**Camp 164** **(& 245) - Weston Lane Camp, Otley, Yorkshire**

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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 |
| SE 192 465 | 104 | 164 | Weston Lane Camp, Otley | Yorkshire | 4 | Base Camp | Site occupied by housing. See Camp no.164 /245 |
| 245 | German Working Camp |

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| **Location:** The main camp was at SE 191 465 (X), and the annexe SE 185 466 (Y). The corners of the perimeter of the main camp - which can still be seen on the 1956 OS map – marked with red spots.  **Before the camp:** Main camp – fields. Annexe part army camp within Weston Park Estate.  **Pow Camp:** The camp was used from 1944 to 1947/8. |  |  |
| Aerial picture 1948 | Ordnance Survey 1956 |

“*The site has been identified from air photographs as a series of structures, earthworks and cropmarks. Some of the* *cropmarks may be associated with the movement of personnel along regular routes between buildings. Various internal compounds, permanent buildings including huts and a guard block and the perimeter fence have been identified. Further information from ex German POWs indicates that there were a number of watch towers spaced at regular intervals along this perimeter fence. They also suggest that much of the accommodation was in tents*.” ( [www.pastscape.org.uk/hob.aspx?hob\_id=1369126](http://www.pastscape.org.uk/hob.aspx?hob_id=1369126) )

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| An interesting set of facts was produced by Abbey Grange C of E Academy, Leeds –  1) Situated on Weston Lane. The land was owned by Weston Hall. A camp for British Soldiers was close by at Farnley Hall.  2) Seven POWs were buried in Otley Cemetery. Their bodies were later moved to Cannock Chase German Cemetery. [Brief note below].  3) People living in Otley remember POWs marching through the town from the railway station to the camp.  4) At first the POWs lived in tents. Nissen huts were built at a later date.  5) Some POWs worked in Otley hospital as gardeners & porters. At the end of the war 2 POWs worked there.  6) During the heavy snow in the 1947 winter some POWs from Otley were sent to help clear the Settle to Carlisle railway line.  7) Many POW made friends with local families. Sunday afternoons were a popular time for local people to walk up to see the camp. It was not unusual for cigarettes to be pushed through the fence wires as a gift to the POWs.  8) The camp was closed in 1948.(?not sure)  9) The WW2 Experience in Horsforth has a painting of the camp in its collection painted by a POW.  10) St Joseph’s Primary School have a wooden carving by a POW on display in their reception. [It shows St Joseph and baby Jesus]. |  |

1945 Picture above by Heinz Lutz; with the kind permission of the War Experience Centre [war-experience.org/](https://war-experience.org/)

**Summer 1944** – Russians. In 1944 there was an attempt by British Intelligence to recruit captured Russians serving (willing or not, many were forced to serve) with the German armed forces. The initial idea was to send them back to France to encourage desertion, and possibly later to continue as British agents. This came under the code name ‘Operation Mamba.’

The site holding Russians at Otley was called “*Camp No.8*” – it is not known if this was the whole camp or just a section of it. It would indicate that while the Russians were present the ‘Russian site’ was treated as a temporary hostel for Mile House Camp 8 which was later used to collect Russians before sending them on to other camps and then back to Russia under the Yalta Agreement.

**17/18 July 1944** – ‘*Report on Preliminary Interrogation of Russian Prisoners of War at Camp No.8 Otley Leeds,*’ by Captain Graham:

“*There are 384 Russian Ps/W at this camp, but all of a fairly low type mentality. 57 were selected for preliminary examination. All had served in German Ost Battalionen or Georgian Legions.”* These were whittled down to 26; “*7 were discarded and 17 segregated in Compound No.2.”*

**20 July 1944** - Major L H Manderstam from the SOE visited for further interrogation of the Soviets. (Visits were arranged through MI 19 the section responsible for gathering military intelligence from pows). His vetting brought the 17 pow candidates down to just 3 – these were transferred to a special training school at Gardener’s End, Ardeley. The remaining Russians were transferred to other camps – on returning to Russia most were killed or sent to camps.

Details – see ‘Operation Mamba’ by Bernard O’Connor, 2020.

**7 June 1945** – For a short while the camp held both officers and OR. PID Progress report 93 confirmed that all officers held here (Camp 164) were moved to an officer’s compound at Featherstone Camp 18. (FO 939/383).

Memories - *“Mr Lutz remembers that as an officer he was allowed to travel outside the camp, but on one occasion missed his train and was left stranded in an unfamiliar town, where the police arranged for him to be put up for the night. He has described how the other guests at the hotel were astonished to see a German officer in full uniform at the breakfast table.*

*Another internee Fritz Weiss remembers leaving the camp each day by lorry to go to railways stations such as Bingley and Keighley to help unload trains. He then went to live and work at Otley Hospital for three years. His time as a PoW came to an end in December 1948, after which he spent another three years working with the British Army bomb disposal unit. Mr Weiss was one of a number who stayed on in England. He married a local girl, and spent the last 36 years up to retirement selling ice cream in the Aireborough district.*

*Gunter Reichel, was taken to the Otley camp in May 1945 and stayed there for 12 months. He married an English girl in 1948 and was officially released as a prisoner of war less than a month later. He remembers that from Christmas 1946, by which time he was at the Horsforth camp, PoWs were allowed out on their own for the evening as long as they were signed out by British people. He had his first pint of English beer at The Old Ball in Horsforth in 1947, but had to stand outside as PoWs were not allowed in. Later he used to visit the British Legion in Manningham with his brother-in-law, and after several weeks was asked if he would like to join.”* (Extracted from an article in the Wharfedale & Airedale Observer).

**29 April to 18 June 1945** - Erwin Hettwer was held at the camp – extracts from his memoirs:

*“The camp was in 2 parts, surrounded by a high barbed wire fence, guard towers, barbed wire rolls in front of the fence and a single strand of barbed wire in front of that. The single strand of barbed wire indicated the limit of the area prisoners could move in. One part of the camp was for officers only, the other for prisoners below the rank of lieutenant. It was located in an open field outside of the town.*

*Accommodation was in 8-man round tents with pie shaped mattresses and blankets. During day time the mattresses were to be folded over in the middle, the blanket folded and placed on top. There were also some larger tents with tables and benches where food was served. Each camp had its own kitchen. There were facilities for washing; the toilets were the outhouse type, 12 seats in a row. We called it the 12 cylinder.*

*The food was the usual, porridge in the morning, a piece of bread for the day and some soup in the evening. Except sometimes the porridge had some raisins or dried prunes in it to sweeten it up a bit and some soup was made from dried peas or beans. The bread was fresh and fluffy, but that made it not very filling. I remember it rained a lot and having to stay cramped in the tent with nothing to do or read, just waiting for the next meal, gave way to boredom. But we had a prisoner that spoke Italian and he offered to teach Italian in the larger mess tent. There was no blackboard, so we used a table, scrubbed it with sand until it was nearly white. The kitchen was using wood for heating the kettles and the charred wood could be used to write on the surface of the table. I still remember a bit of Italian I learned at that time.*

*One of the prisoners had discovered that where the drains from the kitchen were running into the field, a lot of the pits from the prunes had accumulated. So he sat down and opened them between two stones to get at the seed. I know now that the seed contains a trace of cyanide. If one eats one or two it does not really matter, but the amount that he consumed made him sick and he was taken to a hospital. We never heard whether he survived.*

*One late afternoon a group of five or six prisoners were standing close to the fence that separated the two camps, talking to the officers which they knew. They were still clear of the wire that marked the area we were allowed to move in, A shot fell from one of the towers. We got out of the tents, but were warned to stay inside. A guard had fired a shot into the group. It had hit one of the prisoners just below the shoulder and gone through his chest. Although it did not take long for a doctor to arrive from the other camp, the prisoner had already died. It was quite clear, that this had not been an attempt to escape, as the fence was only the dividing fence between the 2 camps and the fallen body was still inside our camp boundaries.*

*Next morning, at roll call the camp commandant apologized for the shooting and promised that it would be investigated. We never heard anything about it again. The rumour mill though had it, that the brother of the guard had been killed during the war and this was his way of taking vengeance.*

*With all the rain, the areas between the tents had turned to mud, which was getting steadily deeper. Somebody had the bright idea that we needed to beautify the camp. It was amazing the things that were built from clay and stones that were found in the camp. Some had true artistic talents. Granted, they were not all Michelangelo’s, but we suddenly had a project to work on. Some of the lazy ones had grabbed some coke (the burning not the sniffing type). They put it to the sides of the tent by size and just put 2 signs up: Coke Fine, Coke Coarse. Of course, my friend Hans already showed his engineering talent. We built a windmill, that when running was driving a lever which in turn moved an arm on a figure outside sawing wood. For all this, we needed a belt and I had to sacrifice a piece of my suspenders to make that belt. When judged we did not win the competition, but I think we came in second.*

*In Otley we also got a change of clothes and a kit bag. Now we had something more than just whatever we were wearing and we had a change to do the laundry. The outer wear were British army uniforms, dyed darker brown with large bright red patches on the back of the jackets and smaller patches on the front and back of the pant legs.*

*On May 08, we were informed that Germany had surrendered and the war was over. We noticed some changes. Our meagre rations were cut even further. While it was assumed, that it was done because Germany no longer had Allied prisoners and could not retaliate, I think it was done to prepare us for volunteering to go to work. Apparently the Geneva Convention does not allow the use of POWs to work for the country they were at war with. However, the work of volunteers is acceptable. The hunger got worse, we were getting weaker.*

*During roll call in the morning, which meant standing still for quite some time, people were collapsing. One day, after roll call, with everybody assembled, we were told that if we were to volunteer to go to work, we would be transferred to a better camp and the rations would be increased to a worker’s rate. I believe, except for 2 holdouts, everybody volunteered. In the morning of June 19, we got an extra helping of porridge and marched out of the Otley camp.”*

<https://www.pegasusarchive.org/pow/erwin_hettwer.htm>

**1947 winter** – a report states that many of the pows were not happy at doing snow clearing. They were handed shovels before they boarded the train taking them to the track section closed by snow. On the first day, over half the pows threw the shovels out of the train window – after that the shovels were carried in the guards’ wagon. (Detail from ‘Children in the Second World War’ by Amanda Herbert-Davies, 2017, Grub Street Publishers).

**April 1947** - NOTE – pow unit 164, Weston Lane, was transferred as a hostel to Overdale Camp 60 – C245 continued.

Reported that five other pows died while pows at Otley – but no detail if this was at the camp or hospital?

**After the camp:** All physical evidence of the camp has been destroyed by the construction of the Weston Estate housing development which began in the late 1940’s.

**Further Information:**

Research was carried out on Weston Park POW camp including interviews with ex German POWs - a full archive of the information recorded, and paintings by a pow Heinz Lutz, is held by The Second World War Experience Centre in the Wetherby and Otley Museum.

Vertical aerial photographs - CPE/UK/2557 4108 28-Mar-1948 and RAF 541/32 4088 18-May-1948