

AFTER THE BATTLE

UNITED KINGDOM



ISLAND FARM CAMP

By Jeff Vincent

On the A48, just outside the town of Bridgend, in South Wales, the traveller may note a group of battered and overgrown huts, the access to which is barred by a hedge and two twisted gate posts with a length of rusty chain strung between them. No indication is present from the road as to the historical significance of the place, which is known as Island Farm. Indeed, apart from some of the local community, few people appreciate that Island Farm Prisoner-of-War Camp saw one of the biggest escape attempts of the Second World War by German prisoners and was the home for two years to most of Hitler's senior officers. It still stands virtually untouched.

The camp was built of prefabricated huts on rich agricultural land in one of the prime sites in the fertile Vale of Glamorgan. The top soil is black humic fill, rich in nourish-

ment for crops, but the subsoil is yellow-orange clay, a detail of some importance as we shall see. The terrain is slowly undulating, gently rising from the north side, the side of the A48 and the camp entrance, towards the sea (which is only three miles away).

The layout of the camp is fairly typical of its time. The accommodation huts were built in prefabricated materials; they represent 'wings' of the central ablution block which was built of red brick. Each of these ablution blocks had a tower with a water tank in the upper storey, and a boiler on the ground

floor. Some buildings, of special use, do not conform to this pattern. Amongst these are the Motor Transport (MT) shed, the cook-house, laundry, HQ block, and two wooden structures at opposite ends of the camp, one used as a coffee shop and the other as a tailor and barber's shop. On the higher side of the camp a larger than average hut was built, with good views towards Bridgend and in the winter, when vegetation is bare, towards the sea.





The first use of the camp was to house female workers at a nearby munitions factory but, not surprisingly, the women preferred to go home every night. Later the camp was inhabited for a brief period in 1944 by American infantry awaiting deployment in Operation 'Overlord', the invasion of France.

CAMP 198

Additional prisoner-of-war accommodation became acute as a result of the large numbers of German Servicemen captured in the closing stages of the North African, the Italian and French campaigns. As a result, once the Americans had moved on, the camp was hastily transformed into a PoW cage with the designation of Camp 198.

The transformation of the camp entailed the erection of surveillance towers, barbed

An undated panorama of Camp 11 believed to have been taken in 1948 by Elwyn Jones, the camp photographer. The picture was taken from the southernmost lookout tower (see plan overleaf) and the town of Bridgend lies in the background. The hut in the extreme right foreground housed the Field-Marshal's and that in the extreme left foreground is the Generals' dining room (No. 12 on plan), with the pointed roof of the cookhouse (No. 13) immediately behind. The small hut in the centre was the barber's and tailor's shop (No. 9). The huts to the left of it (Nos. 10 and 11) housed German junior ranks who looked after the Generals. Note the lights which illuminated the wire at night. These had replaced the trip flares and acetylene lamps after the escape in March 1945. (South Wales Constabulary Museum)

wire fences, trip flares and a double enclosure within the camp, forming an inner and outer compound. Following its hasty conversion, however, the site was not properly

cleared of building materials, and lengths of electric cable, wood, stacks of bricks and nails had been left lying around. Also the camp was not inspected prior to inhabitation,

Forty-one years later the tower has disappeared so, watched by inquisitive cows, the author took the best possible comparison under the circumstances from the roof of the Field-Marshal's hut. The tailor's shop has vanished and everything is overgrown. No trace remains of the fence.





Island Farm PoW Camp lies on the southern side of Bridgend — now in the Welsh county of South Glamorgan but then called simply Glamorgan. Rail communication was convenient via the main London-Swansea line, Bridgend station being just a mile



from the camp. Here Field-Marshal von Rundstedt is escorted from the station at the end of the war when Island Farm acquired special status as a VIP cage for captured high-ranking officers. The sheds on the left have since been demolished.



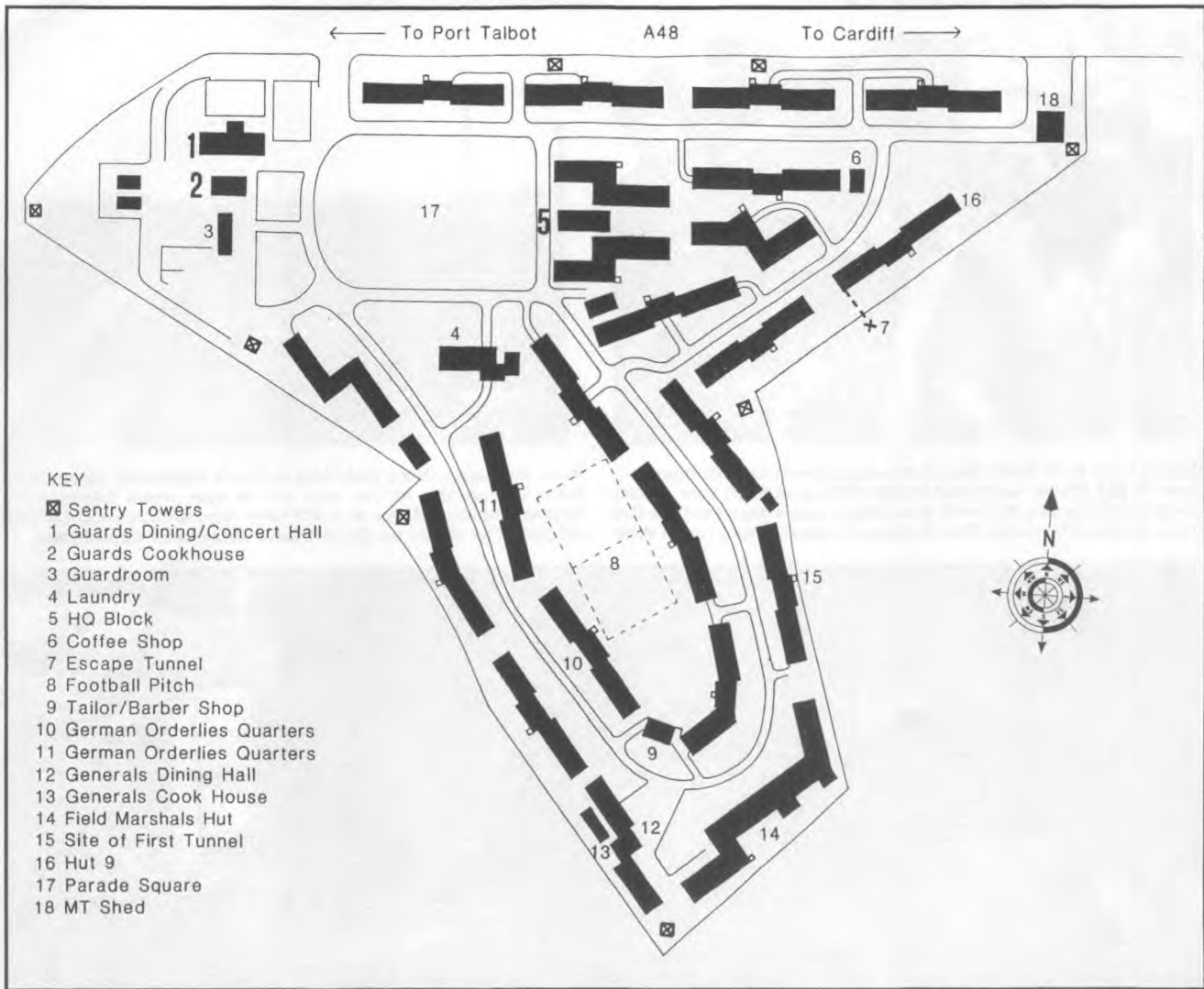
A cheerful group of German junior PoWs, pictured in their room in the hut marked No. 10 on the plan. (South Wales Constabulary Museum)

nor was an inventory made of the contents of each hut. All these security oversights made life very easy for PoWs intent on escaping. The situation was not helped by the guards, recruited amongst medically downgraded personnel. The camp commandant, Lieutenant-Colonel Edwin Darling, MC, had been a PoW during the Great War.

During the winter of 1944-45 several hundred German PoWs were accommodated at the camp. On arrival at Bridgend railway

Herr Guettler, a retired heating engineer now living near Bridgend and former prisoner, stands on the same spot 43 years later. He remembered the faces of his former colleagues but not the names, and led us without hesitation to the spot. The identification was confirmed by comparing the traces of the shelves on the remaining wall.





Plan of Island Farm Camp drawn by Colin Hunt based on extensive field walking, interviews with ex-prisoners, and reference to PC Reginald Dodson's model in the museum

of the South Wales Constabulary. It is by no means definitive and the purpose of several buildings remains obscure. Fading memories and exuberant vegetation have not helped.

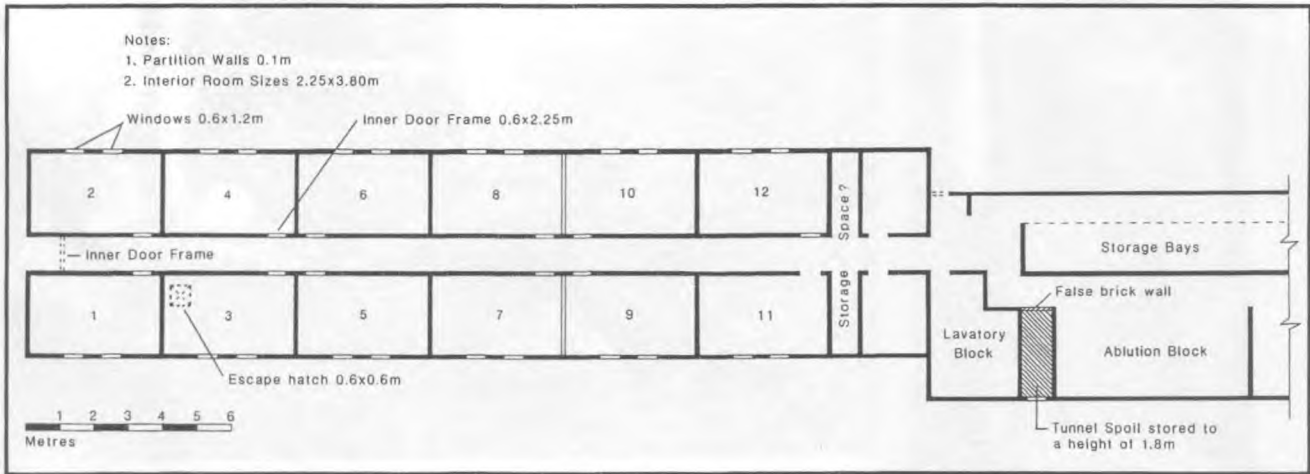
station, they were marched a mile down the road to their new home but it was not long before the young and aggressive prisoners thought of escaping. Elaborate preparations were made for a mass breakout entailing the construction of two tunnels and the arrangement for at least one attempt at cutting the perimeter wire at night.

A first tunnel was dug using a trap door at the base of one of the stoves in an ablution block. The literature and the collected memories of the ex-PoWs are unclear as to its exact position and whether this was supposed to be a real attempt or just a decoy in order to divert the attention of the guards from the main tunnel. At any rate, this first tunnel was discovered during a surprise inspection by two officers on a Saturday afternoon in early January 1945. Although the Commandant immediately pointed out that tunnels usually go in pairs, the guards appear to have assumed a very relaxed attitude to the possibility of the existence of another tunnel.

A second tunnel had been started at the end of 1944, the entrance being situated in the second room on the right of Hut 9 when entering the hut from its southern entrance. It was, naturally enough, a carefully selected location. The hut was about 45 feet from the wire, near the MT shed (empty at night) and fairly close to one of the lookout towers, which, however, also overlooked the A48. This would have meant that the activity on the road would have distracted the guards



The remains of the trap door to the first ill-fated tunnel. The subsidence of the base of the stove platform might have been caused by the stove having been placed on fresh soft concrete soon after the trap door was sealed after discovery. A PoW had scribbled on the walls of the hut 'to the tunnel' with an arrow pointing in the wrong direction, no doubt to taunt the guards after the discovery. The precise location of this tunnel is not known.



and there was a better chance of the road noise covering any from the tunnelers. The ground around Hut 9 was flat and the field chosen for the exit to the tunnel was farmland.

Access was through a trap door cut through a slab of concrete using a red hot chisel. Each time the door was used and replaced, concrete dust was sprinkled on the floor to hide its outline and, in order to distract a guard's attention during an inspection, a picture of enticingly naked women was painted on the wall above the trap door. The initial shaft was sunk to a depth of 20 feet and from the base of this the escape shaft proper was dug towards the field.

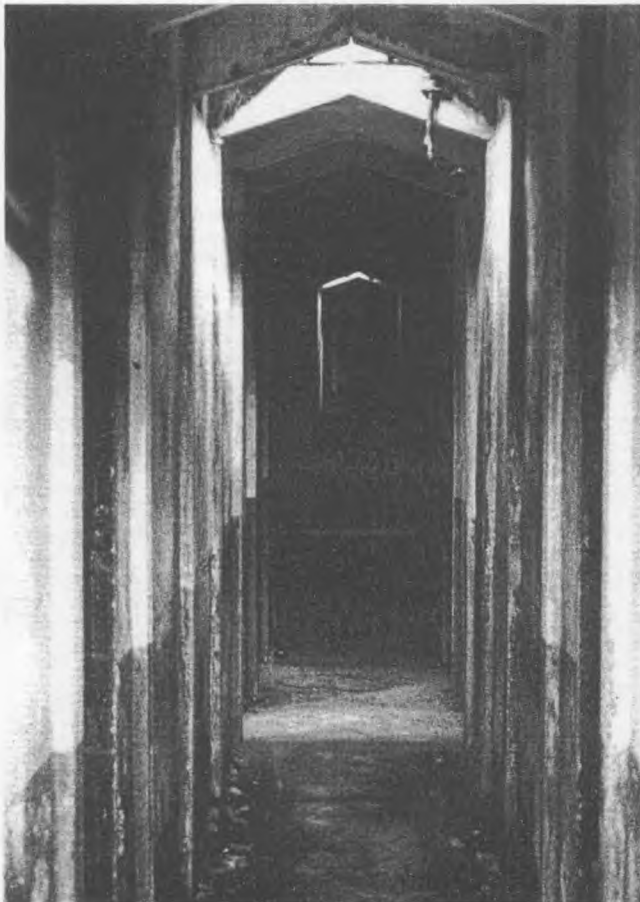
The clay subsoil made the risk of collapses very real and the escapers used pieces of timber and asbestos to shore the sides. At one point, when they ran out of props, they sawed off the legs of all the tables and chairs

A plan of Hut 9, from which the successful escape attempt was made. All measurements were made in March 1989, 44 years almost to the day since the break out — the largest in Britain during the war. (Colin Hunt)

in the hut, lowering them by a few inches. However, as all furniture was uniformly shorter, and the guards had no record of bunk and table heights, they noticed nothing strange. Bed boards were also used as shoring.

The prisoners solved the problem of ventilation in an ingenious way. They built a fan with the vane made out of a bucket and the air tube made out of empty food tins welded together. It is unclear where the fresh air was sucked in from, unless the trap door was left open during tunneling, a somewhat risky business. (In a tunnel in a similar camp in nearby Newport, the air intake had been disguised as a rustic table in the garden of one of the huts.)

The maximum time anyone could spend below was fifteen minutes and prisoners sometimes worked naked in order to avoid bringing the tell-tale clay back into the hut. For the actual digging a home-made iron spike and shovel made out of a bedstead were used. Spoil disposal is potentially the biggest problem for would-be escapers. At Island Farm the spoil was towed out using an improvised sledge pulled by a line made of electric cable but, at some stage, the sledge must have broken under the weight of the clay. Some soil was dispersed onto flower beds and vegetable patches, some in a newly-dug long jump pit, but the bulk of clay was made into small balls and these were piled into a special 'spoil room'.



The corridor in Hut 9 looking towards the ablutions. The trap door room is the second on the right.



The outline of the sealed trap door. The wall still bears faint traces of the alluring woman painted to distract the guards.



The entrance to the 'spoil room' as it appeared in January 1989 with the mound of clay balls still in place. The opening had been made by PC Dodson back in 1984.

At the junction between the ablution block and the south-facing wing of Hut 9 there was a small room 6ft by 10ft with a window, which was probably intended for luggage storage. One night the entrance to this was bricked up using bricks scavenged from all over the camp, but a few loose bricks were left at the top. Here the balls of clay were pushed through and, once the bricks were replaced, the false wall effectively hid the room.

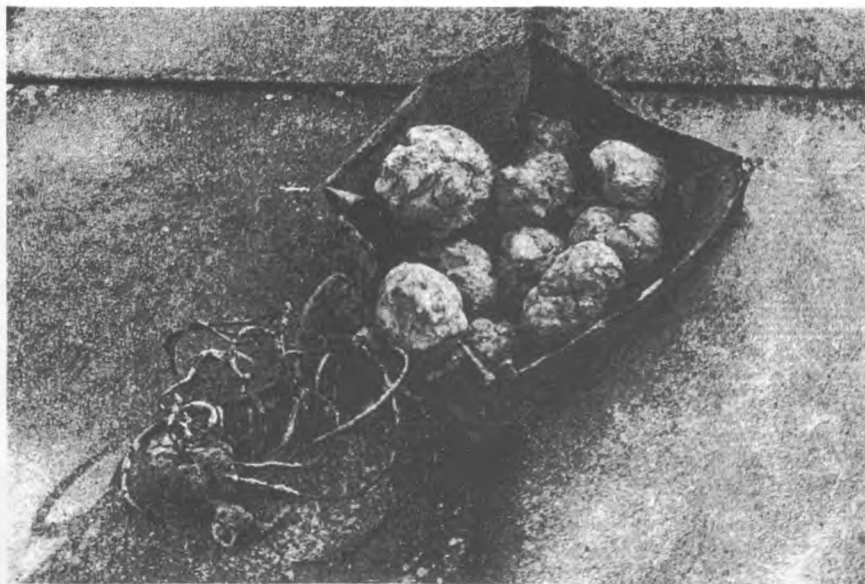
The room was also used to dispose of any items linked with the escape which the diggers wanted to get rid of but dare not throw in the camp rubbish bins because of their heavy contamination with subsoil, a give-away sign to the guards that tunnelling was in progress. The spoil was kept below the level of the window sill (6ft above the floor) so as not to obstruct the window and thus give the game away. Altogether the tunnel took three months to construct.

On the night of March 10-11, 1945, the escapers started assembling in Hut 9, and the escape began at about ten o'clock. One by one the prisoners went through the trap door, dressed in civilian clothes and carrying extra rations which had been carefully hoarded for the escape. One pair, Leutenants Karl Ludwig and Heinz Herzler, carried a map of England on the tail of a khaki shirt. The map had been copied from a railway diagram which the prisoners had removed from one of the rail coaches that had taken them to Bridgend. The stone hiding the mouth of the tunnel was pushed to one side and, by 2.15 a.m., some 66 prisoners had managed to get out of the tunnel undetected. However the escape was given away by the next prisoner, a Luftwaffe subaltern called Tonsmann, who was carrying a white kit bag which was spotted by one of the guards. After shouting halt, the guard had proceeded to open fire, hitting Leutenant Tonsmann in the shoulder. The camp was immediately alerted and eleven escapers who had not managed to get further than the field were rounded up within minutes. For the first few hours the camp staff failed to grasp the extent of the breakout, but by morning,

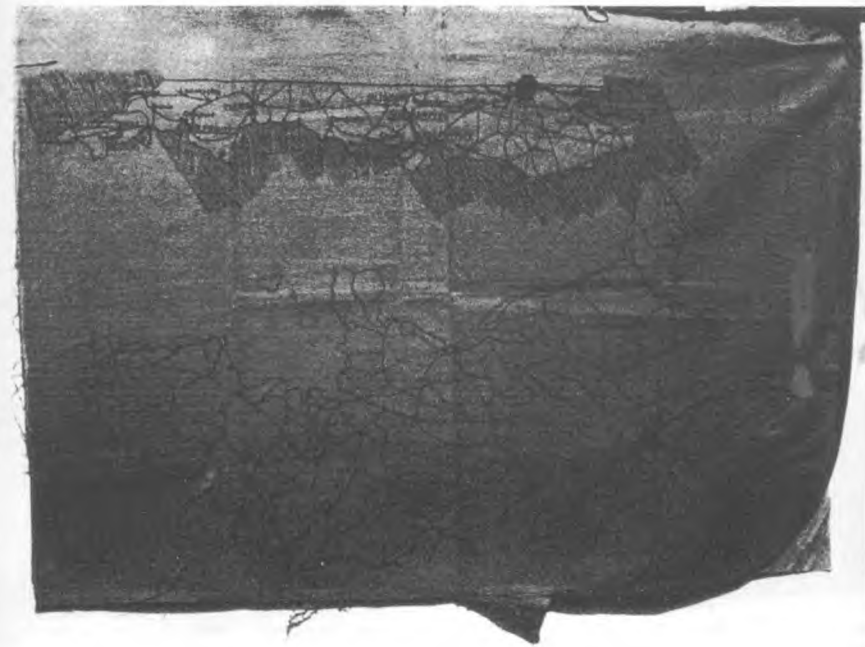
The map copied from a railway diagram onto a shirt tail by the escapers and now in the possession of Mrs Knight, daughter of Superintendent Bill May who was in charge of the police operation to round up the escapers.



The interior showing how the spoil level was kept below the window frame in order not to give the game away. These pictures were taken in January 1989, two months before unknown hands pulled the wall down, scattering the clay balls.



The remains of the sledge, overlooked by the treasure hunters in March 1989. Note the electric cable used as a substitute for rope. It would appear to have been built out of a small oil drum sawn in half. The fact that prisoners were able to steal such items is further evidence of the poor security in the camp.





when an incident room had been set up at the local police station under the command of Superintendent Bill May, a proper nationwide alert and search was set in motion.

The escape generated a spate of stories which are now part of the local folklore, the most bizarre perhaps being the one involving the local doctor's car. This was parked outside his home, in the nearby Merthyr Mawr Road, and when four escapers picked the door lock, they found it had a flat battery. The problem was solved by some off duty camp guards returning from the pub, who obligingly gave the prisoners a push

Left: The exit outside the wire with the boulder which hid the opening rolled aside. **The tunnel mouth could still be seen in the 1970s right.** (Western Mail)

start, without realising who they were helping! Subsequently the car was abandoned in the Forest of Dean after it ran out of petrol.

The escapers had varying degrees of luck, although none stood much chance of getting out of the country. The furthest any escaper had travelled was Eastleigh where two were recaptured.

When all had been rounded up an inquest into the escape was held, which correctly identified the problem as the lax security at

Camp 198. The trap door in the floor of Hut 9 was discovered and sealed with fresh concrete but, so successful were the PoWs in hiding the existence of the false wall to the secret room, that it remained undiscovered. The decision was taken to transfer all PoWs elsewhere, and on March 31 the camp was emptied of all its inmates. Shortly afterwards the second phase of Island Farm's life as a cage began when it became No. 11 (Special) PoW Camp.



CAMP 11

During the six years of the Second World War, the Allies had captured an increasing number of senior Axis officers. The harvest of high ranking prisoners increased considerably after the various German surrenders and, in May 1945, 127 officers of general or equivalent rank arrived in Britain. Some were taken to Grizedale Hall, near Coniston Water (see *After the Battle No. 2*), and others to the White House at Wilton Park near Beaconsfield in Buckinghamshire. Throughout their stay at both locations, many of the senior officers were transferred to and from the interrogation centre, known as the London District Cage, run by the redoubtable Lieutenant-Colonel Alexander Scotland.

In early January 1946, all the senior officers (with the exception of Field-Marshal Ernst Busch who had died in his sleep at Wilton Park) were sent to Island Farm. By this time the camp, although outwardly little changed, had assumed a somewhat more genteel air. It was commanded first by Major Topham, and latterly by Lieutenant-Colonel C. M. L. Clements, a cavalry officer. Both proved kind and considerate towards the vanquished internees, the nominal roll of whom reads like a Who's Who of the German armed forces. Amongst the prisoners were four Field-Marshals — von Rundstedt, von Kleist, von Brauchitsch and von Manstein — and scores of senior commanders who had made their names during the war. There was General Frido von Senger und Etterlin, defender of Cassino and envoy for SS-Standartenführer Karl Wolff (who was also at Island Farm) in organising the surrender of all German forces in northern Italy; General Hasso. Baron von Manteuffel, one of the most successful Panzer commanders on the Eastern front; Generals 'Papa' Ramcke, Hans von Ravenstein and Ritter von Thoma of the Afrika Korps; Admirals Voss and Hartmann and the SS Generals Max Simon and Bherens who would be later executed for war crimes. The Camp Leader was Hans-Georg von Seidel, one of the very few non-career soldiers and ex-Quartermaster-General of the Luftwaffe.

Camp 11 was now securely guarded although vigilance was relaxed, both because of the age of some of the prisoners (von Rundstedt had just passed his seventieth birthday) and because none of the prisoners had anywhere to escape to as Germany lay in ruins. Some 130 German junior ranks served their seniors as batmen, cooks and mess orderlies.

The generals passed their time reading, painting, or carving toys out of wood and some worked for the Forestry Commission or on the farms nearby in order to augment their meagre PoW pay. General von Senger, former Rhodes scholar, holder of the Knight's Cross and the man who had ordered



Left: General von Seidel (on the left), the camp leader, and the commandant, Colonel Clements in 1948 at Ewenny Priory, the squire's residence near the camp. (Lt-Col. C. M. L. Clements) Right: Forty-one years later von Seidel's stand-in has even reconstructed the correct uniform! The white stone eagle was moved into its current place in the photograph in 1974.



the German defenders not to go within 300 yards of the walls of the abbey of Montecassino in order to avoid its destruction by the Allies, worked as a gardener for the squire of Merthyr Mawr. Hardship seems to have been relatively common. General von Seidel, for instance, asked one of the interrogators to sell an Argentinian decoration with diamonds on the open market on his behalf in order to raise money for his family in Germany, and the squire of Ewenny found one Lieutenant-General, employed by him as a labourer, gorging himself on dog biscuits!

The psychiatric condition of some prisoners is also interesting. Stripped of power and its trappings (all medals bearing swastikas had been confiscated), these men who had fought the world for six years suddenly found themselves prisoners in an enemy country, subjected to interrogation regarding their political affiliation, and suspected of knowing more than they admitted about the genocide of the Jews or of war crimes carried out by troops under their command. In some cases they had not seen their families for six or seven years, as in the case of Hans von

Ravenstein (a Pour le Mérite and Knight's Cross holder) who had been captured at Sidi Rezegh in November 1941 while commanding the 21st Panzer Division. Some, like General Karl Wilhelm von Schlieben, the defender of Cherbourg, suffered badly from 'barbed wire fever' a condition of depression common in PoW camps.

The most remote, however, was Field-Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt. His only son had died of cancer and he was the one officer to be allowed two rooms (a sitting room and a separate bedroom whereas everyone else had a bedsit) in the highest and most comfortable hut in the camp. When he left for Nuremberg to give evidence at the trial of the Nazi leadership, all the generals lined up on parade just inside the exit to the inner compound to see him off with his faithful Chief-of-Staff, General Gunther Blumentritt. When he returned from the trial to Bridgend, von Rundstedt had aged considerably. He could not walk without the aid of two sticks because of his arthritic hips and he had to undergo treatment at the local Bridgend Hospital. There he was looked



Left: A group of German junior ranks on the football pitch in a picture taken in late 1946. These men were all employed as cooks or mess orderlies for the generals. The last man on the



left is Hulmuth Guettler. Note the diamond-shaped leg patch denoting PoW status. Right: Herr Guettler, standing in for himself 42 years later.



Left: Field-Marshal von Rundstedt in his prime — an undated souvenir photograph taken after the fall of France and his elevation to Field-Marshal, but before the award of the Oak leaves to his Knight's Cross on July 1, 1944. **Centre:** Von Rundstedt in a copy of an autographed and dated picture given to Captain Lees. The picture was taken while the Field-Marshal

was at Island Farm and the physical change is evident. Most of the contemporary pictures of the generals show physical deterioration although rations appear to have been adequate, but the stress associated with the war and capture exacted a heavy toll. **Right:** The Field-Marshal's bedroom where only a curtain rail remains of the original fittings.

after by a young and caring physiotherapist, Elgiva Thomas (the same girl who had treated the gun shot wound of the unfortunate Leutnant Tonnsman).

All PoWs of senior rank had to be interrogated to ascertain the genuine opponents of Nazism with a view to early repatriation. This process was known as political screening. It was conducted by Dr Otto John aided by four other interviewers. Dr John, a lawyer, had been involved in the 20th July plot to kill Hitler and had escaped the Gestapo by flying to Spain. He was recruited by the Foreign Office as a screener because he knew most of the generals personally and had a very good anti-Nazi background. Dr John was instrumental in obtaining the early repatriation of Hans von Rundstedt, who had been captured with his father at Bad

Tolz on May 2, 1945 and who was suffering from laryngeal cancer. (After the war John was to rise to be head of the Federal Internal Security Office, and was kidnapped and held prisoner by the Russians in unexplained circumstances.)

A young British officer of German stock, Captain Ted Lees, assisted with translation whenever visitors dropped in to visit some of the captive generals. One of these was Captain Basil Liddell Hart, the military messiah of the Blitzkrieg, who had befriended most of the senior officers when they were residing at Grizedale Hall, just a short drive from his own home. This was a unique opportunity to record for posterity the history of a turbulent time in our troubled century, based on first-hand accounts by the German protagonists, and during their

stay at Grizedale. Liddell Hart had spoken to all those senior officers who would talk to him on the conduct of the war. He condensed the outcome of his interviews in two books, *Over the Hill* and *History of the Second World War*. The War Office, however, revoked Liddell Hart's security clearance because he was thought to be too friendly towards Britain's former enemies (for example he had obtained a mattress to ease the pain of von Rundstedt's arthritic back) and he did not see the generals again for two years. On March 21, 1948, the Liddell Harts were finally allowed to take Generals von Seidel, Weckmann, Heinrici, Senger and Dittmar out to lunch at the Blue Bird Cafe in Bridgend and afterwards for coffee to the house of the vicar of Merthyr Mawr.



'God with us' — even in the ablutions block of a prisoner-of-war camp!



The camp concert and guards' mess hall. General von Senger, the defender of Cassino, used to play the piano in a corner by the stage during party nights.



Above: A copy of Captain Lees' picture of the impressive farewell given to Gerd von Rundstedt by 180 generals in May 1948. The elderly Field-Marshal was on his way to give evidence at the Nuremberg trial. (He died in 1953.) The building on the right was the guards' cookhouse. *Bottom:* Our comparison 43 years later. The cookhouse has vanished together with the wire.

Field-Marschals von Manstein and von Brauchitsch left for a military hospital and trial on April 30, 1948, both of them stooped and aged figures, the former a shadow of the brilliant Eastern Front commander he had once been. Throughout their stay, von Rundstedt had refused to have anything to do with them, considering them as Nazi sympathisers, a fact reported in literature and confirmed to the author by one of the mess orderlies who served them at separate tables. On May 4, 1948, von Rundstedt and Generaloberst Strauss (both about to be charged with war crimes) left for Redgrave Hall, near Diss in Norfolk.

By May 1948 the last party of prisoners who had been cleared by John left for Germany under the escort of the CO, Colonel Clements, who noted their reactions of depression to the sights of war-devastated Germany. Clements himself was demobbed shortly afterwards and Camp 11 was officially closed.



Left: The German High Command! A trio of farm labourers in September 1947 at Ewenny Priory. From left to right: Generalmajor Freiherr von Ow-Wachendorf, SS-Obergruppenführer and General der Waffen-SS Demelhuber and Generalmajor Brunz. (Courtesy Mr and Mrs Picton-Turbervill) *Right:* Time stands still in South Wales.



THE EMPTY YEARS

With the War Office having no further use for it, Camp 11 remained empty and deserted and slowly became overgrown. In the 1950s two huts were used by the local TA as drill halls. Sometime after the camp was abandoned, all fittings such as water pipes, stoves and furniture were removed, with the intention that the camp should be demolished and the site returned to its former agricultural use. However it was sold by the War Office to a property development company.

In the 'fifties and throughout the 'sixties interest in the Camp was at a low ebb with the majority of people wanting to forget the war, but in 1976, thanks to a BBC programme 'Come out, Wherever You Are', and a book of the same title (written by Herbert Williams, one of the researchers of the programme), the camp was brought to the attention of the public as a site of historical interest. The book and the programme concentrate on the story of the escape, and the BBC traced and brought back to the UK some of the escapers, in some cases arranging the reunion with the locals who had been instrumental in recapturing them.

The fortunes of the former senior inmates varied greatly. Some like General Seidel, served in the armed forces of the Bundeswehr, while von Ravenstein took up the civilian job he had held before the war. General Dornberger, who had been in charge of the V1 and V2 projects, found new masters in the USA.

Right up to the late 1970s, the tunnel mouth was visible, and a party of geologists managed to re-enact the escape backwards up to the base of the entrance shaft. A picture taken at the time shows the ventilation and shoring systems of the tunnel still virtually untouched, but shortly afterwards the tunnel was sealed.

Several applications for residential development having been turned down, the Camp is now used by locals to walk their dogs and as an exercise ground for mock battles fought by weekend warriors who fire paint pellets at each other, a rather appropriate setting for such an activity.

Published evidence on the camp is, however, hard to come by. One book that may represent the definitive work on the subject of German PoWs in this country is *Thresholds of Peace* by Matthew Barry Sullivan, himself a former interrogator and German scholar. The accurate reconstruction of life in Bridgend, which takes up a whole chapter, makes interesting reading. Sullivan kept in touch with some of the ex-internees and with Captain Lees who still kept his personal records of the prisoners on a series of cards in alphabetical order. An example of the content of his index is the entry for von Runstedt's cousin and last commander of Army Group Vistula, General Heinrich: 'Heinrich, Gotthard, General Oberst, captured 28.5.45 at Huerna near Flensburg. Born on 21.12.1886 at Gumbinnen. Next of kin: Gertrud Heinrich, Munster Westfalen Burkhardstrasse 8.' The card for the former Inspector-General of the Waffen SS reads: 'Demelhuber Karl-Maria, General der Waffen SS, captured 16 May 1945 at Schleswig. Born 27 May 1896 at Freising. Height 178 cms, weight 10st 7lbs'. Otto John's book *Twice Through the Lines* also contains extensive references to the camp.

Amongst the locals, several took an interest in the preservation of the site but, as no momentum was achieved, a local policeman and ex-sailor, Reginald Dodson, began assembling material for a permanent exhibition on the camp at the museum of the South Wales Constabulary. PC Dodson con-

structed an extremely detailed model of the site based on contemporary photographs, eyewitness accounts and hours of walking around the camp over many months. On one occasion in 1984 he met a former PoW living nearby who showed him where the false wall hiding the 'Spoil Room' was located. To Reginald's amazement the wall was still intact and the two set about dismantling it to expose the soil, untouched for 40 years.

In 1987 a party of sixth-formers from a nearby school undertook a project on the history of the camp and produced a display which was so successful that it gained official recognition by being exhibited for a month in the National Museum of Wales. This also attracted national coverage in the media.

The material gathered during the project has been published in a book *Island Farm* which can be obtained from Brynteg Comprehensive School, Ewenny Road, Bridgend, Mid Glamorgan.

The author visited Island Farm several times during the winter and spring of 1988-89. The sealed trap door is relatively easy to spot as its outline is clearly visible and it bears several pick marks as if somebody has tried to open it up again. Amazingly, the spoil is almost all still in place in what must be one of the most unique remnants of WW2 escapology still intact. Some of the clay balls, of which there are thousands, still bear the imprints of the hands that moulded them. During a subsequent visit the author found



The mouldering remains of Island Farm Camp photographed by Ken Wakefield in November 1989.

the place ransacked and the wall dividing the secret spoil room from the showers demolished and most of the spoil disturbed. Interest in the spoil was probably rekindled by these visits, as the author had unwisely remarked to others on the site that the room might have been containing furniture or other kit when it was filled. The treasure hunters had apparently drawn a blank and abandoned the venture but had been careless for there, lying amongst the disturbed clay balls, the author found the remains of the original sledge which had split under the weight of the spoil and had been disposed of 'securely' by the prisoners.

In von Rundstedt's suite the only item still in place is a curtain rail at the window.

Elsewhere, slogans on walls, names of former occupants and fanciful images of naked women are rapidly fading. During each visit the author notices further deterioration. Some buildings, such as the camp laundry, have partially collapsed. Others like the guard towers, the cookhouse and the barber's shop have vanished, only their foundations being visible through the thick undergrowth.

In Bridgend and elsewhere, memories of the generals linger on. Major Topham, Captain Lees, Sir Basil Liddell Hart are all now dead but Elgiva Thomas remembers von Rundstedt as an aristocrat and a gentleman who, to thank her for her attention, gave her a signed photograph which she treasures to

this day. Helmuth Guettler, a sailor captured in Brest in 1944, served the generals as a mess orderly and played football with them in his spare time. At his wedding to a local girl, an SS general played the piano and he was presented with a wedding card drawn by a Luftwaffe general with artistic talent and inscribed by von Rundstedt. He still lives locally with his bride of 41 years.

If and when the contractors move in to clear Island Farm Camp to prepare the site for housing or other development, a unique piece of Second World War history will vanish forever. It is the author's hope that this article will help record for posterity a brief glimpse of this Valhalla of a vanquished army.

