

# HOMELAND STORIES: Enemies Within

## Character Education

- Distinguish between PoWs, internees and refugees
- Relate to the difficulties of dealing fairly with enemy aliens
- Discern differences in enemy and Allied escape stories
- Encourage inquiry into value systems

## Facts

- There were 26 prisoner of war camps in Canada of which 12 were in Ontario
- During WWII Canada interned over 35,000 individuals
- There were approximately 600 escape attempts from Canadian PoW camps
- 10,000 men in the Veterans Guard of Canada, mainly WWI veterans, worked in PoW camps

## Before the Reading

- Distinguish between a prisoner of war, internee and a refugee using Afghanistan as an example
- Canada was far away from the major battlefronts of WWII. Why did it have camps and PoWs?
- Discuss the pros and cons of older men, WWI veterans, guarding young WWII prisoners
- Look up the Geneva Convention and what was required in the handling of WWII prisoners

## Reading – “Collar the Lot!” Winston Churchill

As WWII heated up in 1940 the tides of fortune turned against Britain. Food shortages, fears of enemy columns forming within the country, the risks of PoWs running rampant among the defenceless homeland population and threats of invasion by a steamrolling enemy converged to create panic.

## HOMELAND MINUTES



*The Messerschmitt Bf 109E-4 of Oblt Franz von Werra shot down on the 5 September 1940, pictured at Winchet Hill, Love's Farm, Marsden, Kent  
Fallen Might, June 1983 issue of Aeroplane Monthly  
[www.aeroplanemonthly.com](http://www.aeroplanemonthly.com)*

## The One That Got Away

*Oberleutnant Franz von Werra, a pilot shot down during the Battle of Britain was in transit to a remote PoW camp on the north shore of Lake Superior in January 1941, when he decided to jump off the moving train while still within reach of then neutral U.S.A. Assisted by fellow PoWs, who included Walter Manhard, he managed to thaw the window out of which he would dive head first.*

Von Werra jumped successfully while the train was in the area of Smith Falls; he was only 30 miles from the St. Lawrence River. From a map he obtained at a local garage, he noted that the nearest point to cross the river was Prescott. The river was frozen and in the dark-



Prime Minister Winston Churchill

After the hurried evacuation of troops from Dunkirk with a flotilla of hope, small ships braving the Straits of Dover, newly elected Prime Minister Winston Churchill desperate to quell the rising tide of fear issued the edict, "Collar the lot!". He meant all foreign nationals connected to Axis powers.

Up to that time, tribunals set up to assess enemy aliens had worked rapidly to distinguish among those who were at high and low risk to Britain. The large number of refugees from Hitler's Reich were predominantly classified in the B and C categories—slight or no risk to Britain.

In July 1940, as the German Luftwaffe pummeled Britain, the will to discern among classes of enemy aliens wore thin. Anyone of German, Austrian or Italian heritage was rounded up indiscriminately to be shipped off to the far reaches of the Empire. Former inmates of Nazi concentration camps and political refugees from Hitler's Germany found themselves on the same boats as Nazi prisoners of war—an uncomfortable mix.

Canada, as a true child of the Commonwealth, scurried to find places to house what they were told were the evil foes of Britain. With retrofits and new constructions, Fort Henry, government army training grounds, experimental farms, facilities for wayward boys, TB sanatoria, abandoned saw mills and prisons were turned into facilities for PoWs.

When the first boatloads arrived, Canada was almost ready. In some cases PoWs assisted with the last phases of the construction process. All was going well but for the fact that quite a few PoWs did not look like the dangerous Nazi prisoners of war Canadian authorities had been told to expect. The most obvious clues were men in rabbinical collars and those with the locks of orthodox Jews.

It became quickly apparent that British authorities had allowed Jewish and political refugees to slide into the prisoner of war and dangerous enemy alien compliment. What to do? The Canadian government resisted becoming involved in the screening and clearance of those who they were holding for Britain and they certainly did not want to assume the refugees into their own population.

Canadian authorities eventually effected a rough sort and by June 1941, designated some PoWs as refugees. They were forced to these actions to quell the rising tensions

ness he saw the lights of Ogdensburg on the US side. Unfortunately once he'd made it to the middle of the river he found an unfrozen gap too wide to bridge. In a deserted holiday camp back on the Canadian side he found a row boat which he succeeded in pushing to the river with a great deal of effort. This time he made it across.

As soon as he could von Werra handed himself into the police who handed him over to US Immigration Authorities. He also contacted the German Consul in New York. While British and Canadian authorities negotiated for his return, von Werra secretly stayed at the German Vice-Consul's home and then using a chain of German sympathizers made his way to the Mexican border, through South America to Rio de Janeiro, then via Barcelona to Rome and Germany.

Von Werra, a hero to the German nation for his daring escape, went back into active service. On October, 25, 1941, flying from a base in Holland his engine failed over the sea. No traces were ever found. *Oberleutnant* von Werra never did earn the Iron Cross that Hitler had bestowed upon him in anticipation of his future flying achievements.



German prisoners of war marching through the streets of Gravenhurst on their way from the train station to the prisoner of war camp  
[www.pastforward.ca/perspectives/feb\\_152002.htm](http://www.pastforward.ca/perspectives/feb_152002.htm)

caused by ardent Nazis taunting the Jewish refugees and others who did not share their enthusiasm for the Reich's actions.

Many of the worst Nazis were sent to the former TB sanatorium at Gravenhurst. When the citizens of Gravenhurst saw uniformed German officers with medals gleaming on their chests marching in formation through town from the rail station to the PoW camp, the war hit the home front with a wallop.



Veterans Guard Canada  
Cap Badge

## HOMELAND MINUTES:

Veterans Guard of Canada (from Canadian Military History Gateway) Corps of First World War veterans between the ages of 40 and 65, formed in May 1940, for full-time and reserve service during the Second World War. It grew to

10,000 men in 1944 with another 8,000 on part-time service. The great majority served in Canada with a

few companies in Newfoundland, London (England), Nassau (Bahamas) and Georgetown (Guyana). Some veterans stood guard at power plants, factories and other installations deemed essential to the war effort but most served as guards at the PoW and enemy alien internment camps in Canada. In 1944–1945, some went to India and Burma as “mule skimmers”. The Veterans Guard continued to serve after the war until March 1947, when the last veterans were disbanded.

*“Mule skimmers”, escorted shiploads of mules from the United States to India and eventually the jungles of Assam and the Arakan where they were much needed for transportation.*

The sleepy town of Bowmanville received the same wake-up call when a former school for wayward boys became a camp for over 800 of the highest ranking officers of the Reich. Camp 30 had two *Generalleutenants*, one *Generalmajor* and a U-boat (U-boat is the anglicized version of the German word *U-Boot*, an abbreviation of *Unterseeboot* [undersea boat]) corvette commander in residence. The latter had been awarded a “Knight’s Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords” for having sunk more Allied tonnage than any other U-boat commander.

The PoWs predominantly maintained themselves within their camps, cooking and cleaning for themselves and they were only lightly supervised by the Canadian Veterans Guard. Their presence, however, was felt in neighbouring communities when they were allowed to farm or swim or even work in local businesses such as the peat factory in Wainfleet Township.

In 1943, 60 German merchant seamen arrived in Wainfleet at the peat factory just off Erie Peat Road. They were housed in buildings hastily surrounded by barbed wire. They had been sent from Camp 33 at Petawawa at the request of manager A.Z. Dickie whose company had suffered greatly from the shortage of local labour. The PoWs lived within 100 yards of the Lambert family.

Fern Lambert recalled the arrival of the prisoners whose imminent presence had aroused curiosity, fear and hatred among the local population. “Our oldest daughter was old enough to realize that they were the enemy, and ran in crying, ‘The Germans are coming, the Germans are coming!’” Baby Lambert, outside on a blanket, halted the procession of enemy aliens in their tracks. The homesick men sent forward an English speaking delegate to ask permission to hold the infant. Mrs. Lambert reluctantly agreed on the condition that the baby be returned to her if she started to cry.

Baby Lambert did not cry. She loved the attention as the men gently passed her from arm to arm. Some of these PoWs worked in the factory, some cut and piled peat by hand and others occasionally went to Port Colborne to load peat onto rail cars. A few even managed to disguise the red circle and red stripe on their uniforms to slip into town to see a movie.

The relatively positive Wainfleet PoW experience was different in the Espanola area. The Spanish River Pulp and Paper Co. Mill, converted to Camp 21, received most of the 38 crew members of captured *U 35* in 1940. The actions of these enemy aliens had earned them the cover of *LIFE* magazine October 16, 1939.



*U 35 was featured on LIFE Magazine on October 16, 1939*

**“LIFE’S COVER:** The German submarine *U 35*, shown on the cover, distinguished itself last week by bagging a Greek steamer and bringing the survivors to the Irish shore. It is a 500-tonner built three years ago at Krupp’s Germania yards at Kiel and flies the Nazi war flag with a red field. It is painted gray on the sides to blend with the sky and black on top to blend with the

water when submerged. The rows of round holes are the intakes for induction valve. You are looking forward from about midships.”

An American gum trading card from 1939, number 91 of the “War News Pictures” series, depicted the event that made them famous:

### ***U-Boat Lands Shipwrecked Crew in Ireland***

*After torpedoing the Greek steamer “Diamentis” 4990 tons, off Land’s End on Tuesday, October 3, 1939, the*

German submarine rescued the crew of 28 from the sea and took the men aboard the U-Boat! There they stayed for 36 hours while the undersea craft sought a place on the Irish coast to land them. Finally the ship's crew was set down in a desolate region near Dingle. They were ferried to shore in a collapsible boat. The submarine exchanged greetings with persons on land, then moved from the coast and started to submerge before Civic Guards on patrol duty had time to detain it.

The Espanola PoWs had an active camp life with a theatrical group and soccer teams, but, they were also put to work outside the camp in the area lumber industry. As lumber men they were able to engage in the social activities in logging camps such as dances.

Alton Morse recalled they were very popular with the local ladies. "They were a fine class of people, we thought. The girls were crazy about them and they had a pretty good time. As far as wanting to escape, you couldn't have driven them away."

Fraternizing with these popular enemy aliens came to a head in late 1941 when charges were laid against five teenage girls in Espanola under the *Defence of Canada Regulations*, a type of *War Measures Act*. Five smitten local girls had been writing love letters to the PoWs and among the gifts they'd sent were forbidden items such as cameras.

In March 1942, five Espanola teens pleaded guilty to the charges and were given suspended sentences. Camp 21 was closed in 1943.

In spite of these difficulties with enemy aliens on home soil, by far the greatest problems were caused by their escape attempts. With the Veterans Guard and RCMP spread thin, valuable time ended up being directed towards their recapture. Most did not get away.

### The ones that got away

Although quite a few of the Canadian PoW escapees got far, only two got away—a great record for Canada who was holding over 35,000 enemy aliens on Canadian soil during WWII. Luftwaffe pilot Walter Manhard, a Gravenhurst PoW managed to trick the Veteran Guard into believing he had drowned while swimming. Manhard resurfaced in 1952 when he turned himself in to New York State authorities.

The other more famous escapee, who had tried to escape several times in Britain after his capture as a downed pilot in September 1940, was *Oberleutnant* Franz von Werra.

His exploits were depicted in the book and movie titled *The One That Got Away*.



Camp 30 Dummy  
Bowmanville/Clarington Museum

Less successful but noteworthy escape attempts involved dummies and a Canadian U-boat sting operation. The dummy incident involved *Leutnant* Erich Boehle who escaped with *Oberleutnant* Peter Krug from Camp 30 at Bowmanville with the collusion of Bowmanville's PoW complement.

Krug and Boehle, dressed as workmen and guarded by a PoW dressed in a Canadian Army Uniform (thanks to the camp's theatrical troupe) made their escape over two fences they were purportedly repairing while their PoW cohorts as a distraction wildly cheered on a soccer game.

Supplied with maps, currency and forged documents smuggled into Camp 30, the pair made it to Union Station in Toronto. Boehle headed towards the USA via Niagara. When the Niagara Police Department phoned Camp 30 to ask them to check out Boehle's absence, they were told no one was missing.

Two roll calls later, Commandant Lieutenant Colonel Roland O. Bull M.C. of Camp 30 still insisted that there were no missing PoWs. Finally, when an oral count took place, Boehle's and Krug's escapes became evident. The enterprising theatrical group had manufactured two very convincing dummies using papier-mâché, uniforms and paper stuffing. During the roll calls, ersatz officers Boehle and Krug were held in position by PoWs on either side.

Krug, who crossed at Windsor in a rowboat with oars he hastily cobbled together, was captured in San Antonio, Texas. He had made it that far due to safe house contacts he had from the German *Abwehr*/Spy Agency. In his hotel room the FBI found a .32 calibre handgun purchased from a pawn shop.

The U-boat sting operation involved U-boat commander *Kapitaenleutnant* Wolfgang Heyda. German Admiral Doenitz had planned *Operation Kiebitz* to spring several high profile naval officers including his own former adjutant and Otto Kretschmer, a U-boat ace called the *Atlantic Wolf*. The men were going to tunnel out and make their way to Chaleur Bay where *U 536* would scoop them off Canadian shores.

When the tunnelling part of *Operation Kiebitz* fell through, Heyda decided to take advantage of the rendezvous point with his own daring plan. With civilian clothing, false papers, a rope boatswain's chair and nails hammered into his boots to make them into crampons, Heyda hid out in a shed until he could scale a fence pole and then attach himself to wires going over the fence using the boatswain's chair. Protected from electrocution by the rope of the chair, Heyda slid to freedom. A dummy stood in for him at roll call.

Canadian authorities, however, knew of Heyda's escape attempt and let him make it as far as Pointe de Maisonette. They used Heyda and a signal light to lure waiting *U 536* into the sting. German U-boat Commander Schauenberg, suspicious of noises on his hydrophones did not surface for the pick-up. He evaded the depth charges of the Canadian destroyers and found his way out to the Atlantic.

*U 536* had survived, but not for long. The Royal Canadian Navy sunk it six weeks later. Heyda was returned to Camp 30. Escape attempts continued throughout the war. Escaped German PoWs returned to Camp Ozada in Alberta voluntarily after encountering a grizzly bear; another pair of escapees gave up after trying to cross over the Arctic to get from Canada to Germany. Twenty-eight of 80 hopeful escapees made it out of the Angler PoW camp in Alberta with almost all of them captured quickly but for a pair who made it to Medicine Hat before they were picked up and returned.

With the publicity surrounding escape attempts, PoWs, enemy aliens and refugees, Canadians on the home front saw different aspects of the war that opened up new discussions.

- Were there enemies among them who helped PoWs escape?
- Could one admire the ingenuity of escape when the attempt was made by the enemy?
- Were many of the PoWs, in fact, sympathetic individuals?
- Should Canada have taken in refugees from Hitler's Germany?
- These questions still warrant discussion today.

### After the Reading

- Should Canadian authorities have tried to weed out genuine refugees to send them back to Europe? Why or why not?
- How did refugees from oppression end up being vic-

timized again? How could this type of thing be prevented in the future?

- What was most surprising to you about the stories in this lesson?
- Were the suspended sentences too much or too little punishment for the teenage girls in Espanola who consorted with the enemy?

### Extensions

- Watch WWII movies *The Great Escape* (1998), *The One That Got Away* (1957) and *Das Boot* (1981) to discuss the effects of narrative viewpoint
- Do research on the PoW camp nearest to your community trying to find new stories
- Who were Canada's other internees during WWII. Research and present the stories of two other groups interned?
- Who were the German sympathizers in the USA? Present a study of two

### Sources

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- Melady, John. *Escape From Canada*. Toronto: McMillan, 1981
- Porter, Cecil. *The Gilded Cage: Gravenhurst's German Prisoner-of-War Camp 20, 1940–46*, Gravenhurst Book Committee, 2003
- "World War II Prisoner of War Camp, Wainfleet, Ontario, 1943–1945" *Chronicles of Wainfleet Township: 200 years of history*. [www.ourroots.ca](http://www.ourroots.ca)

### Audio Video Clips

- [wwii.ca/view-footage/74/the-enemy-within/](http://wwii.ca/view-footage/74/the-enemy-within/)  
This feature-length documentary looks at German PoWs from the WWII who were housed in 25 camps across Canada.
- [archives.cbc.ca/war\\_conflict/prisoners\\_of\\_war/topics/1642/](http://archives.cbc.ca/war_conflict/prisoners_of_war/topics/1642/) "Canada's Forgotten PoW Camps"