

Stalag VIIA

The following is an article by Simon Goodman, published in the December 1984 edition of the "Nz POW-WOW" Magazine, and it is based on official German Army records and information supplied by Colonel Nepf, a German officer.

History of Stalag VIIA

On 22 September 1939 Col. Nepf and a couple of doctors visited the site north of the town of Moosburg where a Stalag (Stamm-lager or central camp) was planned. They were not impressed by either the ground nor the situation. Down-river a marshy flat valley, a chemical manure plant in the direction of the town, a dairy, a private dwelling and several shacks all combined to make the site a very poor choice. The inspection group's arguments were to no avail. Reasons for the site were apparently known in Munich and the decision to build became the order: "A camp has to be prepared here within 14 days, a camp for 10.000 POWs."

The first section to be constructed was a temporary delousing station in the chemical manure plant shed. In fact, it was presented as a kind of demonstration object at a conference of camp doctors, held in Berlin in 1940. Not that it by any means met the demands of either the camp commander or the camp's hospital doctor. After that, 25 tents were put up for the prisoners, the first of which arrived on 19 October. However, because of the pouring rain these 200 Poles and 900 Ukrainians spent the night in the train. It took 15 hrs to delouse these prisoners the next day, two thirds of whom were forced to stand in the rain as the train had departed and the shed only held 500 persons. Slowly but surely the camp became organized. The huts were moved into, two far too small areas could be reserved for hospital treatment and on 14 March 1940 a new delousing station was put into operation.

The camp administration had its hands full. The camp, initially intended for 10,000 prisoners with a German staff of 107 officers, civil servants and others, was soon bursting at the seams. The Allies' defeats in Flanders and France meant 1000-2500 new prisoners every night for quite a period. Soon more than 98,000 had gone through the huts

and tents. Col. Nepe made a colourful list of the prisoners' nationalities in July and August 1940. They came from all parts of the world: from the Mediterranean, Negroes from Africa, all kinds of Soviet Russians, Europeans from every country, Australasians. All in all he counted 72 nations in 40 huts and many more tents. Included were 2000 medics - doctors and stretcher-bearers and 170 military chaplains. And every day they were given 8000kg bread, 2000kg meat. 30,000kg potatoes, 300kg salt and sugar, 4600kg assorted foodstuffs (soup-additives, cabbage and other kinds of vegetables).

The main camp was spread over an area of 3,500m² and was separated from the outer camp where the prisoners were registered. The prisoners were examined; registered on filing cards, given a registration counter and passed on to be deloused. Only then were they allowed to enter the huts. There were three sick-bays where 300-600 POWs went every day. Four French and 2 Polish doctors, along with 10 French and 6 Polish medical assistants and 50 French and Polish assistants, most of whom spoke German, cared for the sick under the supervision of German doctors. A major problem initially was the state of the clothing of the newly-arrived prisoners. However, workshops were soon established and the French and Poles in them were very busy repairing and sewing clothes and shoes. There was also a carpenter's shop, a smithy, a watchmaker, a repair shop for bicycles and electrical apparatus amongst others. The prisoners also worked outside the camp. They were paid in Reichsmarks by the paymaster's office in the camp and were allowed to spend it in certain authorized shops in the town of Moosburg. Letters and parcels sent to and from the prisoners were inspected by 50 Germans assisted by 180 French and Polish helpers. The translators were overworked due to the fact that 140,000 letters arrived in a week and 70,000 were sent by the POWs. All 210,000 had to be checked each week. Fifteen thousand parcels arrived per week whereby Christmas 1940 took the prize: 26 cars with 150,000 parcels (private) and 12 cars of Red Cross parcels arrived between 10th and 19th December.

Development of the Camp

(based on a report by Col. Burger)

During the war there was a considerable lack of farm workers and POWs filled in for the missing men. They were often the only male person in the house and were generally treated as one of the family. The situation was similar in the small trade and craft shops and the prisoner, if he did not actually have to take on the position of the called-up

master, was usually journeyman. The prisoners were usually as interested in keeping the shop going as if it had been their own business. Of course, not every prisoner found a job to suit him and there were chores which were strenuous and disliked. The camp administration was sent reports from all sections of the population full of gratitude for the friendly and helpful behaviour of the prisoners. Officially the camp remained free of any direct influence by the Party. Obviously those prisoners working outside the camp came into contact with normal workers and were thereby constantly in the public eye and the eye of the Party. However, here again they achieved little. There were no punishment commands. Special commands were merely those prisoners who needed special watching for various reasons, e.g. at least three escape attempts. These prisoners required watching even during their work though all other conditions remained the same as for other prisoners.

Der Verkehrsreichste Platz des Stalag VII A

The development of a black market amongst the POWs caused the camp administration considerable concern. The intention was to give Red Cross parcels to the most needy of the prisoners - especially as they arrived so irregularly. Those in the camp tended to get more than those prisoners who worked on the farms and the sick were given extra rations. Generally food (bread and meat) were exchanged for money or clothing: e.g. a tin of Nescafe cost initially 60-80RM and later on even 100, - or more. In 1943, when the black market had got too strong a hold on the camp the administration took severe measures to stamp it out but were not completely successful.

Towards the end of the war there were about 2000 guards and administrative staff caring for 80,000 POWs along with another 80,000 prisoners and 8000 guards on outside work duty. Up until the end of 1944 the prisoners continued to pour in. The camp commander did his best to ensure that the lot of the prisoners was alleviated as much as possible. An additional cause for worry was the future of the prisoners and their German staff when the camp should finally be closed. Before that, was the problem of what to do with all the prisoners taken during the final period of the war and the ever decreasing area available for their safe accommodation. Prisoners in such outlying areas had to be transported to Germany as Hitler had ordered that no prisoner should fall into the hands of the enemy. They then ended up in Bavaria if they had not meanwhile been freed by the Allies. The prisoners were considerably helped by the Red Cross which provided over a hundred trucks for the transport of additional food. They were often in a sorry state having walked all the way carrying their worldly goods on their backs or in any form of

transport they could lay their hands on such as perambulators. The commander requisitioned tents for 30,000 prisoners.

Vast formations of enemy planes flew over the camp and helped to boost the morale within. They stuck it out, followed camp orders and safety measures and waited patiently for freedom.

The Closing of the Camp

Thanks to Col. Burger's intervention via the Red Cross, Moosburg was not bombed. The safety of the POWs automatically ensured the safety of the town. Burger also received orders to deport all officers and to send as many of his own men to the defence of Moosburg as he could afford. Both orders would mean a contravention of the Geneva Conference and could undoubtedly be dangerous for the safety of the prisoners and indeed General Command seemed to have an ear for Burger's plea. However, the local command was taken over on 28 April by the SS Division "Niebelungen" and the officer in charge was tricked into believing Burger was going to carry out the deportation orders.

When the officer had left. Burger assembled all the POW officers (15,000 American, British and Russian, including 200 generals) and informed them, in the presence of the head of the guard of his decision to hand over the camp en bloc to the approaching Americans. A delegation which included a Swiss delegate, two POW colonels and the SS officer of the night before as parlementaire was sent off for talks with the Americans in the hope that they could be persuaded to go round Moosburg. No attack would mean that Burger would not have to defend. The Americans kept the SS officer - as Burger had known they would - turned down any plan of going round but accepted Burger's offer for taking over the camp. This was planned for noon on 29th April. Burger and Koller, the head of the camp guard, managed to hoodwink the SS into believing they were preparing for defence and planned the details of the handing over of the camp with the interned officers.

Burger's daring plan succeeded and the handover at noon took place without any untoward incidents. Catastrophe had been completely avoided and the lives of the prisoners and the people of Moosburg saved. No sooner had the camp been emptied of its uniformed inhabitants than the next group moved in - civilian internees. In 1948 the camp

was finally disbanded as a place of internment and was taken over by the Bavarian government and later on by the Bund. Since then it has been a place of shelter for German expellees and has formed the centre of the New Town.

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