PRISONER OF WAR IN ITALY

Monday, 14 September 1942 was a date the crew of HMS Sikh must have remembered for the rest of their lives. Starting at 04.50 the ship was blasted by coastal guns and air attacks, finally sinking at 09.00. The essay 'HMS Sikh's last battle' relates the story of the ship's final operation.

The survivors spent approximately four hours in the water before being picked up by Italian F-lighters (used for coastal transport of troops, vehicles, tanks and cargo) and a German R-boat (a minesweeper and patrol craft). One account said they were rescued by an E-boat (a fast, agile motor torpedo boat used by the German Navy). Those who had died were left in the sea.

German boat crews were reported to have treated the survivors with unexpected kindness, offering lemon water and providing first aid before handing them over to the Italians.

For the survivors – Captain Micklethwait and my dad among them – a new phase of the war had begun: life as a prisoner of war (PoW). They were to join the other 75,000 prisoners, mostly from the army, in one of the 76 camps throughout the country – both these numbers varied over the course of the war.

This essay relates to their time in captivity, which, for the lucky ones, ended with repatriation to the UK six months later. All the locations mentioned in the essay are shown on the following map.

THE FIRST THREE MONTHS

My dad rarely spoke about this period of the war. On the few occasions he did, he mentioned chronic hunger and the relentless battle with dysentery. My mother held onto a handful of letters, which allowed me to pinpoint the PoW camps where he was held captive. Beyond these sparse details, I've had to piece together his story from the voices of his shipmates, both in recorded interviews and in printed accounts. I have assumed his experiences weren't much different from theirs.

Based on the account of Reginald George Reading – like my dad, an Able Seaman HMS Sikh (source: Imperial War Museum) – the experience can be summed up as follows:

On reaching shore, the prisoners were placed in Italian custody. The Italians attempted to take their personal valuables, such as rings and fountain pens, prompting German soldiers to step in and force the Italians to return them.

Curiously, the Germans seem to have been less concerned about the act of confiscation than about the Italians' failure to provide proper receipts.

The wounded were transported to a field dressing station. Many, particularly among the Marines, suffered from severe burns. All that was available was ointment and bandages. Those prisoners who appeared uninjured were moved to a large wire enclosure.

Among the wounded was Reading, who had sustained a leg injury. He was then taken to a makeshift tent hospital just outside Tobruk. Conditions were appalling, with many severely burnt Marines dying during the first night. Soon after, the survivors were transferred to another temporary tent hospital located at Derna, where things were just as bad. It was on a beach, and was infested with lice and sand fleas. The prisoners endured these harsh conditions for over a month, subsisting on minimal daily rations comprising rice, goat meat and small buns.

Subsequently, they were moved by truck to Benghazi, where they joined thousands of other prisoners in a crowded compound. Reading recalled tensions among the British and South African prisoners, largely stemming from differing attitudes towards their black countrymen.

After a few days, the prisoners were transported by ship to Tripoli, a voyage lasting two to three days. They remained in Tripoli for several weeks before being relocated again, this time to Sicily, and then onward to the PoW camp (Campo PG 85), close to Brindisi in southern Italy.

Reading's recollections of this camp were grim, characterised by meagre food supplies and prisoners suffering from dysentery and malaria. It was mid-winter, and the cold, damp, swampy environment exacerbated their suffering. They were initially housed in tents, though they did eventually move into huts, where conditions remained harsh.

Able Seaman Collins was also sunk at Tobruk, and his account of imprisonment is in the Admiralty's files at the National Archives, which is reproduced in the Appendix. He described his capture as follows.

After being rescued from the water, Collins was taken to a dressing station where the Germans gave first aid and treated the prisoners very well.

They were then handed over to the Italians, who took them off in lorries, Collins himself being taken to hospital. This tent hospital was disgustingly dirty and the Italians were completely negligent regarding the prisoners. Collins did not get his wounds dressed for over 36 hours. He said this did not matter as far as he himself was concerned, because he was comparatively lightly wounded, but many others died during this period. In his opinion, this was entirely due to a lack of any reasonable attention.

After two days in hospital, he was taken to a tent hospital in Derna where he stayed for about three weeks, maybe less time.

He then went to a transit camp, where he stayed for about a week. When he arrived, there were only three others in the camp. When others arrived to fill a lorry – about 50 prisoners – they went to a prison camp in Benghazi where about 6,000 men were herded into his pen. In the next pen, about ten yards distant, were 5,000 white South Africans. There was a lot of ill feeling between the South Africans and the British because the latter felt the South

Africans had 'sold the pass' at Tobruk*.

After a few days in this camp Collins was taken to Tripoli by lorry, a journey which took four days. Like Reading, Collins was then put onto a boat to take him to the Italian mainland.

Conditions in the PoW camp in Tripoli were slightly better, with one hot meal a day consisting of beans and rice. The sand was soft to lie on and there were only 1,000 other prisoners.

The two stories are so similar that I suppose they were part of the same group of injured sailors and Marines.

What happened to them during their journey on the Italian ship couldn't have been more different, however. After landing, Reading was incarcerated before being transferred to Germany after Italy's surrender. Collins's story is awful. The details of the tragedy he experienced mark one of the saddest events of WW2. Although not directly relevant to this essay, it needs relating.

At very short notice, they were all ordered down to the docks to embark on the SS Scillin. Originally built as a cargo–passenger steamship in Glasgow, it was now being used to transport Allied PoWs.

After getting 830 men on board, it was found to be impossible to pack the balance of the thousand in, and they were sent back to the camp. Those on board were all in the upper hold, standing with no room to sit. Hatches were battened down, with a small gap in the covering and a ladder to the upper deck, where the latrines were located. Five men at a time were allowed to leave the hold to use the toilets.

During the first night, Collins hid behind some barrels, trying to avoid going back to the appalling conditions down below. He was discovered and forced down.

The second night, he met an Italian cook in the latrine and bribed him with a ring to take him into his galley. While he was there, the ship was attacked by a British submarine, HMS Sahib (P.212). That night on Saturday, 14 November 1942, 787 Allied prisoners of war died. Only 27 survived the sinking, making it one of the deadliest maritime disasters involving Allied PoWs.

The British government kept the details of the sinking and the deaths of the Allied PoWs secret for over 50 years, releasing flawed casualty lists and partial accounts in 1996, after repeated requests from relatives and historians. Families were often told inaccurate causes of death, such as that their loved ones had died in PoW camps or were simply 'lost at sea' rather than on the Scillin.

It has been claimed that the Allies knew the ship's position and cargo of PoWs, but in an effort to stop the Axis knowing about the new code-breaking technology, they intentionally went ahead with the attack. I don't intend to delve deeper into this tragedy. What I do know is that it was not a one-off, but the last in a series of sinkings of PoW ships. Here are the truly awful details of the loss of life of PoWs at the hands of the Allies:

* At this time, the British blamed the South African troops for the surrender of Tobruk in June 1942. Churchill, privately, questioned South African resolve and leadership. In this context, 'selling' the pass metaphorically suggests handing over strategic ground and betraying those relying on its defence.

Ships departing Benghazi

- Sebastiano Venier (9/Dec/41): approximately 300 PoWs killed.
- Ogaden (12/Aug/42): approximately 90 PoWs killed.
- Nino Bixio (17/Aug/42): approximately 336 PoWs killed.

Ships departing Tripoli

- Ariosto (15/Feb/42): approximately 138 PoWs killed.
- Loreto (13/Oct/1942): approximately 123 PoWs killed.
- Tembien (27/Feb/1942): approximately 390 PoWs killed.
- Scillin (14/Nov/1942): approximately 787 PoWs killed.

Overall total: approximately 2,164 PoWs killed in these seven incidents.

Able Seaman Collins was extremely lucky to survive. I now realise the same can be said for my dad and his shipmates from the Sikh.

Learning of these awful accidents – well, I hope they were accidents – gave new meaning to something I wrote in the essay 'Repatriation to the UK'.

Lieutenant Moran Caplat served on the submarine HMS Tempest, which was sunk the day before the Sikh. He was imprisoned in Italy and was, like my dad, aboard the Talma, which carried the naval officers and ratings (the most junior class of seaman) from Italy to Turkey to be exchanged. He wrote in his book about being worried throughout this trip because:

> We knew that the British were justly suspicious of the uses to which the Germans had put Italian hospital ships in ferrying their troops to and from Africa. We thought of our colleagues at sea and prayed that we would have a safe passage and not get torpedoed by one of our own boats. I remembered how 'Tempest' had so nearly attacked a ship given safe conduct.

When he reached the safety of Alexandria and learnt that his journey back to the UK would be on an unescorted liner via the Cape of Good Hope, he wrote: 'The submariners amongst us demurred. We said we would feel most unsafe and would probably arrive home in a worse state than our present one.' Perhaps submariners don't like travelling in any craft that floats and need the reassurance of being below the surface.

The Senior Officer Submarines in Alexandria sympathised with their concerns and arranged for them to travel to Beirut, then by air to the UK.

I recognise that amidst the chaos and turmoil of war, errors are inevitable. Yet, I'm reminded of Paulo Coelho's words: 'A mistake repeated more than once is no longer a mistake. It is a decision.'

Like most of the sailors and many of the Marines, my dad wasn't seriously injured. He never spoke of what happened after his capture, but I was able to piece together the story of

his first three months as a prisoner of war from newspaper accounts shared by his shipmates on their return to the UK.

After being brought ashore, the officers were separated from the other ranks, who were sent to a prison camp that had been hurriedly constructed at Derna, approximately 100 miles away. After a couple of days, they were moved to Benghazi, a further distance of 200 miles. Throughout this time, they were left without food and in the same clothes they had been wearing when the Sikh was sunk. Both journeys were made by road.

After two (maybe three) weeks, they were packed into a cargo ship for the five-day trip to Italy. They hardly had any food, no bedding and were only allowed onto the deck, a few at a time, to get fresh air and a small ration of water. One of the press reports names the ship as SS Revello; however, I couldn't find any proof this was its name.

Most prisoners suffered from dysentery resulting from the primitive sanitary arrangements. When they arrived in Italy (Taranto), they were herded into closed cattle trucks. While this was going on they were insulted by Italian women and children. As bad as these experiences were, they at least made it to the mainland without the ship being torpedoed.

The train journey in these confined conditions was to the transit PoW prison (Campo 51), at Villa Serena – Altamura, about 50 miles, taking a couple of hours. At this high altitude, in tropical temperatures by day, freezing by night, they were held on the side of the hill in tents surrounded by barbed wire. This would be their home for the next 14 weeks. Conditions sound awful, with many of the PoWs being sick and surviving on meagre meals and the occasional arrival of Red Cross parcels (more about these in a moment).

During the numerous interviews, none of the sailors voiced any hostility towards the Italians, who were also enduring severe hardship, suffering from scarce food supplies, and being forced into a war most never wanted.

Allies in Italy is a wonderful website containing details of the PoW camps in Italy. This is what it says about Campo 51:

> PG 51 Villa Serena (Altamura) shared many of its issues with other PoW camps in the south of Italy. It was a transit camp and could theoretically hold 4,000 PoWs, housed in tents, which, naturally, were flooded by mud when it rained.
>
> The services provided were scarce, and the Command's efforts to improve the situation were futile. Hot water was insufficient, while cold water was unavailable in the winter, as pipes froze despite the efforts made by the Italians (discipline was reasonable and there was no vicious punishment).
>
> There were no detention cells in the campo and the guards were not harsh or brutal; life was hard. The camp lacked medicines and food, and the prisoners had to self-tax themselves to buy them. Moreover, there were no spaces for recreational or educational activities.
>
> The military shop was opened only once a week and was rarely supplied with anything other than food. Moreover, according to the direzione di sanità militare [military health management], restrooms did

not work, and heating was insufficient. The camp was teeming with parasites, and according to the British authorities, the Italians did nothing to solve this issue. According to the same source, since there were no waterproof sheets to protect the PoWs' straw beds, which were put directly on the floor, many PoWs were affected by pneumonia, pleurisy and kidney issues.

My dad, along with thousands of others, endured these awful conditions. Yet, unknown to him at the time, he was actually among the fortunate ones being imprisoned in Italy rather than Japan and spared from death at the hands of his own naval comrades.

Before going further with the story, I want to explore what my mum knew about the events engulfing my dad in Libya and Italy.

WAITING FOR NEWS

The first reports of the Sikh's sinking were published in the *News Chronicle* on Friday, 18 September, four days after the event. A very faded copy of this article was among Mum's possessions.

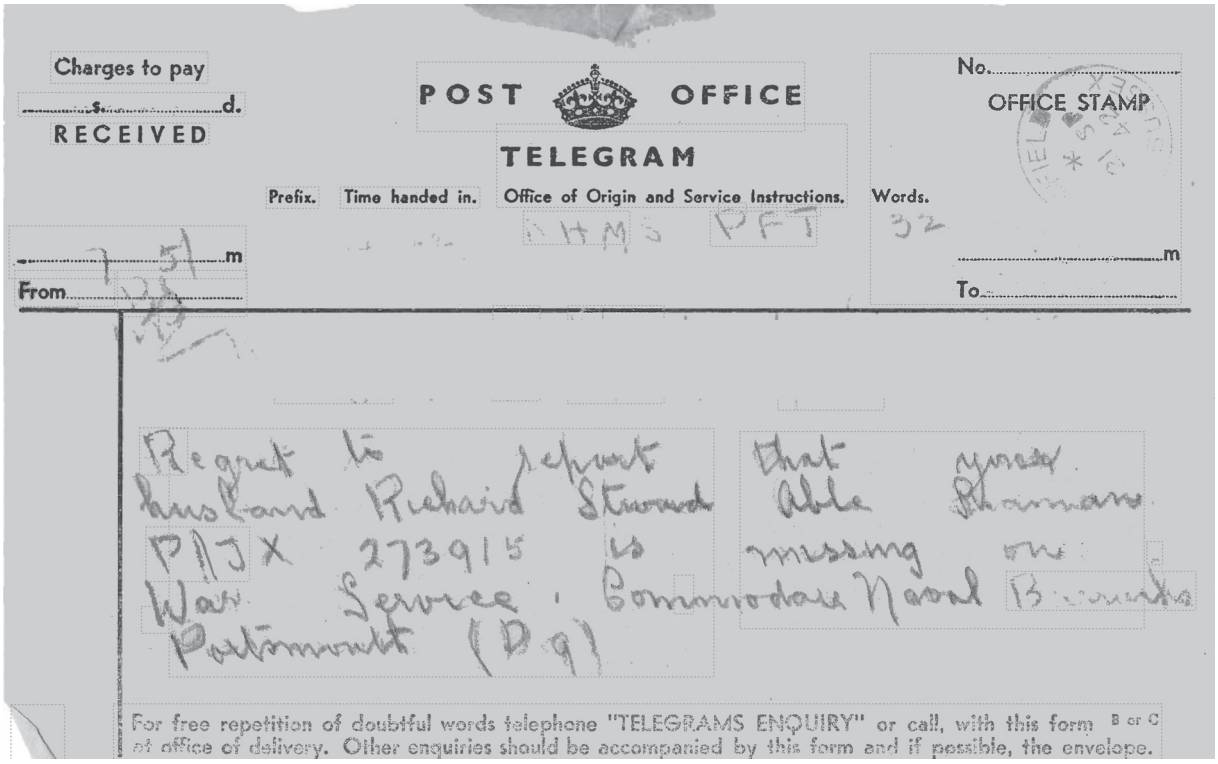
First Eye-Witness Story of The Tobruk Raid: Warships Fought Shore Guns A Mile Off to Cover Returning Troops

H.M.S. SIKH, AFIRE, SINKING, SENT RESCUE SHIP AWAY

The journalist, a Reuters correspondent who was onboard HMS Zulu, told the story of the battle, thankfully not relating the gruesome details about the carnage aboard the Sikh. What on earth must my mum have thought when she read the article and its concluding words about the Sikh's fate?

> Until we slipped out of sight below the horizon, shore guns continued to fire at her [HMS Sikh]. Every flash from the shore guns had its answering flash of defiance from the guns of the crippled destroyer. We could still see her guns firing when the ship herself was nothing more than a tiny speck at the base of a huge, dirty grey column of smoke.

Three days later (21/Sept/42), the dreaded telegram arrived, bearing those stark words that every family feared most: 'Missing on war service.'



Charges to pay
.....s.....d.
RECEIVED

POST OFFICE

TELEGRAM

No.....
OFFICE STAMP

Prefix. Time handed in. Office of Origin and Service Instructions. Words.
HMS PFT 32

.....m
From.....

.....m
To.....

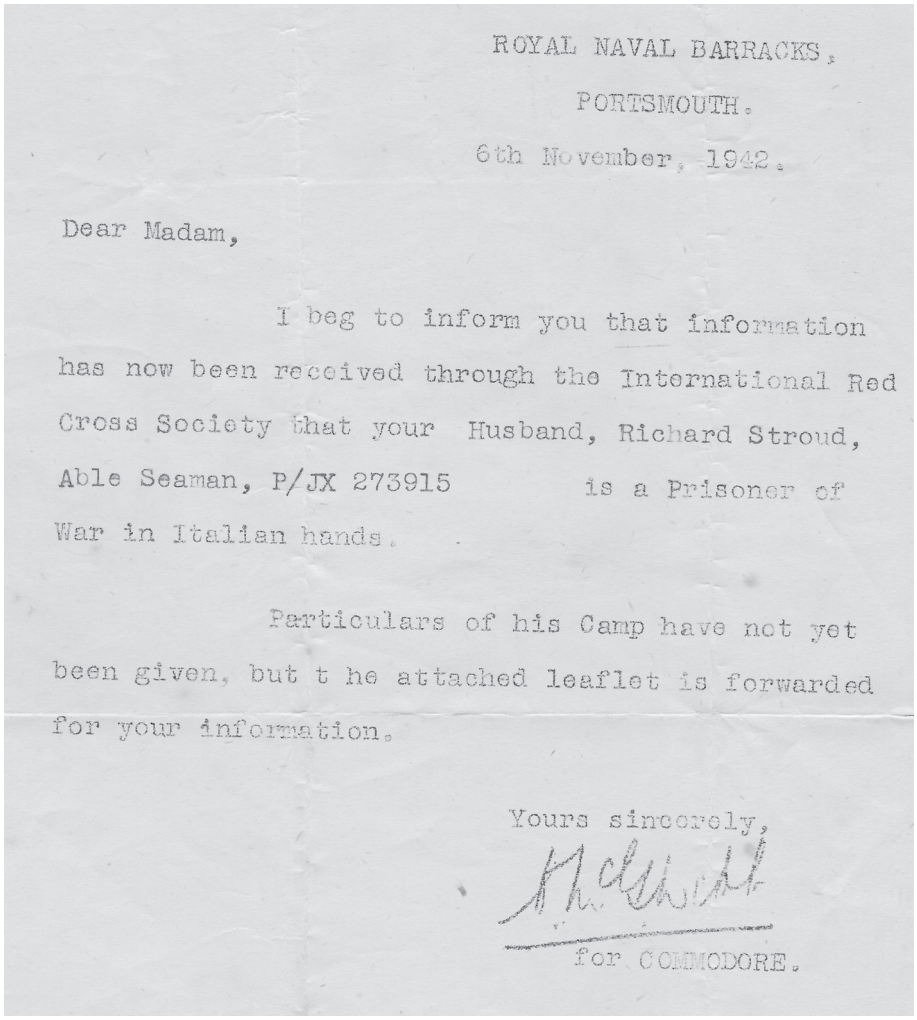
Regret to
husband Richard Stewart
PMX 273915 is
War Service. Commodore Naval
Portsmouth (D9)

that Able
missing on
Barracks

For free repetition of doubtful words telephone "TELEGRAMS ENQUIRY" or call, with this form B or C
at office of delivery. Other enquiries should be accompanied by this form and if possible, the envelope.

How must the family have felt when they caught sight of the distinctive uniform of the young man on a bicycle who delivered these messages? Receiving a telegram was assumed to mean bad news and, during wartime, it usually did. My mum and sister were living among her large family in Sussex. I am sure she had lots of support, with everybody pointing out it said 'missing' not 'dead'. No doubt they all knew families who had received a similar telegram, some receiving a further message saying their loved one was a prisoner, some with worse news.

My mum was one of the lucky ones when, 46 days later, this letter arrived from the naval base at Portsmouth (6/Nov/42). She knew my dad was alive but had no idea where he was:



ROYAL NAVAL BARRACKS,
PORTSMOUTH.
6th November, 1942.

Dear Madam,

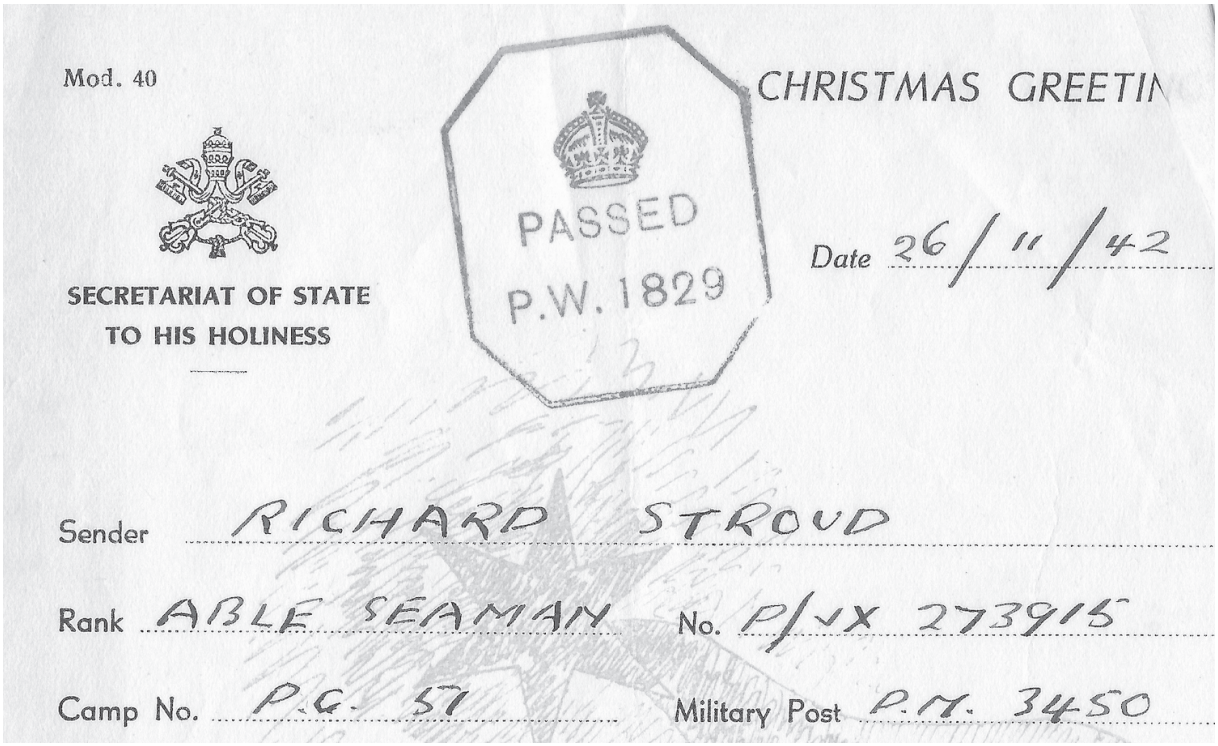
I beg to inform you that information has now been received through the International Red Cross Society that your Husband, Richard Stroud, Able Seaman, P/JX 273915 is a Prisoner of War in Italian hands.

Particulars of his Camp have not yet been given, but t he attached leaflet is forwarded for your information.

Yours sincerely,

for COMMODORE.

I'm not sure exactly when this Christmas greeting arrived (dated 26 November 1942). It contained only ten words, but they were the first she'd heard from my dad in four long months:


Mod. 40

CHRISTMAS GREETIN

SECRETARIAT OF STATE
TO HIS HOLINESS

PASSED
P.W. 1829

Date 26/11/42

Sender RICHARD STROUD

Rank ABLE SEAMAN No. P/JX 273915

Camp No. P.G. 57 Military Post P.M. 3450

This message was processed through the Vatican's PoW mail system, which operated alongside the Red Cross to enable exchanges of short messages and holiday greetings. The code 'Military Post 3450' informed both Vatican and Italian postal authorities of the camp's location, ensuring the card was correctly routed before being forwarded to the UK. Although my mum wouldn't have had any idea where PG 51 was, she now had a way of communicating with my dad.

The Vatican also had a radio station that broadcast news about prisoners of war and missing persons via shortwave radio. These were intended for both the relatives and Allied monitoring services, including the BBC. Decoded broadcasts were then verified and relayed for the broader public through official channels and newspapers.

The British Red Cross and the Post Office had established clear instructions for PoW mail. Families were encouraged to use special PoW stationery and observe content restrictions. According to a Post Office leaflet of the time, only close relatives and friends should write letters, which had to be limited to personal/family matters, and writers were warned against mentioning any military or political information. A link to the original document is in the Sources.

Special PoW air letter forms could be obtained from the local Post Office – a lightweight aerogramme designed for airmail:

> An air letter-card, specially designed for writing to prisoners of war, is on sale at most post offices and costs 3d [£0.75 in 2025 pounds]. By using this card, relatives give the prisoner the best possible chance of receiving news from home quickly.

Alternatively, a regular letter could be sent by paying airmail postage or sent free by surface mail. In all cases, 'Prisoner of War Post' had to be marked on the envelope, and the address had to be formatted exactly.

UK censors reviewed all letters before they left the UK, and Italian censors checked them on arrival.

Typically, letters were flown from Britain to neutral Portugal or Switzerland. Lisbon was a key exchange point where British couriers or Red Cross flights dropped mailbags for handover to Axis representatives. The same neutral swap point was used for incoming mail from Italy. In some cases, mail was sent via Geneva to be sorted by the International Red Cross, then forwarded to Italy. The Italian Red Cross in Rome received incoming Allied mail and handed it to the military postal service.

The time it took for a letter to reach the camp varied widely due to delays caused by censors, transport availability and Allied attacks. Two weeks would be fast; two months or longer would not be unusual.

As far as I can tell, this Christmas message was the only communication my mum received from this PoW camp. The next message, towards the end of February 1943, was from a different camp.

At the end of November 1942, the number of PoWs in Campo 51 was 1,744. By the end of December, that had dropped to 150, so I guess the move took place during this month. A letter she received from the Red Cross confirmed that most of the prisoners from HMS Sikh were moved to Campo 70 and sweetly said, 'therefore he will still be with his companions' (8/Feb/43).

CAMPO 70

My account of Campo 70 is based on press reports from former prisoners of war, detailed descriptions from the *Allies in Italy* website, and an inspection report by the Red Cross following their visit to the camp on 17 December 1942.

Located in the municipality of Fermo, Campo 70 – also known as the Monturano camp – was a mile or two from Porto San Giorgio. It occupied a former linen mill, although some reports said it was for wine making. Built in 1938, it was later converted into military barracks. Its proximity to a railway station suggests that prisoners arrived by train, having travelled roughly 270 miles from Campo 51.

The camp was divided into two sectors: one for the Italian command staff, guards and support services, the other for housing the PoWs. To prevent escapes, the perimeter was heightened and reinforced with barbed wire. The guards were mostly drawn from Army Corps personnel or soldiers deemed unfit for frontline service, supplemented by a few carabinieri and interpreters.

The first group of prisoners, mostly British soldiers transferred from transit camps in Libya, arrived on 19 August 1942, before the camp was fully operational. By the end of that year, their numbers had grown to around 6,000, mostly British, along with about a hundred white South Africans. Many of the prisoners were 'desert rats' – the nickname given to the British 7th Armoured Division.

On 17 December, the naval presence in the camp was 458 non-commissioned officers and men – interestingly, no officers.

Conditions inside the camp were harsh. Prisoners slept on wooden cots arranged in double or triple rows within unheated dormitories. Each man was issued a straw mattress, a sheet and two blankets. Food was initially scarce, though conditions improved somewhat when the prisoners began cultivating fruits and vegetables in a small camp garden. According to the account of a Sikh sailor, 'Daily meals consisted of acorn coffee for breakfast, weak vegetable soup for lunch, and a bread roll with possibly a small piece of dubious cheese for supper.'

Red Cross parcels were essential for supplementing the inadequate rations. Their distribution – along with mail deliveries – was among the few bright spots in the prisoners' routine.

To boost morale, the prisoners constructed a small theatre where they staged performances. Cultural and recreational events were announced on a camp bulletin board and through *The Seventy Times*, a prisoner-produced newspaper. A small library also offered a modest escape from the monotony.

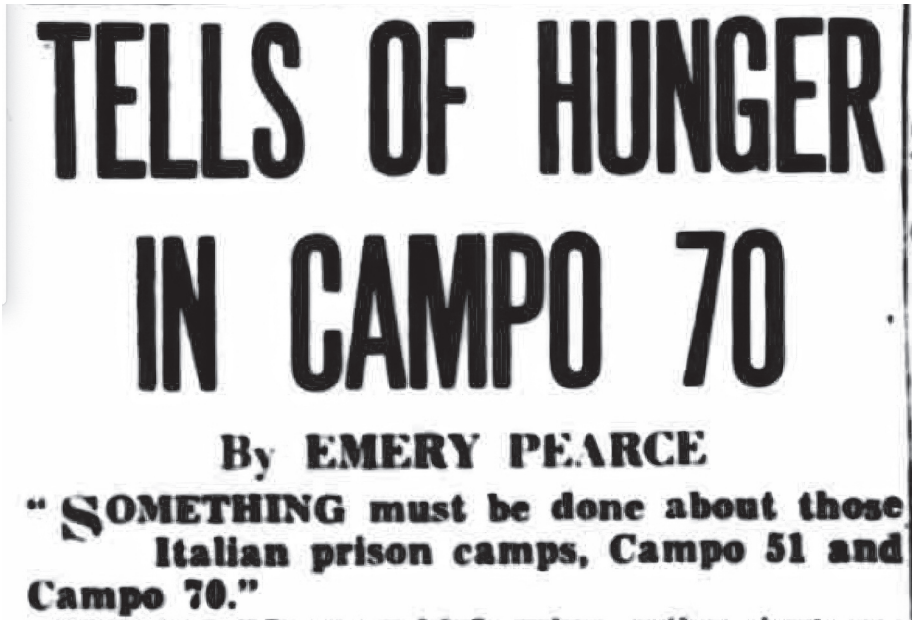
Some prisoners were put to work. Around 50 British PoWs worked on construction projects, earning modest compensation based on their skills and being protected under Geneva Convention provisions. Others contributed to the camp's daily operations: cooking, shoe repair, barbering, carpentry, storage and maintenance. A handful were assigned to agricultural labour outside the camp.

Water shortages were chronic. Although a new reservoir was initiated, it was never completed, and during the winter months the lack of heating made conditions bitterly cold. Between September 1942 and May 1943, 45 prisoners died from respiratory illnesses and infections.

Overcrowding and poor hygiene led to outbreaks of scabies, skin diseases and infestations of fleas and lice. Medical resources and medicines were minimal, with only five British medical officers serving the camp, supervised by an Italian doctor.

Escape attempts were frequent and mostly unsuccessful. One prisoner was shot by a guard while trying to flee; another died from injuries sustained while climbing the barbed wire fence.

The return of the repatriated sailors in June 1943 gave the press its first opportunity of the war to learn about conditions in Italian PoW camps. Articles like this one from the *Daily Herald* (24/Jun/43) described the horrible conditions:



TELLS OF HUNGER IN CAMPO 70

By EMERY PEARCE

"SOMETHING must be done about those Italian prison camps, Campo 51 and Campo 70."

The account ended by saying: 'I hope that conditions in Campo 51 and 70 will be brought to the notice of Parliament and the International Red Cross.'

Sure enough, a few days later the issue was raised in the House of Commons (6/July/43):

> Mr Burke [MP for Burnley] asked the Secretary of State for War whether he will cause inquiries to be made into conditions at prison Campo 51 and 70 in Italy, as, according to reports of repatriated prisoners, food supplies are below standard and the accommodation provided does not give protection from climatic changes.
>
> Mr. Henderson [Financial Secretary to the War Office]: Camp 51 is a transit camp for prisoners of war arriving in Italy and is believed to be unoccupied, all British prisoners of war having been transferred to permanent camps, in which conditions are appreciably better. I am informed that the stoves ordered for Camp 70 were not installed last winter, but I hope that the representations about the heating of camps in Italy, which have led to improvements at other camps, will have the same result at this camp.
>
> I am not aware that the food supplied by the Italians at Camp 70 is below the standard at other Italian camps. Food parcels sufficient to give each prisoner one parcel a week since the beginning of the year have been despatched from Geneva and I have no reason to suppose they have not reached the camp. I will, however, have further inquiries made.

It was after writing this account of the camp that I discovered the Red Cross report that gave a much more positive account of the conditions:

> The camp is well supplied with water but the plumbing was not yet completed and in one of the lavatories the pipes had not yet been installed so that the water for flushing must be carried by the men.
>
> All the huts are now occupied, except the central building, which is used as a place for Divine Worship, a school and a recreation room. The dormitories are supplied with three-tier bunks. Ventilation and lighting, notwithstanding the great number of prisoners, are just sufficient. The bed sheets have been taken away from all the prisoners, except the officers, sick men and prisoners due for repatriation. This measure is general and applies to all the camps.
>
> Since the previous visit the camp installations have been enlarged but they are not yet completed. Many new prisoners of war have arrived in the camp for whom lodgings must be prepared. The morale of the inmates of the camp is high and the cooperation with the authorities gratifying.

What explains this noticeable gap between the firsthand stories of the PoWs and the official account? It appears that the Red Cross and Swiss Legation inspectors were allowed access to the Italian camps only under supervision and in carefully managed circumstances.

The inspectors often found camps prepared specifically for their arrival, with temporary improvements made. There's no doubt that the everyday reality for PoWs was frequently much harsher, marked by inadequate food, medical neglect and arbitrary punishment by the Italian guards.

Red Cross reports from Italy consequently reflected the sanitised environment authorities wanted to show. The organisation was at pains to retain its diplomatic neutrality and to ensure continued access to the camps over direct criticism of the regime.

Survivors and historians have since pointed out that, because inspections in Italy were systematically staged and misleading, the Red Cross reports failed to represent the true conditions endured by thousands of Allied prisoners.

One fact is beyond doubt. Red Cross parcels were vital to the survival of prisoners. My dad talked about them as saving him from near starvation. How strange that it's only now, while writing this essay, that I've learnt what they were and how they were distributed. Perhaps the Red Cross prioritised their delivery, even if it meant relaying inaccurate accounts about the camps?

RED CROSS PARCELS

Rarely did my dad talk about his time as a prisoner of war but, when he did, he always spoke about the Red Cross parcels. To him, they were more than just extra food – they were a lifeline to his old world. I never thought to ask what they contained or how they reached the camps. I just grew up knowing that the Red Cross was a force for good.

Years later, while going through old family papers, I discovered some letters from his employer, Southern Railway, coordinating with my mother to send him parcels via their

centre at Waterloo Station. Now, whenever I pass through the station, I wonder what that was all about.

In this section, I've tried to piece together the story behind those life-saving parcels, both from the Red Cross and from home. It's an attempt to uncover the mystery behind the kindness and logistics that were vital to saving so many PoWs during the war.

The BBC's *WW2 People's War* series included personal memories of life in Campo 70 that discussed these parcels. The full account is in the Appendix; here is a summary:

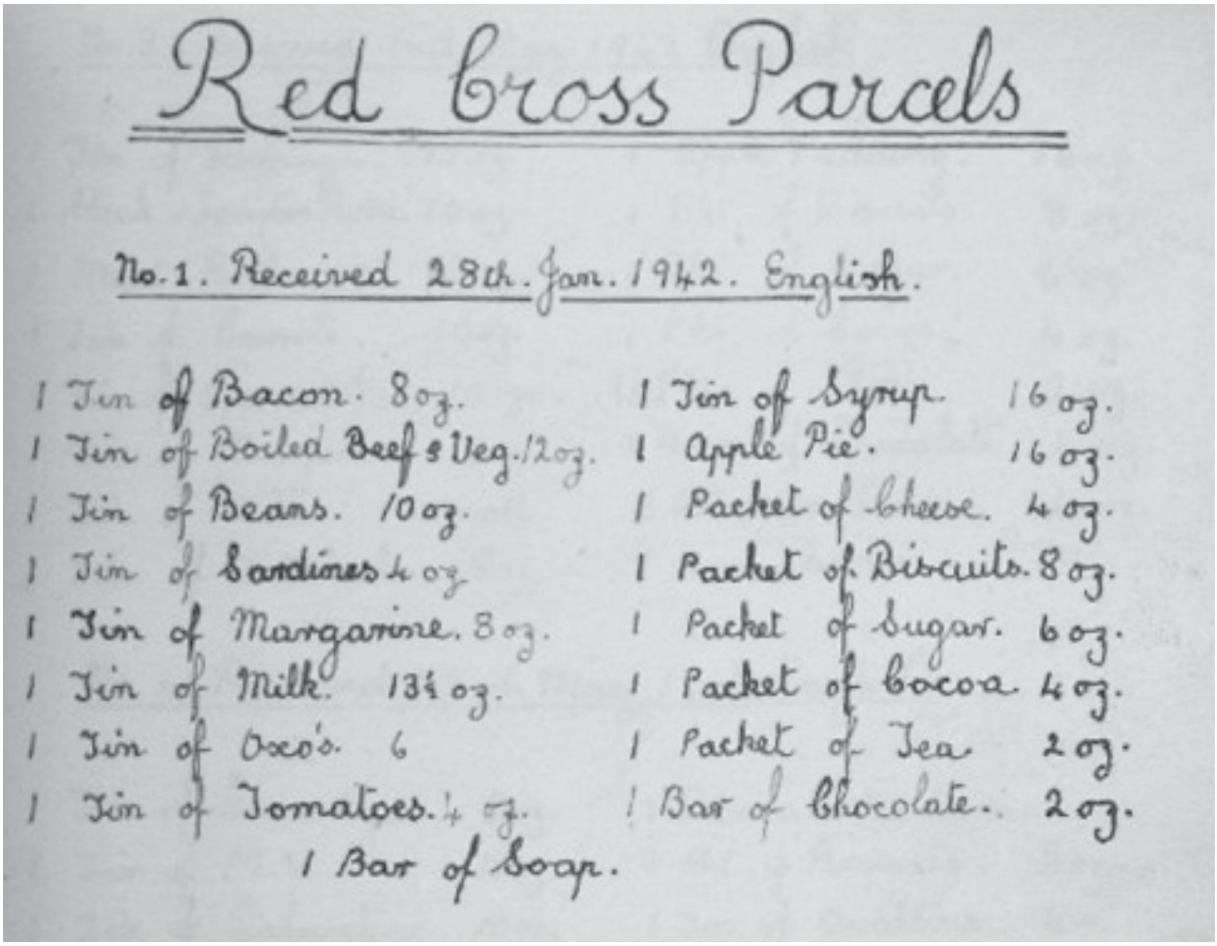
> When the first Red Cross parcels arrived, they transformed our lives and literally saved us from starvation. In 1941, when I volunteered, my weight was 154 pounds. After release and two weeks back in England, it was 119 pounds.
>
> A normal Red Cross parcel was meant to be shared by two persons, but sometimes there were four or five of us, depending on the consignments from Geneva. Plundering along the way was suspected, or sometimes the camp population rapidly increased, meaning there were more mouths to feed.
>
> The only other source of food came from home. Families in the U.K. were able to send articles of clothing to their next of kin in Italy and Germany.
>
> Known as Personal Parcels [the official name was Next-of-Kin Parcels], weighing no more than ten pounds, they were intended to contain clothing and personal items, but chocolate was allowed. One of my parcels contained two pairs of socks and nine pounds of Cadbury's milk chocolate.
>
> Money had no value in the camp. In its place, cigarettes became the standard currency, against which everything was reckoned.
>
> Cigarettes were not included in Red Cross parcels but were distributed separately and rationed accordingly. Later, when American parcels arrived, they contained 200 cigarettes. In those days, when almost 90% of people were heavy smokers, they were exchanged for additional food.

This story poses many questions that I have attempted to answer.

What did the Red Cross parcels contain?

The goal was for every PoW to receive a standard 10 lb food parcel each week.

This is a list of the contents of a Red Cross parcel received at the PoW camp in Servigliano (Campo 59), which was only 12 miles away from Campo 70. See Sources for the website (*Camp 59 Survivors)* that contains this and other material.



Red Cross Parcels

No. 1. Received 28th. Jan. 1942. English.

1 Tin of Bacon.	8 oz.	1 Tin of Syrup.	16 oz.
1 Tin of Boiled Beef & Veg.	12 oz.	1 Apple Pie.	16 oz.
1 Tin of Beans.	10 oz.	1 Packet of Cheese.	4 oz.
1 Tin of Sardines	4 oz.	1 Packet of Biscuits.	8 oz.
1 Tin of Margarine.	8 oz.	1 Packet of Sugar.	6 oz.
1 Tin of Milk.	13½ oz.	1 Packet of Cocoa	4 oz.
1 Tin of Oxo's.	6	1 Packet of Tea	2 oz.
1 Tin of Tomatoes.	4 oz.	1 Bar of Chocolate.	2 oz.
1 Bar of Soap.			

The same document lists the dates of when the next parcels arrived:

Received 14th of March 1942, Canadian 1 between 3!!!
Received 3rd of April 1942, English 1 between 2!!

How the camps handled the irregularity of parcel arrival and the sharing of food between prisoners is covered in the next section. I was intrigued to know how a Canadian parcel differed from one from the UK and whether other countries were involved in providing food.

The purpose of all Red Cross food parcels was to supplement the meagre camp rations; however, their contents reflected the resources and tastes of the sending country.

British parcels provided home comforts including tea, cocoa, chocolate, tinned puddings, processed cheese, condensed milk, sardines, jam, margarine, sugar, biscuits and soap. Cigarettes were sent separately to the camps, typically 50 cigarettes per person, often the Player's brand. The quantities of all these items were limited by wartime shortages in Britain.

Canadian parcels were regarded as the most generous, probably because of the country's plentiful food supplies. They contained larger quantities of high-calorie foods such as milk powder, butter, cheese, corned beef, salmon and pork luncheon meat. Tea or coffee was included, as well as dried fruit, sugar, jam or honey, biscuits and chocolate. The inclusion of butter, which was scarce in British parcels, made them highly prized in the camp barter systems.

American parcels reflected US food habits. Typically, they included coffee, rather than tea, peanut butter, Spam or corned beef, canned salmon or tuna, raisins or prunes, Kraft cheese, margarine and vitamin supplements. They also contained US military field rations, D-ration* chocolate bars and K-ration biscuits and much-prized packets of cigarettes.

There are multiple sources with details about the content of parcels. In the Appendix is a document from the Red Cross detailing the contents of the parcels it sent to German PoWs and their value (approximately £30 in today's terms). Like me, you might wonder how much it would cost to buy the contents of a typical parcel today – the answer is about £40.

This picture of a food parcel appears in the Red Cross museum archive, which also contains an audio story about the organisation.

* D- and K-rations were US Army field rations in WW2, with the D-ration consisting of a high-calorie emergency chocolate bar and the K-ration a compact individual combat meal containing biscuits, tinned food and small comforts such as cigarettes.

How were they distributed and shared?

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) pooled parcels from multiple countries in central warehouses in Geneva and Lisbon, before forwarding them in bulk to the Italian Red Cross for delivery to camps. Often, they were transported in ships from Portugal or Spain (neutral countries) to Italy, under Red Cross protection.

Thus, a British prisoner of war in Italy might receive a parcel prepared in England, Canada, the US, New Zealand, South Africa or Australia, depending on what was available in stock at the time. Parcels were distributed based on supply rather than the prisoners' nationality.

Delivery of the parcels was to the camp commandant (an Italian military officer), who was formally responsible for issuing them to the prisoners.

As we have seen, the distribution intervals varied: a weekly issue was the aim, but wartime transport problems meant gaps of two to three weeks were common and in late 1942 and early 1943, some camps received them monthly.

Article 43 (1929 Geneva Convention on Prisoners of War) says the following:

> In every place where there are prisoners of war, they shall be allowed to appoint agents entrusted with representing them directly with military authorities and protecting Powers. This appointment shall be subject to the approval of the military authority.
>
> The agents shall be entrusted with the reception and distribution of collective shipments. Likewise, in case the prisoners should decide to organise a mutual assistance system among themselves, this organisation would be in the sphere of the agents.
>
> Further, they may lend their offices to prisoners to facilitate their relations with the aid societies mentioned in Article 78. In camps of officers and persons of equivalent status, the senior officer prisoner of the highest rank shall be recognized as intermediary between the camp authorities and the officers and persons of equivalent status who are prisoners.

The name given to the 'agent entrusted with representing' the prisoners was the 'Man of Confidence'. It's the phrase that appears in field reports from the ICRC, prisoner correspondence and the *Prisoner of War* magazine. They must have played a central role in distributing the contents of the Red Cross parcels, splitting food parcels among groups when supplies were insufficient and maintaining records of who received what.

This is how Sergeant Robertson of The Gordon Highlanders describes his role when he was a PoW in Germany (*Montrose Standard*, 9/Feb/44):

> In the camp itself, there is a Man of Confidence, an N.C.O. [non-commissioned officer] or man selected by the men of the camp. His duty is to ensure he has a supply of Red Cross parcels to cover a period of three months and as his stock gets low, he reports the fact to the Welfare Commission.

> Should he receive no further notice, he writes direct to Geneva and they forward the required number parcels immediately.
>
> The man of confidence also acts as go-between for men and Germans. When a man has a complaint he goes to his man of confidence, who in turn takes the complaint to the Germans or the Swiss Welfare Commission. It is through the man of confidence the camp is run.

I have no idea how this system worked in practice at Campo 70, with its 6,000 PoWs. The logistics of receiving, dividing and distributing so many parcels must have been a formidable task. My dad never spoke about the details, but I do recall him telling me, when I was being a greedy child, that I would have struggled to share my parcel. Not surprisingly, he had a lifelong admiration for the Red Cross.

How did the Next-of-Kin parcels work?

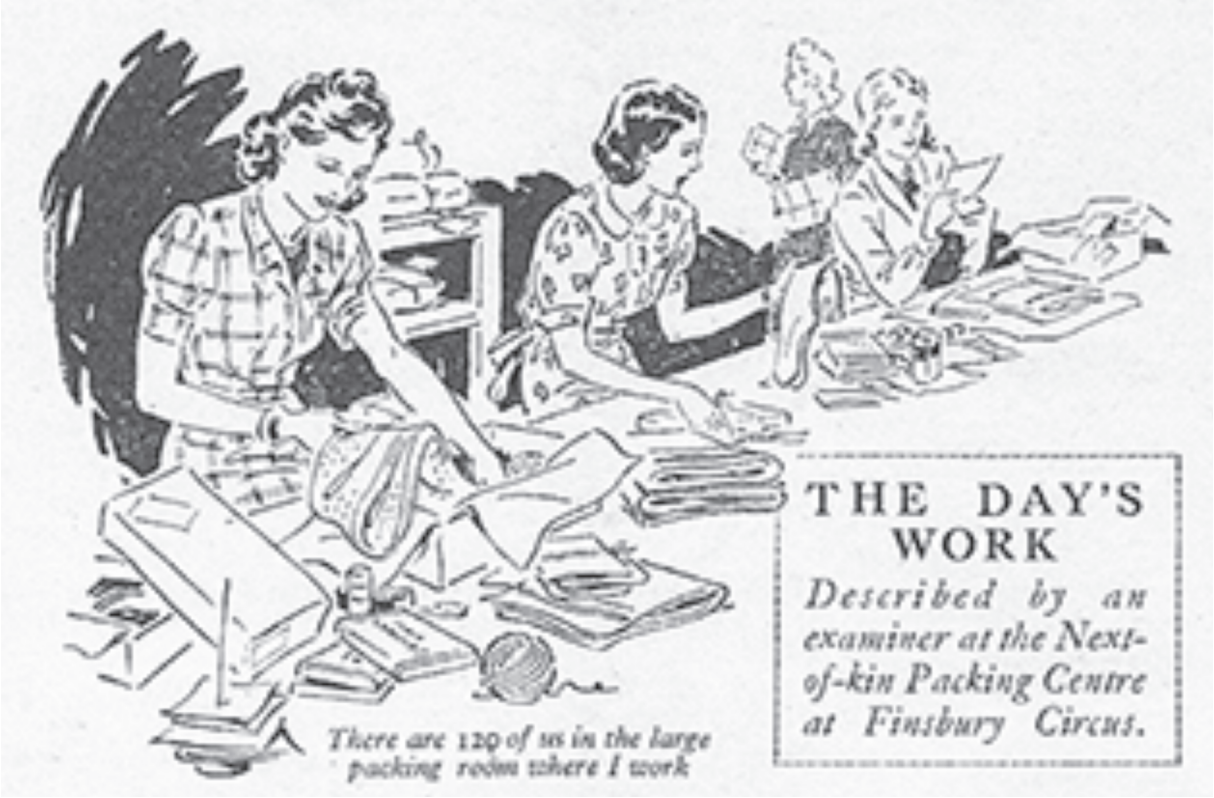
This extract is taken from an official document outlining the regulations for sending this type of parcel. The full text is provided in the Appendix.

> Next-of-Kin parcels for prisoners of war in Germany, Italy and France.
>
> ONE PARCEL EVERY THREE MONTHS
>
> Food and clothing are dispatched by the Red Cross to all Camps, but once every three months the next-of-kin of a Prisoner of War (i.e. his wife, or if he is not married, one of his parents or some other person appointed by him) may send him a parcel, which may, if so wished, contain gifts from other relations or friends.

Because of rationing, special coupons were authorised to help obtain clothes for the parcel. There were 40 coupons for the first parcel and then 20 for each succeeding quarter. As the war went on, the buying power of each coupon diminished; in 1942, a pair of men's trousers or a shirt required eight coupons. These coupons authorised the next of kin to purchase the clothing, but the items still had to be paid for in cash.

Large employers often ran 'Comfort Funds' and acted as agents for their staff families. I have a letter from Southern Railways thanking my mum for sending her parcel and the remainder of the clothing coupons to the company for them to complete and despatch from their packing centre at Finsbury Circus.

The *Prisoner of War* magazine contained a light-hearted article in September 1942, from the perspective of one of the packers, about how the parcels were repacked before being despatched:



As the number of PoWs increased, so did the volume of parcels being sent. The turn-around time of a couple of days subsequently extended to three weeks. I suspect my dad received one of these parcels, possibly two, because during March 1943 he and most of the Sikh PoWs were about to move camp again.

YOU ARE GOING HOME

The essay 'Repatriation to the UK' recounts the exchange of 862 able-bodied British naval prisoners for an equal number of Italian sailors. Most likely their journey began on 16 March, at the port of Bari, on Italy's Adriatic coast, before continuing to Turkey for the handover. The British sailors, drawn from various PoW camps, were first assembled at Campo 75, situated near the city's docks. Many of the prisoners were confined in camp when they first arrived in Italy. Back then, it had a notorious reputation for its bad conditions, which had thankfully improved.

I found two firsthand accounts of what happened when the PoWs were moved to their final camp. The first is from a Royal Marine who was captured at Tobruk (in *Tobruk: A Raid Too Far*):

> In February 1943, the Navy PoWs were summoned to a large hall. Bert Warren and his fellow prisoners were lined up and told to pull up their shirts so that their stomachs could be inspected*. Most of them passed the curious inspection, but those who were rejected would spend the rest of the war in Europe in captivity.
>
> Those assembled in the hall were totally in the dark about any plans for repatriation, although there had been some rumours circulating. A week later, the selected PoWs were transferred to a camp near Bari. From this camp they were marched 7 miles to the docks, along streets lined with Italian women, some of whom spat on the column. They boarded the hospital ship Gradisca.

This is the account of Lieutenant Moran Caplat, an officer on HMS Tempest, a British submarine that was sunk the day before the Sikh:

> Outside in the courtyard was an army truck, a surprise as it was normal for prisoners arriving or departing to be marched to the station. An officer and four guards came with us and treated us with unusual politeness. On the train we were put into a first-class compartment and to our surprise the train set off not to the north but in an easterly direction. Incredulous though we had been when we started, we began to think we might have been told the truth.
>
> We learnt that we were off to Bari, where a hospital ship awaited to waft us home. Now we became very keen not to lose our guards. Far from wishing to get away we were concerned not to be left behind.
>
> Bari of the hideous memories of a year ago was still a transit camp, but it had been cleaned up and improved facilities greeted us everywhere. We found ourselves part of a rapidly growing collection of naval personnel – officers and men drawn from camps all over Italy, all equally bemused by their sudden change in fortune.
>
> The ship, we were told, was in the harbour. We would go on board that evening. Meanwhile a scratch meal and wine was offered and the inevitable documentation hurried through. We also had to be searched before going on board. The search was cursory, we were embussed and taken to the docks, and there was the hospital ship Gradisca.

There are a couple of oddities with these accounts. Campo 75 was in the Torre Tresca, on the northwest outskirts of Bari city, less than 2 miles from Bari docks, not the 7 miles reported in the first account. Caplan mentions his memories from a year ago, when, in fact, it

* The repatriation deal with the Italians was that all the sailors would be fit, the opposite of what had happened in previous prisoner exchanges. This inspection ensured, albeit using a primitive medical, that they were healthy. Gradisca was the ship that took them to Mersina (Turkey) where the exchange took place.

must have been about six months – though I am sure it felt like six years. However, these accounts agree that Campo 75 was used as the mustering point before the repatriation process began.

The *Allies in Italy* website offers a vivid account of conditions in the camp when it first opened, noting that a British officer was killed and another wounded by Italian guards. By March 1943, conditions had improved considerably. At the end of that month, the camp's population stood at 650 – down by 1,073 from the previous month – a reduction likely explained by the departure of the repatriated sailors.

I have some idea how long my dad was at the camp based on a report from the International Red Cross, which visited Campo 70 on 11 March 43, in which it commented: '400 seamen have just left for repatriation.' The term 'just left' could mean anything from a day to a week. Assuming it was a week, then it suggests my dad would have arrived at Campo 75 somewhere around 7 March and departed on the 16th.

What must it have felt like to be singled out in the PoW camp, to leave behind naval friends who were sick or simply unlucky not to have been chosen? Even after 400 men departed for repatriation, 52 sailors remained in Campo 70. When did Dad learn that he would be among those leaving and know for certain his destination was the UK rather than Germany? Questions that, sadly, will remain unanswered.

If it hadn't already, the word repatriation was about to enter my dad's vocabulary, along with the other 861 sailors. After six months of confinement, his time as a prisoner was ending and he was bound for Blighty. The essay 'Repatriation to the UK' is both fascinating and at times amusing and I highly recommend reading it.

APPENDIX

Account of Able Seaman Collins' time as an Italian PoW

Collins was also on the Sikh and was one of the two naval survivors when the Italian ship Scillin was sunk by the British submarine P.212 on the night of 14–15 November 1942 while it was carrying British prisoners of war from Tripoli to Italy.

His account, the first the Admiralty had about the circumstances of the Sikh's demise, is filed in the National Archives. This summarised version tells of his imprisonment in Italy.

> After being rescued from the water, Collins was taken to a dressing station where the Germans gave first aid and treated the prisoners very well.
>
> They were then handed over to the Italians, who took them off in lorries, Collins himself being taken to hospital. This tent hospital was disgustingly dirty and the Italians were completely negligent regarding the prisoners. Collins did not get his wounds dressed for over 36 hours. He said this did not matter as far as he himself was concerned, because he was comparatively lightly wounded, but many others died during this period. In his opinion, this was entirely due to a lack of any reasonable attention.
>
> After two days in hospital, he was taken to a tent hospital in Derna where he met Lieutenant Sharp of the Sikh. Conditions here were equally bad, and Lieutenant Sharp spent his time making tremendous rows about it and was threatened with being placed in a concentration camp. Collins was here for about three weeks – the exact time is doubtful, and Collins does not think it can actually have been as long as that.
>
> During this period, a visit was made by an important official, and subsequently, conditions improved slightly.
>
> Collins then went to a transit camp; he thinks for about a week. When he arrived, there were only three others in the camp, where they waited until a full lorry load – about 50 prisoners – arrived before going to Benghazi.
>
> He then went to a prison camp in Benghazi, where about 6,000 men were herded into his pen. In the next pen about ten yards distant were 5,000 white South Africans.
>
> There was a lot of ill feeling between the South Africans and the British because the latter felt that the South Africans had 'sold the pass' at Tobruk.
>
> He spent days in this camp and they had much joy watching RAF raids on the harbour and had a front seat view of the ships burning and blowing up. When a particularly good fire or explosion was started the prisoners used to cheer and the Italian sentries fired over their heads.

The black South Africans were used as dock labourers. When asked if he or other British prisoners had been used for dock labour, he said, 'Oh no, all the British prisoners were much too weak from starvation and dysentery to do anything of that sort, and most of them could hardly walk.'

He was taken to Tripoli by lorry, a journey that took four days. The food was slightly better there – they got one hot meal a day consisting of beans and rice, and the sand was soft to lie on. The fact that there were only 1,000 men in the camp also made things better.

At very short notice they were all ordered down to the docks to embark in the Scillin. While waiting to embark, Collins noticed that there was no power on the jetty, all the storehouses were burnt and unusable, and most of the jetties that were visible seemed to be fouled by wrecks.

After getting 830 men on board, it was found to be impossible to pack the balance of the thousand in, and they were sent back to the camp. Those on board were all in the upper hold, standing without any possible room to sit down. Hatches were battened down and a small gap only left in the covering with a ladder leading to the upper deck.

The latrines were on the upper deck and five men at a time were allowed up. The first night Collins, determined not to go back to the appalling conditions down below, hid behind some barrels. He was found out, however, and forced down.

The second night, he met the Italian cook in the latrine and bribed him with a ring to take him into his galley.

When the ship was hit, he was on the upper deck. The first shots from the submarine hit a gun post on the top of the bridge and subsequent shots hit deck houses and the engine room.

The ship stopped immediately and was torpedoed.

Collins was not sure how he got into the water but thinks he did an assisted dive, the ship lifting under him to the force of the explosions as he took off.

By the time he came to the surface and pulled himself together, the ship had practically disappeared.

He knows of one man – the other sailor – who, by a superhuman effort, got himself out of the hold but does not believe that anybody else in the hold could have survived.

He estimates that there were certainly no more than 100 men all told in the water.

(This file was closed until 1972. When it was made available to the public, it would have revealed that the sinking of the Scillin was caused by the Allies.)

Account of life in Campo 70

The BBC's *WW2 People's War* published an account of life in Campo 70. This is a summarised version of the story of Phillip Green and Norman Milson, both from the RAF.

> It was really fortunate for us that the first Red Cross parcels of food arrived, which transformed our lives and literally saved us from starvation. Parenthetically, when I volunteered for the RAF in January 1941,I weighed in at eleven stone (154 pounds), at the end of our incarceration and following a week or two normal meals in England (in May 1945) my weight had shrunk to eight and a half stones (119 pounds).
>
> A normal Red Cross parcel was meant to be shared by two persons, but sometimes there were four or five depending on the consignments from Geneva. Plundering along the way was suspected, or sometimes the camp population increased when further prisoners arrived out of the blue.
>
> Camp No.70 (Monturano) was a mile or two from the sea and Porto San Georgio. This proved to be a collection of hangar-like buildings which we learnt later had been constructed to contain wine making facilities.
>
> When we arrived, it was a thriving and bustling camp, housing a few thousand, mostly 'desert rats' [the nickname given to the British 7th Armoured Division], including famous regiments such as the Fourth and Eighth Hussars.
>
> We also met up with many old comrades from RAF Middle Eastern Bombing Command. The Italians had no separate camps solely for airmen as in Germany, NCOs and other ranks shared sleeping quarters, and in most of the buildings, two or three hundred men occupied one of the three-tiered bunks with requisite straw palliasse and a sole blanket! Fortunately, the construction of the buildings provided very high ceilings, ensuring at least, plenty of fresh air.
>
> I do not intend to write very much on the day-to-day life as a prisoner, many, many accounts exist, suffice to say that our main occupation and topic was FOOD!
>
> The rations supplied by the Italians were disgraceful, and as I have intimated, but for the Red Cross, starvation would have ensued. There was one other supplier of sustenance, and that, strangely enough, came from home. Families in the U.K. were able to send articles of clothing to their kin in Italy and Germany.
>
> Known as Personal Parcels weighing no more than ten pounds were specified but they did not have to be all clothing or articles thereof, curiously one other item was allowed –chocolate, and so, I remember receiving in the only personal parcel that ever got to

me in Italy, that contained two pairs of socks and NINE POUNDS OF CADBURY's Milk Chocolate!

So that Norman and I bartered some of the chocolate for bread, corned beef, tea, and sugar, adding to our depleted stocks. Incidentally, as is obvious, money had NO value in PoW camps, in its place cigarettes became the standard currency, against which everything was reckoned.

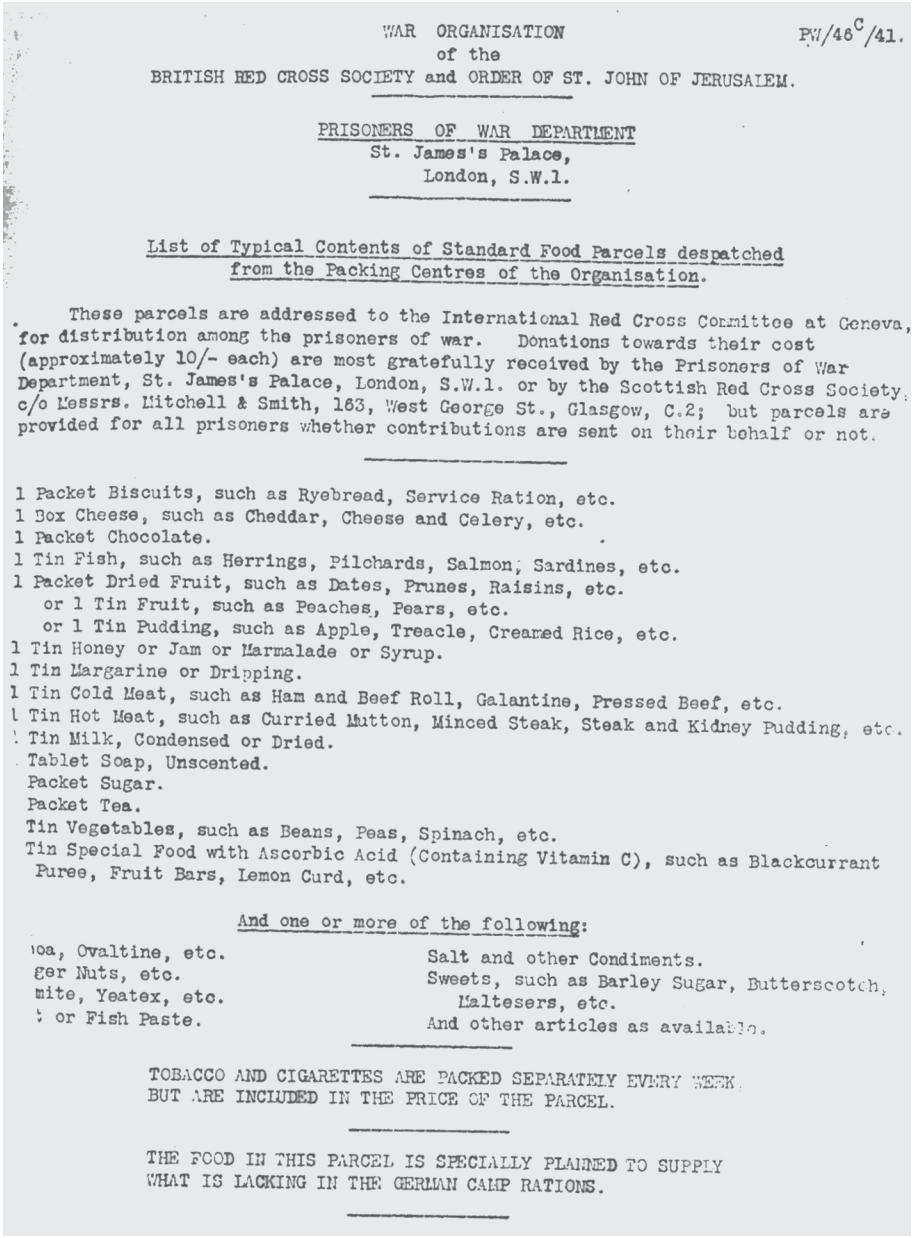
Cigarettes were not included in Red Cross parcels but came separately, and rationed out accordingly. Later, when American parcels arrived, they did contain 200 cigarettes in each. As it happened, Norman and I were non-smokers, so again we benefited by bartering them for food. And, in those days when almost 90% were fairly heavy smokers, there were some who, if they had none, would sell their bread, or anything to assuage the craving.

The more desperate saved tea leaves or coffee grounds, drying them to roll in spills of paper. What they tasted of I cannot imagine, but the smell was awful! Even now, I shudder to think what their lungs must have endured!

So life went on, and as in most camps people settled down to various activities, including classes for languages, accountancy, painting, play reading, and so on. It was the last category that I joined at Monturano.

The enthusiast taking the course was an ebullient man named Fred Hindle. A tall Lancastrian, it was he who devised the idea of presenting a show, roping in the play reading class, plus other volunteers. From somewhere, instruments were obtained (probably the Red Cross), and in a camp of several thousands, sufficient instrumentalists appeared. Fred, who loved operetta, put together a series of numbers, culled from The Merry Widow and The Gypsy Baron, Johan Strauss (Die Fledermaus) and Sigmund Romberg (The Desert Song), and others, wrote a hodgepodge of a story, and this hybrid, he dubbed The Gypsy King. Though I had not much of a voice, nevertheless, was consigned to the chorus numbering some twenty five I believe, and with a few talented principals, succeeded in putting on a show that was rapturously received. This led to my lifelong interest in the theatre, particularly opera and operetta, that endures today.

Documents pertaining to parcels



WAR ORGANISATION PW/46C/41.
of the
BRITISH RED CROSS SOCIETY and ORDER OF ST. JOHN OF JERUSALEM.

PRISONERS OF WAR DEPARTMENT
St. James's Palace,
London, S.W.1.

List of Typical Contents of Standard Food Parcels despatched from the Packing Centres of the Organisation.

These parcels are addressed to the International Red Cross Committee at Geneva, for distribution among the prisoners of war. Donations towards their cost (approximately 10/- each) are most gratefully received by the Prisoners of War Department, St. James's Palace, London, S.W.1. or by the Scottish Red Cross Society, c/o Messrs. Mitchell & Smith, 163, West George St., Glasgow, C.2; but parcels are provided for all prisoners whether contributions are sent on their behalf or not.

1 Packet Biscuits, such as Ryebread, Service Ration, etc.
1 Box Cheese, such as Cheddar, Cheese and Celery, etc.
1 Packet Chocolate.
1 Tin Fish, such as Herrings, Pilchards, Salmon, Sardines, etc.
1 Packet Dried Fruit, such as Dates, Prunes, Raisins, etc.
or 1 Tin Fruit, such as Peaches, Pears, etc.
or 1 Tin Pudding, such as Apple, Treacle, Creamed Rice, etc.
1 Tin Honey or Jam or Marmalade or Syrup.
1 Tin Margarine or Dripping.
1 Tin Cold Meat, such as Ham and Beef Roll, Galantine, Pressed Beef, etc.
1 Tin Hot Meat, such as Curried Mutton, Minced Steak, Steak and Kidney Pudding, etc.
1 Tin Milk, Condensed or Dried.
Tablet Soap, Unscented.
Packet Sugar.
Packet Tea.
Tin Vegetables, such as Beans, Peas, Spinach, etc.
Tin Special Food with Ascorbic Acid (Containing Vitamin C), such as Blackcurrant Puree, Fruit Bars, Lemon Curd, etc.

And one or more of the following:

oa, Ovaltine, etc.
ger Nuts, etc.
mite, Yeatex, etc.
or Fish Paste.
Salt and other Condiments.
Sweets, such as Barley Sugar, Butterscotch, Maltesers, etc.
And other articles as available.

TOBACCO AND CIGARETTES ARE PACKED SEPARATELY EVERY WEEK BUT ARE INCLUDED IN THE PRICE OF THE PARCEL.

THE FOOD IN THIS PARCEL IS SPECIALLY PLANNED TO SUPPLY WHAT IS LACKING IN THE GERMAN CAMP RATIONS.

Contents and cost of Red Cross parcel sent to Germany

P I/A. *Revised March, 1943.*

NEXT-OF-KIN PARCELS FOR PRISONERS OF WAR IN GERMANY, ITALY AND FRANCE

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

KEEP THIS LEAFLET IN A SAFE PLACE FOR FUTURE REFERENCE

OWING TO PAPER SHORTAGE IT WILL NOT BE SENT OUT EVERY QUARTER.

Alterations to these instructions will be published in the "Prisoner of War" Journal as they occur.

COUPONS FOR CLOTHING **The Board of Trade have authorised an issue of special clothing coupons for each next-of-kin parcel sent to Prisoners of War. This issue is limited to 40 coupons for the first quarter and 20 coupons for each succeeding quarter and cannot be exceeded. Any coupons used in excess cannot be refunded.** Please read the instructions in the coupon book and follow them carefully, as otherwise no further coupons will be issued. The cover of the book must be returned in the parcel, even if all the coupons are used.

ONE PARCEL EVERY THREE MONTHS Food and clothing are despatched by the Red Cross to all Camps, but once every three months the next-of-kin of a Prisoner of War (i.e., his wife, or if he is not married, one of his parents or some other person appointed by him) may send him a parcel, which may, if so wished, contain gifts from other relations or friends.

HOW THE PARCEL SHOULD BE PACKED The parcel should be carefully packed in the usual way for Inland Post. The reason for this is that it will first be delivered to the Red Cross where it will be opened and examined by Government Censors and then repacked in a way suitable for foreign post and sent off to the Prisoner.

HOW TO ADDRESS THE PARCEL Each parcel must bear a special tie-on label, which will be sent to the next-of-kin every three months. A date will be shown on the label and the parcel may be posted at any time *after* that date. The name and particulars of the prisoner must be written on the label, exactly as asked for; and they should be copied on to the wrapping paper, as well as the address of the Red Cross Packing Centre, and the name and address of the sender.

WHAT TO DO WITH THE PAPERS SENT WITH THE LABEL Three invoice forms, a Book of Coupons, and a postcard will be sent with the special label and these should be completed as follows :—

(a) **The three Invoice forms :**
These are exactly alike and should all be filled in with the Prisoner's name, Prisoner of War number and Camp address, and the list of contents of the parcel. All three forms must be identical when completed and be placed inside the parcel. Please write the sender's name and address on the back of the forms and the Red Cross reference number on the front.

(b) **The Coupon Book :**
Full instructions regarding the coupons are given inside the cover of the book in which they are contained. Please follow these exactly so that the issue of future labels may not be delayed. The cover of the book must be returned inside the parcel even if all the coupons are used.

(c) **The Post-card :**
The top half of the postcard should be filled in as requested, and the postcard placed in the parcel. The prisoner will then be able to fill in the bottom part acknowledging the safe receipt of the parcel, and return the card to the Red Cross.

POSTAGE No postage is required on parcels bearing the next-of-kin label. If addressed as directed they will be accepted at any Post Office for delivery at 14, Finsbury Circus.

RECEIPT OF PARCEL The receipt by the next-of-kin of the next issue of label and coupons may be taken as confirmation of the receipt and despatch of the current parcel. No other acknowledgment of the parcel will be made by the Red Cross unless a postcard already stamped (1d. stamp) and addressed is enclosed in the parcel by the sender.

[Please turn over

Instructions for Next-of-Kin parcels

SOURCES

National Archives
Operation Agreement, Report of proceedings 12 – 18 September 1942.
ADM1/12771
Account of Able Seaman Collins about the sinking of HMS Sikh and his time as a PoW

Prisoners of war, Italy: Camp 70, Monte Urano; International Red Cross reports on conditions
Date: 1942 Nov 01 – 1943 Sep 30
https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C11603936

Prisoners of war, Italy: Camp No 75, Torre Tresca, Bari; camp commandant's correspondence file
Date: 1941 Jan 01 – 1942 Dec 31
https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C11604203

Prisoners of war, Italy: Camp 70, Monte Urano; International Red Cross reports
1942 Nov 01 – 1943 Sep 30
WO 361/190

Oral history about HMS Sikh
Interview with R.G. Reading – recorded 1981, Imperial War Museum, Catalogue #80004797
https://tinyurl.com/3rj3n2kt

Web sources
Allies in Italy
Contains details of the PoW camps in Italy, including Campo 51
https://tinyurl.com/mpbvwfms

Original documents detailing communication with prisoners of war and civilians interned abroad
https://tinyurl.com/37vrpth2

The BBC's *WW2 People's War*
Containing an account of life in Campo 70
https://tinyurl.com/4pv5ezfv

The Prisoner of War Museum is a charity that educates the public about prisoners of war. This links to *The Prisoner of War* magazine
https://tinyurl.com/2anek8px

Camp 59 Survivors

Experiences of the Allied servicemen who were prisoners of war in Campo 59
https://tinyurl.com/4rb78r38

Contents and cost of Red Cross parcel sent to Germany from the International Bomber Command Centre Digital Archive
https://tinyurl.com/2wr6wvk8

Regulations for sending Next-of-Kin parcels
https://tinyurl.com/3capc7m6

Extract from *Prisoner of War* magazine about Next-of-Kin parcels
https://tinyurl.com/yc2unfy2

British Red Cross museum and archive
https://tinyurl.com/r4v4d69v

Books

Tobruk: A Raid Too Far, David Jefferson. An in-depth military investigation into the raid and why it failed
Dinghies to Divas or Comedy on the Bridge, Moran Caplat. Personal story of being repatriated. Part of the book can be read online: https://tinyurl.com/3pke3wrt