



Sabretache

THE OFFICIAL
JOURNAL OF
THE CALGARY MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

www.cmhsc.ca

July 2019

The German POW Cemetery In Canada

Tucked away in a corner of **Kitchener's Woodland Cemetery** lies the final resting place of 187 German Prisoners of War who died in Canada during their internment. One hundred and forty-eight of these men were German PoWs from the Second World War while the remaining thirty-nine were civilian prisoners from the First World War.

Those interred in Kitchener represent a wide swath of the German armed forces in the Second World War – ranging from airmen shot down in the Battle of Britain to U-Boat crewman picked up in the Atlantic to infantrymen captured in North Africa. Their average age was thirty-three but their ages ranged significantly, with the oldest at age 70, Mtr. Heinrich Burmeister, having committed suicide on January 26, 1944 and the youngest at age 18, Grenadier Adolf Steuer, dying of Tuberculosis on July 5, 1945.

The causes of death were mixed. Ninety-one of those buried in Kitchener died of natural, medical, or health-related causes, including heart attacks, tuberculosis, cancer, and pneumonia. The next most common causes of death were accidents, notably drownings or work-related incidents, which claimed twenty-nine lives. Thirteen men were also reported to have committed suicide during their internment in Canada. The least common causes of death include four PoWs shot while attempting to escape as well as two PoWs murdered by fellow PoWs and the five men convicted of these murders.

Depending on the size of the camp, funeral services could either be held directly at the camp, like in Medicine Hat, or at local civilian churches. The prisoners were originally buried in civilian or small, dedicated cemeteries near the place of death and graveside services were attended by a select group of PoWs. An escort of the Veterans Guard of Canada often provided a rifle salute. Graves were often adorned with wooden grave markers painstakingly carved by their fellow comrades and it was not uncommon to see an Iron Cross or Imperial Eagle adorning the markers.

Because the cemeteries were scattered across the country and many were falling into disrepair, the **German War Graves Commission** looked at the possibility of relocating all of the fallen PoWs to a central site that could be easily maintained. After a long search, the Commission settled on Kitchener, Ontario as the cemetery's location.

While the project attempted to relocate all PoW graves, at least three prisoners who died in Canada were not relocated to Kitchener. One prisoner lies unidentified in Saskatchewan, one Ontario grave could not be found, and the body of a drowning victim was never recovered.



is a non-profit registered society
which fosters the study of the
military and the police, and the heritage of
Canada, the British Empire, and the world
as well as the preservation of military
artifacts and records.

The CMHS meets once every calendar month
at: Petty Officers' Mess HMCS Tecumseh
1820 - 24th Street SW Calgary AB T2T 0G6

Notice of Next Meeting

The next CMHS meeting will be held on
Tuesday, July 16th. @ 19:00 (7:00 pm)
At the Petty Officers' Mess, HMCS Tecumseh.

The unofficial agenda of this meeting will be:
Introduction of guests, Minutes of last meeting Correspondence, Membership report
Treasurer's report, Old business / New business Break, Show & Tell
The President, **Allan Ross** would like to invite everyone to remain after the meet-
ing for an informal time of fellowship.



Hillside Cemetery, Medicine Hat.
Alberta.

Photo shows a funeral of a POW from
Camp 132 in Medicine Hat which held
over 12,000 prisoners.

There were a total of 20 German POW
buried there by end of the war.
All were disinterred in 1970 by the Ger-
man War Graves Commission and
moved to the Woodland Cemetery in
Kitchener Ontario.



Photo of a funeral procession at Camp 133, Lethbridge Alberta

CALGARY MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Minutes of General Meeting held on June 18, 2019
 Petty Officers Mess: HMCS Tecumseh

Meeting called to order by President Alan R. at 7:02 pm.
 17 members present and 0 guests.

Minutes of last meeting. Acceptance moved by Barry E. Second by Indra R.. Approved.
 Newsletter – once again thanks for the great article from Roy.
 Treasurers Report provided by Floyd. Submitted government annual reports as required.
 Moved acceptance by Barry E. Second by Brian H. Accepted.
 Membership - Currently 39 regular members. 3 Life members 2 Honorary. Approval moved by
 Brian H. Seconded by Dave S. Approved.

Correspondence: MCC Journal, Government reports, Saskatchewan Gun Collectors letter re-
 questing a copy of our journal.
 Motion to send Sask. Gun Club our newsletter by Barry Seconded by Brian. Motion approved.

OLD BUSINESS:

D-Day dodgers Gala at museum was a bit hit. Two vets were in attendance one (Stu) from our group. Lots of
 positive feedback received.

NEW BUSINESS:

-June 22nd is the Military Collectors Show. 110 tables have been booked.
 -August 21st is a “Night of Rum and Roti” at the military museums.

BREAK: Raffle conducted by Dave G.

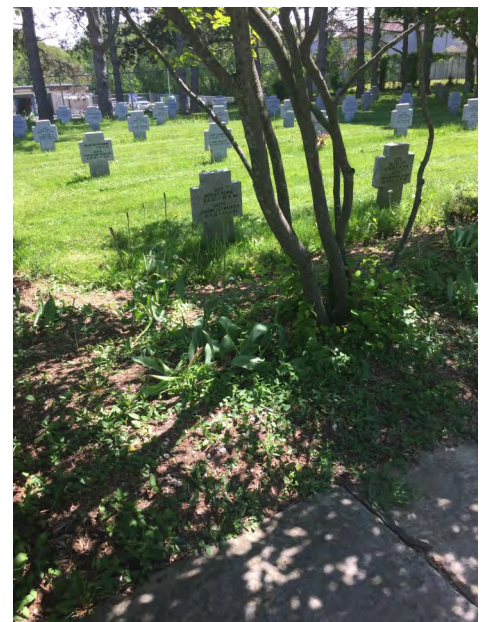
Auction –D-Day compilation package donated by James.

SHOW & TELL:

Stu – D Day dodgers story about a peasant woman in Italy
 Brad – USMC emblem on 25th anniversary of Marine Corps.
 Jack – Private Peat story, an account of the war.
 James B. – D Day maps – 1947 reproductions
 Martin – Showed helmet of a vet from Vietnam era.
 David G. – Royal Regiment of Canada: set of medals, photos, Dieppe
 commemorative medal.
 Al D –Uncle in Calgary tanks on the beaches.
 Barry - Canadian airforce high altitude flight suit dated 1945
 Indra – Question: Sikhs & Muslims in the CEF. Prove the numbers of
 enlistees
 Floyd – Photos of Civil War soldier 1 year apart. Notice changes..
 Al R – Medal grouping – RAF member, buttons, pay book and other
 items.

Moved to adjourn at 8:14 pm by Barry Seconded by Brad

The next
 CMHS
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 be held on
**Tuesday,
 July 16th.
 2019
 7:00 pm
 At the Petty
 Officers'**





Major Wilhelm Georg Bach

Born November 5, 1892, Obereisenheim, Bavaria, Germany
 Death-December 22, 1942 (aged 50) Toronto Ontario
 Buried- Woodland Cemetery, Kitchener, Ont.

Wilhelm Bach was born in Oberwoesheim, Bavaria. He was a veteran of the First World War and a British POW. After the war, he married, raised a family, and became a Lutheran minister in Mannheim. Before the Second World War, he was called up to the military. He served in Africa, where he was promoted to Major and was awarded the Knight's Cross. He courageously defended the Halfaya Pass (named "Hellfire Pass" by the Allies) until supply lines were cut and he surrendered on Jan. 17, 1942. As a POW, he was brought to Canada where he died of cancer later that year. He was very well-liked by his men, who carved a wooden marker for his grave which stands in the corner of the cemetery, separate from his burial plot.



Dr. Karl Lehmann



A survivor of submarine U-31 when it was depth-charged by HMS Antelope north-west of Ireland. Alfred, along with Herbert Löffelmeier, was shot and killed after escaping from his POW camp in northern Ontario

Uffz (Sergeant) Dr. Karl Lehmann was a professor of languages and an Afrika Korps veteran. He was murdered by fellow POWs at Camp 132 near Medicine Hat in Alberta. Four POWs were convicted and hung for his murder. They are: Heinrich Busch, Willi Müller, Bruno Perzonowsky and Walter Wolf.

In 1970 Dr. Lehmann was disinterred from Hillside Cemetery, Medicine Hat, Alberta and buried in the German War Graves Section in Woodland Cemetery in Kitchener, The four men that were hanged for his murder were also disinterred in Lethbridge and are buried a few meters from him in the same graveyard.

Manitoba Snow Too Severe, 19 Germans Return to Camp

Winnipeg, Nov. 1 (CPI)—Worst weather proved too much for 19 German prisoners of war—airmen and sailors—who escaped to wander away from a forest camp in the Riding Mountain National Park. After a night in snow-blanketed bushlands the men returned to camp voluntarily today.

They came in groups, the first two reporting in midafternoon after being absent for more than 36 hours in the woodland of the park.

"We got lost in the bush," a spokesman for the men told camp guards. It had been indicated it was a deliberate escape plot, foiled by a snowstorm which started soon after they left. The storm continued throughout the night.

Scarcely clad in army uniforms, the men were cold and hungry. They had been free for several hours before their absence was reported at the 11 p.m. roll call Sunday night.

The men had been in the camp less than a week. The camp is situated 25 miles west of Clear Lake, a summer resort, 240 miles northwest of Winnipeg. It has no

commission for 400 prisoners and a staff of 150. The guards, recruited from ranks of ex-service men, are civilians.

Scores of RCMP constables, guards and farmers participated in the search today, patrolling the park areas and highways. The police dog "Major," hero of many searches, was called to the scene, but the snow covered early tracks and scents. **Says No Break Planned.**

Ottawa, Nov. 1 (CPI)—The Manitoba Department could tonight a statement saying that no prison break was "planned or carried out" by 19 German prisoners-of-war who returned today to a forest camp in the Riding Mountain National Park, 240 miles northwest of Winnipeg. The statement added: "On Sunday 19 of the prisoners were having their day of rest which they spent in the woods within the prescribed boundaries. They were caught in a sudden snowstorm, became confused and lost their way. Later, all the prisoners found their way back to the camp by themselves. No prison break was planned or carried out by any of the prisoners."

The Great Escape (Canadian Style) POW's in Canada

On November 1, 1943 newspapers across the country announced a mass escape from a POW camp in Manitoba's Riding Mountain National Park.

On October 31, 1943 – only five days after their arrival – nineteen German Prisoners of War (POWs) were found missing from the newly completed camp in Manitoba's Riding Mountain National Park. With no barbed wire fences or guard towers surrounding the camp, the POWs had been allowed to roam within the camp area while not at work but the nineteen men failed to appear at the evening roll call. As guards scrambled to find the missing men, the camp commandant notified local police and military authorities to help in what was billed as the second largest mass escape of POWs in the country.

Meanwhile, the nineteen men had no idea they were considered escapees. Having left the camp that afternoon, the group had only intended on going for a hike to explore their new surroundings. Unfamiliar with the terrain – and the weather – the POWs had left camp in their army uniforms and had taken no provisions. Following the old logging roads and game trails that dotted the area, the POWs soon became lost. Snow began to fall, and the storm escalated to a blizzard, covering all trails and tracks. Realizing their predicament, the POWs settled down for the night.



TOO MUCH FOR NAZIS: This is the north country that was too tough for 19 wandering Nazis who spent one night in the bush near a northern Manitoba prison camp, then limped back to the enclosure. They weren't escaping, they said; they were merely lost. A Tribune photographer took this photo outside the Riding Mountain National Park prison camp.

Back at camp, local RCMP officers arrived to assist in the search while all detachments surrounding the park were put on alert. Camp authorities also notified Brandon and Winnipeg City Police as well as Border and Rail police to be on the lookout for the missing men. Patrols of guards and police officers were dispatched around the camp but were unsuccessful in locating the POWs that night. In the early morning, the POWs – cold and hungry – decided to try find their way back to the camp in small groups, a task that some succeeded. The first POWs wandered back into camp that morning and were immediately taken into custody. By the end of the day, all of the missing POWs had returned to camp on their own accord or had been found by patrols. Questioned individually, each POW emphatically stated they had not tried to escape but had simply gotten lost while hiking. Camp authorities eventually believed their stories and threatened reprisals against any POWs who considered leaving camp boundaries again. However, the RCMP leading the investigation suspected the POWs may not have tried to escape this time but were instead conducting a reconnaissance of the area for a future escape.

As the POWs returned to work the following day, the matter seemed closed. However, the camp interpreter did have to dissuade the other POWs in camp from beating their nineteen comrades in a misguided attempt to show how much they valued the opportunity to work in the camp.

While the papers continued to claim it was the second largest POW escape in Canada (the largest haven taken place at Angler in April 1941), all evidence suggests they were telling the truth and had gotten lost. Almost 70 years later, one of the 19 men was contacted and he assured every one that he had never tried – or considered – escaping for he greatly appreciated the opportunity to live and work in the relative freedom of Riding Mountain National Park.

PoWs who Died in Canada – Johann Schäfer

Johann Schäfer was a soldier captured in the North African Campaign. A member of the German *Afrika Korps*, Schäfer was in his early twenties when his war ended in 1941 or 1942.

Following a brief period in a primitive internment camp in North Africa, Schäfer and his comrades found themselves aboard an Allied vessel on their way to Canada. Following a long journey around the African coast, the ship would have slowly made its way across the Atlantic before docking in New York or Halifax. Offloaded under careful supervision, the PoWs were placed on a train heading West. It is likely that Schäfer was first in-



Postcard sent by Johann Schäfer to a friend in Germany. While he is likely one of the individuals in the photograph, he remains unidentified

terned in the tent camp of Ozada, Alberta, located at the foothills of the Rocky Mountain. Spending only a brief (but cold) period here, Schäfer was relocated to Camp 133 at Lethbridge, Alberta in the late fall or early winter of 1942. Camp 133, having only recently been opened, and its sister camp, Camp 132 in Medicine Hat, had been built to each accommodate over 12,000 PoWs. Surrounded by tall barbed wire fences and guard towers, PoWs made the best of their time by joining sports teams, playing in orchestras, taking educational classes, or by “walking the wire.”

In 1943, Schäfer was photographed with a group of fellow PoWs and was authorized to send the photo back home. In September 1944, Schäfer was sent to work for the Abitibi Power & Paper Co. at Camp 6 near Minataree, Ontario, one of the many PoW logging camps in Northwestern Ontario. Like many of these isolated labour projects, there were no barbed wire fences or guard towers and the PoWs were granted with considerable freedoms. While they worked eight-hour days, six days a week, the PoWs had ample free time and popular pastimes at these camps included hiking, swimming, canoeing, wood-carving, and reading.

As the war in Europe finally ended in May 1945, many PoWs looked forward to finally returning home. Unbeknownst to them, the majority would have to wait years before returning to Germany. Schäfer, however, would never return home. On June 20, 1945, at the age of twenty-five, Johann Schäfer died in a drowning accident.

In accordance with the terms of the 1929 Geneva Convention, Schäfer was granted a funeral with full military honours. Escorted by members of the Veterans Guard of Canada, his comrades conducted a service at Port Arthur, Ontario (now Thunder Bay). Following a brief ceremony and a rifle salute, Schäfer was laid to rest in Port Arthur’s Riverside cemetery. The photograph below was sent to Schäfer’s family in Germany through the International Red Cross.



Johann Schäfer would be one of fifteen PoWs who drowned while in Canadian captivity. Drownings were one of the primary causes of PoW deaths in the country, representing ten percent of the total. The increased rate of drownings in labour projects in 1944 and 1945 prompted Canadian internment officials to either restrict or completely prohibit PoWs from swimming or canoeing. In the early 1970s, Johann Schäfer’s grave was relocated to Kitchener’s Woodland Cemetery where it remains today

Funeral Service for Schäfer at Port Arthur’s Riverside Cemetery, 1945

Information on these stories were from, the site of Michael O’Hagan
www.powsincanada.wordpress.com