


## 'For you, the war is over? Not a chance!' Captivity and escape at Cultybraggan prisoner of war camp, Comrie, Perthshire

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### ABSTRACT

A project to investigate stories of escape attempts at the Second World War Prisoner of War camp at Cultybraggan in Perthshire undertook geophysical survey and excavation to try to locate escape tunnels. While the limited fieldwork did not locate any traces of the tunnels themselves, the work provided insights into the psychology and practice of escape attempts amongst the German PoWs.

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## Introduction

Just outside the village of Comrie, Perthshire, Scotland, the best preserved Second World War Prisoner of War (PoW) camp in Scotland stands in a bowl of hills that forms part of Strathearn (Figure 1). Unlike most of the camps built in Scotland, the camp retains nearly all of its characteristic Nissen huts that provided accommodation for guards and prisoners alike, and the central administration block is still standing. It preserves many of its original features, including the cell doors for the punishment wing. The rest of the PoW camps in Scotland have either been entirely destroyed or demolished to leave at best the concrete floors of the original prisoner blocks. The camp was known as Camp 21 during the war but is more widely known as Cultybraggan Camp. The camp was the location of dramatic events, including the murder of a prisoner by his comrades, and featured attempts by the prisoners to escape. Glasgow University's Centre for Battlefield Archaeology undertook a pilot investigation of the camp, funded by Historic Environment Scotland, using geophysical survey and excavation to search for escape tunnels. The project was also the basis for a complementary study of community archaeology and the effect of communal ownership of heritage sites on local attitudes (Thomas and Banks 2019), funded by the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

Cultybraggan Camp is centred around NN 7685 1990 (56° 21' 20" N 3° 59' 39" W) and is a large rectilinear enclosure sub-divided built during the Second World War to house prisoners of war; initially, these were Italians but in the latter stages of the War, the camp exclusively housed German prisoners. It lies roughly 2 km SSW of the town of Comrie,

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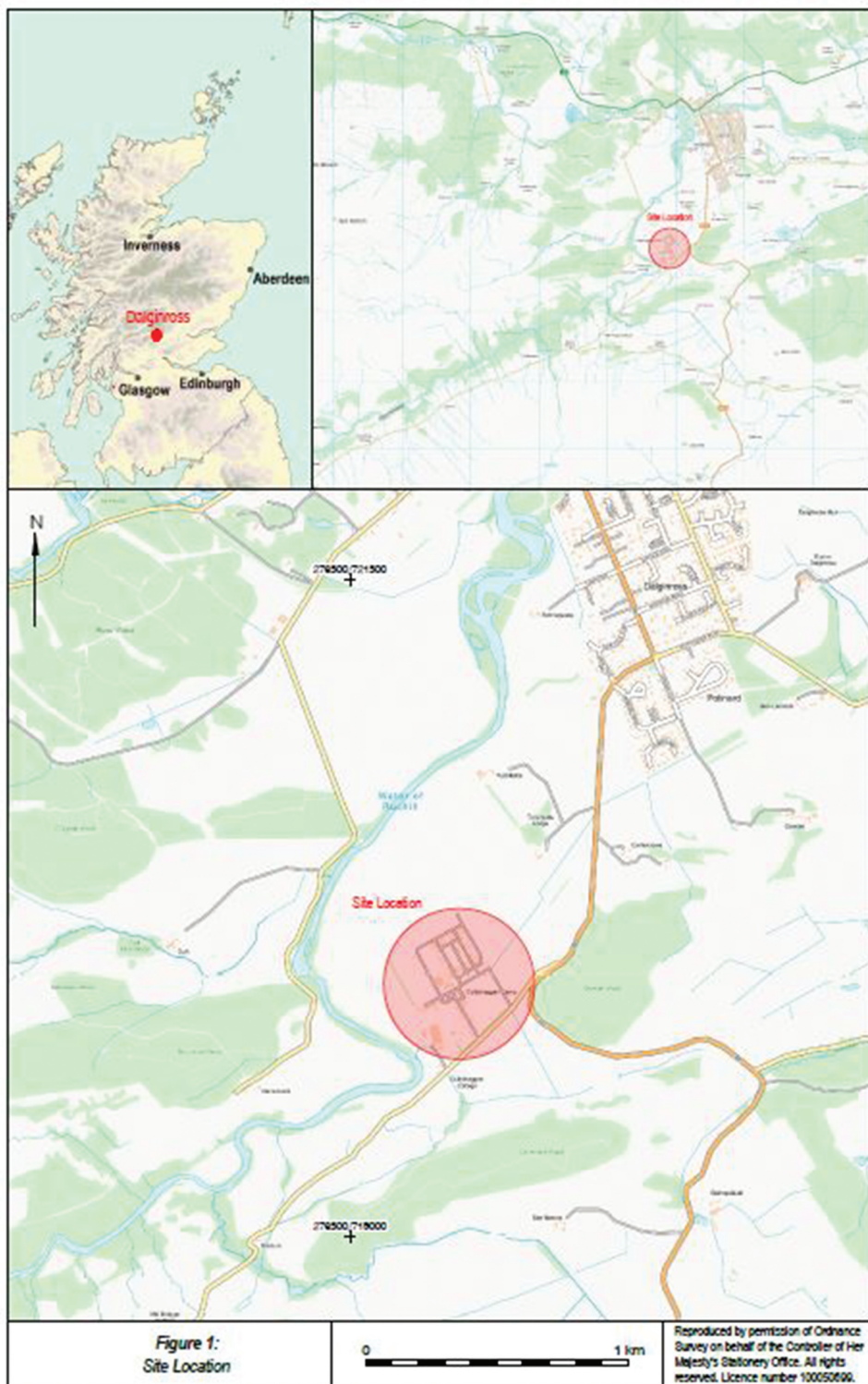


Figure 1. Location map.

Perthshire, and is in an area of mixed pasture and arable. The Water of Ruchill loops west and north of the camp, on its way to a confluence with the River Earn in Comrie.

The camp lies at the head of Glen Artney. The area is an area of relatively flat ground with hills all round, and any escape attempts would have had to navigate across the hills and moors. The underlying geology of the camp is quite mixed; the southern edge of the camp overlies a band of igneous andesite, while the majority of camp sits on an interface between fluvial sedimentary deposits of the Devonian period across most of the southern half of the camp, and marine metamorphic metasandstones and metamudstones. The material derives from sedimentary deposits that were subsequently subject to low grade metamorphism (BGS SC047\_CRIEFF). The overlying soils are all fluvial in nature and are surrounded by glacial tills.

### Prisoners of war and PoW camps

During the 1940s, some 1,500 PoW camps (base, satellite and hostels) were established, housing over 550,000 former combatants (Hellen 1999). Many of these men remained incarcerated after the end of the Second World War, with repatriation only completed in 1948. In 2003, English Heritage commissioned a study into the survival and condition of this element of the built environment. This study was able to identify 487 PoW sites in Britain during the war (Thomas 2003, 10). This represents only a third of the original total, and of these identified sites, only a handful were considered complete or with over 80% of their original site intact. There were a few that remained in use for other purposes, but nearly all were reported as being in poor condition. Eden Camp in Yorkshire is one of the best-preserved examples and comprises 33 huts, which have been converted into a successful and thriving museum/WW2 heritage theme park, welcoming over 150–160,000 visitors annually and demonstrating that there is an appetite to visit these sites. There has been a certain amount of research into PoW camps, using a mixture of archive material and oral testimony. These range from works that focus on stories about individuals (eg Campbell 2010, 2017), to more general studies of PoW treatment (Gillies 2011; Jackson 2011). There are various studies of the treatment of prisoners and the differing standards that captured men faced during the Second World War, with collections of papers looking at the behaviour of the different participant nations (Moore and Fedorowich 1996), and others looking at issues such as the legal frameworks regarding prisoners in conflicts (Scheipers 2010). The most significant text, however, is by a geographer and covers the nature of PoW camps together with an assessment of PoW labour. J. Anthony Hellen's 1999 paper provides an excellent overview of the system of camps across Britain, and the changes that took place across the duration of the war.

To date, there has been little archaeological investigation of WWII PoW camps in Britain. A lot of this work exists in grey literature and has not been the subject of academic work; one example of this is the Deaconsbank camp in South Lanarkshire, which was partially excavated ahead of a construction project. The details of the fieldwork remain in the Data Structure Report, although the camp was referenced in a published paper (Swan and Scott 2005; Banks 2011). Other examples are Bridgend in Wales (Rees-Hughes et al. 2016), where a group of German PoWs were able to tunnel out of the camp; Dumfries House in Ayrshire, which remains in grey literature (Arabaolaza 2013; Jones 2018); and Lager Wick (a forced labour camp rather than a PoW camp) on Jersey, the Channel Islands

(Carr 2016). There has been more work outside Britain, such as a series of excavations of PoW camps in Arctic Finland (Seitsonen and Herva 2011; Seitsonen et al. 2017) and in Norway (Jasinski and Stenvik; Jasinski 2013). In the USA, there have been several studies of PoW camps from the Second World War (e.g. Waters 2004; Thomas 2011; Myers 2013; Barnes 2018a, 2018b). For Britain, the rather regrettable situation is that PoW camps have not been treated as part of the historic environment, and there has been a great deal of redevelopment of former camps with little or no archaeological recording or investigation. There are 61 camps in Scotland whose locations are known, and only five of those survive even as concrete floor bases. Development and forestry have destroyed the remainder and only four of those had any form of archaeological intervention. It reflects the problems that all heritage management organisations face when dealing with sites from the modern era, and it is only as the Second World War recedes into the past that its sites have started to be taken seriously. However, the Scottish Archaeological Framework (ScARF) for modern archaeology that was produced in 2012, which recognises battlefield and conflict archaeology as an important part of modern archaeology in Scotland, only mentions a single PoW site: the Italian chapel that was built by PoWs during the War (Dalglish & Tarlow 2012, 97). It is ironic that the chapel they built is deemed worthy of consideration, but the camp they lived in, which encapsulated their experience, is not.

The history of British PoW camps in the Second World War was quite complex. As Hellen's 1999 paper makes clear, the majority of prisoners in Britain in the first half of the war were Italians. There were very few German prisoners held in Britain, the majority being sent overseas to the Dominions (particularly Australia and Canada) and after Pearl Harbour, to America (Waters 2004). There were initially small numbers of Italian prisoners in Britain, the majority being held in North Africa where they had been captured. From February 1942, however, substantial numbers of Italian prisoners were brought to Britain to work in non-military roles; the first wave of Italians numbered 28,000 (Hellen 1999, 193–194). This was a change of policy by the government; prisoners had worked in agriculture and forestry from 1916 during the First World War with little controversy. It was allowed under the Geneva Convention as long as the work was not too arduous, that the prisoners had the right to refuse it, and that they were paid the going rate for their work.<sup>1</sup> However, in 1940, there was a reluctance in the Ministry of War for using prisoners, and it was only as the labour shortages really began to bite that the decision was taken to use Italian prisoners (Banks 2011, 115). The Italians were distributed across Britain and were soon an integral part of the British labour force. The attitude was very different for the Germans, however, who were not at this stage used at all to undertake work outside their camps. Given the low numbers involved, with less than 2,000 in Britain in 1942 (Hellen 1999, 193), this was not much of an issue. However, there were a couple of events that changed the situation drastically.

The first event came in 1943. Following the success of Operation Torch, Axis forces had been defeated in North Africa and the Allies now made a seaborne assault on Sicily. After some heavy fighting, Sicily was taken and the Allies invaded mainland Italy. On 3 September 1943, Mussolini was deposed, and General Badoglio signed an armistice with the Allies. While the fighting in Italy was to continue into 1944 and 1945, the effect on PoWs held by the Allies was dramatic. Their status as PoWs was derived from their nation being at war with Britain. Following the surrender, there was no longer a state of war between Britain and Italy, which meant that the PoWs could no longer be considered

as prisoners of war. The British authorities gave the Italians the option to volunteer as 'co-operators', where they would continue the work they had been doing as prisoners, but as free men working unsupervised; over 56,000 Italians agreed to this (Hellen 1999, 198). None were repatriated until after the war, which has been criticised by some authors (Custodis 2011, 97); it was certainly a breach of the Geneva Convention by Britain (Geneva Convention 1929, art., 75).<sup>2</sup> However, it would have been completely impractical to try to return the Italian former combatants to Italy when the country was an active theatre of war. Whatever the legal position, the result was that the former PoWs were re-classified as co-operators and either moved to non-carceral work camps, or they remained in camps which were then designated work camps with downgraded security.

The second significant event for PoWs in British captivity was D-Day. On 6 June 1944, the Invasion of Europe began and the threat of invasion by the Germans was gone. This meant that the authorities became much more relaxed about having German prisoners in Britain, and the number of Germans held on the British mainland rocketed (Hellen 1999). As the numbers increased and the threat of invasion receded, the refusal to use German prisoners for labour made less sense. By October 1944, the Cabinet took the decision to start using the Germans. There was some initial reluctance from the prisoners (see below), but by the end of the war they were at least as fully involved in labouring for Britain as the Italians had been. They became critical to Britain's attempts to overcome the damage and destruction of the war, with British manpower struggling to deal with all of the requirements of the post-War world. Britain benefited from their German prisoners for several years, with the repatriation of prisoners only being completed in 1948.

This is potentially controversial and was discussed in Parliament because there was a body of opinion that Britain should have returned their German prisoners as quickly as possible after August 1945:

Although it may be conveniently said that it has lapsed and does not apply, nevertheless, we were signatories to it, and I presume that when the right hon. Gentlemen the Member for Woodford talked about treatment of enemy peoples, he meant under the then existing conditions, which, of course, included the Geneva Convention. Article 75 of that Convention says: When belligerents call for an armistice convention they shall normally cause to be presented therein provisions concerning the repatriation of prisoners-of-war. The Article goes on to say that this shall be completed as soon as possible (Hansard 1946a, 534).

There was a concern that the continued incarceration of German servicemen was vindictive and exploitative, as they were expected to continue working for the Allies. There was a great deal of truth behind that concern, but again, there were practical considerations. There were around 420,000 German prisoners in Britain by 1946, which would have been a massive undertaking to repatriate quickly. It would also be a questionable policy, returning half a million men to a Germany that was in ruins and struggling to feed itself: 'What do we find in Germany? The most appalling devastation, misery and starvation' (Hansard 1947, 1020; however, the remark was made in the context that the men should be sent back quickly to feed their families). There was also an understandable concern about returning Nazis to Germany where they could reorganise and take back control; the Allies wanted to be sure that the new Germany would not fall straight back into Nazism and that the release of anti-Nazis was prioritised:

... we are also seeking to build up a democratic way of life in Germany and Central Europe which, surely the hon. Gentleman will agree, is of the greatest importance to our own future. These people are needed in Germany far more urgently than they are needed in this country (Hansard 1946b, 254).

However, there was, at least initially, an element of punishment to the continued detention of the Germans:

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that a large number of these people came first from America, on their exportation from which they were promised repatriation to Germany? Does he not think, in view of the statement made last night, that it is the considered opinion of His Majesty's Government that this traffic in slave labour should stop? (Hansard 1946d, 773).

The official explanation of the continuation was that the Geneva Convention required an agreement between the belligerents to facilitate the transfer of prisoners. As there was no longer a Nazi government to sign an armistice or otherwise enter into communication with the Allies about the return of their soldiers; it was argued that the Geneva Convention no longer covered the PoWs. However, as the wording of article 75 makes clear, it is not a requirement for there to be an armistice, or any agreement between governments. Repatriation is to take place as soon as possible (see n. 2), but it is clear that the German prisoners were vital to the Allies in the immediate post-war period as Europe started to pick itself up.

British attitudes to the Italian and German prisoners were very different. There was a reasonably relaxed attitude about the Italian servicemen, and the guard ratio for Italians was 5%; in contrast, the guard ratio for German prisoners was 15% (WO 32/11687, 1944). There was far more concern about the Germans than there was about the Italians. Some of this was undoubtedly due to the Germans being perceived as being driven by a political system that was implacably hostile to British traditions of democracy; this was certainly the perspective being presented by the press. There was suspicion and fear of Germans that was even reflected in the attitudes of the authorities towards Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria, which caused a reluctance to allow them into roles where they would be armed (see above). Another reflection of this is that the Germans were classified according to their ideological stance in a way that the Italians avoided. There was a screening programme as part of the interrogation of incoming prisoners that tried to establish the individual serviceman's political outlook (Hansard 1946c, 158; Hellen 1999). Those who were anti-Nazi or democratic had a category A rating, with a white patch for their uniforms. The ardent Nazis, who were largely SS, *Fallschirmjäger* [paratroopers], U Boat crews, etc, had a category C rating, with particularly vociferous Nazis earning a C+ rating; they had a black patch. The B category, the third group, were those considered to be *Mitläufer* [fellow travellers], being loyal to the Nazi regime but not having actively participated in Nazi actions. They had a grey patch. There were relatively few category A prisoners, partly because the screeners erred on the side of caution and were reluctant to identify men as category A unless they were sure of them. The largest group, unsurprisingly perhaps, was the category B. However, there were quite large numbers of category C prisoners. This was for several reasons.

The first was that the same air of caution meant that if in doubt the screeners put men into the C category because that was safer than letting an ardent Nazi go undetected. They could always be re-categorised later if it became clear that they were not dangerous. Another factor was that men were categorised because of their units; all Waffen SS were

category C, for example. The other factor was the human one, where the individual screener might take exception to an individual, or the individual might do something that convinced the screeners that they should be kept under close supervision (De Normann 1998, 134).

The categorisation was a very important for the experience that a German serviceman might have in captivity. Category A prisoners might find work in the administration of the camp, assisting in translation, acting as clerks, or some other trustee position. This could be a dangerous approach, however, as the category C prisoners believed that cooperation with the British authorities was treason and could lead to violent retaliation. Category B prisoners were the most likely to be working during the day, in some cases moving from the main camp to a smaller work camp closer to the workplace. They were rarely officers; under the Geneva Convention, officers were not expected to work, although they could choose to do so.<sup>3</sup> Category C prisoners were confined to the camp and were not allowed to work outside the camp, but then initially at least, they had no intention of working. It did mean that they had no chance to interact with the locals. It also meant that they had plenty of opportunities to sit around and plan escapes, maintain regime discipline within the camps, and generally cause problems for the British authorities. In 1944 with the large influx of Germans after D-Day, there was little attempt by the authorities to separate the different categories of prisoners. This meant that the category C prisoners were able to run the camps for a while, instilling their own discipline on their comrades. With incidents such as the Rosterg murder at Cultybraggan (see below), the authorities realised that segregation was necessary and started to isolate the category C prisoners from the rest. This process was already underway in October 1944, according to a reply in the House of Commons by Sir James Grigg, the Secretary of State for War. He had been asked by the Labour MP George Strauss if steps had been taken to separate the Nazis from the anti-Nazis in PoW camps; his response was that they had,

“... but in view of the large influx of prisoners of war and difficulties of accommodation the numbers segregated up to date have not been large ... I do not want the hon. Member to get the idea that we can go very much more quickly than we are doing. We captured far more German prisoners than we ever expected, and while that is a great blessing it is not an unmixed blessing” (Hansard 17 Oct 1944, 2193).

Clearly, things had not improved dramatically by 1945 as Grigg again addressed the issue in response to a number of questions in the Commons regarding assaults on anti-Nazis in Canning Town camp, among others. His response, which mentions a case of violence in a camp that led to the death of an inmate (this might be Rosterg at Cultybraggan, see below), notes that segregation is the only protection available for the anti-Nazis:

“Considerable progress has been made in the last months in segregating ardent Nazis from the rest but as I pointed out to the hon. Member for North Lambeth [George Strauss] on 17th October the shortage of accommodation slows up the carrying out of this policy considerably ... As I said just now, I do not think any solution, short of an absolute segregation process, which is going on, can prevent, altogether, incidents of this kind. The moral to be drawn from it, apart from the question of getting on with segregation as quickly as we can, is that there is a serious problem left for the post-war world in the eradication of this kind of mentality ... I think the only satisfactory solution of the problem is segregation which is going on as quickly as we can possibly carry it out” (Hansard 1945, 610).

In addition to the segregation, there was also a large-scale programme of education undertaken. A lot of this was straightforward education that gave the prisoners new skills or just passed the time. However, some was intended to re-educate the German servicemen who had been indoctrinated by Nazi propaganda since 1931. Since many of them were young, they had known little else in their lives, and had little idea of alternative perspectives. None of this was particularly subtle, and lots of the prisoners rejected it as propaganda; at the same time, they rejected news of the progress of the war as being propaganda and many refused to face up to the imminent collapse of the German Reich. Once the war was over, and once they were exposed to films of the horrors of the concentration camps, attitudes began to soften and illusions about eventual German victory had to be abandoned. The effort seems to have been reasonably successful, as the Maschke Commission found that British re-education was more effective at instilling commitment to democratic ideals than any other group of former prisoners, and that this had a real impact on attempts to build a democratic *Bundesrepublik* (Wolff 1974, 47).

### Camp 21 Cultybraggan

The camp, built by refugees in 1941 (see below), was possibly intended as an army camp, but it quickly became a prisoner of war camp for Italian prisoners. By the North African campaign of 1942–3, the camp was home to Italian prisoners who had been brought to Britain to plug the shortage of manpower in agriculture, forestry, and industry (Hellen 1999). At this stage, there were no German prisoners in Cultybraggan as there were relatively few Germans being held in Britain (see above). Furthermore, while the camp was used for Italian prisoners, it would not have had any German personnel present because under the Geneva Convention, mixing nationalities was to be avoided (Geneva Convention 1929, art., 9).<sup>4</sup> The situation changed after September 1943 when Mussolini was overthrown by his government, and Italy surrendered to the Allies. There is no record surviving that clarifies the process, but the Italian prisoners were moved on. Cultybraggan remained in use as a PoW camp and was accommodating German prisoners by the second half of 1944; it is possible that the camp had been taking them from late 1943, as it was in what was seen as a remote location that was unlikely to pose a security threat. This element of remoteness also had an effect on the type of German prisoners that were sent to Cultybraggan; the German inmates included a relatively large number of category C prisoners. These men, considered to be hardcore Nazis, were not allowed to leave the camp for security reasons, but the rest of the inmates carried on the agricultural and forestry work that the Italians had previously carried out.

The prisoners at Cultybraggan remained in the camp for a couple of years after the end of the war, and in that time, there was a distinct change in tone. The camp had a bad reputation in 1944 and 1945 as a centre of hardcore Nazi organisation, which was underlined by the murder of one of the prisoners by his comrades in December 1944. The category C prisoners made it difficult for the other prisoners, making it plain that prisoners were being watched for signs of disloyalty and being cooperative with the camp authorities (De Normann 1998). This seems to have lasted for several months after the murder; it will not have been lessened by the official investigation into the murder that eventually led to the ringleaders being charged with murder, with five of them being hanged after the war. However, there were changes coming, both internal and external.



The prisoners received education classes, which included attempts to teach men who had grown up under Nazi ideology about the values of democracy, and which included films from the liberation of the concentration camps. While some rejected all of this as propaganda, the vast majority believed the evidence of the films and accepted that the utter defeat of Germany was not propaganda. Many of the more determined Nazis were removed from the camp and sent to Watten in Caithness, and gradually the mood of the camp improved. At the same time, with the end of the war, there was a fairly rapid change in the attitudes of the British public. Throughout 1945, there was a lot of hostility towards the Germans, revealed in debates from the House of Commons to council debates across Scotland: the mood was that the Germans were responsible for the devastation caused to Britain, and that they were a continuing threat and to be considered as the enemy (Kane 2017, 11–12); the stories coming home with returning soldiers that detailed Nazi atrocities and the concentration camps added to this perception. During 1946, however, attitudes softened considerably and there were repeated calls for the lifting of anti-fraternisation regulations; by Christmas 1946, the men who had previously been symbols of Nazi terror and violence were now poor lads far from home (*op. cit.*, 25).

The inmates at Cultybraggan remained in the camp until 1947 when the last men were sent on to other camps for repatriation (Campbell 2017, 12); shortly after this, it became a Territorial Army camp that was also used for cadets. During this near half century of use, large numbers of Territorials and cadets from all over Britain passed through the camp, with a mixture of good and bad memories of the site. It means that there are a lot of people aware of the camp and with an interest in its future. It also means that the history of the camp is one of being a PoW camp for six years, and a training camp for 57 years, which will have had an impact on the archaeological record. This is clearest in the fact that the interiors of the huts have been painted over repeatedly since 1947, and parts of the camp have been demolished. All of the huts in Compound A have gone, half of Compound B has gone, and a small section of Compound C has been demolished. A firing range was built over part of Compound B, along with a section of assault course.

This usage continued until 2004, when the Ministry of Defence sold the camp to a local group, the Comrie Development Trust [CDT] under the Land Reform Act of 2003 (Thomas and Banks 2019). This has seen further changes, with the cleared area of Compound A being given over to allotments, and several of the huts in compounds C and D being repurposed as workshops. The intention of the CDT in running the camp is to balance the heritage with the needs of the community. This requires a careful course between using elements of the camp to create jobs in the local area against trying to promote the camp as a tourist attraction that will give visitors a meaningful experience when they visit.

## Construction of the camp

Camp 21 was built during 1941 by 249 (Alien) Company Pioneer Corps (Campbell 2017, 3). This company consisted of refugees who had been through the vetting process for enemy aliens and now wanted to volunteer to help in the war. They were mainly Germans and Austrians, and substantially Jewish. In the early years of the war, the authorities were reluctant to put such volunteers into the armed forces. There was a reluctance stemming from their nationality, although they had been through the Regulation 18B internment and vetting process (Kern 2004, 72, 128), but there was also feeling of not really knowing

what to do with the refugees. Many had skills that were not being utilised, and there was a great deal of frustration that they were not being given the opportunity to fight against the Nazis. Despite this, Britain relied upon the work that the alien companies undertook. In 1941, there was a statement from the Under-Secretary for War, Lord Croft that stated the official position regarding the refugees:

“My Lords, enemy aliens are normally enlisted for service in the Pioneer Corps only. The rule governing transfers of all Army personnel is that transfers shall be in the interests of the Service. As aliens perform most useful work in the Pioneer Corps, there are few cases in which transfer to a combatant corps would be of any advantage to the Service. There is no absolute rule against such transfers, but applications are not encouraged, as only in very exceptional cases could they be granted. No such transfers have so far been carried out” (Hansard 1941).

The men who built the camp were such refugees; 249 (Alien) Company Pioneer Corps included a German Jew called Bruno Scheftelowitz, who is better known as the eminent Classical archaeologist, Brian Shefton; he changed his name during the war, and served in the Pioneer Corps from 1940 to 1944 (Crawford, Ulmschneider, and Elsner 2017, 152). It is therefore very likely that he was involved in the building of the camp.

The construction of the camp seems to have involved a degree of levelling out the area of the camp, creating a flat area for the buildings. There was also a story told by some of the local residents that the construction involved the addition of a layer of rubble as a foundational layer as this would make it more difficult for the prisoners to tunnel out. This remains anecdotal, however, as there is no documentary evidence to support the suggestion. There are areas where stone was brought in to form hard standings, as the excavation revealed, but this seems to have been for specific purposes such as creating pathways.

The camp consisted of two halves, one for the prisoners, and the other for the guards and for exercise grounds. Both halves had identical Nissen huts, in keeping with article 10 of the Geneva Convention<sup>5</sup> and the two areas were connected by the interface of the administrative building. The two worlds of ‘inside the wire’ and ‘outside’ the wire came together here. The admin block was where prisoners were processed, where the guard rosters were devised, and where the cells for transgressors were located. In the southern half of the camp, the guards had their accommodation, their mess hut, and their toilet facilities. While the guards were frequently from British units, there were several occasions where the guards were from the Free Polish forces, chosen because they were unlikely to be soft on the German prisoners. The prisoner area was divided into four identical compounds, designated A, B, C, and D running from left to right (Figures 2 and 3). Each compound was surrounded by its own wire fence, with the main perimeter fence beyond them. Each compound had a series of long Nissen huts to provide accommodation, wash houses, showers, toilets and so forth. There were also store-houses, which consisted of two adjacent short Nissen huts with a connecting extension at the back. The camp, particularly for the category C prisoners who were not allowed out to work, had to be a complete and contained environment. Each compound had a classroom for education classes (Campbell 2017), and access to a library and a place for worship.

### Camp life & escape attempts

The division of the prisoners into different categories (as noted above) was intended to break the power of the hardcore Nazis, who had taken control within the camp and



**Figure 2.** Aerial view of cultybraggan camp.

virtually shut the authorities out. Because the men were accommodated without regard to their category, the Nazi elements bullied the rest of the prisoners and created a body of enforcers who used violence to stamp out signs of disloyalty or collaboration (De Normann 1998, 115). Cultybraggan had the reputation of being a difficult camp, where the relatively high proportion of category C inmates provided an air of menace and hostility towards the guards and to the category A prisoners. Compound B seems to have been particularly identified as a category C facility, and the camp education inspector James Grant described the compound as difficult, and that he had been given a cold reception there as late as June 1945 (Campbell 2017, 16).

The Nazi organisation was very determined. Rumours abounded that a new camp was being built to house anti-Nazi prisoners (Camp 13), and within Cultybraggan, the Nazi



**Figure 3.** Aerial view of Cultybraggan compounds.

organisation had taken action. According to the interrogation records of Major Zapp, who was removed from the camp (De Normann 1998, 115), the word had gone out to all inmates that anyone volunteering for Camp 13 would be counted a traitor to the Reich and under Reich law, would answer for the treachery with his own life, the lives of all his family, and with his entire fortune (WO208/3530). Zapp reported that the Nazi organisation (led by *Obersturmbannführer* Goeckel, a member of the *Waffen SS*) had been using prisoners being repatriated on health grounds to get information back to the *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD) in Germany. This had included a plan to put a list of Camp 13 volunteers into the wooden leg of a workman from *Organisation Todt* (OT) who was being repatriated.

The authorities determined to break this sort of organisation down, spurred on by the murder of *Feldwebel* Wolfgang Rosterg on 22 December 1945. Rosterg had been at Devizes, and he had been brought to Cultybraggan from that camp with a group of other prisoners in the aftermath of the discovery of an escape plot. He had not been

involved in the escape plot but was suspected by his fellow prisoners of having been a traitor and of having informed British authorities about the escape attempt. He was openly anti-Nazi and was happy to tell people that he thought Germany would lose the war and that he was not a Nazi. Had he been kept apart from the other prisoners, this might not have been a problem, but he was unfortunate enough to be put into Compound B, which was the most aggressively Nazi compound. As a result, following a mock trial, he was beaten, strangled, and then dragged to a shower block where he was hanged from a water pipe. Rosterg should never have been in Compound B as he was at risk as a potential informer, and also because he was a category A prisoner who was not shy in his opinions. There has been speculation that he was in the compound as an attempt at infiltration (De Normann 1998, 169), but it is much more likely that it was a clerical oversight with dreadful consequences.

Following the murder, and the fact that there were clearly problems controlling the prisoners across the entire network of camps, Britain began to segregate men according to their categorisation. With the appointment of Colonel Wilson as Camp Commandant in March 1945, segregation measures were enacted some point before June 1945 (*op. cit.*, 164). Wilson also made sure that a lot of the category C prisoners were moved out to Watten. This made life easier for the men in Compounds C and D, which were now category A and B.

There were escape attempts from Cultybraggan itself, although the seriousness with which they were prosecuted by the inmates or dealt with by the authorities varied over time. By the end of the war, men were sneaking out of the camp at night to go to meet local girls or go to the cinema. However, in late 1944 and 1945, there were apparently more serious attempts to escape. Just as with Allied prisoners in German captivity, the main focus for escaping was through tunnelling under the barbed wire fences. This worked well at Bridgend in South Wales, where 83 Germans escaped from the PoW camp through a tunnel on 10 March 1945 (Rees-Hughes et al. 2016). At Cultybraggan, there are accounts from a variety of sources, both German and British, of attempts at tunnelling out. There is one account of a tunnel in Compound A that ran for 35 m under the wire, but no other evidence to support it. There are various other accounts, but little supporting detail to make them anything stronger than rumours. The clearest version comes from Col. Wilson, the camp commandant from March 1945, where he talks of having searched a storehouse in Compound B and found a hidden tunnel entrance cut through the concrete floor (De Normann 1998, 138–39). There were also accounts of tunnels in one of the shower blocks of Compound B; one of the shower blocks was also the scene of Rosterg's murder. Compound B was the location of the majority of the escape stories, which is quite likely given that the inmates seem to have been least resigned to their incarceration.

## The fieldwork

In Summer 2017, the Centre for Battlefield Archaeology at the University of Glasgow undertook a programme of geophysical survey and excavation at Cultybraggan in Compound B. The work was grant funded by Historic Environment Scotland. The aim of the project was to investigate the rumours of escape tunnels at the camp, focusing on Compound B. A subsidiary aim was to gain a better understanding of Compound

B through exposing the remains of the demolished buildings, so that the site could be better presented and interpreted for the public. The intention was to make the work as public as possible, with community events and local volunteers participating in the fieldwork. The project was also used as the basis for a separate piece of research into community archaeology and community ownership, funded by the Royal Society of Edinburgh, which has been published separately (Thomas and Banks 2019). In this related project, Professor Suzie Thomas of the University of Helsinki conducted interviews with a range of local residents, asking them about their perspective on the camp, on the community buy-out of the camp, and the camp's future.

#### *The Geophysical Surveys (Figure 4; Figure 5; Figure 6)*

The geophysical surveys were carried out in May 2017, using magnetometry (a fluxgate gradiometer FM256) and resistivity (RM15). The surveys consisted of twelve 20 m grids over the open green field left by the demolition of Compound B; the area comprises the north-eastern quarter of the compound. The western half is now under the post-War firing range and an assault course, while the south-eastern corner is under the premises of Wild Thyme, a food production company. The conditions for the survey were excellent with low grass following mowing by the CDT, no waterlogging and few upstanding obstacles.

#### *Magnetometer Survey (Figure 4; Figure 5)*

The magnetic survey had several constraints in the form of large metal objects that would be visible in the results, and which would also blank out any archaeology in the immediate vicinity. These metal objects were a post-war bus shelter, the corrugated iron of the huts from Compound C, and some service access points for the sewage of the site. These can be seen on the plot as areas of high magnetic signals (Figure 4). Despite this, there are some significant results in the plot (Figure 5). There is a long linear anomaly running north-south, which coincides with the division between Compound B and Compound C. This anomaly, which was roughly 5 m in width, was investigated in Trench 1. There is a scrappy area of disturbance to the north of the bus shelter, which coincides with the location of the storehouse. There are linear anomalies within this area of disturbance which were probably detecting the bricks of the foundations. This was investigated with Trench 2. Finally, there is an area of disturbance that relates to what seem to be services coming in; this coincides with the location of the washrooms/latrines/showerblocks. It consists of a linear anomaly with rectilinear anomalies spaced out along its length. It was investigated in Trench 3.

#### *Resistivity Survey (Figure 6)*

Unfortunately, the results of the resistivity survey were not useful. There is little coherence to the data as recorded, which may reflect the rubble that was encountered during the excavation. A repeat of the resistivity might be more productive, but there was no time to do so before the excavation. Despite this, there are indications of anomalies in the same locations as those detected in the magnetic data (Figure 6), but the data is too poor to provide any certainty and certainly would not allow interpretation without the magnetometry results.

## **The excavation**

A total of four hand excavated trenches, covering a total area of 68 m<sup>2</sup>, including trench extensions that were added where features warranted further investigation, were

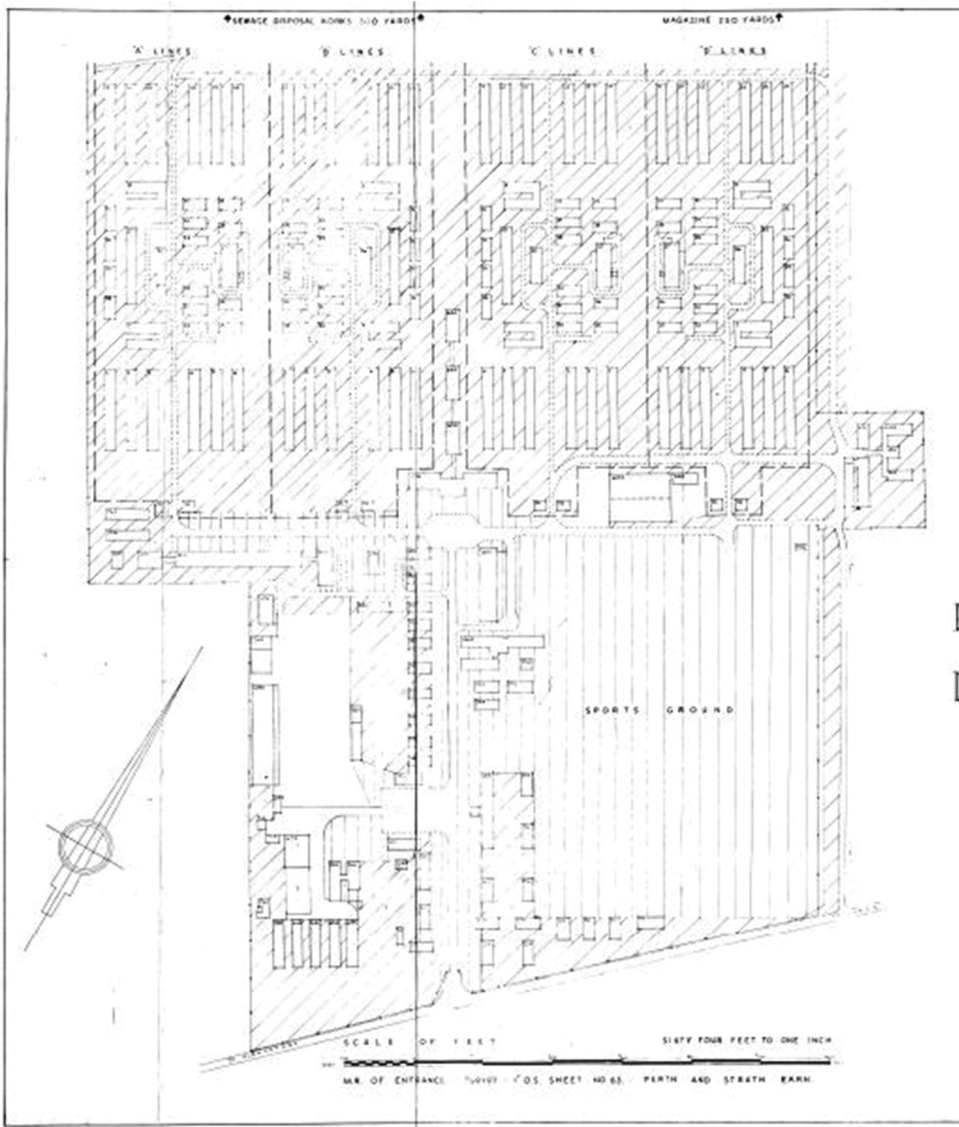


Figure 4. Plan of camp layout, 1957.

positioned within the demolished Compound B at Cultybraggan Camp (Figure 7). The excavated features consisted of the stone remains of an area of hard standing (Trench 1), and brick foundations for walls or footings associated with demolished Nissen huts and fragmentary remains of concrete surfaces (Trench 2 and Trench 3).

#### Trench 1 (Figure 8)

Trench 1 measured 5 m long by 3 m wide and was excavated to a depth of around 0.11 m. A mid-brown sandy/clay topsoil/turf horizon (1001) was found overlying an area of hard standing (1002) towards the north end of the trench. The hard standing comprised a layer of angular whinstone<sup>6</sup> fragments graded with whindust and discrete scatters of coal coke were visible across the surface of the hard standing along its southern edge.

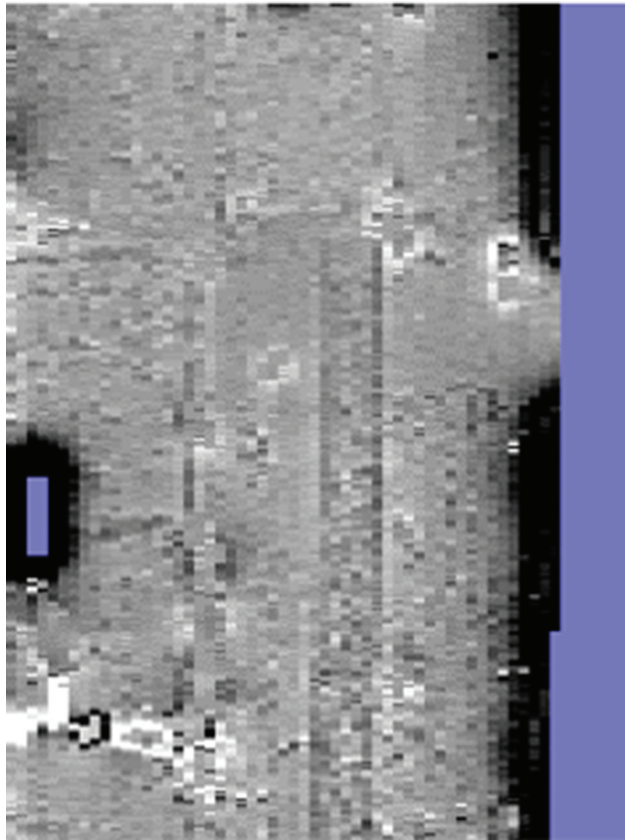


Figure 5. Magnetometer survey.

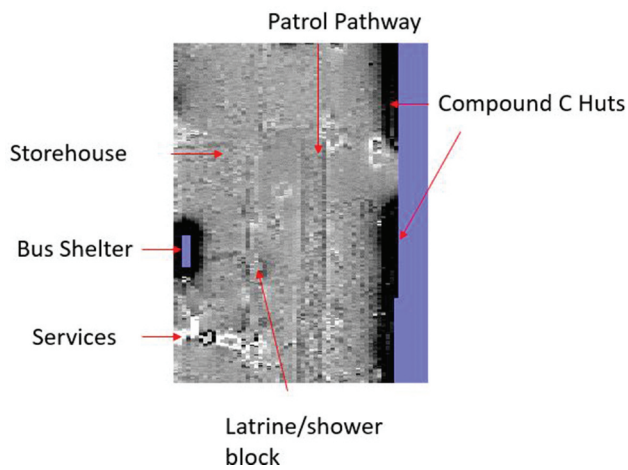
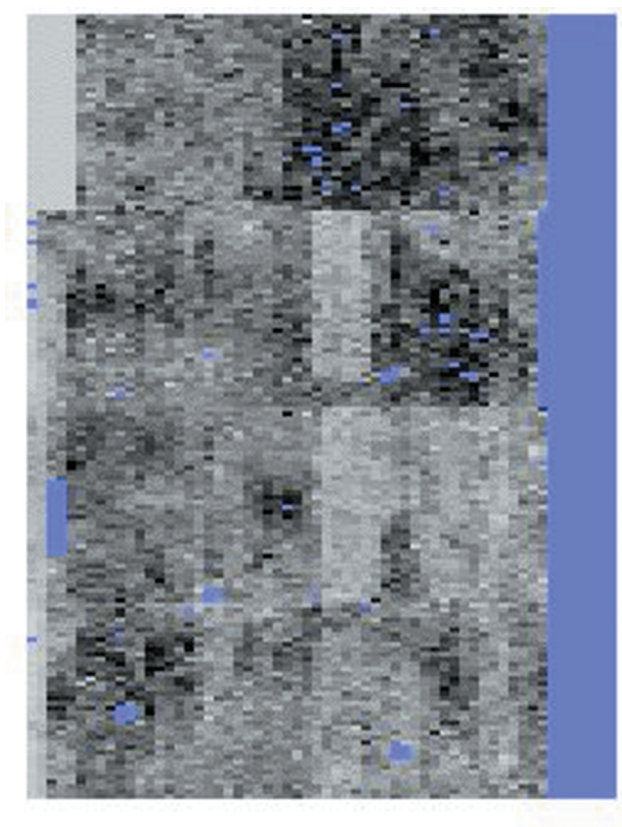


Figure 6. Magnetometer survey interpretation.

Trench 1 was expanded, and the hard standing was recorded over an area 5.7 m long x 4.9 m wide, although it continued below the trench edges to the south-east, north-east



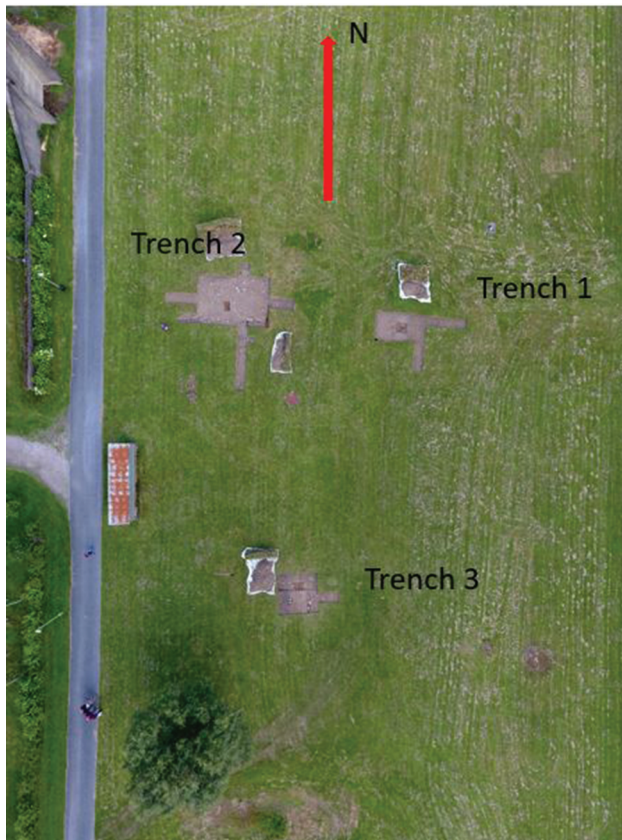


**Figure 7.** Resistivity survey.

and north-west. A sondage excavated in the south-east corner of trench 1 determined the topsoil to be 0.3 m deep and here it overlay natural sand and gravel (1003). It was also clear that the hard standing 1002 was running along the north-south axis of the camp. This hard standing was interpreted as a pathway between the compounds B and C that would allow patrols to pass up and down between the two. It also provided a larger gap between the compounds that would have inhibited contact between the compounds. The plans of the camp from 1952 indicate that there was a larger gap between B and C compounds than there was between A and B, or between C and D compounds. This will be discussed further below.

Insert Plate 1: General view of hardstanding 1002 in Trench 1 from the north-west  
Trench 2 (Figure 9)

Trench 2 measured 7 m long by 5 m wide and was excavated to a depth of 0.1 m through a landscaping topsoil and turf horizon (2001). This overlay a layer of cobble-rich gravel (2003), which contained a sub-circular concentration of demolished brick and brick fragments (2002). This was considered as potentially being an infilled escape shaft; however, both these layers measured around 0.08 m deep and overlay a buried topsoil horizon (2011), 0.12 m deep which in turn overlay natural gravel (2012). The trench was subsequently expanded to investigate a series of truncated brick wall footings or brick piers and the partial remains of two parallel structures were unearthed.



**Figure 8.** Trench layout.

The first structure consisted of the remains of three brick piers forming parts of three sides of a building. The building lay with its long axis running east-west, and the short axis north-south. The north side of the building consisted of a brick pier (2004) located in an extension to the north of Trench 2; this formed the north side of the building, with a discontinuous brick pier (2005) forming the remains of the south side of the building within the main trench. The eastern end of the building was vaguely represented by a short return (2006) at the north-east end of pier (2005), and by displaced sections of brick pier along the axis of this return; this displacement was found to be the result of post-War demolition using a bulldozer (see Discussion, below). The position of the pier forming the eastern end of the building lies under the post-War access road that runs around the edge of the survey area.

The second structure lay around 2 m south of the first and was defined by the poorly preserved remnants of two brick piers (2007) and (2010) forming the north and south sides of the building, respectively. The remnant of a concrete surface (2008) was visible forming a partial area of hardstanding between the two structures. Internally, a shattered remnant of concrete floor (2009) was visible towards the south side of the building. A small trench, Trench 4 was excavated to investigate the continuation of the pier (2010) forming the south side of the building to the



**Figure 9.** Trench 1.

south; sufficient concentrations of displaced brick were unearthed to establish the presence of the pier here.

The two structures formed part of a single building, a storehouse within Compound B. The layout matched its mirror image in Compound C, which was still standing. The modern map of Cultybraggan depicts both as being a squared U-shape where two Nissen huts form a single building through an annexe at one end (see [Figure 10](#)). In the case of the building in Compound B, this would have been at the eastern end, and now lies under the access road. These buildings were used as quartermasters stores and contained a range of supplies. As the mirror structure in Compound C shows, there would have been two doors into the storehouse; one would be at the end of the upper/northern arm of the building, while the other would have been in the middle of the connecting passage at the rear front of the building. This would mean that the lower/southern arm of the building would have been the most private area, furthest from either of the doors, although there was a window in the end wall. However, this would be the most suitable location for any transgressive behaviour such as tunnelling.

#### Trench 3 ([Figure 11](#))

Trench 3 measured 4 m<sup>2</sup> and was excavated through a topsoil and turf horizon (3001) to a depth of 0.08 m. The trench was subsequently extended 2 m by 1 m to the east to further investigate a concentration of brick and concrete debris (3002), indicating the presence of a demolished building, although no clearly defined structural elements of a building survived in this deposit. A possible linear cut [3005] filled by a dark brown silty sand (3004) was excavated to a depth of 0.18 m but not fully excavated. The cut was aligned north to south between two manholes visible out with the excavation area and may represent a service trench, but further work would be required to confirm this. A gravel rich topsoil horizon (3003) occupied the area around the demolition debris (3001) and the possible service trench cut [3005]. A slot excavated across this material



Figure 10. Trenches 2 & 4.



Figure 11. Trench 2 excavation.

determined the depth of this deposit to 0.14 m deep, below which natural gravel (3006) was encountered.

This trench revealed the site of an ablutions block, either a shower block or a wash block, which had been almost entirely grubbed out by the bulldozer demolition that removed the standing elements of Compound B. There were no surviving remains of any structure features or floor, although there was an indication of service pipes that would have dealt with wastewater, etc. There was also a concentration of fragments of reinforced glass, brick fragments, and bolts from the corrugated iron sheets of the superstructure, all of which confirmed that the trench contained the remains of a structure. Despite the destruction wreaked by the demolition, which was much more profound than that in Trench 2, the outline of the structure can be seen in the aerial shots of the trench. This structure would have been a better representation of the hygiene facilities than the surviving facilities within Compounds C and D, because the latter were both upgraded and re-fashioned in the post-War period. For a good idea of the original facilities, there are cartoons painted by one of the inmates during the German incarceration that show what conditions were like (Figures 12 and 13). The toilets are individual, separated by low brick partitions and a central partition along the middle. The structure in Trench 3 was clearly not a toilet because there was no indication of waste holes in lines, which would have survived the demolition. The wash block cartoon shows a line of sinks along the middle of the hut (Figure 14), which could fit the remains in Trench 3, while a slightly odd cartoon of a shower block (Figure 15) indicates a single showerhead in the centre of the hut under which the prisoners are all gathered. From the lack of features within this trench, it is likely that the building was a wash block or a shower block.

## Discussion

One of the main research aims of the project was to investigate reports of escape attempts at the camp (see above). The attempt to locate the escape tunnels should have been fairly straightforward, as indicated by the account of Col. Wilson, the Camp Commandant in May 1945:

I noticed on the cement floor a circle which was smaller than the outer rim of the big bin. I got down on my knees and was able to say, 'here is the tunnel'. With the point of a bayonet we lifted out a circular block of concrete. This was not easy as the block fitted so closely. Underneath was a dark hole from the bottom of which an escape tunnel led out under the wire. (Col. Wilson, quoted in De Normann 1998, 138-139).

Significant here is the mention of the concrete floors; all the surviving huts have concrete floors, and this indicates that the floors were original and that the tunnelling would have had to break through the concrete first. That should have meant that any search for the tunnel entrance would merely require finding the concrete floor and uncovering where a repair had taken place. That did not prove to be the case. The storehouse excavated was the most likely candidate of the two storehouses in this area; this one is towards the outer wire, whereas the other is towards the centre of the camp. However, on excavation, it became apparent that there was little left of any concrete surface. Discussion with local residents revealed the fact that the Ministry of Defence had bulldozed the area when Compound B had been demolished. The bulldozers had completely removed the

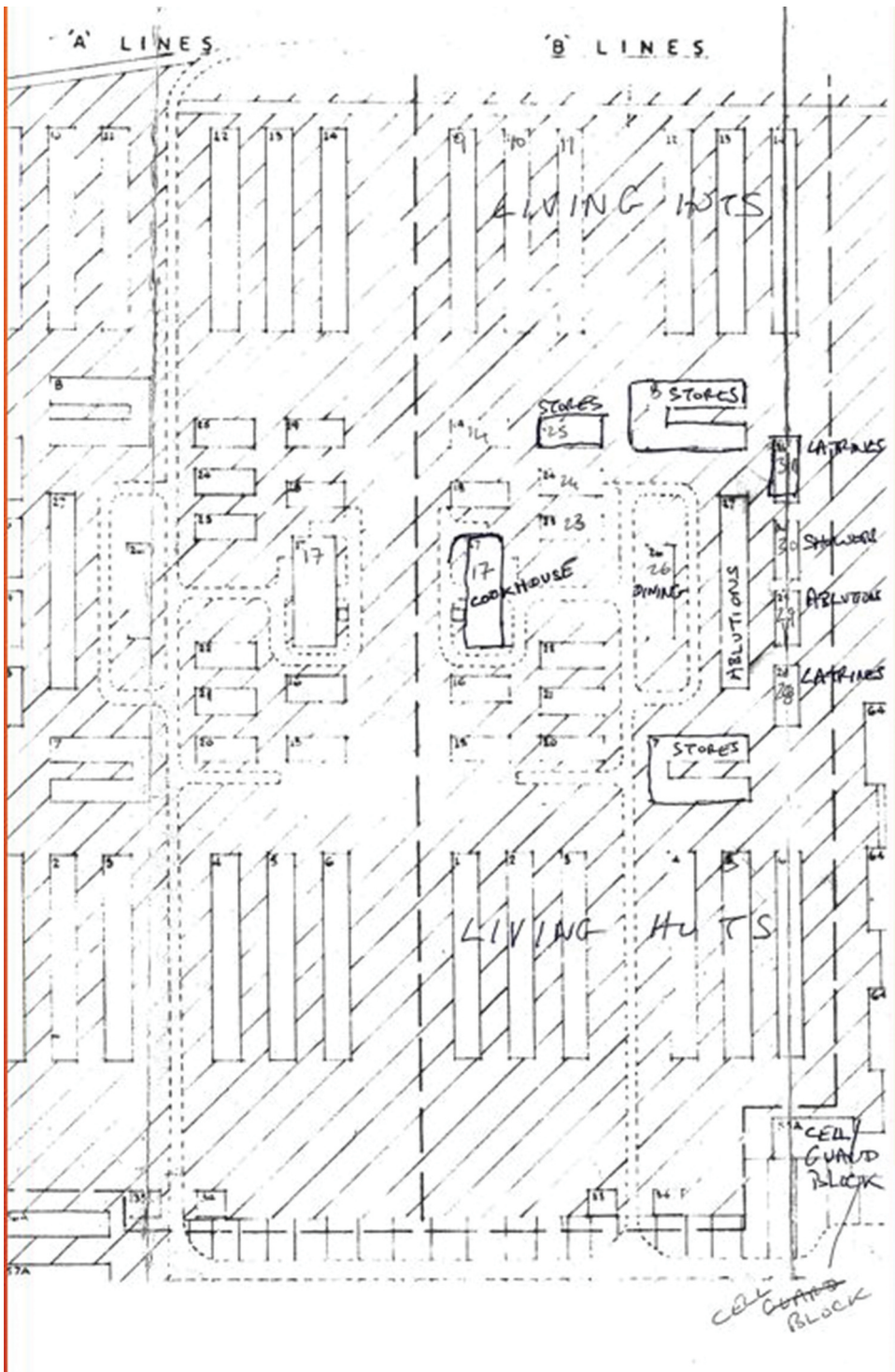


Figure 12. Detail of excavation area from 1957 plan.



Figure 13. Trench 3.



Figure 14. Washroom.

concrete floor, leaving only the brick piers that formed the strip foundation for the huts. That meant that any escape tunnels would survive as an area of backfill within a disturbed



Figure 15. Shower block.

surface, and consequently would be hard to spot. Several potential areas of disturbance were investigated but none had any depth to them and they were discounted. As a result, the search for the tunnel has been unsuccessful although roughly 60% of the storehouse was not uncovered, and there is a great deal of potential for the tunnel to be revealed. Further excavation of the storehouse would be able to determine whether there was an escape tunnel from this building, and if it were found, to establish how effective the tunnel might have been.

The other issue created by the bulldozing was that the floor surfaces dating to the PoW use of the camp had been removed, and along with them, much chance of recovering artefacts from the period. There are six coins amongst the finds that could have been dropped during the PoW phase, running from a 1923 ha'penny to a 1946 penny, but equally, these would have been in circulation long into the post-War period and may well have been dropped in later years. The majority of the finds from the trenches were from later periods (such as blank cartridges from training) or were fragments of the demolished buildings: nails from the Nissen hut plates, window glass from the ablutions block, etc.

The attempt to find a tunnel in the ablutions block was similarly unsuccessful. There was no indication of anything that could have been a tunnel within Trench 3. However, the trench was able to locate the building, which then established the line of ablutions buildings in Compound B. Once again, the potential remains of finding a tunnel as the majority of the building were not excavated, and there are three other ablutions buildings in a line with this one. One of these was the location of the Rosterg murder, although it is



not clear from the accounts which it would have been. However, at least the general location has been identified, and there is no chance of locating any other building associated with the murder. The main assault on Rosterg took place in Hut 4, which was in the south-eastern section of the compound, and now lies beneath the car park and building of the Wild Thyme facility. Any commemoration of Rosterg would need to focus on the ablutions buildings.

Despite the impact of the bulldozing on Compound B, it was still possible to identify the location of buildings that had been demolished. Even although the concrete floors had been ripped away, the storehouse's strip foundations consisting of brick piers remained to show the outline of the building. The location of the ablutions buildings was also revealed, although the traces were less clear, and it is now easier to determine where the buildings stood. What is absent is the artefactual evidence that would illuminate the daily life of the inmates. Part of that is due to the fact that PoWs used the camp from 1941 to 1948, while the camp continued in constant use from 1948 to 2004. The artefactual imprint of WWII will inevitably be overwhelmed by the 56 years of use as a training camp. Even more to the point, the bulldozing of the area will have removed most of the artefactual evidence of the presence of PoWs, while there is currently no sign of middens or rubbish tips that might have contained a WWII layer. This will remain an object of research. Compounds C and D might be more fruitful for artefactual material, but it is clear that the camp will never provide the sort of artefacts found at other camps unless the middens are found.

### **Escaping**

Escape was a significant research element of the project and one of the reasons for the fieldwork in the first place. Although the project was unsuccessful so far in discovering traces of escape attempts, the results did force a reconsideration of the whole issue of PoW escapes. Because of the escape narrative that resulted from films like the 1963 *The Great Escape*, or the BBC TV series *Colditz*, escapes from prison camps are a familiar part of certainly British narratives of WWII. However, the circumstances of escape attempts at Cultybraggan require us to reconsider that familiarity. One success of the excavation was that it gave a greater understanding of the conditions that would face any attempt at tunnelling out of the camp. The soil is a densely packed fluvial deposit that is hard to dig through. Once its cohesion has been disturbed, it becomes quite fragmented and has little inherent strength through surface tension. As a result, it would have been problematic for tunnelling and would have required shoring for the sides to prevent collapse. It certainly raised questions about the story of a 35 m long tunnel from Compound A. The wording of Col. Wilson's description of the tunnel entrance in the storehouse of Compound B given above suggests that the tunnel was a long tunnel, but it is possible that he didn't investigate the tunnel having found the hole in the concrete. It is therefore not known how far, if at all, any escape tunnels would have got. Test pits during the excavation suggested that the underlying geology of fluvial and glacial deposits was close to the surface and would not have been easy to tunnel. The possibility remains that the tunnel attempts were doomed to failure by the harsh conditions of Highland Scottish geology and the shallow nature of topsoil in many areas of upland.

That might suggest that the prisoners were wasting their time in making the attempt. However, the lesson of studying prisoners of war is that the attempt is never wasted. At Stalag Luft III, the geology was similarly highly problematic for escape tunnels, one of the reasons that the site was chosen to house men that were known to be escapers (Banks and Pollard [forthcoming](#)). The response of the prisoners was to make the attempt anyway, trying to find ways of solving the problems as they occurred. The fact that the Great Escapers at Stalag Luft III were able to overcome the difficulties is not just a testament of the ingenuity of such men, and how determination can overcome adversity. It also reflects an essential part of the experience of being made a prisoner.

Being captured drops the individual into a chaotic new world of uncertainties. The moment of capture is generally one of escaping death; the inmates of Stalag Luft III were all aircrew who had been shot down and narrowly escaped the death that claimed many of their comrades and in some cases, fellow crew. In Cultybraggan, there were airmen with a similar story, *Kriegsmarine* sailors whose vessels had been sunk; soldiers who had been in the midst of combat when taken prisoner. They went from the chaos of battle to a different form of chaos where they had no idea what was going to happen to them, how long they were going to be held, where they were going to be held, or what their long-term future might be. They had little control over their lives, with all decisions being taken by their enemies who held them. This explains the desire of the category C prisoners to control the compounds, as to do so was to restore control and deliver a small defeat to the Allies. Escaping was another part of that. That feeling of control would have been all the worse for men captured from 1944 onwards, as defeat loomed.

It must be recognised that the majority of PoWs did not attempt to escape, and that they were relieved to be away from the frontline and the imminence of death. This is not to say that they had given up, but they did not feel the need to escape. Others did feel that need, as is shown by the fact that every PoW camp in the German Reich had an escape committee. As discussed above, a lot of this was a desire to get back some control over their lives. Allied to this was a determination to continue the fight. British PoWs all believed that they had a duty to escape (Banks and Pollard [forthcoming](#)), which is not reflected in any of the official documents relating to being taken prisoner. It was an unwritten rule that had a powerful influence on the PoW mindset. It was underwritten by the *esprit de corps* that meant men did not want to feel like they had let their comrades down, either by surviving when they had died or by being taken prisoner when their comrades had kept fighting. Effectively, it is a form of survivor guilt and meant that the PoWs had a psychological impulse to see themselves as carrying on the fight. What escape attempts proved to themselves was that they had not given up, they were still alive, and they were still engaging the enemy as much as they could. Furthermore, the attempt to escape provided a purpose in what would otherwise be a dead time that will be all too comprehensible to those who have endured the lockdown of COVID-19 in lockdown. The preparation and the planning were in many senses far more important than the attempt to escape, which in the majority of cases was doomed to failure. Without such a purpose in their lives, it was very easy for men to fall prey to barbed-wire fever and suffer mental illness. It may not have been a conscious attempt to offset mental health problems, but it would have been very effective at maintaining a positive mental balance for prisoners.

Escape attempts also provided a framework to the days and weeks that otherwise had little structure to them. Without structure, the days slip by unnoticed, again potentially

leading to depression and anxiety. The PoWs involved in escape attempts had a timetable and were working with others, ensuring that they were able to see sub-projects of the specific escape attempt come together. Each successful project was a victory over their circumstances, and a victory over their fears of being a failure because they had surrendered. Finally, as with all young men, it gave a sense of adventure and excitement to know that they were getting away with something that the more powerful Other (in this case the authorities, but equally could have been teachers, policemen, or parents) knew nothing about. There was a great deal of satisfaction to be taken from getting one over the enemy, and it can be seen in the dismissive slang used towards the guards by the Stalag Luft III inmates (Banks and Pollard [forthcoming](#)). At the same time, it was not just a sense of satisfaction that the PoWs gained from escape attempts. The value of escapes as a blow against the enemy was made clear by Staff Sgt Major Claude Cooper of 3rd Bn Royal Tank Corps in his interrogation record at the end of the war; answering a question about how far the Escape Committee controlled escape attempts at Stalag XVIII A at Wolfsberg, Austria, Cooper talked about the difficulty in identifying the real attempts from the ones that were only 'nuisance attempts' (WO 208-5438-1306, Q8). These attempts were still seen as valuable, however: Cpl Basil Marks of 1st Bn The East Surrey Regiment said that in Stalag XIII C<sup>7</sup>

It was generally given out to the camp that every escape cost the enemy 10 men at work while the PoW was at large. Because of this the committee encouraged even what they considered the most hopeless cases to make an attempt (WO 208-5444-1505, s16).

The point of all this is that there is a degree to which escapes were less important than escaping, i.e. that the attempt was more important than whether it was successful. It was the activities of making the attempt that kept men sane, gave them a purpose, made them feel they were still in the fight, and allowed them to feel that they were back in control of their lives. If that is true, then it did not matter that the escape attempts at Cultybraggan were doomed by the geology. What mattered was that the attempt was made.

However, there is a dark side to this as well. The underlying psychology is one that has a double-edge; the same mindset that drove the escape attempts also drove the determination to maintain Nazi loyalty and ultimately led to the murder of Rosterg. It is also entirely understandable when looked at from the perspective of the PoWs. When they had invested so much time, effort, and resources in the attempt, the blow of the attempt being betrayed would raise catastrophic levels of anger and bitterness that could not be taken out against the guards or the enemy outside. It could only be taken out on the enemy within, the betrayer who had broken the codes of being a comrade. Added to this was the psychological blow when something that had been a way of regaining control within their lives was not only snatched away from them, but by a man who should have been loyal to them. None of this excuses the treatment of Rosterg, particularly as it is thought that Rosterg was not the source for British Intelligence to foil the Devizes escape plot (De Normann 1998). However, it does explain the passions involved that led to a group of young men no older than 21 murdering a man in cold blood. Despite this dark side, without that impulse to keep fighting the enemy, and without the pressure valve of escape attempts, many more men would have suffered from barbed-wire disease. By refusing to accept that for them, the war was over, they were able to maintain a sense of self-worth and survive the experience of captivity.

## Conclusions

The excavation and geophysical survey were carried out to investigate escape attempts from the Cultybraggan PoW camp in Perthshire. The intention was to compare the results of the escape attempts with the results of excavations of the Great Escape at Stalag Luft III in Zagan, Poland (Banks and Pollard [forthcoming](#)). This would have allowed a comparison of techniques, tools, inventiveness, and so forth. However, there was no evidence recovered of the escape attempts at Cultybraggan, so this aim was not fulfilled. However, the excavation was able to fulfil its other aim, which was to confirm the position and layout of buildings within Compound B. Trench 1 revealed a hard standing that is best explained as a pathway for patrols between Compounds B and C, something that was not mentioned in descriptions of the camp but explains a feature of the site plans that survive from shortly after the war. The accounts of the camp do suggest that the walkway was necessary because of the need to separate the category Cs from the other inmates. It reduced the chances of messages being passed between Compounds B and C, which then made it more difficult for the inmates of B being able to coerce and bully the inmates of C.

Trench 2 revealed the foundations of one of the storehouses, the most likely to have been the location of the escape tunnel described by Col. Wilson in his memoir (see above). The building would have been relatively close to the outer fence, and it would also have been a long way from the guards and the places they concentrated. The lower/southern arm of the U-shape would have been the most likely location for any tunnel entrance because it was the point furthest from either of the doors. While no indication of any tunnel was revealed in the trench, the limited area that was excavated was mainly in the upper/northern arm of the building and it is possibly unsurprising that the entrance was not found. It is more likely that the entrance to the tunnel was in the unexcavated part of the lower arm. That said, there is a real doubt that the entrance to a tunnel would have survived the bulldozer demolition although potentially it might still be traceable. Certainly, the loss of the concrete floor was a serious check to the potential of the excavation as it removed the most obvious traces of the tunnel. One issue is that any tunnel would not have gone very deep or very far because of the geological conditions.

Trench 3 uncovered the remains of a washing or shower block. The group of buildings this belonged to is most likely to have been the site of the Rosterg lynching. It was one of the shower buildings in Compound B where Rosterg was left hanging from an overhead pipe. This is the shower/wash block furthest from the guards and the administration block, so it is a likely candidate for the scene of the crime. This building was much more damaged than the features in the other trenches, but it was still visible as a structure.

What the excavation did achieve was to reveal elements of Compound B that are likely to have been significant in the history of the camp. The storehouse is most likely to have been the scene of an attempted tunnelling escape by the German prisoners, while the shower block in Trench 3 is the most likely location of the murder of Feldwebel Rosterg in December 1944. The compound itself is very difficult to perceive following the demolition and remodelling in the post-War years. The current road system through the camp bisects the compound and visitors assume that the present road was the edge of Compound B, rather than marking roughly the halfway point. The remainder of Compound B is covered by a firing range in the northern part of the area, while the southern part has the remains of an assault course and allotments. The disconnect between this side of Compound

B and the WWII remains is absolute, while the flat field of the eastern side of the compound does nothing to help overcome this issue. The excavation has put some of the buildings back into the perceptual landscape and will allow visitors to understand the roots of the camp despite the palimpsest of post-War changes.

As far as the impact of the project is concerned, the reactions of the local population have been covered in detail in an earlier publication (Thomas and Banks 2019). What was very apparent was that there was a considerable variation in the reactions. Many of the older residents were fascinated, but their memories were very much those of people who had been children at the time. These memories were also coloured by the period from late 1945 to 1948, when the inmates were not seen as a particular threat, rather than the briefer period of December 1944 to late 1945 when the Germans were still seen as a threat, still seen as representatives of a nation that was killing and capturing the sons, brothers, and fathers of British civilians. There was a substantial number of later incomers, and their reactions varied between fascination about the history of the site and disgust that the camp had contained members of the SS. There was a surprisingly strongly voiced section of people who thought that the camp should be demolished, some because of its history that they associated with the SS and Nazism, others because they considered its preservation to be a waste of time and money. The level of interest locally was shown by the fact that the public lecture at the start of the excavation had an attendance of over 70 people, while the open day at the end of the excavation had around 200 visitors. At the same time, the interest in the site was clearly at a particular level; while the lecture and the open day were very well attended, there were very few volunteers to participate in the excavation itself. People were happy to know more about the site, but had no interest in creating that knowledge, preferring to consume than create. As the comments collected by Suzie Thomas show (Thomas and Banks 2019), however, being a consumer of knowledge does not prevent those consumers from creating something with that knowledge as individuals create their own interpretations of the history that is presented to them.

From the perspective of PoW studies, the project does not add to the understanding of camps to be gained through the study of the artefacts in the way of a project such as the Camp Lawton investigation in Georgia under Lance Greene and currently Ryan McNutt (McNutt and Jones 2019). With the lack of artefacts that unequivocally relate to the use of the site as a PoW camp, the Cultybraggan project has something else to add through the analysis of escapes. The mentality of the PoWs is important in terms of why they tried to escape, even in situations where there was little or no chance of success. It explains why the interview records of returning PoWs are full of accounts of repeated escape attempts (Banks and Pollard *forthcoming*). At Cultybraggan, there was no chance of tunnelling out in the way that the PoWs did in so many German camps, or even as the PoWs did in Bridgend in Wales (Rees-Hughes et al. 2016). At Cultybraggan, the soil meant that any attempt at tunnelling was doomed to failure, but the prisoners still tried to tunnel out. In Stalag Luft III, despite the murder of 50 of the recaptured escapers by the Gestapo and the declaration that attempted escapes would be heavily punished, a fourth tunnel was started after the Great Escape (Banks and Pollard *forthcoming*); escape attempts continued across the Reich despite the threats of the Nazis. While the Geneva Convention of 1929 was predicated on the idea of the prisoner of war as a helpless non-combatant in need of protection from his captors, the prisoners both Axis and Allied did not necessarily

accept their situation. For those men involved in escaping, there was not a chance that the war was over and they were determined to keep doing what they could to get home and return to the fight.

## Notes

1. GC §27-34 covers the issue of prisoner labour; §34 says that the labour is to be paid at the rates in force for soldiers of the national forces doing the same work.
2. GC §75: ...the repatriation of prisoners shall be effected as soon as possible after the conclusion of peace.
3. GC §27: ...if officers or persons of equivalent status ask for suitable work, this shall be found for them as far as possible.
4. GC §9: ...Belligerents shall as far as possible avoid bringing together in the same camp prisoners of different races or nationalities.
5. GC §10: Prisoners of war shall be lodged in buildings or huts which afford all possible safeguards as regards hygiene and salubrity. The premises must be entirely free from damp, and adequately heated and lighted. All precautions shall be taken against the danger of fire. As regards dormitories, their total area, minimum cubic air space, fittings and bedding material, the conditions shall be the same as for the depot troops of the detaining Power.
6. Whinstone is a quarry term for any hard, dense dark rock but is normally igneous in nature. It is widely used for hard core in road building and construction.
7. In Hammelburg, Bavaria, close to Schweinfurt.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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