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*British attitudes towards German prisoners of war and their treatment: 1939-48*

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**British attitudes towards German prisoners of war and their  
treatment: 1939-48**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines attitudes expressed towards German prisoners of war (POWs) and their treatment in Britain between 1939 and 1948. The original contribution of this thesis is to highlight the importance of British values, particularly the notion of fair-play, in public discussions of the treatment of POWs. In so doing, this thesis brings together three historiographical areas which had usually been dealt with separately: German POWs held in Britain, British national identity, and Anglo-German relations. Chapters two and three are concerned with the wartime period (1939-45), and chapters four, five, and six are concerned with the post-war period up to 1948, when the last German POWs were repatriated. While it is structured chronologically, each chapter is thematic. Chapter two examines the period between the outbreak of war in 1939 and the end of 1942 and explores the legacy of the Great War on discussions of captivity. Following chronologically, chapter three is concerned with the period between the D-Day landings on 6 June 1944 and the unconditional surrender of Germany in May 1945. The effect of the disclosure of atrocities committed by Nazi Germany on discussion of captivity is explored. Breaking from the chronological structure, chapter four takes up the theme of employment. Chapter five then considers the debates on the fraternisation regulations and the marriage ban between British women and German POWs. Finally, chapter six examines the campaign to repatriate German POWs. Throughout the war, the treatment of POWs was a marker of cultural difference between Britain and the German enemy. In the context of the emerging Cold War, the treatment of POWs was given new significance in that it was contrasted with the Soviet Union. Amongst others, this thesis concentrates on three principal sources: newspapers, newsreels, and Mass Observation material. Focusing on these sources, this thesis considers how the narrative of captivity was presented to the British public and the variety of responses which challenged representations of POW treatment.



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## Chapter 1: Introduction

On 14 August 1940, the *Daily Express* reported that a downed German pilot had asked two women who approached him near the crash site, if they were going to shoot him. 'No', Mrs Betty Tylee said in response, 'we don't do that in England. Would you like a cup of tea?'<sup>1</sup> In this anecdotal article of a chance meeting between British civilians and a German POW—it can be assumed that the pilot would have been formally captured soon after—the interplay between civilian/POW encounters, attitudes towards captivity, and British (the terms English and British were often used interchangeably) self-image is evident. Mrs Tylee and her accomplice would not execute an enemy captive as this was simply 'un-English'. Reflecting on the relationship between the treatment of enemy POWs and Japanese national identity, Rotem Kowner concluded that:

The treatment of POWs appears to be an excellent indicator of one's identity since it reflects self-images, the identity of one's reference group and the attitude towards it, as well as the national priorities and ambitions in times of constraint.<sup>2</sup>

In this thesis, following Kowner's suggestion, public opinion and individual attitudes expressed towards the treatment of German POWs in Britain between the outbreak of war in 1939 and the completion of their repatriation in 1948 are surveyed. The social, cultural, and political significance attached to the treatment of captured enemy POWs within the changing wartime, post-war, and emerging Cold War context is examined. In so doing, the intersection between the discussions of the captivity of German POWs and debates on wartime and post-war notions of British national character, attitudes towards Germany and the Germans, and wartime and post-war aspirations are highlighted. Policymaking and diplomacy have been the lenses through which the captivity of German POWs in Britain has been viewed in recent literature. In other words, the treatment of POWs has been explored 'from above', with the administration and negotiation of the POW issue being examined from the perspective of policymakers and officials. In contrast, this thesis approaches the captivity of German POWs 'from below', in that the documents analysed were read or related to by the 'common people', and it is their attitudes which are focused on. This thesis is not concerned with the intricacies of policies developed towards German POWs, but rather

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremy Paxman, *The English: A Portrait of a People* (London: Penguin, 1999), p. 87.

<sup>2</sup> Rotem Kowner, 'Imperial Japan and Its POWs: The Dilemma of Humaneness and National Identity', in *War and Militarism in Modern Japan: Issues of History and Identity*, ed. by G. Podoler (Folkestone: Global Oriental, 2009), pp. 80-110, p. 102.

popular comprehension and individual reactions to the real and imagined presence of captives on the home front and the standard of treatment afforded them by the British authorities. Accepting that a complete examination of attitudes and opinions is an impossible task, this thesis concentrates on a close reading of individual responses to gain insight, even though fragmentary, into what attitudes circulated in society. In focusing on public opinion and individual attitudes of the common people this thesis addresses three historiographical fields usually dealt with as separate: German POWs in Great Britain, British national identity, Anglo-German relations, and the changing mood as the war and then the Cold War developed. The following research questions are addressed:

- How were German POWs and the standard of their treatment in British hands represented in popular media? Did individuals support or challenge the dominant narrative they were presented with? Was the government's handling of German POWs criticised?
- To what extent was the treatment of POWs a marker of cultural difference between Britain and Germany during the 1939-45 conflict?
- What social, political, and cultural values were invested in the treatment of German POWs during and after the Second World War? Did the treatment of POWs reflect a liberal self-image?
- Were values and attitudes deep-rooted and constant or did they change over time in response to the shifting wartime, post-war, and emergent Cold War context?

### **German POWs in Britain**

Between the outbreak of war in September 1939 and the opening of the Second Front in June 1944, there were few German POWs held in Britain. During the eight months of phoney war, beginning with the declaration of war by the western Allies and roughly ending with the German invasion of France and the Low Countries in May 1940, *Luftwaffe* pilots and *Kriegsmarine* crew were sporadically captured in and around the British Isles. By 18 December 1939 there were 250 in British hands.<sup>3</sup> Before being transported to camps, POWs were interrogated. The Combined Services Detailed Interrogation Centre (CSDIC) was initially established at the Tower of London, before

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<sup>3</sup> CAB 67/3 WP (G) (39) 157, German Prisoners of War in Great Britain, 18 December 1939.

moving to Cockfosters and later Beaconsfield in Buckinghamshire. Over the course of the war, information gathered from POWs became increasingly valued by intelligence services.<sup>4</sup> Pre-war planners anticipated only a small number of enemy POWs would be held in Britain and two sites were initially requisitioned by the War Office to act as POW camps. Officers were held at Grizedale Hall in the Lake District, Cumbria while other ranks were accommodated at Glen Mill, a disused cotton mill in Oldham, Lancashire.<sup>5</sup> Policy was altered in light of the catastrophic military defeats resulting in the Dunkirk evacuation between 26 May and 4 June 1940 followed by the fall of France on 25 June. The decision was taken, suggested by the newly established Home Defence (Security) Executive, to remove enemy aliens. POWs were also shipped to camps in the Dominions including Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand as they too were considered a security threat at a time when invasion was feared.<sup>6</sup> While the practice of transporting enemy aliens was stopped after the *Arandora Star* sinking, consignments of POWs continued to sail for the Dominions.<sup>7</sup> Transported to the extremities of the British Empire, the number of German POWs held in Britain remained small.

In contrast to the flow of German POWs away from Britain, there was a steady influx of Italian POWs from 1941.<sup>8</sup> It is worth briefly discussing policy towards Italian

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<sup>4</sup> Kent Fedorowich, 'Axis prisoners of war as sources for British military intelligence, 1939-42', *Intelligence and National Security*, 14: 2 (1999), 156-78; Kevin Jones, 'From the horse's mouth: Luftwaffe prisoners of war as source for Air Ministry intelligence during the Battle of Britain', *Intelligence and National Security*, 15: 1 (2000), 60-80; Falko Bell, 'One of our Most Valuable Sources of Intelligence': British Intelligence and the Prisoner of War System in 1944', *Intelligence and National Security*, 31:4 (2015), 556-78. For an analysis of the transcribed covert recordings of German POWs collected by British intelligence see, Sönke Neitzel and Harald Welzer, *Soldaten - On Fighting, Killing, and Dying: The Secret WWII Transcripts of German POWs*, trans. by. Jefferson Chase, (New York: Aldred A. Knopf, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> On the development of the camp system see, Antony Hellen, 'Temporary settlements and transient populations: the legacy of Britain's prisoners of war camps', *ErdKunde. Archiv für wissenschaftliche Geographie*, 53: 4 (1999), 191-219. On the history of Glen Mill see, Bob Moore 'Glen Mill: The International History of a Local POW Camp During World War II', *Manchester Region History Review*, 10 (1996), 48-56.

<sup>6</sup> CAB 67/7 WP (G) (40) 170, Internees and Prisoners of War, Memorandum by the Lord President of the Council, 2 July 1940.

<sup>7</sup> CAB 66/12 WP (40) 379, Sending Prisoners of War Abroad, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War, 20 September 1940. CAB 65/9 WM 257 (40) 7, 24 September 1940. CAB 67/9 WP (G) (41) 75, Transfer of German Prisoners of War to Canada, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War, 8 August 1941. CAB 65/19, WM 79 (41) 3, 11 August 1941.

<sup>8</sup> On Italian POWs in Britain see, Lucio Sponza, 'Italian prisoners of war in Great Britain, 1943-6' in *Prisoners-of-war*, ed. by Fedorowich and Moore, pp. 205-26. Bob Moore and Kent Fedorowich, *The British Empire and its Italian Prisoners of War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002); Marco Giudici, 'A "Positive Displacement?": Italian POWs in World War II Britain', in *War and Displacement in the Twentieth Century: Global Conflicts*, ed. by Sandra Barkhof and Angela K. Smith, (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 89-102. A notable work which has unfortunately not

POWs as their fate was intertwined with their German equivalents. On 10 June 1940, Italy joined the German invasion of France during the latter stages of the campaign. Benito Mussolini's decision to declare war subsequently expanded the conflict into the Mediterranean theatre. In North Africa, British forces successfully repelled initial Italian advances into Libya. The copious numbers of Italian POWs made for logistic and administrative problems. At the same time, labour shortages in Britain were becoming acute. In an effort to alleviate both these problems, Italian POWs were shipped to Britain and set to work in agriculture. While German POWs were perceived as bellicose fanatical Nazis, Italian POWs were considered docile.<sup>9</sup> An almost insatiable demand for their labour soon followed; noting the British 'addiction' to their labour, Wylie quips that the Italians were 'more useful to Britain's cause in the wheat fields than the battlefields'.<sup>10</sup> The number of Italian POWs employed increased steadily to 108,000 by D-Day and peaking at 162,000 in June 1945. With the capitulation of Italy in September 1943, the use of Italian POW labour was complicated. Although the flow of Italian POW labour was cut, Italian POWs already in Britain would not be immediately repatriated. In order to continue to employ them, a 'co-operator' status was introduced. Italian POWs were offered this status, and in exchange for their continued employment—their remit being expanded beyond agriculture to work directly associated with the war effort—co-operators were offered increased freedoms and payment.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, Italian co-operators were billeted directly onto farms, reducing transport costs. Furthermore, removing them from camps created space for prospective POWs taken during the forthcoming invasion of Normandy.

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been translated is but draws upon Italian sources: Isabella Insolubile, *Wops: i prigionieri italiani in Gran Bretagna (1941-1946)* (Napoli: Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 2012). On the Italian community in Britain during the Second World War see, Terri Colpi, *The Italian factor: the Italian community in Great Britain* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1991) and Lucio Sponza, *Divided Loyalties: Italians in Britain during the Second World War* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> CAB 67/9 WP (G) (41) 6, Italian Prisoners of War for Land Reclamation Work, Memorandum by the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, 13 January 1941. CAB 65/17, WM 7 (41)8, 16 January 1941. CAB 66/16, WP (41) 114, Military Policy for East Africa, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War, 29 May 1941. CAB 66/16, WP (41) 120, Proposal to bring 25,000 Italian Prisoners of War to this country, Report by the Lord President of the Council, 4 June 1941, CAB 65/18 WM 57 (41)9, 5 June 1941 On perceptions of Italian POWs see, Bob Moore, 'British Perceptions of Italian Prisoners of War, 1940-7', in *Prisoners of War, Prisoners of Peace: Captivity, Homecoming and Memory in World War II*, ed. by Bob Moore and Barbara Hatley-Broad (Oxford: Berg, 2005), pp. 25-39.

<sup>10</sup> Neville Wylie, 'Prisoners of War in The Era of Total War', *War in History*, 13:2 (2006), 217-33, (p. 224).

<sup>11</sup> Kent Fedorowich and Bob Moore, 'Co-belligerency and prisoners of war: Britain and Italy, 1943-1945', *International History Review*, 18 (1996), 28-47; Sponza, 'Italian Prisoners', pp. 210-15.

During the Normandy Landings on 6 June 1944 and the subsequent breakout substantial numbers of German POWs were taken by Allied forces. Initially, with no space to hold them in France, POWs were shipped across the Channel to Britain. Having already agreed to share captures between them under the August 1943 50:50 agreement, a number of the German POWs were quickly shipped from Britain to the United States.<sup>12</sup> In June 1944 the possibility of employing German POWs was explored, an experimental group being put to work in agriculture in two counties. The need for labour outweighed security concerns and German POWs were increasingly employed from summer 1944. Demand for labour would not recede with the end of the war against Germany, and British-owned German POWs were transported to Britain from camps in Canada, the US, and Belgium to bolster the workforce.<sup>13</sup> The security restrictions which had hampered the productivity of German POW employment were scratched in May 1945 after the unconditional surrender of Germany, and in August 1946 the number employed in the UK peaked at 381,000.

At the Potsdam Conference (17 July to 2 August 1945) the aims of denazification and democratisation were agreed by Allied representatives. In Britain, the need to design a programme of political re-education for German POWs was made clear early on in a cabinet memorandum circulated on 18 December 1939.<sup>14</sup> However, with the priority being winning the war, the issue was by and large set aside until September 1944 when a scheme was approved by the cabinet. POWs were interviewed to assess their political sympathies, a process known as 'screening', and accordingly segregated into one of three groups: 'white' (anti-Nazi), 'grey' (in-between), and 'black' (ardent-Nazi). Re-education sought to re-orientate German POWs along democratic lines. The programme included discussion groups, lectures, films, and other activities which provided a space in which the POWs could challenge their pre-existing beliefs rooted in Nazism. In September 1946 the German POW population peaked at 402,200. At that time a scheme of general repatriation was introduced at a rate of 15,000 POWs per

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<sup>12</sup> In August 1943 Britain and the United States agreed that captures in joint operations from 12 May 1943 should be equally divided in the theatre after the POWs captured by a third power, such as France, had been deducted. Furthermore, up to a maximum of 175,000 British owned POWs could be sent to the US, a figure reached by February 1945. See, CAB 66/61 WP (45) 89, Disposal of Prisoner of War in Captured in North-West Europe, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War, 10 February 1945.

<sup>13</sup> 27,000 German POWs were transferred to Britain from the Channel Islands after their liberation on 9 May 1945 while 3,200 were retained for work. On the fate of these captives see, Charles Cruickshank, *The German Occupation of the Channel Islands* (Stroud: Sutton: 2004), pp. 311-31.

<sup>14</sup> CAB 67/3 WP (G) (39) 157, German Prisoners of War in Great Britain, 18 December 1939.

month later rising to 20,000. In July 1948, apart from escapees still at liberty and serious infirm cases, the repatriation of German POWs was completed.

### **Historiographical trends**

The product of conflicts from antiquity to the present day, Pieter Lagrou reminds us that POWs 'are a universal phenomenon of warfare'. Changing military tactics which saw increased mobility led to a substantial rise in the number of military prisoners taken during the two World Wars.<sup>15</sup> Over time, popular imaginings of POWs centred predominantly on heroic tales of escape have been demystified. For decades after the Second World War this image was perpetuated in Britain by the 'Colditz industry', but as Simon Paul Mackenzie has demonstrated, the realities of British POWs in Nazi Germany were far more complex.<sup>16</sup> There is now a vast literature on the experiences of POWs in different contexts during both World Wars. In general, it is accepted that German POWs held in Britain between 1939 and 1948 were treated by and large in accordance with international law and fared far better than their counterparts, notably those in Soviet hands.<sup>17</sup> In their memoirs, ex-German POWs look back on their captivity in Britain with fond memories, a time when they forged friendships and rebuild their lives after the devastation wrought by war.<sup>18</sup>

Academic attention has concentrated on policymaking and the handling of POWs by the British authorities. In his chronological overview of British policy towards German and Italian POWs, Bob Moore pinpoints the turning points which transformed the demographic of the POW population in Britain. Moore argues that the

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<sup>15</sup> Pieter Lagrou, 'Overview', in *Prisoners of War, Prisoners of Peace*, ed. by Moore and Hatley-Broad, (Oxford: Berg, 2005), pp. 3-10, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> S. P. Mackenzie, *The Colditz Myth: British and Commonwealth Prisoners of War in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: OUP, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> Richard Garrett, *P.O.W. The Uncivil Face of War* (Newton Abbot, Devon: David & Charles, 1988), pp. 166-84; Chris Christiansen, *Seven Years Among Prisoners of War*, trans. by Ida Egede Winther, (Ohio: OUP, 1994), pp. 151-74. Bob Moore, 'The Treatment of Prisoners of War in the Western European Theatre of War, 1939-45', in *Prisoners in War*, ed. by Sibylle Scheipers (Oxford: OUP, 2010) pp. 111-126. Rüdiger Overmans, 'The Treatment of Prisoners of War in the Eastern European Theatre of War, 1941-56', in *Prisoners*, ed. by Scheipers, pp. 127-140.

<sup>18</sup> Stuart Crocker, *Foreign Shores: A True Story* (Leicester: Matador, 2010); Werner Braun and David Coakley, *Is the War Over? The Memoir of Werner Kurt Braun* (Milton Keynes: AuthorHouse, 2010); George Gebauer, *Hitler Youth to Church of England Priest: My Autobiography* (George Gebauer, 2014).

usefulness as a labour source was a primary factor shaping British POW policy.<sup>19</sup> Examining the employment of German and Italian POWs, Johann Custodis demonstrates that both groups 'made significant contributions' to wartime and post-war agriculture.<sup>20</sup> In *Group Captives*, Henry Faulk outlines the British re-education programme. Examining the results from a sociological perspective Faulk deems the policy successful.<sup>21</sup>

Diplomacy has been placed at the forefront of recent studies of POWs. In *Prisoners, Diplomats, and the Great War*, Richard B. Speed surveys the treatment of POWs during the 1914-18 conflict in Europe and the United States. He conceptualises the 'liberal tradition' of captivity, the view that captured enemies are not chattel property but protected persons. This view was codified in international law, notably in the two Hague conventions of 1899 and 1907. Despite the unforeseen pressures of total war, Speed contends that Britain, France, Germany, and the United States, treated their POWs reasonably well.<sup>22</sup> Commitment to the liberal-tradition of captivity was demonstrated by the ratification of the 1929 Geneva Convention.<sup>23</sup> As in the 1914-18 conflict, the stipulations of the international law were interpreted differently and negotiations between belligerents sometimes broke down. Comparing their treatment across the theatres of war during the Second World War, Simon Paul MacKenzie asserts that the 'mutual hostage factor' was an important restraint on POW mistreatment in the western theatre.<sup>24</sup> This influential essay inspired subsequent studies to adopt a comparative approach, exploring negotiations between governments in an attempt to pinpoint the factors governing POW treatment. MacKenzie's argument that reciprocity was a key influence in POW relations has been nuanced accordingly. In *Confronting*

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<sup>19</sup> Bob Moore 'Axis Prisoners in Britain during the Second World War: A Comparative Survey' in *Prisoner of War and their Captors in World War II*, ed. by Bob Moore and Kent Fedorowich (Oxford: Berg, 1996), pp. 19-46.

<sup>20</sup> Johann Custodis, 'Employing the enemy: the contribution of German and Italian Prisoners of War to British agriculture during and after the Second World War', *The Agricultural History Review*, 60:2 (2012), 243-65.

<sup>21</sup> Henry Faulk, *Group Captives: The Re-education of German Prisoners of War in Britain 1945-1948* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1977), pp. 175-97.

<sup>22</sup> Richard B. Speed III, *Prisoners, Diplomats, and the Great War: A Study in the Diplomacy of Captivity* (London: Greenwood Press, 1990), p. 3. Brian Feltman has problematized Speed's evaluation of Britain's adherence to the liberal-tradition, demonstrating that a noteworthy minority of soldiers and officers showed little concern for observing the law. Brian Feltman, 'Tolerance As a Crime? The British Treatment of German Prisoners of War on the Western Front, 1914-1918', *War in History*, 17 (2010), 435-58.

<sup>23</sup> Neville Wylie, 'The 1929 Prisoner of War Convention and the Building of the Inter-war Prisoner of War Regime', in *Prisoners*, ed. by Scheipers, pp. 91-110.

<sup>24</sup> Simon Paul MacKenzie, 'The Treatment of Prisoners of War in World War II', *The Journal of Modern History*, 66:3 (1994), 487-520.

*Captivity*, Arieh Kochavi suggests that racial considerations played a role in Germany's treatment of captives. Notwithstanding times when it was breached, the observance of the 1929 Geneva Convention regarding Anglo-American POWs contrasts sharply to the brutal extermination policies carried out in concentration camps. While Kochavi's analysis of diplomatic correspondence is sound, a deeper consideration of the cultural context of policymaking is required to explain the disparity in the treatment of different captive groups.<sup>25</sup> Vasilis Vourkoutiotis similarly argues that the sufferings of Allied POWs in German hands were not deliberately caused. The German High Command was committed to the stipulations of the Geneva Convention, but individual commanders, administrative breakdown towards the end of the war, and Hitler's personal involvement resulted in violations.<sup>26</sup> Drawing on the field of international relations, Neville Wylie analyses the intricate diplomacy Britain and Germany played to safeguard their servicemen in enemy hands. He has shown that reciprocity could also mean an escalation in POW mistreatment.<sup>27</sup> In their assessments of the 1942-3 Shackling Crisis both Kochavi and Wylie note that the British authorities had to be mindful of public opinion during the reprisal cycle, and a public distaste of meting out punishments upon defenceless captives eventually led Churchill to unchain German POWs. This suggests that innate cultural aversions played a role. Although not concerned with POWs, Jeffrey Legro has argued that the restraint shown between Britain and Germany during the war was due to deep-rooted cultural beliefs which raises new questions about POW treatment.<sup>28</sup> Both Kochavi and Wylie suggest this in their assessments of the 1942 Shackling Crisis whereby the British authorities had to be sensitive to public opinion which would not condone the chaining of German POWs in retaliation for the manacling of British POWs in German hands.

The phenomenon of captivity was not confined to the wartime period, and extended beyond 1945. Homecoming, reintegration, and memory are themes central to the essays in *Prisoners of War, Prisoners of Peace* edited by Bob Moore and Barbara

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<sup>25</sup> Arieh J. Kochavi, *Confronting Captivity: Britain and the United States and Their POWs in Nazi Germany* (North Carolina: NCP, 2005).

<sup>26</sup> Vasilis Vourkoutiotis, *Prisoners of War and the German High Command: The British and American Experience* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

<sup>27</sup> Neville Wylie, *Barbed Wire Diplomacy: Britain, Germany, and the politics of prisoners of war 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). On the relationship between Britain and the Swiss Protecting Power see, Neville Wylie, *Britain, Switzerland and the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>28</sup> Jeffrey W. Legro, *Cooperation Under Fire: Anglo-German Restraint during World War II* (London: Cornell UP, 1995).

Hately-Broad.<sup>29</sup> Immediate repatriation was just one of 'the spectrum of possibilities' POWs faced at the end of hostilities.<sup>30</sup> In contrast to the immediate liberation of Allied POWs, the repatriation of German POWs was not completed until 1948. During this time their continued employment intersected with the post-war migration and the recruitment of foreign labour, notably the arrival of European Voluntary Workers.<sup>31</sup> German POWs featured in Inge Weber-Newth and Johannes-Dieter Steinert's socio-historical exploration of German migrants in post-war Britain.<sup>32</sup> The authors shed light on attitudes expressed by the British public and non-governmental organisations towards German migrants. After outlining British policy towards German migrants in the context of post-war labour needs, the study is primarily concerned with the migrant experience. Having interviewed ex-POWs and migrants, the authors examine conceptions of self and others as well as recollections of their reception. They discuss the eventual relaxation of the fraternisation regulations near Christmas 1946 which created the opportunity for ex-enemies to meet one another and forge relationships beyond the workplace, noting that Christians and ex-military persons were two particular groups which reached out to their ex-enemies. Focused attention is paid to gender issues in relation to encounters between POWs and British women. In this dissertation, these themes are explored further.

Recording the encounters between British civilians and German POWs has been primarily conducted by amateur historians who usually have some sort of personal connection with the captives. Pamela Howe Taylor, author of *Enemies Become Friends* and *The Germans We Trusted*, chronicled the friendships made between British civilians and German POWs, her father having been a British priest providing service to a POW camp near their home in Lancashire.<sup>33</sup> Studies of the POW presence in particular counties and certain camps also offer some insight into the attitudes of the

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<sup>29</sup> Moore and Hately-Broad, *Prisoners*.

<sup>30</sup> Rüdiger Overmans, 'The Repatriation of Prisoners of War once Hostilities are Over: A Matter of Course?', in *Prisoners*, Moore and Hately-Broad, pp. 11-22, p. 11.

<sup>31</sup> Johannes-Dieter Steinert, 'British Recruitment of German Labour, 1945-50', in *Germans in Britain Since 1500*, ed. by Panikos Panayi, (London: Hambledon, 1996), pp. 171-86. On the recruitment of foreign labour more broadly see, Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* (London: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 64-89.

<sup>32</sup> Inge Weber-Newth and Johannes-Dieter Steinert, *German Migrants in Post-war Britain: An enemy embrace* (London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>33</sup> Pamela Howe Taylor, *Enemies Become Friends: A True Story of German Prisoners of War* (Sussex: Book Guild, 1997); *The Germans We Trusted: Stories that had to be told...* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2003).

locals to their POW neighbours, usually drawing on the memories of local people.<sup>34</sup> Of particular note is Matthew Sullivan's *Thresholds of Peace*. Sullivan, himself having worked with German POWs in post-war Britain, recounted the attempt of the captives to confront the political and moral trials borne out of defeat in 1945. While focused on the re-education programme and the key individuals involved with it, Sullivan also described the actions of British civilians who involved themselves with welfare and aid for German POWs. He drew upon the philosophy of Iris Murdoch to explain what he describes as 'the myriad threads of peace' knitted between the British people and German POWs in post-war Britain. In *The Sovereignty of Good*, Murdoch deemed courageous good deeds people perform against heroic odds a mystifying and central question in moral philosophy. Following Murdoch, Sullivan suggests that those that sought to do good for German POWs 'did not see it as an act of will nor a moral task'. That there were individuals and organisations in Britain that concerned themselves with the treatment of German POWs out of enigmatic inner virtuousness alone is not refuted. However, further interrogation is required of this issue and its place within British histories.

There are few works which centre on public opinion and attitudes towards German POWs during and after the Second World War. Their time in Britain sits awkwardly with the conventional wartime/post-war chronological divide. German POWs, for instance, are absent in Paul Addison's *The Road To 1945* while they are only mentioned fleetingly in Angus Calder's *The People's War*.<sup>35</sup> In regards to post-war histories of Britain, their presence complicates narratives of the 1945-51 Labour government. The retention of German POWs as forced labour does not fit with the image of Britain moving towards a properly constituted welfare state and work-force. Neither does this fit well with the memory of the war. In his effort to dispel the 'myth of the good war', James Hartfield reminds us that Britain, like the USA, 'made defeated

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<sup>34</sup> J. S. Arcumes and J. F. Helvet, *Prisoner of War Camps in County Durham* (Durham: County Durham Books, 2002); Valerie Campbell, *Camp 165 Watten: Scotland's Most Secretive Prisoner of War Camp* (Dunbeath: Whittles, 2008), pp. 83-108; Gloria Edwards, *Moota — Camp 103: The Story of a Cumbrian Prisoner of War Camp* (Cockermouth: Little Bird, 2005); Gloria Edwards, *The war years: life in Cockermouth and the Moota POW camp* (Cumbria: Little Bird Publications, 2009); Ken Free, *Camp 186: The Lost Town at Berechurch* (Stroud: Amberley, 2010), pp. 104-16; Stephen Risby, *Prisoners of War in Bedfordshire* (Stroud: Amberley, 2011), pp. 52-74; Ken Porter and Stephen Wynn, *German P.O.W. Camp 266 Langdon Hills* (unpublished, 2012), pp. 91-120; Ian M. C. Hollingsbee, *Inside the Wire: The Prisoner-Of-War Camps and Hostels of Gloucestershire 1939-1948* (Stroud: History Press, 2014).

<sup>35</sup> Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945: British politics and the Second World War* (London: Johnathan Cape, 1975); Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939-1945* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969) pp. 141, 323.

German [POWs] slaves'.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, in studies of post-war labour and migration, POWs are of secondary consideration.

## Britishness

'Wars', Judy Giles and Tim Middleton note, 'are obvious occasions when ideas about national identity become particularly visible'.<sup>37</sup> The 1939 and 1945 conflict, in particular the events of 1940—Dunkirk, the Battle of Britain, and the Blitz—is considered a time when British cultural awareness was at a highpoint. The Second World War, Richard Weight and Abigail Beach write, 'heightened national consciousness in Britain by creating the potentially inclusive, democratic sentiment of the "People's War" and in doing so, it prompted a thorough examination of what constituted British national identity'.<sup>38</sup> Often, as Barbara Korte and Ralf Schneider indicate, the idea of national unity needs to be cultivated even after the fighting has stopped so that the involvement of the nation in that conflict can be justified and the survivors can be comforted by the idea that their losses were not in vain.<sup>39</sup> The Second World War, Korte notes, 'has engendered its own myths of Britishness'.<sup>40</sup> These mythological elements of the British Second World War narrative—particularly 'standing alone' against Germany in 1940, Britain's 'finest hour' according to Churchill—have been interrogated by historians, most notably Angus Calder.<sup>41</sup> The unravelling of British national identity with the rise of nationalism in Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland, and England has been a central concern in studies of Britishness.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> James Hartfield, *An Unpatriotic History of the Second World War* (Winchester: Zero, 2012), p. 14.

<sup>37</sup> *Writing Englishness: An introductory sourcebook on national identity*, ed. by Judy Giles and Tim Middleton (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 110.

<sup>38</sup> Richard Weight and Abigail Beach, 'Introduction' in *The Right to Belong: Citizenship and National Identity in Britain, 1930–1960*, ed. by Richard Weight and Abigail Beach (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), pp. 1–18, p. 8.

<sup>39</sup> Barbara Korte and Ralf Schneider, 'Introduction', in *Wars and the Cultural Construction of Identities in Britain*, ed. by Barbara Korte and Ralf Schneider (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), pp. 1–8, p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> Barbara Korte, 'Wars and British Identities—From Norman Conquerors to Bosnian Warriors: An Overview of Cultural Representations', in *Wars*, ed. by Korte and Schneider, pp. 9–24, p. 9.

<sup>41</sup> Calder, *People's War*; Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1991). Also of note is: Robert Mackay, *Half the Battle: Civilian Morale in Britain during the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002); Mark Connelly, *We Can Take It! Britain and the Memory of the Second World War* (Harlow: Pearson, 2004).

<sup>42</sup> Richard Weight, *Patriots: National Identity in Britain 1949–2000* (London: Macmillan, 2002).

The image of Britain as a liberal and tolerant society has been questioned in studies of civilian internment. For a time, unable to reconcile mass internment with the narrative of liberal Britain defending democracy, it remained a marginalised subject.<sup>43</sup> Former Isle of Man internee Ronald Stent and journalist Miriam Kochan offer positive interpretations of the experiences of the captives.<sup>44</sup> However, the greater part of literature has been critical of internment policy. Brian Simpson disparages the system of detention without trial, while Neil Stammers has gone so far as to argue that with the suspension of many civil liberties following the introduction of the Defence Regulations, including 18B and the internment of aliens, Britain ceased to be a liberal democracy.<sup>45</sup> The internment of enemy aliens sat uneasily with British notions of justice, and the episode has been explored by historians to complicate British self-image during the Second World War. As the title of the collection edited by Richard Dove suggests, the internment episode was and is considered "*Totally Un-English*".<sup>46</sup> While internment has been regularly used as a controlling measure during times of conflict between The South African War until today, it is consistently seen as 'un-British'.<sup>47</sup> Historians of military captivity in Britain during the two World Wars have suggested that similar cultural forces were at play in debates concerning the treatment of POWs.

Heather Jones's study of violence against POWs in Britain, France, and Germany during the First World War highlights deep cultural differences between the belligerents in their treatment of military captives. In regards to the radicalisation of POW treatment which Jones charts, she observes a British exceptionalism:

Yet if there is a *Sonderweg* to emerge from this study, it is actually Britain, where, throughout the war, violence against prisoners remained far less acceptable than in France or Germany and where cultural constraints acting against radicalisation proved particularly powerful.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Panikos Panayi, 'A Marginalized Subject? The Historiography of Enemy Alien Internment in Britain', in "*Totally Un-English*"?: *Britain's Internment of 'Enemy Aliens' in Two World Wars*, ed. by Richard Dove, pp. 17-28.

<sup>44</sup> Ronald Stent, *A Bespattered Page? The internment of His Majesty's 'most loyal enemy aliens'* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1980); Miriam Kochan, *Britain's internees in the Second World War* (London: Macmillan, 1983).

<sup>45</sup> A. W. Brian Simpson, *In the Highest Degree Odious: Detention without Trial in Wartime Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994); Neil Stammers, *Civil Liberties in Britain during the Second World War* (London: Croom Helm, 1983).

<sup>46</sup> Richard Dove, "A matter which touches the good name of this country", in "*Totally Un-English*", ed. by Dove, pp. 11-6.

<sup>47</sup> Zoë Andrea Denness, "'A Question Which Affects Our Prestige as a Nation': The History of British Civilian Internment, 1899-1945" (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Birmingham, 2012).

<sup>48</sup> Jones, *Violence*, p. 376.

Assessing a letter to *The Times* criticising the lenient treatment of German POWs in October 1918, Jones comments:

Yet, significantly, even in a letter demanding harsher prisoner treatment, such as this, there is still a strong cultural disapproval of beating German prisoners or starving them; the language is very much the high Edwardian rhetoric of 'fair play', closer to the cultural ideals of British honour espoused by the famous poem 'Vitai Lampada' by Henry Newbolt than the rhetoric of wartime extremes.<sup>49</sup>

The young cricketer of Newbolt's poem, by the second stanza a soldier, is stirred to heroic action through schoolboy memories. The line 'Play up! Play up! And play the game!' symbolised the view that the same sporting spirit should inform the battlefield as much as the cricket pitch. 'In European history', James Mangan remarks, 'war has served sport and sport has served war'.<sup>50</sup> During the First World War, Colin Veitch argues that 'Sport was to maintain its ascendancy in the forefront of British thought and expression throughout the remaining years of the conflict, and continued to be used to typify the genetic strength of British manhood'.<sup>51</sup> Assessing the place of sport within British society, Derek Birley argues that the Newbolt spirit which Jones alludes to persisted beyond the First World War.<sup>52</sup> In this thesis, the notion of fair play in connection with the treatment of POWs is explored further.

The importance of everydayness and ordinariness in the construction of British national identity during the Second World War has been emphasised. Sonya Rose observed that 'those who best represented Britain at war were not exceptional individuals but rather were everyday, ordinary people; those who were 'doing their bit'.<sup>53</sup> John Baxendale similarly argues that in the midst of all the destructiveness witnessed on the home front, 'the minutiae of ordinary life [became] all the more precious, a source of national pride, and just as much as democratic instructions, under

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<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, p. 237.

<sup>50</sup> J. A. Mangan, 'Prologue: Combative Sports and Combative Societies', in J. A. Mangan (ed.) *Militarism, Sport, Europe: War Without Weapons* (London: Frank Cass, 2005), pp. 1-9, p. 2.

<sup>51</sup> Colin Veitch, 'Play up! play up! and win the war! Football, the nation and the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 20 (1985), 363-77, (p. 375). See also, Derek Birley, 'Sportsmen and the deadly game', *British Journal of Sports History*, 3 (1986), 288-310. Tony Collins, 'English Rugby Union and the First World War', *Historical Journal*, 45: 4 (2002), 797-817.

<sup>52</sup> Derek Birley, *Playing the Game: Sport and British Society, 1910-45* (Manchester: MUP, 1996).

<sup>53</sup> Sonya O. Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain 1939-1945* (Oxford: OUP, 2004) p. 5.

Nazi threat'.<sup>54</sup> Following the notion put forward by Rose and Baxendale, that everydayness and ordinariness were central to representations of what it meant to be British, the physical gestures towards German POWs recorded in newspapers and other materials can be read as important symbols of British national identity. While donating a packet of Woodbine cigarettes, cup of tea or piece of cake to a German POW might well be mundane at first glance, important messages are codified within them which, when unpacked, can further understandings of the viewpoints held by the ordinary citizen in wartime and post-war Britain.

### **Images of the Germans**

An examination of how the treatment of POWs reflected British self-image during and after the Second World War must also concern itself with the counterpart entity which also defines the self: the other. 'Britishness', Paul Ward notes, 'has always been in a process of formation'.<sup>55</sup> Acknowledging the complexity of national identity, whereby numerous ongoing processes result in conceptions of what it meant to be British being in a state of flux, this thesis is concerned with the creation of Britishness in relation to the German enemy. This is not to suggest that national identity is solely constructed against 'the other'. The contributors in the recent publication *Fighting For Britain?* have highlighted the internal construction of national identities during the Second World War between the various nationalities which make up Britain, as well as those who arrived from the Empire. These differences are not disputed. However, against Nazi Germany the British, Paul Addison states, 'fought as one nation'.<sup>56</sup> While he acknowledged that 'the so-called races of Britain feel themselves to be very different from one another', George Orwell argued that the differences between two Britons, say English and a Scottish, quickly evaporated when they were confronted by another European.<sup>57</sup> As Wendy Ugolini and Juliette Pattinson note, 'much of British national character was also being constructed in opposition to the humourless and militaristic Nazi, with the perceived British characteristics of tolerance, cheerfulness and stoicism being widely

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<sup>54</sup> John Baxendale, 'You and I – All of Us Ordinary People': Renegotiating 'Britishness' in Wartime', in *'Millions Like Us'? British Culture in the Second World War*, ed. by Nick Hayes and Jeff Hill (Liverpool: LUP, 1999), pp. 295-322, p. 300.

<sup>55</sup> Paul Ward, *Britishness since 1870* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 3.

<sup>56</sup> Paul Addison, 'National Identity and the Battle of Britain', in *War*, ed. by Korte and Schneider, pp. 225-240.

<sup>57</sup> George Orwell, 'The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius', in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, ed. by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968), pp. 56-109, p. 64.

celebrated'.<sup>58</sup> While the Axis also included Italy and Japan, it was Germany which was the foil to Britain. Certainly, hatred was directed to the former two nations, poet A. P. Herbert famously calling to 'Sock the Wops, and knock their blocks'. Yet it was Germany which was, Angus Calder notes, 'first and always, the real enemy'.<sup>59</sup> The German people came to represent all that Britain was not: malevolent, degenerate, vicious, deceitful, cold, dishonourable, and mechanical.

## Sources

The administration of German POWs in British hands produced a vast amount of official material. While the focus of this thesis is not policy formation, the records of the Cabinet Office were read in order to understand the executive decisions taken by the successive wartime and post-war governments towards German POWs. More importantly, *Hansard*, the transcripts of parliamentary debates, was read to understand the public face of policy. To gauge public opinion and explore individual attitudes, three sources were central: newspapers, newsreels, and Mass-Observation material. The collection and limitations of these sources will now be discussed, with a particular focus on the issue of digitisation.

In understanding popular opinion regarding German POWs in Britain, newspaper content is a vital source. As the first draft of history, newspapers are one of the 'most important published primary sources for the historian', as John Tosh writes.<sup>60</sup> This is particularly true of twentieth century Britain, a time when, George Orwell observed, the typical Englishman would settle down with the *News of the World* after his Sunday lunch.<sup>61</sup> Adrian Bingham has furthered the picture Orwell paints. Mid-twentieth century Britain, offered perhaps the most competitive newspaper market across the globe. The daily circulations of the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Express*—over four million copies—were unmatched. In all, around three-quarters of the population

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<sup>58</sup> Wendy Ugolini and Juliette Pattinson, 'Negotiating identities in multinational Britain during the Second World War', in *Fighting for Britain? Negotiating Identities in Britain During the Second World War*, ed. by Wendy Ugolini and Juliette Pattinson (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2015), pp. 1-24, p. 9.

<sup>59</sup> Calder, *People's War*, p. 489.

<sup>60</sup> John Tosh and Sean Lang, *The Pursuit of History*, 4th edn., (Harlow: Pearson, 2006), p. 66.

<sup>61</sup> George Orwell, 'Decline of the English Murder', *Tribune*, 15 February 1946, in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell, Vol. IV: In Front of Your Nose 1945-1950*, ed. by S. Orwell and I. Angus (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 124.

read a paper every day.<sup>62</sup> Digitisation has allowed the systematic exploration of newspaper content. Online databases have made searching newspapers quick and convenient. In regard to twentieth century publications there is a rich, if fragmented, collection of digital archives which present the opportunity to explore them. While studies of German POWs held in Britain during and after the Second World War have used newspaper content to provide anecdotal colour, digitisation has enabled newspapers to be rigorously collected and analysed, and this thesis uses newspapers as a principal source to construct the narrative. Newspapers not only brought captivity into the everyday lives of the British public, relaying information regarding the presence of German POWs in Britain and the policies adopted towards them, they provided a space in which discussions of their treatment could be had and attitudes towards them could be expressed.

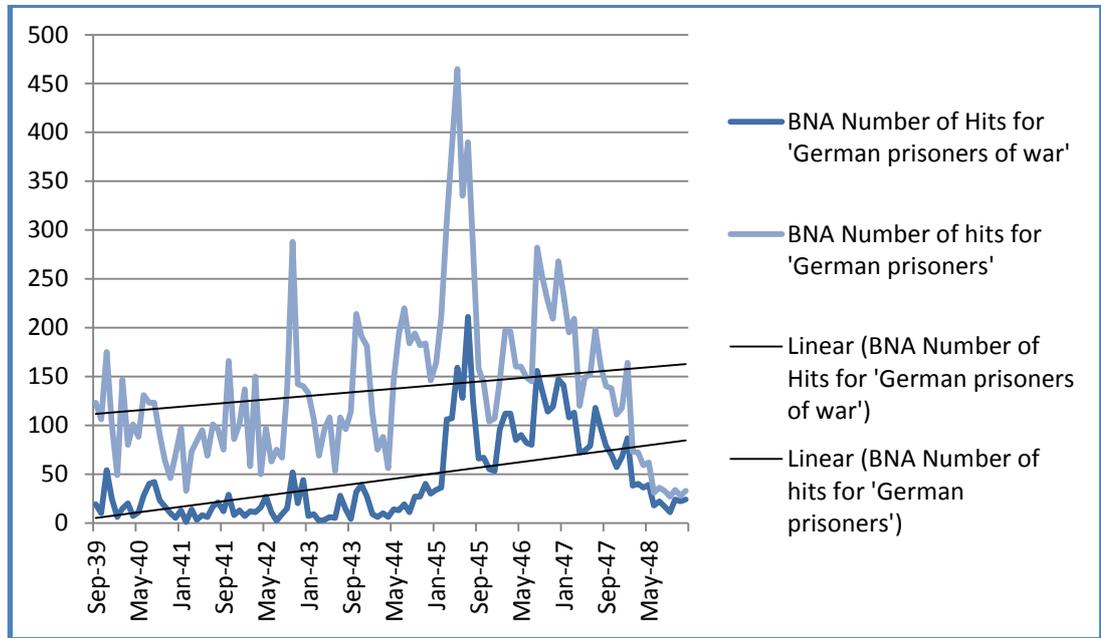
Inspired by the model of distance reading advocated by Franco Moretti, the first digital methodology employed to collect material on German POWs was a macro approach, quantifying the newspaper content retrieved from keyword searches to identify broad patterns.<sup>63</sup> Databases consulted included: *The Times* (1785-1985), the (*Manchester*) *Guardian* (1821-2003), *The Observer* (1791-2003), the *Daily Mail* (1896-2004), and the *British Newspaper Archive*, which contains a wealth of pages from regional newspapers up to the 1950s. While the digital archives of leading daily papers contained all issues of the time period 1939 to 1948, the regional newspapers on the British Library's *British Newspaper Archive* database were incomplete runs. Therefore, before any searches were conducted, the available issues of newspapers held in the database were noted. For instance, while the *Aberdeen Journal* was available in a complete run between 1939 and 1948, the *Bury Free Press* was only available for the year 1948. Therefore, the limitations of the database—missing issues which had not been digitised—were considered. Having done so, a number of keywords and phrases were typed into search engines to retrieve newspaper content, the first, rather blunt phrase, being "German prisoners of war". This search provided tens of thousands of results in each database, as did "German prisoners". Two other phrases were also keyed into search engines: "Nazi prisoners" and "Hun prisoners". Furthermore, these words were then paired with abbreviation of prisoners of war: "German POW", "Nazi POW", and "Hun POW". The abbreviated searched produced far fewer results. Another set of

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<sup>62</sup> Adrian Bingham, 'Reading Newspapers: Cultural Histories of the Popular Press in Modern Britain', *History Compass*, 10: 2 (2012), 140-50, (p.141).

<sup>63</sup> Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary Theory* (London: Verso, 2005).

searches were also conducted. Rather than phrases, keywords were used: "German AND prisoner", "Nazi AND prisoner", "Hun and prisoner", also searching for the abbreviated variant "POW". An example of the search results taken from the *British Newspaper Archive* is provided below.



**Table 1 Full-text searches in regional newspapers**

On the one hand, these searches revealed that the subject was within the content of newspapers. On the other, sifting through such a mass of results was an immense task. The collection and analysis of newspaper content was therefore conducted at time period intervals. Rather than using the date parameter of 1939 to 1948, specific years were then searched, i.e. 1939, also certain periods, i.e. June 1944 to May 1945. Interval searches made collecting and analysing newspaper content far more manageable. Moreover, other content was occasionally retrieved during these specific time period searches. Finding the right keyword is imperative to successful database searches.

The quantitative data collected from search results should be assessed with caution. There are two pitfalls in particular. First, the terminology keyed into search engines may not retrieve results of any relevance to that topic in hand. For instance, search results for the phrase "German prisoners" or "German prisoners of war" could mean one of several things: the results could have been content regarding the subject of research—German prisoners of war held in Britain. 'German prisoners' could also refer to German civilian internees. Equally, the phrase could also refer to prisoners of war in German captivity, i.e. Allied prisoners, civilian internees, or perhaps concentration

camp inmates in German hands. Secondly, the scanning process, i.e. the method by which the physical item is transformed into a digital form, must be considered. While relevant content is certainly picked up by search engines, other relevant content is equally missed due to the inadequacies of the process. Therefore, the results gathered from digital archives are not infallible. With such a crude methodology, it is unwise to place significant interpretative weight on the results. However, what quantifying the results and visually displaying them in a graph has done is to point out possible time periods of significant interest, which can be explored through the second digital methodology. While digitisation has enabled new quantitative/distance readings of newspaper content, it has enabled rigorous qualitative/close reading as well. The time saved in searching for relevant content is invested in reading the material gathered.

During the 1940s, Mass-Observation studied the attitudes of readers towards their newspapers. Between 1940 and 1948 the M-O panel was periodically asked to rank a number of opinion forming influences in order of their significance (see, Table 2).<sup>64</sup> Rankings demonstrated that over eight years the influence of the press declined. In 1940, the influence of newspapers was lesser only to books and personal judgement. A year later the panellists were clearly more wary of opinions in the press, with personal experience also considered more significant, and by 1944 the opinions of friends and family joined these three factors—books, personal judgement, and personal experience—in being considered more influential on opinion formation than the press. It was not only the reliability newspaper content which came into increasing doubt over the period, similar patterns of changing opinion were found with radio and films. In the view of M-O, the war had a clear impact on attitudes towards the press which was thought to be biased and often regarded as sensationalist. As a result, there was an increased wariness towards newspaper content. Despite the trustworthiness of the press being brought into account, this was considered a minority group and M-O still regarded newspapers as a powerful former of public opinion in 1949. The power of the press to shape opinion lay in the subtle absorption of opinion by readers who engaged with the content uncritically.

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<sup>64</sup> Mass-Observation, *The Press and Its Readers* (London: Art & Technics Ltd, 1949), p. 91.

	1940	1941	1942	1944	1946	1948
Personal experience	5	2	2	2	1	1
Own opinion	1	1	1	1	2	3
Books	2	3	3	3	3	2
Friends and family	4	6	5	4	4	4
Newspapers	3	4	4	5	5	5
Recent travel and history	6	7	6	7	6	6
Radio	7	5	7	6	7	7
Meetings	9	11	8	9	8	8
Pamphlets	8	8	9	8	9	9
Films	10	9	10	10	10	10
Posters	12	12	12	12	11	12
Public information and leaflets	11	10	11	11	12	11

**Table 2 Mass-Observation Panellists ranking of opinion-forming influences**

While the majority of newspaper content is written by journalists, columnists, and editorials, newspaper readers also contributed in the form of letters. In their research into the attitudes of newspaper readers, M-O assessed the readership of correspondence columns, also known as letters to the editor. It was found that the popularity of letters was proportionate to their light-heartedness. In general, beyond the *Daily Mirror* and *Sunday Express* which took advantage of this relationship, only a small proportion of newspaper readers admitted to reading the correspondence columns.<sup>65</sup> Certainly, the subjects who write letters to newspaper editors are not representative of the wider readership. They are often more engaged in the subject of their letter than others—or with newspaper reading more generally—and had the time to spend composing their letter(s). In some cases an individual may have written only once on topic that irked them, others were habitual letter writers. Debates between two or more occasionally broke out, with replies and rebukes exchanged over several weeks, sometimes months. All letters were subject to the scrutiny of the editor they addressed, and ultimately the

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 56-8.

majority sent were thinned out through selection. Yet, as a source they are still important despite these considerations. Within them are insights into how certain individuals responded to the stories they read and the events in their everyday lives. They engaged with broader issues, speaking to political, social, and cultural debates then in progress. The frequency and quantity of letters indicates the importance to newspaper readers of the particular topic they are concerned with.<sup>66</sup>

Like their printed counterpart, newsreels are also records which can be read to understand the narrative of events presented to the public. A product of the growth of cinema construction in the early twentieth century, newsreels—a collection of selected news items on a single film reel—were released twice a week in Britain between 1910 and 1979. Typically, they were broadcast prior to feature films at cinemas and in dedicated newsreel theatres in major cities. The five major newsreel companies all imitated each other to a considerable degree, and the style and delivery of newsreels mimicked newspapers. In regards to their audience, statistical surveys suggest that by 1940 the average weekly attendance at the 4618 cinemas open—a small number were closed during the Blitz—exceeded 21 million and that around half the population watched newsreels. In the late 1930s, the highest concentration of cinemas was in industrial areas of Scotland, the North of England, South Wales and the Midlands, while the lowest was in the Eastern Counties, Home Counties and the West of England. The availability of relatively cheap tickets—around 1 shilling at most—and the kind of programmes shown fostered a special relationship with the working class. During the war years, there was an increased middle class acceptance of the cinema, but this special relationship continued. The regular cinema attenders were from lower income groups.<sup>67</sup> Newsreels, as a source of primary information about the events they portrayed, are of peripheral value. However, as records of what a very large, socially important, and relatively little documented sections of the public saw and heard, they are of historical significance. Newsreels document popular obsessions, and are a useful barometer of social change and popular awareness.<sup>68</sup> Historical understanding and value is also found when the production process is considered. It is not just the content that can be examined: assignment and commentary sheets, as well as shot lists survive which

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<sup>66</sup> Denise Bates, *Historical Research Using British Newspapers* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2016) pp. 32-3; Rose, *Which Peoples?* pp. 26-7.

<sup>67</sup> Nicholas Pronay, 'British Newsreels in the 1930s 1: Audience and producers', *History*, 56 (1971), 411-18.

<sup>68</sup> Nicholas Pronay, 'British Newsreels in the 1930s 2: Their polices and impact', *History*, 57 (1972), 63-72.

illuminate editorial practice.<sup>69</sup> During the war, they were indeed censored. The Ministry of Information recognised that newsreels, like short films and documentaries, were useful, more so than feature films, for direct, immediate, short-term information and instruction, particularly on the home front. As negative propaganda, that is the control of information, newsreels are comparable to other news media such as newspapers and radio.<sup>70</sup> The Ministry controlled footage, shooting, editing and censoring the material provided newsreel companies. However, the newsreel companies could interpret the footage to a degree, which the different commentary for the same footage testifies.

The Mass-Observation (M-O) archive located at the University of Sussex and accessible through a searchable online database provides an essential source base for historians of Britain.<sup>71</sup> M-O generated a vast amount of material. There were two principal sources from which material was gathered. The first source was the volunteer panel, the 500 or so individuals who sent off their diaries and responded directly to questions in M-O directives and day surveys. These diaries were scoured for entries concerning attitudes towards and encounters with German POWs. Some diarists made only one passing mention of German POWs. Others regularly wrote of those they had befriended. The second source of material was collected from the M-O investigators who were paid to visit a variety of places to observe people's behaviour and eavesdrop. The material gathered was analysed and then summarised, written up as File Reports. These reports formed the basis of M-O publications. This thesis also made use of the Topic Collections, the material arranged by investigators by theme such as Air Raids and Demobilisation. There are limitations to the material gathered from M-O.

Material held at the Modern Records Centre located at Warwick University was consulted in relation to the employment and welfare of German POWs. The files of the Trades Union Congress provided insight into the attitudes of the various affiliated trade unions as well as discussions between the trade union movement and the British authorities regards the employment of German POWs. The papers of Victor Gollancz are also held at the MRC. Chairing the post-war pressure group Save Europe Now,

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<sup>69</sup> Nicholas Hiley and Luck Mckernan, 'Reconstructing the news: British newsreel documentation and the British Universities Newsreel Project', *Film History*, 13: 2 (2001), 185-99, (p.187).

<sup>70</sup> James Chapman, *The British At War: Cinema, State and Propaganda, 1939-45* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998), pp. 250-2.

<sup>71</sup> For a history of the organisation see, Nick Hubble, *Mass-Observation and Everyday Life: Culture, History, Theory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), James Hinton, *The Mass-Observers: A History, 1937-1949* (Oxford: OUP, 2013).

Gollancz campaigned on issues relating to the treatment of German POWs, notably their repatriation.

## **Chapter outline**

This thesis is composed of five main chapters, divided into two parts. Chapters two and three discuss the wartime period, while chapters four, five, and six deal with the post-war years, ending in 1948. Although broadly chronological, the framework is also thematic, reflecting the changing wartime, post-war, and emerging Cold War context as well as the variety of debates connected with German POWs and their treatment.

Chapter two explores attitudes towards German POWs and their treatment between September 1939 and December 1942. The period before D-Day is often considered insignificant and is rarely discussed in detail. This chapter demonstrates there was interest in the capture and conditions afforded German POWs, particularly during the phoney war. The treatment of German POWs was compared with that of British POWs in Germany during the First World War. Further, as this chapter examines, the recapture of British POWs from the German tanker *Altmark* provided some excitement during the 'Bore War'. Reportage underwent a significant change whereby distrust and danger characterised the landing of German POW captures, replacing the cordial reception during the months of phoney war. There were two episodes after the decision to remove German POWs was taken when the POW issue resurfaced in public discussion: a mooted exchange of POWs in October 1941 and a reprisal cycle known as the Shackling Crisis beginning in October 1942.

Continuing the survey of attitudes chronologically, chapter three examines the period between the Normandy landings in June 1944 and the unconditional surrender of Germany in May 1945. In contrast to the period examined in the previous chapter, the war against Germany had swung in favour of the Allies. This 'second wave' of German POWs entering Britain marked a departure from the earlier period. Yet, this period is characteristically different in another more important way. Two atrocities which were disclosed to the British public bookend the period: the execution of escapees from Stalag Luft III in June 1944 and the treatment of concentration camp inmates following the liberation of Belsen in April 1945. The latter had a profound impact on attitudes towards the treatment of German POWs. Breaking from the chronological survey of wartime attitudes, the second part of the thesis examines three interconnected debates regarding the treatment of German POWs in post-war Britain.

Chapter four examines the employment of German POWs. Fond memories of German POW labourers were shared at the outbreak of war but calls to employ them were dismissed given that there were too few to be of real benefit to the economy. Calls to employ them were often not made out of retribution but of practicality: it gave something for the POWs to do, and would help plug labour gaps. The tone would radically alter in 1945; setting German POWs to work was seen as a legitimate form of reparations after the devastating conflict they had caused. Morality and justice aside, from the perspective of cabinet ministers German POWs were an essential post-war labour source, particularly in agriculture. With the repatriation of Italians, Germans were increasingly employed. The reasons why certain sections of the trade union movement resisted the employment of a useful labour source are explored.

Chapter five examines attitudes towards what is broadly defined as 'interactions' with German POWs. The employment remit of German POWs progressively widened from the initial experiment in 1944. Although a significant number were employed in the agricultural sector, directed into a variety of jobs by WAECs, German POWs could be found working in a number of sectors on a variety of tasks, as well as performing odd-jobs at private homes. Interactions between employers and their German POW labourers were policed by fraternisation regulations. Fraternisation regulations were criticised as petty, a continuation of hostile mentality mobilised to fight the war against Germany. What becomes apparent in the letters sent to newspaper editors and parliamentary questions is a desire for what John Horne initially coined as 'cultural demobilisation'.<sup>72</sup> Studies of German POWs have focused on fraternisation regulations and re-education policy examining how German POWs, ignorant and sceptical of the workings of democracy, were re-orientated onto democratic lines. Seeking a new outlook, chapter four examines the broader desire for German POWs to participate in civil society as a means to mitigate the tedium routine and mental stress of captivity as well as fostering understanding between former enemies within the emerging context of the Cold War.

The final theme, which out of the three examined vexed the British public the most, is the repatriation, or rather lack of a progressive repatriation scheme for, German POWs. In tandem with the calls to relax fraternisation regulations and allow German POWs to participate in British life were appeals to draw up a progressive scheme of repatriation. As with confining them to camps, detaining German POWs indefinitely

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<sup>72</sup> John Horne, 'Demobilizing the Mind: France and the Legacy of the Great War, 1919-1939', *French History and Civilization*, 2 (2009), 101-19.

was thought to be endangering future Anglo-German relations and, in the emerging Cold War context, undermining the British image, pushing German POWs and/or their families at home towards communism. Chaired by the charismatic left-wing publisher turned philanthropist Victor Gollancz, Save Europe Now, a post-war campaign which developed into a pressure group, took concerns over the continued indefinite detention of German POWs straight to the Attlee administration. The chapter explores the arguments for the drawing up of a repatriation scheme, the presentation of a petition to Prime Minister Attlee by SEN, and the cabinet discussion and response.

## Chapter 2: 1939-1942

### 1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the period between the outbreak of war in September 1939 and the unchaining of German POWs in December 1942—this event will be explained below. The first section assesses news coverage of the capture of German POWs and the conditions afforded them in British camps during the period of 'phoney war'. Through a reading of newspaper and newsreel content, a picture of the reception of German POWs is sketched. The cordial relationship between captor and captive which emerges in the media is explained by considering the cultural connection of sporting attitudes in wartime, the lack of militarist spirit, and the portrayal of the Nazi leadership as Britain's principal enemy. Drawing on the work of Heather Jones, it is suggested that fair play was a recurring cultural factor in discussions of POW treatment, one which will be traced throughout this dissertation. Despite being a divisive issue, both praise and criticism of the treatment of German POWs drew upon the rhetoric of fair play and decency. The second section examines the *Altmark* incident. On first reading, this incident had little to do with German POWs and their treatment. Yet, understanding that British self-image was in part constructed against the German enemy, the treatment of British POWs aboard the *Altmark* is worthy of consideration. In contrast to the fair treatment of German POWs, reportage of the treatment of British POWs aboard the *Altmark* exaggerated the horrific conditions they were subjected to and the malevolent behaviour of the captain. The third section examines news coverage of German POWs during the 'fifth column' scare and after, when, under the new Churchill administration it was decided to transport German POWs along with enemy civilian internees to the dominions. During this time a hostile tone was adopted towards German POWs which had emerged during the *Altmark* affair. Media interest in German POWs and their treatment declined after the decision was taken to transport to the dominions. This is not to suggest they disappeared from newspapers and newsreels, as occasional articles continued to appear in newspapers and newsreels. Furthermore, there were two flashpoints when the POW issue aroused public interest again during this period. The fourth section examines the mooted exchange of POWs in October 1941 before and after it was cancelled. Here, hopes that British and German POWs would be repatriated were dashed at the last minute. The fifth section examines attitudes towards the manacled German POWs in October-December 1942, during the Shackling Crisis.

As will be seen, while Churchill made a defiant stance by retaliating, by and large the British public were uncomfortable with the manacling of German POWs. Parallel attitudes are drawn with the bombing of German cities.

Studies of German POWs in Britain during the time period considered in this chapter have focused on the development of British POW policy and Anglo-German relations regarding the POW issue. British authorities showed little interest in both German and British POWs during the phoney war.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, POWs were rarely discussed at cabinet meetings. Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, and Kingsley Wood, and Secretary of State for Air, informed ministers of sporadic captures of *Kriegsmarine* from U-boats and *Luftwaffe* pilots.<sup>2</sup> Only one memorandum was circulated at cabinet level in December 1939 on German POWs. Prepared by the Department of Enemy Propaganda it discussed the 250 German POWs then held in Britain. Although their morale was 'high and their attitudes inclined to be defiant', they were not 'hostile'. Given the ignorance of the POWs of events outside Europe and their 'exaggerated admiration for Hitler', some sort of future political re-education was recommended.<sup>3</sup> While German POWs aroused little interest in official circles, their capture and arrival prompted public discussion. With little actual fighting, the treatment of POWs became an early means to discuss British self-image and the image of the German enemy.

## 2. The 'phoney war', September 1939 to January 1940

Contrary to apocalyptic expectations, inaction followed Neville Chamberlain's broadcast on 3 September 1939 that a state of war now existed with Germany. Richard Overy overstates the despairing prognosis for civilisation touted by British intellectuals and scientists during what he terms 'The Morbid Age'.<sup>4</sup> Yet, when the thoughts of mass-observers turned to a recurrent major war in late August and early September 1939, 'one is', a file report summarised, 'deeply aware of the sense of doom that lay over the

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<sup>1</sup> Wylie, *Diplomacy*, pp. 65-8; David Rolf, 'Blind Bureaucracy': The British Government and POWs in German Captivity, 1939-45', in *Prisoners*, ed. by Moore and Fedorowich (Oxford: Berg, 1996), pp. 47-68, p. 48. Barbara Hatley-Broad argues that the British authorities were 'unprepared for the sheer scale of the burden that administering services allowances in a time of war would entail'. Barbara Hatley-Broad, *War and Welfare: British Prisoner of War Families, 1939-45* (Manchester: MUP, 2009), p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> CAB 65/1 WM 16 (39)3, 15 September 1939; AB 61/1 WM 29 (39)1, 27 September 1939; HC Deb, 27 September 1939, vol. 351, cols. 1346-7.

<sup>3</sup> CAB 67/3 WP (G) (39) 157, German Prisoners of War in Great Britain, 18 December 1939.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain Between the Wars* (London: Allen Lane, 2009).

country [and] the feeling that the end of all things is at hand'.<sup>5</sup> With the upheaval of 'total war' having already been experienced, the public in 1939 had, Robert Mackay argues, a 'fairly clear idea of what a major war would be like'.<sup>6</sup> After the Zeppelin raids during the First World War the distinction between combatant and civilian, home and fighting fronts was blurred. The experience demonstrated the vulnerability of the British civilian population in a future conflict.<sup>7</sup> Cinemagoers could envisage the destruction wrought on British cities in another war, having witnessed the razing of Madrid and Guernica during the Spanish Civil War and Shanghai during the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937 newsreels. The 'next war' was imagined in literature and film, most notably the 1933 novel *The Shape of Things to Come* by H. G. Wells. The 1936 film adaptation opened with the levelling of 'Everytown', an obvious parody of London, in 1940.<sup>8</sup> Orwell also forewarned of the imminent arrival of enemy squadrons overhead through his protagonist George Bowling in *Coming Up for Air*.<sup>9</sup> In the actual event, reality did not match end of the world expectations. Air raid sirens blared unnecessarily and 3.5 million were evacuated to escape the anticipated devastation. Evacuees slowly returned home as the reality of the Bore War set in.<sup>10</sup> Masses of enemy aircraft loaded with an incendiary and poison gas payload that would unleash Armageddon on British cities did not materialise. Instead, eight months of 'phoney war' ensued. 'The whole country', M-O reflected, 'had been keyed up to the highest pitch of tension and had undergone tremendous emotional and material upheavals to meet a catastrophe which did not come'.<sup>11</sup>

Sporadic captures of German POWs in late 1939 provided an indication of ongoing conflict between Britain and Germany. The arrival of a group of U-boat captives at a British port was, as *Pathe* newsreel commentator Bob Danvers-Walker declared, 'living proof that once more an enemy vessel of war has been destroyed'.<sup>12</sup> Reprinting a Ministry of Information statement, newspapers reported that the first

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<sup>5</sup> MOA, FR 2181, *The Crisis*, dated November 1944, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> Mackay, *Half the Battle*, p. 39.

<sup>7</sup> Susan R. Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire: Air Raids and Culture in Britain from the Great War to the Blitz* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), pp. 64-92. Heather Jones, 'The Great War: How 1914-18 Changed the Relationship between War and Civilians', *The RUSI Journal*, 159:4 (2014), 84-91.

<sup>8</sup> See Grayzel, pp. 93-120; Mackay, *Half the Battle*, pp. 39-42.

<sup>9</sup> George Orwell, *Coming up for Air* (London: Penguin, [1939] 1970), pp. 223-4.

<sup>10</sup> David Reynolds, *The Long Shadow: The Great War and the Twentieth Century* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2013), pp. 248-9.

<sup>11</sup> MOA, FR 2181, *The Crisis*, dated November 1944, p. 52.

<sup>12</sup> *British Pathe*, issue no. 39/96, 7 December 1939, U-Boat Prisoners, 7/7. Similarly, *British Paramount News* referred to the U-boat prisoners as 'evidence'. *British Paramount News*, issue no. 915, 7 December 1939, 'Navy Hands over "The Evidence"', 6/7.

German POWs arrived on 21 September.<sup>13</sup> The short article noted that POWs 'laughed when a woman in a small group of spectators at a station shouted, "Hard luck, mate," to which a prisoner replied "Not so hard."' <sup>14</sup> Subsequent articles in late 1939 portrayed a similarly cordial reception and relaxed atmosphere between captor and captive, with POWs smiling and waving to spectators which had gathered to inspect them at ports, railway stations, and the roadside.<sup>15</sup> Curiosity over the captured Germans was evident at Glen Mill in Oldham, Lancashire where the resident POWs quickly became a local attraction. Accommodating the 'other ranks', Glen Mill was one of two initial POW camps; the other being Grizedale Hall in Ambleside which held officers. Shortly after the arrival of the first POWs, on 24 September, a *Daily Mail* journalist reported that they had 'joined the hundreds of people who climbed the slopes overlooking a disused mill in the hope of seeing 40 German prisoners of war'. Since the arrival of the POWs, the crowds had scaled the vantage point each day to view the captives.<sup>16</sup> Reportage suggests that the dominant reaction of the public towards German POWs was curiosity rather than demonstration. As well as being a novelty during an uneventful conflict, the German POWs were perhaps the first 'real' Germans the voyeurs on the Lancashire hilltop had seen in the flesh.

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<sup>13</sup> D-Notices were issued to the media which was subject to censorship. Regarding enemy POWs, the regulations stated: 'No information should be published without submission to Censorship concerning the activities, movements, locations or identity of enemy prisoners of war or internees in the United Kingdom or elsewhere'. MOA, TC: Ministry of Information 1938 to 1941, 43/2/E Ministry of Information Defence Notices, 1941, p. 37.

<sup>14</sup> 'German Prisoners Landed in England', *Cornishman*, 21 September 1939, p. 3. 'German Prisoners Arrive', *Hull Daily Mail*, 22 September 1939, p. 6. 'German Officers in England', *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 22 September 1939, p. 1. 'German Prisoners in Britain', *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 22 September 1939, p. 1. 'German Prisoners in England', *Portsmouth Evening News*, 22 September 1939, p. 1. 'German Prisoners Arrive in England To-day', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 22 September 1939, p. 1. 'German Prisoners Arrive in England', *Manchester Guardian*, 23 September 1939, p. 10. 'German Prisoners in Britain', *Aberdeen Journal*, 23 September 1939, p. 1. 'German Prisoners in England', *Western Daily Press*, 23 September 1939, p. 4. 'German Prisoners in Britain', *Western Morning News*, 23 September 1939, p. 5. 'First War Prisoners Seem to Like It', *Daily Mail*, 23 September 1939, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> 'More German Prisoners Arrive', *Hartlepool Mail*, 28 September 1939, p. 4. 'More German Prisoners', *Gloucester Citizen*, 28 September 1939, p. 8. 'German Prisoners', *Arbroath Herald*, 29 September 1939, p. 5. 'German Prisoners Leave Scotland', *Lancashire Daily Post*, 4 December 1939, p. 1. 'German Prisoners "Flit" From Scottish Camp', *Dundee Courier*, 5 December 1939, p. 4. 'Nazi Prisoners Moved Again', *Lincolnshire Echo*, 13 December 1939, p. 1. 'German Prisoners in Happy Mood', *Aberdeen Journal*, 12 April 1940, p. 5. 'German Prisoners in a Cheerful Mood', *Aberdeen Journal*, 9 May 1940, p. 3. 'German Prisoners Leave Scotland', *Lancashire Daily Post*, 4 December 1939, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> 'Germans Held in Disused Mill', *Daily Mail*, 25 September 1939, p. 2. 'U-Boat Captives in Cotton Mill', *Manchester Guardian*, 29 September 1939, p. 4. This article was reproduced in regional newspapers, for example, 'More U-Boat Men Pinned Behind Barbed Wire', *Dundee Courier*, 29 September 1939, p. 5.

The scenes at Glen Mill echoed those at Frimley Common twenty five years before, where, in 1914 German POWs were watched marching to the camp. Assessing the reception of German POWs in Britain during the Great War, Panayi notes that the dominant reaction of the public was curiosity.<sup>17</sup> According to Brian Feltman British civilians were generally 'rather indifferent' to German POWs, although some 'occasionally received an unexpectedly warm welcome to the U.K.'. In contrast, POWs met 'frenzied excitement that sometimes erupted into violence' in France and Germany.<sup>18</sup> This is not to suggest violence was totally absent from the home front. Anti-German riots occurred in the wake of the sinking of the *Lusitania*.<sup>19</sup> Yet, as Jones contends, powerful cultural factors acted against the radicalisation of POW treatment witnessed in France and Germany. She suggests that it was the British notion of fair play, epitomised by the poem 'Vitai Lampada', which acted to constrain POW abuse.<sup>20</sup>

The continued relationship between war and sport was observed by M-O. The outbreak of war resulted in general disorganisation for most sports, with limitations set on crowd capacity, the requisition of premises, and the calling up of professionals being the main difficulties faced.<sup>21</sup> At the end of November 1939, M-O asked 'sports followers' if the war had altered their interest in sport: 48 per cent answered that the war had lessened their interest in sport; 9 per cent answered that it had increased their interest; and, 43 per cent stated that they retained their peace-time interest.<sup>22</sup> 'The people', M-O suggested, 'brought up on mass sports (where they sit and watch without taking part) look to the war for a similar show'.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, Harrison and Madge speculated that:

If the war had immediately become more dramatic, and displayed the same elements of contest and conflict between two sides or moieties, which is the dominant interest in most sports (where the spectator also identifies himself with one particular side), then the sport habit might have been even much more seriously reduced.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Panikos Panayi, *Prisoners of Britain: German civilian and combatant internees during the First World War* (Manchester: MUP, 2012), pp. 62-4.

<sup>18</sup> Brian Feltman, *The Stigma of Surrender: German Prisoners, British Captors, and Manhood in the Great War and Beyond* (North Carolina: UNC, 2015), p. 49.

<sup>19</sup> Panikos Panayi, *Enemy in our Midst: Germans in Britain during the First World War*, (London: Bloomsbury, 1991), pp. 223-258.

<sup>20</sup> Jones, *Violence*, p. 376.

<sup>21</sup> MOA, FR 6, Sport in War-Time, 29 October 1939, p. 2-3.

<sup>22</sup> Tom Harrison and Charles Madge, *War Begins At Home* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1940), p. 261.

<sup>23</sup> *US 6: Mass-Observation's Weekly Intelligence Service*, 9 March 1940, p. 41.

<sup>24</sup> Harrison and Madge, *War*, p. 264.

This evidence suggests that the relationship between war and sport continued into the Second World War, and the notion of fair play returned in discussions of the treatment of POWs. Understanding that the treatment of enemy POWs was an expression of internal values, a *Yorkshire Post* journalist argued that: 'Our reputation for good treatment of prisoners of war is too valuable to lose. Were we to abandon it, we should be renouncing those ideals of humanity and fair play which we have gone to war to defend'.<sup>25</sup> In February 1940, the *Yorkshire Post* quoted the Chairman of Grimsby Health Committee who stated: 'I am informed by the doctor that the sportsmanship of the Englishman is so apparent that the third hand of the trawler which rescued them has visited the hospital and presented the wounded pilot with cigarettes'.<sup>26</sup> Fair play was a central cultural consideration in the treatment of enemy POWs in 1939 as it had been in the last war.

Violence meted out on enemy POWs in 1914, according to Heather Jones, was fuelled by xenophobia. With hatred of the enemy being an integral part of national mobilisation and the development of war culture, it in turn motivated violence against POWs.<sup>27</sup> In 1939, Chamberlain's declaration of a state of war was not met with a patriotic outpouring. 'Never before in the whole history of mankind', M-O reflected, 'can a people have embarked on a major war with such total absence of martial spirit as was displayed by this country on September 3rd 1939'.<sup>28</sup> While Arthur Marwick quipped, that 'Other countries had revolutions; Britain had a Coupon Election', there was significant fear that the First World War had brutalised society.<sup>29</sup> Rioting in 1919, violent crimes committed by ex-soldiers and the ferocity of the Black and Tan war all provided evidence of a process of brutalisation. Yet, anti-militarist attitudes prevailed and, in contrast to Germany, violence was not legitimised in post-war Britain.<sup>30</sup> 'Paradoxically', Jon Lawrence argues, 'apocalyptic postwar visions suggesting that civilisation had been undone by the brutality of war served only to strengthen mythic views of Britain as a uniquely peaceable kingdom'.<sup>31</sup> Rejecting the militarism of the

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<sup>25</sup> 'Escape', *Yorkshire Post*, 12 December 1939, p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> 'Sportsmanship', *Yorkshire Post*, 14 February 1940, p. 6.

<sup>27</sup> Jones, *Violence*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>28</sup> FR 2181, *The Crisis*, November 1944, p. 36.

<sup>29</sup> Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 2nd ed., (London: Macmillan, 1991), p. 350.

<sup>30</sup> Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in interwar Britain* (Princeton: PUP, 1993).

<sup>31</sup> Jon Lawrence, 'Forging a Peaceable Kingdom: War, Violence, and Fear of Brutalization in Post-First World War Britain', *Journal of Modern History*, 75:3 (2003), 557-89, (p.558).

Great War, 'the British—rulers and ruled alike—found reassurance in the belief that they were a uniquely peaceable people'.<sup>32</sup> The watchword of the 1930s was 'Never Again', as David Reynolds reminds us.<sup>33</sup> Even with the outbreak of war, the commitment to finding a peaceful solution remained, evidenced by 2,435 joining the Peace Pledge Union in September 1939, followed by another 2,280 in October.<sup>34</sup>

In conjunction with the rejection of militarism, the inter-war period witnessed the cultivation of a more courteous British self-image. Charting the reformation of interwar English national character, Mandler argues that the image of John Bull was unsuited to the modern Englishman. Strube's 'Little Man', appearing in the *Daily Express*, exemplified a new national character which was less aggressive and more gentlemanly.<sup>35</sup> Stereotypical masculine representations of the nation as great heroes and adventures in foreign places tapered as the home and ordinariness became pillars in the construction of national identity.<sup>36</sup> During the Second World War, a tempered British masculinity of was contrasted to the hyper-masculine Nazi Other.<sup>37</sup> Attempting to pin down their national characteristics in 1941, George Orwell wrote that 'The gentleness of the English civilization is perhaps its most marked characteristic'.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to the ideal of fair-play and the lack of marital spirit, a final factor helps explain the cordial reception of German POWs in 1939. Reportage of the reception of German POWs aided the differentiation of the ordinary German from the Nazi leadership, Hitler and his cronies being the principal enemy rather than the German people. The atmosphere was amiable at the Scottish port where five officers and 38 crew of the U-35 disembarked a British destroyer on 3 December.<sup>39</sup> Hundreds of Royal Navy sailors 'cheered' and 'waved their caps' to the POWs as they alighted. Amongst the 'good humoured sallies', British sailors encouraged the Germans to 'Get a transfer' and 'Come and join the Navy'. Singled out by the sailors, one particular POW received 'a special cheer'. Fluent in English, he 'had made himself popular with his

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<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Reynolds, p. 247

<sup>34</sup> Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain 1914-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 295.

<sup>35</sup> Peter Mandler, *The English National Character: The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (London: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 163-84.

<sup>36</sup> Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature, and Conservatism between the Wars* (London: Routledge, 1991). Martial prowess and adventurousness did not disappear, but was confined to Boy's Own fiction, see, Michael Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture, 1850-2000* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000).

<sup>37</sup> Rose, *Which People's War?* p. 153.

<sup>38</sup> George Orwell, *Why I Write* (London: Penguin, 2004).

<sup>39</sup> The U-boat was undoubtedly the U-35. See, Paul Kemp, *U-Boats Destroyed: German Submarine Losses in the World Wars*, (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1997), p. 62.

captors'. A 'flaxen-haired youth', the German was greeted as 'Blondie'. Hurrying down the gangway, the British sailors sang 'Good old Blondie' in chorus. Last to go ashore, the commander of the U-boat, 'a strongly-built young man', made his way down the gangway, and given a 'warm welcome'. Shaking hands with the British officers, his departure was greeted with vigorous applause 'as if in a token of some heroic act'. The German POWs were 'given a remarkably friendly send-off by their captors'. Having distributed cigarettes amongst the German POWs, the British sailors cheered them as buses drove them to their camps. The POWs replied by waving their hands.<sup>40</sup> Pictures in newspapers accompanying articles describing the disembarkation of the U-boat POWs showed them smiling for the camera and sharing cigarettes with British sailors. Newsreel commentators observed the camaraderie between German and British sailors. 'They may be enemies', Lesile Mitchell of *British Movietone* commented, 'but the tradition of the sea is one of courtesy between victor and vanquished, and Britain knows how to treat her prisoners'.<sup>41</sup> *Pathe* similarly observed 'no enmity between them and jack tar'.<sup>42</sup> The cordial rapport between captor and captive emphasised in reportage of the disembarkation of the U-boat crew underscored the idea that there was no animosity between the British and the ordinary German, feeding into the official view that the war was against Hitler and the Nazi leadership, not the German nation.

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<sup>40</sup> 'U-Boat Survivors Landed at Scottish Port', *Scotsman*, 4 December 1939. 'German Naval Losses', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 4 December 1939, p. 5. 'Navymen Cheer Nazis', *Aberdeen Journal*, 4 December 1939, p. 1. 'Sailors Cheer U-Boat Prisoners', *Western Daily Press*, 4 December 1939, p. 1.

<sup>41</sup> *British Movietone News*, issue no. 584A, 7 December 1939, U-boat Prisoners Smile on England, 4/7.

<sup>42</sup> *British Pathe*, issue no. 39/96, 7 December 1939, U-Boat Prisoners, 7/7.



**Image 1** *Western Morning News*, 5 December 1939, p. 5.



**Image 2** *Aberdeen Press*, 5 December 1939, p. 1.

Pamphlets published by the Ministry of Information in 1939 professed that the Nazi leadership was the principal enemy being fought, and were remorseful that war had broken out between British and Germans. Providing an in-depth analysis of German history in *Why we are fighting Germany*, D. A. Routh explained that once again the German people had allowed their nation to be ruled by aggressive and ruthless individuals.<sup>43</sup> The German nation was not beyond salvation if National Socialism could be overthrown. In *Assurance to Victory*, the German people were viewed as victims of Nazi tyranny. Hitler had 'trampled on' their rights just as he had done in Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, *Hitler and the Working Man* exonerated the German people from blame for the failings of National Socialism.<sup>45</sup> Ian McLaine argues that this particular pamphlet was 'symptomatic of the extent to which the spirit of appeasement still pervaded the Chamberlain government'.<sup>46</sup> Yet, the camaraderie expressed during encounters between German captive and British captor concerned a section of the public which viewed the war differently.

'Our lack of appreciation of the true character and mentality of the Germans', bemoaned Major-General Ernest Swinton in his weekly review of the war in the *Daily Mail*, 'is sometimes shown by our treatment of prisoners'.

But when one thinks of the sinking without warning of merchant vessels, the drowning of passengers and crews, the fate of widows and orphans, and when one recalls the horrors of Vienna, Prague, Warsaw, and German concentration camps, any question of camaraderie with the perpetrators of these crimes seems singularly out of place. A sense of proportion is required. Neither during the war, nor after, can we afford to indulge in this kind of camaraderie. This is not a sporting contest and there can be no rest for until the enemy's claws are drawn once for all. Well might we leave the greater part of the framing of the peace to our French ally, whose sterner logic will save him from the pitfall of a false sentimentality.<sup>47</sup>

For Swinton, the camaraderie expressed between the captured Germans U-boat crew and their Royal Navy captors symbolised the failure of the British people to grasp the reality that it was the aggressive expansionism of the German nation, not just the ambitions of Hitler, which was being fought against. The 'nice distinctions' between the German people and Nazis, and idea that Britain had no dispute with the German nation

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<sup>43</sup> D. A. Routh, *Why we are fighting Germany* (London: HMSO, 1939).

<sup>44</sup> Ministry of Information, *Assurance of Victory* (London: HMSO, 1939), p. 3.

<sup>45</sup> Ministry of Information, *Hitler and the Working Man* (London: HMSO, 1939).

<sup>46</sup> Ian McLaine, *Ministry of Morale: Home Front Morale and the Ministry of Information in World War II* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979), p. 141.

<sup>47</sup> Maj.-Gen. Sir Ernest Swinton, 'This theory is dangerous', *Daily Mail*, 7 December 1939, p. 6.

was a serious delusion. At the same time, Swinton stated: 'I am no advocate of brutality to prisoners of war. They should be properly housed and fed and kept in good health'.<sup>48</sup> Swinton was not alone and others shared his views. Penning a letter to the *Yorkshire Post*, M. W. Oakwood asked, 'How much longer is this nauseating rubbish to continue of U-boat crews being welcomed on landing?'.<sup>49</sup> Their brother-in-law a merchantman captain, Oakwood reminded readers that the British sailors shook hands with the very men who had murdered innocent merchant seaman. Applauding Oakwood, Tykebor, was equally 'sick' after reading of the reception of POWs at ports. 'The statement that we are not fighting the German people is at the bottom of much of this rot. We *are* fighting them *all*, till the canker is definitely cut out of the German nation'.<sup>50</sup> Contributing to the discussion, a former POW similarly dismissed the sentiment expressed towards German POWs. In sharing his experience of captivity during the last war, the ex-POW emphasised 'the brutal methods used then by the Germans', noting the poor food, arduous labour, and daily beatings they received from their guards. By recounting the brutality he suffered, the ex-POW hoped to reveal to readers what he considered to be the innate callousness of the average German.<sup>51</sup>

Others too pointed towards the cruelty shown British POWs in German hands during the Great War. Writing to the *Gloucestershire Echo* a Lieutenant Colonel found it 'extraordinary how the myth of the good, kind German still exists'. He asked: 'Are the barbarities inflicted on British prisoners of war entirely forgotten?'.<sup>52</sup> Some evidently had not. In the *Yorkshire Post*, Ernest Phillips noted that 'the inhuman treatment of prisoners of war' was one 'German contribution to civilised warfare'.<sup>53</sup> As these letters indicate, the memory of POW abuse was vented in the first months of the war.

Narratives of violence towards POWs were repressed during the inter-war period. Incapable of integrating it into the narrative of the war, Heather Jones suggests, after 1921 POW mistreatment was expediently forgotten in post-war societies. The 'memory of the prisoner of war', Jones suggests,

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<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> M. W. Oakwood, 'U-Boat Crews: Protests Against the Welcome Given to Them', *Yorkshire Post*, 6 December 1939, p. 3.

<sup>50</sup> Tykebor, 'U-Boat Crews: Treat Them "Decently"—but No "Slobbering"', *Yorkshire Post*, 9 December 1939, p. 5.

<sup>51</sup> Ex-Prisoner Of War, 'U-Boat Crews: German and Their Conduct in the Last War', *Yorkshire Post*, 11 December 1939, p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> 'Good Kind German A Myth', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 5 September 1939, p. 3.

<sup>53</sup> Ernest Phillips, 'Frightfulness: The German an "Untamed Warrior"', *Yorkshire Post*, 15 September 1939, p. 4.

was ultimately marginalised because it invariably invoked the question of violence against prisoners. This in turn raised the question of who were the *perpetrators* of that violence. In an interwar Europe that lionised ex-servicemen, few were comfortable facing that question.<sup>54</sup>

Memories of POW mistreatment were suppressed during the inter-war period in the attempt to forge international co-operation and peace.<sup>55</sup> Now in a state of war, memories of POW abuse were aired in order to demonise the enemy. While the warm welcome of German POWs upset ex-POWs, it would be the conditions afforded them in camps which would truly insult them.

In addition to publicising the arrival of German POWs, the press and newsreels depicted them in camps. The *Guardian* reported that a chief concern of the POWs had been a lack of cigarettes until a British officer had generously bought a supply for them. Their only desire was now was for their menu to include more potatoes and less meat.<sup>56</sup> In a caption to a picture of German POWs playing football, *The Times* noted that 'It is well recognized that the lot of the prisoner of war in this country is by no means unhappy'.<sup>57</sup> The *Daily Mail* depicted a usual Sunday routine of the German POWs, which included a trip to the camp barbers. The captives were shown preparing and sitting down to enjoy their 'midday meal of roast beef, vegetables, and a sweet'.<sup>58</sup> Similar pictures appeared in several newspapers. Depicting German POWs in a camp, a *Pathe* newsreel observed, during a shot of a POW carving meat for other POWs, that, 'it's at meal times they find the biggest improvement on home. There's a fair share of everything, and he's just heard you don't have to spread guns on their bread'.<sup>59</sup> Leslie Mitchell commenting on similar scenes in a *Movietone* newsreel noted that, 'Well housed and well fed, the German prisoners of war seem quite contented with their luck'.<sup>60</sup> In parliament, Hore-Belisha, secretary of state for war, assured the house that 'German prisoners of war are being well fed and well treated, and have shown

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<sup>54</sup> Jones, *Violence*, p. 256.

<sup>55</sup> The POW memoir was certainly a popular sub-genre of war book. However, they were predominately adventurous narratives of heroic escapes which sought to highlight the agency of British POWs, and demonstrated that even behind the barbed wire they resisted the enemy. Ian Isherwood, 'Writing the 'ill-managed nursery': British POW memoirs of the First World War', *First World War Studies*, 5:3 (2014), 267-86, 273-4.

<sup>56</sup> 'U-boat Captives in Cotton Mill: Football on the Roof', *Manchester Guardian*, 29 September 1939, p. 4..

<sup>57</sup> 'German Prisoners in England', *The Times*, 6 November 1939, p. 10.

<sup>58</sup> 'War Prisoners' Sunday', *Daily Mail*, 6 November 1939, p. 12.

<sup>59</sup> *British Pathe*, issue no. 39/88, German Prisoners of War in Camp, 9 November 1939, 7/7.

<sup>60</sup> *British Movietone*, issue no. 544A, 9 November 1939, Britain's Contented War Prisoners, 2/5.

themselves much impressed by the marked difference between actual conditions in this country and the picture which they had been put before them in Germany'.<sup>61</sup>

One particular camp was singled out in reportage, and would receive similar criticism as Donnington Hall did during the First World War. While the press was forbidden from revealing the location of the camp, it is clearly Grizedale Hall. An article published in October 1939 described the comfortable conditions afforded the residents:

German U-boat officers who have been taken prisoner by the British Navy are now in captivity in what was once a hikers' hostel on the rolling Westmorland fells. They are guarded by bemedalled veterans of National Defence Companies, and they enjoy the conditions of an expensive spa than that of a prisoner of war camp. The venue is hidden away several miles from a railway station, says the Ministry of Information, and the local cottagers have nicknamed the camp the "U-boat hotel." It was once a country house and was then converted into a hikers' hostel. The massive stone building, which dominates the few white cottages nearby, is closely protected by barbed wire entanglements which can be floodlit at night. The German naval officers have the benefit of a library in which is a full-sized ping-pong table. They feed in a large oak panelled hall, and though the fare is not exactly "ritzy," it is good and obviously appreciated. One English-speaking prisoner remarked after a heavy lunch, "this is better than being chased by the British Navy." [...]. Officers are voluntarily employed in what their captors call "Kaiser Bill's hobby"—chopping wood. The prisoners have already had a visit from the local bishop who is arranging a supply of German books which will be censored, if necessary, by the Commandant. They also play football. At present they have to utilise a tennis pitch which somewhat handicaps their style, but they are hoping when they have made their own ground to do better things "mit ball." In the evenings they enjoy sing-songs around the grand piano. The average age of the U-boat officers is about 24. All are now fit and healthy, and the commandant declares that their discipline is excellent.<sup>62</sup>

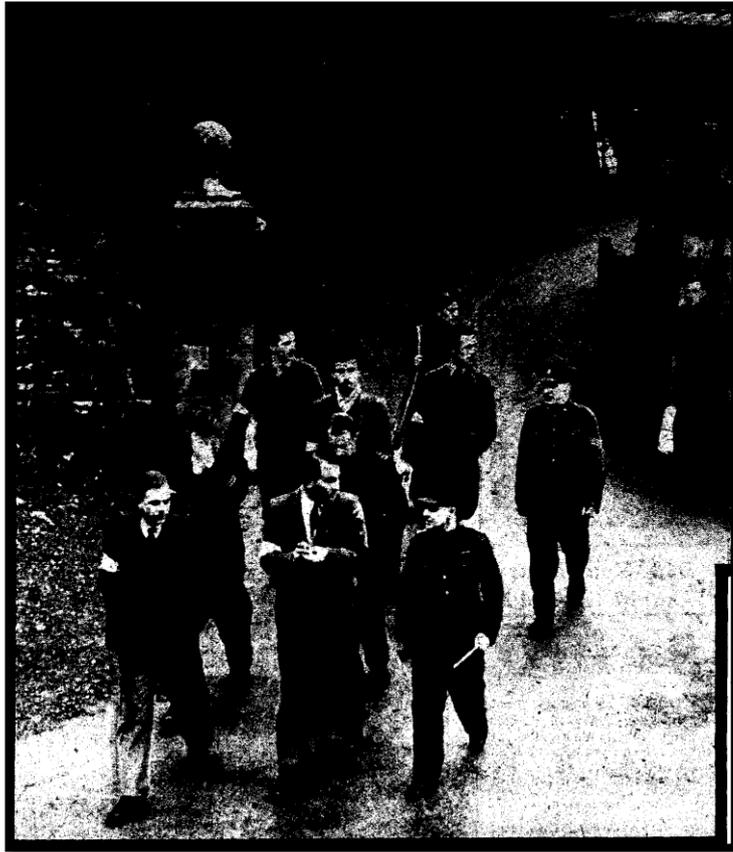
Publishing pictures of the camp (images, 3, 4, 5), the *Daily Mail* invited readers to 'Come with a camera to the north of England', and view the excellent conditions afforded German sailors and airmen at the 'U-boat Hotel'.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> HC Deb, vol. 352, col. 2140W, 2 November 1939.

<sup>62</sup> 'Football and Tennis at the "U-Boat Hotel"', *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 7 October 1939, p. 3. "'U-Boat Hotel', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 7 October 1939, p. 6. 'Hikers' Hostel Becomes a U-Boat Hotel', *Lancashire Evening Post*, 7 October 1939, p. 6. "'U-Boat Hotel.'", *Motherwell Times*, 27 October 1939, p. 8. "'U-Boat Hotel" in Westmorland: Pleasant Quarters For Prisoners', *Yorkshire Post*, 9 October 1939, p. 3. 'Hikers' Hostel Become "U-Boat" Hotel', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 7 October 1939, p. 1. 'Hikers' Hostel Now U-Boat Hotel', *Hull Daily Mail*, 7 October 1939, p. 1. 'Captive Nazi Officers: In "U-Boat Hotel"', *Hartlepool Mail*, 7 October 1939, p. 2.

<sup>63</sup> 'U-Boat Hotel: "Home From Home" For German Prisoners', *Daily Mail*, 15 November 1939, p. 12.



**Image 3 *Daily Mail*, 15 November 1939, p. 12.**



**Image 4 *Daily Mail*, 15 November 1939, p. 12.**



**Image 5 *Daily Mail*, 15 November 1939, p. 12.**

The *Daily Mail* pictured German officers strolling, under slack guard, warming themselves at the fire side in the lounge where they listened to BBC broadcasts, and gathering round the piano in the evening. Grizedale was considered much more a holiday resort, hostel, or spa than a POW camp, the only similarities being the barbed wire and guards.

In late November 1939, 21 German prisoners were held at the camp, which could accommodate 200, at a cost of £50 per day. Outraged, Colonel Josiah Wedgewood (Lab. Newcastle-under-Lyme) asked the secretary of state for war, Hore-Belisha, 'Would it not be cheaper to keep them at the Ritz [...]?'<sup>64</sup> In the *Yorkshire Post*, the juxtaposition of two pictures implicitly suggested a leisurely experience of captivity in British hands compared to Germans. A picture depicting 'German U-boat prisoners, exercising in the grounds of a country house in England' was adjacent to one of 'Polish

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<sup>64</sup> HC Deb 21 November 1939, vol. 353, cols. 1009-10.

prisoners of war, under supervision of a German officer, set to doing reconstruction work in the former province of Posen'.<sup>65</sup> The conditions afforded German POWs were compared to the British civilian. That German POWs would attempt to escape from the comfortable surroundings of the British POW camp was thought 'ungrateful' by the London correspondent of the *Nottingham Evening Post*.

We intern them under conditions which most hard-working Britons would regard as ideal for a summer holiday, and which contrast quite sensationally with their own concentration camps. Yet they persist in escaping, possible because the control is so slipshod as to make the temptation irresistible. Yet if these incidents keep on recurring, even our tolerant British public may begin to grow slightly restive. [...]. Some U-boat prisoners, who are residing in an old baronial mansion, declared the other day that their only lack was cigars. If this oversight on the part of the authorities has now been made good, one trusts it is with German, not Havana, cigars. That might make the punishment fit the crime.<sup>66</sup>

On 8 December 1939, J. B. Dunmore wrote to the *Yorkshire Post* comparing the treatment of German POWs and local Anti-aircraft units. They were 'heartily sick of articles and illustrations in various papers' which told of German POWs being well received, with 'a mattress, bolster, pillow and four blankets, and comfortable bunks, and good plain food, well cooked'. Local A. A. units posted at their lonely sites, Dunmore noted, 'would welcome' these conditions. 'Why not', Dunmore asked, 'look after the comfort of our own lads who are doing their bit to help to defeat a ruthless enemy?'<sup>67</sup> 'I think we must have gone mad', wrote another. 'What bitter reading it is for those who have lost their loved ones and those who have loved ones in danger'.<sup>68</sup> 'Don't let us treat these Germans as pals when in our hands. We can be humane, but the "tuck me into bed" treatment should be over, after what we read of the way the enemy conducts themselves in warfare to master the world and ourselves'.<sup>69</sup>

On 17 November 1939, Victor Burne wrote to the *Gloucestershire Echo* contrasting his experience as a POW in Germany during the last war to the treatment of German POWs depicted in recent newspapers. While British POWs 'were treated worse than pigs', many dying as a result of poor diet, German POWs were being lavishly treated in respect to their accommodation and food. Burne wondered what other ex-

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<sup>65</sup> 'Two Batches of War Prisoners—In England and in Poland', *Yorkshire Post*, 30 October 1939, p. 7.

<sup>66</sup> 'Echoes from Town', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 22 November 1939, p. 4.

<sup>67</sup> 'U-boat crews', *Yorkshire Post*, 8 December 1939, p. 4.

<sup>68</sup> R. B. W., 'Entertaining An Enemy', *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 29 November 1939, p. 6.

<sup>69</sup> 'German Prisoners', *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 1 December 1939, p. 6.

POWs made of this, and asked 'Why this wonderful treatment'.<sup>70</sup> Two responded to Burne's letter a few days later, one echoing his sentiment.<sup>71</sup> The second took issue with Burne's implicit accusation that he and other British POWs had been deliberately mistreated by their German captors. T.F.M. reminded Burne that the British blockade had 'made food scarce very quickly, and that rationing was in force from the first'. In the situation it was not surprising that the Germans had provided for their own before enemy POWs. Supporting their statement, furthermore, T.F.M. noted they had attended a lecture given by a former Ruhleben internee who made 'no complaint whatever' of mistreatment.<sup>72</sup> Burne found support from three fellow ex-POWs who wrote to the *Echo* recounting their own experiences of captivity. Arduous forced labour and near starvation rations were prominent themes in their letters. Furthermore the deliberate cruelty of the German captors was implicitly and explicitly referred to.<sup>73</sup> Having unleashed a wave of criticism, T.F.M. argued that the majority readers would differ from the views of Burne, maintaining the maltreatment of British POWs in Germany during the last war was not intentional and had been exaggerated: 'The fact was that these, like most of the "atrocities," were committed in Fleet-street'.<sup>74</sup> The allegation that the press fabricated the atrocities committed by German proved explosive.

In response to the allegation that the violence against British POWs was invented in the press, overstated for propaganda purposes, several ex-POWs of the Great War wrote to the *Echo* describing their experiences at length. Rowley Lewis challenged T.F.M. noting that his POW diary contained, 'many instances of the brutality which the Hun inflicted'. British POWs were subject to physical violence—'lashed, kicked to death, cuffed, and butted with rifles'—while carrying out their work under continual attack from British shell-fire and aircraft. In his view, the Germans were uncivilised, ignoring the laws of war both then and during the current conflict: 'The Hague Convention, meant nothing—no more than it does to-day in the wanton

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<sup>70</sup> Victor Burne, 'Prisoners: A Contrast', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 17 November 1939, p. 4.

<sup>71</sup> The first was equally infuriated by the pictures of German POWs noting that they had made them 'boil inwardly'. SYMPATHISER, 'They Should Work', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 20 November 1939, p. 3.

<sup>72</sup> T.F.M., 'War Prisoners', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 20 November 1939, p. 3. The lecturer, 'a journalist escaped from the notorious Ruhleben Camp', may well have been Geoffrey Pyke whose memoir brought him minor fame. Geoffrey Pyke, *To Ruhleben – And Back: A Great Adventure in Three Phases*, (London: Constable, 1916).

<sup>73</sup> C. Lewis 'Four Years a Prisoner', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 24 November 1939, pp. 4-5; 'Deliberate Cruelty', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 24 November 1939, p. 5; 'Prisoners of War', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 25 November 1939, p. 3. The mother of an ex-POW recounted her son's similar experiences. 'Bitter Memories', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 23 November 1939, p. 4.

<sup>74</sup> 'War Prisoners' Food', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 27 November 1939, p. 4.

destruction of defenceless women and children by submarine and mine warfare on the high seas'.<sup>75</sup> In response to Lewis, T.F.M noted that a report had confirmed that most of the atrocities were inventions.<sup>76</sup> M.G.W., writing soon after recounted the dysentery and starvation which marked his experience of German captivity. Although the treatment was brutal in the last war, they did not advocate revenge.

And now, I say that the German prisoners should not be treated "soft." Feed them on an equal ration, keep them fit, and make them work. Treat them fairly, and finish at that. British prisoners of war get no sympathy from "T.F.M." because they are fighting men. Some of us still prefer to fight a bully to putting up with him. Mankind needs neither force nor humbug. A militant spirit for economic and social justice, irrespective of race, colour, or creed, he does need; and, above all, less self in leadership. Only a bullet can remove some of the rulers on earth. It is a nasty position for the people to be in.<sup>77</sup>

T.F.M. was lambasted again by another, who argued that if T.F.M. had first-hand experience of captivity they would not hold their present ideas. Having been nursing in a V.A.D. hospital for most of the war, X had been informed of the 'hell' British POWs had gone through in German camps—being 'hit with sticks, belts, swords, and anything else handy, and floggings with "the rubber" were all too frequent'.<sup>78</sup> In the same issue, L. A. Cole wrote that they could not understand why T.F.M. would question the authenticity of the men who had described their ill-treatment as POWs.<sup>79</sup> T.F.M. argued that 'there is always a tendency to exaggerate such horrors when they pander to popular antipathies'. They repeated that they did not condone the brutalities that took place, but these were primarily caused by a lack of supplies.<sup>80</sup> On 19 December, an anonymous writer who had worked with British intelligence during the First World War noted that captured documents taken from German POWs and dead were proof of the 'exceptional inhumanity' which was not 'manufactured for British propaganda'. The writer noted that the content of the documents which described 'murder, ill-usage of women, arson, robbery and gross bullying of armed civilians' were not considered regrettable actions, rather 'as evidence of irresistible German might'. Furthermore, these actions embodied Nazism in all but name.<sup>81</sup> Although tired of the debate, COMMON SENSE suggested that the discussion of what happened in German camps during the First World War was

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<sup>75</sup> 'Brutal Treatment of British Prisoners', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 6 December 1939, p. 4.

<sup>76</sup> 'Invented Atrocities', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 12 December 1939, p. 4.

<sup>77</sup> 'How Germans Ill-Treated Their Prisoners', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 13 December 1939, p. 7.

<sup>78</sup> 'Prisoners of War Flogged', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 15 December 1939, p. 4.

<sup>79</sup> 'German Atrocities', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 15 December 1939, p. 4.

<sup>80</sup> 'Exaggerated Horrors', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 21 December 1939, p. 5.

<sup>81</sup> 'Fair Play Sign Of Weakness', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 19 December 1939, p. 4

a waste of paper; examples of the German 'brutish mentality' were being witnessed everyday on the sea—referring to the submarine and mine warfare.<sup>82</sup>

Before the debate ended, two ex-POWs wrote to balance the record of the German treatment of POWs. V. D. Ventris-Field recounted how a German officer saved his life and wrote of German guards sharing food with British POWs. He concluded that he suffered no intentional brutality from his German captors. There were many atrocity stories but it was clear that there were 'good and bad, kind and brutal Germans, and in our treatment of German prisoners during the present war we should be considerate and just with them in accordance with British principles'.<sup>83</sup> Another ex-POW agreed stating that although it was impossible to exaggerate the sufferings of British POWs in the latter months of the war they did not believe that it was intentional. In their experience of captivity, there had also been 'good and bad Germans'.<sup>84</sup>

The debate in the *Gloucestershire Echo* while idiosyncratic nevertheless provides insight into attitudes towards the treatment of German POWs and the legacy of Great War captivity. The debate centred on whether or not the sufferings of British POWs during the Great War were intentionally caused by their German captors. While the majority of ex-POWs recounted the suffering deliberately inflicted by their captors, a minority contested this view recounting benevolent acts. Although they might well have harboured vengeful attitudes, violence or retribution towards German POWs in British hands was not advocated by any correspondent. What irked former POWs was the idea that Britain treated enemy POWs above and beyond what was necessary.

Nearing the first Christmas of the war, rumours leaked of British civilians sending German POWs festive gifts. In the *Nottingham Evening Post*, a columnist despaired that German POWs, who in their view were all 'enthusiastic young Nazis, and hero-worshippers of Hitler', were 'inundated with Christmas gifts in the shape of cigars, cigarettes, and seasonable fare from sentimental admirers' across Britain. Such 'Good Samaritanism' did not, however, extend to the guards at POW camps. The columnist was perplexed by this view of the enemy, asking 'How can anyone explain this sort of mentality?'<sup>85</sup> In the *Portsmouth Evening News*, another journalist similarly thought that this was 'an atrocious state of affairs'. This 'maudlin sentimentality' was considered misplaced, with refugees who had left to Britain from persecution in Germany a group

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<sup>82</sup> 'German Mentality', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 23 December 1939, p. 3.

<sup>83</sup> V. D. Ventris-Field, 'No Intentional Brutality By His Captors', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 28 December 1939, p. 4.

<sup>84</sup> 'Returning Briton's Gifts to Germans', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 2 January 1940, p. 4.

<sup>85</sup> 'Echoes from Town', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 21 December 1939, p. 4.

from more deserving of Christmas gifts. Individuals who were sending comforts to the captives obviously did not realize that these POWs were responsible for the deaths of their compatriots:

Obsessed by the feeling that the prisoners may well be lonely at Christmas, they do not seem to appreciate that many of the Germans are U-boat men whose activities have bereaved the wives and children of unarmed merchant seamen since September 3; and that others belong to that set of German airmen which is now busily gunning fishermen as they scramble into rowing boat after their trawlers have been bombed.<sup>86</sup>

Despite such attacks, organising comforts for German POWs continued into the New Year. In March 1940, Vyvyan Adams, (Con. Leeds West), asked Oliver Stanley—Hore-Belisha's replacement as secretary of state for war—to forbid a relief committee, chaired by Helmut Schroeder, from sending parcels to German POWs; the committee had sent several circulars to British people asking for donations to assist. However, despite Stanley's agreement that 'such a practice was both unnecessary and undesirable', given that they were 'already adequately provided for', he had no power to prevent Schroeder's Committee from doing so.<sup>87</sup> While the government did nothing to prevent it, gifts and aid sent to German POWs were considered misplaced, the POWs were well provided for and there were more deserving groups, particularly British soldiers. Although criticised, those that did send presents to German POWs in Christmas 1939 were considered overly sentimental not disloyal. Reports of sympathy towards POWs and the perceived indulgence of the enemy irritated the public. A survey conducted by the *Daily Mail* revealed that sympathy for German POWs was one of the main complaints of its readers. Commenting on the result of the survey, to which thousands were said to have responded, Montague Smith noted that 'complaints against coddling German prisoners, and others that too few Germans have been interned is a very significant indication of the rising temper of the nation'.<sup>88</sup>

### 3. The *Altmark* incident

By the turn of the year, 'the war still seemed to remain at a standstill'. With few outlets for the 'violent terrors and excitements' there was 'mass frustration and anxiety'.<sup>89</sup> In February 1940, the liberation of British POWs from the German tanker *Altmark*

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<sup>86</sup> 'British Refugees Neglected', *Portsmouth Evening News*, 22 December 1939, p. 2.

<sup>87</sup> HC Deb, 12 March 1940, vol. 358, cols. 984-6.

<sup>88</sup> "'Daily Mail' readers tell their grouches", *Daily Mail*, 13 January 1940, p. 6.

<sup>89</sup> MOA, FR 2181, *The Crisis*, dated November 1944, p. 52.

stimulated both propagandists and public who had yearned for excitement during a stagnant war. M-O diarists recorded their excitement and cheerfulness. In London, an ARP attendee wrote that 'The news of the release of the 300 prisoners on the "altmark" brightened me up a bit. The Whole crew (ARP Post) were thrilled by it. This was more like the adventurous colourful world of old!'<sup>90</sup> 'Wherever you go' a similarly excited female journalist in London wrote, 'people's eyes dance with glee about the [...] Altmark. The tonic value of this is enormous [...]'.<sup>91</sup> Magarey Davis, a cookery demonstrator in Kent, was 'thrilled by the thought of that shout "Any Englishmen below? We are the Royal Navy!"'.<sup>92</sup> More than simply breaking the monotony of war news, the *Altmark* incident stimulated anti-German sentiment with the conditions and captors aboard the ship being portrayed as horrendous and cruel.

On 17 February, Churchill informed the cabinet that the ship, which had been resupplying the *Graf Spee*, had been identified the previous afternoon by RAF aircraft. The *Altmark* had been subsequently pursued into Jossing Fjord by a British destroyer flotilla, boarded and the British captives freed.<sup>93</sup> Making a statement in parliament, Chamberlain congratulated the Royal Navy for the 'admirably conducted operation', the rescue of the 299 British POWs evoking the spirit of Nelson and Trafalgar, and a 'notable addition to its annals'. More than a heroic tale, the intervention of the Royal Navy had saved the British POWs from, as Albert Alexander stated, 'a durance vile'.<sup>94</sup> The *Sunday Pictorial* wrote how the British sailors had gained:

[...] freedom from a hell ship, freedom from a four-month confinement in stinking holds, freedom from Nazi brutality, from the filthy tyranny, the humiliations, practised by men whose lust for cruelty mounts with the helplessness of their victims.<sup>95</sup>

Although it was known that the conditions the British seaman were subjected to were not as horrific as the press made out, little effort was made by British officials to rein in the scathing remarks regarding the 'hell ship' *Altmark* and her perverse Nazi skipper. As Wylie notes, the incident demonstrates that British authorities were not beyond

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<sup>90</sup> MOA, D 5422, diary for February 1940, p. 26.

<sup>91</sup> MOA, D 5349, diary for February 1940, p. 34.

<sup>92</sup> MOA, D 5295, diary for February 1940, pp.34-5.

<sup>93</sup> TNA, CAB 65/5, WM 44 (40) 2, 17 February 1940. On the *Altmark* incident see, Willi Frischauer and Robert Jackson, *"The Navy's Here!": The Altmark Affair* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1955); Richard Wiggan, *Hunt the Altmark* (London: Robert Hale, 1990); Martin A. Doherty, 'The Attack on the *Altmark*: A Case Study in Wartime Propaganda', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 38: 2 (2003), 187-200.

<sup>94</sup> HC Deb, 20 February, vol. 357 cols.1161-4.

<sup>95</sup> *US: Mass-Observation's Weekly Intelligence Service*, 6, 9 March 1940, p. 42.

extorting advantageous diplomatic and propaganda value from POWs and their treatment if a favourable opportunity was presented.<sup>96</sup> Conditions aboard the *Altmark* were reported as 'ghastly', with the POWs living in 'hell for many weeks'.<sup>97</sup> Newsreels similarly described the 'filthy and inhuman conditions'.<sup>98</sup> *Altmark* survivors were interviewed and their statements corroborated reportage. Fredrick Thomas of Liverpool stated that 'It was a filthy place, with no fresh air. Conditions were terrible, the Germans made them as miserable as they possible could with their cruel, heartless treatment'.<sup>99</sup> Those interviewed reported that their surroundings had been purposefully made worse, by the *Altmark* captain, who *Pathe* described as 'one of the nastiest Nazis who ever sailed the seas'.<sup>100</sup> William Curtis of South Shields stated that he 'was a tyrant' who 'openly declared that he had no feelings for the British whatever'.<sup>101</sup> J. Swaby described him as 'a big-bearded Prussian bully', telling a *Daily Mail* reporter, 'When we were taken aboard he would come and laugh at us, telling us that Germany was going to win the war'.<sup>102</sup> In sum, a *Manchester Guardian* correspondent reported:

The men I talked to make the captain something of a pathological case—"A bit queer, the captain." Sometimes he would smile pleasantly at his captive and wish them a good morning. More often he would abuse them in a towering rage and would address them on the brutalities of the British internment camps or, obscurely, on the sufferings of Germans in Silesia.<sup>103</sup>

M-O took the opportunity to canvass opinion regarding the *Altmark* during an investigation into the Silvertown by-election. Of the 207 people asked, 156 thought that British conduct had been correct, with only three suggesting it had been wrong. Comments in favour included: 'It was a good job', 'They were right to rescue are men', 'About them prisoners. I think we were right to rescue them', 'It was grand what they did', and 'I think they were in the right'.<sup>104</sup> Questioned during the investigation a 54 year-old pawnbroker stated that it was 'Shocking. But true to German type. You wouldn't catch an Englishman doing that to a German, even though they *are* a lot of

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<sup>96</sup> Wylie, *Diplomacy*, p. 66.

<sup>97</sup> 'Freedom After Months of Hardship', *Manchester Guardian*, 19 February 1940, p. 7.

<sup>98</sup> *Gourmont British News*, issue no. 640, 22 February 1940, HMS Cossack Brings Back *Altmark* Survivors, 1/8.

<sup>99</sup> "'Skipper Was A Tyrant'", *Observer*, 18 February 1940, p. 9.

<sup>100</sup> *British Pathe*, issue no. 40/16, 22 February 1940, British Navy Rescues Hell Ship Prisoners, 5/5.

<sup>101</sup> 'Freedom After Months of Hardship', *Manchester Guardian*, 19 February 1940, p. 7.

<sup>102</sup> 'I Lived 4 Months In Floating Gaol', *Daily Mail*, 19 February 1940, p. 5.

<sup>103</sup> 'Altmark Prisoners And Their Nazi "Hosts"', *Manchester Guardian*, 20 February 1940, p 3.

<sup>104</sup> MOA, FR 126, Report on the Press, p. 26.

swine them Germans'. The wife of a labourer, 42 years old, stated: 'Awful. I'd like to do the same to them as they done to our boys, instead of giving the German prisoners food and presents'.<sup>105</sup> Yet, M-O also noted that around one in five were suspicious, doubting the portrayal of the incident in the press, especially the fact the British seamen seemed to look better than made out to be. These voices were in the minority. While newspapers and newsreels were allowed to churn out mordent commentaries of the abuse of British POWs at the hands of their Nazi captors, all were not convinced by the picture they were presented with. M-O diarists questioned the deaths of the German seamen during the boarding of the *Altmark* as well as the infringement of Norwegian neutrality. Disagreements and arguments were recorded between co-workers and acquaintances.<sup>106</sup> M-O pointed out the inconsistencies and exaggerations in the reportage of the incident, noting that the embellishments seeking to stir anti-German sentiments had succeeded in doing so.<sup>107</sup> "The "war cloud" is here again, and although atrocity stories have been widely discredited, people still are ready to swallow stirring stories at a time when news hunger is greater than it has ever been'.

The story has produced far wider and stronger anti-German feeling than we have detected in any previous survey. Whether or not the story is strictly true it can therefore claim success as propaganda for the war. **No longer Hitler, but the enemy as a whole, is the object of mass antagonism.**<sup>108</sup>

In sum, the exaggerated mistreatment of British seamen captive aboard the *Altmark* fuelled anti-German sentiment in Britain, the incident providing new evidence of German cruelty to POWs, symbolic of the inherent barbarity of the German enemy. Following the catastrophic defeats of April-May 1940 and the threat of invasion there would be a change in atmosphere at ports where German POWs disembarked.

#### 4. The deportation of German POWs, May to June 1940

In response to the *Altmark* incident, Hitler brought operation *WeserÜbung* forward and Germany's assault on Denmark and Norway was launched in the early morning of 9 April. What followed was a succession of military debacles culminating in the retreat from Dunkirk, fall of France and the establishment of the Vichy regime. The British

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<sup>105</sup> *US: Mass-Observation's Weekly Intelligence Service*, 6, 9 March 1940, pp. 43-4.

<sup>106</sup> For instance, MOA, D 5069, diary for February 1940, p. 1; MOA, D 5231, diary for February 1940, p. 30.

<sup>107</sup> *US: Mass-Observation's Weekly Intelligence Service*, 6, 9 March 1940, p. 42.

<sup>108</sup> *ibid.*, p. 43.

public soon realised the threat of invasion. M-O recorded that, 'It was towards the end of one of the loveliest Mays in living memory that there came to the British people the realisation that they were in danger of defeat and annihilation'.<sup>109</sup> Policy towards German POWs was altered in response to the catastrophic military defeats in April and June 1940, intertwined with the radicalisation of policy towards enemy aliens, who along with POWs were considered too dangerous to be held in Britain at a time when invasion was feared.<sup>110</sup> The experiences of the First World War, particularly the memory of the *Lusitania* sinking, influenced ideas regarding enemy aliens, with the Home Office eager to avoid repeating the mass internment policies which resulted in the incarceration of 30,000 Germans.<sup>111</sup> Seeking to avoid a general internment of enemy aliens, in September 1939, John Anderson, home secretary and minister of home security, outlined a liberal internment policy in parliament, whereby a sharp distinction would be drawn between friendly and hostile aliens.<sup>112</sup> Tribunals were established in October 1939 to screen enemy aliens and decide if they were to be interned, subject to restrictions, or to remain at liberty, with only a minority of German and Austrian males interned by January 1940.<sup>113</sup> However, their treatment transformed dramatically after the disastrous Allied campaigns and the successful German blitzkrieg which witnessed the fall of France and establishment of the Vichy regime. In the wake of the defeat in Norway, the Chamberlain administration was replaced by a coalition government headed by Winston Churchill, who immediately organised a new department to deal with the question of civilian internment. The newly created Home Security (Defence) Executive (HS(D)E) advocated the removal of enemy aliens and civilian internees, a proposal Churchill eagerly supported.<sup>114</sup> By July, almost all German and Austrian males were in the process of being, if not already, interned. Several dominion governments—Canada, Newfoundland, Australia, and New Zealand—agreed to accept a number of internees and POWs, and ships left Britain in late June and early July.<sup>115</sup> With reports from Norway that Nazi spies had aided the German invasion, refugees and enemy aliens

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<sup>109</sup> MOA, FR 2181, *The Crisis*, dated November 1944, p. 71.

<sup>110</sup> For a detailed account of civilian internment in Britain during the Second World War see, Peter Gillman and Leni Gillman, *'Collar the Lot!': How Britain Interned and Expelled its Wartime Refugees* (London: Quartet, 1980).

<sup>111</sup> Some 10,000 were also deported. Panikos Panayi, *The enemy in our midst: Germans in Britain during the First World War* (Oxford: Berg, 1991).

<sup>112</sup> Peter and Leni Gillman, pp. 20-21.

<sup>113</sup> CAB 67/7 WP (G) (40) 170, *Internees and Prisoners of War*, Memorandum by the Lord President of the Council, 2 July 1940.

<sup>114</sup> CAB 65/7 WM 137 (40)11, 24 May 1940

<sup>115</sup> CAB 67/7 WP (G) (40) 170, *Internees and Prisoners of War*, Memorandum by the Lord President of the Council, 2 July 1940.

in Britain were targeted as potential agents, this 'spy mania' helping legitimise the policy taken by the government.

Reflecting back a year on, Mass Observation noted that 'One of the outstanding features of May 1940 is anticipation of almost immediate invasion. There are long notes on reactions of terror, apprehension, and bewilderment. Dreams about invasion and personal encounters with Hitler are mentioned'.<sup>116</sup> Fear of fifth columnists led to distrust of aliens and refugees. Mass Observation reports indicate that 55 per cent of those asked were in favour of general internment.<sup>117</sup> However, government policy and wholesale deportation of civilian internees was criticised as a thoughtless reaction. Quickly researched and published in 1940, Francois Lafitte's study underlined the governmental panic behind the indiscriminate internment of enemy aliens, including refugees from fascism. His account of the appalling living conditions provoked widespread comment and embarrassment.<sup>118</sup> The outcry in reaction to the sinking of the *Arandora Star* in July 1940 led the government to revise the policy toward enemy aliens. By the end of the year, after the threat of invasion waned, both government and press readopted a more liberal tone towards enemy aliens.<sup>119</sup> In August, Mass Observation noted a clear decline in anti-alien attitudes.<sup>120</sup> Although the deportation of civilian internees was halted, the presence of German POWs was still considered a security threat. In September 1940, proposals to send some 1,000 German POWs to Newfoundland were approved. At that time, there were some 850 in Britain, their number increasing by around 100 per week.<sup>121</sup> Further numbers of POWs and merchant seamen were removed in 1941.<sup>122</sup> The rationale behind the removal of German POWs was clearly outlined by Anthony Eden—secretary of state for war—in a cabinet memorandum:

They are all of a dangerous type, and their security would be a matter for grave anxiety in the event of invasion. In such an event we shall have to use the vacant spaces in existing camps for newly-captured prisoners, and the combination of the character, knowledge and status of the existing prisoners with the fighting

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<sup>116</sup> MOA, FR 773, Comparative Report: May 1940-May 1941, 5 July 1941, p. 1.

<sup>117</sup> MOA, FR 276, Supplementary Report on Public Opinion about Aliens, 16 July 1940.

<sup>118</sup> Francois Laffite, *The Internment of Aliens*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London: Libris, 1990).

<sup>119</sup> Tony Kushner, *The persistence of prejudice* (Manchester: MUP, 1989), p. 147.

<sup>120</sup> MOA, FR 324, Attitude to Aliens, 5 August 1940.

<sup>121</sup> The construction of a camp in Newfoundland to hold civilian internees, funded by the British government, was abandoned when policy toward internees was revised. Eden recommended that the camp be completed and used to hold German POWs. CAB 66/12 WP (40) 379, Sending Prisoners of War Abroad, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War, 20 September 1940. CAB 65/9 WM 257 (40)7, 24 September 1940.

<sup>122</sup> CAB 65/19, WM 79 (41)3, 11 August 1941.

value of the newcomers may give considerable trouble. Apart from the merchant seamen, the prisoners are Luftwaffe or U-boat men, and would be a valuable asset to the enemy if released by an invading force.<sup>123</sup>

Newspapers and newsreels restated the belief of intelligence officials, that spies and saboteurs had aided German military victory, especially in Norway. The treacherous nature of the enemy was extended to German POWs in mid-1940. Depicting the POWs as ardent Nazis and inherently aggressive, the press, emphasising their unruly behaviour during the journey to Canada, helped to legitimise their removal from Britain.<sup>124</sup> Newsreels depicting German POWs adopted a harsher tone towards the captives from May 1940. Commenting on the arrival of German POWs at a British port a commentator for *Pathe News* described the 250 parachute troops:

Many of them are found to carry dangerous looking knives with blades that shoot out. Most of them are obviously youngsters, the average age of all of them is eighteen. They were sent on a brutal job, but the British Government isn't going to make that a reason for given them anything but humanitarian treatment. Almost immediately on landing, they're given a square meal which must by rather a surprise to them after what they've been told at home about our food shortage. So that's another batch out of the way.<sup>125</sup>

An atmosphere of distrust replaced the affability of earlier arrivals of POWs. As the commentator noted, these POWs carried concealed weapons—'dangerous looking knives with blades that shoot out'. Guards were no longer sharing cigarettes but were shown alert, ready to deal with any unruly behaviour, while the POWs were subject to thorough searches. Yet, as was stated, despite the Nazi enemy being heartless and untrustworthy, Britain would maintain the liberal-tradition of captivity, evidenced by the POWs, although probably undeserving, receiving a 'square meal'.

How this change of tone affected attitudes towards German POWs is difficult to gauge. M-O reports indicate that newsreel audiences showed little hostility to the German POWs pictured onscreen. In June 1940, M-O reported that despite the anti-German commentary to shots of POWs in *Paramount News* newsreels, 'there was no sign of similar fury among the audience and it is still very infrequently that there is any

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<sup>123</sup> CAB 67/9 WP (G) (41) 75, Transfer of German Prisoners of War to Canada, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War, 8 August 1941.

<sup>124</sup> 'German Prisoners of War Arrive in Canada', *Portsmouth Evening News*, 3 July 1940, p. 1.

<sup>125</sup> *British Pathe*, issue no. 40/41, 20 May 1940, German Prisoners Arrive, 4/7.

hissing at shots of German prisoners'.<sup>126</sup> Similarly, commenting on audience responses to German personalities in newsreels in August 1940, an investigator reported:

The German people have only been seen in a few sequences of prisoners of war. [...] only twice have there been hisses or boos for this. Once the hissing came from only one woman; her companion turned to her and said "it's not their fault, they can't help it". The woman replied "no, I suppose not" and stopped hissing.<sup>127</sup>

In December 1940, during the Blitz, another report noted that 'Prisoners have been seen on three occasions; twice there was no response, once there was laughter at a particularly ugly German. On no occasion has there been any hissing, or signs of objection'.<sup>128</sup> By this time the German POW population numbered 300 and media interest in the captives declined, although sporadic stories continued to appear in newsreels and newspapers. *Gaumont British News* occasionally broadcast German POWs as part of their 'roving camera reports', their continued capture indicating battlefield successes.<sup>129</sup> For instance in August 1941 the commentator declared that:

If all the German prisoners who have been along this platform on their way to prison camps were placed end to end, they would make Nelson's Column look like a park railing. The point is that week after week we are draining the Luftwaffe of its pilots and crews. We needn't feel that the end is in sight yet – but we can feel that with each batch brought in the noose grows tighter around Hitler's neck.<sup>130</sup>

In January 1941, an article on 'Reflections on Seeing Nazi Prisoners of War' appeared in the *Sunderland Echo*. The journalist, E. H. Elkins, recounted the reactions of British onlookers as a procession of wounded German POWs marched passed them as they waited for a train. 'A little, neat, grey-eyed woman, whose knitting needles had ceased to click, could not restrain an outburst of sympathy, "Poor fellows," she murmured. "They've suffered for anything they might have done."' In contrast, a 'stout man, who [...] had been in a bad raid, wasn't quite so sure. "I don't think anything is too bad for men who have been brought up to be murderers, and seem to find the job a damned

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<sup>126</sup> MOA, FR 215, Newsreels in early June, 19 June 1940, p. 5; FR 141, Newsreel report, 26 May 1940, p. 13.

<sup>127</sup> TC: Films, 1937-48 17/2/H, Note for Miss Lejeune on audience response to German personalities, 13 August 1940, p. 2.

<sup>128</sup> MOA, FR 524, Memo on Newsreels, 12 December 1940, p. 4.

<sup>129</sup> *Gaumont British News*, issue no. 778, 19 June 1941, Roving Camera Reports; Another Group of German Prisoners at London Station, 5/9.

<sup>130</sup> *Gaumont British News*, issue no. 794, 14 August 1941, Roving Camera Reports: More German Prisoners at a London Station, 8/11.

agreeable one," he said'. The women 'had the last word', supposing that the POWs were simply following orders, she declared "'It's Hitler who's to blame.'" Elkins, stirred to write the piece based on this comment, argued that freed from the ignorance of Nazi ideology the POWs could be saved.<sup>131</sup>

##### 5. The mooted exchange of POWs, October 1941

On 30 September, the press celebrated the 'hopeful news' announced by Duncan Sandys, Financial Secretary to the War Office, in a BBC broadcast the previous evening. Addressing the relatives and friends of British POWs in German captivity, he stated that an agreement had been reached, in principle, whereby 1,500 British POWs would be repatriated. On 4 October, two British hospital ships were scheduled to transport German POWs from the south coast to Northern France returning with British repatriates.<sup>132</sup> In Parliament, Sandys declared that the arrangements were nearing completion, and the press eagerly anticipated the arrival of the first British POWs.<sup>133</sup> However, a warning Sandys had given in his broadcast—that such arrangements 'may easily be upset by unexpected changes in the military or political situation'—was farsighted. In light of a message received from Berlin, the War Office announced on 4 October that the exchange was temporarily postponed. Having invaded Newhaven to report the joyful scenes of ships departure, correspondents instead described the atmosphere of disappointment. *Daily Mail* correspondent Olive Melville Brown recounted how the 'darkness of war returned to a dockside lit for a brief truce of mercy', when, at 21.05 the lights illuminating the hospital ships were extinguished. News of the delay brought hundreds of curious Newhaven residents into the streets. Brown

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<sup>131</sup> E. H. Elkins, 'They Came With Fire and Were Burnt! Reflections on Seeing Nazi Prisoners of War', *Sunderland Echo*, 2 January 1941, p. 2.

<sup>132</sup> '1,500 War Prisoners Coming Home', *The Times*, 30 September 1941, p. 4. '300 War Prisoners Already On Way to Britain', *Daily Mail*, 30 September 1941, p. 3. '1,500 Prisoners Coming Home', *Manchester Guardian*, 30 September 1941, p. 5. '1500 British Prisoners Coming Home', *Aberdeen Journal*, 30 September 1941, p. 4. '1500 British Prisoners To Be Exchanged', *Dundee Courier*, 30 September 1941, p. 2. '1500 British Prisoners Coming Home', *Western Daily Press*, 30 September 1941, p. 1. '1,500 Prisoners Coming Home', *Hartlepool Mail*, 30 September 1941, p. 3. 'Exchange of Wounded Prisoners', *Hull Daily Mail*, 30 September 1941, p. 3. 'Exchange of Wounded War Prisoners', *Yorkshire Post*, 30 September 1941, p. 3. 'Prisoners of War Coming Home', *Western Morning News*, 30 September 1941, p. 3. 'Exchange of British Prisoners', *The Times*, 1 October 1941, p. 4. 'Repatriation of Wounded Prisoners', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 2 October 1941, p. 1.

<sup>133</sup> 'Wounded Prisoners of War', *The Times*, 3 October 1941, p. 4. 'Prisoners Expected On Sunday', *Manchester Guardian*, 3 October 1941, p. 5. 'Wounded Prisoners of War', *Motherwell Times*, 3 October 1941, p. 4.

described the situation, as 'cruel' for the POWs across the Channel and the families across Britain anxiously awaiting the return of a 'loved one'.<sup>134</sup>

Although information regarding the attitudes expressed by the British public towards the event which developed at Newhaven is fragmentary, M-O summarised the findings of two surveys taken before and after the exchange was cancelled, questioning small London samples.<sup>135</sup> On 6 October, around half believed that the proposed exchange was a good idea. Some noted that the exchange was pragmatic given that wounded POWs could not be employed and were therefore useless. Others believed that exchanging POWs was humane and civilized, qualities perhaps equated by those questioned with notions of Britishness. However, a 'fairly substantial section' commented that it 'doesn't seem war', a view considered 'rather curious' by the investigator. It was argued that 'one should not "stop the war" even for such a short period'. Furthermore, the view 'you can't trust a jerry' was expressed several times. Any notion of an exchange, some argued, should have been rejected given that the German enemy was distrustful. There was 'a general feeling' that the exchange would have to be 'more profitable' for the Germans. Speculating on the German intentions, it was believed that they were demanding political prisoners, and a minority assumed that their real aim was to retrieve Rudolf Hess. However, many of those questioned were 'puzzled' by the subject, and did not understand the scheme, who exactly was going to be exchanged, or why there were any difficulties involved with such an exchange. While people were watching the development of the negotiations, they 'felt they were badly informed, and wanted to know more about the whole scheme'. As a result, there was a feeling that the British government was not without blame, and that the publicity surrounding the exchange had been badly handled.

After the exchange had been cancelled, the same three groups of opinion—approval, disapproval, and puzzlement—were found when a further sample of opinion was gauged on 9 October. M-O believed that as few people questioned expressed no opinion on the matter, public opinion had been 'thoroughly [...] aroused in the affair'. Those that approved of the action of the British government were very firm in their opinion and blamed the German government entirely. Although the British government did the right thing, some thought it was a pity that the exchange had been cancelled. Those that did not approve of the British government were disappointed that British POWs, who had been waiting on the other side of the Channel, were not repatriated.

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<sup>134</sup> 'Berlin Halts Prisoner Exchange', *Daily Mail*, 4 October 1941, p. 1.

<sup>135</sup> MOA, FR 908, The Exchange of Prisoners, 10 October 1941.

Again, the use of German POWs to Britain was reasoned by some; as they were wounded they would be of no real benefit to the enemy and could have gone for nothing in return. To a lesser extent, some were disappointed that German prisoners were not sent home. A 45 year old female of C classification commented, 'Terribly disappointing to the folks over here and I suppose it must been the same for German families'. As with the proposal to exchange prisoners, 'an appreciable section' of those questioned were puzzled by the scheme being called off. They did not really understand why the exchange had been called off, or which government, German or British, was to blame. Some were of the opinion that the German government wanted 'special people', in particular, Hess. Others believed that the Germans did not really want prisoners at all; 'To quote the vernacular', a 45 year old male of D classification stated, 'I think they were just fiddling'. While the intention might have been honourable, there was concern regarding who was to be exchanged. The report noted that there was a widespread feeling that the truth about the affair had not been told. Speculation about what was being concealed was endemic. While some thought the release of Hess was the contentious issue between the two governments, most of those questioned by M-O were uncertain of the specific details. Although no significant difference of opinion based on gender was noted, more women thought the proposed exchange was a good idea—possibly as it was their relatives being perhaps exchanged—and that the decision to call the scheme off was a bad one. Throughout the affair, two fifths of those questioned supported the government's actions while one fifth thought that the wrong decisions had been made.

#### 6. The Shackling Crisis, October to December 1942

The abject failure that was the joint British-Canadian commando raid on Dieppe conducted on 19 August 1942 resulted in some 2,000 taken POW. On 2 September 1942, the German government informed Britain that those captured at Dieppe would be put in shackles after an order to bind the hands of captured enemies to prevent them destroying documentation was found on British troops taken during the raid. This threat was not carried out as the German authorities were satisfied by the British assurance that no order existed and would be rescinded if it did it.<sup>136</sup> An incident was avoided for the time being. On 8 October the British cabinet discussed another German threat to shackle POWs taken at Dieppe. A small British commando force had orchestrated a raid

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<sup>136</sup> Kochavi, p. 40.

on Sark on the night of 3-4 October. The German authorities discovered that four German engineers, who had been shot while attempting to escape their captors, had had their hands bound by the commandos. The War Office asserted that the Geneva Convention did not explicitly forbid the binding of hands of captured enemies to prevent their escape. This was considered more humane than the alternative of shooting them. During the discussion it was noted that, as it forbid reprisals against POWs, if Germany proceeded to chain POWs the action would be an infringement of the Convention. It was decided to publicly announce that the government did not approve any order to bind the hands of POWs taken in the field, and that the German threat was contrary to the Geneva Convention. If Germany proceeded to manacle the POWs taken at Dieppe, Britain would place an equal number of German POWs in chains.<sup>137</sup> The following day, German High Command informed the British government that they were not satisfied by the response and had proceeded to manacle 107 officers and 1,269 other ranks. Moreover, if the British intended to carry out the chaining of German POWs as stated, three times as many POWs would be shackled by Germany. Discussing the position, the cabinet was determined to proceed.

The shackling episode has been diligently examined by historians, Mackenzie providing an initial overview.<sup>138</sup> It is considered to mark a departure in Anglo-German POW relations, the culmination of a steady decline which prompted new factors governing decision making. Locating the origins of this deterioration in the mistreatment of German POWs aboard the HMS *Pasteur*, Moore identifies the shackling of POWs as the end of the 'gentleman's war'—that being respect for the laws of war—between Britain and Germany. From this point on, British authorities were prepared to risk the welfare of British POWs if military or intelligence advantages were gained.<sup>139</sup> Wylie argues that the POW regime was weakened as a result of the Shackling Crisis, whereby 'the scope of productive dialogue was demonstrably narrower'.<sup>140</sup> The decision to meet German reprisals in kind has been questioned by historians. Rolf considers the cabinet to have 'blundered' into the crisis, endangering Allied coordination on the POW issue. He argues that, 'the British government proceeded to dig a deep hole

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<sup>137</sup> CAB 65/28, WM 136 (42)2, 8 October 1942.

<sup>138</sup> Simon P. Mackenzie, 'The Shackling Crisis: A Case-Study in the Dynamics of Prisoner-of-War Diplomacy in the Second World War', *International History Review*, 1 (1995), 78-98.

<sup>139</sup> Bob Moore, 'The Last Phase of the Gentleman's War: British Handling of German Prisoners of War on Board HMT *Pasteur*, March 1942', *War & Society*, 71:1 (1999), 41-55, 55.

<sup>140</sup> Wylie, *Diplomacy*, p. 154.

for itself, form which extrication was going to prove formidably difficult'.<sup>141</sup> Certainty, as the majority of troops captured at Dieppe were Canadian and that Canada held more German POWs than Britain, the Shackling Crisis had ramifications for Anglo-Canadian relations, which Vance has explored.<sup>142</sup> That Churchill was forced to yield in the cycle of reprisals due to public opinion in Britain and the Dominions is noted by historians of the crisis. Expanding on previous research, the nuances of the attitudes towards the Shackling Crisis will now be explored, and set within the wider context of reprisals against Germany.

The War Office statement, which denied that an order to bind the hands of POWs taken on the battlefield existed, was publicised on 9 October.<sup>143</sup> Churchill followed up the statement in a speech at Edinburgh which clearly outlined his intent, arguing that Hitler, 'feel[ing] the ring of doom remorselessly closing in', turned on the POWs in his hands in an attempt to break British morale. For Churchill, meeting the chaining of British POWs in kind was symbolic of British determination to 'keep right on to the end', the slogan ending his speech.<sup>144</sup> This defiant stance was applauded, but ultimately there was disfavour for reprisals against POWs.

The decision to meet Germany head on was unusual as, until then, British authorities had avoided taking reprisals against POWs. There was an extensive disfavour for reprimanding vulnerable POWs and reservations over the prudence of competing in a campaign of brutality with Hitler. Churchill himself was well aware of this. Reading a report on reprisals during the First World War, he concluded that reprisals should be avoided, 'as we have today to deal with a German Government infinitely more ruthless and ferocious whose counter-reprisals are likely to exceed anything that the public conscience in this country would allow us to do in return'.<sup>145</sup> That reprisals against POWs were unpopular with the British public was recognised by the authorities, with the ineffective reprisals of the First World War in the back of their minds. In March 1915, retaliating to attacks on British shipping, the Admiralty decided that captured U-boat personnel would be tried as war criminals. Although segregated in

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<sup>141</sup> David Rolf, 'Blind Bureaucracy': The British Government and POWs in German Captivity, 1939-45', in *Prisoners*, ed. by Moore and Fedorowich, pp. 47-68, p. 56.

<sup>142</sup> Jonathan F. Vance, 'Men in Manacles: The Shackling of Prisoners of War, 1942-1943', *Journal of Military History*, 59:3 (1995), 483-504; Jonathan F. Vance, *Objects of Concern: Canadian Prisoners of War Through the Twentieth Century* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1994), pp. 134-8.

<sup>143</sup> 'Britain Warns Germany', *Manchester Guardian*, 9 October 1942, p. 5.

<sup>144</sup> Robert Rhodes James, *Winston S. Churchill His Complete Speeches 1897-1963: Vol. VI 1935-42* (London: Chelsea House, 1974), pp. 6682-6683.

<sup>145</sup> Rolf, p. 57.

special detention centres, this was purely symbolic, and their treatment was not especially severe. In response the German government sent British POWs from notable families and the upper-classes to military and ordinary prisons. After mounting pressure in parliament, the Admiralty was forced to change policy. British reprisals were a farce, resulting in Churchill losing his position as first lord of the Admiralty to Sir Arthur Balfour.<sup>146</sup> Public confidence in reprisals was completely shattered, and with politicians extremely hesitant to use such measures after the incident, Britain by and large shunned reprisals from 1915. The principal reason behind the failure of the policy was that British public opinion was not persuaded that the association of German POWs and war criminals was enough to justify reprisals which compromised the position of British POWs in German hands.<sup>147</sup> Continuing reluctance was evident in 1939 when a subdued call for retaliation involving German POWs was made in parliament.

On 21 November 1939, Clement Attlee asked Prime Minister Chamberlain what action the government would take in response to the indiscriminate laying of sea mines by Germans, several ships having been sunk on British trade route in the past week. Chamberlain acknowledged the illegality of Germany's indiscriminate mine laying, assuring parliament that the government would retaliate.<sup>148</sup> Contemplating possible action, Sir Smedley Crook (Con. Birmingham Deritend) suggested positioning German POWs on British ships as a reprisal against the indiscriminate laying of sea mines. Chamberlain dismissed the idea and stated that the government would continue to observe the stipulations of the Geneva Convention.<sup>149</sup> The few correspondents which commented on Crook's suggestion similarly rebuffed it.<sup>150</sup> Writing to *The Times* on 24 November, Hugo Keene was annoyed that Crook was allowed to ask such a question as, 'the world is fully aware that we do not, whether bound by Convention or not, make reprisals on helpless individuals'.<sup>151</sup> In his view, reprisals were a superfluous subject to discuss. Whether bound by international law or not, the British would never resort to reprisals against POWs as it was antithetical to their national character.

The shackling crisis came at a time when the public was growing jaded of the war. The M-O morale report for September 1942 noted an increase in lack of interest over war news.<sup>152</sup> This trend continued into early October. 'It's the Bore War all over

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<sup>146</sup> Jones, *Violence*, pp. 84-5.

<sup>147</sup> *ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>148</sup> HC Deb, 21 November 1939, vol. 353, cols. 1033-4.

<sup>149</sup> HC Deb, 23 November 1939, vol. 353, cols. 1391-2.

<sup>150</sup> C.N., 'Mine Menace', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 29 November 1939, p. 5.

<sup>151</sup> Hugo Keene, 'To The Editor of the Times', *Times*, 28 November 1939, p. 7.

<sup>152</sup> MOA, FR 1432, Morale in September 1942, 1 October 1942.

again', a local health minister was overheard exclaiming. People were 'fed up because there's a lull', the minister suggesting that 'some bad bombing', 'decisive action', or 'even [...] another Dunkirk' was needed to get the war going again. The battle of Stalingrad remained inconclusive, and while, at the end of October, the breakout from El Alamein would provide excitement, prior to it the Shackling Crisis offered some interest to a fed-up public. 'The chaining of prisoners', M-O commented, 'aroused a certain amount of interest, and some indignation, although there were also comments, particularly from B-Class people, that it was all rather silly, or even wicked'.<sup>153</sup> Like historians of the incident, the British public questioned the wisdom of competing in a cycle of reprisals with Germany. The attitudes recorded by MO investigators were by and large negative, believing that responding to German reprisals in kind was ill-advised.

Three letters were published in the *Gloucestershire Echo* on 14 October commenting on the manacling of POWs. 'Reprisals is an ugly word, and is an ugly thing', wrote ONLOOKER, who asked if the British were 'prepared to run a "neck and neck" race with the Germans in cruelty to prisoners?' Chaining German POWs was unfair as they were not to blame: 'The brow-beaten conscripted soldiers of Nazidom are not responsible for the crime of their masters. Like war itself, reprisal punishes the wrong people, while the principals, for the time being, escape justice'.<sup>154</sup> J. W. Seddon, a retired Royal Navy Commander, also thought Britain was 'doing wrong' by retaliating. He noted that as reprisals were proscribed by the Geneva Convention 'then no provocation whatsoever is any excuse for retaliatory measures against helpless prisoners of war'. It was the German people not German POWs that were 'guilty of a very foul deed'. Rather than chaining German POWs, who were not to blame for the manacling of British POWs, Seddon suggested 'the complete wiping out of a small city'. This would be easily accomplished, he argued, by bombers flying at 20,000 feet during daylight as civilian areas would not be as well defended as military objectives. 'There is still further advantage', Seddon explained, 'that if the Germans were not brought to their senses the dose could be repeated against other cities or towns one at a time'.<sup>155</sup> Seddon's suggestion demonstrated a zealous commitment to the rule of war. While the manacling of POWs was prohibited, the complete annihilation of German civilians in a small town was a legitimate act of warfare. E. W. Hallum also suggested bombing, but wanted to target Germany's ally, Italy. 'That the Germans', E. W. Hallum surprised by events,

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<sup>153</sup> MOA, FR 1491, *Morale in October 1942*, 1 November 1942, p. 24; FR 1549, *Feelings of the week ending 4 December 1942*, 31 December 1942, p. 7.

<sup>154</sup> "ONLOOKER", 'No Reprisals', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 14 October 1942, p. 4.

<sup>155</sup> J. W. Seddon, 'Not Right Way to Retaliate', *ibid.*

'would retaliate against our threat to manacle prisoner for prisoner, was, of course, inevitable'. As the Germans were 'barbarians, devoid of honour, human feelings, and decency', chaining their POWs was a 'futile' proceeding. Germany, Hallum advised, should be given twelve hours to unfetter British POWs and if this demand was not met, 'we reduce Rome to ruins without delay'. Italy would then press their ally to free the British POWs.<sup>156</sup> It seems that few shared Seddon's views.

The *Spectator* noted that 'few people in this country are happy at the action taken here, which is that of reprisal for reprisal, or are satisfied that it is the best means of striking back at Germany for her savage treatment of innocent prisoners'.

We cannot compete successfully with them in brutality. We do not help British prisoners by chaining the German. In such a matter we can only play our true part by acting according to our own honour and dignity and disdaining to copy the enemy's misdeeds, dealing out retribution by the greater daring of our bombing and more determined attacks in legitimate war. Here is a situation where Britain should punish the enemy by every proper war-like means, but not by stooping to his level.<sup>157</sup>

Writing to the *Spectator*, Gordon Evans echoed the opinion of the editorial, arguing that in chaining POWs, Britain 'merely play[ed] into the hands of the Nazis'. A 'more effective reply' in his view, was 'to refuse to play the Nazi game', and simply, 'add this new brutal breach of law to the list of crimes to be dealt with when victory is won'.<sup>158</sup>

In his *Spectator* column, Harold Nicolson commented on Churchill's parliamentary statement on the shackling of German POWs. He noted that it was generally accepted that the Germans were at fault and not the British. Yet, Nicholson believed that it was the inappropriate response to meet German reprisals in kind. 'The treatment of prisoners of war', he argued, 'is in fact one of the most accurate barometers of civilisation'. Since the eighteenth century, the view had developed that POWs were not the captor's property and 'his treatment should be based, not upon motives of profit, punishment or revenge, but upon the sole consideration that he must be prevented from again taking up arms'. Britain 'had been pioneers in this enlightened movement'. Therefore, Nicholson hoped that negotiations with the Swiss would prove fruitful and POWs would soon be unchained. Their continued manacling simply corrupted British ideals.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> E. W. Hallum, 'Spared too long', *ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> 'The Chaining Outrage', *Spectator*, 15 October 1942, p. 1.

<sup>158</sup> Gordon Evans, 'Chaining Prisoners', *ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>159</sup> Harold Nicolson, 'Marginal Comment', *Spectator*, 16 October 1942, p. 10.

Reprisals directed towards German POWs were unfair as they were not to blame for the actions of their leaders. The British public had a similar unease and distaste towards the bombing of Germany. Investigating attitudes towards reprisal raids in the immediately after German attacks, M-O 'regularly found that, after a blitz, people in bus, street and pub seldom talked of getting their own back on German civilians'.<sup>160</sup> Bombing was accepted as a necessary evil to shorten the war:

Very few people like the idea of these raids; very few indeed want them stopped. They are widely regarded as an unpleasant necessity, seldom as a just retribution for the raids Britain has suffered. But this does not mean that there is little desire for retribution in any form. The desire is there, and has been since war began. The problem is how to canalise it in the most constructive (or least destructive) direction.<sup>161</sup>

Retributive attitudes were directed towards the Nazi leadership, with a minority of people believing that 'the crimes of war should be visited on the ordinary citizen of Germany'. M-O noted that the statement on war criminals at the Moscow Conference was 'very widely approved'. It was agreed then that after the war, German officers and Nazi party members that were consenting accomplices in atrocities would undergo trial for the crimes in the liberated countries where they took place.<sup>162</sup>

By situating the Shackling Crisis within wider attitudes towards the treatment of Germany, the underlying reasons for public disapproval are clear. With retributive attitudes directed towards the Nazi leadership, meting out reprisals on German POWs offended British notions of fair play. Churchill was aware that the conscience of the British public would never allow Britain to compete in a cycle of ever increasing reprisals against POWs. Ultimately he had to yield. That the chaining of POWs by Germany was barbaric was unquestioned. There were, however, reservations over the wisdom behind meeting reprisals in kind. In chaining German POWs while Hitler, the perpetrator of the crime, escaped punishment justice was misplaced. By acting out the same barbarity as Hitler, Britain descended to the level of the enemy and the distinction between democracy and fascism was lost. Reprisals ran contrary to British values of fair play and the rule of law. Rather than unlawfully manacled POWs, retribution could be wrought through bombing, a legitimate act of warfare and/or waiting to bring the criminals to justice in a post-war tribunal.

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<sup>160</sup> MOA, FR 2000, Vengeance, 14 January 1943, p. 1.

<sup>161</sup> *ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>162</sup> Avalon Project at Yale Law School, 'The Moscow Conference; October 1943', <<http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/moscow.asp>> [accessed 20 September 2016].

## 7. Conclusions

Although few German POWs were held in Britain between 1939 and 1942, their captivity was still a sporadically newsworthy and divisive subject. During the period of phoney war, newspaper and newsreel coverage of the capture and internment of German POWs emphasised their exemplary treatment in British hands. They depicted the German POWs as well fed, adequately—if not lavishly, in regards to Grizedale Hall—accommodated, and highlighted that they were provided with literature, musical instruments as well as time to pursue sporting activities. The press demonstrated, there were far more unfortunate places to find oneself in than a POW camp in Britain. As this chapter has detailed, after the removal of German POWs from Britain in 1940, several incidents bought the POW issue back into focus. Again, news coverage by and large applauded British conduct towards German POWs while condemning the actions of the German government. Britain was represented as an upstanding captor, treating POWs correctly. Churchill's decision to retaliate in late 1942, manacled POWs in kind, was not celebrated but at best accepted as an only decent recourse to confront German barbarity.

Letters to the editor and M-O material indicate that the narrative presented by the media was challenged, however. Comparing their own position to that of German POWs, certain individuals were upset that the latter were afforded comforts denied them. Perceived leniency towards German POWs was criticised. Those who considered the average German a brute could not understand why they were afforded such good treatment.

Throughout the phoney war, the German POWs which found themselves in Britain were depicted as ordinary soldiers glad to be out of the war. Their relationship with their captors—the soldiers on the ships which rescued them from the sea and the camp commandants—were cordial. Reportage of the German POWs held in Britain during the phoney war suggested that all Germans were not evil, Blondie—the German sailor sung to by his British counterparts—being case in point. There was a noticeable change in the tone the press adopted towards German POWs during the period examined. The camaraderie between British soldiers and their German captives disappeared from reportage around the time of the Dunkirk evacuation. At this time of potential invasion, German POWs were depicted as dangerous individuals and British soldiers were cautious when guarding them, a stark contrast to the jovial exchanges

between captor and captive which had characterised earlier encounters. With the end of the phoney war then, it was no longer the Nazi leadership which was the enemy, but also the German people, including German POWs.

The *Altmark*, the mooted exchange, and Shackling Crisis served to highlight the cultural differences between Britain and the German enemy. The perversity of the German captain in his treatment of the British sailors, the pretence of the German authorities when negotiating the exchange of POWs, and the brutality of manacled POWs all fed into the wider demonization of the German enemy. Reportage of the German treatment of POWs followed the pattern of propaganda. Indeed, in terms of the *Altmark* and Shackling Crisis, reality was far different from what was reported. The British sailors on-board the *Altmark* did not suffer intentionally while the chaining of POWs was more symbolic than an actual attempt to harm them.

The reportage of the capture and handling of German POWs did more than simply describe their number and condition. In showcasing the upright treatment of German POWs, British values were demonstrated and celebrated. The way in which Britain dealt with POWs and their captivity highlighted the sportsmanship of the British people.

These values invested in the treatment of POWs were obviously deep-rooted, given the references to the First World War in discussions. It is clear that the legacy of the Great War played an important part in the shaping of attitudes towards captivity and the treatment of POWs. It can be seen in this chapter that the memory of Great War captivity was, however, contested. Whether or not the suffering of British POWs in German hands was intentional during the 1914-18 conflict was a point of debate. It can be suggested that the division of opinion here reflected a broader dispute over the identity of the German enemy. One side argued that the German was inherently cruel, a barbaric enemy which needed not sympathy. The other viewed the Nazi leadership as the principal enemy. The German people had been misled by their masters and showing them compassion would serve to highlight that Britain was not their true enemy, that being the Nazi leadership.

If the idea that the Shackling Crisis marked the end of the gentlemanly conduct between British and German authorities regarding the welfare of the POWs in their care is correct, it remains to be seen if popular attitudes similarly changed. Whether or not the values ascribed the treatment of POWs survived the intensification of the conflict, specifically the disclosure of the Stalag Luft III executions and liberation of Belsen, is the concern of the next chapter.

## Chapter 3: 1944-45

### 1. Introduction

Following chronologically from the previous chapter, chapter three examines attitudes towards German POWs and their treatment between June 1944 and May 1945. This period witnessed the war against Germany turn in favour of the Allies, leading to the downfall of the Nazi regime. The capture and transportation of German POWs from the Normandy beachhead to Britain formed part of the reportage of the invasion, feeding into the narrative of success. Rather than arriving as invaders as they had prospectively been in 1940, German soldiers entered Britain as defeated captives. Again, the public came into close contact with the POWs at the docks, on the railways, and in the streets where they lived. The public met their captives with the same mixture of curiosity and indifference as they had done earlier in the war. Not only had the war swung in favour of the Allies, another factor distinguished this period of the war from the earlier. In May 1944, the shooting of 50 RAF officers from Stalag Luft III was announced. This was the first instance where the brutality of the Nazi regime usually reserved for the racial enemies of Hitler had been directed towards British POWs. While British POWs had been subjected to substandard conditions aboard the *Altmark* and placed in manacles during the Shackling Crisis, they had not been executed. The culpability of the German people in the act was debated, yet there were no calls for reciprocity in the treatment of German POWs. Debates in the press remained similar to that of 1939-44. On the one hand, realist voices emphasising the brutality of the German people considered the treatment of German POWs soft, or unnecessarily superior to the level of treatment dictated by international law. On the other, liberal voices defended the treatment of German POWs and criticised any notion of straying from international law; this would only result in a compromise of British values, descending to the level of the enemy. Moreover, these defenders of the British tradition of treating POWs well made a definite distinction between the German people and the Nazi leadership which had misled them. Therefore, German POWs were exonerated from the atrocities committed by their masters; they were soldiers doing their duty like British servicemen. With the liberation of Belsen in April 1945, and the widespread disclosure of the horrors perpetrated in concentration camps, the liberal voices defending German POWs and their treatment grew quiet, with realist voices emphasising the unjustly soft treatment of German POWs. In the wake of Belsen there was little concern with the

stipulations of the 1929 Geneva Convention. Instead, calls to set German POWs to work dominated public discussion.

## 2. The second wave of German POWs, June 1944 to February 1945

Codenamed operation Neptune, D-Day witnessed the largest amphibious invasion in history. The multinational effort comprised of thousands of small landing craft escorted by hundreds of larger vessels carrying some 130,000 soldiers. It was preceded by an extensive aerial bombardment and airborne assault involving around 1,200 aircraft carrying British, Canadian, Free French and American forces. Neptune was one part of the attempt to establish a Second Front against Germany in North-West Europe, codenamed operation Overlord.<sup>1</sup> While the focus was on pressing forward, the invasion also involved movement backward. Planning for Overlord had to consider the capture and transportation of enemy POWs from the theatre of battle. As there would be no space to hold them on the French coast during the opening stages of the invasion, POWs would have to be shipped back across the Channel to Britain. Forming part of the larger invasion armada, a fleet of Landing Ship Tank (LST) acted as a ferry service, transporting consignments of POWs from the beachhead to ports on the English south-coast ports which operated as staging areas for the invasion, including Southampton, Portsmouth, Harwich, and Portland. After Cherbourg was captured, larger vessels were employed replacing the LST craft which were judged too inefficient for the task. By mid-July 49,000 had experienced the crossing—which could take between 24 hours and 4 days weather depending—rising to 145,000 by the end of the year.<sup>2</sup> From the dockside where they were landed, POWs were moved inland by train and lorry for processing at transit camps before being moved on to more permanent accommodation. POWs in US custody were not destined to stay in Britain. After landing at Portland in Dorset, they were taken to Le Marchant Camp at Devizes in Wiltshire, before being transported across the Atlantic by ships departing Liverpool. The transport of POWs to Britain during the early stages of the Normandy invasion was accepted as a necessity by the cabinet. However, there remained a reluctance to see large numbers of German POWs held in Britain. Churchill was particularly anxious, understanding that their presence would only serve to exacerbate current accommodation difficulties and require soldiers to guard them who could not be spared. As the number of German POWs

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Beevor, *D-Day: The Battle for Normandy* (London: Penguin, 2014), pp. 51-87

<sup>2</sup> Sullivan, p. 21.

increased with the Allied advance, the British authorities would look to their allies to take custody of their POWs on the Continent.

Breaking out of the Normandy beaches, the Allies pushed further into France, trapping a significant portion of the German armed forces in the Falaise pocket before liberating Paris in August. Allied successes led to the capture of large numbers of German servicemen, which, as always, posed problems. Reluctant to see them in Britain, the French were pressed to take custody of 50,000. They would accommodate and guard the POWs, which they were happy to receive to work in agriculture, while SHAEF continued to feed and clothe the POWs.<sup>3</sup> However, the French treatment of their German POWs caused serious concern among British officials. In September 1944, Sir Percy James Grigg, secretary of state for war, warned that British owned POWs in French run camps were being subjected to 'extremely unsatisfactory conditions', which was 'an embarrassment to our Forces'. Despite this, his suggestion that they be brought to the UK, forfeiting a consignment of Italian POWs from South Africa, was overruled.<sup>4</sup> Their presence, it was argued, would only serve to aggravate current accommodation difficulties. Churchill himself emphasised the importance of not shipping large numbers of German POWs to Britain at a subsequent cabinet meeting.<sup>5</sup> Accommodation certainly posed an acute problem for the British authorities. Updating the cabinet in November, Grigg reported that the 130,000 POWs then held in Britain had only been accommodated through intentional overcrowding and the use of tented accommodation. The situation was desperate and the use of tents would have to be made during the coming winter, a direct violation of the Geneva Convention. Attempting to alleviate accommodation difficulties, Grigg had approached French and US authorities to accept 50,000 British owned POWs, warning that a 'very difficult situation' was on the horizon if these steps proved fruitless.<sup>6</sup> Overcrowding and the prospective capture of even larger numbers of German POWs towards the end of the war with Germany forced the British to significantly modify their policy towards their POWs.

The foresight of Grigg was proved correct when in February 1945 two problems were faced by the cabinet concerning German POWs held in North-West Europe. In the

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<sup>3</sup> Moore, 'Unruly Allies: British Problems with the French Treatment of Axis Prisoners of War, 1943-1945', *War in History*, 7 (2000), 180-198, 191-193.

<sup>4</sup> CAB 65/43 WM 129 (44)5, 29 September 1944.

<sup>5</sup> CAB 65/44 WM 147 (44)3, 7 November 1944.

<sup>6</sup> CAB WP (44) 655, Prisoners of War Captured in Western Europe Since 6<sup>th</sup> June 1944, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War, 16<sup>th</sup> November 1944.

immediate term, there was the threat of an outbreak of disease in the overcrowded camps run by 21 Army Group. The total capacity of 39,000 had been exceeded, with 56,700 POWs crowded in them; perfect conditions for a diphtheria epidemic, which was present in the Low Countries. Grigg compelled the cabinet to accept 7,500 POWs from Belgium immediately, and a further 20,000 later in the month if necessary. In the long term, recent operational development of the war in Europe necessitated the framing of plans to cope with the large number of German POWs expected to be captured. SHEAF forecast 860,000 German POWs being captured by the end of the war in Europe. Under the 50:50 agreement, Britain was liable for half the captures, 430,000. Added to those already in British charge, the total amounted to 709,000. Accommodation could be found for only 256,000. Therefore there was a deficiency of accommodation for 453,000. The Secretary proposed a number of possible methods to alleviate the burden, but was not confident they would work. Therefore, Grigg proposed that the United States be approached to revise the 50:50 agreement. Instead, each nation would be responsible for their captures.<sup>7</sup> The Cabinet approved the acceptance of the 7,500 POWs and, if necessary, the 20,000 in the future, and invited Grigg to examine, in consultation with other departments, how best to negotiate with the US about altering the 50:50 agreement.<sup>8</sup>

### 3. The invasion of Normandy, June 1944

Mass Observation reports provide insight into the reactions of the British public to the invasion of Normandy. With the invasion of Italy, optimism was high at the end of May 1944.<sup>9</sup> This positivity fed into the anticipation surrounding the start of the Second Front.<sup>10</sup> For some, the aircraft which crossed Britain in a continuous stream toward Normandy on the night of 5 June were an indicator that a momentous event was underway. At 8.00 German reports of Allied troops landing in France were quoted, followed by an official confirmation of the invasion by General Eisenhower over the wireless. The reaction of the British public to news of the invasion was unlike anything Mass Observation had previously recorded. Summarising the initial response to D-Day, a file report noted that:

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<sup>7</sup> CAB 66/61 WP (45) 89, Disposal of Prisoner of War in Captured in North-West Europe, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War, 10 February 1945.

<sup>8</sup> CAB 65/49, WM 18 (45)7, 12 February 1945.

<sup>9</sup> MOA, FR 2110, Morale in May 1944, 1 June 1944.

<sup>10</sup> MOA, FR 2130, Morale in June 1944, 1 July 1944.

The quietness, lack of immediate apparent emotion or excitement, was one of the vivid characteristics of D-Day. Perhaps, partly, because people had lived over the moment often in the past, expected things to be abnormal and in a undefined way different from any ordinary day. Largely because feelings simply did not get translated into words.<sup>11</sup>

Investigators in London all agreed to the 'extraordinary silence'.<sup>12</sup> Although individual reactions varied significantly, Mass Observation discerned a general narrative arc in the reaction to D-Day. At first, there was a short burst of overt excitement, an emotion, confined to the personal sphere, which was shared between family and friends at home, the offices, and the factory. This phase quickly passed as the implications of invasion became clear. Thoughts turned to friends and relatives taking part in the invasion. Outside the home, feelings were scarcely expressed. Little excitement was shown in public places. Here, there were no suggestions of over-optimism or elation. Observed by investigators, crowds at wireless retailers and newspaper stands were surrounded by discernible anxiety. Tension was evidenced by the speed at which newspapers sold out, as one investigator recorded:

Fresh papers were now coming in; as soon as they arrived, small tense knots of people, mostly men, formed around each news vendor. But there were rarely more than 20 people trying to buy papers from any one man. In about 4 minutes all papers everywhere in Piccadilly Circus had been sold. Roughly counting, investigator found 21 people standing around reading front page of their papers. There was little talking, but others who had not been able to buy paper gave long glances at those standing and reading theirs.<sup>13</sup>

In the clamour for news, jostling broke out in some places. There was irritation when people who had not been waiting received papers first—sellers having held back copies for their regular customers. Tension continued into the days following D-Day, however, there were more confessions of excitement. This was followed by cheerfulness, with some references to the war being shortened by the invasion and gossip of other potential landings.<sup>14</sup> Throughout June and July expectations of how long the war would last decreased further, promoted by the visible collapse of the German defences.<sup>15</sup>

M-O reports indicate that there was a feeling that people were part of an important historic moment. The anxiety felt by individuals regarding the invasion stemmed from the possibility that relations and friends would be killed during the

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<sup>11</sup> MOA, FR 2115, "We're Moving", 14 June 1944, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> MOA, FR 2131, The Invasion of France, dated June 1944, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> MOA, FR 2143, Morale in July 1944, 1 August 1944.

invasion. More general anxiety came from the fact that such invasions had not been successful in the past, the failure of Dieppe perhaps the most notable. Although concerned with the possibility of failure, D-Day marked a point where previous defeats could be overturned. Considering the refraction of the legacy of the Great War, David Reynolds has argued that the end of the conflict in 1945 'finished the job apparently botched in 1918'.<sup>16</sup> During the opening stages of the invasion, the capture of German POWs in Normandy and their arrival at British ports on the south-coast formed part of the reportage of the invasion; it was an important symbol of success and the changing dynamic of the war.

Having been fished out of the Channel—their craft having been sunk by invasion warships—a, presumably small, group of German POWs were landed at a south coast port late in the evening on 6 June.<sup>17</sup> These were the first German servicemen to have been reportedly captured during the landings. The subsequent groups of POWs captured and brought to Britain formed an important element in the reportage of the invasion and subsequent breakout into the French *bocage*, symbolising the changing dynamic of the war which had already swung in favour of the Allies. Early in June, one particular POW anecdote, varying slightly in form in the different regional newspapers it appeared, was published alongside updates on the invasion.

A train load of German POWs being transported to the north on 10 June stopped at a town in the south of England for a few moments. An onlooker asked a POW leaning out a window: "Well, Jerry, what do you think of England?". Another POW quickly responded: "Three years ago," he said, "Herr Hitler promised we would come to England." He shrugged and placed both of his fists together if they were handcuffed. "Vell," he added grimly, "we haf come."<sup>18</sup>

Although impossible to verify the authenticity of it, this light-hearted exchange between captor and captive summarised the significant shift the war against Germany had undergone since the Battle of Britain. Having defeated France and forced Allied armies to retreat from Dunkirk, the German soldiers across the Channel had been poised

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<sup>16</sup> Reynolds, p. 280.

<sup>17</sup> 'Stop-Press News: Prisoners and Casualties Reach England', *Manchester Guardian*, 7 June 1944, p. 8. 'Invasion Flashes', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 8 June 1944, p. 4. 'First Prisoners Arrive', *Yorkshire Post*, 8 June 1944, p. 1. 'First Batch of Nazi Prisoners', *Aberdeen Journal*, 7 June 1944, p. 1. 'Stop Press', *Dundee Courier*, 7 June 1944, p. 3. 'First Casualties Landed', *Yorkshire Post*, 7 June 1944, p. 1. 'Prisoners in England', *Hull Daily Mail*, 8 June 1944, p. 1. 'Prisoners From the Beachheads', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 8 June 1944, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> 'Neat and Tidy Nazi Prisoners', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 10 June 1944, p. 1. "'Ve Haf Come'", *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 10 June 1944, p. 8. 'Veil, Ve Haf Come England', *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 10 June 1944, p. 5.

to invade Britain. Instead of victorious invaders, German servicemen marched into Britain in June 1944 as defeated POWs. Their arrival was commented upon by war correspondents who had flocked to the south coast to report on the invasion.

While journalists had certainly not specifically travelled to observe the disembarkation of the POWs, the inclusion of the captive enemy demonstrates that the German POWs formed an unavoidable part of the atmosphere and scenes of invasion staging areas on the south coast. Reports were by and large factual providing insight into the resistance offered Allied forces on the other side of the Channel. Furthermore, these descriptive accounts of the appearance and temperament of POWs were used as a measure of Germany's military condition and the morale of the enemy soldiers. One of the earliest reports was provided by H. P. Twyford, war correspondent for the *Western Morning News*, who commented on the POWs who he had seen being marshalled into a holding camp near the dockside in early June.

They were mostly between the ages of 20 and 30, with quite a number rather tired and bedraggled looking, and seemingly quite happy about their position. They were of the type of soldier perhaps best described as "holding troops," with just a sprinkling of those of a first line bearing. [...] At this centre where they were received they had their examination, baths, and feeding before being passed along to another part of the country, where they will be kept out of action for the remainder of the war. About his aspect of their war career they seemed perfectly happy and contented.<sup>19</sup>

Twyford provided another account a few days later:

Today further batches of prisoners were being landed. This is a strange ferry service, unlike anything that any previous wars have known. The landing craft go the outward trip laden with fighting men and the implements of war. They bring back the wounded and the prisoners. The prisoners continue to be a very mixed bag, and odd assortment. They contain quite a sprinkling of Russians and Poles who have been forced into the German fighting machine and who are obviously in their element to be captured by the British. One pathetic sight among the prisoners which moved everyone almost to tears was a Russian boy of not more than 14 years. He was crying with fright, for he had been utterly scared by the Germans telling him that the Americans would "slit his throat." It was a tragic scene and it was a long time before any comfort from the British and Americans could assuage his fright.<sup>20</sup>

Joe Illingworth, war correspondent for the *Yorkshire Post*, also provided his observations on the POWs he witnessed.

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<sup>19</sup> H. P. Twyford, 'First Prisoners Arrive', *Western Morning News*, 9 June 1944, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> H. P. Twyford, 'Scared Russian Boy of 14 Among Prisoners', *Western Morning News*, 12 June 1944, p. 3.

This afternoon I saw 500 prisoners brought ashore on the South Coast from a big landing craft. First came a lieutenant in his long coat and top boots. He bore himself well, looking neither to the left nor right as he was marched away alone under the case of the guard. He had the hard, fixed stare of the first-class German soldier. After an interval the rest of the prisoners were marched out on to the quayside, and as they came you could hear onlookers murmur in surprise, for these were a motley collection. A Canadian soldier who watched them go by commented: "These look a very delicate lot." There were few among them who stood six feet in their boots. Most of them, indeed, were undersized. Some were barely five feet in height. They were of all ages, and among them were a considerable number of old men—very old men—much too old to serve, one would have thought. Most of them, frankly, seemed glad to be out of it all, as the guards hurried them along to their cages they laughed both among themselves and at those of us who watched them. [...] Then, as the last of them came off the ship, a ripple of amusement went through the crowd, for behind all this mass of grey-green German uniform scrambled six men in blue-grey uniforms—Italians. They looked better specimens than the Germans. They were certainly more handsome and a great deal better pleased with themselves. They had reason to be, for when I spoke to them afterwards I found they had eagerly taken advantage of our invasion and had made for our lines and surrendered.<sup>21</sup>

Twyford and Illingworth's reports shared common themes which surprised the journalists. Initial batches of German POWs were not considered first-rate soldiers, with a great number being quite old or extremely young. Pictures of the POWs published in the press contrasted the maturity of Allied servicemen with their youthful captives. Furthermore, the majority of the POWs were not ethnic Germans. Batches contained numerous and unexpected nationalities, predominantly from Eastern Europe. These men had been forced to fight for Germany, and, uncommitted to their Nazi leaders, had surrendered to Allied forces at the first opportunity, in some cases killing their German officers. They were glad to have been captured and out of the war, and believed that the war would soon be over. While the reports were predominantly factual accounts of the observations of the journalists, they arguably presented a picture of a German military force lacking resources and men, a sharp contrast to the professional soldiers which had taken part in the Blitzkrieg of 1940 and the North African campaign. Certainly, the 36 infantry divisions made up of some 850,000 soldiers defending the Atlantic Wall, as Beevor describes, 'were of very mixed quality'.<sup>22</sup> Twyford correctly observed that the majority of the POWs shipped across during the early stages of the invasion had been specifically assigned to coastal defence. The best soldiers were directed into SS formations, leaving only the older and younger servicemen for these infantry divisions.

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<sup>21</sup> Joe Illingworth, 'Nearly 2,000 Prisoners Through Our Cages', *Yorkshire Post*, 10 June 1944, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> Beevor, p. 37.

Numbers had been increased through the conscription of *Volksdeutsch*—those deemed to be of German origin from central Europe and the Baltic. Poles had been forcibly recruited while Soviet POWs, wanting to escape the dire conditions of their camps, had volunteered to serve as *Osttruppen*. The various nationalities which made up the infantry divisions defending Normandy concerned German officers and NGOs, who feared that their troops would quickly turn on them when fighting commenced.<sup>23</sup> These other nationalities were dubbed 'Hitler's slave troops' by *Daily Mail* war correspondent Alexander Clifford.<sup>24</sup> These soldiers made up, as journalists reported, the first POWs to be taken during the invasion. Their age and nationality came as surprising, and portrayed a diminishing German military force. However as Illingworth noted, there was a higher proportion of first rate soldiers in later batches.

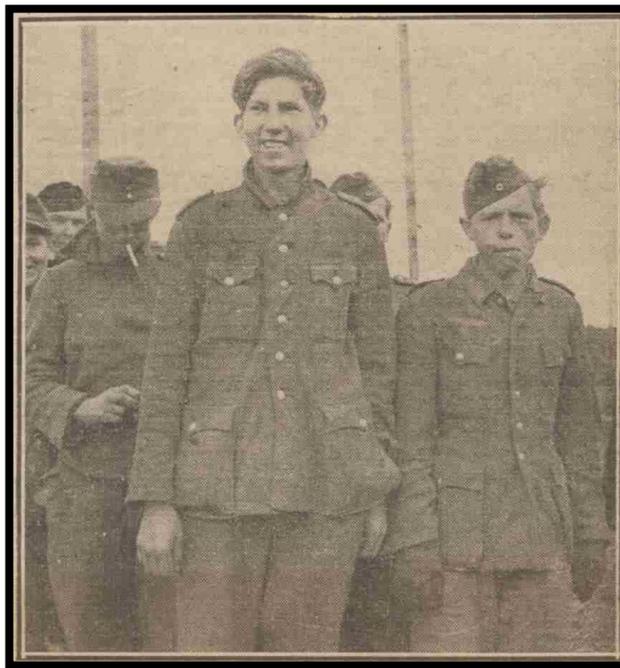
There were German paratroopers among the prisoners, men of strict obedience who exercised a disciplinary influence on the remainder during the voyage. They came ashore in batches of about 100. Many were very young, mere boys, but in general they were a harder and tougher looking lot than those I saw in the early stages of our invasion.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p. 38

<sup>24</sup> Alexander Clifford, 'Hitler's slave troops', *Daily Mail*, 30 June 1944, p. 2. See also, '156 Slave Troops Quit on Beaches', *Daily Mail*, 9 June 1944, p. 1. Alexander Clifford, 'Garrison is Battling for time', *Daily Mail*, 24 June 1944, p. 1. Alexander Clifford, 'Second Army Attacks on 7-mile Front', *Daily Mail*, 17 July 1944, p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> Joe Illingworth, 'Nurses Go To Normandy', *Yorkshire Post*, 19 June 1944, p. 3. Indeed, behind the infantry divisions were panzer formations and Waffen SS divisions which would offer fierce resistance to Allied forces. Beevor, *D-Day*, p.39.



**Image 6 *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 13 June 1944, p. 1.**



**Image 7 *Yorkshire Post*, 14 June 1944, p. 3.**

Newspaper content provides insight into the reaction of the public to the arrival of German POWs, which remained the same mixture of indifference and curiosity as it had been earlier in the war. There were several 'contact zones' where the public encountered the captive enemy first hand. In her seminal work on travel in the imperial environment, Mary Louise Pratt coined the term in reference to the space in which imperial encounters occurred. She defined a 'contact zone' as 'the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and

establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict'. In the case of POW encounters, Pratt's conceptualisation of the contact zone is useful, although it requires some alteration to the different context.<sup>26</sup> The first point of contact between the public and POWs were the docks. On 8 June, the *Daily Mail* reported on the arrival of a group of POWs the previous night. The description of these early POWs matched others, but the report also notes the presence of a crowd which had gathered to view the POWs.

A batch of German prisoners arrived here on British motor-gunboats late tonight. They were N.C.O.s and men in field grey, and there were four ambulance carloads of seriously wounded. Soon after the boats tied up to the dock side armed marines came up the gangways leading a motley procession. Some of the prisoners wore their steel helmets and clutched bundles under their arms. They were loaded into eight open-sided lorries, with grinning Allied infantrymen in the rear. The news had quickly spread through the dockside streets, and hundreds of people, with soldiers and sailors—many of them just returned from the Cherbourg—Havre battle-fronts—stood on the kerbside to watch the prisoners pass. The four brilliantly-lit ambulances swung out of the dockyard and drove swiftly through the dark streets to a neighbouring military hospital. [...] Some of the unwounded prisoners smiled—one gave the "thumbs up" sign as he passed, and several shout "Kaput"—but there was no arm-slinging or "Heil Hitlering." The prisoners were not up to the standard of the average British soldier either in equipment, uniform, or physique. A fair proportion were thin, sallow-faced boys of 18. They gave the impression that all the spirits had been knocked out of them. When a military policeman asked one man how he felt about the war, he replied slowly in English: "It does not matter now; it is soon all over. We are beaten, I know." That was the general attitude of the captives.<sup>27</sup>

The arrival of this group of POWs was something of a spectacle which those in the area of the dock were curious to witness. Memoirs of German POWs support newspaper coverage, indicating that there was little demonstration towards them by those witnessing their arrival. Herbert Holewa noted the quietness of Southampton when he disembarked there: 'British people may have given the "V salute", but otherwise, very, very quiet, very nice'. The civilians standing on the pavement 'looked on in silence' as Siegfried Mohring and the other POWs were unloaded. 'Not one', he recalled, 'threw a stone or spat, swore, or insulted us, no one shouted'.<sup>28</sup> At Harwich, Horst Woetzel recalls the 'cool matter-of-fact way' he was treated. Military personnel and dockworkers did not stare at the POWs. Another POW similarly recalled, 'at Southampton they

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<sup>26</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> Daily Mail Reporter, 'Beachhead Prisoners Landed Here', *Daily Mail*, 8 June 1944, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Robin Quinn, *Hitler's Last Army: German POWs in Britain* (Stroud: History Press, 2015), p. 33.

looked through us as if we were glass'. Writing of their experiences during their transportation, German POWs note a marked difference in British hands when compared to their treatment by soldiers and civilians of other nationalities. It was not uncommon for German POWs to be pelted by stones and bottles or bludgeoned by rifle butts in Belgium.<sup>29</sup> George Gebauer had expected hostility from passers-by as he was marched through Southampton. Instead, 'they ignored us, minding their own business'. Gebauer speculated that the locals had seen many POWs and had become accustomed to the sight of the captured enemy. John Marshall, *Hull Daily Mail* reporter noted that while many POWs were brought to port where he was waiting to embark to Normandy, 'the dockyard workers stood silently watching them'.<sup>30</sup>

There was a degree of curiosity towards the POWs held in at the two large transit camps at Wanstead Flats, a portion of Epping Forest, and on the East Ham-Barking by-pass.<sup>31</sup> These camps aroused local curiosity, with crowds of sightseers visiting Wanstead Flats during the weekend of 7-8 October. Press reports reveal that, at times, the crowds stood six-deep as they press close to the barbed wire. Military guards and specially detailed police kept move the people along. On Saturday passers-by saw the inmates playing football with a ball made of rolled-up rags, and on Sunday evening the Germans could be heard singing inside the camp.<sup>32</sup> For local residents, the proximity of the camps to their homes was resented. In October, the *Daily Mail* published a picture taken from a bedroom window of a house across the road of the POW camp at East Ham, noting that the women of the blitzed areas resented having to look out on the masses of POWs, even though they were behind barbed wire.<sup>33</sup> The camp at Wanstead was closed on 28 October after protests were made by residents, who complained for the 'brilliance of the searchlights' illuminating the camp at night, and of the singing of the POWs.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Sullivan, pp. 27-8.

<sup>30</sup> John Marshall, 'Sea Lane to Normandy Beachhead', *Hull Daily Mail*, 13 June 1944, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Leytonstone Historical Society, *Behind the Wire: Prisoner of War Camps on Wanstead Flats* (Leytonstone: Leytonstone Historical Society, 2013).

<sup>32</sup> 'Crowds of Sightseers At Prison Camp', *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 9 October 1944, p. 5. 'Prison Camp Sightseers', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 9 October 1944, p. 1. 'London Prison Camp Sightseers', *Hartlepool Mail*, 9 October 1944, p. 5. 'London Camps For Nazi Prisoners', *Gloucester Citizen*, 6 October 1944, p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> 'Germans 'Mass'—In London', *Daily Mail*, 6 October 1944, p. 4.

<sup>34</sup> 'Germans Sang Too Loudly', *Sunday Post*, 29 October 1944, p. 16.

From transit camps POWs were distributed throughout Britain, transported by train. Railway stations became another point of contact between civilians and POWs.<sup>35</sup> Newspapers reported some minor incidents. For instance, a train full of German POWs pulled in at a G.W.R. station with two black swastikas on the windows of one coach. The station inspector, looking in the carriages, found two more on the off-side windows. He asked the officer in charge why they were displayed. He said, 'they want to keep the old home atmosphere a bit longer'. The inspector said that the train would not move until they were removed. And they were.<sup>36</sup>

There was some controversy over the travelling arrangements for German POWs. While the cattle truck was the main mode of transportation on the Continent, POWs travelled across Britain in train coaches—upholstered, also being heated in winter. The 'luxurious travelling conditions' afforded German POWs were criticised in parliament, especially the inconvenience it posed to the British railway passenger.<sup>37</sup> On 11 July, Sir Edward Keeling (Con. MP, Twickenham) questioned the unreasonable practice of allowing one seat per POW on train carriages, and asked the secretary of state for war to change it to two POWs per seat, to allow other travellers a fair share of train accommodation. Keeling pointed out that the Germans used box-cars to transport British POWs 40 at a time on the Continent. As a matter of security, and to minimise the number of guards required, Grigg asserted that POWs had to remain seated.<sup>38</sup> The explanation was not considered satisfactory. Reporting on the parliamentary debate, the *Aberdeen Journal* recorded the public irritation at the 'blind adherence to red tape'. The

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<sup>35</sup> 'Wounded Reach Manchester', *Manchester Guardian*, 15 June 1944, p. 6. 'Nearly All Stretcher Cases', *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 22 June 1944, p. 5. 9 German POWs were among 221 wounded from France who detrained at Swansea on 11 June. 'Wounded Nazis In Wales', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 12 June 1944, p. 4. 'Hun Wounded Brought Here', *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 12 June 1944, p. 5. 'Nazis Among Wounded From France', *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 12 June 1944, p. 8. 'Casualties from France', *Hartlepool Mail*, 12 June 1944, p. 8. 33 were seen in Nottingham. 'Nottingham Hospitals 500 Wounded', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 12 June 1944, p. 4. Several wounded POWs were seen among the passengers on a train which arrived in Wakefield. 'Invasion Wounded Reach Wakefield', *Yorkshire Post*, 13 June 1944, p. 6. Similar scenes were seen in Leeds. 'Wounded From France Arrive in Leeds', *Yorkshire Post*, 14 June 1944, p. 6. Further numbers arrived the next day, 'More Wounded Arrive in Leeds', *Yorkshire Post*, 15 June 1944, p. 6. 'Wounded Arrive in Scotland', *Aberdeen Journal*, 26 June 1944, p. 1. A few wounded POWs were also among some 233 wounded being unloaded at Preston Railway Station in August 1944. 'Wounded Men Come In As Preston Holiday Begins', *Lancashire Daily Post*, 12 August 1944, p. 4. 'Nearly All Stretcher Cases', *Derby Evening Telegraph*, 22 June 1944, p. 5. 'More Wounded Reach Derby', *Derby Evening Telegraph*, 3 October 1944, p. 5. 'More Wounded Arrive At Brechin', *Dundee Courier*, 7 August 1944, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> 'Swastikas Not Allowed', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 27 June 1944, p. 1. 'Swastikas Removed', *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 27 June 1944, p. 5.

<sup>37</sup> HC Deb 5 July 1944, vol. 401, cols. 1148-50.

<sup>38</sup> HC Deb, 11 July 1944, vol. 401 cols. 1561-2.

journalist suggested that 'the sooner the authorities take a less gentlemanly view of our enemies the better'.

A number of people feel that War Office procedure is still too closely modelled on 1066 and all that, when your enemy in the field was a brother-gentleman once his armour was off, and to be treated as one of yourselves accordingly.<sup>39</sup>

Such gallant treatment of a defeated enemy was considered not only outdated, but unfair on the British civilian and soldier. The *Glasgow Sunday Post* asked 'What softy insists on soft seats for Jerries?'. During railway journeys 'hundreds of folk have no hope for a seat', something guaranteed for the enemy. Moreover, in contrast to the 'Stalag stories of our prisoners being bundled into truck forty at a time', German officers travel to British camps first class.<sup>40</sup> The inconvenience posed to the public by allowing German POWs seating was brought up in parliament several times.<sup>41</sup> Protest continued in November 1944 when, in the Lords, Earl Poulett noted that while POWs were seen sitting comfortably, the general public were 'crushed up like sardines in a box'. Poulett also criticised the practice of not reserving train accommodation for small groups of officer POWs. They had to be kept separate from the civilians so therefore the civilians were moved out of carriages, exacerbating the already crowded situation. Poulett had first-hand experience of this, when he and his wife had been removed from their train compartment to make way for two POWs at an unspecified Midland station. German POWs interrupted the everyday lives of British railway-goers, although how often this type of thing occurred is unknown; it seems that it occurred rarely. While 'we do not want to imitate the Hun' he noted, the Germans used cattle trucks and the British traveller should be considered a little more.<sup>42</sup> The *Daily Mail* published Poulett's 'astonishing story', along with other examples provided by readers which had long been the cause of 'deep resentment'. The public had had to stand in cramped corridors while they saw 'grinning Germans each with a seat to himself'. One *Mail* reader had recently reportedly witnessing five German officers in a heated compartment, smoking and eating chocolate, while 14 civilians were forced to stand in an 'icy corridor'. It welcomed the end to this 'scandal'.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> 'The London Letter', *Aberdeen Journal*, 12 July 1944, p. 2

<sup>40</sup> 'As We See It', *Glasgow Sunday Post*, 16 July 1944, p. 3.

<sup>41</sup> HC Deb, 20 July 1944, vol. 402 cols. 362-3W; HC Deb, 27 July 1944, vol. 402 col. 897.

<sup>42</sup> HL Deb, 15 November 1944, vol. 133 cols. 1233-6

<sup>43</sup> 'Moves to End the Prisoners Scandal', *Daily Mail*, 17 November 1944, p. 1.

The wounded amongst the prisoners were taken to military hospitals, often being in wards adjacent to British civilians and other nationalities. The proximity of German POWs to British servicemen and civilians caused some upset in parliament.<sup>44</sup> Wing-Commander Errington asked for German POWs to be segregated. Willink pointed out the strain on Emergency Hospitals necessitated German POWs being in wards with British soldiers.<sup>45</sup> A nurse working at Blackburn Royal Infirmary described the arrival of some 30 German POWs to the hospital in late August 1944 in her M-O diary. When the patients of the ward where the German prisoners were to be located realised why they had been moved they were 'infuriated'. However, the animosity expressed toward the German prisoners came from the Polish and Russian patients and staff more so than the British. A Polish patient noticed the German uniforms placed at the end of their beds and 'nearly went mad'. Leaning out of the window into the ward where the German POWs were placed, he shouted and spat at them and had to be hauled back to bed by a group of patients.<sup>46</sup> A female Czech physician refused to attend to the Germans and made a great scene in the theatre [...] when she went in a found the Jerries being anaesthetised to have their wounded attended to'. Emotions were 'running high' in the hospital about the German patients, who the nurse described in her diary as unsavoury characters: nurses attending to the German convalescents were 'greeted by all kinds of catcalls and the Jerries jabble among amongst themselves and appear to be jeering'. The German were, however, treated in exactly the same way as British soldiers, being given a share of free issue cigarettes sent by charitable organisation, and allowed to roam the hospital grounds.<sup>47</sup> Reflecting on the German patients a few months later, she stated that one or two nurses had been regarded as being too friendly with them. On the other hand, some nurses 'would have watched them die without raising a finger'. Personally, she was incapable of hating all Germans, and believed that 'there are good and bad of every race'. She made an insightful observation, revealing another factor which shaped British attitudes towards German prisoners. She thought that she would obviously feel differently towards the German POWs if she had been an 'unfortunate inhabitant' of an occupied country. She believed that if she had experienced German occupation then she 'could know how to hate'. Interestingly the nurse noted that it was strange how a number of the other nurses were 'violently antagonistic to anything German' but had 'no close

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<sup>44</sup> HC Deb 29 June 1944, vol. 401, cols. 809-10W.

<sup>45</sup> HC Deb 7 July 1944, vol. 401, col. 1440W.

<sup>46</sup> MOA, D 5344, diary for August 1944, p. 531.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, p. 532-3.

connections involved in the fight', and had never 'suffered anything'.<sup>48</sup> Her partner had been captured at Dunkirk and was a prisoner in Germany.

A female nurse in Otley was collecting groceries when a batch of German POWs marched by. A 'miserable looking crowd', she felt 'terribly sorry for them'. The people watched them in silence, and there was no demonstration toward the POWs. She was glad that there was no demonstration despite Eden's statement in the commons about the shooting of the 50 RAF officers.<sup>49</sup> This would have made any demonstration against the POWs understandable. 'Passion's sister hatred seem there but [...] when all's said and done they are somebodies lads'. She understood that the POWs were average men. Then again Yorkshire had experienced a very different war to the rest of the country; 'apart from personal tragedies we've not felt the war much'. Leeds was 'semi-blitzed' and Bradford had been attacked once, while Otley had never been raided. Therefore, the lack of demonstration was explained as a result of the different regional experience of the war, suggesting that other areas might react differently to German POWs.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, there were some instances of demonstration towards transports of German POWs. Gebauer, who was on route to the United States with a group of POWs, was greeted with missiles and abuse by a hostile crowd in Liverpool.<sup>51</sup>

#### 4. Stalag Luft III, May 1944 to June 1944

Observing the passage of a trainload of German POWs through the city, an associate of the London correspondent for the *Aberdeen Journal* had informed him that, despite their pitiful appearance—'They looked as though they had had everything the human frame could stand'—the crowd watching them showed no compassion. The shooting of R.A.F. officers at Stalag Luft III, it was suggested, was 'too recently carved on their minds'.<sup>52</sup> Their murder, Vasilis Vourkoutiotis has reflected, 'constituted perhaps the greatest crime against British and American POWs' during the Second World War.<sup>53</sup> Wylie notes that the Stalag Luft III shootings 'stepped Britain's determination to fight on until Germany's unconditional surrender'. The incident also, 'underscored the ferocity of the Nazi regime, and forced policymakers to confront the possibility of their men being subjected to the kind of violence and brutality that had hitherto been reserved for

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<sup>48</sup> *ibid*, diary for February 1945, pp. 705-6.

<sup>49</sup> HC Deb 19 May 1944 vol. 400 cols. 437-9.

<sup>50</sup> MOA, D 5445, diary for June 1944, p. 910.

<sup>51</sup> Gebauer, *Church of England Priest*, pp. 140-1.

<sup>52</sup> 'The London Letter' *Aberdeen Journal*, 9 June 1944, p. 2

<sup>53</sup> Vourkoutiotis, *Prisoners*, p. 181.

Hitler's racial enemies'.<sup>54</sup> Calls for immediate justice against the perpetrators of this crime engendered debate over the accountability of the German people and the treatment of German POWs held in Britain. The unequivocal culpability of the SS, acting on a special command of Hitler, was confirmed at the Nuremberg Trials. However, in the summer of 1944 few in Germany knew the truth, and no one in Britain could positively identify where responsibility lay—it would be 17 months after the killings before the RAF was ordered to find and detain those responsible.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, when the murders were first publically divulged, whether this was a unique act of barbarity committed by the excesses of the Nazi regime, or an incident which confirmed the fundamental maliciousness of the German people was open to debate.

When Eden first announced the deaths of 47 Royal Air Force, Dominion and Allied Air Force officers after the mass escape from Stalag Luft III, on 19 May, he provided few details, ensuring that a full investigation would take place.<sup>56</sup> With no concrete facts known, his statement and subsequent news coverage was vague. By and large, front page articles simply referred to the RAF officers having been killed by 'Germans', a collective term which did not distinguish between the German people and the Nazi regime.<sup>57</sup> Before any further information was reported, the shootings provided further evidence of the war turning against Germany and the intrinsically vicious character of the average German. In the *Gloucestershire Echo*, a columnist considered the act a sign of 'desperation' by a Germany now losing the war. Moreover, the killings exemplified 'the German's native venom and appetite for cruelty'. Suggesting that 47 men were justifiably shot during an attempted escape was thought 'too much even for the most credulous to swallow'. Rather, the Germans had 'obviously seized on an excuse [...] to indulge in their characteristic relish for barbarous killings'. This was 'clear evidence of the despicable state of the German mind in these days of their decline'.<sup>58</sup> Having received a note from the German authorities and compiled reports from

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<sup>54</sup> Wylie, *Diplomacy*, p. 214.

<sup>55</sup> For an overview of the RAF investigation into the Stalag Luft III murders see, Allen Andrews, *Exemplary Justice* (London: Harrap, 1976).

<sup>56</sup> HC Deb, 19 May 1944, vol. 400, cols. 437-9.

<sup>57</sup> '47 Allied Flying Officers Shot By Germans', *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 19 May 1944, p. 1. '47 Allied Air Officers Shot by Germans', *Northern Daily Mail*, 19 May 1944, p. 1. 'Germans Have Shot 47 Escaping Airmen', *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 19 May 1944, p. 1. 'Germans Shoot 47 Air Force Officers', *Hull Daily Mail*, 19 May 1944, p. 1. '47 R.A.F. 47 Allied Airman Shot', *Essex Newsman*, 19 May 1944, p. 1. 'Murder Of 47 RAF and Allied Airmen', *Lincolnshire Echo*, 19 May 1944, p. 1. '47 Allied Air Officers Shot', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 19 May 1944, p. 1. A minority of articles used the terms 'Huns' or 'Nazis'. 'Officers Shot By Huns In Mass Escape Bid', *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 19 May 1944, p. 1. 'Officers Shot By Nazis', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 19 May 1944, p. 6.

<sup>58</sup> Argus, 'Germany's Signs Of Crisis', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 20 May 1944, p. 3

repatriated British POWs and the Swiss protecting power, Eden made a full statement on 23 June 1944.<sup>59</sup> Admonishing the explanation of the German authorities, he declared that the 50 officers—3 more victims having been added to the initial 47 reported in May—had not been killed while attempting to re-escape after arrest.<sup>60</sup> The German justification for the killings contrasted sharply with the statement made and evidence provided by Captain H. M. Massey, the former senior officer at Stalag Luft III.<sup>61</sup> The facts pointed to only one conclusion: the POWs were murdered at an unidentified place after their removal from a Gestapo prison. Eden promised that the government, condemning 'these cold-blooded acts of butchery', would not rest until the culprits were 'brought to exemplary justice'.<sup>62</sup> In the wake of Eden's statement, journalists recorded the anger of the British public and the desire for immediate retribution. Furthermore, a hardening of attitudes towards the German people was reflected. The London correspondent for the *Aberdeen Journal* observed that in the wake of Stalag Luft III, 'The argument that the German people should be left alone as distinct from the Nazi-Gestapo class does not cut ice any more with the majority of people here'.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, the *Dundee Courier* stated that 'There is no depth of infamy to which the Germans cannot sink. The black record of their atrocities covers the whole continent of Europe'.<sup>64</sup> In contrast, the editor of the *Yorkshire Post* advised their readers to 'not be misled by over vociferous demands to treat all Germans as bloody-minded sadists of the Hitler-Himmler kind or by a kindly intentioned insistence that some Germans hated the cruelties done in their name or even knew nothing about them'.<sup>65</sup> The division of opinion on where responsibility lay for the murders, and the crimes committed in the name of National Socialist generally, was echoed in the House of Lords.

Even before Germany had offered an explanation for the deaths of the RAF officers, Vansittart refused to 'accept any explanation or extenuation put forward by the Huns'. Based on his experiences during the Great War as head of the Prisoner Of War Department, he had a 'vivid recollection of German cruelties', and spoke of the German incapability to speak the truth.<sup>66</sup> On 13 July 1944, Vansittart called attention to the 'massacre' of the 50 RAF officers, raising the question of how the culprits would be

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<sup>59</sup> HC Deb, 23 June 1944, vol. 401, cols. 477-82.

<sup>60</sup> HC Deb, 23 June 1944, vol. 401, cols. 477-82.

<sup>61</sup> Allen Andrews, *Exemplary Justice* (London: Harrap, 1976), p. 23.

<sup>62</sup> HC Deb, 23 June 1944, vol. 401, cols. 477-82.

<sup>63</sup> 'The London Letter', *Aberdeen Journal*, 24 June 1944, p. 3.

<sup>64</sup> 'The Gorlitz Massacre', *Dundee Courier*, 24 June 1944, p. 2.

<sup>65</sup> 'Statesmanship and Justice', *Yorkshire Post*, 28 June 1944, p. 2.

<sup>66</sup> HL Deb, 25 May 1944, vol. 131, cols. 945-1000.

punished. He reminded his fellow Lords of the failure to punish war criminals—referring to Generals Stenger, von Billow, and von der Goltz—after the Great War. Although the punishment of war crimes was taken seriously by Allied jurists after the First World War, the result of the trials was poor. With the Treaty of Versailles considered to have treated Germany unfairly, especially the 'shame paragraphs' (Articles 227 and 231), Germans, including the German jurists, were more concerned with clearing the accused of charges than exacting justice.<sup>67</sup> Vansittart was 'determined not to be cheated again'. He agreed that the Gestapo were the 'immediate' culprits, but behind them were the 'ultimate culprits', the German General Staff. Vansittart called for every member of the German General Staff who, at the time, had any connection with POW matters to be put on trial. He contended that they would have had to authorise to Gestapo's actions. The Bishop of Chichester was not convinced by Vansittart. He agreed the barbarity of the murders, but doubted the legal responsibility of the German army in the shootings, believing that the Gestapo superseded Army authority.<sup>68</sup>

#### 5. The burial of German POWs at Cheltenham, June 1944 to July 1944

On 24 June 1944, the *Gloucestershire Echo* reported that four German POWs had been buried at Cheltenham cemetery the previous day, with full military honours.<sup>69</sup> Each coffin was draped with a Nazi flag, and British soldiers of the Royal Corps of Signals acted as bearers. Having read of the funeral, 'two disgusted war-workers' registered their distaste at the ceremony afforded the enemy in a letter to the editor.<sup>70</sup> In light of the 'cold-blooded' treatment of the RAF officers from Stalag Luft III, they doubted if British POWs were afforded similar treatment; a cynical reference to the swift cremation of several of the officers. Four correspondents agreed that the mawkishness expressed towards the enemy in the ceremonious fashion of the funeral was distasteful and inappropriate. 'Away with such silly, sloppy sentiment!' W. T. Knightbridge wrote, while A Real Britisher similarly asked to 'cut out the sob stuff, please'. For those criticising the burial, the Germans, described as 'fiendish jack-booted scum', were not only responsible for the destruction and death caused in the current conflict and the

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<sup>67</sup> Daniel Marc Segesser, 'The Punishment of War Crimes Committed against Prisoners of War, Deportees and Refugees during and after the First World War', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 26: 1-2 (2008), 134-56.

<sup>68</sup> HL Deb, 13 July 1944, vol. 132, cols. 916-34

<sup>69</sup> 'Four Nazis Buried in Cheltenham', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 24 June 1944, p. 1.

<sup>70</sup> TWO DISGUSTED WAR-WORKERS, 'Germans' Funeral', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 27 June 1944, p. 3.

Great War, but had committed heinous crimes against innocent people—'nothing is too bad for them, dead or alive'.<sup>71</sup> Most correspondents, however, condemned the reciprocity advocated. The common trope in letters attacking the war workers view was avoiding descending to the level of the enemy, and the preservation of British values. D. P. Smith called to honour brave men.

To insult the body of a fallen foe, or even to omit to pay him due honours, is the action of a barbarian. The Nazis may descend to that level. Most Englishmen will prefer not to flatter them by descending with them. By such action men dishonour not their enemies but themselves.<sup>72</sup>

Although faced with an enemy capable of barbarous acts, such as the Stalag Luft III shootings, Britain could not sink to the level of the enemy by reciprocating their treatment of POWs. While the Germans might commit 'cold-blooded' acts, 'our war aim', a British sailor's wife wrote, 'was to be what they are not', 'to do justice'.<sup>73</sup> Britain, as 'the accepted centre of freedom and justice', was tasked with setting 'an example to which the oppressed people of Hitler's Europe can look up'. Affording the enemy dead a funeral ceremony was symbolic of the democratic values for which Britain was fighting against Germany. Furthermore, burying the dead was a Christian act, one of the 'corporal works of mercy'. The idea that all Germans were guilty of the crimes committed by the leaders was also challenged. These Germans were not to blame for the death of the RAF officers from Stalag Luft III. Although misguided by their Nazi leaders, they were still soldiers, the same as British servicemen, who had fallen on the field of battle. As the views expressed in the letters demonstrate, the burial of the four German POWs at Cheltenham was saturated with meaning.

#### 6. Comforts for POWs in Aberdeen, September 1944 to November 1944

Correspondents to the *Aberdeen Journal* and *Dundee Courier* registered their 'shock', 'annoyance' and 'fury' at the distribution of sweets and cigarettes to German POWs at Aberdeen Joint Station. In light of the revelation that their money was spent on comforts for the enemy, correspondents noted they would cancel their subscription to the British Red Cross. Those condemning the action of the Red Cross were convinced that the

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<sup>71</sup> SOLDIER'S WIFE AND MOTHER, 'Not the Ceremony', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 29 June 1944, p. 3; W. T. Knightsbridge, 'No Sob-Stuff', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 3 July 1944, p. 3; A REAL BRITISHER, 'Nothing Too Bad', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 4 July 1944, p. 4; 'Germans' Toll', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 4 July 1944, pp. 4-5.

<sup>72</sup> D. P. Smith, 'Honour Brave Men', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 29 June 1944, p. 3.

<sup>73</sup> WIFE OF A SAILOR, 'Not Our Way', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 3 July 1944, p. 3.

German POWs were fundamentally evil. While British POWs were mistreated by Germany in both wars, sentimental souls were treating German POWs like heroes on their arrival of Britain. Reacting to the news of sweets and cigarettes being distributed to wounded German prisoners of war arriving at Aberdeen Joint Station, nine correspondents, from across Scotland, wrote to the *Dundee Courier*. J. A. M. criticised the charitable spoiling of POWs. Angered after learning of the reception given to the prisoners, J. A. M. wondered, if it had occurred to the 'soft hearts' that amongst these German POWs might be the very men who kicked over the water buckets provided by French and Belgium villagers to British prisoners as they suffered the torture of marching from France to Germany.<sup>74</sup> J. A. M. viewed all German prisoners as Nazis, and it was 'a great pity' that so many had been captured—humanitarian idealism was redundant in the reality of war.<sup>75</sup> It was another correspondent who instigated further letters being sent to the *Courier* on the subject. Having been shocked by the news, Vigilante—a pseudonym signalling that they did not think the law was just—asked the readers of the *Courier* their thoughts on the distribution of sweets and cigarettes to wounded German prisoners on arrival in the country. A resident of Fordoun, in Aberdeenshire, they were outraged at the revelation that 'the Hun' received the same treatment as a British serviceman.<sup>76</sup> M. B. Sinclair certainly wondered how many British Red Cross supporters approved of the practice. Sinclair protested bitterly against it. This was not because they were enemies:

I would be among the last to refuse comforts to a wounded enemy if that enemy were an honourable one and a fair and clear fighter, but the German, by the atrocities and barbarities which he has committed both in the last war and in this, has shown himself to be quite beyond the pale of all decency.

The funds of the Red Cross were wasted on providing sweets and cigarettes to 'the arrogant brute'. Paraphrasing Matthew 7:6, Sinclair argued: 'There is such a thing as casting pearls before swine'.<sup>77</sup> George M. Fleming wrote to confirm that he would cease his subscription to the P.O.W. fund until the distribution of comforts to German prisoners was stopped, and suggested—perhaps influence by the action of Reverend Green—sending tins of rat poison to the people who provided the items. If these people

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<sup>74</sup> The kicking over of water buckets and the march from France to Germany refers to the German treatment of British prisoners of war taken during the Dunkirk evacuation.

<sup>75</sup> J. A. M., 'Soft Hearts And Soft Heads', *Dundee Courier*, 27 September 1944, p. 2.

<sup>76</sup> Vigilante, 'Gifts to German Prisoners', *Dundee Courier*, 4 November 1944, p. 2.

<sup>77</sup> To waste something valuable on someone who will not appreciate it. M. B. Sinclair, 'Gifts to German Soldiers', *Dundee Courier*, 6 November 1944, p. 2.

had witnessed the horrors committed by the prisoners, Fleming argued, 'they would not be so mushy over the swine'.<sup>78</sup>

An ex-soldier's wife wondered 'what sane men died for' having read the reports of comforts being distributed to German prisoners. Ten of her brother and cousins, as well as her husband, had fought in France during the Great War. Only her husband survived—two had died of their wounds shortly after returning—and before he could take off his uniform, their sons were donning theirs to fight the Hun again. 'The Germans' she wrote 'had ceased to be a human race and are entirely the Hun, and should be treated as such'. As they were inhumane, they did not deserve compassion. The ex-soldier's wife was glad at the likelihood that the Red Army would reach Germany first. As a result, those 'doing the kid glove business', that is the sympathisers, would not have a say in the treatment of the German people. Those that gave comforts to German prisoners undermined the death of British soldiers who had and were now again fighting the Germans, as they, through their affable treatment, were being too soft and therefore encouraging the German people to fight in the future.<sup>79</sup> Glad to read the letter of Ex-soldier's wife, E. D. Coats suggested she should petition the Prime Minister to stop such action, and similarly argued that,

Though I recognise that a certain number of our people seem to suffer from mental derangement, it did not occur to me that anyone would be so lacking in knowledge of the dastardly conduct of the Germans, both in the last war and in this one, as to send them gifts of any kind.

Coats noted that for the German people it was a win-win situation. The British not only sent parcels to Germany for British POWs, but also distributed comforts to German POWs, 'the most pampered people', in Britain. This, Coats maintained, was 'a direct insult to our own men'.<sup>80</sup> Coats' signature was St. Serfs, St. Fillans: the former was most likely a church, so perhaps Coats was a clergyman, and the latter is a village in the central highlands of Scotland, near Comrie. Finally, a demobilised soldier noted his detestation at the news of pampered German prisoners. Having fought in both wars against Germany, he believed that Christian teachings could not be bought into the business of war. The ex-soldier recounted his time in North Africa, as part of the Men England Forgot. This was the unofficial name for the Middle East Force, adopted as the

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<sup>78</sup> Geo. M. Fleming, 'Gifts to German Prisoners', *Dundee Courier*, 7 November 1944, p. 2.

<sup>79</sup> Ex-Soldier's Wife, 'Gifts to German Prisoners', *Dundee Courier*, 9 November 1944, p. 2.

<sup>80</sup> D. E. Coats, 'Gifts to German prisoners', *Dundee Courier*, 11 November 1944, p. 2.

soldiers believed that compared to other services they were neglected in the press and radio. This was perhaps the source of his anger, that British servicemen in distant theatres of war were ignored while enemy prisoners in Britain were coddled.<sup>81</sup> The majority of the correspondents writing to the *Dundee Courier* criticised the action of the British Red Cross, arguing that callous German prisoners—usually referred to as Nazis and Huns—were undeserving of comforts. One correspondent, however, felt implied to write to the *Courier* answering these letters. Signed Buckhaven—a town on the east coast of Fife—the correspondent did not reveal their name, perhaps believing their opinion was not that of the majority, and fearing reprisal for expressing it. 'All decent-minded people deplore Nazism', Buckhaven wrote, 'but don't let us descend to it. Poor wounded creatures, whether German or otherwise, command pity, and in the case of an enemy mercy'. From a Christian perspective, Buckhaven noted that no discrimination could be made between the wounded, even if they were the enemy. Furthermore, the Allies were supposedly fighting for a 'better world, a Christian world', being unmerciful to wounded enemies undermined this aim. Admitting that some prisoners might be, Buckhaven argued that not all were churlish or cruel. The Christian ethics for which the war was being fought had to be maintained, if not, the British would fall into the barbaric methods which they sought to defeat.<sup>82</sup>

#### 7. A Vicar's vulgar joke, October 1944 to November 1944

Conflicting attitudes extended to the clergy. In October, reverend J. C. Chamberlain, the Vicar Of Christ Church, Shooters Hill, London, appealed to his diocese for comforts for sick German prisoners in Britain. Having heard of the appeal, a fellow clergyman, Reverend H. G. Green, the Vicar of St. Nicholas, Ipswich, responded with a note:

Having seen your tender-hearted request for comforts for the blasphemers of God and butchers of men, I herewith send a small comfort which I am sure they will enjoy. I am sorry the tin is not full, but a small dose will do the trick.

The 'small comfort' was a tin of rat poison. This action evidently caused concern in his diocese, with Green having to defend his actions. Preaching at his Church on 29 October, Green noted his displeasure with Chamberlain's appeal. In an attempt, perhaps, to deflect criticism, he stated that it was 'a bit of a joke'. However, Green—who had two

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<sup>81</sup> Disgusted M. E., 'Treatment of Enemy Prisoners, *Dundee Courier*, 15 November 1944, p. 2

<sup>82</sup> Buckhaven, 'Gifts for German Prisoners', *Dundee Courier*, 8 November 1944, p. 2.

sons serving in the forces—was still of the opinion that German prisoners 'were lucky to get the bare necessities of life'. The Germans had:

[...] perpetrated vile acts of murder, terror, and plunder, and their villainies beggar description. I have no doubt that people who make such appeals think that they are acting in accordance with the Sermon on the Mount and the teachings of St Paul, but I defy anyone to find me a single sentence in the Bible where I can be called upon to serve the enemies of God and man.<sup>83</sup>

While Green defended his actions at his Church, Chamberlain had already forwarded the note onto the Bishop of Ipswich, Dr Richard Brook—as a result, this story was picked up by national newspapers. Rebuking his action, Brook stated that Green 'must not be taken seriously', it was a 'poor joke—cheap and vulgar'. Distancing the Church from Green's views, Brook went on to say that while Green was entitled to his own opinions, 'such idle and ill-mannered jesting in so serious a matter is deplorable, especially in a clergyman'. Green had discredited the Church. However, Green found support from several other sections of society, with members of the Armed Forces, doctors and other clergymen, sending letters of congratulations.<sup>84</sup> One report noted that a Canadian soldier had been sent by 900 wounded comrades at a military hospital to shake Green's hand. The Canadian stated that his fare had been paid by his comrades, who wanted him to say that they were behind him. Freed by American forces, the Canadian had been a prisoner in Germany.<sup>85</sup> Other reports noted that postmen had taken 600 letters to Green in support of his action. Having received such backing, Green stated to the press that he would respond to Brook's rebuke, disagreeing that he had brought discredit on the Church. Green was not the only one to criticise Chamberlain's appeal. Captain J. Davis M. C., president of the Grantham branch of the British Legion wrote to Chamberlain, 'expressing his disgust' over his appeal. He was father of three serving sons, one had died.<sup>86</sup> At the same time, Chamberlain's appeal also received support, and by 6 November, £250 had been raised. While Chamberlain did not refer to Green's actions in his services, Green criticised his appeal again at an Evensong service. In response to Brooke's rebuke, Green stated that German prisoners, he said, would be well looked after. To hand out comforts and prizes was shameful and against all

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<sup>83</sup> 'Why Vicar Sent Rat Poison', *Dundee Courier*, 30 October 1944, p. 2.

<sup>84</sup> 'Vicar's "Vulgar Joke"', *Manchester Guardian*, 1 November 1944, p. 8.

<sup>85</sup> 'Rebuked for Rat Poison Gift: 'Deplorable,' says Bishop', *Daily Mail*, 1 November 1944, p. 3.

<sup>86</sup> 'Grantham News in Brief', *Grantham Journal*, 3 November 1944, p. 4. An urban council member in Lancashire also noted his support for Green in a discussion regarding the availability of books by German authors. Mr. C. C. Mayson suggested that the books should be burnt. 'German Books In Library Protest', *Lancashire Evening Post*, 4 November 1944, p. 4.

principles of justice. 'Far too many people are basing their thoughts and actions on being kind to the enemies of God and men on the misapplied quotation 'Love your enemies,'" he declared. 'I believe in a full-blooded Christ,' he declared. 'He would not call on us to love Nazi brutes'.<sup>87</sup> Chamberlain's appeal for comforts was borne out to the Christian idea to love thine enemies, and evidently received a measure of support, with a sum of £250 raised. Writing to editors, those that supported him were of a similar Christian conviction. However, Green and his supporters had no sympathy with an enemy they considered merciless.

The Allied advance toward Germany waned in January 1945, but by March American and British troops had crossed the Rhine into Germany. The Germans were now being fought on their own soil. From April, the pace of the war accelerated towards conclusion. Scepticism of the authenticity of atrocity stories largely vanished, so too did arguments that the German people were different from their Nazi leaders. Sympathy towards the average German which had been fostered by Allied bombing was lost. Calls for vengeance, M-O reported, did not increase, but sympathy for the Germans certainly declined.

#### 8. The liberation of Belsen, April 1945 to May 1945

With the liberation of Belsen in April 1945, an extraordinary volume of information—wireless broadcasts, newspaper articles, newsreels, and in some cases letters and conversation with relatives and other contacts in the military—presented the British public with evidence of the atrocities perpetrated inside German concentration camps. It was difficult to evade exposure to the stories. Yet, as Holocaust scholars argue, comprehension of the true nature of Nazi atrocities was severely lacking.

The existence of the camps entered the consciousness of the British public in the 1930s, with reports on the abuse of political enemies of the Nazi regime in concentration camps written soon after they were established. In the early years of Nazi rule, inmates who had either escaped or been released published accounts of the cruelty they had witnessed.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, leftists in Britain attempted to highlight this Nazi

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<sup>87</sup> 'Rat Poison: Vicar Replies To Critics', *Gloucester Citizen*, 6 November 1944, p. 7. 'Vicar's Retort', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 6 November 1944, p. 3. 'German Prisoners', *Western Morning News*, 6 November 1944, p. 2. '£250 For Prisoners' Comforts', *Western Daily Press*, 6 November 1944, p. 1.

<sup>88</sup> Hans Beimler, *Four weeks in the hands of Hitler's hell-hounds: the Nazi murder camp of Dachau* (London: Modern Books, 1933); Wolfgang Langhoff, *Rubber Truncheon: Being an Account of Thirteen Months Spent in a Concentration Camp* (London: Constable, 1935).

brutality through inquiries. However, these attempts were subdued by the government pursuing a policy of appeasement. With the outbreak of war, the Foreign Office was free to publicise the mistreatment of prisoners in Buchenwald and Dachau. The White Paper published in October 1939 failed to encourage the wanton indignation in the public. Instead, the report was considered a cynical propaganda stunt of the same character as the atrocity stories published during the Great War. Although the existence of concentration camps was not challenged, it was argued that the government should have revealed more during the time of appeasement. With the public unimpressed, the Ministry of Information was resolved to limit the 'horror stuff', using it sparingly.

Throughout the war evidence was collected by the authorities and sometimes published in the media, but was met with scepticism in official and public circles. The codebreakers at Bletchley Park cracked SS Enigma Keys in late 1940, allowing the British secret service to eavesdrop on the unfolding Nazi terror within concentration camps. A vast number of messages were decoded by British intelligence, providing an 'astonishing' insight into camp structures: inmate movement between and within camps; staffing; the shift to utilising inmates as slave labour; daily terror; and, the deadly nature of Auschwitz where a substantial number of Jews were being sent.<sup>89</sup> The evidence gathered through broken radio communications was, however, rough. Other sources were required to corroborate this material. From the outset of the war, British intelligence agencies secretly recorded German POWs, the transcripts providing evidence of their participation and knowledge of war crimes.<sup>90</sup> Even more significant was the material gathered from Jewish groups and the Polish government-in-exile, which collected reports from the Polish underground, sometimes circulating them directly to the British media. By the end of 1942 at the latest, Allied authorities were aware of the systematic extermination of European Jewry. In December, an Allied declaration publically denounced the slaughter of Jews in East Europe, but it made no reference to concentration camps, instead referring to 'labour camps'. This declaration was quickly forgotten as authorities feared excessive exposure to Nazi atrocities would detract from the war effort.<sup>91</sup> The amounting evidence of the Final Solution was largely ignored. Walter Laqueur, suggests that, due to their ignorance of Nazism, officials in

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<sup>89</sup> Nikolaus Waschsman, *KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camp* (London: Little, Brown: 2015), pp. 492-6.

<sup>90</sup> Stephen Tyas, 'Allied Intelligence Agencies and the Holocaust: Information Acquired from German Prisoners of War', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 22: 1 (2008), 1-24; Neitzel and Welzer, pp. 74-90.

<sup>91</sup> Waschsman, pp. 492-6.

London and Washington met the evils being committed with suspicion.<sup>92</sup> By 1944 the truth was difficult to ignore.

While news of the war was generally positive—British forces 25 miles from Hamburg, Soviet forces 20 miles from Berlin—Mass Observation recorded the 'marked horror' at the revelation of the camps. The British public were asked three questions regarding the news of the concentration camps by Mass-Observation investigators. First, the sample was asked if they had any prior knowledge of the camps: 31 per cent claimed they had heard of them before, while 55 per cent stated they had 'a vague impression before'. Second, they were asked if they believed the stories. There was a dramatic rise in those who now considered them true, from 37 per cent in December 1944 to 81 per cent in April 1945. Finally, they were asked about their feelings towards the German people apart from their leaders. There was a definite increase in the 'unsympathetic' category, rising from 54 per cent in February 1945 to 67 per cent. The majority were now hostile to the German people, describing them as 'a plague spot', 'vermin', and 'an abomination'. Several of the recorded responses called for reciprocity, adopting the fascistic tone of the enemy. A 55 year old male of D classification stated: 'I doubt if there's a decent German left. I think the whole lot deserve to be taken into slavery - oh, I don't know what they don't deserve - hanging or shooting's too good for them'. A more extreme view was taken by a 30 year old female of C classification: 'I think this: the children should be taken out of the country, and we ought to turn their gas-bombs on them and exterminate them'.<sup>93</sup> Similar views were recorded by investigators posted outside cinemas and exhibitions, including the *Daily Express* exhibition at Trafalgar Square, which broadcast images of concentration camps. There were some sceptical remarks recorded. Some did not believe that this was a deliberate policy of the Germans but the result of the disorganisation of Germany, exacerbated by Allied bombing. However, these were untypical. Most were horrified and desired violent revenge. Germans, it was believed, were a brutal race which celebrated murder. The anger directed at the German people included German POWs in British hands: 'After seeing the exhibition I feel we ought to shoot every German. There's not a good one amongst them. We're too soft. We oughtn't to take so many live prisoners'. An extreme solution to the German people lay in the treatment of POWs for a 50 year old male of C classification:

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<sup>92</sup> Walter Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret: Suppression of the Truth about Hitler's "Final Solution"* (Rutgers, NJ: First Transaction, 2012), p. 203.

<sup>93</sup> MOA, FR 2228, Special Pre-Peace News Questionnaire, 18 April 1945.

Pretty disgusted with it, that's how I feel. What's more I'm very glad such facts have been brought to light. The Germans have a sadistic trait in them, and delight in the sufferings of other races. If you'll pardon my saying so, and I'm loathe to say what I'm going to say to a lady, but my feeling on this are very strong indeed - The only way to punish them it to castrate every prisoner of war before he's released. Destroy the German race once and for all. Every healthy German citizen, man and woman, is a potential breeder of a future army in the making.

An M-O diarist, angered by the images of concentration camps on newsreels, wanted reprisals.

The German prison camp was shown; it was not very clear, but clear enough to make me want to put our Nazi prisoners in under the same conditions; nothing less with make those sub-human beasts realize that it is wrong to torture other folk in such cruel ways.<sup>94</sup>

April 1945 also witnessed, alongside the publication of concentration camp atrocities, the liberation and return of British servicemen who had been captive in German hands. Regional press celebrated the return on local men, who were reunited with their friends and family.<sup>95</sup> Interviews with the ex-POWs revealed the ordeal they had suffered. A strong and recurrent theme was the forced marches that they had endured as the Germans moved POWs from the East as the Soviet forces advanced. Anecdotes of brutality and callousness of their German guards littered the narrative of their trek across Poland and Germany. Although there were instances where the POWs noted their fair treatment, especially in contrast to the German treatment of Soviet POWs, these were lost in the emphasis on the suffering of British servicemen. In the *Hull Daily Mail*, two local men who had recently returned home after being taken prisoner during D-Day were 'eye-witnesses of the ruthless manner in which the Nazis punish even their own S.S. men', recounting the hanging of a deserter amongst the German forces. One of the

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<sup>94</sup> MOA, D h5320, diary for May 1945, cited in Margaret Kertesz, 'The Enemy: British Images of the German People During the Second World War', (unpublished doctoral thesis: University of Sussex, 1992), p. 191.

<sup>95</sup> 'Cheltenham Prisoner's Five Weeks' March', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 26 April 1945, p. 1. 'Dundee Man's Forced March of 11 Weeks', *Dundee Telegraph*, 25 April 1945, p. 4. 'Terrible Trek to Stalag 9B', *Western Morning News*, 13 April 1945, p. 3. 'Five Years in Captivity', *Tamworth Herald*, 28 April 1945, p. 3. 'Chelmsford Territorial Home after P.o.W. Ordeal', *Essex Chronicle*, 13 April 1945, p. 12. 'Hun Cruelty in "Black March"', *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 28 April 1945, p. 3. 'Thought of Home Kept Them Going On "Terrible" 1,000-Mile March', *Derby Evening Telegraph*, 28 April 1945, p. 4. 'The Two Good Meals He Had in Germany', *Derby Evening Telegraph*, 1 May 1945, p. 4. 'Death Trek Horrors', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 27 April 1945, p. 1.

returned men recounted the merger rations. They had witnessed the 'starved men' on forced marches. In sum, the Germans, in their opinion, were 'mad' and 'not human'.<sup>96</sup> Another was the semi-starvation of the POWs. Red Cross parcels saved the lives of British POWs, who were underfed by the German authorities. Captain Wright, who had arrived back to Grantham after over four year's imprisonment in Germany, stated that without parcels, 'I should certainly not be here today'.<sup>97</sup> Corporal Stevenson wrote to the *Fife Press* thanking the Red Cross for their parcels.

I cannot too strongly emphasise the importance of these parcels, indeed I would state without hesitation that in their absence we would not have existed. The Italian and German rations were not sufficient to keep body and soul together most of the time. It was the event of the week when the parcel waggon arrived at camp.<sup>98</sup>

On April 28 1945, the *Fife Press* commented at length on the return of several POWs from Germany.<sup>99</sup> One interviewee stated that during the march, it was 'not uncommon' for German guards to assault those that fell behind with their rifle butts. Another recounted the many that fell ill and died on the road, even after arriving to their destination, 'three or four died every day from starvation and malnutrition'. The *Yorkshire Post* reported on three British soldiers recovering from their 500 mile trek from Upper Silesia to Weetzen near Hanover.<sup>100</sup>

They told a "Yorkshire Post" reporter yesterday the story of that harrowing 500-mile march in the middle of Europe's most bitter winter for many years, having to do up to 36 kilometers (24 miles) a day on a few scraps of bread and potatoes they either bought, if they could, or stole, if they could not, of men who dropped out, and were picked up by horse and cart—if they were lucky, of guards to who and kicked them if they did not keep up the pace: finally, they showed me their boots, the soles new and thick when they set off, but worn through when they reached their destination.

They had been subject to 'semi-starvation' for two months at Weetzen before being liberated by American forces. When their liberators arrived, 'all three were too ill to get up from their beds'.

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<sup>96</sup> 'Germans Not Human', *Hull Daily Mail*, 26 April 1945, p. 3.

<sup>97</sup> 'Almost Five Years as a Prisoner', *Grantham Journal*, 20 April 1945, p. 1.

<sup>98</sup> H. M. Stevenson, 'Soldier's Thanks to Red Cross', *Fife Press*, 28 April 1945, p. 5.

<sup>99</sup> 'More Repatriates Arrive Home', *Fife Press*, 28 April 1945, p. 5.

<sup>100</sup> 'Liberated Prisoners Recovering In Leeds Hospital', *Yorkshire Post*, 20 April 1945, p. 1.

"The Yanks were wonderful," they declared. "They piled food on us, but unfortunately we were too far gone; it was too rich for us." Now they are being built up again on a steady diet which started with fish and other light food, and has now extended to a little meat. They are still thin-faced, with nearly all the flesh off their bones, but they said: "You should have seen us when we came in. I think we have all put on at least a stone and a half since last week."

Miscomprehension of the true nature of the images and reports flooding the British press, distinctions between different categories of captive were not made. In the minds of the majority of the British public, the Nazi concentration camps and *Stalags* (POW camps) were conflated into a single barbaric system of abuse, and distinctions between different categories of captive were not made. In press articles and Mass Observation file reports, the term generic term 'prisoner' was employed when discussing concentration camps. Images and commentary concerning concentration camps and malnourished POWs were publicised concurrently. As a result of this universalisation of suffering, the abuse of British POWs in German hands formed part of the atrocity narrative, being incorporated into reportage and understanding of the brutalities committed within concentration camps. This had a sharp impact upon attitudes towards German POWs as the conditions they were afforded were compared to those who had suffered in German camps. Recounting his experiences, Gunner Geoffery Dalton of the Essex Yeomanry asked why German POWs in Britain were receiving double rations. "They're the very people," he says "who delight in hitting our own boys with a rifle butt. Men officially listed sick too! Just for, perhaps, picking up *rotten sugar beet* and swedes to stave off hunger."<sup>101</sup> In the wake of the liberation of Belsen, questions were raised regarding the treatment of German POWs with particular regards to rations.

#### 9. Rations for German POWs, April 1945

The outrage and anger expressed in Britain after the disclosure of concentration camps encompassed German POWs in Britain. At the same time that the horrors of concentration camps were publicised to the British public, it was reported that German POWs received rations greater than civilians.<sup>102</sup> In late March 1945, Grigg came under pressure in Parliament when pressed to acknowledge that German POWs received certain rationed commodities in excess of the British civilian.<sup>103</sup> In the case of German

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<sup>101</sup> 'Yeoman Dished Nazis on 800 Miles March', *Essex Newsmen*, 27 April 1945, p. 2.

<sup>102</sup> 'Nazi PoWs have twice our ration', *Daily Mail*, 19 April 1945, p. 3.

<sup>103</sup> HC Deb, 27 March 1945, vol. 409, cols. 1302-3. Grigg, secretary of state for war, had previously revealed the discrepancy between the rations provided British POWs in Germany

POWs who were engaged in employment, this was true. However, non-working German POWs received rations comparable to civilians. The Geneva Convention stipulated that POWs were to receive rations 'equivalent in quantity and quality' of the captor power's depot troops.<sup>104</sup> While the government sought to adhere to international law, in light of the recent atrocities the press—overstating the situation—and public were incensed. Appearing on the same page as articles on concentration camps and recently repatriated British servicemen, editorials recorded the anger of the British public over this 'indulgent, generous treatment' of enemy POWs, who, along with the entire German nation, were complicit in the atrocities then being revealed. Letters to editors expressing indignation at the higher rations received by German POWs described them as 'murderers', 'inhuman beasts', and 'barbarians'.<sup>105</sup> The German POWs were 'enemies of the human race', 'representatives of the most debased nation the world has ever known'.<sup>106</sup> As they were uncivilised brutes, the application of international law was called into question. In light of Germany's breaches of international law and the maltreatment of British POWs, especially their 'deliberate hunger policy', the Convention was considered null and void.<sup>107</sup> The continued observance of it was considered a 'quixotic indulgence' by one correspondent.<sup>108</sup> 'The Geneva Convention is surely a standing joke as far as Germany is concerned, and it is high time we began to give it a miss', James Bateman, a disabled ex-serviceman of the Great War wrote to the *Gloucester Citizen*.<sup>109</sup> Germany had not upheld the Convention. Instead of continuing to 'overstuff the unlovely German paunch', there were groups far more deserving of the rations given to German POWs.<sup>110</sup> First and foremost the inmates liberated from the concentration camps—the 'human sacrifices', 'wrecks', and 'skeletons'—pictured in newspapers and newsreels.<sup>111</sup> The British civilian, who had been told of the necessity

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and German POWs in Britain earlier that month. HC Deb, 2 March 1945, vol. 408, cols. 1679W.

<sup>104</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War*, 27 July 1929. Part III, Section II, Chapter 2: Food and clothing of prisoners of war.

<sup>105</sup> Angry, 'Feeding German Prisoners', *Dundee Courier*, 26 April 1945, p. 2. 'German Prisoners' Rations', *Dundee Courier*, 27 April 1945, p. 2. Sid Clements, 'German Prisoners' Rations', *Northern Daily Mail*, 24 April 1945, p. 3.

<sup>106</sup> H. F. F. 'Is It Decent?', *Gloucester Citizen*, 30 April 1945, p. 4. A. B., 'German Prisoners' Rations', *Dundee Courier*, 25 April 1945, p. 2.

<sup>107</sup> 'Britain's anger', *Daily Mail*, 23 April 1945, p. 2.

<sup>108</sup> H. F. F. 'Is It Decent?', *Gloucester Citizen*, 30 April 1945, p. 4.

<sup>109</sup> James Bateman (Disable Ex-Servicemen of World War No. 1), 'Punish the Brutes—Now!', *Gloucester Citizen*, 25 April 1945, p. 4.

<sup>110</sup> H. F. F. 'Is It Decent?', *Gloucester Citizen*, 30 April 1945, p. 4.

<sup>111</sup> *ibid*; German Prisoners' Rations', *Dundee Courier*, 27 April 1945, p. 2.

of rationing and feeding liberated countries, had, throughout the war, gone with less than the German POWs.<sup>112</sup> British housewives, in particular, could do with the extra sugar provided German POWs.<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, the overfeeding of the enemy was an insult to the British servicemen repatriated from German camps.<sup>114</sup> British POWs had returned 'mere shadows of the strong, brave young men who went to fight'.<sup>115</sup> The continued observance of international law in the face of horrific atrocities committed by the enemy was deemed overly sentimental. People called for the rest of Britain to rise and protest against this situation, and the cutting of German POW rations was demanded.

## 10. Conclusions

The capture and transportation of German POWs from Normandy to Britain was reported to the public as it provided evidence that the invasion forces were overcoming Germany defences and defeating the enemy. Early captures in June 1944 were surprising, with extremely youthful servicemen and a variety of nationalities found amongst the POWs. The use of child soldiers and conscripts from occupied countries suggested that Germany military resources were waning. Furthermore, being interviewed by journalists, the attitude of the POWs was generally defeatist, resigned to the idea that Germany was going to lose the war. These common themes in early descriptions of German POWs arriving to Britain contributed to the narrative that the Allies were now winning the war and Germany would eventually be defeated. Their arrival symbolised this: German servicemen did not enter Britain in 1944 as invaders, which they had threatened in 1940, but as defeated POWs. Captivity therefore was an important symbol contributing to the narrative of a successful invasion.

Given that the early groups of captives did not match the stereotypical image of the Nazi soldier, they were afforded sympathy and even pitied in some cases. Although, captured German officers and the more professional soldiers were derided as arrogant and tough. While they were humanised to a degree, they entered Britain at the beginning of a period when reports of atrocities committed by German forces were increasingly

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<sup>112</sup> C. T., 'Food Of Prisoners Of War', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 24 April 1945, p. 3. 'Enemy Prisoners' Rations', *Yorkshire Post*, 28 April 1945, p. 4. 'German Prisoners' Rations', *Dundee Courier*, 27 April 1945, p. 2. Angry, 'Feeding German Prisoners', *Dundee Courier*, 26 April 1945, p. 2. Sid Clements, 'German Prisoners' Rations', *Northern Daily Mail*, 24 April 1945, p. 3.

<sup>113</sup> A. B., 'German Prisoners' Rations', *Dundee Courier*, 25 April 1945, p. 2. Angry, 'Feeding German Prisoners', *Dundee Courier*, 26 April 1945, p. 2.

<sup>114</sup> C. V. B., 'German Prisoners' Rations', *Evening Telegraph*, 2 April 1945, p. 3.

<sup>115</sup> Angry, 'Feeding German Prisoners', *Dundee Courier*, 26 April 1945, p. 2.

difficult to deny as propaganda. The period examined also began with Eden's announcement on the shooting of 50 RAF officers at Stalag Luft III. This seems to have had little effect on attitudes towards the German people and the treatment of German POWs, instead reinforcing pre-existing opinions of 'good' and 'bad' Germans. Without a concrete investigation, Eden could only promise that the culprits would be brought to justice in the future, and who exactly the culprits were was a matter of debate.

Discussions of the treatment of German POWs remained divisive remaining similar to those earlier in the war. On the one hand, the treatment of German POWs was scorned as spineless, a view argued by those which judged the entire German people as inherently cruel and more often than not pointed towards the mistreatment of Allied POWs during the last and current war. Sticking to the more tedious stipulations of international law for an enemy judged inhuman and uncivilised enraged individuals of this viewpoint. On the other hand, the liberal treatment of German POWs was defended as a Christian and civilised act. The observance of international law, despite the horrific actions of the enemy, was a central characteristic of the British and symbolic of the purposes for which the war against Germany was being fought. The treatment of German POWs continued to be a marker of British national identity in this period. With the liberation of Belsen, however, these liberal voices defending the treatment of German POWs and arguing for the distinction between 'good' and 'bad' Germans were silenced by the images and commentary on concentration camps and the crisis it posed for humanity. Whether by self-censorship or that of newspaper editors, few defended German POWs on the grounds of international law when it was revealed that they received a higher ration than that of civilians, especially with images and stories of malnourished British POWs appearing alongside reports of concentration camps. By the end of the war, public opinion called for the employment of German POWs, making them work to rebuild the destruction they had wreaked on Britain. This marked the lowest ebb of attitudes towards German POWs and their treatment. In June 1944 the German POWs were afforded some humanity, in the wake of Belsen few could find it.

## Chapter 4: Employment

### 1. Introduction

This thesis now breaks from the chronological structure which informed an analysis of the period 1939 to 1945. Three central themes will now be discussed in relation to the post-war period, this chapter focusing on the employment of German POWs. In May 1945, attitudes towards German POWs, and Germany more generally, were at their lowest ebb. As the last chapter argued, the reportage of the liberation of Belsen, 'death marches' of British POWs, and superior rations of German POWs, fed into demands that German POWs in Britain be set to work. Calls to employ German POWs were made throughout the war, based on the experiences and memories of German POWs employed in Britain during the First World War. This is the concern of the first section of this chapter, which examines the patterns of POW labour employment in Britain during the Great War and how these were recollected during the first months of the Second World War. The work-ethic and craftsmanship of German POWs were positive characteristics remembered by former supervisors and employers. Early suggestions of employing POWs were encouraged based on these ideas of usefulness rather than punishment. However, as section two will examine, concerns regarding security would force the government to dismiss ideas of employing German POWs. Italian POWs were considered far more reliable. However, complications regarding accommodation and the future of Italian POWs in 1943 forced the authorities to sanction and later expand German POW employment. Cabinet records and quantitative analysis demonstrate that they were productive workers who made an important contribution to the British economy, especially in the post-war period. However, as examined in section three, views of German POWs labour varied significantly between regions and among individuals. In certain cases, the introduction of POW labour was resisted outright. Section four examines the view of POWs from the perspective of the trade union movement, focusing on the German POWs in agriculture and the concerns of the National Union of Agricultural Workers. Rather than a useful asset, German POW labour was seen as disadvantageous for the British worker. Section five goes on to examine the concerns of local branches and other organisations which contacted the Trades Union Congress criticising the local employment of POWs and their effect on domestic labour.

## 2. Precedents of the Great War

As evidenced in chapter 2 and 3, experiences and memories of captivity during the First World War influenced discussions regarding the treatment of German POWs in the Second. This chapter begins by assessing utilisation of German POWs between 1914 and 1920 before discussing recollections of their employment in 1939. As will be seen, the German POW labourer was remembered fondly by former supervisors and employers. Notions of employing German POWs on a significant scale would be, however, shelved until the latter stages of the war.

POWs were one category of worker which operated within the broad system of forced labour utilised by belligerents during the 1914-18 conflict.<sup>1</sup> The mass utilisation of POW labour, organised into what Jones has conceptualised as the 'dual prisoners work system', was the foremost precedent set by the First World War in regards to military captivity.<sup>2</sup> Davis similarly distinguishes the 'two basic categories of employment' in the age of total war: 'service work for the armed force detaining the prisoners' and 'contract employment in agriculture and industry'.<sup>3</sup> Working POWs were split between labour battalions set to work near the theatre of operations, and working units based in camps located on the home front. The latter fared better than the former as not only were they removed from the hazardous battlefield environment but home front camps were subject to inspection by protecting powers and ICRC representatives. Such scrutiny of working battalions on the front line was lacking. At certain points in the conflict, POWs were forced to work in areas where they would be subject to their countrymen's artillery fire as reprisal for the unsatisfactory treatment of POWs in enemy hands.<sup>4</sup> While forced labour was undoubtedly arduous and an indirect form of violence, the value of their labour, more so than the stipulations of international law, led both state and employer to ensure POWs were adequately fed in order to perform their work.<sup>5</sup> The utilisation of POWs and other forms of forced labour was a learning curve for belligerents, with positive and negative experiences of the 1914-18 conflict

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Stibbe, 'Introduction: Captivity, Forced Labour and Forced Migration during the First World War', *Immigrants and Minorities*, 26 (2008), 1-18.

<sup>2</sup> Heather Jones, 'A Missing Paradigm? Military Captivity and the Prisoner of War, 1914-1918', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 26: 1/2 (2008), 19-48, (p. 42).

<sup>3</sup> Gerald H. Davis, 'Prisoners of War in Twentieth-Century War Economies', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 12:4 (1977), 623-34, (p. 626).

<sup>4</sup> Heather Jones, 'The German Spring Reprisals of 1917: Prisoners of War and the Violence of the Western Front', *German History*, 26: 3 (2008), 335-356.

<sup>5</sup> Alan R. Kramer, 'Prisoners in the First World War', in, *Prisoners*, ed. by Scheipers, pp. 75-90, p. 80.

influencing, although not determining, the operational patterns of the Second World War.<sup>6</sup>

As the 1914-18 conflict dragged on, POW labour was increasingly integrated into war economies. German POWs began to arrive in Britain from late 1916, being set to work on a variety of tasks—road mending, quarrying, cement manufacturing. The largest concentration of POW labour found itself in agriculture. Over the course of 1917-18, the system of agricultural employment developed gradually. POW labour was broadly split between working camps and migratory gangs. Yet, POWs were far less integral to Britain than other belligerents such as Germany and France. Indeed, the numbers working on the British home front were relatively small when compared to Germany and France. In September 1916 only 3,832 POWs were working in the UK, rising to 30,480 in May 1918. The largest proportion, 9,300 worked in agriculture; in building, 8,850; quarries, 3,360; timber work 3,250, and 2,350 on Royal Engineering tasks. The remainder was employed on manufacturing cement or road building.<sup>7</sup> After the war, German POWs were used on restoration work. Between January 1919 and January 1920, some 200,000 worked under British authorities in France, clearing ordnance and debris from fields, trenches, and canals as a form of reparations.<sup>8</sup> Assessing the significance of the German POWs employed in Britain during the First World War, Panikos Panayi concluded that their labour 'remained of limited importance'.<sup>9</sup> Rather than making a significant contribution to the British war effort, the physical work they performed 'may have proved more important in maintaining routine and fending off the effect of barbed wire disease'.<sup>10</sup> In contrast to the First World War, German POWs in Britain would have a far greater role in the economy during the 1940s, particularly the post-war period.

Recollecting that they had worked the fields of Britain during the last war, ideas of employing German POWs were aired in late 1939 and early 1940. Writing in newspapers, former supervisors testified to the work ethic of the German POWs put in their charge. Francis Adeney, writing for the *Lancashire Evening Post*, found himself the commandant of a small camp after being invalided home in 1916. The country

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<sup>6</sup> Assessing the deportation and force labour of Belgian and northern French civilians in late 1916/early 1917, Jens Thiel concludes that the experiences here 'constituted a crucial, unquestioned background of experience for agents of the Second World War'. Jens Thiel, 'Between recruitment and forced labour: the radicalization of German labour policy in occupied Belgium and northern France', *First World War Studies*, 4: 1 (2013), pp. 39-50.

<sup>7</sup> Jones, 'A Missing Paradigm?', pp. 29-30.

<sup>8</sup> Kramer, 'Prisoners', p.86.

<sup>9</sup> Panayi, *Prisoners of Britain*, p. 223.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p. 224.

mansion in the West of England held around 40 German POWs. News of their arrival 'spread quickly', and early the next morning two farmers were knocking at the door offering work for 20 POWs each. Adeney praised the meticulous, disciplined, and enthusiastic character of the POWs, recalling that they worked 'magnificently [...] proving exceptionally competent with the tractor'.<sup>11</sup> Anticipating the call up of British workers, employers foresaw the use of German POWs to 'solve' gaps which appeared in the labour market.<sup>12</sup> Certain farmers thought highly of German POW labour, considering them better than other groups they were allocated:

During the last war I had as varied a collection as it was possible to get. Some good, bad and indifferent, but the best workers I ever had were German prisoners of war. Prussian guards captured in France at the commencement of hostilities. They were so good that I concluded they were a special type of man.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to their hard work and diligence, German POWs were also remembered for being remarkable craftsmen. T. H. Ogden had also supervised a gang of German POWs in post-war France. Having provided one with a tin, Ogden received a 'beautifully engraved' matchbox holder, and recommended employing them in small workshops producing similar goods.<sup>14</sup> Another correspondent urged authorities to encourage German POWs to produce the 'toys and other novelties' they were characteristically adept in doing. Not only would this do something to mitigate the tedium of camp life, selling the toys during the upcoming Christmas period could help fund the running of the camps, lessening the burden on the state.<sup>15</sup> Responding to the suggestions put forward by readers, a columnist in the *Derby Daily Telegraph* agreed that occupying POWs would relieve their boredom, but thought that their labour could be 'of real benefit to the country'.

The problem of the employment of prisoners is not yet one of any magnitude, but when it does arise, I have no doubt that the experience gained in the last war will be put to good service. Then, Germans in great numbers were given the task of helping on the land. And if work is wanted for them to-day, none better than the raising of food could be found.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Francis Adeney, 'I Was Fond of My Prisoners', *Lancashire Evening Post*, 5 January 1940, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> "'Solved'", *Dundee Courier*, 5 October 1939, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> 'Observations by a Farmer', *Sussex Express & Courier*, 1 September 1939, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> 'Gift From Old Tin', *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 1 December 1939, p. 11.

<sup>15</sup> 'Work for Prisoners', *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 1 December 1939, p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> The Sage, 'Candid Column', *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 2 December 1939, p. 2.

Experience during the First World War had shown that German POWs could be productive workers. These early suggestions and discussions of utilising German POWs were not borne from punitive ideas of employing POWs as a punishment. Rather, they were shaped by positive characterisations of German POWs as diligent and skilled workers. The avocation of setting German POWs to work appeared sporadically in newspapers throughout the war, especially when the effects of mobilisation were being particularly felt by the agricultural sector.<sup>17</sup> However, while these utilitarian recommendations regarding the employing of POWs would be considered by the wartime governments, it would not be until after D-Day when substantial numbers of German POWs were set to work.

### 3. The employment of POWs in Britain

On 20 February 1940, Brigadier-General Clifton Brown, (Unionist MP, Hexham) asked Oliver Stanley, secretary of state for war, whether the government planned to employ German POWs as in the last war. Stanley stated that this was not then being considered, although he did not rule it out in the future.<sup>18</sup> Ministries had already discussed employing POWs in October and November 1939. Keen to see them working British farmland, the Ministry of Agriculture advocated employing German POWs. The Army Council and MOL rejected MAF proposals, pointing out that a substantial amount of the unemployed had yet to be directed into work, and trade unions would undoubtedly oppose POWs being employed before British workers. At an inter-departmental meeting on 21 November, the idea was considered moot as only 150 German POWs were in Britain. Furthermore, POWs would be retained by the BEF in France, set to work behind the front line.<sup>19</sup> Still, German POWs were not idle during the first months of the conflict. 1939 newsreels show German POWs performing manual labour around the camp grounds, and at the 'baronial mansion', Grizedale Hall, officer POWs held there were 'voluntarily employed in what their captors call "Kaiser Bill's hobby"—chopping wood'.<sup>20</sup> While POWs completed chores in the vicinity of the camp, discussions of extending their employment remained hypothetical. The prospect of employing German

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<sup>17</sup> Benjamin Main, 'Farm Labour', *Dundee Courier*, 24 July 1941, p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> HC Deb, 20 February 1940, vol. 357, cols. 1138-9.

<sup>19</sup> Bob Moore, 'Liabilities into Assets', (p. 119).

<sup>20</sup> At Huis Doorn, the manor house in Holland he purchased after abdication, Wilhelm II took personal charge of the 59 hectare park, 'helping fell trees and chop wood'. John C. G. Rohl, *Wilhelm II: Into the Abyss of War and Exile, 1900-1941*, trans. by Sheila De Bellaigue and Roy Bridge, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 1192.

POWs in Britain disappeared with the decision to remove them to the Dominions.<sup>21</sup> While German POWs were considered to pose a security threat and therefore deported from Britain, contradictory plans were arranged for their Italian allies.

Drawing attention to the lack of labour for crucial drainage, ditching, and reclamation work in counties across the UK, the MAF proposed the immediate transfer of 2,000 to 3,000 Italian POWs captured in Libya to the UK, put to work under the supervision of Country Agricultural Executive Committees. The 'peasant' type found among Italian POWs from Northern Italy was considered ideal. The Secretary of State for War agreed so long as the POWs were 'carefully selected' and did not contain 'any violent or Fascist types'.<sup>22</sup> Under the direction of Churchill himself, these initial plans were expanded to include 25,000 Italian POWs in light of the need to remove them from the North African theatre.<sup>23</sup> By September 1943, 74,900 were employed with arrangements for a further 11,000 to be brought to the UK by the end of the year. A further 36,000 Italian POWs had been requested by the Inter-Departmental Committee established to allocated POW labour. In contrast to the plans of expanding the number and remit of Italian POWs employed, the ideas of utilising German POWs in a similar fashion still met a negative response in 1943.

In parliament, Commander Locker-Lampson (Con. Birmingham Handsworth) was an outspoken advocate of setting German POWs to work on a variety of tasks.<sup>24</sup> In October 1944, after his suggestion that German POWs should be used as private gardeners was dismissed by Williams, Locker-Lampson exclaimed in the Commons, 'What is the good of capturing Germans, unless we use them?'<sup>25</sup> It is worth noting a subtle change in attitudes towards the idea of employing German POWs. 'German vandals who have tried to destroy this county ', Locker-Lampson cried in June 1943, 'should be employed to help us to restore it'.<sup>26</sup> In 1939 calls to employ POWs cited their usefulness during the First World War. Midway through the 1939-45 conflict, the those

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<sup>21</sup> Johann Custodis, 'The Enemy on the Farm: The Economic Contribution of German and Italian POWs Employment in Britain and the British Dominions during and after the Second World War', *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte/Economic History Year Book*, 55:2 (2014), 99-128.

<sup>22</sup> CAB 67/9 WP (G) (41) 6, Italian Prisoners of War for Land Reclamation Work, Memorandum by the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, 13 January 1941.

<sup>23</sup> CAB 66/16, WP (41) 120, Proposal to bring 25,000 Italian Prisoners of War to this country, Report by the Lord President of the Council, 4 June 1941.

<sup>24</sup> For Locker-Lampson, German POWs provided the answer to a variety of labour shortages. See, HC Deb 20 July 1943, vol. 391, cols. 676-8; HC Deb, 19 January 1944, vol. 396, cols. 185-6; HC Deb, 22 March 1945, vol. 409, cols. 987-8.

<sup>25</sup> HC Deb, 12 October 1944, vol. 403, col. 1933.

<sup>26</sup> HC Deb, 29 June 1943, vol. 390, col. 1452.

advocating employing POWs did so out of vengence. In other words, they wanted German POWs to pay—through hard work—for the damage Germany had caused Britain. Despite this, the government remained, as before, cited security concerns as to why the government preferred not to employ German POWs, and favoured Italians. However, the future of Italian POW labour would be complicated with the capitulation of Italy in 1943, leading to the greater use of German POWs.

General Eisenhower had stated in a broadcast to the Italian people that all British and US Italian POWs captured in Tunisia and Sicily would be allowed to return home. While Italian POWs captured during the earlier stages of the war would be kept, more recent captures were to be given up.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, in January 1944, the Lord President of the Council noted in a report that as a result of the change in status of Italian POWs, which would follow the signature of an agreement negotiated with the Badoglio government, the conditions which Italian POWs can be employed would be 'considerably altered'. The supply of Italian POWs was now limited. While a total of 73,000 which were surplus to requirements in other theatres could be transferred to the UK, this fell short of the 250,000 desired. In addition to the drying up of Italian POWs who could be employed, accommodation difficulties in the camp system after D-Day led to the cancellation of father shipments of Italian POWs to the UK.

Due to the need to release the maximum amount of accommodation for German POWs arriving from France, the Secretary of State for war proposed transfer of Italian POWs be stopped. From the perspective of labour requirements, the Inter-departmental Committee on the Allocation of Prisoners of War stated that the acceptability of this proposal rested on if the loss of Italian POW labour could be replaced by German POWs. The chief obstacle preventing the extension of German POW employed was the security restrictions, in particular the requirement of an armed escort. The Security Executive had agreed to the employment of up to 20,000 German POWs in small unescorted groups in agriculture and forestry work in rural areas outside Eastern and London regions, stipulating that: district military authorities and chief constables were consulted prior to their employment; that they continued to reside in camps, being escorted to and from work; none were members of submarine crews, *Luftwaffe* or known ardent Nazis; and, finally, that they were segregated from Italian co-operators and POWs. Furthermore, it was strongly recommended that the MOI persuade the press to take a more sympathetic angle on the relaxation of restrictions regarding German

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<sup>27</sup> CAB 66/40 WP (43) 392, Employment of Italian Prisoners of War in the United Kingdom, Memorandum by the Lord President of the Council, 10 September 1943.

POWs than they had done with the Italian POWs. Considering accommodation for German POWs, given they needed to be within travelling distance of work, the Committee estimated that 15,330 German POWs could be employed in the near future.<sup>28</sup>

At the end of the war with Germany, the Secretary of State for War, James Grigg reviewed the employment of German POWs. The Armistice and Post War Committee had decided on 14 December 1944 that any Germans compulsorily employed outside Germany after the war should be POWs. Grigg estimated a total demand of 730,000 German POW labourers in the UK and 150,000 overseas. With only 160,000 in the UK, 570,000 were needed. Grigg thought this was 'quite out of the question'. The problems of transporting, feeding, accommodating, and guarding such numbers, made 'any proposals to meet the present demands quite unrealistic'. Instead he suggested that the maximum number of German POWs already in Britain should be put to work, replacing departing Italian POWs. Grigg recommended that the employment of German POWs should not be billeted or built new accommodation as materials were needed elsewhere. He also warned against delaying the demobilisation of soldiers by holding them back for guarding duties. If these principles were approved then it was a matter of deciding the number of German POWs required out of those available. Grigg advised that skilled workers should be prioritised and that, subject to security, ardent Nazis should be employed. It was, in his view, unwise to send them to Germany but also 'equally indefensible' to retain them in Britain without making them work.<sup>29</sup>

The Minister of Economic Warfare believed that the Secretary of State for War was 'approaching this problem from the wrong angle'.

We must be clear as to our objective. Is it to punish and reform Nazis, or is it to obtain labour necessary to the British war effort against Japan, and the maintenance of food production pending complete demobilisation? I suggest that it is the latter, and the reason why the various Ministries tabulated in Appendix A of W.P. (45) 292 have asked for 730,000 prisoners of war is that they are required for essential purposes.

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<sup>28</sup> CAB 66/58 WP (44) 687, Transfer of Italian Prisoners to this country and increased employment of German prisoners, Note by the Minister of Labour and National Service, 24 November 1944.

<sup>29</sup> CAB 66/65 WP (45) 292, Employment of German Prisoners of War outside Germany after the cessation of hostilities in Europe, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War, 10 May 1945.

The Minister strongly opposed the employment of ardent Nazis on farms as they required guarding. Any German POW labour had to be unguarded to be efficient.<sup>30</sup> The Minister of Agriculture also disagreed with Griggs's proposals. He thought it unlikely that all of the 160,000 Germans in the UK could be employed. The 4,000 officers were exempt from work under the Geneva Convention. Moreover, the other ranks comprised of 'appreciable numbers of ardent Nazis who may be unemployable'. As a result the Secretary's proposals would lead to a 'serious shortage' of POW labour when attempting to meet the total demand of 730,000 POWs.

D-Day, therefore, marks the beginning not only of an increase in the number of German POWs held in Britain but also the beginnings of the utilisation of these captives as a source of labour. Initially thought too dangerous to be employed, the employment of German POWs would be sanctioned and the security restrictions limiting their employment progressively rescinded. As the cabinet records discussed above indicate, by the end of the war with Germany POW labour was regarded as an important, if not essential, source of labour. The following section will now consider how productive German POWs were and their contribution to the economy. As will be seen later, while the positive contribution of POWs is quantitatively undeniable, their employment was not considered advantageous by all, and in certain cases resisted.

#### 4. Debates over productivity

Historians have sought to assess the productivity and contribution of POW to war economies both in general and with particular regard to Britain. Surveying the employment of POWs in twentieth century, Gerald Davis warned against over accentuating their contribution to captor economies. Weighing the benefits against the costs of employing POWs he suggested:

On balance, the economic advantages of keeping war prisoners are reduced by the costs of their maintenance and the fact that POWs have generally been inefficient workers, poorly motivated, ill-suited to their tasks, often unable to communicate in their employer's language and subject to eccentricities induced by confinement.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> CAB 66/65, WP (45) 309, Employment of German Prisoners of War outside Germany after the cessation of hostilities in Europe, Memorandum by the Minister of Economic Warfare, 16 May 1945.

<sup>31</sup> Davis, 'Prisoners', p.630.

The cautious tone of Davis when estimating the role of POW labour is also found in official government histories of the war.<sup>32</sup> However, Moore has stated that POW labour made a 'substantial contribution' to the British war economy, arguing that 'their usefulness as a (limited) labour force [...] did much to shape the policies adopted towards them'.<sup>33</sup> Specifically considering their employment in agriculture, Richard Moore-Coyler has found POWs indispensable to production, especially in the immediate post-war.<sup>34</sup> The work of Johann Custodis has confirmed Moore and Moore-Coyler's claims over Davis' pessimistic hypothesis of POW labour in regards to the British case, demonstrating that German POW labour 'was more important than previously assumed'.<sup>35</sup> Certainly, in quantitative terms, it is undoubted that the role of Italian and German POWs in the British economy was significant.

In government circles it was generally accepted that German POWs were productive workers, a useful asset to the British wartime, and later post-war economy. More often than not, there was a general complementary tone of articles which informed of the allocation of German POWs to various works in the local area. For instance, the *Kent & Sussex Courier* reported that the first group of POWs had arrived to work on the foundations of the 76 temporary houses to be built in the Rusthall area; all were of 'good conduct'.<sup>36</sup> Contractors in Lichfield were reportedly 'very satisfied' with the German POW labour they had been sent on housing sites.<sup>37</sup>

However, there was little consensus of their usefulness and work ethic in public discussions, and in certain cases resistance towards their employment. As the number of POWs employed increased, so too did the variety of opinions towards them. In August 1945, the *Aberdeen Journal* pointed out that the quality of German POWs workers varied between regions.

Widely varying reports are current as to the behaviour in the English harvest fields of German prisoners of war. One observer in the eastern counties goes as far as to say that they are winning the golden opinion of their employers by their diligence, that they yoke promptly at eight o'clock in the morning and working

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<sup>32</sup> Harold Satow, *The Work of the Prisoners of War Department During the Second World War* (London: HMSO, 1950), pp.33-5. H. M. D. Parker, *Manpower: A Study of War-Time Policy and Administration* (London: HMSO, 1957), p.187, 384.

<sup>33</sup> Bob Moore, 'Turning Liabilities into Assets: British Government Policy towards German and Italian Prisoners of War during the Second World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 32: 1 (1997), 117-136, 127, 136.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Moore-Coyler, 'Prisoners of war and the struggle for food production, 1939-49', in *The front line of freedom: British farming in the Second World War*, ed. by Brian Short, Charles Watkins and John Martin (Exeter: The British Agricultural History Society, 2007), pp.117-31.

<sup>35</sup> Custodis, 'Enemy on the Farm'.

<sup>36</sup> 'German Prisoners at Work, On Local Housing Sites', *Kent & Sussex Courier*, 3 August 1945

<sup>37</sup> 'Lichfield City Council', *Lichfield Mercury*, 6 July 1945, p. 2.

steadily until lowsin-time at six, and that they are willing to forgo a part of the dinner-hour in return for a few pence of extra pay. From Yorkshire a very different tale is forthcoming. Here the Hun is said to be sulky and intractable, and farmers, in an endeavour to coax him to mend his ways and get on with the job, are supplying him with cigarettes and cigars. The agricultural executive officer for the East Riding has issued a stern rebuke and a warning against this pernicious practice. A united front against the Boche blackmailer seems to be desirable.<sup>38</sup>

While they had heard of the productivity of German POWs, correspondents wrote to their local newspaper expressing dismay at the lax attitude of German POWs they had observed towards work. Writing to the *Bucks Free Press* in April 1947, Mr Baker was critical of the productivity of a gang of German POWs employed near his home.

We must all do more work in order to live: that is one of the few common-sense things our present Government has told us. We must produce more goods and houses and grow more food. Why, then, is it that now the weather permits of building work being recommended in the fields at the back of this house, the German prisoners are not supervised to the extent that a reasonable amount of work is done by them? I have been interested enough to watch them periodically, because the ground where the building is being done formed (before and during the war) some allotments, one of which permitted me for a number of years to be self-supporting in potatoes and other foodstuffs. This I had to give up, although two seasons' produce were lost before the ground was touched—presumably the inevitable delays resulting from the bureaucracy under which we suffer. Not one German in ten appear to work at a time—the remainder stand about—and when he does work it is in "slow-motion" time. These are the men, moreover, who appeared to have nothing better to do than to wander about our snow-piled streets a few weeks ago. Did nobody think of putting them to work to remove it? Having been in command of a R.A.F. unit through which thousands of ex-Italian P.O.W.s passed during the latter part of the war, I know what work could be got out of *them*. Many units of the R.A.F. were extremely glad to have their services for all kinds of duty. Thus I am sure that with a little energy, a little co-ordination, some organisation and co-operation between the civil and military authorities good work could be got out of these Germans. Now that they are allowed to "fraternise" it is remarkable how smartly they turn themselves out, and the Germans react immediately to discipline. Are we too tired to try and discipline them ourselves? Apparently we are.<sup>39</sup>

Similarly,

Nearly three weeks ago a number of German prisoners of war were directed by the Ministry of Works to take down three Nissen huts earlier occupied by the military authorities, using part of my grounds. This labour, so-called, has no supervision of any kind. The skeleton structures of the Nissen huts are so rotten that they are almost falling down. During this three weeks two huts have been demolished, which has occupied the time of six able-bodied men. The actual

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<sup>38</sup> 'Bribing the Boche', *Aberdeen Journal*, 10 August 1945, p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> 'German P.O.W. Labour', *Bucks Free Press*, 3 April, 1947, p. 5.

hours of labour have occupied rather less than two hours per man daily. The P.O.W.s arrive on the site at approximately 8.10 a.m. A fire is made, which is kept going like a furnace throughout the day by the use of good timber, a commodity most of us find impossible to obtain. By 8.30 a.m. tea is brewed and between this time and 3.30 p.m. this operations is repeated five or six times. Where the quantity of tea is obtained is a matter for speculation. At the least sign of rain these fellows take shelter like cats, while the average Englishman working outdoors carries on with his job. Since it occupies six men one whole week to pull own a decomposed Nissen hut, it would have occupied the same men much less time to destroy a church! I consider the position disgraceful, to find men of this type sitting round a stove of roaring fire playing cards and frittering time away. I wonder what the position would have been had Germany won the war!<sup>40</sup>

Comparisons were often made between Italian and German POW labourers. Yet, comparisons were also sometimes made between German POWs and the British agricultural workers. At a meeting of the Barnstaple Rural District Council in January 1946, it was alleged that in North Devon 10 Germans did as much work as 30 Britons. This inspired a flood of letters sent to the *North Devon Journal* outraged that such a comment was made. Correspondents reminded the Council that it was the endeavour and qualities of the British agricultural worker which had aided victory in the war against Germany. Furthermore, the Council and local farmers were accused of petting German POWs, overlooking the needs of the British worker. The secret of good working Germans was that farmers provided nice hot cups of cocoa and invited them in for dinner while letting their British workmen eat their meals under a hedge outside in the rain. Moreover, several correspondents attested that beyond the gaze of the farmer, the German POW shirked and dodged work. A former Sergeant of the North Devon Regiment was 'amazed and indignant that sentiments [...] could be uttered such a short time after the ending of the war'. The qualities of the British men had only recently been lauded as central to victory in the war against Germany. He suggested that as the councillors had 'such a high opinion of the German and such a poor opinion of their own race, it would appear that Germany should be their habitation'.<sup>41</sup>

During a meeting of Wiltshire agricultural workers where they discussed possible strike action over wages in February 1946:

A resolution demanding control of the use of German prisoners of war led to cries of "Send them back to Germany, or put them against the wall and shoot them." Mr A. Coleman of Cherill declared: "I know a farmer who gives them a

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<sup>40</sup> REGINALD BOWSER, 'P.O.W.s Waste Time Tea-making', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 13 December 1946, p. 4.

<sup>41</sup> A. Mogridge, "Amazed and Indignant", *North Devon Journal*, 24 January 1946, p. 7.

hot dinner, cigarettes, and a hot cup of tea before they go home, yet he wouldn't give an Englishman a cigarette.

Investigating the claim, a reporter interviewed the farmer Coleman referred to, who declared the accusations were false.

He added: "About three weeks ago five German prisoners helped me to erect some electric light poles. They were here for 10 days, and two of them stayed for a few more days to help on the land. I have no German prisoners now. "The prisoners bought their own rations. The only thing I was supposed to do was given them boiling water to make their tea, and I did that. "I don't know whether the men working on the electricity lines gave them any cigarettes, but I certainly did not. "The only people employed on my farm are one boy, my son and myself.<sup>42</sup>

While certain farmers denied providing extra rations and sundries to German POWs, it was well-known that this occurred. As *The Times* reported,

[...] in practice many of them do so on the grounds that to do a full day's work a man needs sufficient food. A clear statement about prisoners' rations should be made by the War Office, because the favoured treatment the prisoners get on some farms causes discontent and is prejudicial to discipline.<sup>43</sup>

In March 1945, the council of the NFU blamed farmers for the 'in many instances for a 'deterioration of discipline' among Italian POWs 'by giving them preferential treatment'.<sup>44</sup> Accusations of preferential treatment POWs received extended into housing. Joiners working at Hough End Fields in Manchester went on strike after the withdrawal of permission to make tea during the afternoon. This brought work to a complete halt. D. V. Thomas of the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers noted that German POWs were allowed to make tea on site.<sup>45</sup>

## 5. Housing

The preparation of housing sites was another important task which German POWs were employed on. Housing was a growing concern of the British public towards the end of the war seemed ever more likely. In October 1944, a Home Intelligence report summarised popular opinion towards the housing situation, noting that 'Gloom and despair are widespread, and people now think it will be years before everyone is

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<sup>42</sup> 'Wilts Farm Workers' Strike Threat', *Western Daily Press*, 18 February 1946, p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> Agricultural Correspondent, 'Germans on the land', *Times*, 15 April 1946, p. 7.

<sup>44</sup> 'Italian Prisoners', *Manchester Guardian*, 22 March 1945, p. 5.

<sup>45</sup> 'Strike Over Tea', *Manchester Guardian*, 25 October 1945, p. 6.

adequately house; they fear the present 'hopeless' position will only be accentuated when demobilisation starts'.<sup>46</sup> While this was a practical use of German POW labour, the use of the ex-enemy on housing projects was resisted by several local councils, especially when it was considered that these homes were for returning soldiers.

Councils discussed the possibility of employing German POWs on housing sites, but were careful to implement such schemes before local labour could be definitely confirmed as unavailable. Suggestions of utilising German POW were dismissed if there was any indication that British labour had not been exhausted.<sup>47</sup> The introduction of German POWs on local housing projects caused heated debate at council meetings. Camborne-Redruth Urban Council discussed the possible employment of German POWs on the preparation of housing sites in late September 1945. The vote won fourteen to four, it was decided that if local labour was unavailable German POWs would be requested from the Ministry of Works. Councillors who voted against pointed out the availability of a large number of unemployed men in the district. While the council was not advocating the employment of German POWs instead of British workers, any notion of employment POWs alarmed those that voted against. Mr Nicholas wanted POWs 'sent back to their own country as quickly as possible'. Mr Tossell went further, stating that bringing German POWs into the area 'would be an insult to the men and women who had been on service during the war'. In his opinion, 'there would be trouble' if they were.<sup>48</sup> In Derby, Councillor Bateman opposed the use of German POWs on house-building, criticising a recent decision to apply for their labour. 'Acute as the housing problem is', he stated, 'I do not think our lads would mind waiting a little longer if they knew sites were being prepared by their own people'. Instead of German POWs, Bateman argued that men from the building trade should be released from the forces to undertake the job.<sup>49</sup> Similar objections were raised at the Lanark County Council. Councillor Robert M'Cracken raised objections and moved that no POW of any nationality should be employed on housing schemes anywhere in the county.

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<sup>46</sup> 'Post-war reconstruction', Home Intelligence report, 12 October 1944, INF 1/292, Public Record Office, London. Cited in Harold L. Smith, *Britain in the Second World War: A Social History* (Manchester: MUP, 1996), p. 115.

<sup>47</sup> 'German P.O.W. Work On Housing: Town Council Turns It Down', *Motherwell Times*, 7 September 1945, p. 5.

<sup>48</sup> 'German Prisoners to Build Camborne-Redruth Houses? "Hundreds of Unemployed in Area" Report Causes Heated Debate', *Cornishman*, 2 August 1945, p. 5.

<sup>49</sup> 'Release Vital', *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 2 August 1945, p. 3.

He said the Council could not justify the employment of prisoners of war when they knew that to-day there were 15,000 Lanarkshire people unemployed. "So long as I am a member of this Council," he added, "there will never be a German employed in this county while Scotsmen are idle. "If you want to employ German prisoners of war give them the same treatment that our prisoners got in Germany. Send them into the coal mines and make them work 16 hours a day, and so save our Servicemen when they are demobilised from having to work in the mines." Councillor James Beecroft seconded.

In response, Councillor Ure stated that unless housing sites were serviced soon, 'they would miss the boat'. Other authorities were using POWs. It was clearly a divisive issue and heated debate as Councillor M'Carckren was 'suspended for refusing to withdraw a remark he made about Councillor Ure, and he left the meeting'.<sup>50</sup> Those that were opposed to the use of German POWs on the preparation of housing sites were concerned their employment would displace British workers and unemployed, it was also considered an insult to ex-servicemen who would live in a house built by the men they had fought against. Concerns regarding the insult that having a house built by German POWs for British soldiers' were perhaps overstated. Evidently, some soldiers' eagerly awaiting demobilisation cared little who built their homes, instead worrying if on return there would be a roof over their head.

Recent reports that various local authorities are refusing to employ German prisoner-of-war labour to deal with the housing problem make disturbing reading for those of us who are stationed overseas, while our families in Britain have been homeless for years. The shortage of houses is so acute that all available man-power should be diverted to deal with it, and it is right that the Germans, who have contributed so largely to the deficiency, should play their part in the rebuilding. Experience in Germany has shown me that German prisoner-of-war labour can be made to work extremely well under supervision. I wonder if those of your readers who have homes of their own can appreciate the prospect which faces many of us on our return and demobilisation. For several years our wives and children have been existing in furnished rooms and living on sufferance with relatives, while we who have been supposedly defending our "hearths and homes" have none to which to come back. How can children be adequately reared in such circumstances? It is an absolute mockery for politicians to press for an increase in birthrate. A desperate situation invites desperate remedies and unless some action ensues we face a sombre future. We cannot rely solely on the Government. There must be co-operation from everyone. Surely peace is worth that price.<sup>51</sup>

Blackpool Town Council turned down a £11,122 contract for new houses as the contractor proposed to use German POW labour. In response, A. Brett Ltd. Preston, the

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<sup>50</sup> 'German P.O.W. And Housing Work, "Own Men First" Demand, County Council Debate', *Motherwell Times*, 7 September 1945, p. 1.

<sup>51</sup> 'P.O.W. labour for housing', *Dundee Courier*, 22 August 1945, p. 2.

contractors, explained that it was not a choice between British or German POW labourers, but that if no British labour was available German POWs would have to be used. A. Brett Ltd. 'hotly denied' they were using German POWs as cut-price labour, going on to state that they, like other contractors, would 'much prefer to use English labour'. As it was not available, they used the 'next best thing [...] whether it is German, Italian, or any other nationality'.<sup>52</sup> The use of German POWs on the preparation of house sites was considered an important use of their labour. However, it was resisted by some as it was feared that the allocation of German POWs would displace British workmen. Furthermore, some councillors considered the use of German POWs to be an insult to the ex-servicemen who would reside in a home which the ex-enemy built. These concerns and fears were, however, seemingly unfounded with several serving soldiers writing to their local papers to note their indifference to the labour used. All they hoped for was a home to return to.

## 6. Agriculture

The largest proportion of POW labour in Britain was employed in agriculture. Shipped from North Africa, 2,000 Italian POWs selected for their experience in the industry were set to work in July 1941, their number expanding to 50,000 by September 1944. The utilisation of Italian POWs allowed other labour sources such as WLA and schoolchildren to be directed elsewhere. An insufficient number of farm workers demobilised from the Armed Forces returned to agriculture. In addition Italian POWs were steadily repatriated from November 1945. In order to alleviate shortages, German POWs were increasingly used. Foreseeing the need to replace Italian POW labour after Italy surrendered in 1943, an experimental group of 969 German POWs were employed at two camps in Cumberland and Warwickshire in January 1944. By October 1944, 16,000 German POWs were employed by the MAF across 22 camps. The number of German POWs employed in agriculture peaked in March 1947 at 170,000. By this time, German POWs constituted one fifth of the total agricultural labour force. Most POWs were collected from their camps in the morning by farmers and returned in the evening. Those with records of good behaviour were housed in hostels a short walking distance of the farm. POWs of the upmost compliance and trustworthiness could be billeted, up to a maximum of three, directly on farms, working and living with the farmer. As it reduced the costs of transporting, accommodating, guarding and feeding POWs, the

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<sup>52</sup> 'Why Contractor Proposed German Labour', *Lancashire Daily Post*, 4 October 1945, p. 4.

authorities preferred to locate POWs at hostels and billets. Moreover, theoretically at least, it increased the time POWs spent working.<sup>53</sup> The contribution of POW labour to British wartime and post-war agriculture is clear and the authorities sought to maximise their productivity. Yet, in the view of the trade union movement POW posed a serious threat to the British agricultural worker.

In November 1945, the NUAW raised concerns over the difference in rates of pay for British workers and POW labour at a Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) meeting with the Minister of Labour, George Isaacs.<sup>54</sup> The NUAW delegation noted that it was cheaper for farmers to hire POW labour. The rate of 1 shilling an hour had been accepted by the union when Italian POWs were first employed given the 'inferior character' of their work. German POWs had, however, proven to be capable workers and the availability of their labour at this rate was considered 'detrimental to Trade Union standards'.<sup>55</sup> On 22 January 1946, a union delegation met with the Ministers of Agriculture and Labour to discuss the matter further.

At the meeting, the NUAW read a statement outlining their concerns based on complaints received from local branches. They argued that German POWs were displacing British workers as the rates paid for their labour did not match estimations of their productivity. In the view of the NUAW, most German POWs had experience of agricultural work, and had proved to be 'well-disciplined' and 'tractable'. As a result, 'it was a paying proposition to farmers to get a body of disciplined men to work for them, first at a rate of a shilling an hour and then at 1/3d'. Their availability at this rate was 'disastrous' for British agricultural labourers. The NUAW pointed out that if a farmer employed a member of the Women's Land Army through the WAEC, the cost to him would be no less than 1/3d. an hour and to obtain male workers he would not only have to pay the minimum rate of wages applicable to the County, but enough cover overhead charges as well.<sup>56</sup> In the opinion of the unions, farmers would always seek the most cost-effective labour.

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<sup>53</sup> Custodis, 'The Enemy on the Farm', pp. 110-11.

<sup>54</sup> Introduced by Ernest Bevin in 1941 when Minister of Labour and National Service, the JCC was a seven-a-side representation of management and unions. Robert Mackay, *The Test of War: Inside Britain 1939-1945* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1999), p. 88.

<sup>55</sup> MRC, MSS.292/881.423/8, M.O.L.J.C.C. Minutes of General Council Side, 'Employment of prisoners of war in Agriculture', 20 November 1945.

<sup>56</sup> Ministers were aware of this. In a letter to Bevin, Isaacs had noted that employers benefited from not having to pay National Insurance contributions when employing POW labourers. WO 32/10755, Isaacs to Bevin, 30 Aug. 1945, cited in Moore and Fedorowich, *Italian POWs*, p. 216.

Farmers, the unions argued, were using underhand measures to acquire German POW workers, and offered examples of complains from local branches. In Cambridgeshire NUAW members employed by Mr. Robbins in Isleham were offered 18 shillings an acre for harvest work. They refused this wage as it was usually a higher rate. Mr. Robbins immediately asked his local W.A.E.C. for POW labour, which was supplied. The NUAW representatives argued that this was 'a typical case of a farmer attempting to depress rates of wages by means of German labour'.<sup>57</sup> Reports also indicated that in parts of the country where it had been usual for many jobs to be done piece-work rates, farmers were introducing German POWs on time-rates. Piece work earnings offered workers additional pay as their wages reflected productivity. The introduction of German POW on time rates, deprived NUAW members the added remuneration they had 'a right to expect' from piece-work earnings. Amongst other examples, in Bedfordshire, members of the Cople Branch complained that Mr. Mark Young of Sandy was employing thirty German POWs to stook corn. This was usually done on a piece work basis, until the arrival of the prisoners. When POWs were not available British workers performed a variety of jobs on piece work rates which they then had to do on day rates. In addition, the NUAW highlighted that farmers were retaining POW labour while dismissing or turning away British workers. For instance, in Lincolnshire, Mr. B. Runciman of Weston Spalding discharged two union members stating that 'there was nothing for them to do'. At the same time he employed four German POWs. In sum, the NUAW argued that the cases mentioned showed how POW labour was 'undermining the economic position of British workers in agriculture', presenting farmers with 'an economic power against the workers' which prevented them from 'obtaining the rates of wages and conditions of employment [...] necessary to their well-being'.<sup>58</sup> In their statement the NUAW also made clear their opposition to the billeting of German POWs on farms:

In every village throughout the land there have been young men who have had to fight against the Germans. The German have been notably brutal in their prosecution of the war and have not hesitated to violate the international code in respect of civilised war-fare. Now the Ministry of Agriculture proposes to billet these enemy aliens upon the rural population of England and Wales, our people view this proposal with great dis-favour and they do not think that Prisoners of War should be billeted on farms or in the villages but that they should be kept in camps

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<sup>57</sup> MRC, MSS.292/881.423/8, 'Statement to be presented to Ministers of Agriculture and Labour on Tuesday, 22<sup>nd</sup>, January, 1946: Prisoners of War on the Land'.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*

isolated from the population and should return to their native country as soon as circumstance will permit.<sup>59</sup>

During the ensuing discussion, TUC officials supported the claims of the NUAW. They too wanted to see German POW labour be paid for at the rate of the job. Furthermore, they believed the continued use of German POW labour was preventing farmworkers from being demobilized. In regards to billeting, the TUC understood that 'there was a differentiation between the billeting of Italian prisoners and of German prisoners. There was not only a domestic difference but a psychological difference as well'.<sup>60</sup> The public hostility towards Germans had not evidenced itself particularly against Italians. Therefore, while the billeting of Italians might be accepted, there was not likely to be an acceptance of Germans. Furthermore, the TUC suggested that although a farm worker might be against the billeting of a German POW, they were 'susceptible to the subtle pressure' of their employer.

Having considered the views expressed by the union side, the Minister of Agriculture put them into a realistic perspective. He made clear the need for German POWs in agriculture. Since the outbreak of war auxiliary labour had been needed to supplement the labour force. The problem had not disappeared and the food situation was in fact worse now than in 1939. Williams stated that 'his problem was not so much supplying labour to farmers as supplying food for Britain'.<sup>61</sup> As the MAF was directing orders to farmers it was their responsibility to find them labourers. Yet, WLA members were being released and the estimates of voluntary labour for the year had dropped. Furthermore, although 60,000 Italian POWs were employed in December they were being gradually repatriated. Therefore, German POWs were needed to alleviate shortages in agricultural workforce. In regards to the rates for German POW labour, the Minister noted that the 1/3d. an hour fee took into account their inexperience in agricultural work, and the added costs of supervision and transport which resulted in a loss of working time. He assured the delegation that this would now take place before March. Although the Minister could not promise the outcome of the review, 'he gave the assurance that he was desirous, so far as practicable, of meeting the wishes of the

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<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> MRC, MSS.292/881.423/8, 'Employment of Prisoners of War in Agriculture: Report of Deputation to Ministers of Labour and Agriculture on Tuesday, January 22, At the House of Commons, Commencing at 3-15 P.M.'

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*

agricultural workers'. The minister 'was not unsympathetic to the agricultural workers' claim and he promised an early review of the payment of prisoners of war'.<sup>62</sup>

The minister then considered the issue of billeting the main difficulty being in respect of milking. Milking was a 'top priority' and it presented the 'gravest difficulty' at the present time.<sup>63</sup> It was doubtful whether the supply of milk could be continued at its present level in the near future unless something drastic was done. Milking required a worker to be available seven days a week, Italian POWs 'had shown themselves capable of training for milking' and were employed to perform it. Because of the early morning milking it had been necessary for them to be billeted near to the place of employment if not actually on the farm.<sup>64</sup> Accommodation was sometimes found for Italian POWs employed on milking in the form of barns and stables, or even in the household of the farmer, but milking had been the principle reason for the billeting. At the time around 18,000 Italians had been billeted on the farms. Italian POWs were 'the best type of workers' and as a rule, the most productive workers were to be repatriated first.<sup>65</sup> This had left a 'nasty breach' of labour which was contributing the present difficulties and would have to be filled. German POWs offered the solution. The ministry were aware of 'the different psychological attitude towards Germans' and, 'indeed, so were the Cabinet to whom this experimental scheme had been submitted'.<sup>66</sup> At the time some 200 German POWs were billeted and no German POWs had been billeted on a farm without the written assent of the farmer being given.

It was clear that the MAF needed the labour of POWs in certain industries—as the case of milking had demonstrated. In order to make sure that the employment of POWs did not displace British workers, Prisoner of war Panels were set up in order to investigate claims of this happening. These Panels comprised of a farmer, farm worker, and an independent member; the Minister issued instructions that any complaints made should be examined immediately. If it could be proved that a farmer had dismissed British labour in order to employ German POWs, every POW in that employment was to be withdrawn at once. Since the inception of the employment, there had been some twenty complaints. However, in only two or three cases was it shown that the farmer could be really indicted. Moreover, the minister had appointed a special investigating officer who was a former organizer of the NUAW and 'a well respected member of that

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<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*

organization' who had the full authority to go into any part of the country to enquire at once into any labour dispute which arose.<sup>67</sup> They had attempted to meet every possibility of a complaint which might arise – concerning billeting there had been, so far as the MOA was aware, none.

The Minister of Labour, Mr. Isaacs, stated that the Minister had covered everything in the case. The situation regarding food production was 'really serious' at the present time; if encroachments on existing rations which 'would be disappointing to many people' the agricultural labour force would need to be considerably expanded. Although 18,000 agricultural workers had been released under Class B, 13,000 had been recruited into the Armed Forces from the industry; this represented an expansion of only 5,000. In regard to billeting and the local committees for dealing with complaints 'he wondered whether it was possible for the Minister to let the committees have some more explicit statement, for he felt that if the machinery was properly used it would be of considerable help'. Williams stated that he would immediately consider elucidating instructions to the panels. 'The only complaint he had had concerning these panels was from Essex and that was the case which had been handed in at that meeting by the National Union of Agricultural Workers. He promised that that case would be investigated personally by his investigating officer, Mr. Monks, within twenty-four hours'.

At the end of the meeting, Williams stated that he would inform the unions as soon as possible concerning the proposed review of rate for POW labour. Isaacs invited the General Council and union representatives to stay behind and discuss the employment of POWs generally. He outlined the problems regarding labour. The Ministry of War Transport was 'anxious' to get more labour into railway workshops in order to deal with 148,000 railway wagons which needed repairing. Informal discussions has taken place between with railway union representatives. It was clear that the union opposed the introduction of German POWs into the industry. Yet, only 5,000 railway workers had been demobilised. This number was too small to alleviate the labour shortage. Accidents had occurred as a result of the lack of workers and inadequate supervision. For similar reasons, the MOL wanted to send German POWs into mines. While the United States had decided to repatriate all their POWs, the government was 'anxious' to keep them. Sending German POWs home would only exacerbate the already 'alarming' food situation there. Furthermore, it was impossible to cut down the number of occupation forces while returning German POWs. Isaacs

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<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*

informed the union representatives that 565,000 POWs were 'needed' in Britain in 1946. They were useful as they could be directed into unattractive employments such as farming. Here, 'it was not so much wages that were unattractive so much as the dirt, the damp, the heat and the general bad conditions in some of these jobs'. Isaacs was unsure how the relevant unions would react to the introduction of German POWs into these industries. Again, sympathetic to the concerns of the trade union movement, Isaacs explicitly stated he wanted clear communication between both sides of industry and 'was very definitely of the opinion that the rate of the job should be applied and he would adopt no other attitude'.

The NUAW deputation, with the help of the TUC, was successful in negotiating a higher rate for POW wages in agriculture. After careful consideration, the Minister of Agriculture decided that from 1 April 1946, the principle of the rate for the job would apply to POW labour in the industry—the rate to be charged for prisoner labour was to be equivalent to the minimum wage fixed by the Agricultural Wages Board for regular adult male workers.<sup>68</sup> Despite the successful renegotiation of wages, the position of agriculture workers was still threatened in the view of the NUAW. In early 1946, the JCC had discussed the need for POW labour in that year. The NUAW had wanted the wages for POWs raised to act as a deterrent to farmers who wished to employ them. However, with the need for agricultural manpower still serious, more POWs were to be employed in the industry. Dann wrote to the TUC in March expressing the NUAW's disillusionment over this recent news. He noted that with the 'helpful support of the General Council' the MAF had decided to give the rate for the job for POW labour in the industry. However Dann noted that the proposed introduction of more POWs alarmed the NUAW, which undermined the negotiation of wages:

My Executive did appreciate, during the war, the necessity of food production, and they acted with that factor in mind. It is now intended to bring even larger number of them on to the land, and my Executive and our membership feel that the presence of such vast numbers will undermine the conditions of employment of our membership. The idea of fixing the rate for the job was that this should act as a deterrent upon employers, but the fact that the Minister will take this into account when fixing prices removes a great deal of the value for the "rate of the job" from our point of view. On the other hand, my Executive and membership do feel that the opposition to the claim of this Union for £4.10 per week is impeded by the presence of such large numbers of prisoners.

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<sup>68</sup> MRC, MSS.292/881.423/8, Letter from Mr. M. F. Haynes (Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries) to General Secretary T.U.C., 18 February 1946.

Dann reminded the TUC that some 160,000 POWs were working on the land and ultimately it was intended to bring a further 248,000—roughly half the number of regular British farmworkers. The NUAW were resolved to resist this expansion in POW labour; their executive passed the following resolution:

This Committee is much concerned with the presence of such a large number of prisoners of war and it is further greatly concerned by the intention to bring more, which it is felt will undermine the position of the British farm worker. Therefore this Executive does not support the continuance of employment of prisoners of war on the land.<sup>69</sup>

Correspondence between the TUC, local union branches, and government, reveal little about the attitudes of the trade union movement towards German POWs beyond the concern expressed that British workers were being displaced. Although analysis can only be speculative as the empirical material hides these attitudes, contextualising the evidence within the broader post-war situation regarding the trade union movement and agriculture can help unpack the material collected.

Turning his attention to post-war agriculture and farming in his study of the British countryside since 1900, Alun Howkins notes the prevalent belief in society that the agricultural industry, revolutionised in terms of technological advances during the conflict, had saved Britain from starvation during the Second World War, 'farming and farmers' Howkins states, 'were among the heroes of the 'people's war''. While the contribution of agriculture was highly regarded, a deep distrust of government was held in the farming community.<sup>70</sup> Memories of the 1918 betrayal were difficult to overcome. The general view held was that governments were only very interested in agriculture when the threat of war was apparent.

The continued employment of German POWs and the expansion of their activities in post-war Britain alarmed the unions, perhaps as it was seen to evidence that the government cared less about the welfare of British farmworkers in post-war Britain. The farming community had been called upon during the war, after being neglected during the inter-war period, to produce food in the fight against Germany. Now, in victory, the agricultural landscape was increasingly populated with the ex-enemy, an economic rival to the British farmworker. The number of cases which the union

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<sup>69</sup> MRC, MSS.292/881.423/8, Letter from Alfred C. Dann to T.U.C. 'Prisoners of War', 5 March 1946.

<sup>70</sup> Alun Howkins, *The Death of Rural England: A Social History of the Countryside Since 1900* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 142.

collected from local branches, presented to the MAF in January 1946, were few. Furthermore, the union found it difficult to prove that British labour had actually been displaced by German POWs and not legitimately dismissed by farmers. All evidence points towards exaggerated fears of German POW labour, flooding the labour market and undercutting wages, undermining the position of British workers. Yet, this inflated concern demonstrates that the unions were fearful not only of the German POWs, but the government's use of them. For the union, this was perhaps a symbol of what they feared most, that agriculture would again be neglected after the war concluded. Looking back on the post-war years, Jack Boddy a Norfolk farmworker in 1945, later becoming General Secretary of the NUAW, stated:

All the activities of Tom Williams appeared to be directed towards assisting farmers, leaving the farm workers to pick up what they could from the increasing prosperity of their employers, which left them at the mercy of the Agricultural Wages Board....Sad to say, I believe Labour felt it could ignore the farm workers because their ability to influence the results of the General Election was numerically low as they had become a relatively small proportion of the rural workers.<sup>71</sup>

Farmers criticised the decision to raise POW rates. The subject came up at the Executive Committee meeting in Leamington. It was agreed that German POWs 'were not worth the rate they were being paid before the last increase', and a strong protest was sent to NFU headquarters. The Staffordshire branch had registered a similar protest. At the Tamworth meeting, W. L. Hemus thought the NFU had not 'taken a strong enough line'. He had employed four POWs. 'If they were Englishmen and willing to work, which most prisoners were not, it would be rather an insult to our own men to pay them the same rate. They were not skilled at all, and the N.F.U. should refuse to pay them a rate equivalent to their own workers'.<sup>72</sup>

## 7. Local disputes

The displacement of British workers by German POWs was a central fear of local union branches. Any instance of German POWs being employed in an area where there was unemployment was met with a stern response, usually demanding the removal of German POWs from the particular workplace concerned or even withdrawing German

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<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 147-8.

<sup>72</sup> 'Tamworth N.F.U. Branch: More Protests Over P.O.W. Labour', *Tamworth Herald*, 20 April 1946, p. 3.

POWs from the entire industry. In May 1946 the Secretary of the Leamington & Warwick Trades Council wrote to the TUC protesting at the employing of German POWs in the engineering sector and requesting that they were withdrawn. The union had 60 members signing at the Local Employment Exchange, and considered their continued unemployment the result of the availability of German POWs.<sup>73</sup> The following September, Poole Trades Council requested the TUC to review government policy regarding POW labour as their employment had resulted in 'British labour being displaced'.<sup>74</sup> The Tintern and district branch of the British Legion had similar concerns.

At the monthly meeting of the Executive Committee held [...] on May 3, I was instructed to draw to your attention the amount of German P.O.W. labour being used in this district, to the exclusion of British labour, paramount to exploitation. Instances were quoted, particularly in the motor engineering industry where P.O.W. are being employed at a very reduced rate of pay, to the exclusion of British labour. Again, in the farming industry where recognised rates are paid, P.O.W.s are being used for work other than farm labouring. My Committee feel that action should be taken to ensure that the recognised rate of pay (T.U.) should be charged for their P.O.W. labour & not in isolated industries only. In the opinion of my Committee action would stop a lot of the possibility of exploitation & may help to ease a lot of the unemployment in S. Wales.<sup>75</sup>

The British Legion wrote to the TUC enclosing an extract from *Empire News*. 'We are receiving strong complaints from our people in the North West regarding the employment of German prisoners of war in driving other prisoners to work, on the ground that it forces ex-Servicemen out of employment'.<sup>76</sup> The TUC ensured the British Legion that, 'If this story is true, then it would be completely contrary to the arrangement arrived at between the General Council and the Ministry of Labour'. *Empire News* proclaimed: 'DRIVER ON DOLE NAZI IN HIS JOB'. Men from the Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire regions had been reportedly sacked by the Ministry of Transport, their jobs given to POWs.

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<sup>73</sup> MRC, MSS.292/881.423/8, W. M. Hood, Secretary Leamington & Warwick Trades Council, to TUC Trades Councils' Department, 28 May 1946.

<sup>74</sup> MRC, MSS.292/881.423/8, W. E. Cole, Secretary Poole Trades Council to General Secretary TUC, 30 September 1946.

<sup>75</sup> MRC, MSS.292/881.423/8, Lt. W. I. Noel, Secretary Tintern and District Branch British Legion, to General Secretary, TUC, 9 May 1946. 881.91. The Secretary of the Trades Councils' Department suggested contacting W. H. Collins, Secretary of the Chepstow and District Trades Council, to deal with this matter locally. Secretary, TUC, to Lt. W. I. Noel, Secretary Tintern and District Branch British Legion, 13 May 1946.

<sup>76</sup> MRC, MSS.292/881.423/8, J. R. Griffin General Secretary British Legion to Dale TUC, 1 August 1946.

Other unions were concerned that the POWs were being used for jobs beyond their initial use. Writing to the TUC in February 1946, the Frome & District Trades & Industrial Council noted their concern at the 'usage' of German POWs in the area. The secretary of the trades' councils department agreed that this was 'a disturbing matter', advising that the local Employment exchange be consulted. It transpired that the German POWs had been employed on the structural alteration of property previously requisitioned by the government during the war. Such employment came under the remit of the local Employment Exchange. However, the German POWs had in fact been employed by the County War Agricultural Executive Committee and originally assigned to agricultural work. This was 'irregular', unless some special circumstances had been arranged.

A particularly controversial and worrying letter received by the TUC was sent by the Westbury (Wilts) Divisional Labour Party in June 1946, which had received a resolution from the Warminster Local Labour Party protesting against the dismissal of 70 employees from the local Government R.E.M.E (Corps of Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers) factory. 'It is alleged that German P.O.W. labour is retained, it is further suggested that our political opponents are arranging to make political capital in this matter'. The dismissal of the British workers and the retention of German POWs was considered to breach protocol which dictated that POWs would not be employed when British labour was available. The TUC took the matter to the Ministry of Labour, seeking advice as to whether 'these discharges violate the agreement arrived at with the TUC that prisoner-of-war labour shall not be employed whilst suitable British labour is available'. Having inquired into the matter, the MOL informed the TUC and the Westbury Labour Party of the outcome:

I find that the prisoners engaged in this establishment are employed under War Office control on work of a kind formerly done by soldiers. The civilian workers threatened with discharge were engaged on unskilled work in another branch of the factory manned by civilian personnel. The War Office have assured us that the proposal to discharge the civilian was in no way connected with the employment of prisoners, but it is clear that the circumstance have been such as to give rise to considerable local criticism and the War Office have suspended all discharges pending further consideration of the position.<sup>77</sup>

While displacement was not widespread, and in many cases the accusations of displacement were based on misunderstanding, the employment of German POWs in

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<sup>77</sup> MRC, MSS.292/881.423/8, Letter from E. A. Hitchman (MOL) to E. P. Harries (TUC), 11 July 1946.

districts which had unemployed or potentially dismissed workers was a delicate issue for unions and the TUC. While safeguards had been introduced and in many cases, it can be assumed, acted accordingly in protecting British workers from displacement, incidents did occur which provoked criticism of the employment of German POWs. It suggests that local unions which raised concerns over the employment of POWs did so as they were upset that little or no consultation had taken place as it had been promised when the introduction of POW labour had been discussed.

## 8. Conclusions

While ideas were aired in press and parliament from the moment the first were captured, the widespread employment of German POWs only became viable from the summer of 1944. By this time, attitudes towards their employment had changed. In late 1939 and early 1940, those which advocated the employment of German POWs did so based on fond memories of their work ethic and usefulness during the Great War. Moreover, it was thought that setting POWs to work would alleviate the tedium of captivity. Such ideas remained hypothetical given the decision to deport German POWs from 1940 and the government's view that they were far too dangerous to employ. So then, the issue of employing German POWs was predominately a late war/early post-war subject of discussion.

German POWs were undoubtedly productive, a vital asset to the British wartime and post-war economy. This was the conclusion of the ministers when discussing labour needs. The British public and other organisations clearly had different views. User Departments attempted to work with the trade union movement to allay their fears concerning the employment of German POWs. However, User Department had to continually point out that there was a great need for POW labour. It seems that the employment of German POWs was by and large accepted at a local level, but concerns and problems arose periodically, with German POW labour outright resisted in certain areas. Interestingly, while on the one hand, the employment of German POWs was considered a just form of reparations after the destruction Germany had wrought, on the other, their employment was considered insulting at times, British workers had, throughout the war, received a message that they must work hard for victory, now they were told that the Germans were needed to fill gaps which British labour could not.

For the trade unions, the wartime enemy was now a post-war rival in the labour market. Yet, it was not necessarily a hatred of the German which was at the root of

concern, but rather a criticism of the way in which they were utilised, and anger at the ability of employers to hide their illegal employment of German POWs to the detriment of British workers. This chapter has therefore provided a more nuanced examination of attitudes towards the employment of German POWs, beyond that of official circles. The stereotypical image of the hardworking, meticulous, and polite, German POWs is challenged. While productivity reports may have portrayed this image, individuals perceived the workmanship of German POWs in a variety of ways. Based on the evidence collected, it can be suggested that there were pockets of local resistance towards the employment of POWs. Writing to their local papers, individuals registered their annoyance having witnessed unsupervised German POWs relaxing. As employment policies regarding German POWs were relaxed in order to increase productivity, they became more visible in post-war Britain. This led to complications regarding fraternisation regulations as the space in which the public encountered POWs amplified. Debates regarding regulations governing contact between the public and German POWs, their freedoms and participation in civil society, is the subject of the next chapter.

## Chapter 5: Fraternisation

### 1. Introduction

The employment of German POWs increased their visibility in post-war Britain, and brought the public into closer contact with them. Unused newsreel footage shows civilians strolling by German POWs working at Kensington Gardens in preparation for the Victory Parade in London in April 1946. Outwardly, the civilians captured on the camera were indifferent to the POWs.<sup>1</sup> Reflecting on opinion towards the German people, M-O noted 'some qualitative change' between April and October 1946. While the majority of a London sample was still antagonistic towards Germans, 'People appeared to be feeling their way towards a new attitude'.<sup>2</sup> Concern over the welfare of German POWs led to calls for a relaxation of the restrictions governing their freedoms. What becomes apparent in reading the arguments for relaxing restrictions on contact between public and POWs is a desire for 'cultural demobilisation'. This concept, defined by John Horne, refers to the process whereby the wartime mentalities summoned to fight a war are dismantled in an endeavour to return to a peacetime society.<sup>3</sup> In regards to British attitudes towards German POWs, Henry Faulk alluded to this, stating 'The war psychosis began to ebb at the beginning of 1946'.<sup>4</sup> In the attempt to rebuild civil society at a national and transnational level, individuals and organisations in British society sought to interact with German POWs still held in Britain. It was believed that in the attempt to secure future peace, the British people had to reach out to their German captives, demonstrating the British way of life. There was, however, a sharp division of opinion with a section of the British people still harbouring hatred for the German people and POWs.

This chapter begins by outlining the fraternisation regulations enacted during the war and the continuation of the fraternisation ban in the post-war years. While contact between POWs and the public was policed, the increased proximity of POWs to the public led to them becoming features of the local landscape. As a result, the fraternisation regulations were brought into question. This is the concern of the third section. Following pressure in both parliament and the press, the government lifted the fraternisation regulations in December 1946. From this point, POWs were given

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<sup>1</sup> *British Pathe*, German POW's In Kensington Gardens, 8 April 1946, unissued.

<sup>2</sup> MOA, FR 2565, Attitudes to the German people, 23 February 1948, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Horne, 'Demobilizing the Mind'.

<sup>4</sup> Faulk, p. 168.

increased freedoms. The debates regarding their increased freedoms are considered. Fraternisation, as Bob Moore has noted, was a gendered policy, the main concern of the British government being to minimise contact between British women and German POWs. In turn, this chapter considers the subject of marriages. After some high profile cases of British women and German POWs, marriages were permitted from July 1947. As this chapter demonstrates, German POWs were brought into ever closer contact with the British public, eventually being allowed to marry British women.

## 2. Non-fraternisation policy

Prior to the arrival of significant numbers of German POWs and their widespread employment across Britain from mid-1944, a legislative framework was already in place to regulate contact between them and the public. The Defence Regulations, enforced from September 1939, included a stipulation to deter members of the public from aiding POWs in their escape. Under Regulation 18C, 14 years penal servitude was the maximum punishment for any civilian caught assisting the escape of a POW. Such an extreme penalty demonstrated that the authorities regarded such action as a serious offence. In the wake of the Dunkirk evacuation, a time when invasion was feared, regulations were amended. The Prisoners of War and Internees (Access and Communication) Order No. 1389, passed on 27 July 1940, prohibited the public from access to any place where POWs or internees were detained. Furthermore, civilians acting in a way which was likely to prejudice the discipline of a POW or civilian internee would be penalised. Under this somewhat vague language, the transmission of communications for or with enemy POWs and the gifting of items such as cigarettes and food, were criminalised. While these stipulations formed a seemingly standard set of regulations to govern contact between enemy prisoners and the public, the authorities ran into difficulties from mid-1941. Italian POWs were transported to Britain from camps in North Africa to alleviate labour shortages in agriculture. In order to maximise their productivity, a number of Italian POWs were later billeted directly onto or nearby farms, thus eliminating the need to transport them to and from their employment. Billeting, however, brought the enforcement of fraternisation regulations under scrutiny. As billeted POWs were not 'detained', a term used in the regulations to describe them, civilians conversing with or being friendly toward them were not breaking any particular rule. Reluctant to change the wording of the Defence Regulations, but eager to minimise contact, the authorities judged incidents of fraternisation on a case by case

basis. Therefore, by the time the German POW population in Britain was substantially increasing a legislative framework had been constructed to limit contact between them and the public. In this way, the British authorities attempted to regulate contact and ensure the discipline of enemy POWs. Towards the end of the war, however, non-fraternisation was a measure which aimed to do more.

Before stepping onto German soil in September 1944, the British soldier received a War Office guide for entering Germany. 'You are', the guide read, 'about to meet a strange people in a strange, enemy country'.<sup>5</sup> Worried that the suffering of the German people would be met with sympathy from the good-hearted Tommy, the guide emphasised that they were responsible for their own suffering, having elected Hitler into power and not resisted his regime. The German was not to be trusted, and the best solution was to avoid contact. The Germans, the guide concluded, were to be regarded as 'dangerous enemies'. The warm relations between liberator and liberated in countries such as Italy and Belgium were not to be repeated. Authorities were particularly eager to keep Allied servicemen away from German women. As William Hitchcock has summarised, 'the occupation aimed to educate the German about their moral and political failings, and this required a distance, cold, and firm demeanour'.<sup>6</sup> Towards the end of the war, Montgomery's warning to his troops was reported to the British public. He made it clear that soldiers were not to fraternise with Germans in any way, apart from official business.<sup>7</sup> This was to teach the German people a lesson. The ban on fraternisation was enforced to make clear to the German people that they could hope for no more than a satisfactory level of treatment. This aim, however, was immediately undermined, and, considered absurd by some, and quickly became an embarrassing policy to adopt. Almost immediately after they had entered Germany, Allied soldiers broke regulations.<sup>8</sup> By the summer of 1945, there was ample evidence of fraternisation reported back to Americans in newspapers.<sup>9</sup> The general feeling of Germans, British observers noted, was that non-fraternisation was similar to the more ludicrous policies of the Nazi regime.<sup>10</sup> Gradually, restrictions on fraternisation were lifted. Unrealistic and criticised, the failed non-fraternisation order was reversed by October 1945. This

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<sup>5</sup> William I. Hitchcock, *The Bitter Road To Freedom: A New History of Liberation of Europe* (New York: Free Press, 2008), p. 177.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p. 178.

<sup>7</sup> "Don't Fraternise", *The Observer*, 25 March 1945, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Hitchcock, *The Bitter Road*, pp. 180-1.

<sup>9</sup> Petra Goedde, 'Villains to Victims: Fraternization and the Feminization of Germany, 1945-1947', *Diplomatic History*, 23:1 (1999), 1-20, (p.1).

<sup>10</sup> Barbara Marshall, 'German Attitudes to British Military Government 1945-47', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 15 (1980), 655-84, (pp. 70-1).

was an acknowledgement that inevitable ties had been forged between soldiers and Germans. Yet, in Britain, fraternisation between the public and German POWs remained illegal. This geographic inequality was not lost on the public. In early 1946, the government was questioned on the continuation of the fraternisation ban in Britain.

### 3. Civil Society

The interwar period has been commonly viewed as a time where associational activity declined, especially in Europe and North America. When the 1920s are compared to the 1940s, there is certainly a basis for this conclusion. However, scholars have noted that such a comparison between these two decades neglects the important changes which civil society underwent and the marked expansion of associational life in the 1920s and 1930s. The Great War witnessed a substantial reduction in associational activity. Rather than the beginning of a decline, however, this led to civic leaders reorganising and refocusing associational life. For instance, the weak pre-existing organisations of the peace movement were replaced by new, vigorous organisations such as the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (established 1915), and the movement for the creation of a League of Nations. Along with the creation of stronger organisations, civil society witnessed a great expansion after the Great War, with many new associations created. In Britain, the most notable was Save the Children (established 1919). This expansion occurred also at a transnational level with human rights and environmental NGOs which operated at an international level. The Great War, therefore, witnessed a reorientation, not a decline, in civil society and associational life. Civil society did contract, during the interwar period, and the expansion of associational life was reversed. This was not due to the Great War, but the impact of the Great Depression and the rise of authoritarian regimes in the 1930s and 40s.<sup>11</sup>

### 4. Lifting the fraternisation ban, March 1946 to December 1946

The period between 1944 and 1948 witnessed a dramatic expansion and diversification of the POW camp network in Britain. During this time, German POWs came to dominate as the numbers of Italian POWs first peaked and then decreased. The precise number of camps which were built and used to house POWs across the United Kingdom

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas Davies, 'Civil Society History VI: Early and Mid 20th Century', in *International Encyclopaedia of Civil Society*, ed. by Helmut K. Anheier and Stefan Toepler (Springer: New York, 2009), pp. 363-5.

is difficult to know, due to the complicated numerical sequence allocated to them. Difficult to recover archeologically, the surviving list of camps can only illustrate a potentially vast network of sites housing POWs. Attempting to recover the legacy of Britain's POW camps, Anthony Hellen recorded some 390 major sites. If all types of camps are considered—main camps, satellites and hostels—the figure rises to some 1,500. In 1945, there were 50 base camps, 27 labour camps (9 under construction), in addition to transit camps, officers' camps, hospital camps, and special status camps such as Wilton Park, a training centre, and Norton, a YMCA camp. The geography of camp settlements was linked to the employment of German POWs, and generally correlated with major areas of arable farming in lowland areas of Britain. In Yorkshire, over 30 camps were located, accounting for 7.5 per cent of the national total. Lincolnshire, Hampshire, Gloucestershire, Lancashire, Essex, and Shropshire each account for 3-4 per cent. In Scotland, Dumfriesshire had 5 camps, the most of any Scottish region. In Wales, Monmouthshire had 6, the most for any Welsh region. Overall, the majority of camps were located in England, 83 per cent, Scotland and Wales both had 10 per cent of the camps, and the rest were located in Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands. Rutland was the only county in England that did not have a main camp situated in the region. 12 counties in Scotland had no camps, in Wales there were none in three, and in Northern Ireland camps were only located in the regions of Belfast, County Down, and Armagh.<sup>12</sup> As the number of German POWs increased, and their employment expanded, so too did their contact with the British public.

While fraternisation regulations sought to minimise contact between the public and German POWs, the decision to employ German POWs from 1944 brought them into closer contact.<sup>13</sup> As part of the larger POW camp network, smaller satellite sites, working camps, and hostels were constructed as well as billeting German POWs directly onto farms. While this was done to increase productivity, it also increased the proximity of camps, and their inhabitants, to localities. Commenting on the relationship of the sites to their surrounding area, Hellen writes:

these camp settlements were eventually a locally well-known and widespread feature of normal civilian life across much of Britain, and they formed an

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<sup>12</sup> Anthony Hellen, 'Temporary Settlements and Transient Populations, the Legacy of Britain's Prisoner of War Camps: 1940-1948', *Erdkunde. Archiv fur wissenschaftliche Geographie*, 53 (1999), 191-219, 206.

<sup>13</sup> Bob Moore, 'Illicit Encounters: Female Civilian Fraternization with Axis Prisoners of War in Second World War Britain', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 48:4 (2013), 742-60, (p.743).

important part of the cultural landscape, although their overall extensiveness was deliberately kept from public awareness.<sup>14</sup>

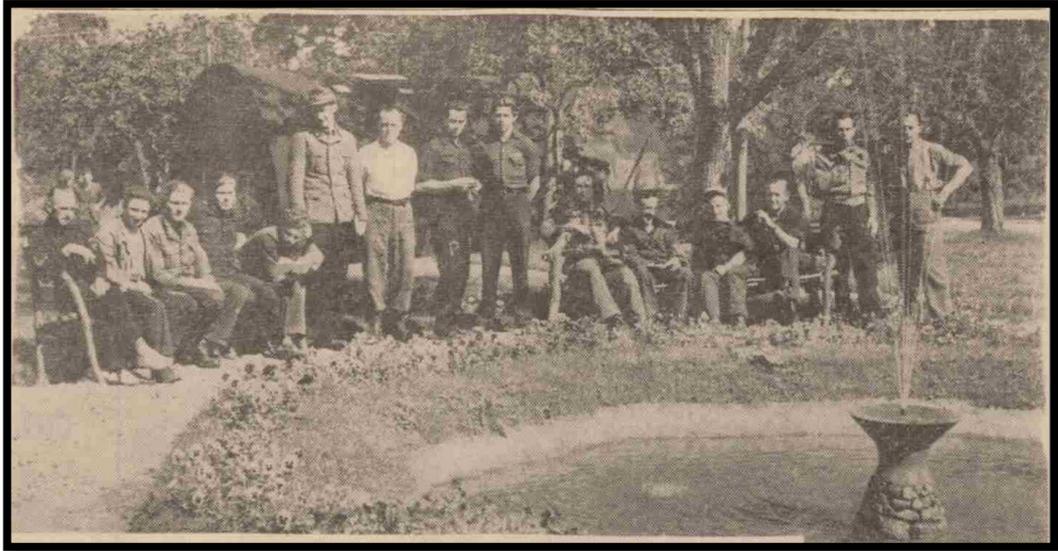
German POWs gradually became a feature of the local landscape. The first contacts made by POWs were generally through their employment and religion. Regional newspapers took interest in their readers' new neighbours. A reporter from the *Cheltenham Chronicle* was given permission by the War Office and Lieutenant-Colonel F. S. S. Lamprey, the commandant, to report on the conditions of Camp 263, Leckhampton Court. Located near Cheltenham, this medieval manor house was initially requisitioned in 1939 by the War Office to provide accommodation for the Durham Light Infantry, followed by the US Army Signal Corp during preparations for D-Day. From 1945 it functioned as a working camp, providing accommodation for German POWs who were employed on farms in the local area. The reporter noted that the inmates were content in their captivity, and had no complaints regarding their treatment; the POWs 'knew that the position here was made as tolerable for them as possible'. Provided with camp tokens they were able to buy sundry items at the camp canteen which provided a 'liberal quantity of articles'. Welfare arrangements were described as 'uniformly excellent', and the beauty of the camp environment was emphasised in the several pictures included in the article.<sup>15</sup> In addition to praising the treatment of the POWs, the article also served to familiarise readers to the everyday lives of the captives, and humanise the German POWs. The POWs were pictured relaxing around a 'delightful little pool of running water with a fountain, ringed by a bed of flowering pansies, built by the German prisoners of war' (image 10). While one POW was pictured with Betty, a tame jackdaw, settled on their head (image 11). According to George Orwell, the British people were, characteristically, 'flower-lovers' and 'pigeon-fanciers', with German POWs demonstrating these characteristics, they were portrayed not as brutal Huns or Nazis but as human beings enjoying similar pursuits as the caricatured Englishman.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Hellen, 'Temporary', p. 191.

<sup>15</sup> 'No Complaints from P.O.W.s at Leckhampton', *Cheltenham Chronicle*, 24 August 1946, p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> George Orwell, *Why I Write* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 15.



**Image 8** *Cheltenham Chronicle*, 24 August 1946, p. 4.



**Image 9** *Cheltenham Chronicle*, 24 August 1946, p. 4.

Over the course of 1946, the government was lobbied, predominantly by their own party members, to lift the fraternisation ban. The punishments meted out to members of the public for fraternisation were considered petty. In Parliament, government ministers routinely dismissed any suggestion of revising the regulations. In March 1946, Reginald Sorensen (Lab. Leyton West) asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department, James Ede, if his attention had been brought to a recent case where a woman had been fined £5 for fraternising with a German POW. Given that regulations had been relaxed in Germany, Sorensen wanted to know if similar relaxations would be considered in Britain. Ede stated that inquiries were being made into the case, but made no statement on the lifting of the ban.<sup>17</sup> A few days later Jack Lawson, Secretary of State for War, declared, in response to Flight-Lieutenant John Haire (Lab. Wycombe), that there was

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<sup>17</sup> HC Deb, 14 March 1946, vol. 420, col. 241W.

no intention of relaxing current regulations.<sup>18</sup> In April, Mr Messer asked if the ban could be lifted so that German POWs and British people could converse and thereby build a better understanding between the people of both countries. Lawson referred Messer to his previous reply to Haire.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, 'No, Sir' was the blunt answer Richard Stokes (Lab. Ipswich) received from Lawson when he demanded that the non-fraternisation rule be suspended in June 1946.<sup>20</sup> He later described a £1 fine ruling a woman was given for gifting a piece of cake to a German POW as 'ridiculous'.<sup>21</sup> As German POWs were to remain in the country, Tom Driberg (Lab. Maldon) asked Lawson if fraternisation would be permitted between civilians and POWs, at least including 'white' POWs. Again, Lawson dismissed the suggestion.<sup>22</sup> Further pleas to relax the regulations made by Driberg and Skeffington-Lodge were met with the same response by the newly appointed Secretary of State for War, Bellenger, in October.<sup>23</sup> The government persistently maintained that no relaxation of current rules was being contemplated.

The division of opinion amongst the general public can be gauged by the letters sent to the press on the subject. Having witnessed two German POWs be ejected from a football match between Derby County and Preston North End, an ex-serviceman wrote to the *Derby Evening Telegraph* criticising the pettiness of the authorities.<sup>24</sup> While this was a minor incident, it provoked a series of letters which attached social and cultural significance to the treatment of POWs. Other correspondents, applauding the ex-servicemen's criticism considered the ejection of the two POWs un-civilised and un-Christian.<sup>25</sup> It was time, they argued, to treat German POWs as human beings, not enemies. The current regulations were outdated. Some correspondents testified to the humanity of the POWs, living nearby camps in Derbyshire and meeting the Germans had shown that they were not fanatical Nazis, instead they were, as a mother of an ex-POW wrote, 'good behaved boys', who had bonded with local children. The British people were called upon to practise their Christian principals, showing compassion and forgiveness. One suggestion was that POWs could be invited to British homes during

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<sup>18</sup> HC Deb 19 March 1946, vol. 420, col. 336W.

<sup>19</sup> HC Deb 16 April 1946, vol. 421, col. 425W.

<sup>20</sup> HC Deb 4 June 1946, vol. 423, cols. 305-6W.

<sup>21</sup> HC Deb, 16 July 1946, vol. 425, cols. 1183-90.

<sup>22</sup> HC Deb, 2 August 1946, vol. 426, cols. 283-4W.

<sup>23</sup> HC Deb, 8 October 1946, vol. 427, cols. 2-3W.

<sup>24</sup> 'Those P.O.W.s', *Derby Evening Telegraph*, 6 November 1946, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> "'Cut Out Hate'", *Derby Evening Telegraph*, 11 November 1946, p. 5. 'P.O.W.s Are Human', *Derby Evening Telegraph*, 14 November 1946, p. 8.

the forthcoming Christmas period.<sup>26</sup> Allowing the German POWs to participate and understand the British way of life, was considered imperative to future peace. Those that advocated lifting the fraternisation ban were well aware of the hostility still present in others towards the former enemy. Acknowledging, and in some cases agreeing, that a victorious Germany would show little mercy towards a defeated Britain, they still believed this line of thought unhelpful. Continuing to cast German POWs as social pariahs, it was argued, would only lead to building resentment amongst them; resentment, it was pointed out, was a cause of the last war. However, the humanitarian and Christian calls to reach out to German POWs were rebuked by those who saw them, and the German people in general, as inhuman brutes. A lengthy, and rather sarcastic, letter was sent to the *Derby Evening Telegraph*, criticising those who had suggested inviting the POWs into British homes. Having fought in both wars, the correspondent reminded his more sympathetic citizens of the atrocities committed by the Germans during the recent war, which he himself had witnessed:

I have had the very pleasant experience of taking my comrades off the cross, who had been murdered by these nice men. I have also seen the women and children brutally killed, children with their hands cut off, their insides torn out all by these same nice young men. Yes, let me remind these same people of Belsen, and of London, Coventry, Sheffield, Hull, Grimsby, Birmingham, Bristol, Manchester, and a lot more that had death rained down on them through this same kind race. Look at the suffering in the world to-day, all because these nice boys thought they were the master race. The old saying "turn the other cheek" went out of date long ago. These beasts have made people suffer; they must and should take their punishment for it, or next time we may not be so lucky in stopping the German jack-boot from strutting about the streets of England.<sup>27</sup>

The German POWs were beyond salvation and sympathy; their status as social pariahs was a justified punishment. Compassion would allow Germany to rise again, ultimately leading to future war. This letter provoked a great response, with the *Telegraph* dedicating an entire page to the numerous letters concerning German POWs, noting the 'sharp division of opinion'. There were those that argued the Germans POWs were beyond forgiveness; never, could their cruelty during the war, and the Great War, be forgotten. Again, the cruelty of Germans was emphasised: revealing in killing helpless

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<sup>26</sup> 'Our World', *Derby Evening Telegraph*, 15 November 1946, p. 4. 'P.O.W.s', *Derby Evening Telegraph*, 21 November 1946, p. 8. 'Blessed Are...', *Derby Evening Telegraph*, 27 November 1946, p. 3. 'End Hatred', *Derby Evening Telegraph*, 27 November 1946, p. 3. 'German Guests', *Derby Evening Telegraph*, 28 November 1946, p. 8.

<sup>27</sup> 1914-1918—1939-1945, "These "Nice Men"", *Derby Evening Telegraph*, 2 December 1946, p. 5.

women and children and making lampshades from human skins was referred to. It would be a mistake to allow the POWs to escape punishment, and an even greater mistake to forget they were capable of this barbarism. There were far more people, such as British servicemen, deserving of a place at the Christmas tables of the British people.<sup>28</sup> This attitude towards German POWs was considered narrow-minded. War was a horrific business, with terrible acts committed by both sides. 'I have also seen nights that have nauseated me, carried out not by the "Nice Germans" but by the so-called "English Gentlemen.", a former Royal Engineer wrote, in reference to the bombing of Hamburg.<sup>29</sup> Britain had fought and men had died to create a better world, 'the only way to secure it was through uniting nations and encouraging fraternisation'.<sup>30</sup> Adhering to wartime attitudes of hatred would make a 'mockery' of the peace'.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the idea that all Germans were inhuman brutes was considered ridiculous by those that had met the POWs nearby their homes. Furthermore, taking the idea that all Germans were brutes to task, a correspondent defended the 'Decent Germans'. As this debate shows, the idea of lifting the fraternisation ban was a contentious issue, those in favour saw it as a necessary step to sure future peace, those against could never forget what Germany had done. The captivity of German POWs was an issue which was intertwined with many others: religious principals, national identity, civility, and the legacy of both the 1914-18 and 1939-45 conflicts.

While the government remained dismissive of any suggestion to relax regulations, MPs pleading for the ban to be lifted emphasised that the festive period would be an opportune moment to begin restoring Anglo-German understanding. Skeffington-Lodge suggested that, if rules were not to be relaxed, special arrangements could be made to allow German POWs to spend Christmas Day in British homes, if invited to do so. He argued that it was 'important to return prisoners of war to Germany as an example of our British way and purpose'. Stokes agreed that it was a 'golden opportunity to instil a bit of British life' into the POWs, one that 'ought not to be wasted'. Although sympathetic to the suggestion, Bellenger refused to comment.<sup>32</sup> Soon after, however, Bellenger unexpectedly declared that regulations would be relaxed. Well-conducted POWs were permitted to take unescorted walks up to a five mile limit

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<sup>28</sup> 'MADE THEIR BEDS', *Derby Evening Telegraph*, 5 December 1946, p. 8. 'SHORT MEMORIES!', *Derby Evening Telegraph*, 5 December 1946, p. 8.

<sup>29</sup> 'BURY THE HATCHET', *Derby Evening Telegraph*, 5 December 1946, p. 8. 'ENGLISH CRUELTY', *Derby Evening Telegraph*, 5 December 1946, p. 8.

<sup>30</sup> 'FRATERNISATION', *Derby Evening Telegraph*, 5 December 1946, p. 8.

<sup>31</sup> 'PEACE A MOCKERY', *Derby Evening Telegraph*, 5 December 1946, p. 8.

<sup>32</sup> HC Deb, 26 November 1946, vol. 430, cols. 1405.

of their camp or billet, to converse with the public, and, subject to the permission of the camp commandant, accept invitations to private houses within the five mile radius of the camp. These relaxations were not a special arrangement for Christmas but would continue beyond the festive period. Skeffington-Lodge welcomed the concessions.<sup>33</sup> A few days later, Bellenger announced that POWs may receive parcels from relatives and friends in the UK, and write and receive letters from members of the British public.<sup>34</sup> Although welcomed in parliament, the lifting of the fraternisation ban and the prospect of German POWs spending Christmas in British homes divided opinion. In the *Western Morning News*, it was reported that:

Gradually, new conceptions of the etiquette towards ex-enemies are replacing the natural wartime mentality. Some residents in the vicinity of prisoner of war camps in the South-West have developed sympathy towards these vanquished men. Many will regard as apt the statement in Parliament by the Secretary for War (Mr. Bellenger) concerning relaxations in the rules relating to fraternization with prisoners of war in this country. [...] German prisoners stationed at a Plympton camp have had a number of invitations from local householders to spend an evening in their homes, and one woman in the area has offered to entertain 20 at Christmas. Recently, following an entertainment at Robourough prisoner of war camp, two prisoners presented two souvenirs to be sold in aid of the Salvation Army's Christmas Cheer Fund for Orphans. Even in the heat, hate, and turmoil of war there was fraternization on certain sectors of the Western Front between British and German troops in the 1914-18 War. How often after a raid or patrol captors rewarded captives with "Cigaretten, Fritz?" before sending them down the line to captivity.<sup>35</sup>

Reacting to the news of the relaxation in regulations Rhona Churchill, *Daily Mail* columnist, pondered over the type of man British families would be inviting into their homes. She had spent several days 'chatting' with German POWs to gain insight into that thought. Herman Schmidt, Churchill explained, possessed a 'strange, jumbled, yet partly lucid mind'.

It contains not the slightest sense of war guilt, no consciousness that Hitler was evil, a scepticism of all camp literature and lectures, and is completely blank so far as any understanding of the British point of view is concerned.<sup>36</sup>

Fritz Schultze, a POW 'Somewhere in England', agreed with Churchill's diagnosis, but thought it unfair to the minority of POWs who were not like Hermann Schmidt.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> HC Deb 10 December 1946, vol. 431, cols. 967-8.

<sup>34</sup> HC Deb 20 December 1946, vol. 431, cols. 452-3W.

<sup>35</sup> 'Fraternisation With P.O.W.s', *Western Morning News*, 14 December 1946, p. 6.

<sup>36</sup> Rhona Churchill, 'Inside the mind of German prisoner', *Daily Mail*, 13 December 1946, p. 2.

Christmas 1946 was a watershed moment in the history of German POWs still captive in Britain. Fraternisation regulations were relaxed. The government conceded to individuals and organisations which advocated interacting with POWs as means to not only alleviate the monotony of captivity, hopefully improving the morale of men separated from their homes and families, but also to teach the POWs about the British people and their lives. There was a positive response to Bellenger's announcement that POWs would be permitted to accept invitations to private homes to celebrate the Christmas period. The *Daily Mail* reported that camp commandants 'throughout the country' had been 'overwhelmed by the flood of invitations for German prisoners to spend Christmas in British homes'.<sup>38</sup> In regional newspapers the number of invitations was recorded. In Cheltenham, a number of local residents offered to entertain German prisoners held at Leckhampton Court. Recently, residents had donated some 250 books in addition to numerous magazines and newspapers to the camp.<sup>39</sup> It was initially reported that the people of Bedfordshire had by and large ignored the county's 4000 POWs.<sup>40</sup> However, on 27 December the *Bedfordshire Times* reported that a number of families had invited German POWs.<sup>41</sup> Families across Nottingham district sent invitations to the military authorities at Camp 166 at Wollaton Park—a map was included in the article illustrating the five mile radius around the camp.<sup>42</sup> The *Glasgow Sunday Post* announced that 'Dozens' of German POWs 'will share Christmas fare in Scots homes' on Christmas Day. 25 had been asked for by name from camps in Lanark and Peebles. Others had been invited from camps at Johnstone, Errol, Ricokchiem, and Craigellachie. 180 prisoners would be guests of the Perthshire Agricultural Committee.<sup>43</sup> The *Western Morning News* reported that around 1000 invitations had been received by the camp commandant at Chaddlewood House, Plympton. Some commandants were certainly in favour of POWs spending Christmas at British homes, the Commanding Officer at Taunton Golf Club had appealed to local residents to extend their hospitality to 30 POWs under his command on Christmas Day and Boxing Day.<sup>44</sup> German POWs at a camp in Horsforth were welcomed into the homes of West Riding people on Christmas and Boxing Days. In one case they were guests of a former

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<sup>37</sup> Fritz Schultze, 'Schultze versus Schmidt', *Daily Mail*, 19 December 1946, p. 2.

<sup>38</sup> 'Big Request for PoWs', *Daily Mail*, 16 December 1946, p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> 'Hospitable Offers', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 17 December 1946, p. 4.

<sup>40</sup> 'Prisoners of War and Christmas', *Bedfordshire Times*, 20 December 1946, p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> 'German Prisoners Entertained', *Bedfordshire Times*, 27 December 1946, p. 7.

<sup>42</sup> 'German Prisoners' *Nottingham Evening Post*, 13 December 1946, p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> 'German P.O.W. Guests', *Glasgow Sunday Post*, 22 December 1946, p. 2.

<sup>44</sup> 'Invitations to P.O.W.s', *Western Morning News*, 21 December 1946, p. 2.

prisoner of war in Germany. The German prisoners were allowed out in 2s and 3s in response to over 250 invitations.<sup>45</sup> 70 German POWs from Leckhampton camp were able to take up the invitations of local people to spend Christmas Day.<sup>46</sup> 80 German POWs in the Vale of Evesham would sit down to Christmas dinner with 'their former foes'. The commandant of the POW camp near Evesham told an *Echo* reporter that invitations were still being received.<sup>47</sup> 120 German POWs were entertained to dinner on 26 December at Stranraer by the wives of farmers they had been working for. The farmers also attended, the company numbering about 200. The wives served from tables on which sat decorations made by German prisoners. About 150 German POWs were entertained by Derby families of Christmas Day and around 100 visited private homes on Boxing Day.<sup>48</sup>

I've been thinking how the German prisoners who were invited into British homes enjoyed their Christmas. I should very much have liked to meet some of them; and I think it was a most excellent idea, though a pity that many of them through red tape were unable to accept invitations. I hope they were not despising us in their hearts, and thinking rather bitterly of us as magnanimous conquerors. It's difficult for us to think of them as human beings, these men whom we have seen behind barbed wire for so long, wearing strange uniforms which mark them unmistakably from their fellow beings; it is harder for them to think of us as humans, for they cannot afford to be generous towards us. But it's by these home contacts and gestures of friendship that we shall gradually break down the walls of hostility and bitterness which, if not broken down, can bring us another war.<sup>49</sup>

As well as invitations by individual families, groups of German POWs were invited by organisations and local churches and cathedrals to join in with the Christmas celebrations. Bristol Cathedral organised a special carol service for German prisoners of war amongst the arrangements made for Christmas. Some 400 were expected to attend. Around fifty people had written to the commandant of Ashton Gate camp inviting seventy German prisoners to their homes for Christmas.<sup>50</sup> There were similar services organised.<sup>51</sup> In Preston, Reverend Wilson (minister of Carey Baptist Church), made arrangements for some thirty German prisoners to visit the homes of members of the

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<sup>45</sup> 'P.O.W. Guests of Former Prisoner', *Yorkshire Post*, 27 December 1946, p. 6.

<sup>46</sup> 'Poles, P.O.W.s Invited to Local Homes', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 28 December 1946, p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> '80 Germans Invited to Christmas Dinners', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 24 December 1946, p. 1.

<sup>48</sup> 'The Prisoners Came To Dinner', *Dundee Courier*, 27 December 1946, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> MOA, D 5403, 26 December 1946.

<sup>50</sup> 'Carol Service for War Prisoners', *Western Daily Press*, 14 December 1946, p. 5.

<sup>51</sup> 'Chew Stoke Service For Germans', *Western Daily Press*, 21 December 1946, p. 2. 'P.O.W. In Carol Service', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 21 December 1946, p. 1. 'Christmastide Services', *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 21 December 1946, p. 6.

congregation for Christmas dinner. The prisoners attended the Church every Sunday morning.<sup>52</sup> 50 German POWs from Tealing camp were to be entertained to a Christmas party in Linathen Centre on Christmas Eve. This was organised by the minister and four elders of Mid Craige Church.<sup>53</sup> 1000 cigarettes were to be distributed to some 80 German prisoners when they were to attend Harpenden Roman Catholic Church on Christmas Day. Collections to purchase the cigarettes had been made at Masses.<sup>54</sup>

Invitations to spend Christmas at British homes had a profound emotional effect on the select German POWs who could take up the invitations. Thirty-seven-year-old Erich Scarl, a lawyer whose home was in blitzed Hamburg, spent his happiest Christmas since 1938 in Preston. He was one of 22 German prisoners from the camp at Fishwick Bottoms, Preston, who were entertained on Christmas Day in the homes of members of Carey Baptist Church. Erich had his Christmas dinner with the church secretary, Mr. George Cook, and his family, at their home in Linnet-street. Erich and Mr. Cook sat by the fire in the afternoon and talked of their respective lives during the war years. Erich, who has been a prisoner for three years, said he 'was very, very happy to find himself spending Christmas in an English home'. Those Germans among the 22 who could not speak English could still play dominos and draughts with their hosts, some of them men who spent part of the war in Germany.<sup>55</sup> German POWs, sometimes through their camp commandant, expressed thanks for the hospitality shown by British people during the Christmas period.<sup>56</sup> A columnist in the *Western Daily Press* stated that the several hundred invitations extended to German POWs in the area to spend Christmas day at the homes of Bristolians and worship at the Cathedral was an 'Outstanding example of the spirit of goodwill'.<sup>57</sup> However, while the lifting of the fraternisation ban for Christmas 1946 was welcomed as a means to promote Anglo-German understanding and foster future peace, while also breaking up the monotony of camp routine for the POWs, there was some criticism. Some that wrote to their local paper suggested that British children, orphaned by the war, were more deserving of parties at Christmas than

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<sup>52</sup> 'P.O.W. Christmas', *Lancashire Evening Post*, 20 December 1946, p. 5.

<sup>53</sup> *Dundee Courier*, 21 December 1946, p. 2.

<sup>54</sup> 'Cigarettes Gift for P.O.W.s', *Gloucester Citizen*, 21 December 1946, p. 8. 'Cigarettes Gift for P.O.W.s', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 23 December 1946, p. 6.

<sup>55</sup> 'Germans Spent Christmas in Preston Homes', *Lancashire Evening Post*, 26 December 1946, p. 5.

<sup>56</sup> James R. Dey, 'Letters to the Editor', *Aberdeen Journal*, 23 January 1947, p. 2. A. J. Uden, Lieut. Col. Commandant 124 German Prisoner of War Camp, Bedminster Camp, Bristol 3, 'Prisoners' Thanks for Hospitality', *Western Daily Press*, 31 December 1946, p. 6.

<sup>57</sup> 'But "Set Fair" For Festivities', *Western Daily Press*, 24 December 1946, p. 3.

German prisoners.<sup>58</sup> One who suggested this had been a prisoner of war in Germany for five years. Set to work in a coal mine, he noted that 'If the Germans are away from home, they are at least well fed and not ill-treated. People who find they are open to offer hospitality could make many orphaned children happy by inviting them to their homes'.<sup>59</sup> However, by and large, appeals to entertain German prisoners were endorsed by some who argued that it was the way to lasting peace.<sup>60</sup>

##### 5. Further relaxation of restrictions, January 1947 to July 1947

The relaxation of restrictions in December 1946 led to further calls in press and parliament to liberalise the POW regime in Britain. It was hoped that permitting German POWs greater freedoms would lessen the hardship of captivity as well as normalise relations between them and the British public helping to foster understanding between former enemies. Several German POWs attended a lecture on recent visits to Germany and France given by Mr. Jas. L. Palmer, Editor in Chief of the *Western Morning News*, at the Plymouth Public Library on 25 January 1947. Since his visit to Germany, Palmer had spoken on many occasions and had at every opportunity advocated the proposals that POWs of good conduct should be allowed more liberty:

They should have the opportunity of participating in cultural and religious life, because we have every reason to be proud of our record in the war and since, and it is all the good that they should have first-hand opportunities of observing our traditional way of provincial life.<sup>61</sup>

Advocating the future relaxation of restrictions in a letter to the *Hull Daily Mail*, a Reverend Erving noted that the screening process had shown that most POWs were not ardent Nazis, and in two local camps not a single Nazi was found:

Most of them are very nice fellows, and anxious to meet and know English people and see a little of England. They have received very good impressions of English people and England. Their propaganda during the war had told them all sorts of stories about us, that we would shoot them and do all sorts of horrible things to them. The good impressions which they have gained could be deepened permanently, and to good effect, if they were allowed a little more freedom, for example, permission to use public transport, to visit the cinema, if

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<sup>58</sup> 'Christmas Parties', *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 17 December 1946, p. 3.

<sup>59</sup> WONDERING, 'P.O.W. Experiences', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 18 December 1946, p. 4.

<sup>60</sup> Unter Aller Kritik, 'Entertaining German P.O.W.', *Dundee Courier*, 17 January 1947, p. 2.

<sup>61</sup> 'Let P.O.W.s See British Ways', *Western Morning News*, 27 January 1947, p. 6.

necessary only in the company of an English civilian. I know that this would be much appreciated.<sup>62</sup>

Granting more freedoms to POWs so that they might experience more of British life and British people would help, Erving argued, to mitigate the lies which wartime propaganda had fed the German POWs about the British people, aiding a better understanding between former enemies. WM. ABBOTT asked if Erving had 'forgotten that all these German prisoners-of-war were Nazis or they would not have followed Hitler into war'. He was deeply suspicious of the suggestion that the POWs were 'nice chaps', knowing that:

[...] the German always is when he is licked. But let him be the top-dog and then he is the biggest bully and braggart and cruellest man the world has seen or is ever likely to see. As a little reminder to Mr Erving, just let him look around and he will see what I mean. He surely must come into contact with people who have lost loved ones by the actions of those "nice chaps." I wonder if Hitler would have let us go to the pictures if he had won this war?<sup>63</sup>

Abbott was dismissive of relaxing regulations based on the argument that in victory the Germans would have been punitive. This generalisation of the German POWs as Nazis was criticised by Frieda Denby, who noted that there were good and bad in every nation:

[...] all Germans were not Nazis, as all Britons are not Socialists. Germans male and female were conscripted for war just as we were. [...] That there were Nazis and sadists is not disputed—but there are these types in Britain too. Hate is an unchristian thing, and continuation of that policy between nations will surely bring about another war in the not far distant future. The Germans, too, have lost loved ones by our action: family love is the same thing in every nation, it is not just peculiar to us. It is up to us now to make friends with the prisoners of war, to write to their families, to do everything in our power to cement international friendship and love: it is the only way to safeguard our children—and, theirs—from the horrors of war.<sup>64</sup>

Overcoming wartime notions of the enemy and remembering the common humanity of Britons and Germans and their shared suffering in the war was crucial to future peace in Denby's view. Erving wrote in agreement:

It is surely complete nonsense to assert that because some German soldiers were cruel during the war, when passions were inflamed and conditions quite abnormal, therefore *all* Germans are the same. If a stranger were to say that

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<sup>62</sup> REV L. A. ERVING, 'More Freedom for Germans', *Hull Daily Mail*, 7 May 1947, p. 3.

<sup>63</sup> WM. ABBOTT, 'Nice Now', *Hull Daily Mail*, 13 May 1947, p. 4.

<sup>64</sup> Freida Denby, 'NOT ALL NAZIS', *Hull Daily Mail*, 16 May 1947, p. 4.

because there is at present a spate of crime in this country, therefore all Englishmen are criminals, murderers and so on, would we not be the first hotly to deny it and point out examples of people who are the opposite? I know personally one German POW who gave two pints of his blood to a Norwegian mother after childbirth. Secondly, the people of this land have for centuries been noted for chivalrous treatment of those against whom they fought in battle. That chivalry was based on the Christian religion. It is not surprising, therefore, though it is equally wrong, when people say that because we would have suffered at the hands of the Nazis, had they been victorious, we must make things unpleasant for *all* Germans. Not all Germans were Nazis, just as not all Englishmen are Conservatives or Socialists. Those of us who have tried to use the way of friendship with Germans (and there are many) to try to help in some small way towards building up international peace, know that it is the more constructive way, and are quite convinced that to keep so many men here as *prisoners* two years after the end of the war is a blot on the good name which we have had hitherto for chivalry and fair-dealing.<sup>65</sup>

In February, when pressed to equate the freedoms of German POWs with that of Italian co-operators, Bellenger stated that he was looking into the matter.<sup>66</sup> In March, German POWs were given further freedoms. The patches on prisoners' clothing and distinctive lettering were to be gradually removed as chocolate dyed battledress became available to them. General Officers Commanding Home Commands were given the authority to extend the five mile radius, if it enabled POWs to reach a special amenity such as a town, otherwise restricted. Authority was also given to allow individual prisoners, 'of exemplary character', to proceed to an area outside the normal limit. POWs were allowed to enter private houses without having to obtain their Commandant's approval and attend football matches and other games in organised groups at the invitation of the management or local authority. POW bands were permitted to entertain friends in return for hospitality where it was possible to a hut or hall outside the Camp to be used; payment for admission to such events was prohibited, and incidental costs had to be paid by the POWs. They could also take part in educational activities outside camps after the approval by the Control Office for Germany and Austria under arrangements made by that Department.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, in June, it was announced that from July POWs whose work was satisfactory and were not ardent Nazis, would be able to draw part of their pay in sterling, to use shops, cinemas, restaurants and public transport within the five mile radius of their camp, but not to use licensed premises.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> (Rev) L. A. Erving, 'Way to Peace', *Hull Daily Mail*, 29 May 1947, p. 4.

<sup>66</sup> HC Deb 11 February 1947, vol. 433, col. 179.

<sup>67</sup> HC Deb 18 March 1947, vol. 435, cols. 184-6.

<sup>68</sup> HC Deb, 24 June 1947, vol. 439, cols. 184-6.

Learning of Bellenger's announcement in parliament, the *Aberdeen Journal* reported that, 'The emergence of the German P.O.W.'s into our ordinary lives is certainly going to give rise to sharp controversy. This is clear from reports from many parts of the country'. Cinema proprietors and individual football clubs were to exercise their own discretion on whether to admit POWs to their establishments.<sup>69</sup> The liberalisation of the POW regime was a divisive issue. Commenting on 'the increased liberties and privileges recently granted to German prisoners of war', the editor of the *Yorkshire Evening Post* noted that 'In Leeds this has produced sharp debate on the prospect of rubbing shoulders with them "at the pictures"'. In a poll the paper conducted earlier in the week, 85 per cent of respondents stated that they would not mind, reflecting 'the tolerance usually shown by the people of this country'. However, strong feelings had been aroused by the issue, demonstrated by the number of letters sent to the paper in recent weeks.

In point of fact this is one of the problems which the average citizen would rather be rid of than face. Few people remain unaffected by some degree of embarrassment when they meet the prisoner of war, walking aimlessly about with nothing to do until the time comes from him to return to his billet or camp. It seems all wrong. Yet such are the fortunes of war, and these are the men who fought against us and would gladly have taken the fruits of victory. Moreover, there were things done during the war one does not need to go into all those matters which trouble the mind of the average citizen when he is faced with the question of how he should treat the captive enemy. It is obviously the question of rubbing shoulders with the German prisoner, of finding oneself sitting alongside him, which is going to cause difficulty. He might be the very one who dropped the bomb which blasted one's home, or caused the death of some loved one. Any yet, to go on treating him as an Ishmael is hardly the answer for a civilised nation. [...] It is, of course, on the possibilities of provocation—of feeling being sharply aroused—that the whole subject turns. Some little additional liberty for these men is not untimely. Yet they themselves will have to show direction about the way it is exercised.<sup>70</sup>

While the need to grant further freedoms to the German POWs was accepted, the wounds of war and memoirs of atrocities still fresh would make encounters between them and the public awkward. Indeed, in some areas German POWs were barred from cinemas after local patrons protested against their admittance. The *Manchester Guardian* reported that POWs had been barred from two cinemas in Essex and four in Bridgend, the director of the company explaining, 'that the ban had been imposed to avoid causing offence to patrons who had lost relatives or property at the hands of the

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<sup>69</sup> 'Germans Step Out in Britain', *Aberdeen Journal*, 17 July 1947, p. 1.

<sup>70</sup> 'Fritz at the Cinema', *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 31 July 1947, p. 4.

Germans'.<sup>71</sup> The Ross Urban Council rejected a request from the Foreign Office asking if they would permit German POWs to attend meetings to observe the workings of democracy. Light-heartedly, council Shawcross argued that the POWs would be 'completely fogged' by council discussions, with another member agreeing that 'some of us go away not known what has happened!'. Councillor Davis, 'would not tolerate such a thing' having lost his only son in the war.<sup>72</sup>

The changing nature of the POW regime, bringing them into ever closer contact and visibility in British society was observed in the *Essex Newsman*. In their 'Sign of the Times' section, it was reported: 'SEEN in Chelmsford High Street on Thursday: –Two tall German prisoners pushing prams, with babies, and the young mothers walking alongside. The number of local families who regularly entertain Germans in their homes has more than doubled since Easter'.<sup>73</sup> In some instances, those that entertained German POWs received abuse:

On two occasions recently my wife and I have invited German prisoners of war to our home. This morning we were disgusted to be the recipients of a letter containing a highly flavoured account of a battle incident involving alleged German atrocities culled from an American magazine, with a comment written by the anonymous sender. "Pity you were not there." As our correspondent is so chary of divulging his or her identity, it is, unfortunately, impossible for me to reply personally. May I, therefore, through the courtesy of your columns, explain that though we were not present at that particular incident (if it ever occurred) we were both rather busily employed elsewhere; my wife for four years in an aircraft accessory factory in London, where she was incidentally the first, and for some time the only, woman bakelite moulder in England, and myself for five years on R.A.F. aircrew duties. As we, directly and indirectly, did our best to destroy as many Germans as possible during the war, quite irrespective of age and sex, so we now ask the right to do all in our power to prevent our children being involved in a similar unhappy duty in a few years' time. We are still sufficiently idealists to believe that this can be done better by establishing bonds of genuine friendship than by threats and atom bombs. We are aware that this last statement is the subject of many different opinions, all worthy of consideration except one—that of a person who is sufficiently contemptible and malicious to send unsigned abuse through the post.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> 'P.O.W. Barred From Cinemas', *Manchester Guardian*, 23 July 1947, p. 5.

<sup>72</sup> 'ROSS COUNCIL'S "NO" TO P.O.W.S: NOT TO ATTEND MEETINGS', *Citizen*, 29 May, 1947, p. 7.

<sup>73</sup> 'Sign of the Times', *Essex Newsman*, 18 July 1947, p. 2.

<sup>74</sup> J. H. MEREDITH, 'Treatment of War Prisoners', *Hastings & St. Leonards Observer*, 5 April 1947, p. 2.

Evidently, there was still a division of opinion towards German POWs and their treatment in mid-1947. Considering the local opinion of the 'Germans in Our Midst', the *Nottingham Evening Post* published a number of letters on the subject in June 1947.<sup>75</sup> Two correspondents praised the local German POWs. MERE WOMAN thought they were 'a credit to the community'.<sup>76</sup> While Mr Sykes, hon. secretary of the Nottingham Prisoner of War Welfare Committee emphasised the need to reach out to them: 'We have an opportunity to making them ambassadors of peace and friendship when they return to their own country'.<sup>77</sup> In contrast, two correspondents condemned the 'forgive-and-forget policy'.<sup>78</sup> A serving soldier thought the public had been too quick to forget what the ex-enemy had done:

There are quite a lot of German P.O.W.s in Nottingham now, and they are getting looked after better than the British soldier. During the war, while we were fighting, nine out of every ten people hated the Germans, and they thought that nothing was too good for the British forces. But now the war is over, people think more of P.O.W.s than they do of us. How does correspondent "G.P.G." expect the peacetime soldier to show his manners to anybody who thinks more of those who were, a little more than a year ago, killing English sons and husbands.<sup>79</sup>

Beginning in Christmas 1946, regulations governing the contact between German POWs and the British public were relaxed and numerous privileges were granted whereby the captives were permitted to enjoy leisure activities outside the camps and accept invitations into British homes. For the authorities, the relaxation of regulations was a means to mitigate the adverse effects of continued captivity on the morale of the German POWs helping to increase their productivity in their employment. It also placated calls in press and parliament which argued that interaction between civilians and POWs would help foster Anglo-German understanding and lessen the burden of captivity. Yet, while the necessity of relaxing regulations was by and large agreed, the legacy of the war, particularly the revelation of atrocities, would undoubtedly make everyday encounters between POWs and the public awkward affairs. Moreover, hostility towards German POWs was still very much present in British society. Those that opposed the relaxation of restrictions argued that in victory Germany would never

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<sup>75</sup> 'Germans In Our Midst', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 13 June 1947, p. 4.

<sup>76</sup> MERE WOMAN, 'Germans In Our Midst', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 13 June 1947, p. 4.

<sup>77</sup> J. SYKES, 'PEACE AMBASSADORS', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 13 June 1947, p. 4.

<sup>78</sup> F. H. H., 'ONCE FANATICS', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 13 June 1947, p. 4.

<sup>79</sup> PEACETIME SOLDIER, 'BETTER SERVED', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 13 June 1947, p. 4.

have permitted the British such luxuries and that while the POWs might seem repentant they were the same old enemy.

#### 6. British women and German POWs

One of the first films which German POWs could go and see, if their local cinema had not barred them, was *Frieda*, directed by Basil Dearden. Released on 19 June 1947, the titular character, a German nurse played by Mai Zetterling, aids British pilot Robert escape a German POW camp towards the end of the Second World War. Robert, who is grateful but does not reciprocally love Frieda, marries her so that she may obtain a British passport. On their return to Oxfordshire, Robert introduces his wife to the family. Robert is forced to leave his job as a local schoolteacher on account of the hostility he and Frieda faces from the townspeople.<sup>80</sup> The publicity poster asked 'Would *you* take Frieda into your home?' posing the question whether the audience would accept a German woman in Britain.

As historians such as Rose have shown, women who enjoyed themselves—'good-time gals' and 'flappers'—were often cast as anti-citizens, especially when they involved themselves with the different ethnicities which populated wartime Britain.<sup>81</sup> Such negative attitudes were exacerbated when British women were discovered to be associating with German POWs. As Bob Moore notes, fraternising with the enemy was a 'far more morally charged debate'.<sup>82</sup> However, attitudes towards fraternisation between British women and German POWs gradually relaxed as the POWs increasing proximity to the public allowed them to be seen as normal, average men. The wartime measures, continued to be enforced during the post-war, which sought to minimise contact between women and POWs were increasingly viewed as petty. Given the freedoms allowed German POWs and their proximity to women in the WLA and ATS, how could the government, it was argued, continue to make the unavoidable natural relationships between women and POWs illegal? From being cast as an inhuman perpetrator of the horrors disclosed in concentration camps, the German POW, by July 1947, would be considered marriageable material for a British woman.

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<sup>80</sup> *Frieda*, dir. by Basil Dearden (1947).

<sup>81</sup> Rose, pp. 71-106.

<sup>82</sup> Moore, 'Illicit', (p.743).

On March 2 1945, the *Daily Mail* published a picture of two women outside Bury Magistrates Court.<sup>83</sup> With three others who were employed at the Florence Nightingale Hospital, they had been summoned to the court for breaching the non-fraternisation order. This was the first high profile case of fraternisation between British women and German POWs. The two Sisters and three nurses were accused of exchanging letters and gifting sundry items to German POWs who had received treatment at the hospital in January and February that year. The letter racket was described in court as 'a persistent, clever, and crafty system of communication'. On inspection, a Sergeant of the Pioneer Corps had uncovered a stitched-up bag which was concealed underneath the uniform of a German POW leaving the hospital. Nicknamed 'Mosquito' by the POWs, Sister Helena Mulvenna admitted to sending letters to Erich Neumeister, and visiting Warth Mills camp, where the POWs were held, on several occasions. Read out in court, the content of the letters was described by the prosecution as 'rather warm'. However, they were considered 'romantic' and 'harmless', with Mulvenna stating that her 'high regard' for Erich had affected her judgement. Sister Winnie Cunnane admitted that she had given cigarettes, soap, and razor blades, to Rudolph Frommert, arguing that it was fair given that the British patients were given these items as well. Cunnane admitted having a 'slight attachment' to Frommert, and that 'there had been a little kissing in the kitchen', but claimed that she had refused a proposal of marriage from Frommert and the question of escape was never discussed. Nurse Ivy Knott had sent a cigarette case engraved with her name and address to another POW. The Detective-Sergeant investigating the case had a first though they were assisting the POWs to escape, but inquires had confirmed that this was 'only a serious case of fraternisation and the nurses had no ulterior motives'. Found guilty, the women were not branded traitors, anti-citizens, or collaborators. They were considered foolish by the Bench, silly for having let their excitements overcome their judgement. While it was noted that the magistrates had considered sending them to prison as a deterrent to others from acting similarly irresponsibly, they were instead fined: the two Sisters £15, Knott and Hodges £1, with Owen dismissed on payment of costs. This case of fraternisation was one of many uncovered by the authorities. It was one, however,

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<sup>83</sup> German Captive 'Proposed' to Hospital Sister', *Daily Mail*, 2 March 1945, p. 3. 'Secret Letters To War Prisoners', *The Times*, 2 March 1945, p. 2. 'Nurses' Letters To German War Prisoners', *Manchester Guardian*, 2 March 1945, p. 2. 'Hospital Nurses' Gifts to German Prisoners', *Yorkshire Post*, 2 March 1945, p. 3. 'Letters in secret bag: Nurses' affair with German prisoners', *Dundee Courier*, 2 March 1945, p. 2. 'Secret Letters to Nazi Prisoners', *Aberdeen Journal*, 2 March 1945, p. 3.

that had additional scandalous qualities. First, the relationships between the women and POWs had been formed while Britain was at war with Germany. Second, the women were employed in a professional capacity and had breached regulations at their workplace. Indeed, recognising this breach in discipline, the board of the Florence Nightingale Hospital dismissed Mulvenna, Cunnane, and Knott.<sup>84</sup> As a result of the incident, any German POW who required treatment in the future in the area under control of Western Command was not sent to civilian establishments.<sup>85</sup>

A few weeks after the incident at Bury, in the Commons, Rhys Davies asked if the Secretary of State for War would consider amending the appropriate regulations so as to preclude the sex inequality which has arisen whereby a British POW may marry a German woman abroad and bring her to the UK while British female nurses were recently prosecuted for being too friendly with, and suggesting marriage to male German POWs here. Henderson noted that Davis had misunderstood the regulations; British POWs were not allowed to do that. The nurses were prosecuted for contravening regulations prohibiting fraternisation with German POWs.<sup>86</sup> This case of fraternisation was probably not the first and certainly not the last.

While regulations were lifting from late 1946, sexual relations between British women and German POWs remained illegal. Yet, as Bob Moore has noted, despite the fraternisation ban, 'all manner of clandestine relationships' were discovered during and after the war.<sup>87</sup> Policing these relationships was ultimately impossible. In September 1946, the Derby borough police called upon the parents of young girls in the county to warn their daughters against associating with the men or frequenting the vicinity of camps.<sup>88</sup> Young girls in the area had been seen conversing with German POWs through the barbed wire at several camps. As it was difficult to police it can be speculated that many couples successfully avoided discovery of their forbidden relationships; the precise numbers of incidents will remain unknown. Yet, POWs and women were caught, and their cases were published in regional and, when particularly scandalous, national newspapers. These reports provide insight how these relationships developed, how the participants were dealt with, and attitudes towards fraternisation.

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<sup>84</sup> 'Nurses and German Prisoners', *Manchester Guardian*, 3 March 1945, p. 3. 'Three Nurses Dismissed', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 3 March 1945, p. 1. 'Three Nurses Dismissed', *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 3 March 1945, p. 8.

<sup>85</sup> 'Ban on Civil Hospitals for German PoWs', *Daily Mail*, 5 March 1945, p. 1.

<sup>86</sup> HC Deb 22 March 1945 vol. 409 cols. 1016-7W.

<sup>87</sup> Moore, 'Illicit', p. 743

<sup>88</sup> 'Police Watch Girls Near P.o.W. Camps: Many Complaints of Fraternisation', *Derby Evening Telegraph*, 23 September 1946, p. 7.

At Romford Magistrates Court, in March 1946, Lily Anne Sampford pleaded guilty to a fraternisation charge. She had become friendly with a group of POWs working nearby her home the previous August, inviting them into her home for tea, and offering them cigarettes and, occasionally, a meal. Sampford admitted to allowing one POW to kiss her, but argued that it was out of friendship not passion. When the POW had been transferred to Potters Bar, Sampford continued to visit him. It was here that their relationship had been uncovered, when they were spotted together behind a hedge. Sampford claimed that she was returning a collection of photographs which the POW had left behind at her house, and stated that she did not realise her actions were wrong. While the chairman informed her she was liable to three months imprisonment and a £100 fine, Samford was considered of good character and fined only £2 in each of the two cases.<sup>89</sup> When convicted of fraternisation, the full force of the law—a £100 fine, or even imprisonment—was rarely, applied. The women, prosecuted at Magistrates Courts, were often described by the Bench and prosecution as 'foolish', having allowed their emotions to overcome their better judgement.

In August 1946, 27 year old Hans Kupzog, a POW held at Ripon camp, was brought before a court martial. Evidence was provided including letters which had passed between Kupzog and a local girl named Thirkill. It was stated that on one occasion they had met in a wood near Wath where they kissed and marriage was mentioned. Thirkill stated in court that cycling to work with a friend, Kupzog had waved to them and they had waved back. In May 1945 six letters were exchanged between them; Thirkill passing them to Kupzog on her way to and from work. Kupzog had also made her a wallet, and she in return gave him chocolate and cigarettes. Her friend, Aileen White, also 17 years old, admitted to passing letters and the wallet between Thirkill and Kupzog. Thirkill denied that she had encouraged him; rather she was sympathetic to his plight as a POW. Kupzog, pleading not guilty, maintained that he misunderstood the meaning of the term fraternisation. However, the German camp leader stated that the regulations had been made well known in the camp. Kupzog argued that he had only heard of the regulations when he had been charged; he believed that talking and writing to British women was permitted. The solicitor defending Kupzog agreed that as a victorious nation, Britain had to ensure the discipline of German POWs was maintained. However, he argued that the regulations had not been given or had been given in a manner which Kupzog had misunderstood. 'We have to

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<sup>89</sup> 'Woman was kissed by a German P.O.W.: Bench fine her £4 for Fraternising', *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 8 March 1946, p. 5.

protect our womenfolk', the solicitor stated, 'but there is a certain type of woman who will go after and encourage people who a short time ago were our enemies. I think that from a humane point of view this is grossly unfair to the prisoner concerned'.<sup>90</sup> Kupzog was charged with conduct prejudicial to good order and discipline in that between 30 April and 26 May he had improperly associated with Thirkill. Such incidents continued into 1947.

In May 1947, Otto Port, a 20 year old German POW, was tried by military court at #96 POW camp in Rugeley, Staffordshire. He had been charged for illegally consorting with Eunice Eveleyn Jackman, a domestic servant and resident of Burton-on-Trent. It was alleged that they were found asleep in a store hut on the edge of an RAF aerodrome. Constable Tomkinson had found Port standing behind the door of the hut on the aerodrome at 5 am on 30 March. Jackman was hiding behind some stacks of radar material. Although the couple contended that they had been 'walking around all night', 'dodging' the police, Tomkinson stated that not only was Jackman in possession of an alarm clock—presumably to wake them up—a stack of radar paper strips had an imprint of two persons who had been lying there. While the court-martial took place, hundreds of Port's comrades crowded the room at the POW camp. He pleaded not guilty. The German camp leader, Otto Schoenfield, stated that that the regulations regarding fraternisation were displayed in the camp mess and had been read out to the POWs. Jackman, who had provided several false names when asked by Tomkinson, eventually admitted that she had met Port at 10 pm on 19 March at an inn in Needwood, and had spent the night with him in the shed; she had known Port for about a month. Port maintained that he had tried to leave but stayed when Jackman said she was afraid of the dark. He denied that anything improper had taken place.<sup>91</sup> In certain sections of British society where there was hostility towards German POWs, women were chastised for any interaction with German POWs. However, there was a growing call, especially after marriages were permitted in Germany, to permit relationships between British women and German POWs.

Women who fraternised with German POWs, especially those women already married, were considered irresponsible. In January 1946, Canon Elliot Mitchell, Vicar

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<sup>90</sup> 'German P.O.W. Charged with Fraternisation: Kissed Yorkshire Girl in Woods, Marriage Mentioned', *Yorkshire Post*, 18 August 1946, p. 1.

<sup>91</sup> 'Girl Set the Alarm at Six', *Daily Mail*, 31 May 1947, p. 3. 'P.O.W. CHARGED', *Gloucester Citizen*, 28 May, 1947, p. 5. 'Fraternisation Charge: Court Told Of—P.o.W. and Girl in Hut at Aerodrome', *Derby Evening Telegraph*, 30 May, 1947, p. 12. 'P.o.W. Tells of Meeting Girl', *Derby Evening Telegraph*, 31 May, 1947, p. 4.

of Dartford, denounced British women for 'petting and pampering' German POWs. A group of women had been recently reported for fraternising with 20 German POWs from Swanscombe camp, while the POWs were working on a housing site near Dartford town centre. The women had taken cigarettes and cakes to the POWs. The Canon stated:

We are told they are giggling girls and irresponsible married women. I am wondering what sort of homes they come from. These married women should spend their time preparing a nice place for their men—a splendid place—when they come back from serving this country in Germany and other places.<sup>92</sup>

Opposing attitudes towards fraternisation were captured in the *Lancashire Evening Post*. In September 1946, two 'disgusted girls'—asking to remain anonymous as their parents did not agree with their views—wrote to the paper protesting against the inequality of allowing British soldiers in Germany to fraternise with German women while British women were not allowed to with German POWs in Britain.<sup>93</sup> In response, P. Turner asked if the two girls realised what would have happened to them if Britain had been invaded by Germany, suggesting that there would have been 'but "mass rape" of British women. 'It isn't the two girls who should be disgusted. It is the public who should be disgusted with them'.<sup>94</sup> Similarly, an ex-serviceman of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, was sickened by the letter, and on the same lines noted that in the event of a victorious Germany the girls, 'would have no alternative to fraternise' with the Germans'. They were reminded of Belsen, and criticised for forgetting the sacrifices of the British soldiers.<sup>95</sup> Others came to the girls defence, noting the gender inequality. Belsen, 'another disgusted girl' argued, had not stopped British soldiers in Germany from fraternising with 'frauleins'. If they were allowed to marry Germans, surely British women were as well.<sup>96</sup> Whereas British women were abused for considering marriage with a German POW, the British soldier in Germany 'aroused sympathetic interest, and even cheerful little articles in the Press' one wrote to the *Yorkshire Post*, 'What is the difference in the situations?' they asked.<sup>97</sup> Two correspondents to the *Hull Daily Mail* made it clear that women seeking a German husband would not be welcome in Britain.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> 'Girls who 'pet' the Germans attacked', *Daily Mail*, 28 January 1946, p. 1.

<sup>93</sup> 'Wish to fraternise', *Lancashire Evening Post*, 12 September 1946, p. 3

<sup>94</sup> 'Reply to "Two Girls"', *ibid.*, 16 September 1946, p. 2.

<sup>95</sup> 'Remember Belsen', *ibid.*, 18 September 1946, p. 3.

<sup>96</sup> 'FRATTING COMPLAINT', *ibid.*, 23 September 1946, p. 4.

<sup>97</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 15 July 1947, p. 6.

<sup>98</sup> Disgusted, 'Got To Germany', *Hull Daily Mail*, 3 September 1946, p. 3; Briton, *ibid.*

## 7. Monica Cann and Herman Ganter, May 1947

In May 1947, the secret marriage between 22 year old Monica Cann, and 28 year old Hermann Ganter was revealed.<sup>99</sup> The pair had met at the Central Ordnance Depot in Donnington, where Cann, a 22 year old A.T.S. (Auxiliary Territorial Service) Sergeant, taught English. Cann was summoned to Wellington Police Court, charged with signing a false declaration of marriage on 9 January and causing the insertion of a false statement into the marriage register on 11 January. She was remanded on bail for one week.<sup>100</sup> Reporting the case, journalists were right to speculate that revelation of their wedding five months after it happened was likely to open up the important issue of the prohibition of marriage ban between POWs and British women. In the House of Commons, Bellenger was asked to clarify the position of the government towards the marriage ban. Pointing to the 'recent case' of marriage, Tom Driberg (Lab. MP, Maldon) asked what action the Secretary of State for War would take. Given the case was *sub judice*, Bellenger refused to comment on it, suggesting only that the matter of marriages between British women and German POWs was under consideration. Echoing Driberg, Hector Hughes (Lab. MP, Aberdeen North) asked 'is it not unreasonable to allow this social intercourse and rule out the probable consequences of it? Would it not be reasonable to allow both?' Richard Stokes went further, asking Bellenger, 'Does he not realise that he cannot resist the inevitable course of nature'. The desire of marriage between British women and Germany POWs was thought an entirely expected one given that regulations allowed them to enjoy each other's company. Bellenger remained reticent about War Office thinking and his personal view.<sup>101</sup>

The idea that relationships between British women and German POWs were a natural and predictable occurrence was a sentiment echoed in court. On 4 June, Cann pleaded guilty to both charges, receiving a £2 fine on each charge along with court costs). After announcing the magistrates' decision Alderman Thomas Jones stated: 'The vagaries of human love lead very often to extraordinary conditions'. Certainly, the ceremony itself was secretive and impulsive; the witnesses were a lady from a nearby house and a man found in a library. Cann paid all the expenses, and borrowed a

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<sup>99</sup> 'POWs Marriage Question', *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 17 May 1947, p. 8. 'A.T.S.—P.O.W. Wedding', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 17 May 1947, p. 1. 'P.O.W.'s Secret Marriage', *Yorkshire Post*, 17 May 1947, p. 1

<sup>100</sup> 'A.T.S. Who Wed German' *Nottingham Evening Post*, 28 May 1947, p. 1. 'A.T.S. Who Wed P.O.W. Charged', *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 28 May 1947, p. 5. 'A.T.S. Who Wed P.O.W. Remanded', *Lancashire Evening Post*, 28 May 1947, p. 1. 'A.T.S. Bride Accused', *Dundee Courier*, 29 May 1947, p. 3.

<sup>101</sup> HC Deb, 3 June 1947, vol. 438, cols. 16-7.

complete uniform from a soldier which Ganter was married in. Defending her actions, Cann stated: 'I married him because I loved him, and I do not regret it one bit. I knew it would be hopeless to try to get married through the proper channels. I did not put Ganter's true name because if I had they might have guessed he was a German'. This sentiment was echoed by Cann's solicitor, who stated that a 'sense of proportion' had been 'utterly lost' during the case. 'Here is a girl' he continued, 'not yet 22, who desires to marry the man she loves, and she commits some technical offences'. The solicitor pointed out that there were similar cases all over the country every month'.<sup>102</sup> Evidently there was public interest in the case, Hermann Ganter's repatriation being published in local newspapers unconnected with Shropshire. When Ganter was repatriated in July 1947, Cann intended to follow him to Germany.<sup>103</sup> Hermann Ganter was repatriated with 1,399 other POWs on 22 July 1947.<sup>104</sup> In the wake of Cann's charge, further questions were raised regarding the marriage ban. On 10 June Skeffington-Lodge asked the Secretary of State for War how many official and unofficial applications he had received from British women wishing to marry POWs and what disciplinary action had been taken against the men involved. Freeman said that 54 written applications had been received and that no disciplinary action had been taken against any of these POWs based on the information contained in the letters of inquiry.<sup>105</sup> Further questions about the issue were met with the response that an announcement would be made shortly.<sup>106</sup> By the time Cann's secret marriage to Ganter was disclosed, public opinion was shifting; the idea of marrying a German POW became more acceptable. Following Cann and Ganter, it was one particular case which would provide the catalyst for reversing the marriage ban.

#### 8. Olive Reynolds and Werner Vetter, July 1947 to August 1947

At his court-martial in early July 1947, the 22 year old Werner Vetter described himself as 'a man who had not the right to love'. Sitting next to her and their ten week old baby girl, he pleaded guilty to improperly associating with 21 year old Olive Ethel Reynolds. His defence was that he intended to marry her as soon as possible. Found guilty, Vetter was sentenced to 12 months imprisonment.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> 'A.T.S. Bride of German Fined', *Dundee Courier*, 5 June 1947, p. 4.

<sup>103</sup> 'Former A.T.S. to Join Freed P.O.W.' *Aberdeen Journal*, 23 July 1947, p. 1. 'P.O.W. Bridegroom Gets Repat.', *Dundee Courier*, 23 July 1947, p. 3.

<sup>104</sup> 'Gather Goes Home From Hull', *Hull Daily Mail*, 22 July 1947, p. 1.

<sup>105</sup> HC Deb 10 June 1947 vol. 438 col. 90W.

<sup>106</sup> HC Deb 1 July 1947, vol. 439 col. 137W.

<sup>107</sup> '12 Months for German POW', *Hartlepool Mail*, 2 July 1947, p. 7. 'POW who wanted to marry is gaoled', *Gloucester Citizen*, 3 July 1947, p. 9.

The sentence given to Vetter sparked a lengthy debate in the House of Commons. Considered severe, Bellenger was asked to revise the sentence. He was reminded that Vetter was young and of good character. Skeffington-Lodge, Paget, and Hughes, all pressed the Secretary of State for War to permit Vetter to marry the mother of his child. Bellenger ensured that the case would be examined as soon as the War Office received the court martial proceedings. Leah Manning pointed towards the 'sex discrimination' practiced by the War Office against British women. British servicemen were allowed to marry German women. Sorensen pressed Bellenger to ensure that German POWs who had fathered children by British women would be allowed to meet their financial obligations rising from paternity by receiving adequate pay. Bellenger asked the House to await the response of the Home Secretary on the subject of marriages between German POWs and British women. He did, however, rule out any differentiation in pay between POWs who became fathers and other POWs. In response to Renton, Oliver stated that he was anxious that the implications of such a marriage were fully appreciated by the women and the POW. First, the women would lose her British nationality. Second, there could be no provisions made for her to live with her husband, who were remain a POW and therefore was confined to the camp or hostel under military control; there could be no relaxation of regulations in the husband's favour over other POWs. Third, there was no guarantee that the husband would be permitted to stay in the country when due for repatriation. These stipulations would be made known to both the women and the POW wishing to marry; 'if, nevertheless, they determine to marry, no obstacle will be placed in their way'. Although the allowance of marriages was welcomed, several MPs raised concerns regarding Oliver's statement. Skeffington-Lodge was not satisfied by Oliver's reply when he asked in Vetter's case would be quashed. He promised to raise the subject in the near future.<sup>108</sup> Oliver's statement was considered a 'warning' to POWs and British women wishing to marry.<sup>109</sup>

A *Daily Mail* reporter interviewed Olive and her sister Pat after Oliver's declaration that the marriage ban would be lifted. The sisters celebrated in their three roomed basement flat in Farnsley Road, Chingford, Essex. The announcement that Werner might be freed and they could marry overjoyed Olive. It was revealed that Pat

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<sup>108</sup> HC Deb, 8 July 1947, vol. 439, cols. 2013-9.

<sup>109</sup> 'Reminder to British Women', *Yorkshire Post*, 9 July 1947, p. 1. 'P.O.W.'s May Wed British Girls', *Aberdeen Journal*, 9 July 1947, p. 6. 'Prisoners Free to Marry', *Western Daily Press*, 9 July 1947, p. 4. 'P.O.W.s Free to Wed British Women', *Gloucester Citizen*, 9 July 1947, p. 4. 'P.O.W. Rules Must Stay', *Western Morning News*, 9 July 1947, p. 3.

had a 'secret love' for another POW, Herbert Wolf, a 22 year-old POW who had served with the Waffen SS, which could now be disclosed. Olive and Pat's mother supported their decision to marry their German POWs. Olive had received 150 letters from sympathisers, 60 from other girls wishing to marry German POWs. Another POW had written to her proposing marriage. Both sisters were expecting to go to Germany and were prepared to lose their British nationality.<sup>110</sup>

Skeffington-Lodge, who was a minor champion of German POWs, especially in his Bedfordshire constituency, asked Bellenger to make a statement about Vetter's imprisonment. Bellenger stated that all cases would be reviewed.<sup>111</sup> Charles Studden, writing to the *Cornishman*, was 'shocked at the severity of the sentence' given to Vetter.

This case seems to have disposed of the proudly held belief that British justice is "tempered with mercy." Are the Germans still to be regarded as enemies in the full sense of the word even now the war is over? Is this country also going to "nationalise" the emotions of the human heart? Warm, human faults such as these two are guilty of are surely not so sinful as many cold-blooded, calculated and wilfully committed crimes, and there was no evidence given against the girl's moral character, who has apparently been a respectable citizen. This surely is a case where British folk should demand justice with mercy, in view of the special circumstances which should have been taken into account.

Studden quoted from an article which appeared in the *Cornishman* on 10 May 1945. Herbert Thomas had advocated taking a merciful attitude towards Germany, putting the needs of humanity above any thoughts of vindictiveness. Studden called for readers of the *Cornishman* to write to him immediately if interested in the case of Vetter. If he had a sufficient number reply to him, Studden would then petition Bellenger so that 'something may be done for this unfortunate couple'.<sup>112</sup> Subsequently, due to public and parliamentary pressure, Vetter had his sentence remitted in August.<sup>113</sup> Olive and Werner married at the village church of Hampton Lovett near Droitwich on 28 September 1947. Bride and groom entertained some sixty guests at a Droitwich Girl Guides' hut. However, the honeymoon ended at 10 pm when Vetter had to be back at his POW camp.<sup>114</sup> The *Daily Mail* reported that 'Wedding bells will ring tomorrow' for Reynolds and Vetter at Hampton Lovett parish church in Worcestershire. As a result, a discussion

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<sup>110</sup> 'Pat can now wed POW sweetheart and Olive waits release of German father', *Daily Mail*, 9 July 1947, p. 3.

<sup>111</sup> HC Deb 22 July 1947, vol. 440 col. 1031

<sup>112</sup> 'Werner Vetter', *Cornishman*, 31 July 1947, p. 4.

<sup>113</sup> 'POW sentence remitted', *Daily Mail*, 13 August 1947, p. 1. *Nottingham Evening Post*, 13 August 1947, p. 1.

<sup>114</sup> 'Wedding Curfew', *Derby Evening Telegraph*, 27 September 1947, p. 1. 'Honeymoon ends at 10-0 P.M.', *Hull Daily Mail*, 27 September 1947, p. 1.

would take place in parliament regarding POWs marrying British women. Reynolds stated that Vetter had managed to rent a flat near his work for the couple, when she was interviewed at her home by a *Daily Mail* reporter. It was noted that Reynolds would take a pram brought for the baby as a christening present by the POWs at Chingford camp, where Vetter had been in a military prison.<sup>115</sup> Olive could not afford the fare to accompany Vetter back to Germany; his repatriation was scheduled for June 1948. Olive told a *Daily Mail* reporter that they were expecting another child in August and since they were married last September, Vetter had been the

[...] perfect husband. I would not change him for any Englishman. We have had only evenings together—when he arrived at five and had to leave two hours later to be back at camp by 11. [...]. He was told by a fellow prisoner that he was to be sent back to Germany and last Saturday he was so upset that he would have to go and leave Janet and me that he risked everything and stayed with us over Sunday. The police came for him yesterday. His home in Germany is in the Russian zone and I doubt if we shall every see him again. He is just the type the Russians want to work for them.

Vetter had made repeated application to stay in Britain to work as a waiter or painter and Olive had been to the War Office several times attempting to get him civilian status.<sup>116</sup> His application was initially rejected and Vetter was informed that he would be repatriated in June 1948.<sup>117</sup> After public and parliamentary pressure, Vetter was permitted to stay in Britain.<sup>118</sup> He was, however, deported a few months later after being sentenced for housebreaking.<sup>119</sup> On 2 February 1949, Vetter pleaded guilty at Essex Quarter Sessions to three charges of housebreaking at Buckhurst Hill and Woodford Green, and theft of £218 of property. He was bound over until 9 March and the bench recommended that he be deported to Germany.<sup>120</sup> Consequently, Werner, Olive and their daughter Janet left Britain for Germany.

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<sup>115</sup> 'POW will marry tomorrow', *Daily Mail*, 27 September 1947, p. 1.

<sup>116</sup> 'Werner to go home—alone', *Daily Mail*, 9 June 1948, p. 3.

<sup>117</sup> 'German Wed Here, to be Sent Home', *Aberdeen Journal*, 9 June 1948, p. 1.

<sup>118</sup> 'Minute Mail', *Daily Mail*, 26 June 1948, p. 3.

<sup>119</sup> 'Far and Near', *Daily Mail*, 10 March 1949, p. 3.

<sup>120</sup> 'German Thief Deportation Recommended', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 2 February 1949, p. 1.  
'Deported', *Essex Chronicle*, 11 March 1949, p. 1.



**Image 10 *Daily Mail*, 9 July 1947, p. 3.**



**Image 11 *Daily Mail*, 27 September 1947, p. 1.**

On 11 July 1947, it was reported that Ebert and Locock had given provisional notice of marriage to the Cheltenham Registrar on the day the ban was lifted. As a day had to be allowed before the ceremony could take place, it was arranged for two days' time. The relationship between Ebert and Locock began four years before when they met at a civilian party in Guernsey where Locock was then living. The scenes at the wedding were described: Locock stated to an *Echo* reporter:

When the ban was lifted I really could not believe it was true after waiting so long and trying so many times before. [...]. I applied last September and they said ours was such an isolated case that they couldn't allow it. [...]. We cannot very well plan the future because we do not know what will happen to my

husband, but if we can we will stay in England. [...]. If we have to go to Germany I shall be quite happy.

Her mother stated that they were 'very happy' about the wedding. Ebert (27) spoke English fluently and Locock (23) spoke German. After the ceremony, the wedding party left by taxi with the intention of spending the evening at Leckhampton Parish Hall, where a party had been arranged in their honour by some of his fellow POWs at Leckhampton Court. This was reported as the first marriage to take place in the town and one of the first in the country between a POW and a girl of British origin.<sup>121</sup>

The *Essex Newsman* reported, after interviewing the N.C.O. in charge of a local camp, that despite the lifting of the marriage ban, no applications for permission to marry had been made in the Chelmsford area. The N.C.O. knew of 'a number of romances blossoming since prisoners were stationed in this area', but none had come forward so far. Two days before the restrictions were lifted, Canon Wilson, Catholic priest of Chelmsford preaching at the evening service, spoke strongly against denying German POWs, 'the ordinary human right of marriage'.<sup>122</sup>

The strictness of the regulations regarding marriages between British women and German POWs was designed to prevent them from being justifications for the right to residency in Britain. Therefore, if a wife was unable to afford the cost of travelling to Germany they would be separated from their husbands who were prohibited from remaining in Britain. Attempting to remain together, a number of women were charged for harbouring POWs who were to be repatriated. 28 year old Gladys Bowden from Cornwood in South Devon was fined £25 for concealing a former German POW. A fortnight before, Josef Wollny was sentenced in the same court—Plympton—to one month imprisonment for having illegally entered the country. Bowden, the wife of a Warrant officer in the Royal Engineers, pleaded not guilty. In a statement she said that she had met Wollny in September 1946 and as he moved between camps she continued to visit him. When Wollny returned to England 'they lived as man and wife'.<sup>123</sup> Bowden stated defiantly:

No matter the outcome of this, I am prepared to wait for Wollny as we love each other very much. I have not had a happy married life and it was not until

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<sup>121</sup> 'Girl Weds Local P.O.W. as Ban is Lifted', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 11 July 1947, p. 3.

<sup>122</sup> 'Non German Weddings Here—Yet', *Essex Newsman*, 11 July 1947, p. 1.

<sup>123</sup> 'Woman Fined for Harbouring German', *Gloucester Citizen*, 16 February 1948, p. 1.

meeting Wollny that my happiness began. It has been the happiest time of my life.<sup>124</sup>

Wollny went back to Germany. Ernest Orlando Bowden was granted *decree nisi* on the ground of the misconduct of his wife Gladys. The question of the custody of the child was referred to chambers.<sup>125</sup>

## 9. Conclusions

With the end of war in Europe, German POWs came into ever closer contact with the British public. At a regional level, they became part of the local landscape. Set to work in agriculture and on various other employments, they were a common sight for many. The government sought to minimise contact between German POW and the public, initially as a security matter. With the conclusion of the war, the fraternisation ban continued to be in force. Security remained a concern but the authorities also hoped that the cold-shoulder treatment would help emphasise the wrongdoings of the German POWs and the German people more broadly.

The media continued to emphasise that German POWs were adequately fed and properly housed. Yet, from early 1946, the continuation of the fraternisation restrictions placed on German POWs was increasingly criticised. The government was criticised for restricting contact between the public and POWs as it was considered a unique opportunity to foster Anglo-German understanding after such a devastating conflict. In press and parliament it was argued that continuing to ostracise POWs only served to turn them against Britain. As social pariahs, the German POWs, it was believed, would harbour hostile attitudes towards the British people, perhaps leading to another war. The lifting of the fraternisation ban in December 1946 was welcomed by the media.

With the proximity of the German POWs to the public gaze increased, the humanity of the captives could be viewed and assessed. They were shown to be keen gardeners, musicians, and thespians. This countered the wartime propaganda which had emphasised the hyper-masculinity of the German soldier. Having been humanised, it was only a short time before they were pitied for the position they found themselves in. Furthermore, German POWs were eventually considered adequate husbands for British women. This display of emotion, such as Vetter's love for Olive, and interest in hobbies and pursuits which Britons also enjoyed decreased the cultural differentiation between

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<sup>124</sup> 'Harbouring Former POW', *Devon and Exeter Gazette*, 20 February 1948, p. 5. 'Harbouring Former POW', *Western Times*, 20 February 1948, p. 5.

<sup>125</sup> 'Plymouth Divorce', *Western Morning News*, 1 May 1948, p. 3.

captor and captive. Some may well have been Nazis, but in the main, the German POWs were viewed as ordinary men.

During the 1939-45 conflict, the liberal treatment of the captured enemy demonstrated the values for which Britain was fighting Germany to defend. There was also a desire to retain humanitarian and Christian ideals after such a devastating conflict. To undermine these ideals was to undermine the war effort. Fair-play was again central in discussions of the treatment of German POWs. If they were to be kept and worked, it was only fair that they should enjoy increased freedoms. After all, the war was over and they were no longer enemies. The exploitation of defenceless captives had been a criticism levelled at the German authorities during the war, and it remained antithetical to Britishness in the post-war period. Again, with the marriage ban, it was considered unfair that while British soldiers were allowed to marry German women, British women were barred from marrying German POWs. There was no solid justification for regulating the natural course of human relations.

While the values invested in the treatment of POWs remained constant, they took on a new significance in the post-war period. Rather than being values to be defended against Nazi tyranny, they were to be demonstrated in order to promote reconstruction.

## Chapter 6: Repatriation

### 1. Introduction

The final chapter of this dissertation focuses on British attitudes towards the repatriation of German POWs. The first section examines British policy in relation to the stipulations of the 1929 Geneva Convention. In other words, what the obligations of the post-war Labour government in relation to returning German POWs were in the context of unconditional surrender. As seen in chapter 4, the continued employment of POW labour was considered vital to Britain's post-war economy. Therefore, no plans for a progressive scheme of repatriation were considered. The second section examines the concern raised in press and parliament over the lack of a repatriation programme and the effect continued detention was having on the POWs in 1946. A notable figure which emerges is Richard Rapiet Stokes (Lab. Ipswich), and his individual motivations are considered. Having already established itself as an influential post-war pressure group, Save Europe Now, chaired by the charismatic publisher turned campaigner Victor Gollancz, organised a formal protest urging Attlee to draw up a gradual repatriation scheme, this is the focus of section three. Understanding the growing public concern, symbolised by the SEN Memorial, section four considers the response of the Labour government and the beginning of repatriation in September-October 1946. Although this was welcomed, pressure continued to hasten repatriation. Criticism continued into 1947, resulting in a second Memorial sent to Attlee by SEN, this is examined in section six, with the final section considering Attlee's dismissal of the demands and the eventual completion of repatriation. In their study of German migrants in post-war Britain, Weber-Newth and Steinert provide a concise overview of the 'debate over repatriation' and 'Government considerations'.<sup>1</sup> Expanding on their brief description, this chapter takes a more nuanced look at the concerns aired in press and parliament over the continued detention of German POWs.

### 2. International law and repatriation

As part of the development of international law, the process of repatriation was revised. The 1907 Hague Convention stipulated that: 'After the conclusion of peace, the

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<sup>1</sup> Weber-Newth and Steinert, *German Migrants*, pp. 20-23.

repatriation of prisoners of war shall be carried out as quickly as possible'.<sup>2</sup> Considered obsolete after the First World War, the wording of the 1929 Geneva Convention took into account that wars were usually fought to the bitter end. Given that a ceasefire quickly preceded a peace treaty the 1929 Convention acknowledged the necessity of quickly repatriating POWs:

When belligerents conclude an armistice convention, they shall normally cause to be included therein provisions concerning the repatriation of prisoners of war. If it has not been possible to insert in that convention such stipulations, the belligerents shall, nevertheless, enter into communications with each other on the question as soon as possible. In any case, the repatriation of prisoners shall be effected as soon as possible after the conclusion of peace.<sup>3</sup>

While the wording emphasised haste, the Convention offered leverage to delay repatriation until a peace treaty was signed. Implicit was the idea that repatriation was subject to bilateral agreement rather than unilateral obligation.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, international law stipulated that POWs should be repatriated as quickly as could be organised by belligerents after peace terms had been agreed. There would, however, be no peace treaty with Germany until 1990. Fighting the war to unconditional surrender was decided at the Casablanca Conference in 1943.<sup>5</sup> At the 1945 Potsdam conference, it was agreed that the Council of Foreign Ministers—established at the conference—would 'be utilised for the preparation of a peace settlement for Germany to be accepted by the Government of Germany when a government adequate for the purpose is established'.<sup>6</sup> Yet, with the division of Germany into two states in 1949, no peace treaty with 'Germany' was signed.<sup>7</sup> In May 1945, there was no discussion regarding the repatriation of German POWs. With the end of the war in Europe, government departments were more concerned with utilising the maximum number of German POWs in Britain in order to meet labour demands. Policy towards German POWs was utilitarian rather

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<sup>2</sup>International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Hague Convention (IV) respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land and its annex: Regulations concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land*, 18 October 1907. Section I: On Belligerents, Chapter II: Prisoners of War, Article 20.

<sup>3</sup>International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War*, 27 July 1929. Section II Liberation and Repatriation at the End of Hostilities, Article 75.

<sup>4</sup>Overmans, 'Repatriation', pp. 13-4.

<sup>5</sup>Michael Balfour, 'Another Look at 'Unconditional Surrender'', *International Affairs*, 46: 4 (1970), 719-736.

<sup>6</sup>The Berlin (Potsdam) Conference, July 17-August 2 1945, (a) Protocol of the Proceedings, 1 August 1945, Section 1: Establishment of a Council of Foreign Ministers, 3 i.

<sup>7</sup>Peace was formally concluded in September 1990 with the signing at Moscow of The Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany.

than retributive; they were employed out of necessity, not set to work as a form of punishment.

### 3. Protests over the retention of POWs, March 1946 to August 1946

In the House of Commons, Richard Rapiet Stokes, Labour MP for Ipswich and member of Save Europe Now, championed the cause of repatriation, as well as the general welfare, of German POWs. A peculiar political figure, his political views were based on an affinity to fascism, hostility to Bolshevism, and his Roman Catholic faith.<sup>8</sup> His initial concern was with the supposed secret arrangements made at the Teheran and Yalta conferences to supply Russia with two million Germans slave labourers.<sup>9</sup> Stokes demanded that a White Paper concerning the decisions taken at the conferences be published to alleviate concerns over the fate of the German people; this was dismissed by Attlee, which only served to fuel Stokes belief that the victorious powers were exploiting POWs.<sup>10</sup> Stokes then turned to the treatment of German POWs by the British government; during early 1946, in debates over the work conducted by POWs, Stokes referred to them as 'slaves' or their employment as tantamount to 'slave labour', especially when rates of pay for their labour were discussed.<sup>11</sup>

Late on 27 March, Stokes was given an adjournment when he voiced his anxiety over German POWs to the Financial Secretary to the War Office, Frederick Bellenger.<sup>12</sup> Expressing sympathy for the POWs, he stressed the importance of the subject of repatriation; there could be nothing 'more dreadful, and nothing more degrading, than finding oneself [...] detained for an indefinite period'. Stokes argued that the continued detention of German POWs made a mockery of the on-going trials in Nuremberg; he considered the trials 'bogus' as the charges of 'forcible detention and slave labour' were exactly what the British government were perpetrating. Stokes dismissed the government's arguments as to why German POWs had not been repatriated. Germany had surrendered unconditionally, a policy which Stokes had been an opponent. In turn no peace treaty was signed, and, as a result, article 75 of the Convention—calling for

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<sup>8</sup> For an overview of his political career see, Robert Crowcroft, 'What is Happening in Europe?' Richard Stokes, Fascism, and the Anti-War Movement in the British Labour Party during the Second World War and After', *History*, 93: 312, (2008), 514-530. His involvement with Save Europe Now has been also been overshadowed by that of Victor Gollancz, see, John Farquharson, 'Emotional but Influential': Victor Gollancz, Richard Stokes and the British Zone of Germany, 1945-9', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 22:3 (1987), pp. 501-19.

<sup>9</sup> HC Deb 11 April 1945, vol. 409, cols. 1934-50.

<sup>10</sup> HC Deb 5 June 1945, vol. 411, col. 687.

<sup>11</sup> HC Deb 4 March 1946, vol. 420, col. 30; HC Deb 26 March 1946, vol. 421, cols. 202-3.

<sup>12</sup> HC Deb 27 March 1946, vol. 421, cols. 531-40.

the immediate repatriation of POWs—did not have to be upheld. As the war was over, the terms of the Convention effectively lapsed. Previously Stokes had asked the Foreign Secretary on the matter of the application of the Convention in this situation, the response was negative. The Foreign Secretary assured him that POWs would be treated 'in accordance with the best Socialistic principles'. For Stokes, this was a highly unsatisfactory response, treating them 'virtually as slaves' was not in accordance with Socialistic principles. The fact that the Convention did not apply and that no peace treaty had been negotiated, in Stokes view, increased the onus on Britain 'to see that fair treatment is meted out to these people'. He argued that the treatment of German POWs was in fact getting worse; they were being treated as slave labourers. Stokes had experience of being allocated a group of POW labourers, and noted that as they were not credited with proper pay for their labour, the 'consequence was they worked like blacks'. He asked the House if they would 'sit here for a moment complacently' if the Italian or German governments 'used our people [...] as slaves'. After outlining his thoughts on slavery and the position of German POWs, Stokes asked Bellenger to reply to five points, all of which contributed to the slave status of German POWs. First, that some POWs were being 'denied the opportunity for their proper religious observances'. Second, that government policy could be clarified regarding the date on which POWs would be repatriated. Third, if that was not possible, then at least provide some understanding on when they would be. Fourth, that he provided an assurance that communications between POWs and their families would be restored as soon as possible. Finally, would he see that POWs, if not paid in full at the time, be credited with a fair proportion of what employers pay to the government for their labour. For Stokes, the entire issue resonated more widely than just the treatment of POWs; it was about upholding human rights. Stokes argued, 'It is human rights for which we stand, and we should see to it that human rights must be respected'. Bellenger's response was sympathetic, not only because he himself had nearly been captured at Dunkirk. He assured Stokes that POWs would 'undoubtedly' be repatriated. However, a peace treaty needed to be concluded, as Germany had no government, it could not be done at the present time. In regards to communications, German POWs were free to send mail to their families and there were direct mail facilities to all neutral and allied countries as well as Germany and Austria. Difficulties persisted, however, sending mail to the Russian Zone in Germany and Berlin; mail facilities had only been open to these areas since February. Indeed, with the help of the War Office, SEN had established a makeshift service to send mail to Germany. Religious observances were being fully

respected for POW in Britain and Bellenger dismissed the idea they were not. In regards to pay, no agreement had ever been reached with the German government and therefore a system was adopted; POWs were credited with pay as soldiers by their own countries which they would receive when repatriated.

On 16 July 1946 Stokes obtained another Adjournment with Bellenger to raise the issue of German POWs. Again, Stokes dismissed the government's argument that the principles of the Geneva Convention did not have to be abided. Citing Article 96 of the Convention, he argued that Britain could not denounce the stipulations of it as signatories.<sup>13</sup> The Prime Minister had declared that the German people would be treated fairly having surrendered unconditionally; Stokes believed that the government, therefore, had the responsibility to uphold the terms of the Convention. However, this had not been done. Stokes again pointed out Article 75 of the Convention and the fact that German POWs had not been repatriated. He dismissed the government's argument that as no peace treaty had been concluded, German POWs did not have to be repatriated. At any rate, Stokes noted, the Allied Control Commission in Germany governed the country and therefore acted as a government through which a peace could be negotiated. In his opinion, as an ex-soldier, he believed that the Government were 'disgracefully' dishonouring the obligations implicit in conditions of unconditional surrender. The 'appalling [...] moral and spiritual' effect of indefinite captivity was stressed; German POWs were 'being detained beyond the intention of any regulation'. Stokes believed that this 'evil' was the product of 'the foundations that were laid at Tehran and Yalta'. Having received new information, he took back his apology and stated that secret agreements to use German slave labour had been made between the Powers. Stokes was 'ashamed' that any Labour Government could condone these agreements. Britain, however, was not alone in 'treating these men in this tyrannous manner'; the 'same beastliness' could also be seen in Belgium, France, and Russia. Stokes therefore, once more, pressed Bellenger to clarify the Government's policy of repatriation. He also reaffirmed his condemnation of not paying POWs properly. 'Why', Stokes asked the House, 'when one gets a fellow into the position of [POW], he should be treated as a slave and paid a bob a day, I fail to understand'. 'Surely', he thought, 'every trade unionist at least on this side of the House will agree [...] that if a man has to do a job of work he should be paid the rate for the job'. The 'fact' was for Stokes, that

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<sup>13</sup> Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, Geneva 27 July 1929, Article 96, Section III, 'Final Provisions'.

the Government were 'making something of the order of £750,000 a week out of slave labour'.

In addition he brought up the fraternisation ban, which he believed required revision. 'Perfectly ridiculous things happen' Stokes recounted a case of a British woman who was fined £1 for gifting a POW a piece of cake. Bellenger's response to the 'onslaught' on the Government was again sympathetic. He noted that the problem was delicate from a legal perspective, and although the Government did not base policy entirely on the Convention, they were entitled to treat POWs as POWs. Bellegner denied that the Government was making a profit and pointed out that Stokes had not provided any 'conclusive evidence' of what would be a 'very immoral' practice. He also outlined that German POWs were being sent back, with 2,000, having been screened as 'anti-Nazis', being sent home this month.<sup>14</sup> Over the course of the year, Stokes sporadically brought up the issue in the Commons, especially when labour was discussed; he often referred to 'traffic in slave labour' or German POWs as 'slaves'.<sup>15</sup>

In May 1946, commenting on the recent Conference of Foreign Ministers in Paris, Harold Nicolson was one of the first to draw attention to the German POWs still held by Britain in his *Spectator* column. The failure to reach an agreement at Paris demonstrated that the Western Powers and the Soviet Union had deeply conflicting ambitions for post-war Europe.<sup>16</sup> Nicolson argued that Britain, although skilfully represented by Bevin, could never match the 'unity of command' backed the 'formidable physical power' of the Soviet Union. However, as the foremost representative of democracy in Europe, Britain could draw upon an 'enormous moral power' which would gain the co-operation of the 'millions' in Europe. The people of Europe were exhausted after the recent war and would, Nicholson feared, 'prefer the certainties even of a harsh totalitarian system'. It was essential that Britain demonstrated a coherent political formula, practising the democratic principles it preached. However, the chief example of the British hypocrisy which played into the hands of the Soviet Union was the absence of a policy of repatriation towards the increasing number of German POWs held in Britain. There was, as the conference had demonstrated, little chance of a peace treaty being signed with Germany any time soon, and the retention of German POWs was therefore in accordance with the Geneva Convention. Although permitted by

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<sup>14</sup> HC Deb 16 July 1946, vol. 425, cols. 1183-90.

<sup>15</sup> HC Deb 30 July, 1946, vol. 426, cols. 763-4; HC Deb 30 July, 1946, vol. 426, cols. 772-3; HC Deb 5 February 1947, vol. 432, cols. 1775-916.

<sup>16</sup> When the conference was resumed, agreement would be eventually reached on the Peace Treaties with other states bar Germany.

international law, indefinitely retaining POWs was a flagrant violation of the 'human' values for which Britain stood, damaging Britain's image and future relations with Germany. Instead of sending German POWs home as friends, they would return as enemies:

It is not to be expected that these men, when they eventually return to Germany, will be convinced or convincing missionaries of the democratic faith. But a little prudence, a slight effort of prevision, the faintest touch of ordinary human compassion, might prevent them from returning as living witnesses against our cause. Such prudence, such foresight, such compassion are not apparent in the policy of His Majesty's Government. No statement has ever been vouchsafed to them as to the date at which they may reasonably expect release.<sup>17</sup>

Treating human beings in this way, Nicholson argued, was 'more than wrong, it [was] blind and stupid'. In July 1946, the *Economist* similarly examined the subject of Britain's 'Peacetime Prisoners', criticising the government's treatment of them. 'Personally and unofficially, they are anything but ill-treated; but their official treatment has been so unsatisfactory that their morale is rapidly falling, their willingness to work is disappearing, and friendliness towards this country is turning into bitterness'. The system of political grading was also pointed towards, 'But the real trouble, from which most lesser grievances derive and which colours the prisoners' whole life with dreary apathy or complete despair, is the absence of any scheme whatever for gradual repatriation'. The *Economist* attacked the arguments for retaining the POWs. It was accepted that under international law the government was not obligated to repatriate German POWs as no peace treaty had been signed.

The effect of such complete uncertainty on men who have been separated for years from their families, about whose condition they have the scantiest information, and with whom they have little communication—apparently even the sending of parcels is prohibited—is not difficult to imagine.<sup>18</sup>

The POWs were certainly 'indispensable to the British economy', without them the forthcoming harvest might well not be gathered. However, the dependence of German POW labour simply highlighted the permanent shortage of domestic labour willing to work in agriculture. Rather than employing forced labour with a nominal wage, the recruitment of foreign free labour was advocated as a better solution. Having criticised

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<sup>17</sup> Harold Nicholson, 'Marginal Comment', *Spectator*, 24 May 1946, p. 10.

<sup>18</sup> 'Peacetime Prisoners', *Economist*, 17 July 1946, pp. 130-1.

the arguments for retaining POWs, the *Economist* called on the government to begin a progressive scheme of repatriation.

If any hopes of peaceful co-operation between Germany and the rest of Europe are to be salvaged, Britain must cease to wait on international action and remedy those injustices within her own power. One step should be taken immediately. Any orderly scheme of repatriation—even one extremely slow and whose start is delayed—would work wonder with the prisoners. It is over a year now since the German war ended. Surely they have the right to know what the Government means to do with them?<sup>19</sup>

On 10 July 1946, the *Manchester Guardian* welcomed the small cigarette ration introduced for German POWs working on British farms. However, far more important to the POWs was an answer to the question: 'When are we likely to be sent home?'. The *Manchester Guardian* argued that 'the facts are plain', the notion of justice and the needs of the British Zone of Germany, necessitated the speedy return of the German POWs. It was considered unjust to retain POWs for so long while their fellow countrymen who had fought for far longer against Britain, having been captured on the Continent towards the end of the war, were already home. While the Nuremberg Court would decide the punishment of Germans who were criminals and had committed atrocities, the German POWs in Britain were ordinary soldiers and retaining them here only hampered the reconstruction of Germany, where men were needed far more.<sup>20</sup> The editorial pointed towards a letter published in the same issue written by a German POW who had spent five years in captivity. The writer drew attention to the attitude of his fellow POWs towards their position. Although anxious to return home, they were instead held in camps, preventing them from participating in reconstruction. As a result, the writer argued, re-education efforts were being wasted. Sending German POWs home to help reconstruct their country politically and economic was far more productive than keeping them in captivity.<sup>21</sup> Another letter appeared a few days later, written by Tom Fernley, a former British POW who had spent time in captivity in Germany. He sympathised with the German POW correspondent, knowing 'only too well the feeling of spiritual degradation at being behind barbed wire', and advocated their return:

Surely the Government should be making up its mind as to the policy to be adopted towards all these able-bodied Germans. Keeping them in England

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<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> 'German Prisoners', *Manchester Guardian*, 10 July 1946, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> Five Years A Prisoner, 'German Prisoners', *Manchester Guardian*, 10 July 1946, p. 4.

indefinitely, even though they may be bombarded by expert teams of social-psychologists, economists, and moralists will not make them good democrats. Here in England are many thousands of them, nearly all in their full vigour, young, restless, good material for tackling the renaissance of Germany. Let them be sent home to add their quota of brains and brawn to the common stock. If Germany must make reparations let these healthy young men contribute their share. Re-education will start at home. I am sure that 99 per cent of former P.O.W.s, if asked what to do with these men, would say at once, "Send them home." Not even those who, when rotting in prison camps, toyed with the idea of revenge would now say anything else. Twelve months after the end of the war we should be told why these Germans are still wondering when, or whether, they will see the Heimat again. It is about time we put them out of their misery.<sup>22</sup>

On 21 August 1946, the *Daily Mail* editorial called on the government to inform German POWs when they might expect to return home, their 'indefinite detention' at that time 'troubling the consciences of many people'. The German POWs, along with their fellow countrymen, were 'guilty of very great crimes against humanity'. Repairing the damage which they were responsible for was not unjust. However, retaining German POWs indefinitely was vindictive, 'contrary to British ideas of justice'. Those convicted of crimes in British courts, no matter how depraved, were told the length of their sentence. The same rule, it was argued, had to be applied to German POWs. Leaving them in this uncertain state was described as 'cruelty'. The argument that a victorious Germany would have treated British men in a similar or even worse way was irrelevant. Two reasons were given by the *Daily Mail* to announce a repatriation policy. First, it would combat the growing despair among the POWs which was affecting their work. Second, given the desire to re-educate German POWs in British ideals, it was imperative that they were not sent home with 'bitterness in their hearts'. The editorial pointed towards an article appearing in the same issue. It reported on the deaths of two German POWs who were held in Britain. 21 year old Heinrich Holze hanged himself at his camp in Guildford. Reporting to the inquest, the coroner suggested that the cause behind his unstable mental state had been the uncertainty of his future:

The continual confinement may have something to do with this unfortunate boy taking this extreme course. It is to be hoped as many of us think, that these German prisoners will be returned to their country with the greatest possible speed.

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<sup>22</sup> Tom Fernley, 'German Prisoners', *Manchester Guardian*, 15 July 1946, . 4.

30 year old Karl Panwitz had also hanged himself at Swanwick camp in Derbyshire. Speaking at the inquest, a friend and fellow POW stated that Panwitz had told him that if he remained in Britain for more than two years he would kill himself.

In August 1946, *The Times* also picked up on the public anxiety regarding the retention of German POWs over a year after the end of the war. Unlike other papers, *The Times* did not press for reparation, suggesting that the subject was a complex one.

The question bristles with complications, and in any discussion of it a number of considerations jostle and conflict. Food production here and in Germany, transport, housing space and employment in Germany, reparations, moral factors, even the legal position—all these demand a hearing.<sup>23</sup>

In early August 1946, Noel-Buxton wrote to *The Times* condemning the delay in repatriating German POWs, fearing that

the delay in repatriation is counteracting the admirable efforts made in the British Zone towards encouraging a "good behaviour" spirit in the Germany of the future. Men who would have gone home keen to work in that direction are coming to doubt our humanity and to despise our claim to Christianity. They hear of relations and friend in great distress, but may neither go home to them nor send them gifts from their own rations or earnings.<sup>24</sup>

Phoebe Lean expected some comment on the recent incentives offered to German POWs to work harder. She thought that the POWs were being treated like children, criticising the incentives offered. 'Anyone having occasion to speak to them informally will subscribe to my suggestion that the only real incentive would be a definite repatriation schedule'.<sup>25</sup> A. S. Crawley also welcomed *The Times* article which drew attention to the retention of German POWs. Having served in the British army for several years, it was clear to him that 'prolonged exile from home is one of the most deadly possible wounds that can be inflicted on the modern citizen soldier, one of the surest sappers of his morale'. For Crawley it was unfair that reparations were being exacted from men who had were in British hands 'through the fortunes of battle'.<sup>26</sup> Miss Hawkes, writing to the *Bristol Mirror* in June 1946, argued that there was 'no valid reason' for detaining them and in doing so 'we are increasing their hatred of us and possibly'—echoing Nicholson's concern—'sowing in their hearts seeds of

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<sup>23</sup> 'German Prisoners', *The Times*, 19 August 1946, p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> Noel-Buxton, 'The German Prisoners', *The Times*, 8 August 1946, p. 5.

<sup>25</sup> Phoebe Lean, 'The German Prisoners', *The Times*, 8 August 1946, p. 5.

<sup>26</sup> A. S. Crawley, 'Prisoners of War', *The Times*, 21 August 1946, p. 5.

Communism'.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Mr Carnegie wrote to *The Times* in August, fearful of future conflict arising from treatment German POWs in this manner. Although having fought against them and 'seen examples of what horrors they could perpetrate', he argued that 'it does no good to go on harping on that line' as it would 'make doubly certain of the whole business occurring again'. The argument that German POWs deserve such treatment was 'not a convincing answer' and was 'surely the attitude [Britain] fought against for six years', retaining them Mr Carnegie thought, was a method that was 'expect[ed] from the victorious Germans'.<sup>28</sup> The *Lancashire Daily Post*, wrote that the prolonged detention of German POWs was 'causing serious concern in many minds', and were certain that this concern would engender 'stronger and more insistent representation', demanding a detailed and definite release plan.<sup>29</sup>

Newsreels broadcast the repatriation issue on screen in early September 1946. Reporting for *British Movietone*, Leslie Mitchell stated that 'the problem of German POWs in this country has been in the forefront of discussion'. Over shots of the POWs bailing hay in a field, chopping and milling wood at a sawmill, and digging trenches for drains on the London-Guilford road, he stated that 'acquired a good reputation as hard workers' and were 'usefully employed in a score of ways'. Yet, Mitchell spoke of the 'strong body of opinion in Britain that they should be repatriated as soon as possible'. Although POWs had been 'properly treated' in terms of their employment and general welfare, the lack of a repatriation scheme was both a practical and moral problem:

There's no question that they've been properly treated here. No, the problem is one of repatriation. It's no use sending them back to Germany until the situation there makes it possible to reduce our liabilities in that country. At the same time, humanity dictates their release as soon as possible. Besides, even if we are short of manpower, we don't want to depend on POW labour.<sup>30</sup>

German POWs were usefully employed on a variety of work, but at the same time their continued captivity—keeping them separated from their families and homes—was cruel. Understanding the 'controversy rage[ing] around them', John Parsons of *British Pathe* went into the streets to gauge attitudes over the need to repatriate POWs for *Pathe's* own opinion poll. When asked his opinion, a vicar thought it was 'a great human question', and that Britain should not rely on forced labour.

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<sup>27</sup> 'Liberate the Prisoners?', *Western Daily Press*, 17 June 1946.

<sup>28</sup> 'German Prisoners', *The Times*, 19 August 1946.

<sup>29</sup> 'War Prisoners', *Lancashire Daily Post*, 21 August 1946.

<sup>30</sup> *British Movietone News*, issue no.900, 2 September 1946, Prisoners of War, 2/6.

This is a considered opinion. It is based on the view that to keep prisoners indefinitely is to keep slave labour. That, the churches say is to do ourselves the things we fought to destroy in our enemies. We know there are other opinions - no less honestly held. These Germans, now looking apathetic and harmless, were once confirmed Nazis. They carried German arms over Europe and Western Russia. They must take their share of responsibility for German crimes.

Two soldiers understood that the POWs helped with the harvest, but Germany also needed men to work on reconstruction. Finally, Parson's asked Mrs Tuffy what she thought. Her response was simple: 'What do I think about the Germans? Well, they're human beings the same as us. And they should be sent back to their country same as our boys should be sent home here'. Although it could be read as slightly xenophobic, Mrs Tuffy clearly wished for normality to be restored. She thought that there were no fundamental difference between Germans and British and that both German POWs and British soldiers occupying Germany should be demobilised and allowed to return home. For *Pathe*, it was for the British public to wrestle with the issue of repatriation, stating that it was 'You, the people of Britain must decide these men's fate' and ending the segment by asking, 'Meantime, the prisoners wait. What have you decided?'.<sup>31</sup>

#### 4. Save Europe Now and the first Memorial, August 1946

The concerns voiced regarding the retention of German POWs would be formally brought before the government by Save Europe Now. Set up as a pressure group in August 1945, SEN developed out of a concern with the situation in post-war Europe and the plight of German civilians.<sup>32</sup> The key personality behind the creation and successes of SEN was the charismatic publisher turned philanthropist Victor Gollancz who chaired the organisation. Between the 1930s to the late 1960s, Gollancz championed many campaigns: solidarity with Spain during the civil war, the campaign for nuclear disarmament, and the abolition of capital punishment. Although an enthusiastic campaigner, his background was rooted in business. His publishing house Victor Gollancz Ltd. revolutionised the industry during the inter-war years, particularly Gollancz's marketing strategies.<sup>33</sup> In turn, he used his lucrative company as a platform for promoting his radical causes. In the 1930s, Gollancz attempted to increase the

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<sup>31</sup> *British Pathe*, issue no. 46/73, 12 September 1946, Pathe's Opinion Poll - Prisoners: "Send Them Back", 8/8.

<sup>32</sup> Peggy Duff, *Left, Left, Left: A personal account of six protest campaigns 1945-65* (London: Allison & Busby, 1971), p. 17.

<sup>33</sup> Shelia Hodges, *Gollancz: The Story of a Publishing House, 1928-78* (London, 1978), pp. 25-49.

circulation of left-wing literature through the Left Book Club.<sup>34</sup> In the post-war world, Gollancz's preoccupation was with the treatment of Germans by the victorious Allied nations. Like his other campaigns, Gollancz's work for defeated Germany was motivated by a 'passion for the moral underdog', and his 'sheer enjoyment of [...] being seen to take up an unpopular cause'.<sup>35</sup> As the end of the war was in sight, Gollancz increasingly focused on the question of morality, redemption, and international understanding. His views were controversial, above all his thought on German collective guilt. Throughout the war, Gollancz never ceased to push an anti-Vansittart message, refusing to believe that Germans were predisposed towards aggression, and were all, in turn, to blame for the cruelties inflicted by Nazism. The liberation of Buchenwald by Allied forces in spring 1945 provided pictures of the most barbaric element of the Nazi regime, reinforcing the argument advocated by Vansittart. For large sections of the British press and public graphic images of concentration camps provided proof that the German people had to be collectively punished for supporting the Nazi regime. However, Gollancz argued, the reverse was true. In his pamphlet, *What Buchenwald Really Means*, Gollancz pointed out that evidence of thousands of Germans suffering under the Nazis highlighted that millions of Germans had been terrorized into silent compliance.<sup>36</sup> Gollancz attacked those who condemned the entire German people, and believed the treatment of Germans stemmed from what he perceived to be the 'new morality' victorious powers.

Writing to his longstanding colleague Kingsley Martin at the *New Statesman*, Gollancz presented a moral critique of post-war Europe, in which the treatment of Germans was pivotal. Gollancz compiled and publicised four letters he wrote to the press criticising the self-interest of victorious nations entitled *The New Morality* in September 1945. As Matthew Frank explains, 'The expulsion of the Sudeten Germans was but one symptom of a malaise which Gollancz believed was spreading throughout Europe, where the 'Nazi spirit' had infected the victors'.<sup>37</sup> Although Britain and its allies had won the war, Gollancz wondered whether they had lost it morally. This critique of post-war morality shaped the initial SEN campaign, which would successfully lobby the Labour government to increase aid to German civilians.

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<sup>34</sup> S. Samual, 'The Left Book Club', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 1 (1966), 65-86.

<sup>35</sup> Edwards, *Gollancz*, p. 401.

<sup>36</sup> Victor Gollancz, *What Buchenwald Really Means* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1945).

<sup>37</sup> Matthew Frank, 'The New Morality — Victor Gollancz, 'Save Europe Now' and the German Refugee Crisis, 1945-46', *Twentieth Century British History*, 17: 2 (2006), 230-256, (p. 237).

By mid-1946 SEN had gained momentum, and in conjunction with organised aid to European civilians, a parallel SEN campaign was established on behalf of German POWs in Britain and the Middle East. The same rhetoric of morality applied, and the indefinite captivity and continued employment of Germans POWs was seen to evidence further the self-interested 'new morality' of victorious government. On 5 July 1946, Gollancz sent a circular to influential public figures and organisations, inviting them to a conference to discuss the issue of German POWs held in Britain and the Middle East. Enclosed with the invitation were two memoranda, which provided information on the situation regarding German POWs. The key issue raised in both was the lack of a coherent repatriation policy and the adverse effect this had on the attitude and morale of the captives. The first document enclosed was a paper on German POWs in British hands, it presented facts on: the numbers of POWs in Britain and the Middle East; the work they performed and their wage; the screening process and results; and, how many POWs had been repatriated so far. It noted the 'growing unrest' of POWs in Britain regarding their repatriation, which had been recently aggravated by the arrival of German POWs from camps in the US and Canada; these POWs believed they were being repatriated, only to be sent to camps in Britain. It stated that the repatriation of German POWs was 'highly unsatisfactory', and required a 'thorough overhaul'.

The second document had been compiled by camp visitors and ministers. It warned that the 'uncertainty about the date of repatriation' was having 'political and moral effects which may be described without exaggeration as disastrous'. Across British camps, POWs believed that the British authorities were deliberately preventing the establishment of a German government in order to retain POWs beyond the end of hostilities. While the stipulations of the 1929 Geneva Convention were not being broken, the POWs maintained that the spirit of it was. As a result, some did not consider themselves POWs, 'but slaves working by duress for the victor'. The POWs reasoned, if reparations were to be paid by physical labour then it should be a cost levied on the whole German people, not just POWs who were in their situation 'by a mere accident'. The British government had informed POWs of the situation in Germany, and argued that conditions were far more favourable in Britain. However, this did not convince them, they found it 'unbearable to reflect that their families may be starving' while they were 'shut away and prevented from doing anything to help'. Camp visitors and ministers had noted a 'rapid change' in the atmosphere of camps from the beginning of the year. Not only was there 'a growing feeling of helplessness' among POWs, they were also 'bitterness and resentment'. In turn, educational activities had been 'paralysed'.

The most worrying effect of the situation was that the 'growing acceptance of the principles of Christianity and democracy' was 'now being reversed', as POWs considered 'indefinite incarceration [...] wholly opposed to those principles'. Many were 'becoming extremist and nihilistic'. 'At best' there was apathy, and 'at worst [...] moral degradation and superstition [...] to a disastrous degree'. In thirteen camps, nine suicides and five attempts had recently occurred. All this amounted to resentment towards the British, which 'jeopardised' future friendships with Germans: the 'movement of sentiment' towards 'friendship' was now 'towards hatred'. Both memoranda sought to persuade the reader that a lack of a definite policy of repatriation was having a severe effect on German POWs. Threatening to make enemies of them and reverse re-education efforts, it was suggested that a repatriation policy should be created and announced to the POWs as soon as possible.

The conference, organised by SEN in conjunction with a group of Labour and Liberal MPs, was at Livingstone Hall in Westminster.<sup>38</sup> Several religious and welfare organisations attended or sent representatives to the meeting, including: personal representatives of the Archbishop of Canterbury and Archbishop of Westminster, Commissioner A. G. Cunningham of the Salvation Army, the British Council of Churches, and the Society of Friends.<sup>39</sup> Discussion was opened by Pastor Forell at 11 am.<sup>40</sup> Forell, a Swedish pastor, was a key figure in the spiritual welfare of POWs. Since 1944, he had visited some two hundred POW camps in England, working for the World Alliance of the YMCA, and visited post-war Germany to co-ordinate POW welfare; Gollancz had met the Swede a year before in Scotland.<sup>41</sup> Both Forell and Professor J. Courvoisier — Dean of the Theological Faculty at Geneva and chairman of the Oecumenical Commission for Chaplains Serving Prisoners of War respectively — 'stressed the appalling moral effects of indefinite captivity'.<sup>42</sup> In addition to the concern over the effects of indefinite detention on POWs, the ensuing discussion raised other difficulties relating to their position. First, 'strong remarks' were made about the employment of German POWs. Labour MP Richard Stokes considered it tantamount to 'slave trading' by the government. He pointed out that while the Exchequer received around £700,000 a week in money paid by employers of POW labour, the POWs

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<sup>38</sup> These included: Richard Stokes, Rhys Davis, Wilfred Roberts, Reginald Thomas Paget, Victor Yates, Harry McGhee, and Thomas Skeffington-Lodge.

<sup>39</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 'Slave Trading by Government: German Prisoner's Pay', 17 July 1946.

<sup>40</sup> MRC, MSS.292/881.423/8, Victor Gollancz (Chairman Save Europe Now), 'Prisoners of War', 5 July 1946.

<sup>41</sup> Sullivan, pp. 74-85.

<sup>42</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 'Slave Trading by Government: German Prisoner's Pay', 17 July 1946.

themselves received only a fraction of the wages for personal expenditure. Second, the 'illogicality' of allowing British soldiers in Germany to fraternize with Germans, but forbidding German POWs in Britain to make friends was criticised; Clarence Tritton spoke of openly defining the ban. Third, Reverend Henry Carter discussed the degeneration of family life in Germany with fathers, husbands, and brothers away. Finally, the need for allowing POWs to send parcels to their families was urged.<sup>43</sup> Reginald Paget argued that it was an infringement on human liberty not to allow POWs to send parcels home. However, the views put forward were not unanimously agreed; a Methodist at the conference warned not to forget what the Germans had done, stressing that POWs required re-educating before they returned. Two refugees believed that Nazi and non-Nazi POWs should be treated differently. Moreover, the British Council of Churches was somewhat dubious of the meeting; Archibald Campbell Craig, the General Secretary, disagreed with the idea of lifting the fraternisation ban. The result of the conference was the adoption of a resolution; it was unanimously agreed that: a letter would be sent to the press, a deputation would wait on, and a Memorial sent to, Prime Minister Attlee. The conscious of a Christian and liberal minded Britain addressed itself to a socialist government.

The first Memorial to the Prime Minister would encourage the government to hasten the speed of repatriation. The Memorial had 875 signatories, including, three Roman Catholic Archbishops, fifty five Anglican Bishops and other Church Leader, 118 MPs, 76 members of the Royal Society, a large number of heads of colleges and schools, as well as prominent figures in public life and the arts.<sup>44</sup> The Memorial began by outlining the serious concern towards the continued captivity of German POWs in Britain. They had been prisoners more than a year since victory; it stated that there was 'a point at which men cannot live without hope'. The Memorial asked the government to: devise a definite policy of repatriation for German POWs held in Britain as soon as possible; and, to announce this scheme to the prisoners without delay, 'since the certainty of release even at a relatively distant date would be less intolerable than the present uncertainty'.<sup>45</sup> In the letter to the press, SEN expanded upon the issue of repatriation of German POWs, outlining the effect their continued captivity was having their moral and views on Britain. Religious figures which had visited POWs in camps had reported 'a very rapid spiritual deterioration'. German prisoners, 'who might have

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<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> 'War Prisoners In Britain', *The Times*, 22 August 1946.

<sup>45</sup> MRC, MSS.292/881.423/8, Victor Gollancz (Chairman Save Europe Now), 'Memorial to the Prime Minister', 21 August 1946.

gone back [...] full of determination to build a more liberal society' were 'becoming hard and cynical'. They believed that British values — liberalism and Christianity — were a façade, and the prisoners' respect for British institutions was being quickly 'replaced by indifference and even hatred'. Overall the 'uncertainty about their fate' was demoralising them; they 'felt that convicts are better off, for at any rate they know when their imprisonment will end'. Tied to the uncertainty of repatriation, other factors added to their dejection: the pay POWs received for their labour; the restrictions governing POWs sending parcels to their relatives; and, the non-fraternisation rule. In regards to the payment of POWs, it was noted that while employers paid the government the full trade union rate for their services, the POWs received only a nominal wage for personal expenditure. While POWs received letters for relatives at home in grave distress, they were prohibited from sending gifts, even their own rations. Finally, the non-fraternisation rule was felt to be turning German POWs into 'pariahs'. It was considered 'an offence to Christian principles', and was taken by the POWs in this way. In the letter to the press, SEN suggested that: prisoners be paid the rate for the job, part of the money perhaps being paid on a weekly basis and part being credited to them upon their release; POWs be permitted to send food parcels to relatives; and, the non-fraternisation rule be relaxed. The question of the treatment of German POWs, however, was not only tied to the welfare of the POWs themselves. It was also a matter of the spiritual and moral welfare of the British people. As the Memorial made clear, the drawing up of a definite scheme of repatriation was for the sake of 'both our common humanity and of the British good name'.<sup>46</sup>

##### 5. Attlee's response, September 1946

The effect of the Memorial was immediate: Attlee ordered an inter-departmental review of the prisoner situation, and a Cabinet discussion was held on 4 September. The 'substantial public support for the memorial' and criticism of the government's behaviour worried the Cabinet.<sup>47</sup> Attlee, keen to placate the public's humanitarian concerns, announced in early October that prisoners would be repatriated at a rate of 15,000 per month: this figure was agreed with the Ministry of Transport, taking into account the estimated capacity of British shipping in 1946 and 1947. However, this was not solely motivated by altruism. It was also considered a politically and economically

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<sup>46</sup> MRC, MSS.292/881.423/8, Victor Gollancz (Chairman Save Europe Now), 'Letter to the Press', dated August 1946.

<sup>47</sup> CAB 128/6/16 CM (46) 79, 4 September 1946.

opportune moment to begin the progressive repatriation of German prisoners. Local elections were soon being held in Germany, and priority was given to the repatriation of 2,000 'white' prisoners—politically screened as anti-Nazi/pro-democrat—so they could participate. Moreover, coal mines in the British occupation zone were near operational. With a shortage of skilled labour in the British zone, prisoners with mining experience were also considered a priority repatriation category. Subject to those priorities, the length of captivity was the main factor which governed which prisoners would be repatriated. 'Black' prisoners—pro-Nazi—would not be repatriated as they represented an ideological threat to the reconstruction of Germany. Regarding a definite date by which all prisoners might expect to return home, Attlee did not consider it expedient to announce one. The Ministry of Agriculture had made it clear that prisoner labour would be required for the 1947 harvest: the Joint Parliamentary Secretary to the MAF was 'anxious' to point the implications of repatriation on the agricultural workforce out in his report.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, departmental demands for prisoner labour showed no tendency of diminishing in 1947 and 1948: it was estimated that, after the seasonal fall in demand over the 1946 winter, 433,000 would be required in October 1947. POWs were employed in industries which had found it difficult to attract labour. Any policy of repatriation must not risk the 1947 harvest, a point which the MAG agreed. Yet, the MOL recognised the recent fall in POW productivity was likely to intensify unless prisoners were given the prospect of release.<sup>49</sup> POWs had to be repatriated, but contingency plans in turn had to be implemented to recruit labour to replace POWs. The Cabinet agreed that while prisoner labour was to be progressively reduced and replaced by the recruitment of displaced persons from Europe and demobilised Polish servicemen, and Attlee conceded that prisoners would have to be retained during 1947, and perhaps 1948. At the same time the government allowed POWs to send parcels to their families through SEN agencies. Yet, on fraternisation the response was slow; it would not be discussed until November. Eventually, however, the fraternisation ban was lifted on 12 December. Moreover, no statement was made over the working conditions of POWs. The implementation of a repatriation scheme for German prisoners of war in October 1946 was therefore a compromise between public opinion anxious

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<sup>48</sup> CAB 129/12/32 CP (46) 332, Repatriation of German Prisoners of War from the United Kingdom, Memorandum by the Joint Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, 2 September 1946.

<sup>49</sup> CAB 129/12/25 CP (46) 325, Repatriation of German Prisoners from the United Kingdom, Memorandum by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Labour and National Service, 29 August 1946.

regarding the fate of German prisoners and politico-economic considerations. However, while the scheme was welcomed in the press, it was not considered to go far enough.

#### 6. Protests continue, March 1947 to August 1947

While the scheme was applauded, criticism of the government continued. The lack of a fixed date when the repatriation process would be completed left German POWs in doubt of when they would return home. Writing to the *Spectator* in December 1946, Dorothy Buxton, founding member of Save the Children, asserted that the announcement of a repatriation scheme was merely a 'concession to the uneasiness of a public disturbed by the sight of "slave labour" in our land of freedom—a sad incongruity in the headquarters of democracy [...]'. The hypocrisy of lecturing the prisoners in democracy while continuing to exploit them was endangering future relations between Britain and Germany.<sup>50</sup>

Stokes again raised the subject on 24 March 1947. Researching into the legality of retaining these POWs, Stokes had been passed from one Ministry to the next, all had provided, 'increasingly indefinite and confusing replies'. He contended that the Nuremberg Trials were based on the recognition of the Control Commission for Germany being the legal Government of that country. In turn, the Commission had to be recognised as the legal government in relation to article 75 of the Geneva Convention for the purposes of repatriating POWs. 'The situation is that', Stokes argued,

the Control Commission is the legal Government of Germany, and we refuse to enter into negotiations with it, we are nowhere. I would ask, where are we? Are we at war with ourselves? I suggest that it will mean that His Majesty's Address from the Throne next autumn may well read: 'My relations with Foreign Powers continue friendly except with the Control Commission for Germany.' I wish I could get some definite answer [...].<sup>51</sup>

Here, as before, Stokes continued to attack the government's adherence to the Geneva Convention; suggesting that if the Control Commission was the legal government of Germany then it was the British government's duty to negotiate the repatriation of POWs, if it was not, then, the Nuremberg Trials were defunct. In conjunction with the legal aspect of the problem Stokes raised the question of morality in keeping POWs detained. The suffering of German families, exacerbated by the influx of refugees, was made worse as husbands, fathers, and sons were kept from them. Moreover,

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<sup>50</sup> Dorothy F. Buxton, 'Friends of Enemies?', *Spectator*, 20 December 1946, p. 7.

<sup>51</sup> HC Deb 24 March 1947, vol. 435, cols. 1018-43.

marriageable German women outnumbered men some six to one. On the question of labour, Stokes believed that if slave labour was to be extracted from defeated enemies it should be 'levied on the nation as a whole' not just those 'who accidentally found themselves [POWs] when hostiles ceased'. Stokes again pointed towards the agreements at Yalta, were something, 'pretty fishy' had gone on. While the government had denied that it would use Germans as slaves, Molotov had 'spilled the beans' recently at a meeting of Foreign Secretaries in Moscow; using German labour as reparations had been agreed, and it was exactly what the Belgian, French, and British governments were doing. Stokes returned to the issue of paying POWs 'properly', and considered it 'an abomination' that they were paid 6d. for a full days labour. Treating German POWs in this manner would turn them into enemies of Britain, what the government should be attempting to do, in Stokes view, was to 'make them good ambassadors', which was 'honest-to-goodness common sense'. While the government had recently improved their conditions — allowing them to visit British homes at Christmas and 'stray' from the confines of the camp — there was much more to be done; particularly improving their wages. Stokes also criticised the lack of clarity regarding POWs communicating with MPs, while there were allowed, they were not told they could. In addition, the method of screening German POWs was 'ridiculous'. Stokes spoke of his experience at a camp in East Anglia, where a German POW had been asked personal questions relating to his sexuality. This was hardly the sort of question that needed to be asked in his view. Stokes concluded his speech by assuring Bellenger that he would continue to press the subject of repatriation until the government clearly defined its policy. As the year wore on he continued to press the government on paying POWs the full rate for their services; especially those still in Egypt.<sup>52</sup>

Stokes restated his argument in March 1947, that the government had a moral obligation to repatriate all prisoners without delay.<sup>53</sup> As well as individuals, several organisations continued to protest against the government's retention of German prisoners. In May 1947, a conference was organised at Kingsway Hall in London bringing together Methodists and Quakers as well as The Prisoner of War Aid Society, run by Mary Foss. The conference passed a resolution appealing for the Government to return German prisoners without further delay.<sup>54</sup> In June 1947, the national administrative council of the Independent Labour Party passed a resolution urging the

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<sup>52</sup> HC Deb 20 May 1947, vol. 437, col. 2169; HC Deb 28 October 1947, vol. 443, cols. 681-2; HC Deb 4 November 1947, vol. 443, cols. 1518-9.

<sup>53</sup> HC Deb 24 March 1947, vol. 435 cols. 1018-43.

<sup>54</sup> 'Londoners' Protest For P.O.W.s', *Catholic Herald*, 16 May 1947, p. 5

immediate repatriation of all German prisoners. The resolution stated: 'That this present Government above all others, should tolerate the kind of treatment these men are receiving is a denial of the moral principles inherent in the Socialist faith on which it raised itself to power'.<sup>55</sup>

Gollancz and SEN were similarly dissatisfied and organised another Memorial to increase the speed of repatriation. In July 1947, another Memorial was circulated to the Prime Minister, which outlined the continued concern over repatriation and the spiritual welfare of both POWs and the British public. SEN believed that there was a 'great deal of evidence that the public' was 'ready, and the more responsible part of it painfully anxious, for another step forward'. It was noted that there had been no increase in the number of German POWs repatriated since September 1946—when the government had fixed it at 15,000 per month, with an additional 500 per month for compassionate cases. While this was welcomed, there were, as of 1 June 1947, still 282,431 prisoners in this country and 81,988 in the Middle East — more than two years after the end of the war with Germany. Moreover, the recent negotiations in Moscow at the Council of Foreign Ministers were not considered to have solved the issue.

Our anxiety has been increased by the agreement reached recently at Moscow, providing that the repatriation of prisoners from all countries should be completed by the end of 1948. While we are grateful to Mr. Bevin for securing even this agreement, we contemplate with shame the fact that, unless this decision is revised, there will still be a considerable number of prisoners in this country more than three years after the termination of the war.<sup>56</sup>

SEN did not let up the pressure on the government's repatriation policy. Furthermore, a new rhetorical device was introduced to heighten the importance of the issue regarding the employment of POWs in Britain. Their continued employment was considered akin to slavery. Despite, 'the recent most welcome concession, the labour of these prisoners', the Memorial read, 'is still in effect slave labour'. A particular point was the payment of POWs, the Memorial continued, 'we find it impossible to be easy in our minds when we note the immense discrepancy between the rate at which they on the one hand, and free Englishmen on the other, are paid for precisely the same services'. As in 1946, SEN also reiterated the issue of German families being separated from their husbands and fathers.

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<sup>55</sup> "'Send The Germans Home"', *Manchester Guardian*, 21 June 1947, p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> MSS.292/881.423/8, Victor Gollancz (Chairman Save Europe Now), 'Memorial to the Prime Minister', July 1947.

In terms of the humanity for which we sacrificed so many lives and so much treasure, the importance of repatriation cannot be exaggerated. Every day despairing letters reach this country from German women, who, amidst the terrible conditions now prevailing in their country, are deprived of the support, physical and spiritual, of a husband, a father, or a son. When women write to say that they can bear everything, even semi-starvation, expect the continued absence of their men, we cannot but feel that we are committing an offence wholly unworthy of "our customs and our nature".<sup>57</sup>

The Memorial begged the Prime Minister to again increase the speed of repatriation; at least announcing the date for the last POW to leave Britain as December 1948. An immediate announcement of this effect would, the Memorial read, 'do something to mitigate the cynicism and despair now so prevalent throughout Germany, and thus to prevent a further collapse of the values in which, without distinction of party or creed, all Englishmen presumably believe'. In regards to the policies of other countries, SEN believed that if Bevin failed to secure an agreement regarding the release of other POWs, 'that should not deter us from acting, so far as our own prisoners are concerned, in accordance with the principles which we hold in trust, and which, whatever others may do, we at least cannot lightly betray'.<sup>58</sup>

In August 1947, Lindon Laing, news editor of the *Daily Mail*, accused his readers: 'You are now charged with conspiracy to murder'. The article introduced readers to Werner X, a German POW acquaintance of Laing who was 'ready to go home and destroy his wife and his two children, and then himself'.<sup>59</sup> Laing asked, 'How do you plead, reader? Guilty or Not Guilty?' In response to Laing's accusation, *Daily Mail* journalist Guy Ramsey pleaded 'Not Guilty'.

We, the British people, are responsible for neither for his threats, the hysteria which produced them, nor the fulfilment of those threats if ever they be fulfilled. We are responsible not even for his family's shortage of food, fuel, or film. We are not even responsible for his retention in Britain. For that *he*—in the past—is responsible; not we.<sup>60</sup>

Antony Hunter pleaded 'guilty' to Laing's charge. 'If you could understand the tragedy played out in the war prisoner's brain, you too would plead guilty on the count of mental murder. In that I have not spoken, I stand convicted now'.<sup>61</sup> The *Daily Mail* received '76

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<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Lindon Laing, 'The PoW said: 'It is better to die'', *Daily Mail*, 20 August 1947, p. 2.

<sup>60</sup> Guy Ramsey, 'Not Guilty', *Daily Mail*, 21 August 1947, p. 2.

<sup>61</sup> Anthony Hunter, "If you prick us, do we not bleed?", *Daily Mail*, 26 August 1947, p. 2.

forcefully expressed opinions' regarding Laing's accusation; *The total score: Guilty*, 24; *Not Guilty*, 52'.<sup>62</sup>

#### 7. The completion of repatriation, September 1947 to June 1948

In September 1946, Attlee and his Cabinet were aware that public opinion had to be placated. A year later, his response to the second SEN Memorial was sensitive to the position of the POWs still held in Britain but dismissive of any ideas in increasing the rate of repatriation at that time. In a letter to Gollancz, published in the press, Attlee stated: 'I sympathise with the human considerations which are put forward in the Memorial, but I cannot share the view that the retention of German prisoners-of-war is inequitable'. He maintained that it fair that Germany compensated for 'the loss and destruction which German aggression had brought on so many countries of Europe'. One of the 'only practical means' by which Germany could do this was through POW labour. The work performed by German POWs was of significant importance, no more so than in agriculture. Therefore, in his opinion, the continued employment of German POWs was a fair method to extract reparations from Germany. Furthermore, he argued that POWs were being treated decently. Not only were their 'material conditions [...] entirely adequate', POWs were given 'all reasonable freedom and amenities'. Not only were POWs being treated acceptably by the British government, any change to the repatriation programme—which would be completed by the end of 1948 at the latest—would only serve to complicate and even hold up the return of German POWs.<sup>63</sup> Attlee's response outlined the practicalities of repatriation, emphasising that the POWs were required to work—this not being unjust given that Germany had caused the war—and that plans were already in place to ensure they returned home. Although Attlee did not rule out the hastening of repatriation after the completion of the 1947 harvest, this was not considered a satisfactory response to the SEN Memorial.

This explanation did not convince. The Bishop of Sheffield thought retaining such a large number of POWs two years after the end of the war was 'morally indefensible and could not be politically wise'.<sup>64</sup> Published in *Germany Revisited*, Gollancz's reply was critical. He considered Attlee's letter 'a profoundly disturbing document' as it admitted that German POWs were being retained for 'the selfish needs of our own economy'. For Gollancz, the continued use of POW was unfair:

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<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> 'Prisoner-Of-War Repatriation', *The Times*, 9 September 1947, p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> 'War Prisoners', *The Times*, 18 October 1947, p. 6.

Mr. Attlee excuses our action by saying that prisoner-of-war labour is one of the only practical means by which "Germany" can make any practical reparation for the havoc she has wrought in so many parts of Europe. The question of reparation is an admittedly difficult one. For my own part I deprecate forced reparation of any kind: the only reparation worth having - and, incidentally, the only reparation which a conquered country, treated with justice and mercy by its conqueror, willingly makes out of its revived prosperity. It is also, if Mr. Attlee will forgive me for saying so, nonsense to suggest that little reparation has been, is being, or will be made except by the labour of these prisoners. Has he forgotten, for instance, the German industrial processes and trade secrets which have been forcibly acquired under the "T-force" procedure, or the factories which have been or are being dismantled, or the many hundreds of others the imminent dismantling of which may have been announced before this pamphlet appears? If Mr. Attlee has forgotten these things, I can assure him that no German has. But even on Mr. Attlee's own ground, shaky as it is, how can our action be defended? If "Germany" has sinned, then "Germany", on the current theory which is not mine, must be forced to make reparation. You cannot have it both ways: you cannot make use of the collective theory when it suits you, and abandon it when it does not. I say nothing of mercy: but the forced retention of these men sins lamentably against an earlier and more commonly regarded law, the law of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. How, as a matter of the most primitive justice, can it be right specially to penalize a man for the wholly irrelevant reason that we happened to capture him? Mr. Attlee knows the answer every bit as well as I do: but there is something in the modern political climate - is this Hitler's victory? - that corrupts a man even as good as he.<sup>65</sup>

In his letter, Gollancz argued that if Germany as a collective was to pay for the war then it was unfair to extract reparations through German POW labour alone. The *Spectator* similarly thought Attlee's argument was flawed:

The Prime Minister's statement on the repatriation of German prisoners rests on legality, rather than equity, and indeed on the stretching of legality to something very near dishonesty. It is true that under the Geneva Convention we are entitled to hold prisoners of war until a treaty of peace is signed, but no one ever contemplated, when that convention was drafted, that more than two years after the end of a war the treaty of peace would not even be in sight. Mr. Attlee's claim that the retention of these prisoners, as one of the only ways in which Germany can make reparation for the damage she has caused, is not inequitable will not stand examination. Even assuming that it is equitable to impose this form of reparation unilaterally, in the absence of any treaty provision regarding it, it is obviously inequitable to the point of inhumanity to hold in this country month after month and year after year particular individuals whom the accident of capture befell. Why should they bear vicariously for the German nation the whole burden of this form of reparation? If reparation through forced labour can be legitimately insisted on—and there is something to be said for the contention that it can—then at least let the Germans now here go home and others be brought over to take their place. But forced labour of any kind is repugnant to British ideas. The right course is to let Germans, here or

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<sup>65</sup> Victor Gollancz, *Germany Revisited* (Victor Gollancz: London, 1947), p. 38.

in Germany, work in Britain, like other foreigners, as volunteers at proper rates of pay.<sup>66</sup>

Despite the unsuccessful second Memorial, repatriation was increased in December 1947 from 15,000 to 20,000 per month, and, on 12 July 1948, the repatriation of German POWs was completed.<sup>67</sup>

## 8. Conclusions

In tandem with the fraternisation ban, the issue of when German POWs might expect to be repatriated was discussed in newspapers and newsreels from early 1946. The media noted that Britain was still upholding international law, in that it was permitted to retain POWs until a peace treaty was signed. That Britain was not technically breaking the 1929 Geneva Convention was not tested. Retaining POWs for so long after the war, however, was not considered justified no matter what the law stated. Newspapers and newsreels continued, as ever, to depict the contentedness of POWs with their surroundings in terms of accommodation and subsistence. It was not this that was the issue. Rather, it was a matter of time. While all material comforts were provided POWs, it was clear that few could stand to live in captivity for this length of time.

Ex-POWs who had been in German hands shared their views and explained that the separation from home and the routine of captivity was difficult to face. In doing so they were highly critical of the lack of any announcement regarding the expected release of German POWs. As with the fraternisation ban, others feared that indefinitely detaining POWs served only to turn them against Britain. Philanthropic and religious organisations, journalists and individuals writing in the columns and letters to national and regional newspapers, and liberal and labour MPs, lobbied the post-war Labour government to draw up a scheme of repatriation for German POWs still held in Britain a year after the end of the war, as their indefinite retention and continued employment was considered antithetical to the values for which Britain had fought for in the recent war. Among the voices which were critical of the government's treatment of German POWs, Save Europe Now led by Victor Gollancz was the most influential, formally presenting public anxiety direct to Attlee in two petitions. The presentation of the first memorial in August 1946 marks a significant shift in public opinion towards German POWs. In the wake of the liberation of Belsen and the repatriation of half-starved British POWs from German camps, attitudes towards German POWs in Britain were at

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<sup>66</sup> 'Indefinite Durance', *Spectator*, 12 September 1947, p. 2.

<sup>67</sup> HC Deb 27 October 1947, vol. 443 cols. 494-5; HC Deb 13 July 1948, vol. 453 cols. 996-7.

their lowest ebb; their employment was called for as a legitimate form of reparations for the war which they had caused. In less than a year, voices critical of the indefinite retention of German POWs were heard in press and parliament, leading to SEN's first petition. Public opinion had swung from calls for reparation to repatriation.

The exploitation of subjugated people as slave labour was a method characteristically ascribed totalitarian regimes, an abhorrent sight in democracies such as Britain. Interning defeated soldiers indefinitely and forcing them to work as slaves was expected of a victorious Nazi enemy not Britain who was supposedly a liberator of Europe and defender of democracy and freedom. There was an evident fear, expressed by Gollancz and in the Memorials sent Attlee, that the British had been infected by the evil they had sought to defeat, adopting a fascistic outlook toward their captured POWs. Having gone to war to fight fascism, it seemed that Britain was now adopting the methods of the enemy, undermining the image of Britain as a representative of democracy. The use of slave labour was also considered a betrayal of the socialistic values of the Labour party, which, during the 1930s, had endeavoured to highlight the oppression of the concentration camps.

The values invested in the treatment of POWs during the war—fair-play in particular—continued to be after 1945. In fact, it may be argued that they were given increased importance. Certainly, the POWs issue became far more vexing in the post-war years, particular in regards to repatriation. The hypocrisy of preaches the virtues of democracy, championing human rights—according to Stokes—and having liberated Europe only to intern human being for an indefinite amount of time while making them work was considered antithetical to the values for which Britain had fought the war.

## Chapter 7: Concluding remarks

### 1. The contribution to knowledge

This thesis has explored attitudes expressed towards the treatment of German POWs held in Britain between the outbreak of war in 1939 and the completion of repatriation in 1948. Newspaper and newsreel content was examined in order to understand how the captivity of German POWs was represented to the British public. The events covered by the media shaped the structure of the thesis. Letters to the editor, Mass-Observation material and other sources also provided insight, if fragmentary, into the reactions of the public to coverage of issues regarding the treatment of POWs in Britain, and at relevant times Germany. The focus of this thesis was not actual events, but rather how representation of them in the media. Undoubtedly the material which was published during the war was censored. Nonetheless, whether the representations of POW treatment were accurate or not did not deduct from their power to evoke notions of British national identity. The purpose of this thesis was not to interrogate the 'truth' behind the treatment of POWs but to demonstrate the power of it as a representational force. Charting the ebb and flow of attitudes circulating British society towards German POWs and their treatment during and after the Second World War, this thesis investigated how this particular subject intersected with wider debates taking place in wartime and post-war Britain. The specific contribution to knowledge this thesis has made is by establishing the link between the treatment of enemy POWs and notions of national identity in Britain between 1939 and 1948. In other words, through the treatment of German POWs, Britain could practically demonstrate the values for which it stood, aiding the construction of national identity in war and peacetime. The behaviour towards captured enemy servicemen was emblematic of characteristics considered central to Britishness. The findings of this thesis therefore substantiate Konwer's suggestion that the treatment of POWs is a valuable lens through which to investigate the self-image of the captor, the identity ascribed the captive, and the aim and ambitions of the captor in wartime.

The Second World War was a highpoint of expressions of British national identity; the values considered central to Britishness were invested in the treatment of German POWs. This relationship between the treatment of enemy captives and expressions of national identity has been uncovered in other contexts elsewhere. For instance, David Dzurec argues that narratives of the callous treatment of POWs in

British charge during the American Revolution aided the construction of a patriot identity amongst the revolutionaries. Published accounts of British POW abuse helped define the American's cause to overthrow their corrupt colonial masters.<sup>1</sup> This argument, that there was relationship between conceptions of national identity and the treatment of captured and incarcerated enemies, is further highlighted in studies which examine civilian internment in Britain during the Second World War.

Civilian and military internment has rarely been studied in unison due to the chronological distance between the two episodes.<sup>2</sup> At the highpoint of internment in April-June 1940, there were few German POWs held in Britain. By August that year, after public and parliamentary pressure, policy was reviewed and the first releases of internees began. By the time of Brune's declaration at the York Convocation, the internment episode of spring 1940 was largely forgotten, with many of the internees having served on the Home Front or in the armed forces. On the one hand, the refugees, Kushner and Cesarani suggest, 'did not want to dwell on the episode'. On the other, the reactionary measure sat awkwardly with the image of Britain standing alone in 1940, fighting 'for democracy and freedom against totalitarianism'.<sup>3</sup> Yet, the statements above indicate there was a clear degree of overlap in the socio-political and cultural themes aired in discussion of both civilian and military internment, centring on how the treatment of captives reflected, or rather did not reflect, the British values. In regards to civilian internment in 1940, Kushner argues that the 'ideological factors have not received sufficient attention, specifically the debate about Englishness'.<sup>4</sup> As the titles of studies of the subject indicate—"*Totally Un-English, A Bespattered Page?, In the Highest Degree Odious*"—examinations of the internment episode have questioned the British liberal self-image.<sup>5</sup>

Calling for a review of civilian internment policy on 10 July 1940, Eleanor Rathbone, the independent MP and long-term campaigner for women's rights, stated in parliament that: 'This is a question which affects our prestige as a nation, and we do not

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<sup>1</sup> David Dzurec, 'Prisoners of War and American Self-Image during the American Revolution', *War in History*, 20:4 (2013), pp. 430-51.

<sup>2</sup> Panayi has looked at both civilian and military captives held in Britain during the First World War, see Panayi, *Prisoners*.

<sup>3</sup> Tony Kushner and David Cesarani, 'Alien Internment in Britain during the Twentieth Century: An Introduction', in *Internment*, ed. by Kushner and Cesarani, pp. 1-11, here 5-6, 7-8.

<sup>4</sup> Tony Kushner, 'Clubland, Cricket Tests and Alien Internment, 1939-40', in *Internment*, ed. by Cesarani and Kushner, pp. 79-101, p. 79.

<sup>5</sup> "*Totally Un-English*", ed. by Dove; Stent, *A Bespattered Page?*; Simpson, *Highest Degree Odious*.

want to let it go out that our land is a land of oppression and not a land of the free'.<sup>6</sup> On the same day, Major Victor Cazalet, another fervent opponent of internment, declared it to be 'a totally un-English attitude to adopt towards a problem of this kind'.<sup>7</sup> Rathbone and Cazalet opposed the indiscriminate mass imprisonment of enemy aliens as it was antithetical to British values and tarnished the tolerant image of the nation.<sup>8</sup> Just over seven years later, the Archdeacon of Chester, The Venerable R. V. H. Burne, asserted at the full synod of York Convocation that 'It is a blot on our fair name to keep these men, and it is contrary to the instincts of the ordinary Englishmen's idea of fair play'.<sup>9</sup> In October 1947, Burne was not speaking in relation to civilian internees but German POWs. Like Rathbone and Cazalet, Burne drew upon national ideals in his criticism of the treatment of these captives. Although purely speculative, had that not died before the July 1946 SEN conference, Rathbone and Cazalet may well have joined Stokes and Gollancz in the campaign to repatriate German POWs.<sup>10</sup> Notwithstanding the differences between the two categories of captives, the rhetorical overlap in discussions and criticism of the internment of enemy aliens in the summer of 1940 and the retention of German POWs after 1945. This thesis has demonstrated if the civilian internment issue was a matter of national identity, so too was the treatment of German POWs held in Britain between 1939 and 1948, which suggests a deep cultural abhorrence towards treating enemy internees, be they civilian or military, unjustly or cruelly.

The first objective of this thesis was to investigate how the media represented the captivity of German POWs in Britain and to examine the responses of the British public to this representation. Through an analysis of newspaper and newsreel content this thesis has provided a robust outline of what the average Briton read and viewed in relation to the German POWs held in their country as well as an indication of reactions to reportage of their treatment.

Chapters two and three concentrated on the wartime period, with the capture of substantial numbers of German POWs during and after the Normandy invasion being a

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<sup>6</sup> HC Deb, 10 July 1940, vol. 362, col. 1220. On her opposition to civilian internment see, Susan Pederson, *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience* (London: Yale University Press, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> HC Deb, 10 July 1940, vol. 263, cols. 1208-306.

<sup>8</sup> On the criticism of internment policy and the response of the government see, Louise Burtleson, 'The State, Internment and Public Criticism in the Second World War', in *The Internment of Aliens in Twentieth Century Britain*, ed. by Tony Kushner and David Cesarani, (London: Frank Cass, 1993), pp. 102-124.

<sup>9</sup> 'Retaining P.o.W.s "A Blot On Our Fair Name"', *Derby Evening Telegraph*, 17 October 1947, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> Cazalet died in July 1942, Rathbone in January 1946.

logical point of departure between the 1939-42 and 1944-45 periods. Sporadically, the fate of POWs in Britain and Germany was considered a newsworthy subject. As this thesis has shown, several incidents brought the treatment of POWs was reported in newspapers and newsreels from the outbreak of war in September 1939 to the unconditional surrender of Germany in May 1945. Throughout this period news coverage underlined that Britain dealt with enemy POWs correctly, at certain time going above and beyond the standard of treatment set in international law. Certainly, on occasion, the surprise among German POWs at the standard of treatment afforded them was highlighted. Having assessed wartime reportage, the thesis then moved onto the post-war period in chapters four, five, and six. Here it proved logical to assess attitudes in relation to the three main themes regarding the captivity of German POWs: their employment; the regulations governing their contact with the British public; and the subject of their repatriation. These issues were interrelated. While it was by and large accepted that German POWs were needed for labour, their continued post-war captivity raised questions of how much freedom they should be allowed and when they might expect to return home. While the media championed the treatment of German POWs during the war, and continued to emphasise their material and physical wellbeing, the government's handling of them post-war was increasingly criticised.

Through a reading of letters to the editor and M-O material, this thesis has revealed that individuals questioned how the authorities reacted to events and handled POWs. It is clear they the British public were not easily swayed by what they believed to be propaganda. They compared the position of the POWs—their rations and accommodation in particular—to their own. What was emphasised as the fair treatment of enemy POWs, highlighting the sportsmanship of the British nation in wartime, was conversely deemed unfair towards other groups such as refugees, evacuees, and British servicemen. In other words, it was thought highly unfair when the standard of treatment afforded the enemy POW exceeded that of the average Briton. For example, signed 'Well Stung', a correspondent from Fife registered their annoyance over the two ounces of cigarettes German POWs received per week. 'Here am I with 54s a week, 10s of which goes to pay the rent, and I am taxed to supply Germans of all people with a luxury I can't afford myself. It's a great war this for the enemy'.<sup>11</sup> While the German POW was granted a tobacco allowance, the upset writer could not find the money in their weekly wage to buy it themselves. In the case of rationing of food and sundry items, as the letter points out above, it was thought that the German POWs were, in

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<sup>11</sup> Well Stung, 'Cigarettes for German Prisoners', *Dundee Courier*, 28 March 1941, p. 4.

some cases, better off than British citizens. In discussions of the treatment of POWs such (in)justice was a recurring theme. That it was disputed whether or not the treatment of enemy POWs was fair/unfair only strengthens the argument that it was a central notion in popular contemplations towards the POW issue. In other words, the difference of opinion over whether or not the treatment of enemy POWs was fair indicates that it was crucial to the debate.

The British authorities as well as individuals were criticised for being too compassionate towards the captives. Yet, it is important to note that, generally those who disparaged the leniency would also indicate that they were not in favour of any sort of brutality or physical harm towards POWs. There were instances, however, when more punitive treatment was implied. The argument that German POWs should be given a taste of their own medicine was put forward. These attitudes intensified towards the end of the war. It can be suggested that after the shocking revelations following the liberation of Belsen there was a short period of cultural forgetfulness when it came to attitudes towards German POWs. In light of the shocking news of concentration camps and the death marches British POWs were forced to endure, the fate of German POWs in Britain seemed unimportant. Overtime, the significance of treating enemy POWs correctly was recalled.

Some noted that they were uncomfortable with being told to 'love thine enemy'. As noted by Matthew Sullivan there was a great 'Christian response' towards POWs in post-war Britain. Clergymen and religious organisations, such as the Quakers, actively encouraged the reaching out to POWs. Letters analysed in this thesis has shown that individuals were at times offended by such calls. Although they were Christian, they reserved their right to hate Germans and detest the inhuman acts Germany had committed during the war(s). This attitude is exemplified in Reverend H. G. Green's donation to the appeal of his counterpart, J. C. Chamberlain, for comforts on behalf of ailing German POWs (see, chapter two).

This thesis has demonstrated that the period before 1944 is worthy of consideration. The concern expressed over the treatment of German POWs did not suddenly materialise in post-war Britain. Rather, as this thesis has indicated, POWs were a cause of angst from September 1939. It is clear, however, that the significance of the issue was amplified post-45. Practically, there were far more German POWs in Britain and therefore the issue of their welfare was accordingly enlarged. In contrast to the few thousand of POWs placed in secluded areas, by 1946 there were hundreds of thousands camped at sites stretching the length and breadth of the UK.

While the government underscored that they were performing useful work, individuals wrote of workshy groups of German POWs employed in their local area. The enduring stereotypes of the lazy Italian and hardworking German supported by quantitative analysis are accurate generalisations, but accounts contrary to this view are not difficult to find. Again, the suggestion was that the government was too soft towards the ex-enemy. The POWs, it was argued, should be made to work. Although the government was careful to assuage their concerns—introducing safeguards to protect domestic labour from being displaced—the trade union movement, particularly the NUAW, were anxious over the employment of POWs.

During the war, the media emphasised that German POWs were treated fairly. Their treatment was criticised when it was considered excessively lenient or if it was revealed that the captives were indulged. The opulent surroundings afforded captives at Grizedale Hall were thought to exceed what was called for. Rather than POWs, the German captives were treated as holidaymakers. So then, there was an apparent limit to what was considered fair. Expressing themselves in letters to the editor, individuals certainly considered this unfair.

This thesis suggests that post-war British policy towards German POWs lagged doggedly behind public opinion in regards to fraternisation and repatriation. The authorities wished to minimise contact between public and POWs for several reasons—maintaining discipline and safeguarding POWs from hostility, in particular—while repatriating the Germans was not an immediate priority for the newly elected Attlee administration. As chapters five and six suggest, overtime the restrictions governing the freedoms of German POWs and their indefinite captivity were considered needlessly petty and overly punitive.

The second objective of this thesis was the determine the extent to which the treatment of POWs encouraged an awareness of cultural difference between Britain and the German enemy. Reportage of the *Altmark* incident, the mooted exchange of POWs, the Shackling Crisis, and the Stalag Luft III executions emphasised the inherent fairness, chivalry, and honesty of the British in contrast to the bigotry, incivility, and treachery of the German enemy when dealing with POWs in their care. The revelation of Belsen and stories of forced marches told by liberated British POWs stressed the inherent cruelty of the average German. In so doing, the reporting of these events accentuated the cultural differences between Britain and Germany and signified the values which the British people were fighting to defend.

The third objective of this thesis was to identify the values invested in the treatment of POWs and whether or not the British treatment of POWs was thought to reflect the values for which the nation stood. This thesis suggest that the reason why the treatment of POWs was such a vexing and newsworthy issue was due to its power to reflect the values self-ascribed the captor and projected on the captive. This thesis has made visible that cultural significance was invested in the treatment of captured enemies. Having unpicked the meaning attached to the handling of enemy captives, this thesis suggests four principle values which continually reoccurred in debates over their treatment: fairness, democracy, justice, and a Christian ethic. In all the issues discussed in regarding the treatment of POWs, this thesis suggests that fair-play was explicit or implicit in them. With the arrival of German POWs in September 1939, newspapers and newsreels emphasised that Britain treated them in accordance with the stipulations of the 1929 Geneva Convention. They were provided decent food, leisure time, and comfortable accommodation. In so doing, the inherent sportsmanship of the British was clearly demonstrated. At the same time, individuals who viewed the German people as undeserving of such treatment. It was deemed far too lenient a way to the treat Germans who had proved to be a barbaric people, and unfair that while German POWs were provided comforts, British soldiers manning defences and refugees were not given the same consideration. While there was disagreement over the standard of treatment, both views emphasised the notion of fair play. In October 1942, while it was somewhat accepted that there was little recourse for Churchill and the government, the news that German POWs had been manacled in response to Germany do so caused discomfort. The POWs, whatever their character, were not to blame for Hitler's decision and therefore it was unfair to mete out reprisal on them. There was a similar feeling towards the bombing of German civilians in late 1942. In regards to employment, it was considered unfair that German POWs were not remunerated for their work, while the trade union movement considered their availability at a cheaper rate an unfair advantage to employers who preferred to hire them over British workers. In post-war Britain, it was considered unfair to retrain POWs and keep them locked up in camps, unable to participate in normal activities and relations. Men as well as women calling for the right to marry German POWs pointed out the gendered inequality whereby British men could marry German women, a state of affairs also considered unfair. In discussions of repatriation, it was considered unfair that German POWs were given no indication when they might expect to return home. When tensions emerged, it was not due to conflicting attitudes towards the centrality of these characteristics. Instead, debate arose due to the

applicability of these characteristics towards the German enemy. Certainly, the British observed a Christian ethic, but was the German POW deserving of it?

The final objective of this thesis was to contemplate how attitudes towards the treatment of POWs and the values invested in it remained constant or changed over time in relation to the shifting wartime, post-war, and emergent Cold War context. It can be suggested that the notion of fair-play remained of central importance throughout the war and post-war period. It seems, however, that the disclosure of the horrors of Belsen had a profound effect on attitudes towards German POWs. This was relatively short lived. In the context of the emergent Cold War it was important that Anglo-German understanding was promoted. Reflecting on the German POWs who had been held in Britain, the *Sunday Express* summarised the changing attitudes of the British public towards them: 'At the beginning bus conductors refused to carry Germans, Councillors would not have them in libraries, ex-soldiers fought them in dance halls, but all gave way to public opinion. The Germans are all right'.<sup>12</sup> Attitudes had changed and there was a political impetus in them doing so. In the emerging context of the Cold War it became important to find the 'good German'. The centrality of these themes to discussions of the treatment of German POWs suggests that while the Second World War witnessed changes to British society and culture, exemplified by Labour's 1945 landslide victory, there were also continuities. The values expressed towards the treatment of POWs during the Great War remerged in the Second World War and also overlapped with the internment of civilians. Something which did change is the enemy to which the treatment of POWs was contrasted with. During wartime it was Nazi Germany, but in the post-war it became the Soviet Union. Despite the emergence of the new principal post-war enemy the need to treat POWs was invested with the same values. While this thesis has sought to correct the idea that the period 1939-44 was unimportant as there were few held in Britain, it is clear that the post-war issues of employment, fraternisation, and repatriation were more vexing and complicated. Furthermore, the need to maintain standards in the treatment of POWs took on new significance in the post-war world. In the context of the emerging Cold War, it became, as Harold Nicholson observed, important to demonstrate British qualities in contrast to the Soviet Union. Voices concerned by the retention and continued employment of German POWs in post-war Britain, notably Gollancz, were worried by the image of Britain it presented. Fearful of Soviet influence over Europe, it was paramount that

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<sup>12</sup> *Sunday Express*, September 1948, p. 6.

Britain did not act hypocritically and demonstrated democratic ideals practically in the treatment of German POWs.

## 2. Memory

This thesis concluded in 1948 with the repatriation of the last German POWs. Their story does not of course end here, 25,252 elected to stay on in Britain, taking up the offer to continue working in agriculture, their status akin to indentured labour. Around 12,000 stayed on beyond their short term contracts. Almost all German servicemen experienced a form of captivity as POWs or Surrendered Enemy Personnel, and those which were held in Britain represented only a fraction of the total number. Some eleven million Wehrmacht soldiers became captives in one way or another in May 1945. While they shared this status, their journeys varied significantly. In June 1945, around 20,000 German soldiers were employed as guards at food dumps and other stores in Germany to relieve British troops.<sup>13</sup> While their continued detention in post-war Britain was decried, it was a comparably short time to their counterparts in Soviet captivity, the finally cohort permitted to make their journey home in 1956.<sup>14</sup> Near the same time, Bert Trautmann received his FA cup winner's medal from Prince Philip—having played the last 15 minute of the game with a broken neck. Aside from Rudolf Hess, Trautmann is perhaps the most famous ex-German POW to have been captive in Britain.<sup>15</sup> Born in Bremen, Trautmann served as a *Fallschirmjäger* on the Eastern Front earning the Iron Cross. Transferred to the Western Front he was captured by British forces towards the end of the war. Trautmann found himself in a camp at Ashton-in-Makerfield, Lancashire. Refusing an offer of repatriation in 1948, he stayed in Britain working in agriculture. While playing for St. Helens Town, Trautmann gained a reputation as a goalkeeper, and in 1949 he signed for Manchester City who then played in the First Division of the Football League. Like the Second World War, Trautmann's story has engendered its own mythology. It is thought that as an archetype 'good German', Trautmann won over a hostile Manchester populace—a supposed 20,000 strong

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<sup>13</sup> HC Deb 7 June 1945, vol. 411, cols. 1083-4W. On the use of Japanese Surrendered Personnel (JSP) in post-war Southeast Asia, see, Stephen Conner, 'Side-stepping Geneva: Japanese Troops under British Control, 1945-7', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 45:2 (2010), 389-405.

<sup>14</sup> On the reception in both west and east Germany of returning POWs released from Soviet captivity see, Frank Biess, *Homecomings: Returning POWs and the Legacies of Defeat in Postwar Germany* (Princeton: PUP, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> Bert Trautmann, *Steppes to Wembley* (Robert Hale, 1956); Alan Rowlands, *Trautmann the Biography* (Derby: Breedon, 2009); Catrine Clay, *Trautmann's Journey: from Hitler Youth to FA Cup legend* (London: Yellow Jersey, 2011).

demonstration protested at the decision to sign a former German paratrooper—and through his impressive displays on the pitch was a forceful personality in post-war Anglo-German reconciliation. Stephen Wagg has scrutinised these myths, finding that Trautmann was 'already integrated into working class life in the areas by the time he came to Manchester', and 'that the reconciliation myth was fashioned retrospectively to celebrate a purportedly special British captivity for tolerance'.<sup>16</sup> Whatever the realities of Trautmann's story the contrast with the German POWs released from Soviet captivity is clear. While Trautmann was receiving his FA cup winner's medal, his contemporaries were only just beginning to wrestle with the problems of homecoming.

While for the Soviet Union the subject of war criminals remained important, in Britain, the ongoing Nuremberg trials were viewed as ever more tedious. There was 'some light revival of interest' in the trials as they approached conclusion in September 1946, M-O reported. Two out of five people asked the previous March stated that they were had no interest in the trials. It was considered a waste of time and money given the obvious guilt of the defendants. Yet, some believed the trials were thought of as historically significant and a good measure of British justice.<sup>17</sup> Out of 20 people interviewed by M-O, although regretful he had not faced trial, few were concerned that Himmler had committed suicide.<sup>18</sup> The sentencing of General Erich von Manstein and Albert Kesselring unleashed a wave of criticism in Britain. In reaction, Manstein's sentence was reduced to 12 years from 18 in February 1950 and Kesselring's death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment in July 1947.<sup>19</sup> Reginald Paget, having been involved with SEN and the protest over the continued retention of POWs in Britain, was on Manstein's defence during his trial and went on to publish a bestselling book on him exonerating his character.<sup>20</sup> Taking *The Times* to task over their view that all German field-marshal had violated the laws of war and deserved punishment, Algernon Sidney, 4th Baron De L'isle and Dudley, was dismayed:

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<sup>16</sup> Stephen Wagg, "'That German Boy who Played for Manchester": Bert Trautmann - Biography, History and Politics', in *On and Off the Field: Fußballkultur in England und Deutschland = Football Culture in England and Germany*, ed. by Anthony Waive and Kristian Naglo (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2014), pp. 25-46.

<sup>17</sup> MOA, FR 2424A, 'Note on Nuremberg', 27 September 1946, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> MOA, FR 2243, 'Himmler's Death', 25 May 1945, p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> Benoit Lemay, *Erich von Manstein: Hitler's Master Strategist*, trans. by Pierce Hayward, (Havertown, PA: Casemate, 2011), pp. 169-70; Kerstin von Lingen, *Kesselring's Last Battle: War Crimes Trials and Cold War Politics, 1945-1950* (Kansas: KUP, 2009), p. 91.

<sup>20</sup> M. R. T. Paget, *Manstein: His Campaigns and His Trial* (London: Collins, 1957).

The detention of prisoners of war in rigorous confinement for three years after the end of hostiles, the proposed "demilitarisation" and trial of leading commanders of a defeated enemy, upon charges so long delayed and not yet announced, fill me, Sir, with dismay. I fear for the reputation of our country, and I fear for a precedent which is likely to prove not a deterrent but an incitement to further barbarity in war.<sup>21</sup>

Of the plethora of films produced concerning the Second World War, two centred on German POWs held in Britain.<sup>22</sup> Based on the book of the same name published near the same time, the film *The One That Got Away* (1957), told the story of von Werra's continued efforts to escape captivity in Britain and his success in returning home via the United States—at that time neutral in the war—having escaped the train transporting him to a camp in Canada. By the time it was released the genre of POW film based on daring escapes was still popular. Yet, this story was from the perspective of a German. The director, Baker, was irritated by the stereotypical portrayal of Germans and wanted to present the German in a different light. Rank Organisation preferred a British actor to play von Werra but after fighting hard and persuading Rank, Baker cast Hardy Kruger. Controversy surrounded Kruger's Nazi background and after an awkward press conference the press refused to cover the film.<sup>23</sup> It was almost pulled from production. Despite this, it was a great commercial success, especially in Germany. Von Werra was portrayed as a 'good German'. *The One that Got Away* was one of several films which sought to build Anglo-German understanding through sympathetic, if not entirely forgiving, portrayals of the 'good German'. It was important to find the good among Germans as Germany was now the buffer between the West and the much expanded Soviet empire. Film historians have often analysed Kruger's portrayal of von Werra. In regards to this thesis it is important to note that the British captors in the film conform to stereotype: unfaltering polite and fair, offering cigarettes and a comfortable chair to von Werra. Britain's reputation as a captor state is left unquestioned. The German officer in *The McKenzie Break* (1970), Willi Schlüter, is problematic in contrast to von Werra. He is definitely not a 'good German'. Whereas von Werra was depoliticised, the German officer in *The McKenzie Break*, like his men, is a committed Nazi. The German POWs in the film are shown singing SS marching songs, and brutally beating others

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<sup>21</sup> De L'Isle and Dudley, 'War Crimes', *The Times*, 6 September 1948, p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> *The One That Got Away*, dir. by Roy Ward Baker (Rank, 1957); *The McKenzie Break*, dir. by Lamont Johnson (United Artists, 1970).

<sup>23</sup> Melanie Williams, "'The most explosive object to hit Britain since the V2!': The British Films of Hardy Kruger and Anglo-German Relations during the 1950s", *Cinema Journal*, 46:1 (2006), 85-107, (pp. 88-93).

thought to be non-Nazis. Yet, while Schlüter might not be a 'good German', he is perhaps a somewhat 'likable Nazi', as Robert Murphy notes, commanding the respect of his men who, in turn, admire him, the officer demonstrates similar characteristics to Michael Caine's Steiner in *The Eagle has Landed*.<sup>24</sup> Beyond these two films, and an uncritical TV documentary, *The Germans We Kept*, based on Taylor's book, the memory of German POWs held in Britain is dislocated from the collective memory of the war.<sup>25</sup>

In her recent work, *Returning Memories: Former Prisoners of War in Divided and Reunited Germany*, Christiane Wienand explores the complexities of individual and collective memories of German POW returnees in East and West Germany.<sup>26</sup> Despite much of the physical presence of the camps across Britain having disappeared, at a regional and individual level the memory of German POWs held in Britain is clearly alive. In 2003, English Heritage published a report on the effort to record the POW camps established in Britain between 1939 and 1948. For the 370 known 'Standard' camps, 17 per cent survived in 'complete or near complete form'.<sup>27</sup> Memories of German POWs often emerge in unusual places. In the oral histories drawn upon for a research project into Lincolnshire coastal grazing marches, Mr Clarke shared his wartime memories as a farmer in Burgh-le-Marsh:

We had quite a few (prisoners of war). We had Italians to start with and later it was Germans. We had a prisoner of war Camp – well, there was two in Burgh. One was in Orby on Boothby Hall and the other one was on station road. Ay – they filled a gap in. Germans wasn't bad workers. They wasn't very strict with them. They all had to wear trousers with a patch on, patch on the back of the jacket so you could easily see them. At first there used to be a soldier guarding them. In the end they used to come on a bike. We had one chap and he used to play in a symphony concert in Bremen. I think we had one letter from him (after the war) but it was in German. Anyway we used to have musical evenings with

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<sup>24</sup> Robert Murphy, 'Don't Let's Be Beastly to the Germans': The Representation of Germans in British Second World War Films', in *The Long Aftermath: Cultural Legacies of Europe at War, 1936-2016*, ed. by Manuel Braganca and Peter Tame, (Oxford: Berghahn, 2016), pp. 96-113, pp. 106-7.

<sup>25</sup> *The Germans We Kept*, (BBC Timewatch, 2000).

<sup>26</sup> Christiane Wienand, *Returning Memories: Former Prisoners of War in Divided and Reunited Germany* (Rochester: Camden House, 2015).

<sup>27</sup> Roger J.C. Thomas, 'Prisoner of War Camps (1939-1948)', English Heritage (2003), p. 10. <<https://content.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/prisoner-of-war-camps/prisoner-of-war-camps.pdf/>> [accessed 26 September 2016].

the German prisoners playing [...] So I learnt that Germans didn't have two heads with horns on. They made us some toys for us kids at Christmas.<sup>28</sup>

While the material is fragmentary and uneven in local archives it is perhaps here where the local and individual significance of captivity needs further exploration. For some individuals who contributed to the BBC People's War online archive, the memories they submitted revolved entirely around the German POWs they met and befriended. At an individual level German POWs were the most important part of their war memory.<sup>29</sup> Contacting local history groups—some of which have published accounts on the POWs residing in their respective localities—and recovering local memories will perhaps further highlight the impact and significance of captivity beyond the desks of policymakers. Furthermore, this thesis has focused on the content of newspapers and newsreels to explore how the captivity of German POWs was communicated to the public. In hindsight, the role of radio and how this medium communicated the narrative of captivity was also worthy of exploration. Established in 1922, the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) played a central role in maintaining civilian morale during the Second World War.<sup>30</sup> As a fundamental institution in the nation building project according to Thomas Hajikowski, the BBC promoted a multi-national/racial British identity centring much of its programmes on the empire during the 1939-45 conflict.<sup>31</sup> The importance of radio was not lost on Germany. Broadcast over the medium wave station Reichssender Hamburg, Lord Haw-Haw aimed to demoralise the British people with English language propaganda.<sup>32</sup> Despite the importance of radio being highlighted in these studies, the radio coverage of German POWs remains to be evaluated.

Captivity is an experience which millions were subjected to during and after the Second World War. During the conflict, ensuring the welfare of captured soldiers in enemy hands required tactful diplomacy, at least in the western theatre, and despite lapses in the standard of treatment the 1929 Geneva Convention worked reasonably

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<sup>28</sup> Heritage Lincolnshire, 'Lincolnshire Coastal Grazing Marches Project, Integrated Historic and Landscape Study', vol. 1, (August 2010), p. 238.

<[http://www.lincsmarshes.org.uk/assets/downloads/Heritage\\_Landscape\\_Character\\_Assessment\\_\(Compressed\).pdf](http://www.lincsmarshes.org.uk/assets/downloads/Heritage_Landscape_Character_Assessment_(Compressed).pdf)> [accessed online 15 September 2016].

<sup>29</sup> For instance, BBC People's War, A2235007, gavinkp, 26 January 2004.

<sup>30</sup> Sian Nicholas, *The Echo of War: Home Front Propaganda and the Wartime BBC, 1939-45* (Manchester: MUP, 1996).

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Hajkowski, *The BBC and National Identity in Britain, 1922-53* (Manchester: MUP, 2010).

<sup>32</sup> Martin A. Doherty, *Nazi Wireless Propaganda: Lord Haw-Haw and British Public Opinion in the Second World War* (Edinburgh: EUP, 2000).

well. Handling enemy captives required the cooperation of several departments which drew up policies. Notwithstanding captivity being an experience, a diplomatic issue, and a set of policies to handle them, this thesis has shown that it was a subject of public debate and individual contemplation intertwined with issues of British national identity, images of the German people, and Britain's position in the Europe. Through the treatment of POWs the values for which Britain stood for during and after the Second World War were expressed, fairness being of central importance in discussions of the handling of German POWs. This is not to suggest a consensus that German POWs were treated fairly. Yet, despite much debate over their conditions, freedoms, and employment, it is clear that there was an underlying cultural commitment to the decent treatment of them. This was not solely borne out of a moral and humanitarian commitment to ensure their welfare but what doing so represented.

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