**Camp 16 (& 175) - Flaxley** **Green Camp, Stilecop Field, Rugeley, Staffordshire**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1947 Camp List** | | | | | | | |
| 175(B.C.) | Flaxley Green Camp, Rugeley, Staffs | W. | Priswar, Rugeley | Rugeley 293/4 | Brindley Heath | Lt.Col.H.W.Saunders | v/202/4 |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Prisoner of War Camps (1939 – 1948) - Project report by Roger J.C. Thomas - English Heritage 2003** | | | | | | | |
| OS NGR | Sheet | No. | Name & Location | County | Cond’n | Type 1945 | Comments |
| SK 034 158 | 128 | 16 | Flaxley Green Camp, Stilecop Field, Rugeley | Staffordshire | 4 |  | LARGE STANDARD. Camp consisting of a guards' compound and six prisoners' compounds, three for tents and three with hutting. See Camp no.175 |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Location:** SK 034 158 for centre of camp, shown on 1955 OS map.  **POW Camp:** British Camp 16 > American Transit Camp No. 2 > British Camp 175.  For most of its existence, this was a pretty awful place. Italian and later German pows.  **Camp 16**  A 1947 report stated that this was an Italian punishment camp – that meets with the layout of the camp with separate compounds/cages. The three compounds with tents were temporary.  **American phase – American Transit Camp No.2**  There were two serious incidents involving US troops, but not the pows in transit to the States.  1. Robert Stafford was a black soldier promoted to technician 5th grade in the segregated Company D, 390th Engineer General Service Regiment. He arrived in the UK, June 1943. In March 1944 his unit was stationed at Flaxley Green Camp to maintain and upgrade the site. Also stationed there was the 425th Military Police Escort Guard Company. (It was confirmed that this was American Transit Camp 2 in a witness statement – also present was the 440th Military Police Prisoner of War Processing Company).  On 4 March 1944, Robert Stafford was walking back to the camp from Rugeley with two others. They were about 400 yards away from the entrance when they were attacked by a group of white MPs from the 425 MPEGC. Stafford was knocked to the ground, beaten and strangled with his tie – the other two managed to run to the camp and alert the guards. Stafford was taken to the 312th Station Hospital where he was pronounced dead. |  |
| Ordnance Survey 1955 |

Five suspects were arrested – two went forward to court martial at Whittington Barracks. Private William C. Forester and Private Tracey Bryant were found guilty and sentenced to; “*dishonorable discharge, total forfeitures and confinement at hard labor for life.*”

Research into Robert Stafford’s background; <https://delawarewwiifallen.com/2022/01/26/technician-5th-grade-robert-stafford/>

Record of the trial - <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/ll/llmlp/ETO-BOR_Vol-6/ETO-BOR_Vol-6.pdf>

2. One of the American guards at the camp, Aniceto Martinez, was found guilty of raping an elderly local woman in August 1944. Found guilty under US military law, he became the last man to be executed for rape in the UK on 15 June 1945.

**British POW Camp 175**

**1945 / 46 –** Italian pows.Camp 175postal items seen: Italian POW card shown, 20/1/1945; Letter-sheets, all Italian – 11/7/45; 1/12/45; 10 April 1946.

**2 August 1946** – The camp became a high security centre for C+ (‘black’) Nazi pows. 54 pows were transferred from Mile House Camp 8 to form the camp staff + a small number of additional pows.

**October 1946** – Large numbers of C grade pows transferred to the camp from others all round the UK.

|  |
| --- |
| Oversight of political gradings and development of re-education activities and English teaching for German pows was carried out by PID (Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office) / COGA (Control Office for Germany and Austria – UK). Visits and reports were made. The standard of the reports varied greatly. The visitors took little interest, if any, in activities other than re-education. They rarely mentioned welfare, sports, games, pastimes, crafts, etc of the pows. If there were still Italian pows in hostels, they were usually ignored by PID. |

**4/6 December 1946** – Visit 1 “*To organize Re-education*.” Base camp strength; 2 officers (the M.O.s), 1323 Other Ranks – all in the main camp, (i.e. no hostels or billets).

Commandant: Lt Col H W B Saunders DSO. Camp leader: Stabsfw Ebert (B)

Interpreter: S/Sgt G Allan Deputy C/L: Ogefr Roediger (B)

German M.O.: Stabsarzt Dr Kriech (B); Obarzt Dr Loerchner (B)

Compound leader: Fw Grothuesmann (C+)

The Commandant was co-operative and wished to see the start of re-education activities. He maintained a “*suitably high standard of discipline*.”

The Interpreter was of Austrian descent. He had been at the camp for 2 years and had been the Italian interpreter.

Camp leader Ebert was a regular soldier and former professional boxer, *“with little imagination, but willing to co-operate… if not liked, is at least respected by the black PW for his efforts to improve the amenities.”*

Deputy C/L Roediger was a former SPD Landtagsabgeordneter (Member of the state parliament). He had played an active role at Camp 8.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Political screening: | A | B+ | B | B- | C | C+ | Unscreened |
|  | 1 | 1 | 13 | 4 | 26 | 1233 | 47 |

The camp was surrounded by barbed wire and strictly guarded. Pows were not allowed to leave the camp unless performing a duty – only pow staff were allowed a weekly recreational walk. The site was, “*bleak and unattractive – nothing will grow on the stony ground.”* The huts were “*fairly good*.”

There were three compounds (cages), one was unoccupied. In Compound 1 there were about 850 pows without employment. There were plans to employ 500 of them to work outside the camp. Compound 3 held about 450 pows including the camp staff and those pows employed around the camp.

Morale was low. Most pows were not informed why they were sent here. Many were shocked on learning the nature of the camp, especially as this had an effect on repatriation, loss of pay and greater restrictions.

Despite their C grades, none of the pows were considered to be politically active. Most were apathetic. There were cases of pows, *“suffering from mental and psychological disorders, either induced or accentuated by captivity,”* but they were not considered to be dangerous.

The visitor believed that some of the pows had suffered an injustice in their gradings and recommended that re-screening should take place for many.

45% were youth pows (under-25) and this was recognised as a problem. An age break-down was given:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Under 20 | 20 - 25 | 25 - 30 | 30 - 35 | Over 35 |
| 98 | 470 | 253 | 216 | 280 |

Many of the younger pows were resistant to re-education activities. It was recommended that up to 300 should attend the special youth camp 180.

For a while the Commandant had forbidden any political activity, but on advice from PID he had cancelled that instruction. Some of the pows were willing to attempt to develop activities; as in most camps, the British staff were not interested. The standard list of re-education activities was given – it was poor in comparison to many camps;

Wochenpost and Ausblick – 220/140 copies respectively.

Newspapers – a range of daily and weekly British papers were taken. Some political weeklies, (New Statesman, Spectator, etc) were bought from the camp welfare fund. 8 German papers were received weekly from COGA.

Library – Inadequate; 150 books.

Lectures – none. Uncertainty what the reception of visiting lecturers would be.

Discussion group – due to start following a visit from a COGA lecturer.

Films – Fortnightly, YMCA and Gaumont British alternate.

Wireless – One set in each compound and the medical centre (CRS). Loudspeakers installed in the recreation and dining huts.

Camp magazine - ‘*Die Zukunft’* (The Future) issued monthly, (started November). A close watch was to be kept on the content of material. COGA was requested to send paper and stencils.

Press review – 250 pows attended a weekly review. The content had previously been vetted and approved.

English instruction – 302 studying English at various stages of ability.

Information room – to be started.

Other camp activities –

Religion – little interest. A RC padre from Camp 194 visited for one week each month for 25-30 pows. A pow lay preacher held small services for protestants.

Education – Many classes, mainly for languages and commercial subjects. Text books were obtained from the YMCA. There was a shortage of exercise books.

Entertainment – A theatre group for light entertainment had been formed. There was a 12 piece orchestra. Compound 1 had an excellent stage in the dining hall. A small theatre for 150 was being built in Compound 3.

**21-24 January 1947** – Visit to review Re-education Progress and Re-screen some pows. Strength: 2 officers, 1468 OR.

Captain P Stemmer, from Alsace, had joined S/Sgt Allan as an interpreter. The new IO, “*lacks initiative and respect-commanding personality*,” which was badly needed in a camp of this type.

The Camp Leader and Deputy had both been regraded as (A).

Compound leaders: 1 - Fw Grothuesmann, upgraded to (B-); 2 – Fw Schmidt (Unscreened); 3 – Stfw Ebert, the Camp leader.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Political screening: | A | A- | B+ | B | B- | C | C+ | Unscreened |
|  | 3 | 1 | 8 | 48 | 17 | 40 | 1296 | 57 |

There was a high turn-around of pows arriving / departing – this was a further hinderance to the development of activities.

650 pows were appealing against their political grades – the better the grade the sooner repatriated, in theory. 26 pows repatriated to date.

The Commandant complained about the lack of support being given by COGA. He had visited Bush House in London (COGA HQ) to unsuccessfully request re-educational material and a pow padre.

For the pow camp staff and a few other pows who were allowed out of camp, morale was “*fairly good / fair*.” For the majority of others, it remained low. Although not politically active, most pows retained their Nazi ideas, and there was little occurring to change this. The visitor believed that this attitude could be changed for most through more developed re-education activities.

None of the youth pows had been sent to the special youth camp as requested. It was repeated that this was essential, and a list of 200 was sent for consideration.

The standard list of re-education activities showed little improvement and clearly demonstrated COGA’s inadequate response to this camp. This was compounded by the majority of pows being unemployed and therefore Welfare Funds were not built up from sales of goods in the canteen.

Newspapers – the camp only received British papers bought from the low Welfare Fund, none were sent by COGA. It was also requested that more German and Swiss papers be sent.

Library – no change, totally inadequate.

Lectures – still none, but 1 expected soon.

Discussion groups had started in each compound.

Films – YMCA charged for entry (usually 3d), but let those pows who were not working in free. Gaumont charged 6d which was considered to be too expensive.

Education – Small classes for French, Russian, Spanish, shorthand, agriculture, maths and law.

Entertainment – 28 members of a good theatrical group and a good 12 piece orchestra. Very limited opportunities for outdoor sport.

Overall, there was an impression of not just putting too many rotten eggs in one basket, but then closing the gate and ignoring them.

**March 1947** – recorded that 250 youth pows were transferred to Radwinter Camp 180, (via Tarporley Camp 74) – “*former C+ who were rescreened early this year and mostly up-graded.*” (FO939/311).

**27/29 May 1947** – Re-educational survey. Strength; Camp staff ONLY; 2 officers (the same MO’s), 248 OR.

The purpose of the camp had changed – from a C+ Base Camp to a Transit Camp. In addition to the pow staff, many hundreds of pows were passing through, mostly from RAF administered POW camps which were closing down.

Commandant: Lt Col H W B Saunders DSO. Camp leader: Uffz Paetz (B)

Interpreter: Capt P Stemmer and S/Sgt G Allan Deputy C/L: Gefr Buechner (B+)

German M.O.: Stabsarzt Dr Kriech (B); Obarzt Dr Loerchner (B

Compound leaders: Cage 1 - Fw Grothuesmann (B+); Cage 2 – Hfw Giesecke (B-); Cage 3 – Uffz Paetz (B) (Camp Leader).

Camp Leader Paetz; aged 45, unpolitical, a regular soldier, “*a pleasant personality…. Honest and trustworthy.”* He had been a Nazi Party member and member of the SA.

Deputy leader; “*a reliable policeman*.”

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Political screening staff only: | A | B+ | B | B- |
|  | 2 | 51 | 118 | 79 |

No appeals pending. 376 pows repatriated to date. Morale was fairly good among the staff.

The visitor stated that re-education had developed rapidly since his visit in January – but then the camp changed and the C+ pows were removed to Watten Camp 165. Further changes in re-education activities had occurred, many negative:

Newspapers – as well as British papers, COGA were sending a few German papers.

Library – 1120 books.

Lectures – regular.

Discussion groups – small group for the staff.

Films – None. Pows passing through were unable to pay and the Welfare Fund was insufficient to cover costs. The Commandant felt it would be unfair to show films only for the staff – I would imagine they thought it was unfair that they were missing out because of others passing through.

Camp magazine – closed. There were plans to restart it.

Press reviews – none.

English Instruction – none, other than private studies.

Information room – closed.

Education – none.

Theatre and orchestra – disbanded.

**20/21 August 1947** – Re-educational survey. Strength of staff; 2 officers, 289 OR.

No change to senior staff. Just 1 change for Cage 2 leader – UFm Beikendorf (B).

Despite recorded attempts by the Commandant to get re-education moving, the PID visitor stated that he was known to have a, “*reputation for being a slow and somewhat difficult personality*.” Based on previous reports and lack of response, his attitude to PID/COGA would seem wholly justified.

The Interpreter Officer was described as; “*noteworthy only for his temperament and his gloomy and pessimistic views on re-education.”*

The camp was still receiving pows from RAF camps that were closing down, they only stayed for a few days before being transferred to other camps. They were kept ‘busy’ by parades, inspections and documentation.

Very little change to re-education activities - the camp magazine had restarted.

**September 1947** – the site became a Repatriation Camp.

**20-23 October 1947** – General re-education survey. Strength of pow staff; 1 officer, 359 OR.

Commandant: Lt Col H W B Saunders DSO. Camp leader: None

Interpreter: Capt P Stemmer and S/Sgt G Allan Deputy C/L: None

German M.O.: Stabsarzt Dr Kriech (B)

Compound leaders:

Cage 1 – Gerhard Lehmann (B+); professional soldier; “*Sound reliable type with previous Camp leader experience at an RAF Station*.”

Cage 2 – Ernst Bickendorf (B); machine fitter; “*Reliable and efficient.”*

Cage 3 – Georg Bartsch (B-); carpenter; “*Needs more drive and personality*.”

The previous Camp leader had been removed as he was sick and physically incapable of continuing. No replacement had been selected and the Commandant ordered that each cage would be independent and self-contained.

The report started with a lengthy, rambling account of being received by the Commandant and IO who explained some of the difficulties arising in the camp. Some of these issues arose from pows being repatriated who had legal problems. Other aspects referred to the ‘atmosphere’ in the camp and relationships, notably a strained relationship between the Commandant and the German MO.

Morale was recorded as “*far from good*” for both the pow staff and pows in transit. Two main reasons given were bad news from Germany and the attitude of British staff at the camp. Many of the British personnel had been here when it was a C+ camp and had retained the same attitudes to these new, passing through, pows. It was also recorded that there was a lack of friendliness on the part of the local population.

Re-education activities continued to be meagre.

Religion – despite all previous requests, there was still no padre in the camp.

Entertainment – “…*depressing. There is a gramophone with no records and musical instruments without players.”* The visitor suggested each new batch of pows should be checked to see if players could be found.

Various recommendations were made – all too late: Needed - a padre, a lawyer to deal with repatriation problems, and a camp leader. Installation of cinema apparatus, films were still not being shown. Use of some accommodation for activities.

**14 November 1947** - Camp number included in an ‘Urgent Memorandum’ of (FO 939/270) regarding inspection of food parcels.

**End of 1947** - Believed to have closed; there were comments in reports for Camp 53, that books from here had been sent on after the camp’s dissolution. The interpreter, Captain Stemmer was recorded as being transferred to Nether Heage Camp 58.



Known Camp Commandants:

1946 - Lt Col Hugh Ward Bannerman Saunders DSO; 1898-1972. Gordon Highlanders.

**After the camp:** Army camp, abandoned in 1957. Council Survey - The site of the camp is largely covered by trees and aerial photographs (taken circa 2000) suggest that several of the huts’ bases survive and others may be present under the trees.

Site still shows on 1963 aerial photo - [raf\_543\_2336\_v2\_0275 - Aerial Photo | Historic England](https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/archive/collections/aerial-photos/record/raf_543_2336_v2_0275)

**Further Information**

National Archives file FO1120/230 – used above.

Camp Magazine No.1 – November 1946: [Die Zukunft : Lagerzeitung P.o.W. Camp 175 - The Wiener Holocaust Library](https://www.whlcollections.org/image/112994/)