



Prisoners of War

"I must explain, in addition to our organised sports we had a dance band, a jazz band and an orchestra. We also had weekly shows and a very active drama group, putting on a play every few weeks. Our camp ... had many professional people from the entertainment world, all competing to do something to relieve their boredom"

Private Thomas William Good, Prisoner of War in Stammlager XXA in Poland

Prisoners of War (POWs) were captured on the field of battle during the First and Second World Wars. Many infantry troops were forced to surrender on the battlefield, whilst some Airmen were captured after being shot down and crashing in enemy territory. The POWs were often detained in camps with poor living conditions of insufficient food and hard labour.

Despite the hardships of the camps, POWs still managed to find ways to occupy and entertain themselves. They set up different committee boards to organise sporting events such as football, cricket and boxing. They also

worked on their education by running courses in various subjects, including languages, maths, economics and science.

Specific entertainment facilities were built by the POWs in some camps. Prisoners would use the theatres they had constructed to perform concerts and plays for their fellow inmates and captors. Costumes were borrowed from within the camp, and were sometimes made from the actors' bed sheets. As the camps were largely segregated by gender, some POWs dressed up as women to perform on stage.

In the later years of the Second World War, POWs could receive gifts from outside their camps. The Red Cross and YMCA sent packages containing daily necessities such as sweets and cigarettes, and supplies such as textbooks and sports equipment were provided for the prisoners' pastimes. People from home could also send letters to the POWs to support them through their imprisonment.



16 soldiers stood outside of a POW hut at Stalag VIII B in Germany. This photo was sent from Private David Craig of the 4th Battalion of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry to his mum. He was captured as a POW in 1940.

