**Camp 232** **– Northwick Park Military Hospital, Blockley, Gloucestershire**

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| **1947 Camp list** |
| 232(Hospital) | 232 P.W. Hospital, Northwick Park, Blockley, Glos. | S. | Priscamp, Blockley | Moreton-in-Marsh 135/6 | Blockley | Major W.L.Hughes | v/1416/1 |

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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 168 365 | 151 | 132 | Northwick Park Hospital, Blockley | Gloucestershire | 1 |  |  |

**NOTE** – I can find no reference to this camp being numbered 132 – possibly an error and should be 232.

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| **Location:** Between Chipping Campden and Blockley. Aerial photo: [View map: Ordnance Survey, OS Air Photo, 6 inch to the mile (1:10,560), Sheet 42/13 N.E.](https://maps.nls.uk/view/238921312) **Before the camp:** The estate belonged to the Spencer-Churchill family. The US Army directed the construction of the Military Hospital in 1943 on a site known as the cinquefoil. It was built by Higgs and Hill Limited. The MH was called the 327th Station Hospital.**Pow Camp:** 55 Nissen huts (recorded in 1947), with structures needing firmer bases such as toilet and shower blocks being brick-built. The camp was surrounded by barbed-wire fencing with wooden guard towers.**1944 - US Station Hospital.****1 June 1944** - The hospital was put under the control of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) – Official records designate the site as Hospital 232, though it was still under US / Red Cross control. In the first few months only part of the military hospital was used for pows.**June 1944** - An American Red Cross report commented that there were a large number of German pows; *“It was his* [the Commandant’s] *decision that we should give them cigarettes until they get PX rations, but no comfort articles. He also OK’d giving them old magazines, chess and other checker games. Other than that, we have nothing to do with the POWs*.” \* German medical officers staffed the hospital for the pows. |  |
| Ordnance Survey 1952 |

**20 September 1944** - it was decided to hold only pows at the site. American service men and medical staff were moved to other hospitals. Supervising medical staff and administration came under British personnel.

**British POW Military Hospital Camp 232**

**April 1946** – British Commandant, Lt Col Robertson started.

**28 October 1946** – became a fully British controlled pow hospital with Other Rank staff mainly from Bourton Camp 157, and doctors from Llanmartin Camp 184. Capacity 600.

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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. |

Due to the nature of the camp with just a small number of ‘permanent’ pows, it was difficult to organise activities. Further obstacles were created as the officer-doctors kept themselves separate from main activities, and in general, pow staff were over-worked.

**17/19 December 1946** – Re-education Report / Screening. Strength of staff only; 16 officers, 204 Other Ranks. Recorded as the first PID visit.

Note that the report concerns the pow staff, not the 350 patients.

Commandant: Major R D Austin Camp leader: O/Fw Oskar Oertelt (B)

O/C Medical: Col Robertson Deputy C/L: Uffz Hans Ruesgen (B)

Interpreter: S/Sgt H Gruss German M.O.: O/F/Arzt Dr Ewers (B)

The Commandant was recorded as supportive of PID re-education aims and he requested that a Training Adviser visit to further develop activities.

Camp leader Oertelt, aged 29, a chemist who became a professional soldier. “*Pleasant personality, very willing and co-operative*.”

Deputy leader Ruesgen, aged 40, Artist. “*No great personality or political understanding but a pleasant individual and most co-operative*.”

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| Political screening: | A | B | C | Unknown |
|  | 11 | 158 | 44 | 7 |

7 pows were appealing against their grades – the better the grade, the sooner repatriated, in theory. 12 appeals had been heard and 5 accepted. 2 pows repatriated to date.

Morale was recorded as ‘poor,’ but improving. The O.R. staff had mostly been unemployed in Camp 157. The first signs of repatriations was a major positive factor. The officer (doctors) were feeling “*slightly antagonistic*” as some privileges had been withdrawn by the Commandant after “*abuses*” (not described).

Only a very small number of pows were ‘youth’ (under-25). They were not considered to be a problem.

The pows were described as being very busy, and few re-education activities had been developed. The standard list was given –

Wochenpost and Ausblick – separate appendix.

Newspapers – just 4 British papers purchased by the Welfare Fund, (money raised mainly through sales in the canteen). 6 German papers and occasional Swiss papers were received and passed on to patients after staff had finished with them.

Library – 120 books for the staff. No library for the patients.

Lectures – Regular with 60/70 pows attending.

Discussion groups – None.

Films – shows provided by YMCA (2d – 2 pence – charge), and by Gaumont British; 6d charge considered to be too expensive.

Wireless – One receiver and 2 extra loudspeakers for staff. An additional set with 2 speakers for patients.

Camp magazine – None.

Press review – Weekly with readings of news.

English instruction – Separate appendix.

Information room - None

Other camp activities –

Religion – Adequate facilities. Protestant lay-reader, PW Franke (A) also ran a Bible class for 10-15 pows.

Education – None, other than English instruction.

Entertainment – None in the hospital. Occasional visits to entertainments in nearby camps.

**29 April – 1 May 1947** – Re-education report. Permanent staff: 21 officers 213 Other Ranks

 Patients 2 430

Commandant: Major D L [W L] Hughes Camp leader: Fw Herbert Eickmeyer (B+)

O/C Medical: Col T A Henderson Deputy C/L: Uffz Karl Wilde (B)

Interpreter: S/Sgt H Gruss German Chief M.O.: Oberst Arzt Hermann Loers (B)

The new Commandant was ‘co-operative,’ that is not to say involved in re-education.

Camp leader Eickmeyer, “*very quiet, a good type, interested in re-education but not a driving force*.”

The chief German MO had made “*an excellent impression and he is interested in the cultural and educational activities.”* It was hoped he would encourage the other officer- doctors to participate.

Simplified screening figures were given for the staff: A 3 / B 193 / C 38. 22 pows were appealing against their grades. 57 staff pows repatriated to date.

The morale for the staff, who were kept busy, was ‘fair’ – but ‘poor’ amongst the patients. A rigid discipline and frequent inspections, “*involving a lot of cleaning and polishing*” had a negative impact on morale. A second roll call was maintained at 21.30, which meant that all activities had to end shortly before 21.00 to prepare.

Though there was little progress, there were some changes to the standard list of re-education activities –

Wochenpost and Ausblick – 110 copies of Ausblick received – more requested.

Newspapers – a wider range of papers was received. The pows requested copies of the (generally left wing) ‘Daily Herald,’ but the Commandant would not commit to this.

Library – 350 books. ½ of the books were for staff; ½ for patients. The visitor requested that the patients be allowed more books, but the Commandant refused. No books were sent to the infectious diseases ward.

Lectures – Regular.

Discussion groups – One had existed briefly, but stopped due to fuel shortages.

Films – Irregular.

Wireless – ‘Adequate.’ 2 new sets had been purchased.

Camp magazine – None.

Press review – Weekly, with readings of news followed by discussions.

English instruction – Separate appendix.

Information room – None

Other camp activities –

Religion – 2 resident chaplains for Protestants and RC. 3- 4 services each week. 50-60 attended on Sundays, about 12 during the week.

Entertainment – an excellent orchestra from Springhill Camp 185 visited monthly.

**29 May 1947** – Death of pow Otto Tittel from injuries at a farm. [Recorded as Otto Tital, died 23 May, in Cheltenham Chronicle]. He was later re-interred at the Cannock Chase German Military Cemetery.

**18/19 June 1947** – Re-education report / Investigate political activities of the German M.O.’s following a complaint by the Commandant.

Permanent staff: 19 officers 204 Other Ranks

Patients 1 314

No change to senior personnel.

Camp leader described as aged 41, bookkeeper, married, protestant – “*Plump, cheerful and willing to help whenever possible. Very little political sense.”*

Deputy leader, Wilde, aged 42, master barber, married, protestant; “*a simple individual with no political understanding.”*

Chief MO, aged 54, professional soldier, married, RC. *”Politically quite indifferent, very reserved and afraid to voice any opinions. Unable properly to control the German MO’s and does not get on well with them.”*

Political screening for the staff: A 1 / B 222. 9 appeals pending. 74 staff repatriated.

Morale was recorded as ‘poor’ all round. Long working hours, bad news from home and slow repatriation were all affecting the pows. Most pows were politically apathetic.

41 pows were youth – not seen as a problem, but they had little interest in anything but repatriation.

Changes to re-education activities –

Library – 500 books and an increased supply for pow patients.

Films – Improved, with a projector from Bourton Camp 157 borrowed fortnightly. YMCA and Travelling Film shows alternate weeks.

Camp magazine – Due to start.

Press review – Deteriorated, held fortnightly, news read with no discussion.

Entertainments – Orchestra and theatre group from Camp 185 visited.

Changes to other camp activities -

Religion – RC Padre, M/Oberpfarrer Richard Classen (A), aged 49, professional soldier since 1938 – *“Very poor, self-centred individual. Disdainful and pessimistic. Feels that there is little use in doing anything as all re-education is doomed to failure. Not a good type to have in a hospital.”*

Protestant padre, Hptm Gerhard Jentszsch (B), aged 55, German missionary in Palestine 1926-39 – “*Not much personality and seems frightened of the RC padre, but has a very decent outlook and really tries to help his fellow men.”*

There was no mention of the investigation into German MO’s in this report – presumably a separate report was issued. In most hospital camps, problems arose as the officer-doctors kept themselves separate from the rest of the pows and camp activities; there are slight comments in the report to suggest that this was the case at Camp 232.

**July 1947** – 1st edition of camp magazine; [Das Hospital : 232 Mil. P.W. Hospital Northwick Park - The Wiener Holocaust Library](https://www.whlcollections.org/image/99753/)

**17 August 1947** – Death of pow Otto Wiedemann from accidental drowning in the lake at Northwick Park. He was later re-interred at the Cannock Chase German Military Cemetery.

**29-30 September 1947** – Re-educational report. Permanent staff: 18 officers 248 Other Ranks

 Patients 5 244

Noted that the Commandant and British staff had very little interest in re-education – as in most camps.

1 change to senior personnel; A mew senior German M.O.; O/S/Arzt Maximilian Nolte (B+), aged 38, professional military M.O., skin specialist, married, protestant. A member of the SA 1933 – 36, he had been upgraded from C+. “*A striking personality who gives the impression of sincerity and decency.”*

Political screening for the staff: A 1 / B 265. 0 appeals pending. 91 staff repatriated.

Morale was still only ‘poor/fair.’ As many were ‘Protected Personnel’ serving in a military pow hospital, their repatriation was very slow. Very slow political progress was being made.

Changes to activities –

Newspapers – 2 Swiss papers being received and preferred as they were seen as being politically neutral. German papers were received from home and from PID.

Library – 750 books. Books being sent by the International Red Cross.

Discussion group – A small group of 12 pows met fortnightly.

Wireless – 8 receivers and 6 extra loudspeakers.

Press review – Ceased.

Religion – the protestant padre was active and had a growing number of pows attending his services and Bible classes. The RC padre was unpopular and pows preferred to attend local churches.

Outside contacts - Due to the isolation of the hospital, civilian contacts were rare. The local population maintained an, “*unfriendly attitude towards PsW.”* One small group of pows had attended a Council meeting in Cheltenham.

**24/26 November 1947** – Re-educational survey / Cultural Contacts / Screen pows. Permanent staff: 23 officers 262 Other Ranks

 Patients 16 485

The Interpreter had left and not been replaced.

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| Political screening - | A | B+ | B | B- | C+ |
| Camp staff: | 2 | 41 | 181 | 61 | - |
| Patients: | 2 | 495 | 4 |

Number of pows repatriated; “*Not known in camp*” (why not?).

Morale – 245 out of 285 staff were Protected Personnel. They had a low morale due to the uncertainty of repatriation. The nearest town, Evesham, was 13 miles away. The isolated hospital had no bus service, there was an infrequent local train service, and pows had to be back at camp by 21.45. Visits had been made to Oxford and Evesham, but no further excursions were taking place due to petrol restrictions. There was no evidence of political extremism. The 19 pow doctors were; “*aloof from political activity seemingly absorbed by their profession and round of duties*.”

Re-education activities were mainly for the staff, but pows were allowed to join in if healthy enough. Changes to activities -

Press reviews – Re-started.

Library – 940 books + another 1800 just arrived from the recently closed Swindon pow military hospital. 50% split for staff / patients.

Information room – Exhibiting text and pictures, usually supplied by COGA, on a theme; currently entitled; “*Youth Movement*.”

Films – There was no projector in the camp. Travelling Films visited fortnightly bringing their own projector. Pows had to visit camp 157 to see YMCA supplied films, but this was difficult without transport. It was requested that YMCA resumed its visits and costs would be paid by the camp welfare fund.

English Instruction – 20 pupils in 2 classes with 2 teachers + 20 studying on their own.

Religion – There was a pow chapel, used on Sundays by protestant and RC, and on alternate days for further RC services. Pows able to attend the churches in Blockley and Chipping Campden.

Entertainment – A theatre group was being formed. There were no further visits from other camps due to petrol restrictions. The main recreations were football (on a small pitch), table tennis, chess, billiards and darts.

**13/16 January 1948** – Re-educational survey / Cultural Contacts / Screen pows / Interview pows for the Training Centre. Permanent staff: 22 officers 194 OR

Patients 5 275

Commandant: Major R [sic] Hughes Camp leader: Fw Herbert Eickmeyer (B+)

O/C Medical: Not given Deputy C/L: None

Interpreter: None German Chief M.O.: O/St Arzt Dr Maximilian Nolte (B+)

Screening figures; Staff, A 2 / B all others. Patients, Unscreened 1 / C+ 2 / B all others.

98 pows repatriated to date.

Morale had improved as the rate of repatriations increased. On Saturdays some pows were able to get to Evesham, but no indication as to how they travelled there. Doctors had been permitted to travel further by rail – but that privilege had been curtailed, no reasons were given for this.

There was 1 recommended pow to attend the special course at the training Centre at Wilton Park.

Changes to activities –

Press reviews – Ceased due to the repatriation of the leader.

Library – 2740 books.

Information room – The same exhibition from November was still on display. The visitor requested something different be sent.

Films – Travelling films weekly and YMCA fortnightly.

Entertainment – the new theatre group of 11 members managed to put on a Christmas show and carol festival. A small trio of musicians formed a limited group with an accordion, clarinet and guitar.

**2-4 March 1948** – Re-educational assessment / Cultural contacts / Reaction to Dutch Lecturer. Permanent staff: 21 officers 170 OR.

Patients 10 227

No change to senior personnel.

A survey was conducted in camps still open at this time concerning pow attitudes to the British, (following a PID circular dated 25.2.1948). It was pointless, carried out far too late and in totally random ways. Some visitors simply gathered whoever was around and asked them to give a show of hands to the questions, some only asked a ‘selected’ group – most did not state how the data was gathered or the numbers involved. In this camp the visitor appears to have merely asked some, “*observant witnesses*” what they thought the pows opinions might be.

Cultural contacts – these were still extremely limited; occasional attendance at council meetings in Moreton-in-Marsh; contacts [?] with Blockley YMCA.

Information room – exhibition still not changed.

Reaction to Dutch lecturer – the lecture concerned democracy, it was well received. Presumably it received attention from the visitor because it was given by someone who was Dutch.

**16 April 1948** – Final re-educational survey. Strength, staff only; 14 Officers, 148 OR.

Commandant: Major W L Hughes Camp leader: o/Fw Alfred Loeschner

O/C Medical: Col G H Haines Deputy C/L: None

Interpreter: S/Sgt Bailey German Chief M.O.: Dr von Geiso

A remarkably silly time to visit – “*This hospital is closing on 30th April. All patients had been transferred on the day of the visit, and all staff with the exception of 30 PW, who will be left to clear up under the administrative care of camp 263, are to be transferred to camps 18 and 114 in the course of the next few days.”*

This was a different visitor to the previous. He seemed to have no idea that the ‘survey’ on attitudes to the British had already been carried out – and he repeated the same pointless exercise with an unknown number of pows in an unknown manner. For what it is worth (anything?) the results were:

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| Attitudes to the British: | Hate | Dislike | Distrust | Benefit of the doubt | Liking |
|  | 0% | 10% | 75% | No figure given | *“A few individuals”* |

**The pow hospital camp closed soon after.**

There were other deaths at the hospital than the two recorded above.

Known Camp Commandants:

1946; Major R D Austin

April 1947; Major W.L. Hughes from the Royal Pioneer Corps. Previously Commandant at Eden Vale Camp 114.

Medical Officers in Charge:

June 1944 to June 1945; American Colonel Benny Alfred (or Arthur) Moxness (1899-1991).

April 1946 to April 1947; Lt Col William John Robertson, from the Royal Army Medical Corps.(1892-1964)

1947; Col T A Henderson, from the Royal Army Medical Corps.

1948; Col G H Haines.

**After the camp:** The site was taken over by the Ministry of Works and Ministry of Health. From 1948 to the mid-1960’s it was used as a Polish resettlement camp. 2019 Northwick Business Centre.

**Further Information:**

‘Inside The Wire’ – Ian M.C. Hollingsbee, 2014, The History Press. A chapter on Northwick Park - \* extracted from here.

London Metropolitan Archives, have details of all the tenders by Higgs and Hill – ref B/HIG

Details of the Polish Camp + some pictures - <https://www.polishresettlementcampsintheuk.co.uk/northwick01.htm>

National Archives FO 1120/233 – Re-educational survey visit reports for camps 230 to 235. Dated 1 January 1946 to 31 December 1948. Used above.