

Colditz Memoires Donated to Museum

The CMEA recently acquired two copies of the book *Detour: The Story of Oflag IVC*, signed by the editor, [Lt J.E.R. Wood, MC](#) from Mr John Campbell of Winnipeg. The books will be donated to the Canadian Military Engineers Museum in Gagetown.

Jerry Wood was a Royal Canadian Engineer platoon commander at Dieppe. For his actions on the beach, he was awarded a Military Cross. Unfortunately, he along with 128 other Sappers, was taken prisoner after the fighting ended. Initially, he was taken to Oflag VII B in Eichstatt, Germany, about 60 kilometres from Munich. Later that year, along with 64 other prisoners, he made an escape through a tunnel, but like all the rest, he was re-captured. As a 'dangerous PoW', he was then sent to 450 kilometres northeast to Colditz Castle, the inescapable Oflag IVC, near Leipzig where he spent most of the rest of the war.

From the dust cover:

DETOUR

THE STORY OF OFLAG IVC

edited by

LIEUT. J.E.R. WOOD, MC

Royal Canadian Engineers

OFLAG IVC was the German idea of an escape-proof camp for captured officers. Situated on the top of a hill, it was the only one of its kind in Germany. The prisoners in the camp were treated by the Germans as criminals and were composed of interservice and international units: that is to say, Army, Navy, Air Force – Great Britain and the Dominions, American, French, Polish, Czechs, Dutch and Serbian. The majority were officers who had escaped several times. It was a very strong escape-minded camp with more guards than prisoners. Four daily roll calls were instituted instead of the usual two and there were four gates to the usual one. In 1943, the International Y.M.C.A. sent a war diary to the Canadians in which to write,

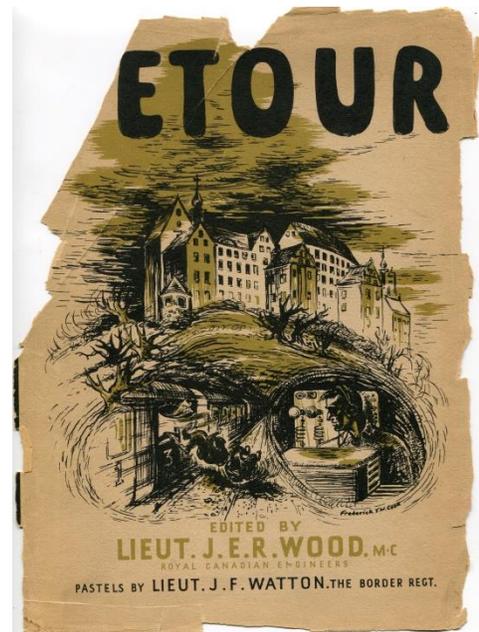
sketch, paste photographs and so on. The narratives in Detour were selected from over one hundred odd originals written in the war diary. The pastels, drawn in the camp, were executed with materials sent by the Red Cross. The idea of a memorial volume originated with the suggestion of the men wanting to make some sort of contribution to the Red Cross, whose food saved them from becoming as weak as those unfortunates at Buchenwald and whose gifts of sporting equipment, reading matter and educational matter enabled them to keep up a certain physical fitness and save them from going "wonky" mentally. "The morale of the camp was something that had to be seen to be believed ... We had daily B.B.C. communiques by virtue of an illicit wireless that had survived every German effort to discover it The exciting days towards the end ... that Americans started shelling the village Monday morning at about 9 o'clock, two GIs came through the gate Thursday we flew to England ..."

While he was at Colditz, a fellow PoW, [Lt WA Millar](#), the other RCE officer sent to Colditz, suggested prisoners use the books from the Y.M.C.A. to record their experiences for posterity.

Jerry became the editor of a collection of the stories that he was able to have published in 1946 while he was still in Britain. Lt John Watton, a British infantry officer in the Border Regiment captured at illustrated the book with pastel portraits and cartoons.

Once the book was published, Jerry presented a personal copy to then-Princess Elizabeth and it remains in the Royal Collection. Other copies were presented to the King, Mr Churchill, prime ministers of all the Dominions, General Crerar and many other personalities of the time. Most of all, Lt Wood expressed an undying debt of gratitude to the Canadian Red Cross for the food boxes sent to Germany for our PoWs and donated all proceeds of the book to them.

Not to alone in making a contribution, Jerry recounted his experience being shackled by the Germans in retaliation for Canadians having shackled prisoners. Unknown to Jerry and the other prisoners, Canada and Germany engaged in a trans-Atlantic spat over the shackles. The back and forth continued until late December 1943 until the Red Cross stepped in and stopped the practice entirely.



Copies of the book came into our procession through the generosity of Mr Campbell. Jerry had presented two signed copies to his father, Kenneth Campbell, a Canadian insurance executive posted to London in 1939. Mr Campbell volunteered as an Air Raid Warden and Red Cross volunteer. He had a special interest in assisting returning Canadian PoWs and met Jerry Wood through that effort. He brought both copies home when he returned to Toronto in 1950. Unfortunately, one of the copies suffered slight water damage during the floods that accompanied [Hurricane Hazel](#) in 1954. The other copy remains in good condition. Both copies have been sent to the CME Museum at Base Gagetown, NB.

The CMEA is grateful for these donations and the Museum has sent an official thank you to Mr Campbell.

LIEUT J. E. R. WOOD, MC

Royal Canadian Engineers

As the Editor of this book, he has made such a good job of his thumb-nail sketches of the various contributors, I am submitting this one of him.

Jerry, a mining engineer and a farmer from Vancouver, B.C. Well over 6 feet, red hair, and a face that might well be taken for a piece of the Rocky Mountains.

Jerry never let up in Germany and in a most extraordinary way mixed studying with escaping. Jerry was often to be seen disappearing into a tunnel with tools in one hand a German Grammar in the other. In this way, he wasted no time. An inveterate attender of lectures on any subject whatsoever, he was always to be seen well to the fore, notebook in hand.

This book is a great tribute to his perseverance, as once having selected his victim, he got no peace until he came across. Jerry is a great character, and one of the most popular personalities of the camp.

G. M. Pemberton-How Capt R.A.S.C.