**Camp 34** **- Warebanks Camp, Kirkwall, Orkney (aka Tankerness)**

Included in the 1945 ICRC camp list – Labour Camp. 34. Tankerness Camp, Kirkwall, Orkney

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 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 |
|  |  | 34 | Warebank Camp, Kirkwall | Orkney |  |  | Scotland |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Notes: Although Camp 34 on Burray and Camp 60 on Lamb Holm were separate, and for most of the 2 years and 9 months that they held pows they had separate commanders, I have put basic, shared information under Camp 60.  Names – There were four camps on Orkney, (see details Camp 60). I do not know why ‘Tankerness’ was associated with the camp at Warebanks.  Location: **NGR** ND 474 982. Warebanks camp was located on the north of the ‘bleak’ island of Burray, Orkney. It was the smaller of the two camps located on the islands to build the Churchill Barriers. The farm located at the site of the camp is called Warebanks.  Before the camp: Remote farm and lands.  Stone crushing site on Burray – picture from Balfour Beatty |
| Ordnance Survey – ND 4761 9819. Approximate area for camp. |

POW Camp: The reason for Camps 34 and 60 was to build the Churchill Barriers on the eastern access routes to Scapa Flow. Camp 60 was larger and famous for its ‘Italian Chapel’ - Camp 34 also had its own chapel, but it was destroyed at the end of the war.

< Causeway / Barrier to Burray, taken on a very cold, wet, and windy day in the middle of July, 2019.

Extracts from an account by Coriolano Caprara who arrived at Burray Camp 34 in early 1942:

*“My contingent, made up of 530 men, was allocated to camp 34 on the island of Burray. The other contingent of 500 men was allocated on the island of Lamb Holm.*

*The British commandant of our camp was Major Yates. The internal commandant was Marshal Bertone, who immediately had to organize the working squads as well as the camp staff. I was lucky to be amongst the group of 15 men (along with chefs, two orderly room men, a nurse, a barber and a cobbler) who, once free from their specific tasks, had to look after the good running of the camp, keeping it clean and buying the food. Apart from that, I was in a well-organised “band” that put on stage shows to lift our comrades’ moods amid the hard working conditions.*

[The work was considered to be related to war (See Camp 60) and a strike ensued]*. …Unfortunately, we were punished for this and were fed only bread and water. A normal meal would come only every four days. The guards would often burst into our huts at night, forcing us to get up and go out so they could carry out inspections inside. This would often happen several times during the same night.*

*After about 20 days of this atmosphere, an International Red Cross Committee arrived at the camp to communicate to us that the works at the barriers were not of war-like nature… Not all of us believed what we were told but, despite that, we all decided that we’d better resume our work. After this turbulent episode, our relationship with the British command and their men improved and became less strict.*

*A few of my comrades fell psychologically ill, some were homesick, and others fell sick because of the hard working conditions or because of the weather. In order not to fall victim of depression myself… I made sure I kept myself busy as much as I could. Along with working on the maintenance of the camp, I organized shows and played the drum in the band. Some instruments were donated to us by locals, others were provided by Major Yates, who was happy that the troubles at the works were over.*

*I tried to engage the spare time I had by learning English. I started by myself with a modest book I found at the camp outlet,*The English Language in Three Months. *Once finished, I realised I hadn’t learnt much. I had the idea to ask the military chaplain of the camp, Don Luigi Borsarelli, who was available, to give lessons to illiterate soldiers. Not only did he agree to help me but he also lent me £10 to purchase a grammar book, a dictionary, etc. He had me sign a receipt with the commitment to give him the borrowed money back once we returned to Italy. When I got back to Italy, I was pleasantly surprised to find out that the loan had been a present from the very beginning.*

*With the time passing, life at the camp got organised in a way that made our forced stay less tough. We used to be paid with symbolic currency, spendable only in our outlet where necessary goods were sold: pens, pencils, paper, toothpaste, toothbrushes, soap bars, razor blades, candies, etc. No alcoholic drinks. There were also table tennis, playing cards, draughts and a radio where we could listen to music and to war bulletins in English. Moreover, our skilled craftsmen built a billiard table with concrete. The cloth for the top was made with blankets, which had been made smooth by rubbing them with razor blades. The pins were brilliantly made with toothbrush handles. The balls were made of concrete. We could only play with the balls because we didn’t have the cues. We tried with broomsticks but stopped after few attempts. During an inspection Major Yates was fascinated by our craftsmen’s skills. After a few days he donated real balls and a pair of cues.*

*The hard work at the barriers proceeded well. Our men got qualified and many obtained positions of responsibility as drivers and crane operators. One of them became assistant to a civilian who was responsible for the electric power station that supplied energy to the four cableways and the two camps. Despite the harsh weather, the works went on. The 5 and 10 ton concrete blocks were built and stocked up waiting to be used. The superintendents to the construction company were happy with the works and the Commandant of the camp didn’t have any further problems.*

*One day in April 1944 we got the order to gather in the canteen. Major Yates announced that the Badoglio Government along with the British Government had decided to make us an offer. We couldn’t be repatriated because the German troops were still occupying our land. Whilst waiting to be repatriated, we were free to form an “Italian Labour Battalion” with the following rules.*

*We would wear a uniform identical to the ones worn by the English soldiers, without the much-hated red patches, featuring the Italian flag and the word “Italy” written on the shoulders.*

*We would no longer be escorted by armed guards on our way to work. Instead, we would be under one of our non-commissioned officer’s responsibility.*

*We would be paid with normal currency, spendable even outside the camp.*

*We had free time from 18:00 to 21:00. Sunday we had the whole day off.*

*There were also some restrictions. We couldn’t go further than 5 miles away from the camp; we couldn’t use public transport, go to pubs and have relationships with women.*

*Whoever decided not to accept these conditions would continue to be considered a POW with the same treatment as before and be transferred to another camp.*

*We were given two hours to decide. I had no hesitation in accepting the new offer because we had always worked and this way we could continue to work, but with better treatment. It is painful to remember that some of the friends we had lived in harmony with for years decided to leave. Instead of saying goodbye to us in a fraternal way, they shouted from the truck, “Traitors! Jersey-sellers!" Some of us shouted back, “Dirty fascists!” What a shame. It was such a painful episode.*

*Many things improved because of this new situation. We organised football matches against teams of English soldiers, and track and field competitions….*

*Thanks to the free time, we could get in contact with the locals. We became friends with them and I met the Wylie family… I was so touched by their openness because we had been considered with mistrust and hatred for so many years. The way they treated me made me regain confidence in human nature.*

*The evening before we left Orkney (April 1945) I went to say goodbye to my friends. I left them the £3 that I hadn’t spent to purchase the books.”*

For the full story and many pictures - <https://www.orkneyology.com/italian-pows.html>

**16 December 1942** – Orders on Ground Defence of Burray. At Stand To, 4 look-out posts were stationed around the island and instructions were given to defend the island.

With regard to the pows:

“*POW Camp will be responsible for custody of prisoners and defence of the Camp….*

*POW to be deprived of braces and belts and handed over to O.C. Tps at Westermill.”* [Westermill = Island HQ].

A railway network was built on Burray to transport rock and sand from a large quarry to the east of the camp.

The camp was listed as an Italian Labour Battalion under the Scottish Command area in May 1944, (WO 32/10737).

**Further information:** Historic Environment Scotland [http://canmore.org.uk/site/304493](https://canmore.org.uk/site/304493)

National Archives – WO 199/2717 Defence scheme: Burray Operation Order. Dated 1942 Dec. Used above.

The site as it is today - <https://repatriatedlandscape.org/pow-sites-in-scotland/pow-camp-34-warebank/>