ARTICLE

THE BOYS’ OWN PAPERS: THE CASE OF GERMAN POW CAMP NEWSPAPERS IN BRITAIN, 1946-8

Ingeborg F. Hellen

I. Context

From 1939 to 1948 the number of German POWs and their camps in Britain fluctuated greatly. Until March 1944, because of the invasion threat, they never exceeded 1,854 men. Whereas the influx of Italian POWs reached a peak of 157,000 by 1943, after March 1944 the number of Germans rose to 402,000. Most of these were repatriated by

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July 1948. This study will focus not on the wider historical or military context, which is well documented,¹ but largely on the post-war period during which the prisoners produced their own camp newspapers or magazines. As such, these Lagerzeitungen were written by and for the POWs, but the extent to which they were the POWs' own creation, an authentic reflection of their lives, remains a key issue here.

How far the Lagerzeitungen formed a significant component of the camps' historical record between 1946 and 1948, let alone their historiography, is debatable. Judged by their near absence from scholarly work on the subject over the intervening sixty years—that by Henry Faulk and Kurt W. Böhme is the great exception—they form a largely unconsidered and perhaps forgotten literature. The reasons are not far to seek. As sources, these newspapers were by nature ephemeral: cyclostyled and cheaply reproduced on poor-quality paper, with print-runs normally in the low hundreds, and principally intended for internal circulation only. In all there were 348 titles, but some amalgamated and others ceased publication. Few issues survived the widespread 'culling' of unwanted paper records in 1948 when the last camps closed down. They were written and edited 'in house' for a diverse and changing range of POWs, and their journalistic conti-

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Antuity was subject to the disruptions of routine labour movements and cumulative repatriation out-flows. By September 1947, POW numbers had declined to 220,000 from a peak of 402,000 in September 1946.

However, a deep understanding of the history of this period cannot depend solely on the official records of individual camps, not least because so few camp commandants and adjutants had any fluency in German. In this connection the Lagerzeitungen unquestionably warrant attention as primary sources. Not only do they yield insights into the lives and changing attitudes of the POWs, but they were regarded by the Prisoner of War Department (POWD) of the Foreign Office, which had taken over responsibility for re-education from the Psychological Warfare Education Department (PWE) in 1944, as barometers as far as re-education was concerned. The POWD had noted in 1946 that ‘they would reflect changes in political orientation, in mood, and in political activity’, and in 1947 the department had described the camp newspapers as being both ‘important as a means of exchanging free opinion’ and also ‘a rich source for assuring the success of re-education’.  

At their peak, German POWs were gathered in around 1,500 camps and hostels all over Britain from Cornwall to Caithness, but today demolition and site re-development has meant that the physical evidence of camps in the UK has largely disappeared; in 2002–3 five ‘standard camps’ still survived virtually intact, with another seven ‘near-complete’. In the war years the British population hardly noticed the presence of the camps, as most were deliberately located away from conurbations, major lines of communication, military concentrations, coastal areas, railway stations, air-fields, and defence-related industries. After the war years, rural sites were favoured, where POW labour would be most useful and accessible for work on the land (see Fig. 1).


Figure 1. Distribution and location of the main Prisoner of War camps in Britain, 1944–8

Source: J. A. Hellen.
The first German POWs to arrive, in November 1939, were housed at Camp No. 1 at Grizedale, a large country estate house in the Lake District. Later most POWs lived more modestly where space was available, from disused factories to tented accommodation on race courses. Growing numbers of Italian and later German POWs necessitated the erection of over 100 ‘standard’ camps, settlements of prefabricated or brick huts, each generally capable of housing about 1,000 men. The facilities accorded with regulations on sanitation, heating, bedding, space per person, and so on agreed under the Geneva Convention. Although initially surrounded by barbed wire, after 1945 watchtowers were rare and virtually all camps removed the wire by Christmas 1946. Nonetheless, ‘barbed wire disease’ or ‘stalag syndrome’ – the feeling of homesickness, isolation, and loss of freedom, and more serious symptoms such as intense irritability, moodiness, depression, and even paranoia – persisted and exacerbated the risk for some, particularly the older men, of psychotic and psychological illnesses.

The day-to-day management of the camps followed rules prescribed by the British military authorities. Both provision at, and running of, the camps were periodically checked by the Red Cross (ICRC) inspectors. The overall responsibility for camps, satellites, and billeted-out men rested with the British commandant, reconciling in this capacity the various, at times conflicting, policies of the War Office, PW Division of the Foreign Office, the Treasury, Public Works Department, and so on. A Lagersprecher or camp spokesman, usually the most senior German officer or NCO, handled the internal organization and discipline of the POWs. Liaison was facilitated by one or more camp interpreters, often émigrés, who had a native speaker’s familiarity with both languages and cultures. These initial widespread inability of the POWs to read, speak, or understand English, and the reverse situation for the British, posed obvious difficulties. To overcome these obstacles, and at the same time to present a United Kingdom which differed from that behind the camp perimeter, English for All (fortnightly for the POWs) was made available in camps from Apr. 1946 to May 1948; planned in 1945, by 1946, 40,000 copies of every issue were printed, albeit half the number the camps would have liked. Faulk, Group Captives, 19. The 16-page paper assumed basic vocabulary and grammar to be in place; an excerpt from Hemingway’s A Farewell to Arms appears under the heading ‘Elementary’. See English for All, no. 2, 1.
appointments could prove an inspired choice for achieving re-education and reconciliation, but occasionally the reverse resulted.

Documentary and other primary and secondary source material on the camps is scattered. In addition to the government papers at the National Archives, other evidence can be found at places such as the Imperial War Museum, local libraries, and county record offices. The official 22-volume German POW History (1962–74) edited by Erich Maschke is central to research into the camps, and volume 11, part 2 (Re-education) by Faulk and volume 14 (Geist und Kultur) by Böhme, with chapters on publications and the camp newspapers, are invaluable. Further material on individual camps can be found in the Red Cross inspection reports archived in Geneva and Berne, in the archives of organizations such as the International YMCA or church diocesan offices, in other collections in Germany, in county record offices and regimental museums, and in unpublished POW memoirs and private papers. Crucially for this research, a limited range of some of the 268 camp newspapers (the Lagerzeitungen) is stored at the Wiener Library and the Imperial War Museum, both in London.

II. Papers Compiled for the POWs

Just over a year after the confirmed arrival of the first German prisoners, the POW Recreational Association, already aware of the ‘stag-nation of mind that prison threatens all men with’, began in April 1941 to supply them at the rate of one copy per six men with Wochenpost, a paper for German POWs in Britain. It was edited by Bernhard Reichenbach and published in London, from where it was sent to all camps. Reichenbach subsequently wrote a retrospective assessment of the periodical, emphasizing that ‘it was never an Eng-
lish newspaper in German linguistic guise'.

Direct responsibility for its contents lay with the Prisoner of War (P/W) Department (hereafter POWD) of the Foreign Office, which saw it as an attempt to ‘force prisoners, hitherto brainwashed from childhood by Nazi propaganda, to think for themselves’. To that end it carried the full text of the daily Wehrmacht bulletin side by side with the British version of events. Readers regarded it with suspicion. By June 1942, when the threat of invasion was real and most German POWs had been transferred to camps in North America (their numbers in Britain having dwindled to a mere 200), publication of Wochenpost was suspended.

Wochenpost was revived in November 1944, eventually publishing 186 weekly issues before it ceased publication in September 1948. It was distributed to 3,000 addressees, again with the aim of helping prisoners to resolve the conflict over what to believe. Initially it was regarded with scant respect. Some POWs condemned it out of hand: ‘Wochenpost? We just tore it up. Nobody read it, just tore it up and threw it at the feet of the chap who delivered it. We knew it was propaganda and never touched it.’ This view was echoed by H. Reckel at Gosford Camp near Edinburgh: ‘There was nothing to read but Wochenpost, a special paper for POWs which no one took seriously.’ Others appreciated the paper, regarding the term Wochenpest, as some POW used to call the paper, as directed more against the editor than its contents, or as the only possible protest of the little man who resented being lectured. One POW found the slang term Wochenpest ‘plain silly’ and another, who attributed its unpopularity to lack of local news, observes that to start with there was little else to read, but also that readers eventually came to appreciate it.

10 It was replaced by a modest, 8-page cyclostyled publication, Die Lagerpost, at a ratio of one copy per six men.
12 Quoted ibid. 24.
13 Personal communication, J. Heerdegen, 3 June 2004.
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a third even grew to like particular writers and looked forward to their contributions.14

Initially neither content nor tone of the 1944–8 issues of Wochenpost differed much from the earlier ones of 1941–2, both reporting on political, chiefly war-related, events of the day in their first two pages, which were taken from the German, British, and international media. General cultural matters appeared on the following four pages, while the last two were reserved for specific POW interests (search corner, sport, and so on). The revived paper added a comments page, intended to stimulate discussion, but it was soon dropped because responses were more emotional than objective. It seems that the POWD had underestimated the psychological traumas of the POWs—defeated, despondent, imprisoned, stigmatized, penniless save for Lagergeld, many of them still very young—who felt more like giving up on life than debating. Rejection of all forms of cooperation with the British at the earlier stage could be interpreted as a refusal to go over to the other side, but later as burying one’s head in the sand.

However, far-reaching systemic changes were afoot. From early 1946 the oppressive rules and restrictions of camp life were progressively relaxed. Repatriation had been agreed at Westminster in July 1946, and the programme was begun on 26 September and lasted until late 1948. Postal services were already more or less ‘normal’ by the end of 1945 and from 26 October 1946, POWs could send parcels and remit money to Germany. From December 1946 fraternization with the general population and movement outside the camps were allowed and even encouraged.15 Under such changed circumstances the second series of Wochenpost did eventually attract more favourable comment, not least in camp reports sent in by the training advisers. In April 1946 the editorial board of Wochenpost had received a perceptive letter from the A-graded editors of Lagerbrille at Camp 249 (Carburton), which set out a critique, the main points of which were as follows:

15 In fact, many POWs privately record that unofficial fraternization was already common before the ban was lifted, although there are frequent newspaper reports about miscreants being taken to court and fined or even imprisoned.
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• Giving the impression that the readers were uneducated should be avoided.
• Irrespective of their upbringing under Nazi rule, young people have valuable qualities. They have shown courage, reliability, community spirit, and made sacrifices. For them to criticize their homeland, their society, condemn all that took place... would call forth opposition.
• Shorter, less academic articles might go down better.
• News from all four Occupation Zones and from different cities should feature.
• Above all, the editors were asked to be honest and not to deny that they wanted to educate or re-educate their readers.
• Access to authors hitherto unavailable, as well as good art etc. should be introduced.16

Their feedback was accepted and acted upon to the extent that, by March 1946, the POWD admitted that the changed circumstances had altered the very politics of Wochenpost. By December 1946 the paper was judged by the POWD to be ‘much better’; by the following July to be ‘more respected’, ‘improving and attracting more takers, who read more thoroughly’, and by August 1947 it was ‘being quoted as an authority’.17 Faulk reports a 1947 survey which found that 55 per cent of readers now accepted Wochenpost; another 14 per cent did so whilst criticizing certain points; 11 per cent did not care; and 20 per cent were opposed to it. Circulation had risen to 110,000 copies by September 1947.18

Nevertheless, muted criticism of Wochenpost continued. A manuscript play written and performed as a Christmas entertainment by Hermann Schulz of Camp 278 at Clapham near Bedford in 1947 presents a weary young POW who sees no way out but death. He knocks at heaven’s gate, where St Peter, holding the traditional key, puts him through a screening. Towards the end, St Peter peers down into the camp below, where he spots more desperate inmates. He asks why one has such a miserable face and receives the reply: ‘Oh, him! He’s just read the Wochenpost!’19

16 Faulk, Die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen, 295.
17 POWD, cited ibid. 299.
18 Cited ibid. 299 and Faulk, Group Captives, 111.
As from March 1945, another magazine for the camps, entitled Der Ausblick, appeared. Under the title Neue Auslese, it went on sale in Germany itself from September 1945, when it was taken over by the American Central Office of Information with the POWD retaining only an interest in general policy. The training adviser reported that the magazine was liked, but that the standard was too high in tone and content.20

The camp libraries also provided camps with copies of the official daily Hansard for both the Commons and the Lords along with reading material such as the Oxford Pamphlets on World Affairs, eighteen of which were published in German from autumn 1945, and the British Survey produced by the British Society for International Understanding. Finally, there was Monatsbrief: Christliche Zeitung für Kriegsgefangene, ‘an excellently presented, YMCA-sponsored journal from Norton Camp 174 in Nottinghamshire, with a circulation of 3,000, sent out to all camps with the aim of bringing Christian doctrine and comfort to its readers and to restore their broken links with family, home and nation’. Its first editor, W. Theopold, ‘mixed bible passages, homilies, stories, poems – some in dialect—a garnering of traditional piety and wholesome wisdom, mostly of a pastoral kind, and presented it in a setting of the church calendar’.21

20 Quoted in Faulk, Die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen, 297.

21 Sullivan, Thresholds of Peace, 264–5. Norton Camp, once described by Gerhard Noller as ‘a kind of monastic enclosure … excluded from time and the world’, exercised a considerable influence in the wider camp system through its publications. For reflections on this theme see the report of the 1995 reunion of former POWs: Die Universität hinter Stacheldraht, Cuckney, Nottinghamshire, England: Kriegsgefangenenhilfe des Weltbundes der Christlichen Vereine Junger Männer, 1945–1948. Bericht über eine Reise nach 50 Jahren, 1995 (Pfullendorf, 1995). Despite this, however, M. B. Sullivan, a former camp interrogator, reported external criticism of Monatsbrief to the effect that it lay rather uneasily on the borderline between nostalgia and renewal, was in danger of being escapist, falling into neo-romantic tendencies, providing a shield against reality, and presenting a way of not looking closely at the shadowy side of human nature. Nonetheless, it must have meant a lot to one German reader, who had included a page of Monatsbrief pasted into a copy of Nordlicht, the camp newspaper at Watten, found at the Wick Heritage Centre in Caithness.
III. In-Camp Publications as an Alternative to Government-Sponsored Periodicals

If the objectives of Wochenpost in its early form as a POWD (FO) tool of psychological warfare for re-education had been sensed and rejected, an attempt to influence POWs by words from their own ranks might have seemed more promising. Indeed, from 1945 some training advisers had suggested forming discussion groups, camp parliaments, and camp periodicals. Availing themselves of ‘spontaneous’ camp initiatives to produce a paper of their own, whether for entertainment, contact, information, or re-education, might prove a more likely path towards an openness to new ideas where Wochenpost was evidently failing.

22 Another form of Zeitungsschau is described at Camp 165 where the ‘A’ Camp was invited to a Presseeschau (What the Papers Say) and a small number of interested men had assembled in the canteen to read and have articles from various sources translated for them. ‘Although the inmates are regularly informed of events by the English radio and press, a show of this kind is quite indispensable for those of us who cannot read English. The interest the first event of this kind generated was confirmed by the ensuing discussion, which was remarkable for its objectivity and fair criticism’, Nordlicht (Watten), 1 Sept. 1947, 20.
1. Editor Selection and Training

Editors were primarily regarded as pacemakers. Initiative and ability were more important than experience and political persuasion, although a background as an editor in the National Socialist state might have been a disqualification. Political screening and classifying men into ‘white’ (non-Nazi), ‘grey’ (indifferent), and ‘black’ (Nazi), which ended officially on 1 July 1947 and was based on seven gradations from A+ to C, was obviously not complete by the time the camp newspapers were organized. Ideally, editors would have been ‘white’ (Wilton Park-trained activists able to recruit and motivate contributors) but non-‘whites’ could be trained to become ‘white’. An editor failing to meet expectations could always be transferred to another camp.

Building on work carried out by the Psychological Warfare Executive (PWE), Wilton Park Camp had opened in January 1946 as a training centre for POWs and in the years between 1945 and 1948 about 1 per cent of the 402,000 POWs in Britain attended a six- to eight-week training course on which professional, preferably but not invariably ‘white’ POWs were prepared for leading positions in the British administrative zone in Germany and to contribute to re-education as group leaders, training advisers, and editors in the camps. In many camp magazines and newspapers, former Wilton Park stu-

Table 1: Political grading of camp newspaper editors: 1946 and 1947

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>Newspaper cooperative</th>
<th>No grading</th>
<th>No camp newspaper</th>
<th>Other*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A+</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>B</td>
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<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: POWD, cited by Faulk, *Die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen*, 443. Sample surveys, each of 100 camps.

*Note: ‘Other’ refers to a camp newspaper produced by the British camp administration.
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dents reported on the training centre; they liked its methods, and defended it against the disparaging slogan that it was merely an institution for opportunists seeking early repatriation.

Any Lagerzeitung written in the context of such training therefore presented a filtered version of events and analysis ‘steered’ by the authorities. The presentation documented the authors’ attempts to adapt to the new political reality, whilst others stuck strictly to objective contributions, drawing on their professional experience, memories, and general interests. Critical contributions were therefore very rare, but there were exceptions.

2. Planning Camp Magazines

On leaving Wilton Park, trainees would take with them a summary of their coursework in the form of the camp magazine Die Brücke to assist them in their future work. This may explain why virtually the same topics were discussed in camp papers at the same time. ‘Key problems of Germany’ appears in Ritt in die Zukunft, and in Der neue Weg. ‘Politics again? The duty to think politically’ in Quelle, and ‘Political activity as duty: political thinking’ in Zeit am Tyne (ZaT). Evidence that editors set the tone and outlined the direction their paper would take appears in ‘Bemerkungen der Schriftleitung’ in Der Quell, Camp 93 at Harperley.

The paper is trying to offer education and entertainment, and to introduce the idea of democracy through contributions from

23 Cf. Die Zeit am Tyne (ZaT), no. 5, Oct. 1946, 2, ‘ Impressions from Wilton Park’, and no. 12, July 1947, 8, ‘Women in Wilton Park’ (the reference is to the first female course with ten participants from Germany).
24 Faulk, Group Captives, 92.
25 One such example is a probing interview by Ralf v. Bargen (later of Die Zeit, Hamburg) of ‘Mr Rossiter’ (Philip Rosenthal), a training adviser, on the highly contentious subject of political screening, in ZaT, Feb. 1947, 4. See also Faulk, Die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen, 441, esp. nn. 407 and 408.
26 Ritt in die Zukunft, no. 1, pt. 1, 14 May 1946.
27 Der neue Weg, no. 23, 11 May 1946.
28 Quelle, no. 3, 1 May 1946.
29 ZaT, no. 11, May 1947.
30 This working camp newspaper was run by an Arbeitsgemeinschaft (working group) of seven. Its editors appear to have changed with each number.
other good papers and magazines as well as from POW readers. It hopes to kindle interest in all questions concerning public life, be it in the area of culture, society, economy, politics, or administration. At the same time it hopes to encourage readers to take part in discussions and to form their own opinions by inviting views from within the readership on ‘issues of our time’. In addition there will be reports on events in the camp and its hostels. The editors look forward to lively cooperation from its readers.\textsuperscript{31}

Camp newspapers or magazines are said to have arisen from the POWs’ own desire to create a common bond, a symbol of belonging, although one POW remembered that ‘there was no need for this; our common pariah status allowed us to be as thick as thieves. But we welcomed the papers for information and relaxation, especially those of us who could not read English well enough to enjoy it. Interest never flagged, even later on, when we were given leave to go out and meet English people.’\textsuperscript{32} This was certainly the case at Camp 266, Langdon Hills in Essex, whose inmates had started a paper quite spontaneously in order to enjoy doing something together, buying the necessary paper, stencils, and ink through the camp welfare fund. When a new duplicating machine was needed, funds simply did not stretch to a replacement until a visiting adviser informed them that the POWD would provide one and set the wheels in motion, with the result that the paper flourished once again.\textsuperscript{33}

Nonetheless, one cannot help feeling that the idea of a newspaper had in some way to be ‘sold’ at particular camps. Besides those going under the simple title of Lagerzeitung, many others strove to engage the attention of POWs by showing the way forward or offering reassurance, such as Wegweiser (signpost), Leuchturm (lighthouse), Anker (anchor), Lotse (pilot), Regenbogen (rainbow), Glückauf (safe journey),

\textsuperscript{31} Der Quell, no. 1/2, 1947, 24.
\textsuperscript{32} Personal communication, Johannes Heerdegen (Hamburg), 3 June 2004, who subsequently made a prize-winning film on this and other camps entitled Reise in die Vergangenheit (English version: Journey into the Past), which won a gold prize at the Dortmund Documenta Festival 2003.
\textsuperscript{33} Faulk, Die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen, 442 quoting Training Adviser Report for Camp 266.
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or Aufbau (reconstruction). Others recommended a newspaper as a link between main camp, satellite camps, and those men billeted-out on farms, or as a means of entertainment or information about events in the camp, the region, the country, and as a link with Germany. 34

Richard Höhne of Camp 674 at Bagshot in Surrey called his paper Zuspruch (encouragement) and its first issue explains his choice of title as comforting and encouraging, reminding his readers of the saying that ‘it helps to talk to one another’. He began his first editorial: ‘The child has been given a name! That was almost the hardest task’, that is, to set the direction the paper was to take. 35 Höhne had compiled the first ten-page issue of Zuspruch single-handedly, interspersing his articles with three pages of a Wilton Park lecture on ‘German foreign policy 1939–45’, a one-page article by Harold Nicholson on ‘German POWs in England’, a diary page from the Stratton Factory Camp, and a poem and short texts by famous German authors. 36 But he needed contributors, and asked for them to come forward.

Editors were not the only ones to reflect on the direction the camp paper would take. In Camp 174 at Norton, which was established by the YMCA and the ICRC to provide training for future primary teachers, youth workers, and Protestant clergy, the April 1946 issue of Wegweiser carries a reader’s contribution reflecting on the first issue:

I have read no. 1 of our camp paper very attentively, not only because the title touched me, and was immediately sympathetic, but also because the picture at the top seemed promising, for I assume it is the objective of our paper to be a help to every one of us to find a new path from Nazism and war to a brighter future. This is borne out in picture and title, and also by the editorials. . . . Nonetheless, reading the paper did not have an uplifting effect on me. I felt that intention and reality did not meld. This may be because some contributors used their newly gained freedom of expression in a negative sense. . . . I would therefore like to suggest the following: the two fac-

34 Lagerpost, no. 1, Sept. 1946, 1.
35 Der Zuspruch, no. 1, April 1946.
36 Spectator, 24 May 1946.
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ulties, theology and education, should form an editorial committee which includes three elected members drawn from both lecturers and students. This committee would not only decide on which articles to print according to their form and content, but also offer contributors assistance if wanted. They might also decide on themes for each issue, which would invite contributions from both faculties.\(^{37}\)

It is not known whether this suggestion to act democratically was taken up, however.

3. Recruiting Contributors

The British commandant at Camp 138, Wolviston Hall in Co. Durham, did not equivocate. Launching *Ritt in die Zukunft*, he wrote: ‘This paper is an experiment. It is not large, but that may change if it is popular. I have great hopes that it will help you, teach you, entertain you. With your co-operation and contributions, it is sure to reach that goal.’ The latter’s German camp spokesman continued: ‘We may not be top-notch, but the main thing is to get the horse going. Even those who have never put pen to paper may find that they can write charming stories to delight us all.’\(^{38}\) And, spurred on by a pack of cigarettes per contribution, they did. It being May, the month of the German Mother’s Day, the first piece to be handed in was a heartfelt tribute ‘To my mother’, perhaps not the dedication to reformed political thinking the commandant had hoped for, but proof of what many POWs had in their thoughts.

Initially it often proved difficult to attract contributions from POWs. Since every article had to be signed with name and camp number, it served as feedback for the POWD and as a means of assessing the author’s and wider camp attitudes. Some worried about being regarded as turncoats, others about being seen as ingratiating themselves to achieve early repatriation. POWs from the eastern part of Germany, by then the Russian zone, feared reprisals if on their return they were known to have supported pro-British, pro-democratic activities.\(^{39}\) Some were simply not accustomed to putting

\(^{37}\) *Wegweiser*, no. 2, Apr. 1946, 28.

\(^{38}\) Issue dated 14 May 1946, no. 1, pt. 1.

\(^{39}\) Faulk, *Group Captives*, 144.
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pen to paper and formulating their thoughts, people whose interests centred on their homes, families, and country, and who regarded working with words as a substitute for real life. Others, lacking the physical fitness of front-line troops, would have been worn out by eight or more hours of unaccustomed hard physical labour in all weathers. It was easier to recruit staff at officer camps because officers had no obligation to work, were free to organize their own time, often came from an educated background, and were trained to put thoughts into words. In time, all who were willing to contribute found a niche in sports reports, entertainment pages, as chess experts, or in religious celebration, writing about camp life, their area of professional expertise, or their hobby. A few, of course, never participated.  

Mass transfers and particularly repatriation, which began on 26 September 1946 building up to 15,000 a month, led to the progressive amalgamation of camps and the loss or redundancy of editors and staff.

When our old Camp 121 joined Camp 247 at Ripon, our Kleine Welt (Small World) also ceased to exist. Many readers feared that this really was the end. The appearance of the united papers of Die Pforte and Kleine Welt, however, shows that life goes on. Readers of the latter will be happy to find all that had made our paper one of the best of its kind in England, and fans of Die Pforte will note that their paper, though in a new dress, is by no means worse.  

The format and appearance of the former were combined with the title and editorial staff of the latter to produce a fortnightly instead of a monthly paper. ZaT for Camp 18 had five editors in the twenty-six months of its existence. Camp 156 changed from Heiderundschau in

40 Thus Camp 232 at Haywards Heath never had a camp magazine (personal communication, G. Mohring, 26 Apr. 2004), and another POW nominally attached to Camp 93 at Harperley, but actually billeted on a farm, never saw one (personal communication, G. Heyden, 17 May 2004). At Camp 18 at Featherstone, a former U-boat officer was ‘too busy’ to get involved with such writing (personal communication, R.-W. Wentz, 1 May 2005).

41 Die Pforte, no. 18, 25 May 1946.
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1945 to *Fackel* in 1946, and to *Die Umschau* from November 1947 to March 1948, the latter as a monthly as against weekly publication because of the shrinking number of readers.

Although eventually willingness to contribute to camp magazines increased, lack of continuity of staff posed a growing problem. Transfers affected editors, contributors, illustrators, and printers alike. One thus finds the professional artist, Heinz Schneider, much of whose work survives, successively providing illustrations for Camp 221 at Blyth in Northumberland, before moving to Camp 69 at nearby Darras Hall, and finally coming into his own working for *Die Pforte* at Camp 247, near Ripon in Yorkshire.


Several papers described the technical process of creating a Lagerzeitung, in most cases by hand. *Die Pforte* produced 570 copies per issue, each of twenty pages, that is, 14,250 pages in total to be duplicated; as six pages appeared in colour, each required between two and seven separate runs, making it even more. Few papers graduated to a proper printing press, however, and some even remained in manuscript; five are known to have been ‘professionally’ printed, two of them on old machines restored by the POWs themselves. From May 1946, *ZaT* at Camp 18 was published using the *Hexham Courant*’s local printers, not an easy task for typesetters who knew no German. The number of copies of *ZaT* produced could thus be increased from 250 in December 1945, to 1,000 by June 1946, albeit with only eight quarto pages, to 1,600 in tabloid format, and finally to 2,500. In-camp production of articles increased over time from 6 to 30 per cent, and finally to 80 per cent of the total, excluding those by the editorial staff. One thousand of these were sold in the camp (officers received pay), the rest going to other camps in the UK or abroad.

Camp magazines tended to have between eight and twenty pages, although some issues of *Nordlicht* reached 36 sides, usually foolscap

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42 e.g. Camp 667 at Byrness in north Northumberland reported in the new *Das Ziel* that ‘since the former issue, 28 men have been repatriated due to illness, 42 transferred to Camp 662 at Catterick, Yorkshire, and more than 100 are billeted outside the camp’. Quoted from *Das Ziel*, 17 June 1946.

43 Fig. 2, the cover of *Die Pforte*, no. 21 (23 July 1947), illustrates how effective the simple duplicator could be.
Articles

and later quarto size. *Die Pforte* was probably the only one routinely to fold the paper transversely, thereby creating a visually more pleasing format. It was also one of the few to have colour, others being *Der Quell* for Camp 93 at Harperley, and *Litfaßsäule* at The Barony, Camp 298, Dumfries. Most added drawings or lino-cut illustrations, even cartoon sequences. The front page usually displayed the magazine’s title and number, its camp name and number, a date, and a picture which was sometimes a famous view in Germany or the UK, sometimes a seasonal or humorous topic. At only one camp, Norton, sometimes called ‘Norton University’ by the POWs, was a location map published, and this in itself was probably a statement of its administrative independence under the YMCA.

Camp newspapers were never regarded as commercial enterprises. Technical material such as paper, ink, and stencils were provided by the PWD free of charge; editorial work, contributions, and production by POWs was not remunerated, which was neither applauded nor resented by the POWs, but simply accepted. Camp 27 at Ledbury is the only one known to have offered an honorarium: 2s. per page, 2s. 6d. for one and a half pages, and 1s. per poem, brain-teaser, or sketch. As a rule, papers were also distributed free of charge, an exception being Camp 189, which asked for one penny per issue ‘to cover its costs’. The number of copies produced for a given camp at a given time varied according to its population. POWD never doubted that camp papers were a true reflection of POW life and thinking, nor did they ever find evidence to the contrary; the papers in their view therefore justified the material support they received from the POWD.

IV. Contents, Censorship, Political Agendas

Even prison camp magazines followed agendas. Whether explicitly or implicitly, these were set by the POWD, the German readership, the YMCA in the case of Norton Camp, and in some cases by the commandant himself. The example of one of the two largest officers’ camps at Featherstone can be cited in its commandant’s words in

44 Quoted in Faulk, *Die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen*, 453.
45 POWD, quoted ibid.
Figure 2. *Title page of Die Pforte (Gateway), Ure Bank Camp 247 at Ripon*

It reads: ‘How our camp newspaper comes into being’ and shows the simple printing methods employed.

*Source: Die Pforte, no. 21, 23 July 1947. Coloured original by Heinz Schneider.*
Articles

ZaT. From the beginning Lt. Col. Vickers saw Lagerzeitungen as a historical record of a particular time—the name Zeit am Tyne had been deliberately chosen to echo the title of The Times, then widely regarded as Britain’s premier paper—and wanted it to be a show-piece for distribution abroad.46

At Featherstone the POWs requested that certain topics should be included: news about their homeland; information about developments in the wider world and about their own small world, the camp; information about their host nation and country; entertainment and mental stimulus; German-language material, especially if billeted-out with non-German speakers; morale-boosting items. The YMCA Camp 174 at Norton wanted to produce ‘a record of camp life’, and attempted to collect all POW magazines across Britain for that purpose. Arguably, that agenda is the one that engages the modern reader sixty or so years later, when little evidence remains of the camps. The German readership hoped for news from Germany, about their wider surroundings, and events in camp.

1. Contents of Camp Magazines
In broad terms, contents were shaped, even determined, by the various ‘agendas’ and desiderata. The editor of Der Neue Weg stated that ‘ever since being set up in December 1945 Der Neue Weg had been run along the lines of re-education’.47 It would have been hard for any POW magazine not to do the same. This paper devoted pages one and two to political contributions and reports from the home country, page three to entertaining, feuilleton-type articles, and page four to camp news, dates of events, local information, and humour. This pattern was more or less the same for all the 348 POW magazines which appeared and in some cases disappeared in the UK between 1945 and 1948.

Apart from contributions from a camp and its satellite hostels, a number of other sources would be regularly drawn on, including material from Wilton Park’s Die Brücke, translations of items from the British press by British camp staff, and pieces from German newspapers and magazines. The papers were also wide-ranging in content, reporting on the surrounding landscapes and towns, British society

46 ZaT, no. 1, 1 June 1946, 1.
47 Der Neue Weg, 4 May 1946.
and encounters with the local population, work in camp workshops and voluntary work outside the camp or for private purposes, and cultural activities and study courses.48 The number of lecturers from Britain and abroad who visited camps to speak on a wide variety of topics, and the way in which the POWs responded and were reported, for instance, at Camp 18 (‘you could hear a pin drop, even in the canteen’49), contrast with the view of C. Brooks, Chief Editor of Wochenpost: ‘These people not only repeat, parrot-like, the slogans Dr Goebbels has drummed into their heads—they even seem to have lost the very capacity for objective thinking.’50

Upbeat life is well represented; the downside of worries, failed escape attempts, illness, death, or suicide less so (although the ICRC inspectors’ reports included such statistics), possibly for fear of being too outspoken. Instead there are jokes and cartoons such as the POW in the turnip field (see Fig. 5), perhaps amusing at first glance, but really a cry of despair, if not an accusation. Neuer Weg for Camp 115 in Cornwall presents a rare case of picking up the highly sensitive issue of political grading and its potential repercussions on repatriation and finding employment back home.51 ZaT was the only paper to publish an interview with a camp screener, Philip Rossiter (formerly Rosenthal), along with an article by R. von Bargen, later of Die Zeit in Hamburg, on ‘Worries about political classification’; unusually, it included short POW obituaries.52 The official German history records that a total of 994 German POWs died in Britain from all causes between 1944 and 1948, 219 of whom were suicides. British records list 1,254 POW deaths between 1939 and December 1947, but they rarely featured in the newspapers unless they involved accidents at work.53

50 Quoted by Böhme, Geist und Kultur der deutschen Kriegsgefangenen, 65.
51 H. Dommeratsky in Neuer Weg, no. 3, 1946, 11-12 (NB Camp 167 had the same title).
52 ZaT, 8 Feb. 1947, 4.
Articles

In normal life even a cross section of independently published papers covering a period of two to three years would find it difficult to provide a true record of all aspects of life in that time span. Whereas in civilian life the same facts are written up by journalists for very different readerships, here one camp newspaper had to consider all its readers, as well as following a prescribed path. At Camp 296 at Peters Hill, Sheffield, a working approach reflecting the understanding of readers was achieved by issuing two separate papers: Zeit for serious readers on the first day of the month, and Halbzeit for ‘tabloid’ fans on the fifteenth. Similar decisions were taken at the Nordlicht press office at Watten-Stuartfield: articles such as ‘Health problems in captivity’ may well have been based on the same Wilton Park suggestion as ‘Do we get enough to eat?’

The one thought that was foremost in the minds of nearly all POWs, and increasingly so as the years went by, was the desire to go home. In the words of the editor of Die Pforte: ‘repatriation is the ever-present, main topic of POW existence’, and ‘When guns are firing, behind barbed wire, everywhere—home is the direction our thoughts most frequently take.’54 In March 1947, ZaT published a collection of limericks, including the following verse, in German:

There was an old German called Hein  
Who lived—so long—on the Tyne  
Thinking by day and by night  
How to change black into white  
For he dearly wished for the Rhine.

2. Censorship

Papers produced in-camp were not censored before internal distribution. A summary of the POWD attitude to censorship of camp newspapers published in November 1946 states as Regulation 4: ‘Due to the lack of British interpreter-translators all camp newspapers are regarded as not subject to censorship.’55 It was the duty of the CO to inform himself of the paper’s content and tone, a task he normally delegated to his intelligence officer (IO), and to pass suspicious ma-

54 Die Pforte, no. 23, 1947, 20.
55 Faulk, Group Captives, 144; and id., Die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen, 441.
terial to the POWD. There were, of course, measures in place to pre-empt the need for censorship. Though POWs volunteered to act as editors, they were appointed or dismissed by their fellow inmates. It was often expected that those graded A, or at least B, were more acceptable to the British authorities than Cs; in fact no more than 20 per cent were graded A. Grading had not been completed when the first papers were started, and was abandoned in July 1947, while papers continued to be issued until March 1948. More important than political orientation was the ability to attract contributors and readers, in short, to be an activist. Six- to eight-week courses at Wilton Park would train future editors, and on passing out, equip them with a handbook of recommended topics and their presentation in future camp papers; roving advisers would regularly visit camp editors’ offices, thus forming a critical link between the POWD and POWs. A statement by the POWD circulated for training advisers in March 1947 insisted that ‘Censorship within the camp of origin, i.e. the withdrawal of the right of editor and contributors to express opinions freely, would entirely undermine their value for re-education.’

POW and camp personnel were not, however, permitted to send copies of their papers to third parties, to other camps, or to organizations. Commandants sent up to sixty copies per issue to the Literature Section of POWD in London, where, after being censored they were distributed to other camps and organizations. Depressing news about Germany, complaints about conditions in the camp, negative views on democracy, the Allies, and especially the British government, and inflammatory language were all unwanted. The number of papers thus withheld varied from 2 to 6 per cent of the total, the higher figure applying after repatriation had affected the publication. Where an editor had ‘got out of line’, a representative

56 POWD, quoted in Faulk, Group Captives, 443.
57 Quoted ibid. 444.
58 A certain number—Faulk mentions sixty but ZaT sent 1,000 or more—were passed to the POWD in London and, after censoring, distributed elsewhere; a selection of the best were collated in a POWD publication called Cross-section. Ibid. 22.
59 Quoted ibid. 444.
Articles

could visit the camp—or the COs would be asked to take the POW editors to the POWD—to discuss the matter in hand.\textsuperscript{60}

With tongue in cheek, the editor of \textit{Der neue Weg}, G. Schweer, used censorship and the delay it caused in publication to boost the circulation of his paper. When deliberately unusual wording aroused the suspicion of the camp interpreter, who referred it to the commandant who, in turn, referred it to London, the paper was prevented from coming out on the usual day, fliers adorned the camp, shrieking ‘\textit{DELAYED DUE TO CENSORSHIP!}’, curiosity was aroused, and the papers went like hot cakes when they finally appeared.\textsuperscript{61} It seems that this ploy was not detected in higher places for, at the end of his first year as editor, and again on leaving the post, there was fulsome praise for \textit{Der neue Weg} and its editor from Bush House (POWD): ‘We should like to congratulate you, the editorial staff and all those whose efforts have contributed to the production of so excellent a publication, and at the same time express the hope that the same high standard of constructive criticism will be maintained.’\textsuperscript{62} Herr Schweer went on to become a newspaper editor in Hamburg!

3. The British Political Agenda

Ostensibly at one level the agenda of the POWD could not fail, considering that those who were responsible for it provided ideas, materials, training, advice, supervision, and occasional accolades, as well as exercising censorship. Not all commandants who were required to put into effect instructions from the centre regarded camp magazines as their responsibility. The tone adopted by the commandant of Camp 139 at Wolviston, Co. Durham when introducing the idea of a camp magazine suggests that he was merely fulfilling his role in the chain of command.\textsuperscript{63} By contrast, Lt. Col. Vickers

\textsuperscript{60}The YMCA’s original intention to collect all POW publications in order to build up a full picture of life in the camps may have proved difficult to achieve, considering censorship restrictions on contributions and their authors, and the YMCA archives held at Birmingham University today have no special collection of \textit{Lagerzeitungen}.

\textsuperscript{61}Personal communication, Gunnar Schweer, 15 Apr. 2004.

\textsuperscript{62}Letter from M. L. R. Briggen to G. Schweer.

\textsuperscript{63}\textit{Ritt in die Zukunft}, 14 May 1946, 1.
German POW Camp Newspapers in Britain

at Camp 18, who expressed his ‘best wishes for the new camp paper’ at its launch in 1946, seems to have been an exception. He continued: ‘I hope that it will fulfil its chief purpose for information and comments not only in Camp 18, but also for the inmates of camps in other parts of the country where it will be sent. I am certain that those who take it home will be reminded by it of the time they spent on the Tyne, not as a waste of time but as an opportunity.’ His agenda seems to have been implemented when, in his farewell speech, he was able to say: ‘I feel that Zeit am Tyne is The Times among camp papers.’

There is evidence that the POW’s own newspapers did foster independent thinking and, at times, a more critical engagement than had resulted from the POWD’s strategy in Wochenpost. ‘Letters to the Editor’ included an example of overt criticism as well as the response it drew in the paper’s January 1948 issue.

I have been told some time ago of a select group of ten gentlemen meeting to discuss the article on re-education by A. Weber, which appeared in the paper. Unfortunately the discussion took place behind closed doors, and so far no report on it has been published. Why are we not informed about the outcome of this undoubtedly interesting exchange of view? (signed) B—politically engaged.

This was printed with the Editor’s reply: ‘Did you really expect a report? It was merely an exchange of views! Moreover, we did not want to spoil the season of goodwill in our December issue.’

Another voice appeared under the heading ‘What the papers say about us’, a regular feature in ZaT, in an English reader’s letter taken from The Times of London: ‘Mrs X seems to think that, after vindicating the principles of democracy and humanity, after retaining POWs in custody and undermining their morale, we should uplift their morale again through lectures on how democracy works. I beg to differ. We should repatriate them before their character has been ruined for good.’ Less nimble minds did not wrap up their criticism: ‘One

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64 ZaT, no. 1, June 1946, 1.
65 ZaT, no. 16, 8 Jan. 1948.
wonders whether all those who command the POWs and lay down how their lives should be run are aware of the enormous emotional burden many of them have to bear. How can a man be expected to discuss political theories and fundamental problems concerning our age, and muster enthusiasm for these when there is only one thought in his mind: HOME.\textsuperscript{67}

Censorship had evidently not removed these observations in print, and independent critical thinking, in order to arrive at a new socio-moral point of view, which was the goal of re-education. The word ‘critical’ is not to be misunderstood here as disparagement of camp conditions or military discipline by a POW, which was sometimes dealt with by an immediate transfer to another camp, but in the sense of ‘discernment’. British reaction to humorous POW protests, be they limericks or cartoons in the paper’s entertainment section, remarks in a Christmas pantomime, or melodies hummed on the way to work were most likely met with tolerance. The principle of re-education was, after all, ‘freedom of expression’, and that was generally respected.

However unintentionally, the POWs also caused a change of mind among many in the British population, as fear of the POWs, and particularly escapes, gave way to recognition of the distress among these men. In spite of the fraternization ban from 1940, countless civilians did speak to, help, or stand up for POWs at the cost of heavy fines and even imprisonment.\textsuperscript{68} The initial criticism and protests against the maltreatment of POWs by individuals, churches, charitable organizations, the press, and particularly MPs soon became a flood. After the War Minister’s insistence as late as 26 November 1946 that the law could not be changed, fraternization and even private Christmas invitations came about less than four weeks later. Ordinary Britons had changed not only their own attitudes, but forced change on the government and many personal friendships sprang up, some of which have lasted for sixty or more years.\textsuperscript{69}

\textsuperscript{67} Der Weg, Nov./Dec. 1947.
\textsuperscript{68} Examples listed by Faulk, Die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen, 627.
\textsuperscript{69} For a collection of 30 such ‘histories’ see Pamela Howe Taylor, The Germans We Trusted, with an intro. by Lord Hurd of Westwell, former Foreign Secretary (Cambridge, 2003), and the BBC2 Timewatch programme, The Germans We Kept, 2000.
V. Lagerzeitungen as Chronicles of Camp Life

With paper and even pencils initially in scarce supply, only a few POWs kept diaries and even fewer subsequently published their memoirs or autobiographies. Camp papers therefore provide intriguing, and to some degree unique, insights into what occupied the hands and minds of their readers. To start with, there were the daily domestic duties: bed-making, with military precision, lighting fires, sweeping-out, laundry work, growing vegetables and, often by order of some commandants, beautifying the surroundings with flowers. All of these are charmingly described and illustrated in ZaT, for example.\textsuperscript{70}

After roll-call — often repeated, come rain or shine — there was the important issue of food. The subject is given much thought and space in the Lagerzeitungen in the shape both of poems and prose, which extol the cook and his labours. The camp spokesman for Skellings-thorpe Hostel at Camp 156 and the head baker at Featherstone Park, Camp 18, both tell of the difficult conditions and the strenuous efforts they made to supply their men with bread. At Camp 156, 47,000 loaves a week were produced, using 450 sacks of flour (6,300 pounds), with the dough being kneaded by hand.\textsuperscript{71} At Featherstone the master baker also ran courses for beginners and improvers, and in 1947, eighteen apprentices passed their examinations to become journeymen.\textsuperscript{72}

In May 1947 Ure Bank Camp announced in Die Pforte that Max Jäger, a watchmaker, had set up shop in Hut 105. He joined the many other trades illustrated in Fig. 3. Camp 18 similarly provided workshops for shoemakers and tailors, fitters and metalworkers, joiners and carpenters, and was thus self-sufficient in those trades, whether converting a hut into a chapel or making anything from kitchen tools to stage props, all in conjunction with training courses. Der Quell at Harperley reports on the construction of its theatre, now part of a ‘listed’ historic monument.\textsuperscript{73} The importance of the training courses

\textsuperscript{70} ZaT, no. 16, 8 Jan. 1948, 12.
\textsuperscript{71} Heiderundschau, no. 56, pt. 6, 1946, 6.
\textsuperscript{72} ZaT, Christmas 1947, 9. The bakery worked three shifts and two-thirds of its production went to other POW camps.
is confirmed by Lieutenant Egon Schormann: ‘I was 20 years old in April 1945, and originally a law student when I became a POW and student of the “hotel and catering industry” at Crewe Hall.’ Having sat his examinations and obtained a qualification which would be accepted in Germany, he wrote to his parents:

the five month course in twelve theoretical fields was taught by eleven masters according to the professional rules, the exams stuck close to the rules of the hotel and catering trade, the diploma was endorsed by the Commandant. . . . I truly hope that I shall never need to make use of this certificate, but who can tell? I may be 23 on release, the German universities may not be operating—I must think of other openings—as an under-waiter perhaps, if times continue bad.74

As for higher education, Camp 18 at Featherstone practically ran a ‘university-in-exile’, given semi-official recognition when, with delegates from Camps 29 and 174, some of its students attended meetings of the British Student Christian Movement (SCM) at Swanwick in Derbyshire.75 Three camps specialized in professional training and education. Early in 1945, urged on by the ICRC and by scientifically qualified POWs, Camp 23 at Devizes started pre-clinical teaching with 222 medical students as a medical academy accredited by Hamburg University. To give it access to a teaching hospital, it moved first to Chepstow in the winter semester 1945–6, and subsequently to Camp 23 at Sudbury near Derby.

At Norton Camp 174, near Mansfield, colleges for teacher-training and Protestant theology were established in August 1945. Norton Camp, which published the Monatsbrief mentioned earlier, had been founded by the International YMCA and the ICRC in response to misgivings about the British re-education policy. Similar motives had led to the establishment of a Jugendlager (youth camp for POWs as young as 16) at Radwinter (Camp 180), later transferred to Trumpington (Camp 57) near Cambridge. When it closed in 1948, Norton had trained 600 primary school teachers and 125 youth workers; a

74 Kochan, Prisoners of England.
75 ZaT, no. 14, Aug./Sept. 1947, 6. Apart from officers, the camp housed other ranks working as orderlies, who underwent such training.
Figure 3. A bird’s eye view of Camp 247 near Ripon, published in Die Pforte, 1947.

Source: Die Pforte, no. 19, June 1947.
Further 200 had passed their Abitur examinations, qualifying them for university entrance, and 130 had completed the first stages of their theological training. A third college, a Roman Catholic seminary, was established at Berechurch Hall (Camp 186) near Colchester under the supervision of the Apostolic Delegate.

There was also voluntary work. One POW, Dr E. Stöbe, reports on archaeological excavations at Hadrian’s Wall, Northumberland under the direction of Professor Eric Birley of King’s College Newcastle (University of Durham). Digging concentrated on the abutments of the first Roman bridge across the North Tyne, which linked the camp at Chesters with the Roman Wall. In the autumn of 1946 this was followed by the excavation of mile-castles, and in 1947 by work at Vindolanda and Corstopitum. The four qualified archaeologists turned into road builders when they constructed an access path from nearby Chollerford to the bridge foundations opposite the fort (Cilirnum), still in use today. During the long, harsh winter of 1946–7 interest was kept alive by Professor Eric Birley and other archaeologists in Saturday lectures and book loans from King’s College. Such events were recorded in ZaT, and the POW’s collaborative research was subsequently published in academic journals.

In November 1946 Ernst Bleuel had also reported in ZaT that German POWs had made a significant contribution to bringing in the harvest in Northumberland. Every day up to 850 unsupervised volunteers had gone to 250 farms and eighteen drainage sites to help, and by 30 September 450,000 metres of drainage ditches had been dug or restored to enable 2,500 hectares of bog and moorland to be reclaimed. So necessary was this work that, instead of POW transport travelling 1,500 miles a week, hostels were opened at three other sites closer to the workplaces. Yet in terms of reconciliation, more important than the crops themselves was the seed corn of understanding sown by these men. Harvest Thanksgiving was celebrat-
Figure 4. *Weekly class timetable: Officers’ Camp (18), Featherstone Park*

Source: H. Heckeroth (former Luftwaffe pilot).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zeit-Ort</th>
<th>Montag</th>
<th>Dienstag</th>
<th>Mittwoch</th>
<th>Donnerstag</th>
<th>Freitag</th>
<th>Sonnabend</th>
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<tr>
<td>8:15-9 a.m.</td>
<td>Englisch</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:15-10 a.m.</td>
<td>Mathematik</td>
<td>Technik</td>
<td>Technik</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:15-11:15 a.m.</td>
<td>Deutsch</td>
<td>Geschichte</td>
<td>Geschichte</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:15-12 p.m.</td>
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<td>12:15-1 p.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:15-2 p.m.</td>
<td>Kaffee</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:15-3 p.m.</td>
<td>Vortrag</td>
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<tr>
<td>3:15-4 p.m.</td>
<td>Lektionen</td>
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*Unser Wochenplan.*
ed at Hexham Abbey in Northumberland by 400 locals and 1,000 German POWs with their commanding officer, an occasion widely reported in the local and national press.79

For most POWs, unlike the officer volunteers, the term ‘working camp’, meant just that. In 46 lines a ballad called ‘The Turnip’ in Die Pforte (Camp 247), tells of the finer points of turnip cultivation and cropping, of the land workers’ seemingly endless toil and disappointments. Dr H. W. Thost, reporting on a peat cutter’s day in northern Scotland at Watten, tries to find redeeming moments in all-weather, all-season, all-day labour on the peat crop.80 He records how, for the 100 men who boarded the five Bedford trucks every morning at 7 a.m. for a seventeen-mile drive to work, the red-haired girl who always stood at the Halkirk stop waiting for the 8 o’clock bus was the most welcome sight of the day. Neither side ever spoke or waved a hand, but for the POWs it was visual proof of a world closed to them. How much greater was the joy and gratitude of these men at Watten when they were asked by local people to join in with their Highland Games, and thanks to support from their commandant, competed in some events. After admiring Highland dress, bagpipes, and dancing, they took second place in the tug-of-war. The applause from the former enemy was heart-warming to them.81

An appeal from the Red Cross for German POWs to make toys for orphanages at home in Germany was met with an enthusiastic response. Raw materials of all sorts were immediately squirreled together, one hut being set aside as a toy factory (Fig. 6), and work began.82 Many POWs longed to act paternally, to bring joy to children, and ZaT reports how, on one rainy night, there came a knock at the door and three pixies entered the toy factory. As the camp newspaper noted, it was difficult to say who was more delighted: the children who had discovered Santa’s wonderland, or the men who

79 Cf. Hexham Courant, 16 Nov. 1947, under the headline ‘The ‘Enemy’ in Our Midst. But he has beaten his Sword into a ploughshare’, and the Daily Express, 18 Nov. 1947, ‘Abbey Locks its Doors for P.O.W. Service. Scores left outside’. The service was also reported by The Times, Manchester Guardian, Daily Telegraph, and Daily Mail.
81 Ibid. 29–32, article by Peter Schmidt, ‘Der Sportmonat’.
Figure 5. ‘The turnip field’. A cartoon from the Camp 247 newspaper, Ripon

Source: Die Pforte, no. 24, October 1947.
Articles

showed them how to make things, or rediscovered their own delight in play.

Many camps turned into beehives of activity at night, the work ranging from carving chess sets for in-camp competitions to unpicking hessian sacks for recycling as slippers. On occasion the muses inspired some POWs in quite remarkable ways. A few murals, mostly of German landscapes or wildlife, which adorned canteens at Harperley (Co. Durham), Stirling (Stirlingshire, Scotland), and Brigg (Lincolnshire), still survive. Elsewhere there were paintings of biblical scenes in the camp chapels, as well as triptychs, nativity sets, crucifixes, and stations of the cross, and stage scenery for the camp theatres was in constant demand. Pen-and-ink drawings and linocuts embellished many camp magazines from northern Scotland to Cornwall.

The camp artists exhibited inside many camps or, occasionally, at public exhibitions. One such, an exhibition and sale of eighty-four paintings and watercolours (priced from one to fifteen guineas) by five artists, was held at the Town Hall in Ripon and opened by the Bishop of Ripon and reported next day in the Yorkshire Post. It included crafts, ranging from musical instruments to the traditional Erzgebirge Pyramiden, from ships in bottles to shopping baskets. In opening this exhibition the Bishop was reported as saying that ‘the prisoners had left a permanent mark of their stay in Ripon in the pictures which had been painted on the walls of the Y.M.C.A. Those pictures would remind us of what war meant and of the separation and unhappiness it brought, and they should strengthen our resolve to do all we could to prevent such things happening again.’

The years of captivity released unsuspected or dormant artistic abilities in men, as if the liberation from the pursuit of a career had freed them to pursue seriously what had been no more than a hobby. The review published in ZaT of a three-man art exhibition mounted at Featherstone gave details of the restrictions imposed by captivi-

83 The paintings in Moota Camp (103) chapel, Cumberland, now demolished, are fully illustrated in Gloria Edwards, Moota POW Camp (Kirkgate Museum Group, 2006).

84 Yorkshire Post, 17 July 1947, 7. A similar link was established with Newark (Notts.) where Dr Wolfgang Scheffler, an art historian and former POW at Little Carlton Hostel, donated 240 of his local drawings to the town, which had held exhibitions of his work in 1988, 1995, and 2005.
Figure 6. The ‘toy factory’ at Camp 18, Featherstone Park

Source: Die Zeit am Tyne, no. 13, 1947, 11.
Articles

ty. It was the second art exhibition at Camp 18 to show the work of young painters, sculptors, and architects, the previous one having been staged in September 1946, three months before contacts outside the camp were permitted.

‘Every decent German camp has a stage. If it hasn’t, it is not a decent camp. A stage needs to be constructed to make it so.’ These words inspired a start to be made on building a theatre in Camp 165 at Watten on 24 March 1946. By September 1947 it had seen 150 performances; three months earlier at Featherstone ZaT had reported the first guest evening hosted inside the camp for the civilian population. The number, variety, and venues of such performances up and down the country were impressive: tragedies, comedies, classical Greek plays, Shakespeare in English as well as German, the German classics, plays written and composed in-camp, operettas, variety shows—not a camp, not a week without one of these, and too many to review here.

That spirit seems to linger on. The first building that the new owners of Harperley POW Camp Museum sought to restore was the theatre. An operetta was translated into English, music students recruited from Durham University and dressed like the former camp band, the original conductor flown in from Hamburg, and an audience of ten ex-POWs assembled to be filmed for the BBC2 Restoration programme screened in 2003.

Among other camp puppet or marionette theatres, that of Norton Camp under the direction of Wolfgang Kaftan excelled, with titles from the repertoire ranging from classics such as Dr Faustus to the more topical Mr Punch Becomes a POW, or Punch Goes Fraternizing. All in all, there were seventy performances in English and thirty in German at other camps and local schools to audiences totalling 25,000. Choir singing and instrumental playing naturally offered themselves as community-building and entertainment activities.

Nordlicht mentions how even on the daily march to work POWs hummed, whistled, or sang anything from ‘The Volga Boatmen’s Song’ to Chopin’s ‘Funeral March’. According to Querschnitt the

85 ZaT, 13 July 1947, 7.
87 BBC2, broadcast on 2 Sept. 2003.
88 Nordlicht, no. 12, 1947, 27: P. Szameitat, ‘On the 150th performance of the BB’ (Bunte Bühne, the theatre’s name).
first camp choir had started in October 1944. Three groups of 500 to 600 POWs arrived, followed by a further two on 21 December 1944. There were barracks, but because of an administrative oversight no beds and, more seriously, hardly any food either, but on Christmas Day no fewer than 120 men assembled to form a choir. In the course of time most camps followed these examples, for their own enjoyment finding and pursuing common interests with the British public and giving pleasure to others. Donations of instruments followed from the YMCA, the Red Cross, and the public, and the camp magazines abound with announcements and reports on musical performances of all types.

Finally, team sports and athletics, sports days, even Highland games and regattas, all received regular coverage in the camp papers, whether inside the camps or in competition with local clubs after the non-fraternization restrictions were lifted in December 1946.

VI. Conclusion

The population of many German camps, numbering between 600 and 6,000 men including those allocated to satellite hostels and billeted on farms, was comparable in scale to that of some surrounding villages and small towns. But where the host communities normally had parish magazines to disseminate local news and views, and thus to contribute towards a shared identity, the Lagerzeitungen bore little similarity to these. The Lagerzeitungen were written for an exclusively male POW readership, for men without women; for men between the ages of 16 and 55, brought together by chance from all corners of the German Reich and from diverse civilian backgrounds; for men cut off from their families and communities and having little or no knowledge of the place, region, or society in which they found themselves prisoners.

To make judgements on the success and achievement of the camp newspapers at large among such a diverse readership would be virtually impossible, and not all retrospective comments have been favourable. They range from those of the former U-Boot officer who had ‘no time for entertaining magazines’ to those of the Heidelberg

89 Querschnitt, no. 5, 1 May 1948 (Camp 77).
Articles

professor who wrote: ‘Nice try, little impact, save for the Wilton Park papers’ and the film-maker’s view that ‘We were all in the same boat and knew it; that saw to bonding; we did not need magazines for that.’  

More positively, in Lincolnshire the Heath Camp magazine at Wellingore alerted another respondent ‘to new acquisitions in the library, to discovering literature and the arts, and to organizing theatre performances with and for our comrades. Contributing to the Lagerzeitungen became for them an absorbing interest.’ At another camp in the Midlands a former POW commented that ‘we always looked forward to the camp magazine, even when fraternization was allowed’, and a third from a Sussex camp found that ‘a new world opened to me through English for All’, adding that he had kept all his copies to this day.

For those responsible for the contents of a camp newspaper, visiting advisers, censorship, initial inside resistance, and other factors could make the task demanding, but identifying common interests among their readers, and creating, as it were a Boys’ Own Paper was no less difficult.

At the outset editors had to conform with agendas imposed by higher authority. The purposes of the Lagerzeitungen were specific: to re-educate, to stimulate discussion, to provide information on Britain and British institutions, to assist bonding between men arbitrarily thrown together, to create a group ethos, and to entertain and divert. The different agendas could and sometimes did contradict each other.

91 Personal communication, G. Riemann, 15 June 2004. This extraordinary working camp in Wellingore, Lincolnshire, held reunions for over 50 years and members collectively published several substantive volumes. These included Dichtung und Musik hinter Stacheldraht, a complete 288-page documentation of the camp’s drama group Unser Schatzkästlein, its 63 productions ranging from Wallensteins Tod and Julius Cäsar to Götz von Berlichingen, Hedda Gabler, and many musical performances, and Gerhard Riemann’s Stationen der Erinnerungen: Englische Kriegsgefangenschaft 1944–1948 (Kamen, 2001), probably a unique record.
92 Personal communication, J. Heerdegen, 23 Apr. 2005.
93 Personal communication, S. G. Mohring, author of Freedom in Captivity: Personal Recollections of World War II (Books on Demand, 2001).
German POW Camp Newspapers in Britain

other, and what was actually published often failed to engage with the POWs. In the most influential of the camp papers, Rolf Jensen in a long article looking back at three years at Featherstone Camp wrote that the agendas ignored the fact that the POWs were interested first and foremost in returning home. ‘Repatriation: this word explains most, if not everything, the POW thinks about.’

To this extent, the official directives and agendas from the ‘centre’ paid little attention to the societal realities or to the psychology and mind-sets of those behind the wire, and the heterogeneity of the 1,500 camps and hostels involved was largely discounted. Faulk’s assessment, written nearly twenty years after the camps closed and his own work had ended, still has contemporary relevance:

Although the Second World War was the same historical event for both Germans and the Allies, they saw it from diametrically opposed points of view. . . . Re-education, unique in its attempt to alter the norms of group belonging . . . provided a unique opportunity to see how a mass of human beings, who arrived for the most part as a loose agglomerate, coalesced into groups in 1,500 separate camp units.

Virtually all the camps eventually produced or shared in the production of a paper and created a record which mirrored the individuality of each camp. Faulk’s comment that: ‘No two camps were exactly alike, and consequently the camp was the psychological unit of imprisonment. Each camp evolved a tone, an atmosphere of its own, consisting of socially approved attitudes and opinion, which were obvious to all and approved by all’ underscores the singular value and importance today of the individual camp papers as unique historical documents.

Against the background of a familiar and shared culture, the German-language medium of each Lagerzeitung was a vital factor in recreation, particularly for those readers billeted on farms in an English-, Welsh-, or even Gaelic-speaking environment. One former editor commented that ‘Wochenpost may have failed because it lacked

94 ZaT, no. 17, Mar. 1948.
95 Faulk, ‘Foreword’ (2007) to Group Captives, 10.
96 Ibid. 33.
small talk, local news and the personal touch’, but the camp newspapers avoided this mistake.97

The formal announcement of a repatriation programme in September 1946 had raised spirits, and the ending of the non-fraternization law in December 1946, coupled with greater freedom of movement beyond the camps and a 10 p.m. curfew, for the first time brought the POWs into close and growing contact with local communities and individuals, and opened the outside world to them. These changes were quickly reflected in the more optimistic tone of their papers. Outside contacts were to lead to many other enduring friendships, as acceptance as equals had long been a deep, if unexpressed, need of the POWs. It found perhaps its highest expression in the 796 marriages between POWs and British women registered by mid-1948.

The camp leader at Featherstone Camp chose to mark the repatriation of the last officers in May 1948 and a statement of reconciliation with a letter to a local Tyneside newspaper:

> We have experienced so many examples of true hospitality and deep-felt interest in our mother-country that we should like, on behalf of those comrades already repatriated, to express our gratitude here. The benefits we received were a welcome compensation to the hard lot we endured by the long separation from our loved ones. I am quite sure those connections will outlast our repatriation.98

Finally, the ending of political screening in mid-July 1947 provided POWs with a new freedom to express their own thoughts in articles and letters in what they had come to regard as their own papers. In little more than two years, 268 Lagerzeitungen had been established and sustained. This achievement alone represented a sea change from the resigned ‘ohne mich’ attitude of many POWs to a tangible recognition, reflected in their papers, of what represented their own and the common good. The strict post-war regime, where POWs were returned each evening under guard from their outside work, gradually softened.

98 Colonel Merkel, the last Lagersprecher, in Newcastle Evening Chronicle, 4 May 1948.
To what extent were the camp magazines objectively POW creations, reflecting their experiences, and consequently their ‘own’ papers? Assuming that the camp newspapers were the spontaneous result of a generally felt need for a voice and network within the camps, the British authorities had been quick to avail themselves of this medium as a vehicle for re-education and a barometer of mood within a large, and potentially threatening, foreign body in its midst. Wilton Park training, a handbook of suggested topics and approaches, the selection of editors, peripatetic advisers, censorship, and material assistance were all put in place to this end.

At the level of 1,500 individual camps and hostels, the actual writing and selection of contributions for publication in the Lagerzeitungen was done not by British officials but by fellow prisoners, and the resulting publications seem genuinely to reflect the minutiae of their restricted lives as much as their remote involvement in, and concern for, the great questions of the day being played out in their homeland. Whether for readers or writers of the Lagerzeitungen, the theoretical concepts and themes of re-education were daily put to a reality test over the years of captivity. Its outcome can still be read about in this ‘forgotten literature’, as it were, as case notes or progress reports on a group of individuals whose experience in the camps, whether good or bad, was an important, often formative, and for many unforgettable part of their lives, not least as evidenced by the reminiscences of the correspondents acknowledged at the beginning of this article.

INGEBORG FRIEDERIKE HELLEN was born in Speyer, Germany in 1933 and has lived near Newcastle since 1965. She is a graduate of the universities of Bonn and Newcastle upon Tyne and has worked mainly as a teacher of German and as an academic translator. From 1995 her interest in the Lagerzeitungen developed from fieldwork and archival research on the POW camps across Britain in collaboration with her husband.