Hallmuir prisoner of war camp Lockerbie

Why is the Hallmuir POW camp an important part of Dumfries & Galloway's history?

Chloe Murley – Lockerbie Academy

The Hallmuir prisoner of war camp was built in 1942. It was originally made to house up to 450 German and Italian prisoners of war during WW2. Two years after the war, in 1947 after the Germans and the Italians were allowed to leave and return to their countries, it was used as a home for over 400 Ukrainian conscripts who had fought against the USSR. The fate for these people, had they returned to Ukraine, would likely to have been brutal treatment by the Soviet authorities. One of the forty huts that were used in the camp had been transformed into a place of worship for the Italians and when the Ukrainians were housed there, after the war, they turned it into a place of worship for the Ukraine Orthodox faith. The Hallmuir prisoner of war camp is historically significant as it provided housing for the prisoners along with food, water and medical care. They made sure the prisoners of war were being treated humanely and made sure to follow the Geneva Convention. The Geneva Convention is a list that establishes standards for the humanitarian treatment of individuals such as prisoners of war during armed conflict. In this essay I will be looking at the history behind the Prisoner of war camp in Lockerbie, how the prisoners were treated and the effects this camp had on the local area. For this essay I will be using websites and news articles to do my research.

The prisoners were looked after in line with the Geneva Convention and the rules were followed to the best of their abilities. There was great respect for this convention immediately after the war as Britian had just fought in a conflict whereby many of its own people had been subject to treatment that went against the Geneva convention e.g. prisoners of war of the Japanese. The experience of anyone who resisted the Nazi occupation and the treatment of minorities by the Nazis were also widely known at that time in Britain. The people who were accommodated at Hallmuir had shelter, they were provided with wooden barracks which included communal living areas, dining areas and facilities for activities. They were given food which included a diet of bread, potatoes, vegetables, meat or fish and stew. The prisoners participated in growing vegetables in the gardens to avoid food shortages and participating in work programs that provided extra food. The prisoners were given work such as agricultural work, maintenance work and other labour jobs. They were allowed to play games such as football or do drawings to pass the time. This treatment is in huge contrast to POW camps in Japan where they suffered lots of mistreatments. Japan was one of the countries who did not agree with or sign the Geneva Convention, so they don't have a set list of rules they have to follow. Most of the prisoner in Japanese POW camps were given less than a cup of filthy rice daily, they suffered malnutrition and malaria and dysentery were common. The Japanese army made over 70,000 American and Filipino POWs walk one hundred kilometres to reach a train that would take them to a POW camp. They also beat the prisoners and killed them for unjustified reasons as the Japanese felt they were a superior race. This tells us that the UK treated the POWs a lot more humanely than other countries such as Japan. In WW2, more than 170,000 British POW were taken by German and Italian forces. Many soldiers felt ashamed of being forced to surrender on the battlefield, the Geneva Convention rules were not always followed but the German and Italians treated the British POWs reasonably well, especially compared to how they treated other enemies of the

state. The food was rationed fairly but there were shortages, and the men had to work hard labour, but they weren't mistreated.

After WW2, the Italian and German POWs were repatriated, which means they were allowed to leave and return to their countries. Although a few of the prisoners died at the camp, the majority were allowed to leave at the end of the war. The Italian POWs were often released earlier than the German POWs as Italy switched sides during the war and was considered an Ally by the end of the war. It also took longer for the German POWs to be released from the camp as Germany needed a lot of reconstruction, and the Allies were cautious about sending them back to quickly. They were sent onto trains that took them to ports where they could get on boats which took them back to their homes. Before being sent home POWs were processed at collection points or camps so they could be accounted for and to prepare for their return to their countries. This included health checks and documentation to make sure they were fit for travel, and their identities were verified. However, some Italian and German POWs decided not to return home for many reasons. Hallmuir POWs opinions on returning home varied as German POWs sometimes chose to stay in Britain due to homes being damaged or for families and friends, they had built there during and after the war. Some Italians, however, were forced into labour and later declared "civilian workers" against their will, prolonging their time in detention.

The POW camp had many benefits on the local community which includes economically and socially. The POW camp was economically beneficial because it created jobs for the locals as they were able to work at the camp with security, camp administration and support services which helped the unemployment of many people during the war. The prisoners also helped with farming, growing food and helped fill labour job positions. The POW camp also helped the community socially as they were able to show and explain their different cultures, foods, languages and traditions. The interactions also helped humanise the prisoners and reduce hostility between the enemies. Some prisoners and locals may have formed friendships or connections and learnt about their experiences. The camp also helped the prisoners mentally recover from the trauma of the war; it was like a haven for them.

The POW camp is important to be researched, talked about and remembered because like all important history we can try and prevent things from happening again like WW2. The impact Hallmuir Prisoner of War camp had on Dumfries and Galloway history is the presence of the camp had an economic and social benefit; it also reflects how during a war the community can help provide for those in need. The interactions with those from different countries helped break the barrier and bring people closer together in general. The camp is a reminder of the people who were imprisoned there and what happened and the effects it had on the overall war effort. Among the local communities in Dumfries and Galloway there are many surnames that stand out as being German or Ukrainian. These are the descendants of the people who remained and they have gone on to build their lives in Dumfries and Galloway and have become part of the community. The camp is also one of the highlights of the Doors Open day in Dumfries where people can gain free access to historical sites. It is entirely run by volunteers who are descended from the very prisoners that were housed there.

Hallmuir POW Camp holds significant historical importance for several reasons. Its existence shows of wartime rules and the treatment of POWs. One of the most important aspects of

Hallmuir POW Camp is its role in the treatment of POWs. During World War II, the Geneva Convention stopped any mistreatment to the soldiers, and they were protected. The treatment of prisoners at Hallmuir was generally in line with the standards set by the Geneva Convention, which is significant because it shows that Britain, in contrast to the enemies they fought, can follow the laws and even treat the prisoners with respect in a time of war. This humane treatment of the POWs showed their Allies that they were committed to protecting their soldiers in a time of need and greatly helped the war effort. It also alludes to the views towards the USSR, which had been an ally during World War 2. The fact that these former prisoners, who had been enemies of Britain, were allowed to stay shows that there are suspicions about how they would be treated when they arrived back to the USSR. Positive relationships had obviously been formed with the prisoners and moving them back to the USSR, which by 1947 was being viewed as the new enemy, as the Cold War started to take shape, shows that Hallmuir stands as a source of evidence of Britain's new relationship with the USSR in the post war period.

The camp housed thousands of German soldiers, many of whom were separated from their families and homes. Their experiences, struggles, and bravery to life in captivity showed us that no matter where a person is from, in Britian, and in Dumfries and Galloway, people can come together and form a community.

Sources of information:

https://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/lockerbie/ukrainianchapel/index.html

https://scottishcivictrust.org.uk/advice-support/case-studies/ukrainian-pow-chapel

https://www.tracesofwar.com/sights/82613/Building-Hallmuir-Prisoner-of-War-Camp.htm

https://littleukrainianblog.com/travel/ukrainian-pow-chapel/

https://www.tracesofwar.com/sights/82613/Building-Hallmuir-Prisoner-of-War-Camp.htm

https://www.durham.ac.uk/ukraine/academic-comment-and-expertise/2022/03/how-a-makeshift-pow-chapel-from-wwii-continues-to-connect-ukrainians-and-britons/

https://www.trove.scot/place/247031

https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/local-news/dumfriesshire-rural-members-friends-visit-35330077

https://www.heritageandhistory.com/contents1a/2010/09/hallmuir-ukrainian-pow-chapel/

https://portal.historicenvironment.scot/apex/f?p=1505:300:::::VIEWTYPE,VIEWREF:designation,LB49592

https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001ng22

https://www.annefrank.org/en/timeline/152/prisoners-of-war-and-internment-camps-in-japan/

https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/what-life-was-like-for-pows-in-east-asia-during-the-second-world-war

https://www.army.mil/article/179395/under_the_enemys_yoke_the_pow_experience_in_japan