**Camp 154** **- Ministry of Works Camp, Swanscombe, Kent**

Included in the 1945 ICRC camp list – Labour Camp. 154. Min. of Works Camp, Swanscombe, Greenhithe, Nr.Dartford, Kent.

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| **1947 Camp list** | | | | | | | |
| 154(G.W.C.) | Ministry of Works Camp, Swanscombe, Greenhithe, Kent | E. | Priswar, Greenhithe | Gravesend 4797 | (Blank) | Lt.Col.P.H.W.Russell O.B.E. | 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 |
| TQ 605 739 | 177 | 154 | Ministry of Works Camp, Swanscombe Street, Swanscombe | Kent | 4 | German Working Camp | Site occupied by housing |

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| **Location:** Shows above Manor House Farm. Aerial photo 1947 - <https://maps.nls.uk/view/238925368>  **Before the camp:** Farmland  **Pow Camp:** Italian and later German pows.   |  | | --- | | 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. If there were still Italian pows in hostels, they were usually ignored by PID. | |  |
| Ordnance Survey 1962 |

**16 March 1946 –** Edition No.8 of the camp magazine - [Lagerstimme : Demokratische : P.O.W. Camp 154 Swanscombe Kent - The Wiener Holocaust Library](https://www.whlcollections.org/image/99580/)

**13-16 May 1947** – General re-educational survey. Strength; 1 officer (the M.O.), 796 Other Ranks at HQ, 4 hostels + billets. Recorded as being the first PID visit – it was extremely late in comparison to other camps.

Commandant: Lt Col P H W Russel O.B.E., R.A. Camp leader: Fw Hans Vesper (B+)

Interpreter: Sgt Gruenfeld Deputy C/L: Ofw Oscar Ziegner (B)

German M.O.: St Arzt Körner (A)

The Commandant was new to this camp; he supported the aims of re-education. It was highly unusual for a Lt Col to be in charge of a camp this size – it would usually be a major.

The camp leader was stated to be; “*a quiet, unassuming man, rather better educated than the average, and seems to have the camp well in hand*.”

The M.O. supported re-education activities though he felt bitter as his repatriation was delayed. He also believed he should be repatriated due to his father’s position, (Adolf Körner, district president of Lower Franconia). He was not recorded at this camp in September.

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| Political screening: | A | B | C | Unscreened |
|  | 55 | 700 | 38 | 4 |

82 pows were appealing against their political grade – the better the grade, the sooner repatriated – in theory. The report stated that the majority of pows thought that screening was carried out fairly and sympathetically – pows in other camps stated the opposite. 450 pows repatriated to date.

Morale was recorded as generally good. A main negative factor was bad news from Germany. Positive factors included relaxation of restrictions, good relations with civilians and having a good indication of when they could expect to be repatriated. No trace of Nazism was observed.

‘Youth pows’ – usually recorded as under-25, but here listed as under-27. 50% were in this age group. Most had no interest in re-education or general education activities, preferring to spend their spare time out of camp.

The standard list of re-education activities was given:

Wochenpost and Ausblick – separate appendix.

Newspapers – Poor. Only the Manchester Guardian and The Times was taken officially for the HQ and hostels and paid for from the Welfare Fund, (money raised through sales in the canteen). Other papers had to be purchased privately. 6/8 German papers sent weekly by COGA.

Library – ‘*Adequate*.’ Did not state how many books.

Lectures – regular and popular.

Discussion groups – small groups at all sites meeting weekly or fortnightly. HQ took the form of a debating club.

Fims – Only YMCA visiting regularly. Most other camps had visits from a private company as well.

Wireless – “*Inadequate.”* Old sets at all sites with poor reception, German stations could not be heard. There were insufficient funds in the Welfare Fund to buy new sets.

Camp magazine – A dozen, short, daily sheets, and a fortnightly magazine of about 150 copies - *Lagerstimme: Demokratische Lagerzeitung* (The Camp Voice - Democratic Camp Newspaper).

Press review – only the daily news-sheet.

English instruction – separate appendix.

Information room – no exhibitions held.

Other camp activities –

Religion – Low interest. Pows able to attend services, concerts etc., organised by local churches. Evangelical chaplain, Ernst Roeder (B) was a lay preacher. A RC chaplain visited monthly.

Education – very few classes as pows preferred to walk out of camp in the good weather.

Entertainments – The HQ theatre group had been disbanded due to repatriations. HQ had an orchestra with 10 members – but they were short of music scores.

The report gives an overall impression that pows were left to get on for themselves – newspapers, films and wireless were inadequate – the extremely late survey by PID – and later there was no interpreter, poor formal outside contacts, and a lack of supplies (often sent by COGA) to maintain the magazine.

**21/25 August 1947** – General re-educational survey. Strength; 1 officer, 591 OR.

Commandant: Major L J Dyer R.A. Camp leader: Fw Hans Vesper (B+)

Interpreter: None Deputy C/L: Ofw Oscar Ziegner (B)

German M.O.: O.Arzt Brandt (B+)

The new Commandant supported the aims of re-education.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Political screening: | A | B | C | Unscreened |
|  | - | 590 | - | 2 \* |

\* 1 pow in Strangeways Prison for 12 months, unknown reason, due for release in October 1947 – 1 pow had been in hospital for about a year and was due for medical repatriation. There were 6 further appeals against political grading by pows recently transferred from Carpenter’s Road camp 30.

Morale continued to be generally good. There were complaints from the German camp staff (and at other camps) that their pay was lower than those who went out to work. In many camps they were paid an additional 3 shillings from the Welfare Fund, but at Swanscombe there was insufficient funds to continue paying this. The majority of pows were politically apathetic.

Changes to re-education activities –

Newspapers - The extremely limited range had not improved and was made worse by a reduced number of copies due to low Welfare Funds. Pows believed that papers sent from the Russian zone in parcels from families were being removed within the UK. (True?)

Discussion groups – ceased due to pows preferring to leave the camp.

Films – YMCA and Travelling Films Ltd fortnightly.

Camp magazine – expected to end due to lack of paper and stencils.

Other camp activities –

Religion – The chaplain had been repatriated. About 10% of the camp attended local services.

Education – no classes at HQ.

Entertainments – The small music group was not very active. “*Previous recitals of chamber music are too highbrow for the average P.W.”* (…and the above average?). Popular gramophone recitals were given at the local Methodist Church Hall and it gave the pows a chance to meet local civilians.

**14-17 October 1947** – Re-educational survey. Strength; 1 officer; 446 OR.

Only change to senior personnel; German M.O. O/Arzt Ernst Enhuber (B)

All pows screened as ‘B.’ 637 pows repatriated to date. Morale was still recorded as good. There was a fear of Russia’s intentions.

The camp magazine had been discontinued – but this was blamed on lack of contributions rather than lack of supplies. The daily news-sheet continued.

There was a new, unnamed, protestant padre.

Outside contacts – apart from informal links made with local families, formal links were extremely poor, limited to a small group of pows attending a meeting of the Dartford Rural Council.

**18-21 November 1947** – Re-educational survey. Strength; 1 officer, 410 OR.

No change to senior personnel. The camp was in the process of closing down and this had lowered morale – most pows were only interested in repatriation and walking out. The Commandant was praised for his work with re-education – but it does not state what that entailed.

667 pows repatriated to date.

Pows spent most of the free time in Dartford or Gravesend.

The new padre had been posted elsewhere. A small number of pows had contact with the WEA and “*other bodies.”*

**January 1948** – recorded as a hostel for Walderslade camp 117.

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|  | Known Camp Commandants;  1947 Lt Col P H W Russell O.B.E., from the Royal Artillery. Previously at Pabo Hall camp 119.    1947 Major L J (or L G) Dyer R.A. Previously at Purfleet camp 286  Camp token money. Could only be used in the issuing camp. It was stamped on the back each time it was used.  **After the camp:** 2019 residential area. |  |

**Further Information:**

National Archives FO 1120/228 – Re-educational survey visit reports for camps 151 to 154. Dated 1 January 1946 to 31 December 1948. Used above.

IWM have a copy of the camp newspaper dated Christmas 1946 / January 1947. Catalogue LBY E.J. 383

**POW NUMBERS**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Open |  |  | With other camps |  |  | Unknown |  |  | Not open |

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | 5/1947 | 8/1947 | 10/1947 | 11/1947 | 1948 |
| Swanscombe HQ |  | 329 | 237 | 207 | 280 | With C 117 |
| Denton |  | 148 |  |  |  |  |
| Shornemead |  | 50 | 129 | 75 | 91 |  |
| Sutton-at-Hone |  | 61 | 78 | 47 |  |  |
| Wilmington |  | 190 | 134 | 100 | 10 |  |
| Billets |  | 19 | 14 | 18 | 30 |  |
| TOTALS |  | 797 | 592 | 447 | 411 |  |

**Hostels**

**Denton**

**5/1947** – Hostel leader; Ofw Theenhausen (B+). High number of youth pows – 75%. No wireless for 8 weeks due to a faulty valve. Had an active theatre group.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | 5/1947 | 8/1947 | 10/1947 | 11/1947 | 1948 |
| Denton |  | 148 |  |  |  |  |

**Shornemead**

**5/1947** – Hostel leader; Ofw Friedr. Juergens (B+)

**9/1947** – Hostel leader; Fw Clemens Johannhardt (B) – “*a rather dull type who is completely overshadowed by the canteen manager Gefr Koch, Heinz (A).”* **10/1947** – same leader.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | 5/1947 | 8/1947 | 10/1947 | 11/1947 | 1948 |
| Shornemead |  | 50 | 129 | 75 | 91 |  |

**Sutton-at-Hone**

**5/1947** - Hostel leader; Owm Ulrich Uhde (B+).

**9/1947** – Hostel leader; Uffz Anton Kraemer (B), aged 40, hotel reception clerk – “*shows considerable interest in re-education.”* Small classes for French language. **10/47** – same leader.

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|  |  | 5/1947 | 8/1947 | 10/1947 | 11/1947 | 1948 |
| Sutton-at-Hone |  | 61 | 78 | 47 |  |  |

**Wilmington.** Identified in the Heritage trail at TQ 531 721.

**5/1947** – Hostel leader; Fw Willi Stock (B+). **9/1947** – same leader; “*bright and efficient.”* **10/47** – same leader.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | 5/1947 | 8/1947 | 10/1947 | 11/1947 | 1948 |
| Wilmington |  | 190 | 134 | 100 | 10 |  |