

Poland 1942, Australian Prisoners of War go on strike!

To be courtmartialled after the war

NX20584 Corporal Syd Bishop 2/5 Australian General Hospital tells us the story - he was there

The Australian contingent arrived at Stalag XXA - Fort 15 - Torun (Thorn) Poland, late on New Years Eve December 31 st 1941 - after a twelve day journey from Greece, through Europe - during the worst winter in eighty years. The temperature was around 35* - 40*C BELOW and the snow on the ground and the Fort was frozen solid.

Anyhow, after a short while, we settled in and took our turn on a roster to perform the day to day duties which usually comprised of:

- Pumping the Fort's water supply from the underground well, up to the 5000 litre tank high in the roof;
- Hygiene Duties: cleaning of the 'aboveground portion' of the antiquated latrines, cleaning the four ablution areas and sweeping the corridors;
- Bringing in the delivered supplies, as they arrive at the entrance
- Supply men as needed to push / pull the four wheeled, unsprung cart (normally pulled by a horse) in picking up supplies - mail etc. from Stalag Head Quarters, perhaps a mile or so distant, in snow up to our knees.

These duties came round approximately once a month, for each Room - about one day a week on duty.

The Aussies occupied six of the thirty odd Rooms, the remainder were mostly Englishmen - Scots - Irish and Welsh etc. with a few Poles - French and Odd Bods, with one Room set aside for British N.C.O's.

Our blokes, NCO's like Don Mould, Bill Cawood, Gunner Harrison and Fred Butterfield to name a few, refused to be segregated (like the English) and were roomed with us 'ordinary ranks'.

We became aware that the Pommy NCO's did not do any of the above duties, so we decided to go on strike - refusing to do all duties until such times as the English NCO's took their turn. Well - this created a furore amongst the Upper Echelon of the Poms, and as a result we were called on to a special Parade on the Platz - one of two areas on top of the Fort, set aside for Sport and Recreation - Roll Calls - Parades etc. These areas were only about 42 x 50 yards, being the only flat areas available.

We were addressed by the British Colonel, who told we recalcitrant Australians that we were on report and that we would be court martialled after the war. There would be dire consequences!

Anyhow - we let him know in our own brutal fashion (after all - we were Aussies) that he was welcome to have a go!

The 'Strike' went on! We won!

The Pommy NCO's had to do their stint for all duties in the roster! Of course as everyone would be aware, we had a fair few 'Poms' of our own. And they were 'one' with us!

And to quote Syd: "Don't know what happened after the war regarding the Colonel's Report"???

Syd spent two and a half years in Greece and Poland - as a Guest of the Fuehrer.