**Camp 59** **- Sawtry Camp, Wood Walton Lane, Sawtry, Huntingdonshire (Cambridgeshire)**

Included in the 1945 ICRC Camp list – Labour Camp. 59. Sawtry Camp, Wood Walton Lane, Sawtry, Hunts.

|  |
| --- |
| **1947 Camp List** |
| 59(G.W.C.) | Sawtry Camp, Wood Walton Lane, Sawtry, Hunts | E. | Priswar,Sawtry | Sawtry 55 | Abbotts Ripton | Lt.Col.J.G.M.B.Cooke M.C. | v/1453/2 |

|  |
| --- |
| **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 19 82 | 142 | 59 | Sawtry Camp, Woodwalton Lane, Sawtry | Huntingdonshire (Cambridgeshire) | 5 | German Working Camp |  |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Location:** NGR TL 184 820. About 2.5 km SE of Sawtry. Parts of the camp shown on 1954 map.**Before the camp:** Farmland**Pow Camp:** **December 1941** - The site was accepted as a pow camp. An Italian pow construction gang was allocated from Camp 26 Barton Field to work with the Pioneer Corps. **1942** - The camp opened for Italian pows.The camp was built on both sides of the road leading up to a compound with barbed wire fencing. Nissen huts with concrete prefabricated slab building for amenities such as cookhouse, ablutions, latrines… There was a camp hospital and chapel. Later, for German pows there was a theatre and information room inside huts.**12 February 1943** – there was an International Red Cross inspection - Italian prisoners, capacity 880.**1943 / 44** – 3 hostels for Italian pows were listed: Huntingdon, Catworth, Yaxley. (Camp 279 later opened at Yaxley). |  |
| Ordnance Survey 1954 |

**21 May 1943 –** Death of Soldato Ernesto Madini, aged 26. Born 24 July 1916 in Magherno, Italy. Later reinterred at the Italian Section, Brookwood Cemetery.

**May 1944 and November 1944** - The camp was listed as an Italian Labour Battalion under the Eastern Command area, (WO 32/10737).

**1945** - Another hostel was opened (before September 1945) (FO939/383) – Abbots Ripton with150 pows.

Italian pows up to at least Autumn 1945, then German pows. The Foreign Office file (FO 939/140) holding re-education reports begins in August 1946.

|  |
| --- |
| Oversight and development of re-education activities and English teaching for German pows was carried out by PID (Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office) / COGA (Control Office for Germany and Austria – UK). Visits and reports were made. The standard of the reports varied greatly. The visitors took little interest, if any, in activities other than re-education. They rarely mentioned welfare, sports, games, pastimes, crafts, etc of the pows. |

**22 – 26 August 1946** – Four members of the ‘Segregation Section’ visited the camp to review political screening. Strength; 1 officer, 1863 other ranks. Main camp + Warboys Satellite and Hostel. Note that the four hostels listed for Italians in 1943 - 1945 were no longer included.

Commandant: Lt Col J.G. Cooke M.C. Camp Leader: Fw P Marner (A)

Interpreter: S/Sgt J Solms Deputy C/L: Hfw K Viehl

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Political Screening: | A+ | A | A- | B+ | B | B- | C | C+ | Unknown |
| 1 | 48 | - | 322 | 641 | 308 | 201 | 23 | 319 |

Overall, the main camp was politically ‘grey,’ with the majority of C class pows at the Warboys Satellite Camp. Morale was low due to uncertainty of repatriation. As in the majority of camps, no interest was shown by the Commandant in re-education. The pows were regarded as, “*culturally on a low level, consisting mainly of agricultural labourers and manual workers*.”

The Camp Leader was a 29-year-old medical student. “*He is intelligent and conscientious, but lacks the necessary moral stamina and has asked to be relieved of his duties.”* The deputy leader had taken over by the next report.

The Deputy C/L, Karl Viehl was regarded as; “*An excellent non-political type. He was employed in the Prussian State Police from 1928-1934, when he was dismissed for fighting an SS man. Good at his job*.”

The German M.O. was 33 years old, a member of the Nazi party and the SS from 1933; “*Primarily an egoist. A very capable and energetic doctor and well liked*.”

**25 September 1946** – English Inspector’s report by Major R L S Raffles. Strength in main camp, 731. There were three small classes for English teaching. Major Raffles went on to inspect the Warboys Satellite Camp.

**10 – 14 December 1946** – Mr Oliver Nash visited the camp to review; “*Screening Group 11 and re-education*”. Strength 1828 – 1 officer and 1827 other ranks.

Commandant: Lt Col M G Cooke M.C. Camp leader: Hfw. Viehl Karl (B+)

Interpreter: None I.O. Major Mockler Deputy C/L: Stfw Urlau Paul (B+)

 German M.O.: Stabsarzt Dietmann (B-)

Simplified political screening figures listed: A – 9 / B – 1343 / C – 259 / Unscreened 217

Major Mockler was 2nd in command and was dealing with the pows’ welfare. It was noted again that there was little support for re-education.

Despite the previous report stating that the Camp Leader was good at his job, in this report it was stated; “*very obliging but has done nothing to further re-education.”* Mr Nash was more insulting in his next report.

Protestant padre, Kurt Schroeder; *“…very active, almost fanatical in religious respect, but he has not troubled about re-education, even from a humanitarian angle*.”

Morale was regarded as low, mainly due to lack of repatriations. 25% of the pows were ‘youth’ (under-25), but that was not seen as a problem.

The standard list of re-education activities was given.

Wochenpost and Ausblick – separate appendix

Newspapers – well catered for. A range of British papers were received daily. German papers were received, but more copies needed.

Library – only 700 books, mainly at HQ.

Lecturers – regular. Low attendance at HQ, greater interest shown at Warboys.

Discussion groups – lack of support. Warboys Satellite may start.

Films – YMCA and Gaumont British sending films

Wireless – Good installation and able to broadcast over loudspeakers. Some problems with noisy card players in the same room.

Camp Magazine - ‘*Rundschau’* (Review) – published monthly.

Press reviews – 10-minute news reviews due to start on the wireless / loudspeakers.

English teaching – Comprehensive programme by reliable teachers.

Information room – none.

Other activities:

Religion – both denominations were catered for adequately.

Education – various subjects including French, shorthand, arithmetic and Latin.

Entertainment – A small theatre group at HQ and a band at Warboys. Plenty of opportunities for cards, football, boxing etc.

**1 – 4 April 1947** – Oliver Nash returned to review ‘Re-education and re-screening’. Strength; 1 officer, 1527 other ranks.

Commandant: Lt Col J G M Cooke M.C. Camp leader: Hfw. Viehl Karl (B+)

Interpreter: I.O. Major Mockler Deputy C/L: Stfw Urlau Paul (B+)

 S/Sgt B Hayhurst German M.O.: Stabsarzt Diekmann (B-)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Political Screening: | A | B | C | C+ |
|  | 17 | 1268 | 242 | 1 |

28 appeals against screening grades had been made – all were upheld. It was important for pows to get a better grading to ensure faster repatriation.

Major Mockler received praise for his special concern over pow care and welfare.

S/Sgt Hayhurst, the Interpreter, was reported to have a “*halting”* level of German.

The Camp Leader, Karl Viehl, was described as being aged about 40, and clearly not liked by Mr Nash; *“He is stupid, unimaginative and has no re-educational value”*. The deputy was regarded as a “*quiet type of higher intelligence than the Camp Leader but contributes nothing to re-education*.”

The M.O. was described as a “*fat country doctor*” and an “*opportunist*” – Mr Nash did not bother to state whether he was competent or not.

Morale was still low, “*owing to unemployment and cold.”* Political progress was restricted to small numbers. “*There is a strong undercurrent of resentment at still being in captivity. Democracy is denounced because it has not given them comfort and luxury in Germany. There is no sense of guilt, or complicity in the hardship at present prevailing throughout the world.”*

There had been some slight improvement in re-education activities: Newspapers – some Swiss papers received / Library - had more books / Small discussion groups were meeting weekly.

**1 May 1947** – English inspector’s report by Major R L S Raffles. Strength 1475 at main, 1 satellite and 1 hostel. English tests were carried out with 39 pows, but no further details were given in his report. COGA issued English language certificates to successful participants.

Commandant Lt Col.: W M Knatchbull Lagersprecher: Vienl

**1 – 3 July 1947** – Oliver Nash revisited to carry out a Re-educational Survey. Strength; 1 M.O., 1353 other ranks

Commandant: Lt Col W M Knatchbull Camp leader: Hfw. Viehl Karl (B+)

Interpreter: I.O. Major G E Mockler Deputy C/L: Sfw Alscher, Max (B+)

 S/Sgt B Hayhurst German M.O.: Stabsarzt Diekmann (B-)

A simplified screening figure was given – 1354 B’s. 440 pows had been repatriated to date.

Despite a change in Commandant, there continued to be little interest in re-education activities amongst the British staff and the pows were said to be apathetic.

This time, Mr Nash was more positive towards the Camp Leader; “*gives satisfaction as camp leader, handling the men without resort to Prussian methods*.”

Morale had improved due to better weather, employment – and repatriation.

Re-education activities were much the same as before. It was hoped that groups of selected pows would be able to attend Huntingdon Law Courts and local council meetings.

**26 – 29 August 1947** – Oliver Nash returned for another Re-education Survey. Strength; 1 officer, 1227 other ranks.

Change in Camp leader. Karl Viehl had been relieved of his duties for misappropriation of pow funds. The previous deputy, Sfw Max Alscher, had taken the position. Alscher was aged 35, a blacksmith and then professional soldier. “*Typical regular NCO, popular with the PW.”*

Morale was again recorded as being low, due to various factors – long captivity, bad news from home, fears for the future, and the isolation of the camps.

Re-education activities had declined further. The camp magazine had been abandoned, there were no press reviews and attendance at most lectures was down. Outside contacts were scant: the vicar of Warboys visited the satellite to give some English lessons; 6 pows attended the law courts once a week; 10 pows were to attend Methodist guild meetings once a month. The isolation of the camp made it difficult to promote outside links.

**September/October 1947** – a pow was killed in an accident at Peterborough. Mentioned in October Report, but no further details given.

**7 – 9 October 1947** – another English Inspector’s report by Major Raffles.

The Lagersprecher was ‘Franke’. There were 2 small classes in the main camp and 1 at the satellite. Attendances had fallen. The vicar giving lessons had stopped, though it was hoped he would re-start in the near future.

**14 – 17 October 1947** – F C French visited to carry out a Re-education Survey. Strength; 1 officer, 1186 other ranks.

One change from the survey carried out in August; the new Camp Leader was Masch.Maat Francke, Fritz (B-). “*A clerk by profession; no party record. A sincere and honest man who takes his job seriously, and is popular with British staff and German PsW. This man is well suited in his job, although he is not as much of a disciplinarian as the Commandant would like.”*

Simplified screening – A 1 / B 1186. 851 pows repatriated to date.

Similar reviews of staff as the previous visitor. The CO was interested in re-education, but ran the camp with a “*strict military outlook*”. 2nd i/c Major Mockler promoted re-education activities and was popular with the pows. S/Sgt Hayhurst was efficient, but had little authority.

The visitor believed that morale had improved due to the work of the studies leader, Herbert Woelk, and to more contacts being made outside the camp – however, increased repatriations would have been the major factor. He believed that the camp had too much of a “*militaristic attitude*”. The CSM was criticised; “*a regular soldier of Jewish extraction and has no understanding of the treatment of PsW in long captivity*.” The Commandant agreed to post or relegate the CSM to another job.

A recent War Office Order caused resentment. Pows were ordered to work on fatigues on Saturday mornings for 2 hours – this was after they had completed a hard working week of 48 hours at the brickworks.

About 50% of the pows were youth (under-25). They were not a particular problem, but were little interested in re-education. A number were listed as being suitable to attend the Youth Camp.

Re-education activities were similar to the previous report. An information room had been started where extracts from newspapers were displayed.

Other activities –

Religion – The Protestant Padre, Obgefr Kurt Schroeder, aged 36, member of the SA 1933-1934, had no political influence in the camp. Congregation of about 50, but he was unpopular with many pows. He refused to carry out a burial service for the pow killed in Peterborough as the man did not belong to a church and was an atheist. The visitor recommended that he should be removed.

The RC Priest was based at Yaxley Camp 279. Congregation of about 90. The former priest, Muecke, had been posted to Shalstone Camp 55.

Education – most classes had ended, but it was hoped more would start.

There was a theatre group of 15 men which also visited neighbouring camps.

**November 1947** – Sawtry took over Glatton Camp 279 + a hostel at Orton Longueville.

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

**26 – 28 January 1948** - another English Inspector’s report by Major Raffles. Strength 2268.

Very little English teaching was taking place – Glatton was slightly better than the other sites.

**10 – 12 February 1948** – A Re-education Survey was carried out by A G George. Strength; 2 officers, 1666 other ranks.

There was a new interpreter; S/Sgt L Cave. He had been a pow in Germany for 5 years, and was then interpreter at Glatton Camp 279 before it was taken over by Sawtry.

The camp leader, Fritz Trinks, previously at Warboys, had been transferred to the main camp and became the overall camp leader. The deputy C/L was Kurt Becker (B-).

Morale was good due to the increased rate of repatriations. Negative factors were news from home, hard work at the brickworks, and poor clothing for those being repatriated. Camp discipline was firm. There had been little political development apart from a general anti-communist trend.

A lot of re-education work had ceased due to repatriations of the pows leading the activities. There was a short-lived weekly camp magazine of 250 copies – ‘*Wir und die Zeit’* (Our Times), and a daily news-sheet – ‘*Neues vom Tage’*. Wall newspapers were issued for the information room.

**1 March 1948** – At the level crossing at Connington North, in dense fog at 7.00 a.m., a train hit a Fordson 2½-ton lorry carrying 11 German pows. The lorry was owned by the Huntingdon War Agricultural Executive Committee. It was driven by a German pow, (Gustav Baehr) with 10 German pow passengers going to neighbouring farms. 3 pows were killed at the scene, and three others, including the driver, died soon after – the remaining 5 were seriously injured.

A doctor and the medical officer from Sawtry pow camp arrived at about 7.45 a.m., at about the same time as the ambulance from Peterborough.

The Ministry of Transport Report on the accident: <https://www.jonroma.net/media/rail/accident/uk/mot/MoT_Conington1948.pdf>

**31 March – 2 April 1948** – Oliver Nash returned for a Re-education Visit. Strength; 1 officer, 766 other ranks.

No changes to senior personel since the last report.

Mr Nash made comments about his findings of the pows’ attitudes towards the British. He found no evidence of “*positive hatred”,* a small percentage who disliked the British, but 90% felt indifferent.

He also expressed his own views of the pows; “*They are a dull lot with very little political or civic intelligence, mainly interested in their immediate comfort and convenience with little thought of what the future may bring or what their part in it should be.”* Despite this he still believed that, *“much has been achieved by re-education….. and the seeds sown of democratic consciousness*.”

**Numbers of pows when known:**

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

1943 – capacity 880. 1943 – 1945 hostels listed at - Huntingdon, Catworth, Yaxley and Abbots Ripton with150 pows.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Pre 46 | 8/46 | 12/46 | 4/47 | 5/47 | 7/47 | 8/47 | 10/47 | 1/48 | 2/48 | 4/48 |
| Sawtry |  | 814 | 725 | 669 | 644 | 495 | 489 | 701 | 639 | 422 | 275 |
| Warboys Sat |  | 962 | 694 | 755 | 368 | 756 | 369 | 399 | 389 | 366 |  |
| Warboys Hostel |  | 295 | 364 | 262 |  |
| Glatton Sat |  | With Camp 279 | 862 | 679 | 449 |
| Orton Hostel |  | With Camp 279 | 280 | 126 |  |
| Billetees |  | 88 | 114 | 104 | 99 | 103 | 108 | 87 | 98 | 75 | 43 |
| Total |  | 1864 | 1827 | 1528 | 1475 | 1354 | 1228 | 1187 | 2268 | 1668 | 767 |



< Toy made by pow from Sawtry.

<https://sawtry.ccan.co.uk/content/catalogue_item/toy-made-by-a-prisoner-of-war-in-the-1940s-at-conington>

Known Camp commandants;

? – April/May 1947: Lieutenant Colonel J G M B Cooke M.C. From the Royal Regiment of Artillery.

April/May 1947 – 1948: Lt Col W M Knatchbull

**After the camp:** Used as emergency housing, then as a fuel depot and pumping station.

For the site as it is today:

<https://repatriatedlandscape.org/england/pow-sites-in-eastern-england/pow-camp-59-sawtry/>

**Further information:**

National Archives – FO 939/140 59 Working Camp, Sawtry Camp, Sawtry, Huntingdonshire. Dated 1946-1948. Used above.

**Satellite Camps**

**Glatton Satellite Camp.** 3 miles from the main camp. Previously linked to Yaxley Camp 279.

**January 1948** – Officer i/c, Major Baker.

**February 1948** – Camp leader; Erich Hecker (B-)

**April 1948** - same Camp Leader

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|  | Pre 46 | 8/46 | 12/46 | 4/47 | 5/47 | 7/47 | 8/47 | 10/47 | 1/48 | 2/48 | 4/48 |
| Glatton Sat |  | With Camp 279 | 862 | 679 | 449 |

**Warboys Satellite Camp.** 11 miles from the main camp. (Possibly independently administered camp before 1946).

**August 1946** - Camp leader Hfw Buck (A). A professional soldier, aged 32, who was, *“very keen, extremely capable, intelligent, honest and sincere, though definitely non-political. He speaks very good English, and makes an excellent camp leader*.”

The political complexion was recorded as ‘black’ (C grade) with many pows being Waffen-SS and ‘youth’ (under 25) – “*who are still hopelessly immersed in Nazi ideology. They are fanatical and blind…*” Another contributing factor was that many of the pows had come from camps in the USA where they had been misinformed that they would be returning to Germany, despite the fact that their destination to the UK was known. Some had been in Camp 2228 near Brussels where they had received very poor treatment.

One C grade pow, O/Soldat F Steinbrink – ex Hitler Youth leader and voluntary Waffen SS was listed as; “*a dangerous, fanatical, trouble-maker who continually stirs up strife, and tried to start a ‘go slow’ campaign amongst his fellow workers.”* It was recommended that he be removed without delay.

One other pow, Soldat Werner Geiger, also C, was recommended for attendance at the special pow youth hostel (Camp 180 Radwinter) as he had; “*the right type of discipline, has great potential for good*.”

**September 1946** – English Inspector’s Report for the Warboys Satellite Camp was submitted by Major R L S Raffles. Strength 768.

Commandant: Capt J Sinclair. Lagersprecher: Lachmuth. 3 small classes were held. Attendance had fallen off due to long working hours during harvest.

**27 October 27 1946** - a church service was held in Warboys village, with about 150 pows. The sermon was partly in German, led by Protestant Padre Kurt Schroeder - and partly in English led by Rev Nelson Trafford. Translations were provided for the mixed congregation. Some reports state that Schroeder was from the Warboys Camp, but records place him at the main Sawtry Camp. There are further records of the vicar from Warboys attending the camp to give English lessons.

**December 1946** – Leader Fw. Gerhard Loewert (B). Pows worked at a brick works on shift duties (day and night).

**April 1947** – same leader, aged 34, a member of the SA 1935 to 1939 – “*Co-operative but watchful.”*

**July 1947** – Camp leader Fw Trinks Fritz (B) – he had previously been leader of the Warboys Hostel. He had been with the Channel Islands Occupation force.

**August 1947** – the Camp leader was noted as having greatly improved re-education at the camp.

**October 1947** – same camp leader.

The commandant – Captain James was a very good influence, “*he understands the PsW perfectly and does everything in his power to teach them the democratic way of life*.”

**February 1948** – Camp leader; Josef Seufert (B+)

No further records after this date.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Pre 46 | 8/46 | 12/46 | 4/47 | 5/47 | 7/47 | 8/47 | 10/47 | 1/48 | 2/48 | 4/48 |
| Warboys Sat |  | 962 | 694 | 755 | 368 | 756 | 369 | 399 | 389 | 366 |  |
| Warboys Hostel |  | 295 | 364 | 262 |  |

**Hostels**

**Abbots Ripton**

**1945** - Opened before September 1945 (FO939/383) – with150 pows.

**September 1946 –** A pow hostel with 286 pows was listed at **‘**Abbots Ripton 264 M.U.’(Maintenance Unit) with Kings Cliffe Camp 702. Same place?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Catworth.** NGR TL 085 732**1943 / 1944** – listed as a hostel for Italian pows.Certainly linked to a different HQ camp after this. |  |
| Ordnance Survey 1958 |

**Huntingdon**

**Local information states -** The Italian camp was just past the Iron Bridge opposite the old bus depot, the German camp was up St.Peters Road where the school is.

**1943 / 1944** – listed as a hostel for Italian pows.

**Orton Longueville Hostel.** 12 miles from main camp. Previously hostel for Camp 279. NGR TL 167 965

**January 1948** – No English classes. “*Ps/W whom I tackled on the subject were dull and apathetic. It is expected that this hostel will be shortly closed down and the house derequisitioned*.”

**February 1948** – Camp Leader; Fritz Lippel.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Pre 46 | 8/46 | 12/46 | 4/47 | 5/47 | 7/47 | 8/47 | 10/47 | 1/48 | 2/48 | 4/48 |
| Orton Hostel |  | With Camp 279 | 280 | 126 |  |

**Warboys (No. 3) Hostel**

**August 1946** – the hostel was not listed as being separate from the Warboys satellite camp. Sometimes figures were given for both the Warboys sites, at other times they were separate.

**December 1946** – Leader Fw. Trinks Fritz (B). Pows worked at a brick works on shift duties (day and night).

**April 1947** – same leader who was seen as genuinely furthering re-education.

**July 1947** – Leader Stfw Urlau, Paul. (B+), aged 40, a professional soldier. “*Rather tough N.C.O. type who should be well able to deal with the rather unruly inmates (brickworkers) in this hostel*.”

After August 1947 there are no separate reports for this hostel – it was regarded as part of the Warboys Satellite camp.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Pre 46 | 8/46 | 12/46 | 4/47 | 5/47 | 7/47 | 8/47 | 10/47 | 1/48 | 2/48 | 4/48 |
| Warboys Sat |  | 962 | 694 | 755 | 368 | 756 | 369 | 399 | 389 | 366 |  |
| Warboys Hostel |  | 295 | 364 | 262 |  |

**Yaxley** (Camp 279 later opened at Yaxley).

**1943 / 1944** – listed as a hostel for Italian pows.