



# **Cumbria at War 1939 - 1945**

*A Role Play Exercise in seven chapters, for use in secondary schools*

## **Chapter 6**

### **Missing Home** *Prisoners of War.*

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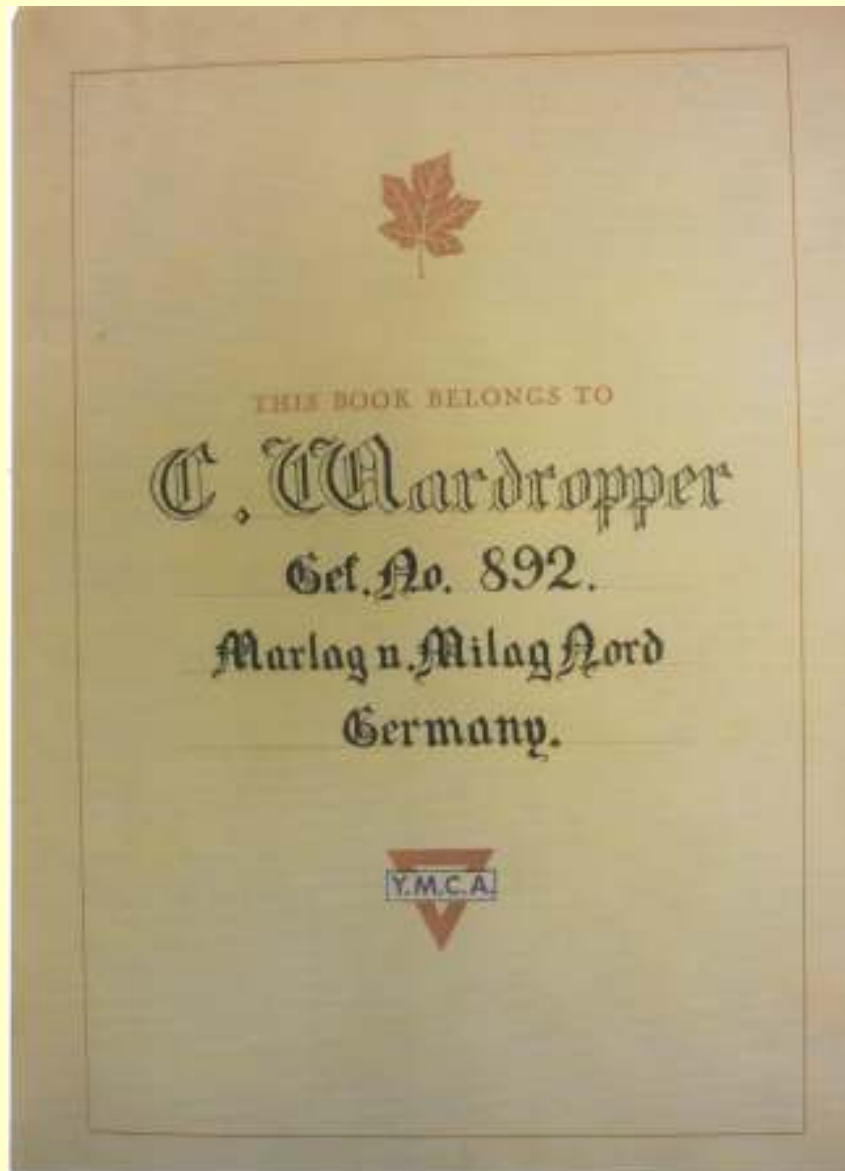
A Cumbria Archive Service learning resource for secondary schools,  
created by Guy Woolnough September 2009, modified for web April 2011



A lot of people found themselves prisoners in the war. In some ways, being a prisoner was better than being killed in action, but prisoners of war did not have an easy time. They had a very uncertain future, because they had no idea when they might be able to get back home.

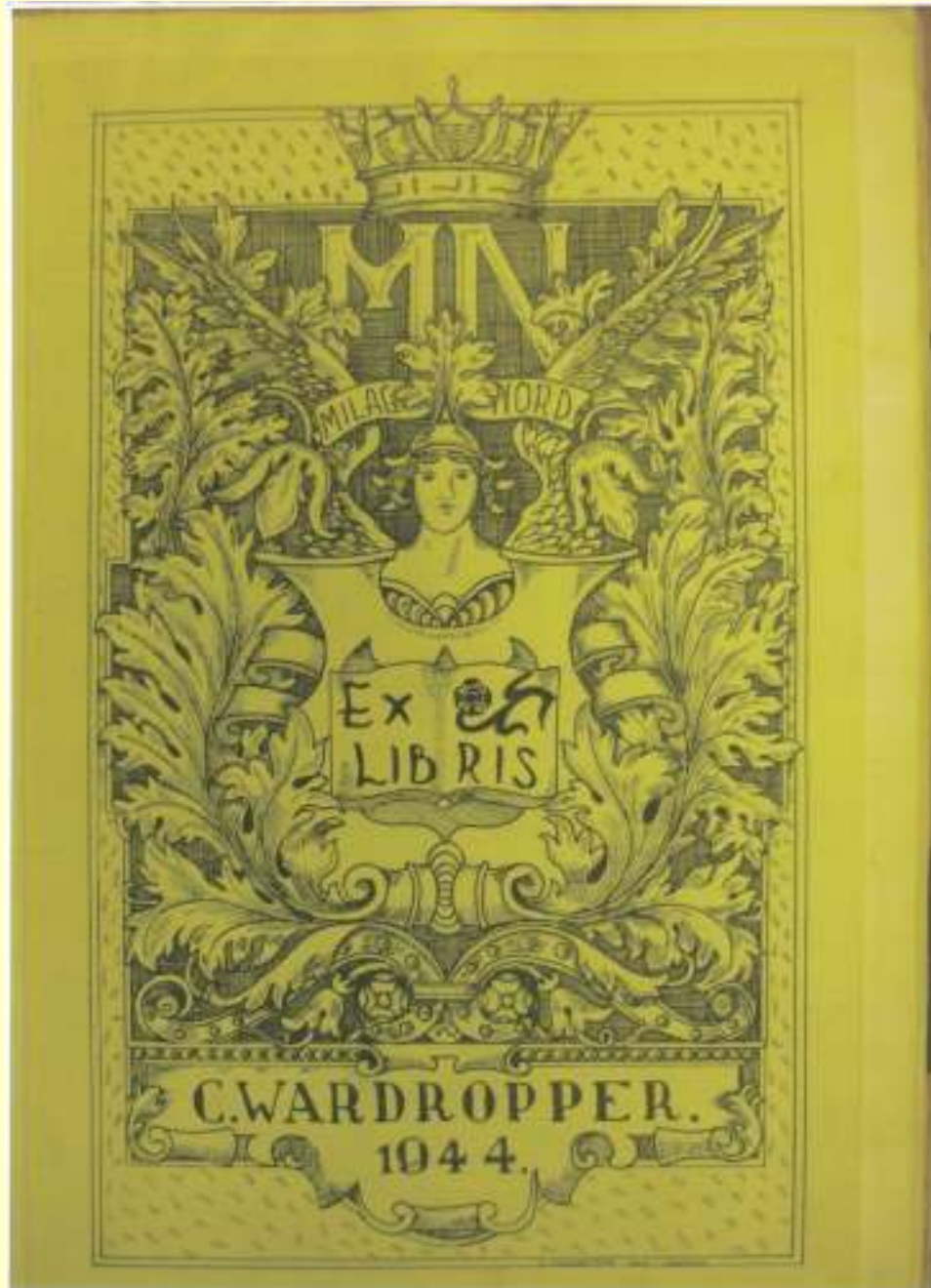


**A German soldier, W. Nitz, held prisoner at Shap, Cumbria**



**The front page of C Wardropper's sketch book.**

Time dragged by for PoW's. They found many different ways to fill their time. One Cumbrian PoW (prisoner of war) kept a detailed sketch book: C. Wardropper was a merchant seaman, not a soldier, but still ended up a prisoner when the Germans sank his ship and picked up the survivors. He spent the rest of the war as a PoW in Germany.



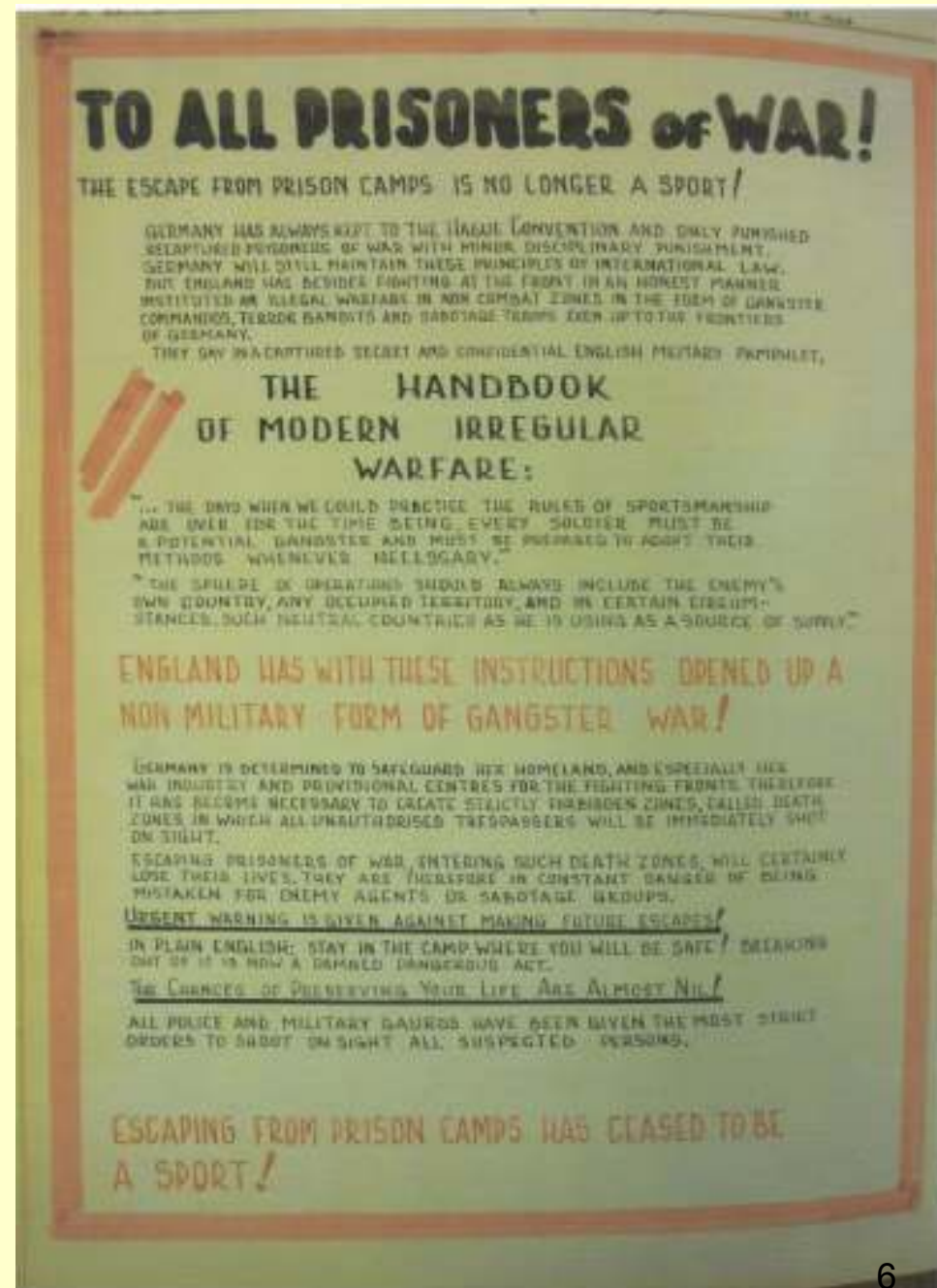
This page is a pencil drawing.

With a lot of time on their hands, the men found things to do.

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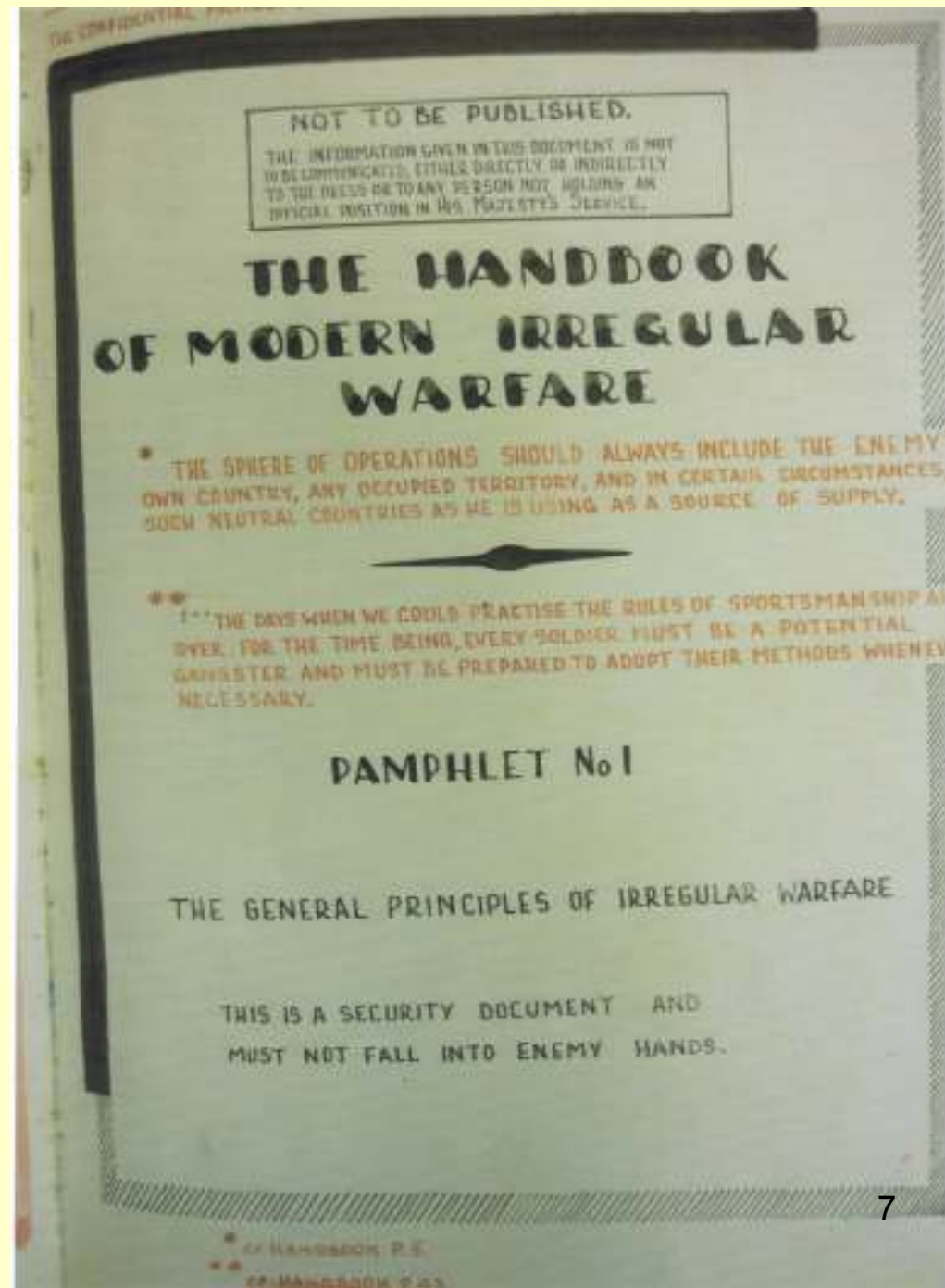
Some men dreamed of escaping back home, but Wardropper included in his sketch book a deadly serious warning given to would be escapers by the Germans.

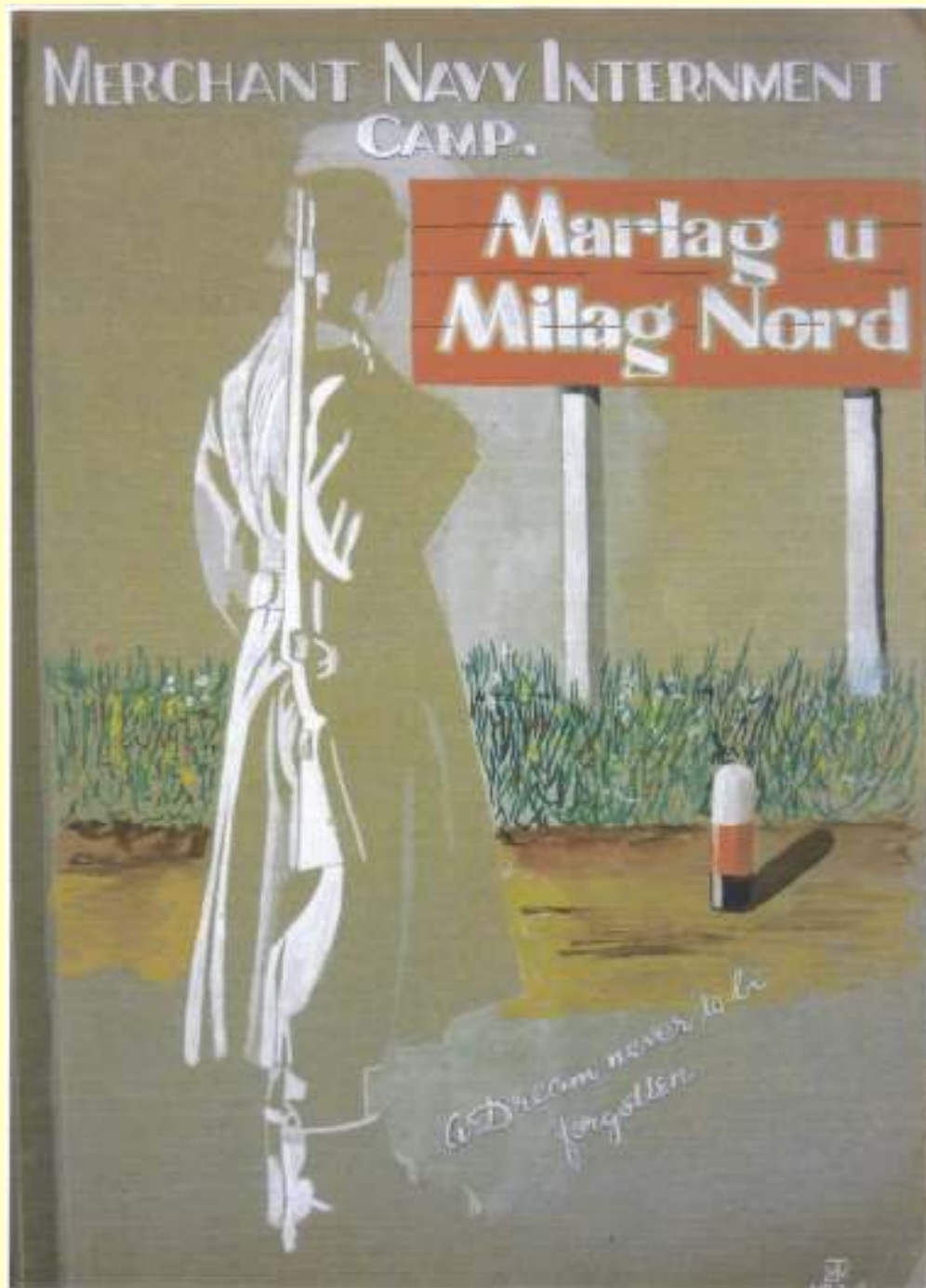


Wardropper's sketch book also contains this "Top Secret" plan for irregular warfare. His German guards would have been very angry if they had seen this.

**"Pamphlet No. 1" from C Wardropper's sketch book.**

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The art work is  
really rather good.

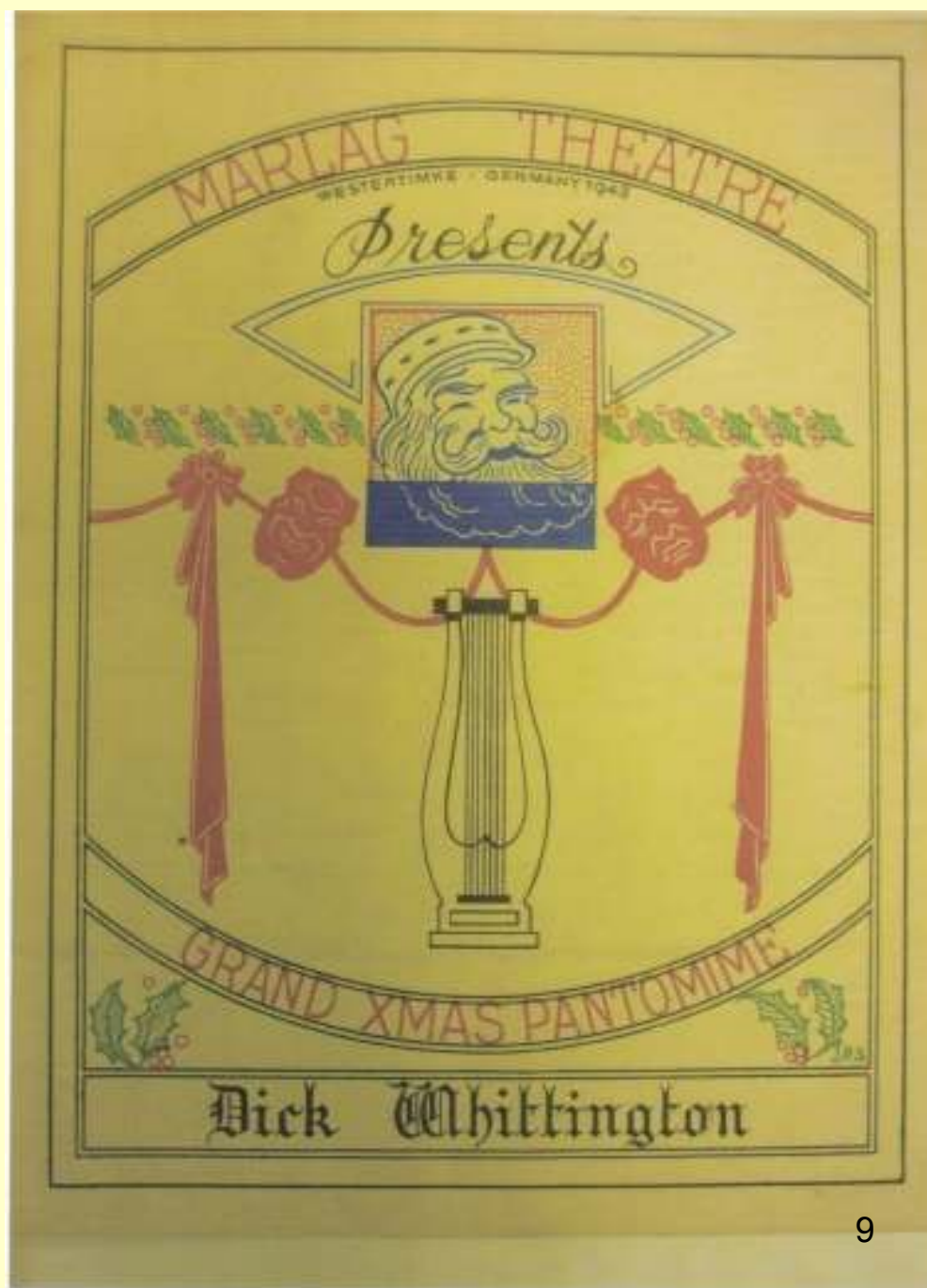
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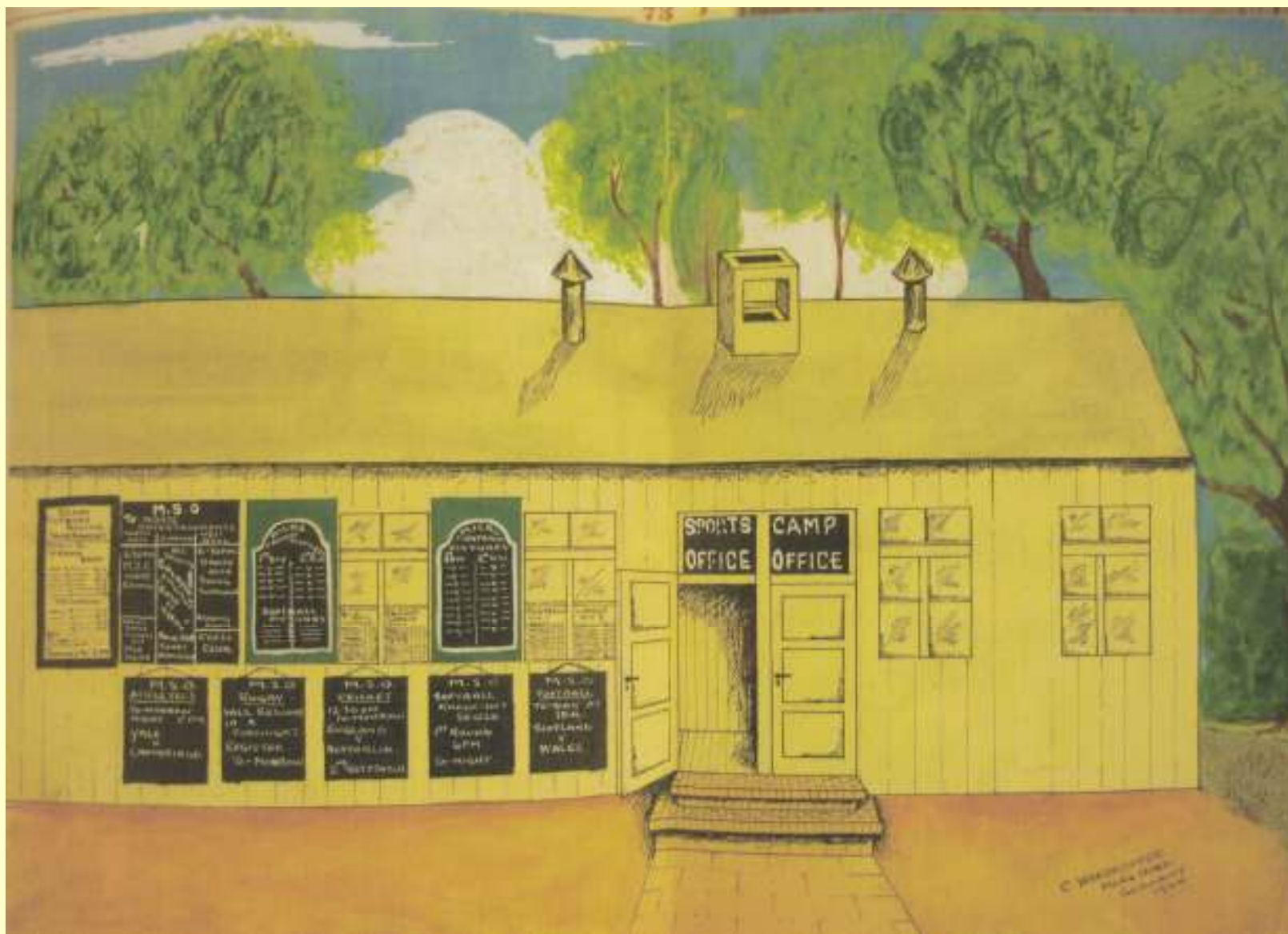


Most of the time, being a POW (Prisoner of War) was just boring. At Christmas, the men often put on elaborate shows to keep themselves busy. Here is Wardropper's poster for the 1943 Christmas pantomime.

**Poster from C Wardropper's sketch book.**

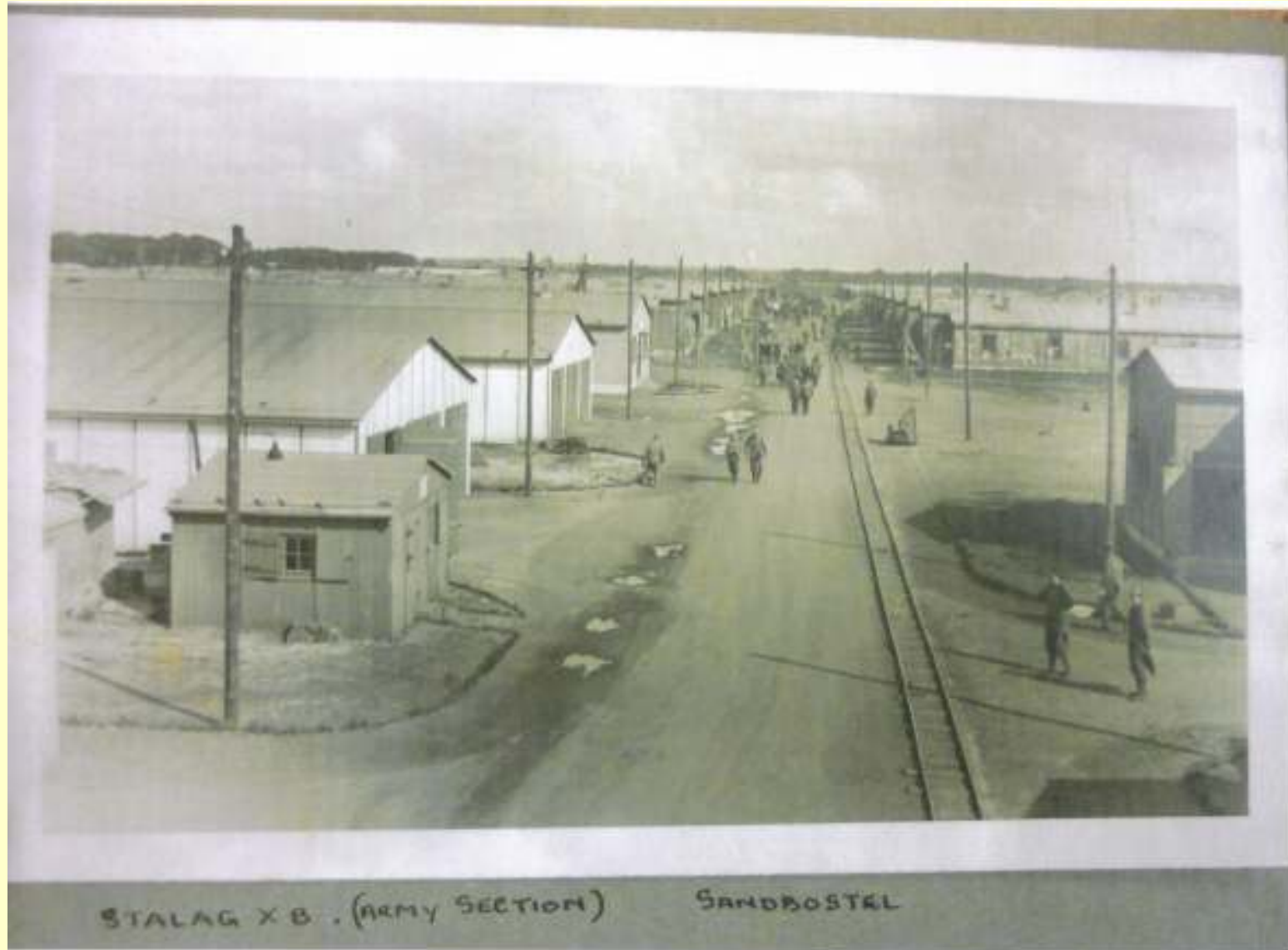
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Many of the pictures in Wardropper's book were drawn by other men. This is one he drew himself

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Here is a photo, found in Wardropper's book, of a POW camp. Is it the one he was in?



Kriegsgefangenenlager

Datum: 14 5 41

My dear host. You will have by now received my last post-card  
So that you no longer think I am lazy! I have received your very  
welcome and excellent parcel. The bed-jacket was especially useful as I  
have been in bed for a day or two and it helped to keep me warm. Really, my  
dear, there is nothing I need now and I do wish you would not spend money  
on me that you must need yourself. Maarten is still in hospital but should  
be going home soon now and we hope to go at the same time. Also Hineke  
of St. Bramble she does not write now but I think she is well. I am having  
letters from my wife regularly now and both she and Timothy seem to be  
thriving. Thank Heaven. Now do be good and take care of yourself and please  
do not send things to me that I know must be expensive and  
difficult to get and knowing you I am sure that you will be  
looking after yourself! All my love and thanks, John Stealy.

Here is card written by a Cumbrian POW to a Belgian woman who had helped him. POW's were only allowed to write postcards, which were carefully checked by the guards before being sent.



14-5-41

*My dear Wat, you will by now have received my last post card, so you no longer think I am lazy! I have received your very excellent and welcome parcel. The bed-jacket was especially useful as I have been in bed for a day or two and it helped to keep me warm. Really, my dear, there is nothing I need now and I wish you would not spend money on me that you must need yourself. Madden is still in hospital but should be going home soon now and we hope to go at the same time. Also Lieutenant Colonel & the others are not here now but I think are well. I am having letters from my wife regularly now and both she and Timothy seem to be thriving, thank heaven. Now do be good and take care of yourself and do not send things to me that I know must be expensive and difficult to get and knowing you I am sure that you will be going without yourself.*

*All my love and thanks, John Heslop*

**Here is the text of the card. John Heslop was writing to Mlle de Rouville (“Wat”) who had met and helped him earlier at Lille. At the end of the war, Wat came to live for a couple of years at the home of John and his wife, near Cockermouth.**

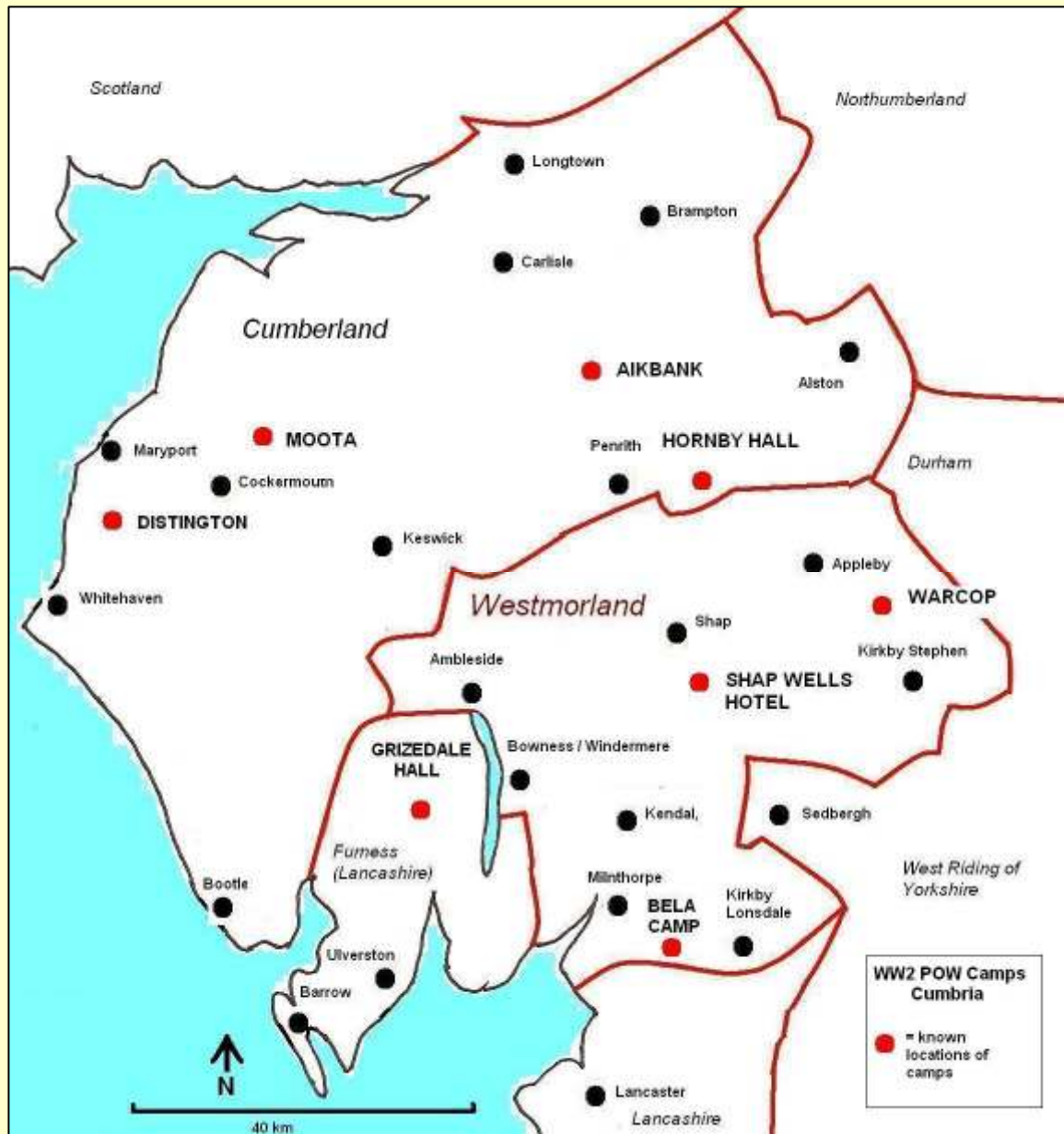
**John Heslop was a doctor, and had joined up to serve as an army doctor.**

**You can find out more about this story at <http://www.radiowaves.co.uk/story/7624> 13**

# POW Camps in Cumbria

By 1945, there were a lot of German POW's in Britain. Many camps were set up in Cumbria: it's not difficult to see why the Government thought Cumbria was a good place to put POW camps.

I have discovered the whereabouts of eight Cumbrian camps, but there may have been more.



This is from a recording of a Kendal woman talking about her experience in the war on the family farm, near Kendal. This was recorded in an interview around the year 2000.

*A. We never had any Land Girls, we had Prisoners of War. We'd one for a long time, Alfred. He was German and he spoke perfect English, better than we did, and he . . . It was a shame really to think that he was fast here and couldn't go anywhere or . . . .*

*Q. Did he live with you?*

*A. Yes, he lived in with us. . . .he was a confectioner (maker of fancy cakes) . .*

*Q. So he did baking for you?*

*A. He did baking for us, shouldn't have done, wasn't supposed to. Everybody kept quiet. And we dressed him up in a pair o' me brother's grey flannels as they wore then and a shirt . . . . And a sports jacket on. And we called him Alfred and nobody knew who he was.*

*Q. So he joined in family life?*

*A. Oh yes, we just tret him like as if he was one o' me brothers.*



Cumbria Archive Centre, Kendal WS/CONS/Shap POW Photos

## What was to be done with German PoW's?

As the war came to a close, there were more and more prisoners, and they were less and less likely to try to escape.

The solution to the problem was to put the PoW's to work.

They actually preferred to be working rather than sitting in a camp doing nothing. Work gave them a bit of freedom, and they were even given a small amount of pay. Because Germany was in state of chaos after 1945, they were not allowed to go home, so they stayed on, some until 1948.

Some of them even met and married local girls, as you can hear in this sound clip.



Follow link on our website to hear the story of how a local young woman married a PoW



# Did any German PoW's try to escape?

There was an attempt, in 1940, by some Luftwaffe men to escape from Shap Wells. They got to Carlisle, where they stole a plane, but they only got as far as Great Yarmouth, on the east coast, where they were arrested.

This document is about another escape attempt, five years later.

	<div style="text-align: right;">160</div> <div style="text-align: right;">4<sup>th</sup> April 1945.</div> <p>14.</p> <p>R. Wilson reports capturing the following named prisoners of war, circulated as escaped from Featherstone Park P.O.W. camp, near Tyne Bridge, Alston.</p>
<p>es.</p> <p>Recapture of escaped P.O.W.</p> <p>Handed over to military escort</p> <p>12 M/V 1/4/45.</p> <p>it</p>	<p>about 9/10 on 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1945.</p> <p><u>FRANZKE, Herbert</u> Luftwaffe Spl Class</p> <p><u>KIRCHDORFER, Josef</u> "</p> <p><u>OSINSKI, Adolf</u> Army.</p>

## **Did any German PoW's try to escape?**

***4th April 1945: PC Wilson reports capturing the following named prisoners-of-war, circulated as escaped from Featherstone Park POW Camp, near Tyne Bridge, Alston, about 9pm on 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1945. Handed over to military escort, 12 m/n, 1/4/45.***

In February 2005, Joseph Kirchdorfer (one of the escaped Luftwaffe pilots) contacted Northumbria Police, requesting more information about his recapture. The Police got in touch with Carlisle Record Office. Until then, the Record Office had no knowledge of the incident. Luckily, they had the Alston Police Station Occurrence Book (from which the paragraph above is taken), and were able to give Mr Kirchdorfer the details. Mr Kirchdorfer gave the Record Office his own account of what happened. He wrote that:

***Eight prisoners escaped from a camp at Haltwhistle, Northumberland, in the early hours of April 1st. They split into groups; one of them drowned trying to cross the river Tyne. Joseph Kirchdorfer and two others followed the railway line to Alston, looking for an airfield to steal a plane from. They did not realise they were climbing into the hills and further away from any airfields.***

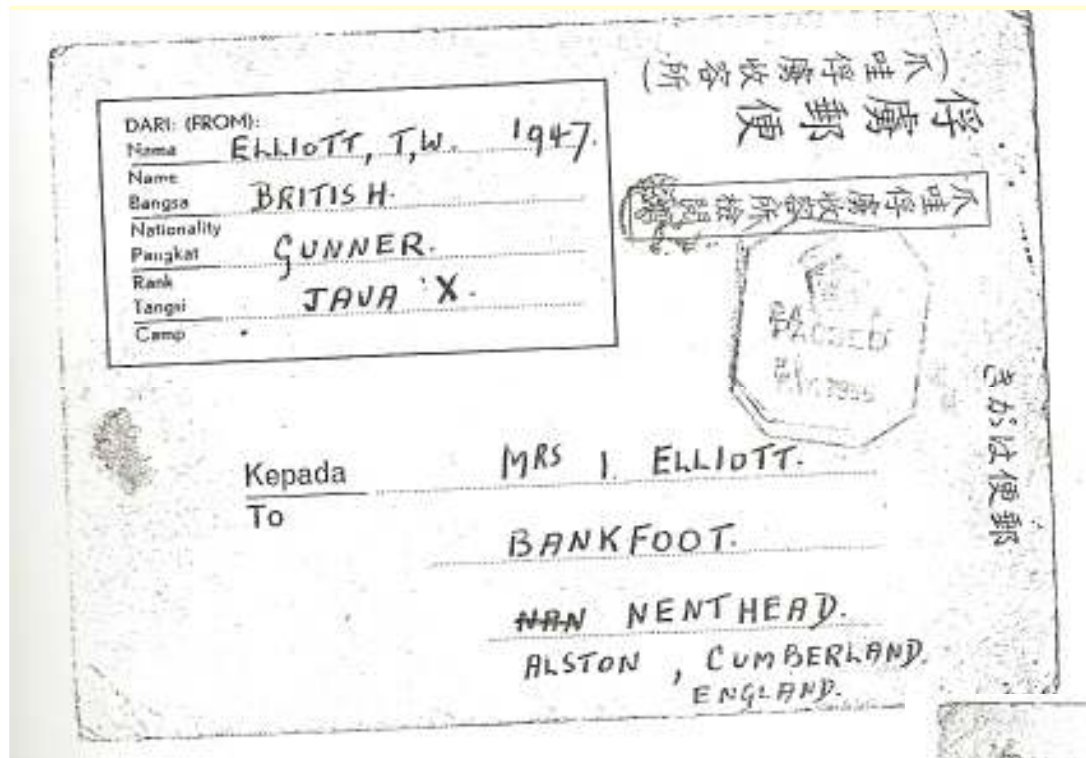
# Prisoners of the Japanese

It was not pleasant to be a PoW in Britain or Germany, but at least the treatment the men received was humane. Conditions in Japanese PoW camps was far worse. The few details known about one Cumbrian give us just a glimpse of how difficult things were for the men and their families at home in Cumbria.

## Nenthead

Mrs Isabella Elliott, Nenthead, was informed by the Red Cross that her son, Gunner Thomas William Elliott, was a prisoner of war in Japanese hands. This was the first word of him since he embarked for foreign service in November 1941.

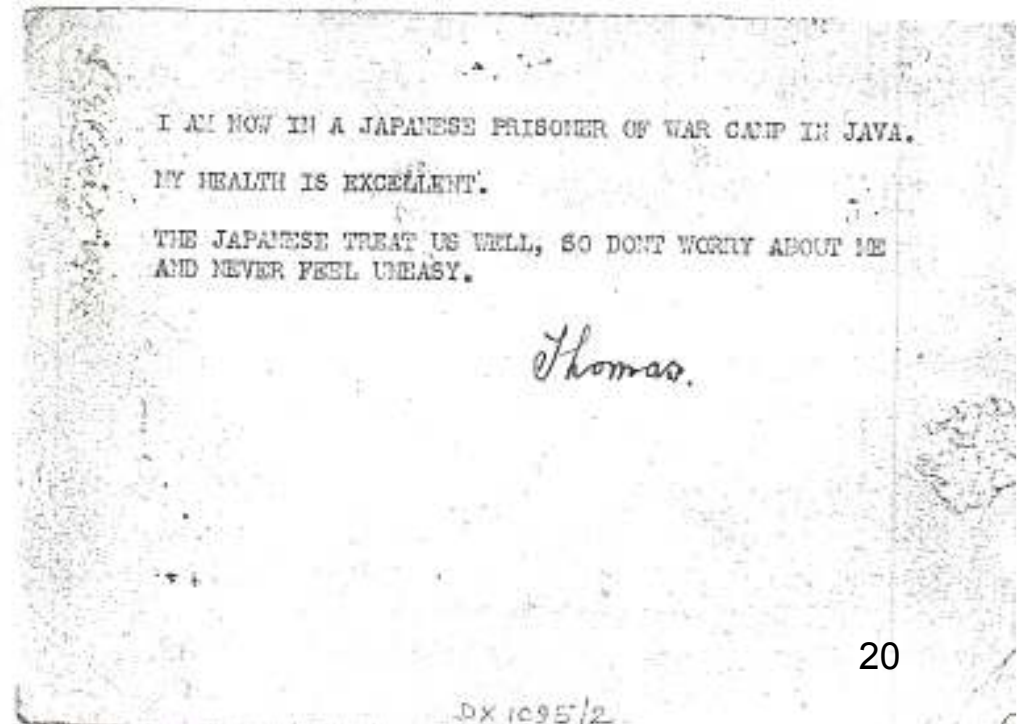
Cumberland Newspaper, 1943.



This is the only letter that Isabella Elliott received from her son while he was a PoW in Japanese hands

Some time after the war ended, she learnt that he had died in a PoW camp in Java, in 1944.

Cumbria Record Office, Carlisle DX 1095/2





## FATHER OF FOURTEEN CHILDREN

### Workington Man Charged With Being Deserter

Believed to be the father of Cumberland's largest family, Private R. Hastings, of Workington, attached to a pioneer battalion, came before a Workington Magistrate on Saturday as a deserter. He was remanded to await a military escort. "I asked for leave," he said, "and when it was not granted, I took it."

Hastings has 14 children, all living, and four of them are with the fighting forces. A fifth, aged 25, registered on the day his father was arrested.

## A different type of wartime prisoner

The war meant a whole range of new laws that people were supposed to obey. Quite a few who broke these laws ended up in jail.

Every man up to the age of 40 was liable for conscription. Mr Hastings seems to have not wanted to be in the army, so ended up under arrest.

Was he a prisoner of war?

Whitehaven News, 2nd May, 1940

Cumbria Record Office and Local Studies Library Whitehaven

## The last word

Wilhelm Hackl was a German, a PoW at Bela Camp. In 2005 he wrote an article for the Westmorland Gazette, in which he emphasised the humanity he was shown here in Cumbria.

*“Here we were treated as humans, free from threats and humiliation.”*

Wilhelm worked in a quarry, near Coniston. A few days after he started there, one of the English workers

*“Albert, during a lunch break, came over and gave me a bottle filled with milk, saying: ‘From the missus.’ This happened every day, just 14 months after the end of the war. I am certain his ‘missus’ filled the bottle daily for Albert’s lunch break. This great gesture towards a former enemy rekindled in me the belief in humanity. Even now, 58 years later, a special warmth flows through me whenever I think of Albert.”*

# Cumbria at War, 1939-1945

*A Role Play Exercise in seven chapters for use in secondary schools.*

## **Chapters:**

1. Introduction: VE Day, Cumbria, May 1945.
2. In Uniform: those who served in uniform in Cumbria.
3. Working: those who worked in Cumbria to help win the war.
4. Home Supplies: how Cumbrians got what they needed in the war.
5. Away from Home: evacuees, and Cumbrians serving overseas.
6. Missing Home: prisoners of war, Cumbrians and Germans in Cumbria.
7. Not Coming Home: remembering those Cumbrians who fell in the war.