons and scissors which seem reasonable, but it also includes candies, medication of any kind, fruit juices, books and printed material of doubtful or indecent character, blank paper, writing paper, postcards and potatoes.

Prisoners were sent out of the Stalag to smaller work camps known as Arbeits Kommandos which were scattered within a 200 mile radius of the main camp. These camps contained anywhere from six to 500 men. A guard was always watching prisoners at work unless they were off in ones and twos on private farms. Then the civilian farmer was responsible for them.

Roy laughs now at how he learned to sew grain by hand, plow with a horse and a cow hitched to a single furrow plow, and thresh grain with a flail. It was a new experience for him since he had been raised in a city.

He remembers one time when he was talking to a farmer about the war and how it was going and then man instantly changed the subject when his wife appeared.

"Families couldn't even trust each other not to inform," he says.

When the Germans found they were really losing the war and the Russians were about to march in, they took the British from the east to the west of Austria where they could be surrendered to their own people. It was a bad trip, Roy says.

They were 29 days on the road with very little food. The column of prisoners was several miles long and every-

one tried not to fall towards the end. They could hear rifle shots at the end of the line as the guards took care of the sick and the lagger.

They were in a camp near Salzburg for several weeks before the Allies liberated them. The Americans arrived the night he cut a hole in the barbed wire and decided to escape.

They were flown back to a reception camp near Oxford, England. The women's air force had laid out tea and cakes for them when they got there and they were all so shy of the women, they didn't know how to behave.

Gord Browne of Norval was captured with the Seaforth Highlanders while they were cutting the road to Rome.

When they were taken the

destroyed too many of their convoys by mistake. Germans had a trick of disguising their convoys under Red Cross banners and the Allies were fighting back a bit too indiscriminately, Gord says.

In order to keep things going because the prisoners desperately needed the supplies in those parcels an agreement was reached that Germany would release Canadian PoWs to organize and run the convoys.

Gord was one of the 16 men picked for the first convoy out of Lubeck. After that his run was from Constance on the Swiss border north to Nuremberg, Germany. He was usually at the head of the convoy because he could read the maps as well as drive.

He had a close shave one

day when the RCAF didn't recognize the Red Cross on their trucks in time and put six bullets in the cab of his truck all around him.

He also got the task of transporting 75 women from a concentration camp to Denmark near the end of the war. No one had told the women where they were going or why and they were scared to death, he remembers.

One woman was so weak she couldn't climb up and Gord had to help her. That broke the ice and they discovered he was a Canadian. Then they found someone who could speak English to translate for them. In the end he gave them cigarettes.

"You'd think the whole truck had caught fire. You couldn't see it for smoke if you looked into the mirror," he laughs.

The Swiss wanted them to stay behind when the war ended to help clear the concentration camps, but Gord says none of the men would agree. They had seen enough with transporting that one load and they were all just a bit nervous of what they might find.

"At that age, we couldn't let anyone see us cry, you know," he says. "And it was hard to believe that one human being could do such things to another. We were just too squeamish to risk it."

Citizens call meeting

Concerned Georgetown citizens have been invited to a public meeting organized by residents who attended the first day of Ontario Municipal Board hearings Monday, to hear evidence on the Focal Property application for a subdivision south of Georgetown. The meeting, which will be held in St. Andrew's United Church at 7:30 p.m. Sunday will discuss the impact which a sudden 40 per cent increase in Georgetown's population would have on such things as taxes, further industrial growth, traffic and recreation facilities.

Veterans provided manpower for Canada's PoW camps

While Canadians were figuring out ways to survive in foreign PoW camps the Axis servicemen were discovering what life was all about in Canadian camps.

A special unit known as the Veteran Guards was formed to man the PoW camps that were scattered throughout Canada and seven Georgetown men, including Jim Murphy and Mike McGill, enlisted.

Mr. Murphy had served with the Royal Army Service Corps driving horse-drawn transport vehicles in WW I. He says that his group went to Halifax to pick up the first group of PoWs to arrive. They were two trainloads of German Luftwaffe bound for a camp at Angler on the shore of Lake Superior.

The nearest large centre was Port Arthur.

The guards moved around from camp to camp, Mr. Murphy says. The prisoners slept in bell tents when he was at Angler, but by the time Mr. McGill was there they had wooden huts 10 to 12 feet long. The camp was enclosed by barbed wire and guards watched over it from towers. They did 24 hours shifts with four men in each tower.

Escapes were not terribly uncommon, but the prisoners seldom got far. Mr. Murphy remembers 28 prisoners tunnelling out of Angler one fine April day. They were all back within two weeks because a blizzard came up and

caught them unprepared. Apparently they had tried to cross Lake Superior in a small boat but it was too rough.

Although the Germans were in camps all over Canada the Italians were in a camp on St. Helen's Island, Quebec.

According to Heinz Klaus of Terra Cotta being a German PoW in a Canadian camp wasn't bad at all. He liked Canada so much, in fact, that when the war ended he decided to come back.

Heinz was a petty officer on a German ship sunk in 1941. He was picked up by the British navy 400 miles from Brest, France, and taken to London for questioning. Then 800 PoWs were brought to Canada aboard the Ile de France.

Although no one was really hard to get along with, he found the sailors were definitely nicer to them than the regular guards.

There were 28,000 German in Lehighbridge, Alberta, when he got to the camp. The one at Medicine Hat had 32,000. That was where he decided to escape. There was too much squabbling among those who still believed in Hitler and those who had been disillusioned, he says, and a few got killed in the arguments.

He had five friends to help him tunnel under the barbed wire but none of them wanted to come with him. He wore his uniform but took all the

identifying items off it. Then he set out to hitchhike. He had very little English, but anyone who questioned him seemed satisfied with his story of being in the Dutch navy. He was picked up in a restaurant in Toronto.

After he was captured, Heinz was sent to Petawawa. There were only 500 prisoners there and it was much better. All the men were seamen and the atmosphere was much nicer. He went to work cutting pulpwood for the Abitibi Paper Company at a camp near Bancroft.

His wartime job helped him when he returned in 1957. He went to Dornier two days after he came and filled in an application for a job. Apparently the man doing the hiring was quite indignant that he should apply when native Canadians were in the line up, too.

When he explained that he had already had some experience cutting pulp for the Abitibi as a PoW he got the job immediately.

Heinz says that he found no resentment from Canadian people during the war. The guards, too, were not unpleasant. After the first Christmas they all seemed to thaw out towards each other and it was a first name basis after that.

He was taken back to England, July 13, 1945, but then he had to spend a year doing farm labour there as part of his penance for being a career soldier.



Roy Rudiger purchased this picture of Russian PoWs arriving at Stalag 18A under the watchful eye of a camp officer when he was leaving the camp. Roy also has a pocket book, Hills in Line, which details events in the camp and depicts certain guards and prisoners which he knew.

Airman notes change in attitude since war

S.J. (Chick) Henderson of Glen Williams was in the Royal Air Force during World War II. Although he can remember the war with good humour and numerous stories he points out the tremendous change in attitude since that time.

"We thought we hated them in those days," he says, "but it wasn't really the hatred of one country for another. It was all precipitated by one man's ambition. Both sides were just following orders. We had no choice in what we did."

Chick joined the air force on an apprenticeship scheme a couple of years before the war began. He took airframe and engine training, but radio and armament were also taught.

In November, 1939, he went to a fighter squadron to do aircraft maintenance. Although he moved around as squadrons disbanded and reformed, he remained in maintenance until the Halifax and Lancaster bombers came into use in 1943. Then he became a flight engineer.

Britain was trying to end the war by totally destroying German cities with bombs at that point, he says.

Squadron, the Dam Buster Squadron, was created early in 1944 specifically to bomb the dams supplying power to the Ruhr Valley because this was the heart of Germany's industrial area.

Although he was not in the squadron at that time he wound up in it as planes went down and experienced crews were brought in to fill vacancies.

The unit was supposed to be disbanded after the dams were blown but it was refrained to do any type of precision bombing that was required.

Their targets included things like floating docks in harbours, the assembly plants but not the catenans, at the Michelin tire factory in France, the Turpiz which was one of Germany's biggest battleships, and an island off Holland.

Chick chuckles as he points out that not everyone can sink an island.

It seems that it was really a piece of land off the Dutch coast which had been dyked and pumped dry. The 617 squadron blew holes in the dykes and "sank" the island because it was full of special German equipment at that

time. The squadron usually had 22 to 24 planes each with a crew of seven. That included the pilot, navigator, flight engineer, radio operator, bombardier and two gunners.

During the time when Britain was staging such heavy bombing raids on Germany there might be 600 to 800 aircraft converging on the target, he says. They came by different flight paths, at different heights, and in waves.

They could arrive, drop their bombs, and leave again all within five minutes. The raids were always carried out on dark nights and collisions were a major problem. Losses on heavy raids ran to 10 per cent and higher, he says.

"We had a gentleman's war," Chick says. "We went off for eight hours of fighting. Then we came home, showered, shaved and took off to the pub."

"It was a risky business," he admits, "but we weren't conscious of it. It was cold and noisy and hard on the nerves but we didn't have anything like the soldiers went through."

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NEW HOME OF THE WEEK
PLAN No. 77-1226
AREA: 1226 sq. ft.
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SPLIT LEVEL CONTEMPORARY

This three bedroom, partial basement, side split offers many convenience features designed for gracious living and yet is well suited to a narrow frontage lot. The eye-catching exterior creates an impression of the mountain chalet with its diagonal siding, cedar shake roof and stone veneer chimney.

The very large rectangular living-dining room combination, with cantilevered stone veneer fireplace, excellent natural light and sliding door separating it from the kitchen, makes large scale entertaining a pleasure. An easy separation of formal dining and casual family meals is greatly facilitated by the central positioning of the U-shaped kitchen between the dining room and the large dining nook.

Casual outdoor meals in fair weather are encouraged by the rear patio connecting to the dining nook via sliding glass doors. For those who prefer it, the nook could be partially separated from the kitchen by a snack bar counter - enabling the furnishing of the nook as a small family lounge or family room.

All three bedrooms are centrally positioned around the main bathroom, which has a sliding door separating the tub and toilet from the vanity counter and sink. The spacious master bedroom has a walk-in closet, three piece ensuite with tub, and sliding glass doors leading onto the rear deck. The secondary bedrooms also have sliding doors leading on to a front balcony - further creating the mood of a mountain retreat.

A partial basement under the master bedroom provides the space necessary for future development of a recreation room, workshop, or possible bedroom for the growing family.

Plans for design No. 77-1116 may be obtained at a cost of \$50. for the first set and \$9. for each additional set, plus \$4.00 for postage and handling. Ont. residents please include 7 percent sales tax.

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Major peewees win
The line of Robbie Duke, Eric Clark and Howie Oram led the Georgetown Standard Products Major Pee Wees to a 4-0 win over West Flamboro. Duke scored three of Georgetown's goals and Clark earned three assists. Oram chipped in with one assist. Greg Robertson scored the other goal with an assist going to Fred Kendrick. Derek Murphy played a fine game in earning the shutout. The win lifted Georgetown's record to 3-2.

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