**Camp 195** **(& 241) Merevale Hall Camp, Atherstone, Warwickshire**

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| **1947 Camp List** |
| 241(G.W.C.) | Merivale Hall Camp, Atherstone, Warwickshire | N | Priswar, Atherstone | Atherstone 3245 | Atherstone | Lt.Col.A.J.Godfrey | 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 |
| SP 299 980 | 140 | 195 | Merevale Hall Camp, Atherstone | Warwickshire | 4 | Base Camp | Restored parkland. See Camp no.241 |
| 241 | German Working Camp |

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| **Location:** Merevale Hall is near Atherstone. Aerial photo 1948 - [raf\_541\_29\_rs\_4128 - Aerial Photo | Historic England](https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/archive/collections/aerial-photos/record/raf_541_29_rs_4128)**Before the camp:** Country house and estate. Barracks for troops.**Pow Camp:** Pictures in the Wright Family Rural North Warwickshire Archive show Italian and German pows.**1944 to start 1945** - Italian pows recorded.**Late 1944** – Germans arrived. A brief description of the camp is included in diary extracts from Vinzenz Fetzer, ([Tonbridge Historical Society](http://www.tonbridgehistory.org.uk/archives/war-diary.html)), a German POW who was held at Merevale Camp from 25 October 1944 until 10 March 1945: “*I wrote fewer notes there, as there was a dearth of paper and pencils. The camp was big and in an old park. A walk around the barbed wire perimeter fence took half an hour. I didn't do any work there and completely gave up smoking. Our rations were very good, sufficient and varied. In the first four weeks things were a bit short until everything was up and running……**Many courses took place which I attended. I also sang in the* |  |
| Ordnance Survey 1955 |

*choir and was never bored. RC and Protestant services were held but with only 15% attendance.”* He later moved to Camp 194 at Penkridge and Somerhill Camp 40.

**1945** – Camp memories: *“I came to be here as a Prisoner of War in the Merevale Camp near Atherstone. This was towards the end of the war when the Italians had been moved on from the camp. They left it in a terrible mess so the first thing we had to do was clear it all up! As a group we were all very skilled so we often helped with building works around the area. The person who ran the camp would often get us to help on repairs with his house because he knew that  we would do a good job.*

*We made the camp look a lot nicer as well. Before, the Italians had just had their living quarters and some grassland, but we created a full holiday camp style place. There was a full sized football pitch which we used to have games on, and we built a theatre that we and the local villagers could use. The orchestra used to play there and we would put on stage shows for the camp boss and the villagers.  I used to be the prompter, sat in the box at the front of the stage throwing lines out when the actors would inevitably forget what they were supposed to say. I could always do this regardless of whether it was German or English actors because I had taught myself English when I first came to the camp. I was curious about what everyone was saying and determined not to be out of the loop.*

*We got on very well with the local villagers, and none of them seemed to mind that we were there. They used to give us fresh eggs off their farm quite often, which we all enjoyed. Sometimes if the guards were in a bad mood they would confiscate the eggs from us. One time a guard tried to do this to me so I ‘accidentally’ dropped the eggs on the floor because I didn’t feel it was fair that I had been given them, and then they were going to enjoy them. However, the guards were often amicable and we didn’t have many problems apart from the odd times they were grumpy.*

*We were treated quite fairly by the villagers that we did work for as well. After we’d cleaned up the camp we would often be shipped off in a lorry to various farms to help complete the labour needed in those areas. There was a particular farmer up in Grendon that we referred to as ‘Mr Scrooge’ because of how grumpy he acted towards us, but apart from him we were rarely treated like we were the enemy by anyone in the villages we worked in.*

*As well as doing labour for the farmers we would make toys for the children of the village at Christmas. These were made with whatever we could scrape and spare when we were working out and about, and while we were on the camp. It was nice to be doing something we could give to the community and it saved a lot of boredom when we were just stuck in the camp and not out on labouring jobs.*

*There was a chap from the village who used to go around doing door to door sales of the items that we had made for the children. As one of the few Germans who could speak English I would often go out with him so that I could explain what it was that had been made. It was through doing this that I met my wife Violet. She has unfortunately passed away now but when she was alive she was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. She had this gorgeous singing voice that would just carry you away with the melodies that she could sing.*

*When the camp shut I stayed in England so that Vi and I could get married. We had to wait till after the war had ended because even though the villagers were kind towards us it would have been fairly scandalous for us to have got married while I was still a Prisoner of War. We lived together in the village, and had two beautiful girls who I adore. Life is quieter now with Vi gone and without the kids who have flown the nest but I still enjoy my life here in the village.”*

<https://www.ourwarwickshire.org.uk/content/article/a-merevale-prisoner-of-war-life>



**June 1945** – comments raised in a camp report on pows transferred from Merevale to Nether Headon camp 52:

*“…195 suffered rather from a preponderance of very young men, the older ones having been drafted out to labour camps, and from an influx of paratroopers and SS men. Difficulties had been caused by attempts to escape, but he remarked on the very excellent effect of the Commandant’s address to the young men, that it was their duty to behave as soldiers and nothing more. Weck added that it was the past necessity of retaining these boys within the camp all day that caused the trouble, and that sending them out to work would in due course have an excellent effect. He further remarked that their enlightenment (‘They have seen nothing except Nazism and war’) was the duty of older men who were brought up before the time of Hitler.”*

Camp number changed from 195 Base Camp to 241 German Working Camp.

**21 April 1946** – Camp 241 Magazine; [Der Lagerspiegel : Deutsche Zeitung des G.W.C. 241 - The Wiener Holocaust Library](https://www.whlcollections.org/image/99585/)

**August 1946** – Above, the main avenue of Merevale camp. (The picture was from the ‘Ourwarwickshire’ website which no longer opens. It was not listed as coming from the Wright Family Collection). It shows a mixture of Nissen type and other construction for the huts.

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| 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. |

**4-9 December 1946** – Camp 241; Visit by the Segregation Section of PID mainly for political screening. Strength; 1 officer (the M.O.), 1870 Other Ranks.

Commandant: Lt Col A J Godfrey Camp leader: Hptm Wolfgang Wahl (A).

Interpreter: Capt J D’Orville, M.C. Deputy C/l: None.

 German M.O.: Atabsarzt Gerhard Klein (B+)

1 hostel recorded at Witherley.

Only partial screenings were carried out.

The Commandant and Interpreter took great interest in re-education.

Camp leader Wahl, aged 35, leader since November 1946. Had been a Nazi Party candidate in 1937 and a member of the National Socialist Flying Corps – despite this he was graded pollical category A (non-Nazi). “*He is a pleasant, reasonable individual, at times rather sentimental, without pomposity and not very militaristic in his manner. He has a very clear idea of the true character of Nazism and states that his policy is to educate the PsW into thinking for themselves*.” He believed that re-education in the camp was very effective.

The M.O. had been a Nazi party member 1933 to 1939, though stated he took little interest in the doings of Nazism. “*Co-operative and with a pleasant sense of humour.”*

Study leader, Uffz Hermann Hueniche (A), aged 46, an elementary school teacher. Member of the Nazi Party 1933 to 1939 – “*outside pressure forced him into the Party. He is now a convincing, forceful anti-Nazi.”*

Head of the camp police, Fj/Ofw Werner Schwien (A). Joined the Nazi Party in 1932, resigned 1934. Ex member of the Schutzpolizei. “…*has worked very satisfactorily in handling this large number of prisoners.”*

A brief summary of re-education activities was given – weekly press review; discussion group; visiting lecturers; films (regarded as poor quality); range of English and German newspapers.

Other activities – theatre group; orchestra and chorus of about 40 members; classes for French, stenography, mathematics and book-keeping.

**19 March 1947** – Re-education report. Total strength; 1 officer, 1372 OR.

2 hostels were listed – Wissely [Witherley], and Polsworth [Polesworth] – the name of the camp was misspelled in the next report. 2 hostel leaders were listed without saying for which site – Ofw Vilsch (B-) and Ofw Jenssen (A).

It was stated that the Interpreter’s German was “*not too good,”* but he continued to play an active role in re-education activities.

A new Camp leader: O.Fw Zeuke (B+) from 15 January 1947. Aged 35, teacher. Joined Nazi Party in 1937.

A new Deputy C/l: Fw Fritz Hermann (B).

Good morale was recorded with a wide range of activities available.

350 ‘youth’ (under-25) pows, they were not considered to be a problem.

The standard list of re-education activities was given:

Wochenpost and Ausblick – separate appendix

Newspapers – “*Adequate*.”

Library – did not state how many books, more requested.

Lectures – regular, generally well received.

Discussion groups – weekly meetings together with a press review.

Films – YMCA films every three weeks.

Wireless – a good set with three loudspeakers controlled from the camp leader’s office.

Camp magazine – copy sent in.

English instruction – 68 pupils in 2 classes.

Other camp activities –

Religion – Protestant padre, Blobau (A) held weekly services. A Catholic priest from Maxstoke Camp 39 visited every 3 weeks.

Education – Small classes for mathematics (10 pows), physics (10), shorthand (11), French (12), tailoring (18), bricklaying (5), book-binding (3) and signwriting (22).

Entertainments – 26 members in a theatre group, also visited the 2 hostels. Good choir of 34 and orchestra of 13 – were due to perform at Easter in the local church.

**2 June 1947** – Re-education report. Strength; 2 officers, 1527 OR. No hostels listed.

Commandant: Lt Col Lowe Camp leader: O/Faehnr Zeuke (B+)

Interpreter: Capt J D’Orville, M.C. Deputy C/l: O/Faehnr Hermann (B+)

 German M.O.: Atabsarzt Gerhard Klein (B+)

The new Commandant started a week earlier.

A brief review was given of Camp leader Zeuke – it was almost identical to the one given for the previous leader, Wahl. Same words and phrases used; “*pleasant… reasonable… not very militaristic in his manner…”* and the same views on re-education. This duplication brings the accuracy of the report into doubt. Most visits lasted 2 or 3 days – this one, and the previous, was for just one day.

Simplified political screening figures were given: A 13 / B 1460 / C 56. 48 of the C category (Nazis) were appealing against their grades; the better the grade, the sooner repatriated, in theory. 348 pows repatriated since 1 January 1947.

Morale was good in this well kept camp. New privileges allowed to pows were beneficial. Some pows were unhappy about the length of time it was taking for their appeals to be heard against the political grades given.

The number of ‘youth’ pows had risen to 400.

Re-education activities had decreased mainly due to the freedom for pows to walk out of camp when not working, and the good weather. Changes to activities –

Library – 1000 books, but many were old and needed to be replaced.

Films – shows given by YMCA and Travelling Films Ltd. Pows had to pay to attend.

Religion – Protestant padre Dr Reinhardt (A) held weekly services for about 50 pows. The Catholic priest from Arbury Hall Camp 196 visited.

Education – About 10% attended small classes for mathematics, shorthand, French, bricklaying, book-binding, signwriting, draughtsmanship, shoemaking and agriculture.

Entertainments – 10 member orchestra, 28 member choir, 25 member theatre group, 18 members of a ‘variety team’ performed “*acrobatic shows etc*.” Popular sports were football, handball, table tennis and boxing.

Many pows had established contacts with local families. No formal outside contacts were mentioned.

No further reports in the National Archive file.

Known Camp Commandants

1946/7 Lt Col A J Godfrey. (I think he was from the Royal Artillery).

1947 Lt Col Lowe.

**After the camp:** Private country house and estate.

**Further Information:**

National Archives FO 1120/235 – Re-educational survey visit reports for camps 240 to 246. Dated 1 Jan 1946 – 31 Dec 1948. Used above.

3 pictures of groups of pows - <http://www.nuneatonhistory.com/world-war-two.html>

**Hostels**

**Polesworth.** SK 265 019. Listed in 1943 with Maxstoke Camp 39.

March 1947 – 50 pows.

June 1947 – no longer listed.

**Witherley.** SP 325 976. Previously attached to Garenden Camp 28.

12/1946 – Called the “*black spot”* for the camp. “*Many of the PsW here are youngsters who volunteered for the Waffen SS with enthusiasm and belief in ultimate victory, complete faith in the Fuehrer’s military genius and the conviction that Germany was fighting a just war.”*

March 1947 – 150 pows

June 1947 – no longer listed.