

Oflag IX A/Z Rotenburg an der Fulda Research News 1



June 2009

This is the first of an irregularly published news sheet to keep anyone interested in my research into the history into Oflag IX A/Z from 1942–1945 up to date

My intention is to publish my research as an archive of personal accounts once I have found a publisher.

I imagine no more than two issues of this news sheet a year, if that. If you would rather not receive this please let me know. If you would be happy to have this by email again please let me know. It will save on postage costs.

I have circulated this edition to everyone who has been generous with their time and resources in meeting requests for information. Please feel free to pass it on to anyone you think maybe interested in the camp.

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Oflag IX A/Z Rotenburg an der Fulda

Oflag was the German abbreviation for Offizierslager, 'Officers camp' and its number derived from the military district, the 'Wehrkreis' in which it was located. Camps for NCOs and other ranks were Stalags an abbreviation of 'Stammlager' or in English 'prison camp'.

The camp at Rotenburg was a sub-camp of Oflag IX A/H a few kilometres down the Fulda at Spanenberg. The 'H' was short for Hauptlager or main camp: 'Z' short for Zweiglager, a sub camp.

The first occupants of the prison camp in November 1939, were 700 Polish officers from Warsaw and Krakow. They left in May or June of 1940 by train for a camp at Braunschweig. Included in the prisoners were 60 Polish priests. In March 1940, according to records held by the Internationaler Suchdienst, the priests were 'deported by truck to an unknown destination'. In the summer of 1940 500 Belgian prisoners arrived. In turn they were moved to a camp near Hamburg in mid-1942.

The first British and Commonwealth prisoners arrived immediately afterwards. The majority of these POWs came from Oflag VIB at Warburg and included men captured in Norway and France in 1940. By September 1942 there were 277 POWs in the camp including 29 Australians, 1 American

and 40 Indians. The numbers increased so that by April 1943 there were a total of 566, including 154 American officers and 68 other ranks.

By the end of 1944 the Americans had gone to their own camps, leaving just British and Commonwealth prisoners.

These were, by country:

Britain	372
New Zealand	35
Australia	29
South Africa	14
Canada	11
Poland	2
Indian army	7
Cyprus	2

The official British War Office records suggest that the maximum number of prisoners that the camp could accommodate was 300–350. The camp nominal roll for January 1945, that has survived in the papers of the Senior British Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Kennedy in the Imperial War Museum, records 413 officers and 57 other ranks serving as orderlies, 470 in all.

(Extract from the draft text)



The route of the march

The apparently haphazard route from Rotenburg was a response by the Germans to the activities of US forces in Central Germany.

The camp was evacuated with the destination being Mühlhausen. The advance of US 4th Armored Division, part of US 3rd Army, to the south of Mühlhausen in early April led the march to change direction northwards. In doing so the POWs narrowly missed (by about a day) being liberated by US 6th Armored Division which had, unlike 4th, been tasked to capture Mühlhausen.

The next destination was the Harz Mountains where 11th SS Panzer Army was assembling in vain attempt to relieve German troops trapped in the Ruhr. The bombing of Nordhausen and Dora Mittelwerk by the RAF on 3 and 4 April filled the nearby villages with refugees and no doubt 450 POWs was an extra problem the German army could do without.

This led to the third change of plan: to move them by rail southwards to Bavaria. Only the first stage of this was completed by the time US 3rd Armored Division from US 1st Army liberated them on Friday 13 April 1945.

The people of Oflag IX A/Z

Currently I have reasonably detailed information on the following former prisoners, civilians and German military.

Lieutenant Edward H Baxter, Royal Army Ordnance Corps

Major E J A 'Peter' Brush, Rifle Brigade

Lieutenant H H L Cartwright, South Staffordshire Regiment

Lieutenant-Colonel Basil L Clay, Royal West Kent Regiment

Captain A Quas Cohen, 9 Commando

Private Frederick W Daniels, Queen's Royal Regiment

Lieutenant S Douglas, Cameronians (Scottish Rifles)

Captain Ernest L C Edlmann, Royal East Kent Regiment

Lieutenant Marcus Edwards, 2/2 Field Regiment, Imperial Expeditionary Force

Lieutenant Terry Fairbairn, 2/1 Battalion, Imperial Expeditionary Force

Corporal James Fuller Royal Northumberland Fusiliers

Lieutenant Hamish Forbes, Welsh Guards

Reverend George W Forster, Royal Army Chaplain's Department

Lieutenant Alan Thomas Green, Border Regiment

Lieutenant-Colonel G W Kennedy, East Surrey Regiment

Lieutenant W K 'Butch' Laing, Sherwood Foresters

Lieutenant Leighton McLeod 'Lee' Hill, New Zealand Expeditionary Force and YMCA

Captain F H Muller MC, New Zealand Expeditionary Force

Lieutenant Harry Roberts, Royal Mechanical and Electrical Engineers

Lieutenant Theobald Redway, Durham Light Infantry

Lieutenant A G Smith, South Lancashire Regiment

Rev Gunnar Celander, Swedish YMCA

Hauptmann Prosper Heyl, Landesschützenbataillons 631

Obergefreiter Martin Christian Erhard, Landesschützenbataillons 631

Herr Adam Diegel, Rockensuß Volkssturm

Herr Rudolph Karl Funck, Rockensuß Volkssturm

Herr George Knoch, Rockensuß Volkssturm

Pictures have come from

Lieutenant Frank Slater, Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders

Captain John L McIndoe, New Zealand Expeditionary Force

Lieutenant Leighton McLeod 'Lee' Hill, New Zealand Expeditionary Force and YMCA

Technician 5 Grade, Charles Sumners, US Army Signals Corps

The camp buildings

The buildings that housed the camp were built in 1909–1912 as a residential girls training college for primary teachers. It was then, and is now, a large imposing building on the northern edge of Rotenburg. In 1925 the teacher training college left and building was turned over to the secondary department of the existing Rotenburg school. In September 1926 the school was named the Jakob–Grimm–Schule.

On 27 August 1939 the school building was designated a reserve military hospital and the Jakob–Grimm–Schule moved into Rotenburg. In November the buildings became a prison camp.

After the war and a brief period as an American hospital, the school returned to its home. It remains a secondary school. Additional buildings have been added at the rear.

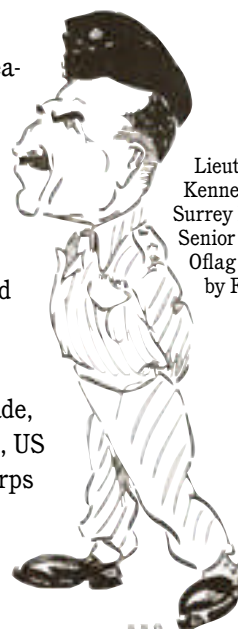
Information sources

I have received immense help from Bjorn Ulf Noll, whose father taught at the school, and who continued to live in the school house alongside the camp. Bjorn was 12 at the time the camp was evacuated.

The museums, archives and families of ex-POWs from the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Germany and the United States have made the research possible.

My interest in the camp

My father, Alan Green, was captured at Arnhem and was in the camp from October 1944 and took part in the march to Eisleben.



Lieutenant-Colonel Kennedy, East Surrey Regiment, Senior British Officer, Oflag IX A/Z, by Frank Slater