**Camp 279** **Yaxley Militia Camp, Yaxley, Huntingdonshire (+ Glatton Camp)**

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| **1947 Camp List** | | | | | | | |
| 279(G.W.C.) | Militia Camp, Yaxley, Peterborough, Northants | E | Priswar, Yaxley | Yaxley 261 | Farcet | Lt.Col.G.C.Cooper | v/1453/2 |

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| **Prisoner of War Camps (1939 – 1948) - Project report by Roger J.C. Thomas - English Heritage 2003** | | | | | | | |
| OS NGR | Sheet | No. | Name & Location | County | Cond’n | Type 1945 | Comments |
| TL 1736 9275 | 142 | 279 | Militia Camp, Yaxley Farcet | Huntingdonshire (Cambridgeshire) | 4 | German Working Camp |  |

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| **Location:** Yaxley lies approximately 4 miles (6 km) south of [Peterborough](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peterborough), just off the [A15 road](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A15_road_(Great_Britain)).  **Before the camp:** British troops, including the Royal Engineers recorded at the site.  **Pow Camp:**  In 1943 / 1944 ‘Yaxley Hostel’ was listed for Sawtry Camp 59, holding Italian pows.  Pows worked on local farms and at brick-works where many of the pows worked in shifts.  It is likely that the hostel became a separately administered camp in late 1945. The Foreign Office file FO 939/315 for ‘*279 Working Camp, Glatton Airfield Camp, Peterborough, Lincolnshire and Militia Camp, Yaxley, Lincolnshire’* starts in May 1946.  **14 May 1946** – the pows organised a democratic committee (Demokratische Arbeitsgemeinschaft - DAG) - to discuss and promote activities within the camp.  Although there were many pows who were non-political or anti-Nazi, there was also a sizeable group of category C (Black) pows, some of whom were causing trouble.  **15 – 16 June 1946** – Dr C F Allan, a visiting lecturer, reported that; “*At least 100 Nazis boycotted the lecture and tried to induce others to follow their example. Both prisoners and officers are in the main hostile to this section which exercises an evil influence. The great majority seem to be anti-Nazi.”* He also noted that the anti-Nazis were asking when a date would be set for their repatriation.  **24 – 26 June 1946** – Dr Felix Langer, the next lecturer, visited the main camp and 2 hostels – Orton / Sibson.  Commandant – Lt Col Baron de Robeq 2nd i/c Major Vickers Interpreter Captain Barden. |  |
| Ordnance Survey 1958 |

Dr Langer commented on the presence of Nazis. From information he received from the Lagersprecher, they were mainly pows who had been returned from USA and Canada. The pows from Canada were regarded as a particular ‘*bad influence’*. These pows had been sent from the UK to Canada several years before, and many still held the belief in the strength of Nazism as opposed to democracy – this was also recorded in other camp reports.

**8 August 1946** – ‘disturbances’ caused by a group of pows occurred during the evening roll-call. Scant information. This may have been caused by a misinterpretation of an announcement that German pows were to be repatriated at a rate of 2,000 per month – and at that rate it would take well over ten years for all pows to return home! (The 2,000 number was an initial figure for the first batches).

**9 August 1946** – a meeting open to all pows at Yaxley was arranged by the DAG regarding the previous night’s disturbances – 450 attended. Those present voted unanimously for a resolution that condemned, *‘the happenings*’ and stated that they were prepared to prevent any repeat – “*We have nothing in common with those shouters and trouble-makers and we resent their methods of force….”*

However, a document produced by the DAG after the meeting also listed various grievances such as why Italian and Austrian pows were being released before Germans, and the better treatment that officers received. Specific points raised about the camp were: not enough ablutions, recreation hall was too small, the loudspeaker in the dining-room was *‘not sufficient’,* and a shortage of soap.

**22 August 1946** – L P D cooper visited the camp to carry out political screening mainly of the German personnel, and to make a general report. Strength – 1 officer, 2169 other ranks. (Numbers for each site given in chart below).

Commandant: Lt.Col Baron J.H.E. de Roebeck CBE. Camp leader: Stabsfeldw. Schwenk (B+)

Interpreter (IO): Capt C B Bardens C/L for HQ: Feldw. Stork (A)

Deputy C/L: Oberwachtm. Loth (B+) (? Difficult to read).

German M.O.: Dr Kuhlo (C)

This was a slightly unusual set up as the camp leader was usually the leader at the HQ.

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| Political screening: | A+ | A | B+ | B | B- | C | C+ | Unscreened |
|  | 2 | 32 | 41 | 132 | 34 | 45 | 25 | 1859 |

The Commandant and IO were both keen on re-education. The IO was regarded as exceptionally good. The German staff had been appointed by the commandant and were regarded as efficient, except at Sibson hostel.

Morale was bad, mainly because of “*C+ agitators*” who were due to be removed from this camp. Other reasons were bad news from home and lack of information regarding repatriation. “*There have been four attempted suicides recently”.*

There were 290 youth pows, (under-25) in the main camp – these, and others in hostels, were not regarded as a problem.

The standard list of re-education activities was given. They were extensive and under the control of Uffz.Huebner (A+), supported by the British IO.

Wochenpost: 200 copies

Ausblick: 50 copies

Newspapers: Hard to obtain, no foreign newspapers.

Library: 1981 books, adequate.

Lectures: Fortnightly.

Discussion Groups: Weekly, led by Huebner.

Films: Fortnightly from Gaumont British and the YMCA.

Wireless: Good set controlled from librarian’s office. Two loudspeakers.

Camp magazine: Regular, edited by Huebner. [‘*Deutsche Kriegsgefangenen Zeitung’* – German POW News]. There was a shortage of paper.

Press review: Translations of British press were posted daily on a wall.

English instruction: 23 beginners, 19 intermediate, and 8 advanced – three classes held twice a week in the main camp.

Other activities:

Religion: RC padre Hoffman (B) held services in the main camp and visited the hostels. A protestant padre from Camp 106 (Stamford) held weekly services. Interest in religion was small owing to apathy.

Theatre: a good dramatic company.

Orchestra: 15 members gave regular performances.

**30 August – 1 September 1946** – I Rothenberg, a visiting lecturer, recorded that there were three hostels – Sibson, Orton, and Norman Cross.

The lecturer believed that the DAG was becoming a useful and strong body with the confidence and support of the pows. He also commented on the high regard held by the pows for other individuals in the camp - their education officer who was about to take part in a training course at Wilton Park, their spokesmen (lagersprecher), for the officers and the Interpreter Officer, “*whom all call ‘Uncle’*”.

Although repatriations had gradually increased, this was still a major concern within this camp and others. Initial feelings of unfairness declined to some degree, though there were often grumbles about why certain pows were sent home before others. Despite this, various visitors to the camp commented on the good work of the British officers and the German DAG.

**4 – 6 October 1946** – a visiting lecturer recorded that he visited the main camp and three hostels – Sibson, Orton and ‘Glatton’. Glatton does not appear to be the same hostel as Norman Cross – 4.6km separate the 2 villages. Glatton was based at an ex-aerodrome and was 4 times the size – I think that the Norman Cross site closed and the pows were sent to the larger Glatton site. All reports after this refer to Glatton, and not Norman Cross.

Several lecturers reported on the excellent relationships between the British administration and the pows.

**November** – a new Commandant, Lt Col.Cooper, started. Commandants had extensive powers and their attitudes could change the nature of a camp. In this case the changes were highly negative. To begin it might have been a matter of a ‘new broom’ not being liked, but so many reports made by officials and visiting lecturers raised the same points. Even though the problems caused by the Commandant were reported, nothing was done to replace him.

Incidental information from a German theatre group journal held by the Deutsches Historisches Museum. The group toured pow camps around England during 1946. It recorded its visit to Militia Camp, 279 in late 1946 for 5 performances.

**13 December 1946** – a letter sent by the visiting lecture service reported on comments made by lecturer, Dr Weckel. He had stated that the new commandant; *“has had a very bad effect on the men who told him that the new Commandant imposes innumerable fines, like 5/- for a bad shave, or if the men don’t clean their boots quickly enough. They also complained that the meals were arranged at inconvenient times so that they had to go without food for most of the day, and are again fined if they try to get bread out of the camp for a midday meal.*” It was requested that this situation be investigated.

**13 December 1946** – a second lecturer, R Laufer, followed up with another damning report and submitted a further ‘special report’ regarding conditions in the camp. He began by stating; *“A very good and promising camp is now turned into a hotbed of antidemocratic propaganda (not very strong yet but growing)….”*

His special report listed various examples of unfair treatment of the pows: e.g. pows working in a brickworks returning to camp late and not permitted to clean up until the next day – fines of up to 10 days pay imposed for dirty boots - pows fined if they were found with food given to them by the farmers they worked for - night shift workers unable to sleep as their barracks had to be cleaned every morning for inspection…..

A note attached to reports dated 31 December, 1946, stated that a training Adviser would be sent to the camp to investigate.

**1/4 January 1947** – Oliver Nash visited the camp to carry out a Re-education Survey. Strength – 2 officers and 2255 other ranks.

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| Political screening: | A | B | C | C+ |
|  | 84 | 1642 | 415 | 0 |

Number of pows repatriated:

114 whites (A)

88 crocks – Mr Nash visited other camps, e.g. Camp 72, and used the same term for injured / ill pows.

237 greys (B)

Commandant: Lt Col G C Cooper Camp leader: Ofw. Roehl, Max (B+)

Interpreter: Capt Bardens Deputy C/L: Koy, Theo (B+)

S/Sgt Cave German MO: S/Arzt Dr Kuhlo at Sibson (C)

O/Arzy Dr Fischer at Glatton (B-)

The camp leader had been appointed 2 weeks earlier, after his predecessor had been repatriated. He was 48 and had no Nazi party associations. “*He is carrying out his duties satisfactorily in circumstances rendered very difficult by grave discontent among all P.W. due to what they consider harsh treatment by the present C.O*.”

The German study-leader, Rudolf Lenz (A), had been a pow in the USA. He was still head of the DAG though expected to be repatriated soon.

Mr Nash also submitted a ‘Special Report’ about the conditions within the camp. He stated that morale was very low throughout. Regarding political progress; *“All progress has been arrested, in fact the feeling of resentment and frustration caused* [described in the special report] *has swung a large proportion of waverers back into their former anti-British and anti-democratic attitude….”*

Standard re-education activities were still taking place:

Wochenpost / Ausblick – separate appendix

Newspapers – a range of English newspapers being received, but no German papers.

Library – adequate

Lecturers – regular

Discussion Groups – weekly.

Films – regular, but only to 3 out of 4 camps on a rota basis.

Wireless – adequate.

Camp Magazine – edited by Guenther Hauschildt, a professional journalist. Despite being graded C, he was regarded as being satisfactory. The weekly magazine title was listed simply as ‘279’. An additional paper illustrated with pictures from British newspapers, was issued weekly and posted on the HQ noticeboard.

Press reviews – weekly at all sites.

English instruction – separate report.

Information room – there was a news room.

Other activities:

Religion – The same RC priest had negligible influence. A protestant padre visted from Camp 59 (Sawtry) and pows attended local churches.

Education – none of any significance.

Entertainment – theatre and choir.

Mr Nash stated in his conclusions that the outlook for the camp was bleak.

**24 - 26 January 1947** – A lecturer, Dr Arthur Leib, gave a mixed report on conditions in the camp. He had heard rumours that the commandant was ‘hostile’ and spoke to pows and British officers to try to find out what was wrong – “*Nobody could give any point where the present commandant had acted ‘inhumanely’. On the contrary, mature men expressed their admiration for his attitude which was definitely a little strict when he came in November but very correct and in many cases extremely gentleman-like….. Apart from one or two very nervous POW, nobody had any grievances*.”

Dr Lieb believed that some British officers disliked the commandant and that they, “*unconsciously stir the Germans up against the commandant.”* There may have been some truth in what Dr Lieb stated, however, he was the only person to find that the Commandant was being unfairly treated.

**22-24 March 1947** – Report by a lecturer who found that there was still a strong interest in education, and a very high level of self-administration – but the friction with the CO continued. “*No complaints came up in discussion but outside it every minute someone or the other came back to this subject, and the CO himself equally told me at length about his difficulties. An atmosphere of finding fault at any cost exists, and the entire camp has repsonded and is finding fault too.”*

**16 – 19 April 1947** – Mr Oliver Nash returned for another Re-educational Survey. Strength 2 officers and 1737 other ranks. Sibson hostel had closed.

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| Political screening: | A | B | C | C+ |
|  | 19 | 1656 | 60 | 4 |

736 pows repatriated to date.

Commandant: Lt Col G C Cooper Camp leader: Ofw. Roehl, Max (B+)

Interpreter: Capt Bardens German MO: S/Arzt Dr Kuhlo

Mr Nash found some improvement in the camp. Morale was fairly good as the commandant was “*less inhumane*” and repatriations were progressing. Captain Bardens continued to receive good reports about his work with the pows.

Standard re-education activities were similar to previous reports. Minor changes – some German newspapers received, changes in organisers of activities due to repatriations.

**25-27 April 1947** – Lecturer Dr J Klein stated that; “*The good relations between the POWs and the British have been restored*….”

**3-5 June 1947** – unfortunately the hope expressed in the two previous reports did not continue as another visiting lecturer, H A Kluthe, condemned the atmosphere within the camp created by the Commandant.

A passing remark in his report stated; “*Immediately before my lecture, two Ps/W had been buried*….” but no indication to causes of these deaths.

**June 1947** – The camp at Yaxley was closed down and pows were transferred to the Glatton Airfield site.

**9 – 12 July 1947** – Oliver Nash returned for another Re-education Survey. Strength; 1 officer and 1627 other ranks. Camp address is now Glatton Airfield, Connington, Herts.

Commandant: Lt Col G C Cooper Camp leader: Owm Hecker, Erich. Aged 33, a textile finisher, No party associations, co-operative.

Interpreter: Capt G R Bardens Deputy C/L: Ofw. Roehl, Max (was camp leader in last report), Aged 48. No political influence.

German MO: S/Arzt Dr Kuhlo, Traugott. Aged 40, “*opportunist Nazi”,* no political activity.

Political screening was being phased out – simplified numbers given – A: 8 / B: 1620. 855 pows had been repatriated to date.

Glatton camp occupied a former aerodrome and was widely scattered. It had 3 ‘site leaders’:

Site 1 Hfw Schilling, Karl, aged 27, a clerk. Evidence that he was an anti-Nazi. Heads the camp DAG.

Site 2 Uffz Stroehlein, Adolf, aged 34, telegraph employee, was a member of D.A.F. (*Deutsche Arbeitsfront* – Nazi trade union organisation) and R.B.D.B. (*Reichsbund der deutschen Beamten* – Nazi Civil Servants Federation).

Site 3 Ogefr Jakobi, Emil, aged 37, “*quiet, intelligent”.*

Mr Nash admits that despite his more hopeful last report, there had been no progress. Morale was ‘fairly low’ due to long captivity and the attitude of the C.O. *“who is feared and hated by the Ps/W. This results from constant humiliating pinpricks, such as frequent inspections and various checks at odd and inconvenient times and the use of his discretionary powers…*” A positive effect was expected from pow concessions due to be made allowing them a little more freedom.

Re-education activities continued to be good with the continued support of the Interpreter Officer. There had been some disruption to discussion groups and the wireless facility due to the move from Yaxley. The only criticism regarded films – the YMCA continued to supply, but the other source was T.F. (Travelling Films) which was sending too many American films, “*with the accent on sex having been shown”.* Films with a story and Newsreels were preferred.

As part of new concessions, outside contacts were being developed. There were religious links with a methodist church and the Salvation Army. Visits were planned to the local magistrates court and Peterborough Council meetings. However, contacts were limited due to the remoteness of the site.

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

**20 November 1947** – A visiting lecturer, C K Murray, reported that; “*This camp is being taken over within the next week by 59 camp*”. (Sawtry)

There were no further reports for Camp 279 in file FO 939/315.

Further – see Sawtry Camp 59

Commandants:

John Henry Edward Fock, 6th Baron de Robeck. 1895 - 1965. Previously with the Royal Artillery.

G C Cooper – I think he was from the South Wales Borderers.

**Numbers of pows when known:**

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|  | Open |  | Uncertain |  | Closed |  | With other camp |

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|  | Pre 6/46? | 6/46 | 8/46 | 10/46 | 1/47 | 3/47 | 4/47 | 7/47 | 11/47 | After 11/47 |
| Yaxley HQ |  |  | 892 |  | 820 | 720 | 683 |  |  |  |
| Orton Hostel |  |  | 425 |  | 264 | 250 | 232 | 268 |  | Camp 59 |
| Sibson Hostel |  |  | 749 |  | 669 | 620 |  |  |  |  |
| Norman Cross Hostel |  |  | 104 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Glatton Hostel / HQ |  |  |  |  | 427 | 370 | 728 | 1276 |  | Camp 59 |
| Billetees |  |  |  |  | 77 | ? | 96 | 84 |  | Camp 59 |
| Total |  |  | 2170 |  | 2257 | ? | 1739 | 1628 | ? |  |

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|  | **After the camp:**  Became Yaxley Hostel used by the Ministry of Labour to accommodate workers at various local industries up to the mid-1950’s.  The camp as it is today:  <https://repatriatedlandscape.org/england/pow-sites-in-eastern-england/pow-camp-279-militia-camp-yaxley-farcet/> |
| Yaxley early 1950’s |

**Further Information:**

National Archives

FO 939/315 – 279 Working Camp, Glatton Airfield Camp, Peterborough, Lincolnshire and Militia Camp, Yaxley, Lincolnshire. Dated 1946-1947. Used above.

FO 1120/242 – Re-educational survey visit reports for camps 279 to 284. Dated 1 January 1946 – 31 December 1948

IWM have copies of the camp newspaper dated 1947. Catalogue LBY E.J. 423

Some more pictures - <https://www.peterboroughimages.co.uk/yaxley-pow-camp/>

**Hostels**

**Glatton** - ex-aerodrome. The camp was spread over various locations at the aerodrome that had been a large US airbase just to the E of Glatten.

**January 1947** – Leader Rudolf Kahlen (A); trained at Wilton Park. German M.O. O/Arzt Dr Fischer.

**April 1947** – Leader Karl Grueninger, aged 27, commercial student, member of Hitler Youth. Described as; “*arrogant, typical German N.C.O.”* M.O. as before.

**June 1947** – became the main camp until late 1947 when it was taken over by Sawtry camp 59.

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|  | Pre 6/46? | 6/46 | 8/46 | 10/46 | 1/47 | 3/47 | 4/47 | 7/47 | 11/47 | After 11/47 |
| Glatton Hostel / HQ |  |  |  |  | 427 | 370 | 728 | 1276 |  | Camp 59 |

**Norman Cross** – 2 miles from the main camp. Norman Cross is famous for being the site of a Napoleonic Wars pow camp – the ‘Norman Cross Depot’.

Only 1 entry in the FO file for this hostel.

**August 1946** – Leader: St.Fw Stoergle (B). 40 youth (under-25) pows. 26 pupils for English Instruction.

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|  | Pre 6/46? | 6/46 | 8/46 | 10/46 | 1/47 | 3/47 | 4/47 | 7/47 | 11/47 | After 11/47 |
| Norman Cross Hostel |  |  | 104 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

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| **Orton Hall** – 4 miles from the main camp. Described as; “*in a very comfortable Manor House in the middle of a beautiful park.”* NGR TL 167 965  The camp was made up of huts and the house.  **August 1946** – Leader: St Fw Sebastian (B) / Deputy: Obwm. Golla (B). 140 youth (under-25) pows. 60 pupils for English Instruction.  **January 1947** – Leader Wilhelm Sebastian (B)  **April 1947** – Leader Berthold Golla – age 32, electrician, “*Makes an honest impression*.” 3 shifts of pows working at a brick-works.  **July 1947** – Leader Hfw Fritz Lippel. Aged 32, was a member of D.A.F. (*Deutsche Arbeitsfront* – Nazi trade union organisation).  **Late 1947** - taken over by Sawtry camp 59.  The Hall is now a hotel. |  |
| Ordnance Survey 1958 |

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|  | Pre 6/46? | 6/46 | 8/46 | 10/46 | 1/47 | 3/47 | 4/47 | 7/47 | 11/47 | After 11/47 |
| Orton Hostel |  |  | 425 |  | 264 | 250 | 232 | 268 |  | Camp 59 |

**Sibson** – 10 miles from the main camp, next to the A1. Several possible sites, including a number marked as ‘hostels’ after the war.

**August 1946** – Leader Ob Wm. Haecker (C) – although the Commandant wished to retain this leader, the camp visitor regarded his removal as essential on the grounds of political unreliability. 246 youth (under-25) pows. 70 pupils for English Instruction.

**January 1947** – Leader Karl Grűninger (C). German MO S/Arzt Dr Kuhlo (C)

A brief memory by Bill Watkins – “*Towards the end of the war we had two POW’s from the Sibson camp working for us which we fed, along with Mr Coles, before they returned to the camp. Like many POW’s they collected wood, wire and HP sauce bottles to make Ships in Bottles and toys for us children*.” <http://livingvillagesmagazine.co.uk/files/March2020.pdf>

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Pre 6/46? | 6/46 | 8/46 | 10/46 | 1/47 | 3/47 | 4/47 | 7/47 | 11/47 | After 11/47? |
| Sibson Hostel |  |  | 749 |  | 669 | 620 |  |  |  |  |