

GORDON LESLIE HINES

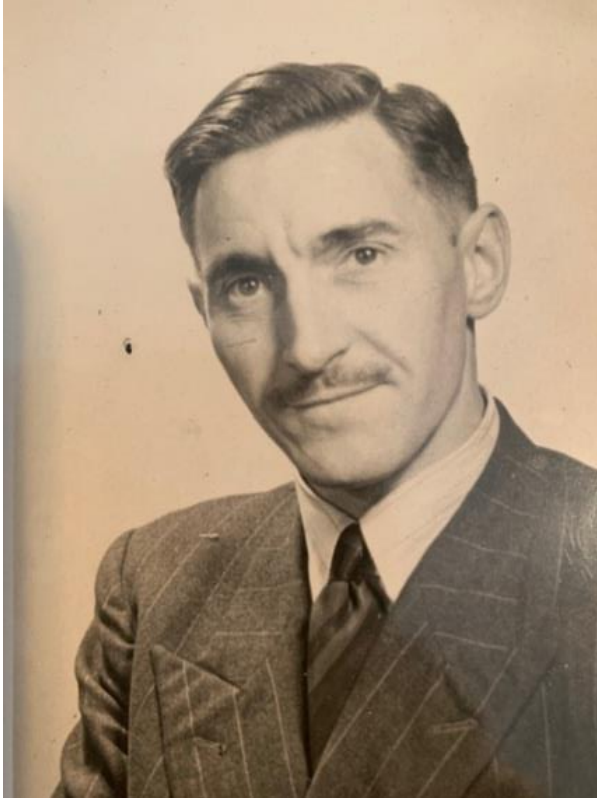
born 1918, died 1963

Life Story by Richard Hines, Gordon's son

Available online at www.livesretold.co.uk

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Gordon Hines, Circa 1947

1 Background

This is the story of my father Gordon Leslie Hines and in particular his experiences during the Second World War. I had for many years in my possession a well thumbed exercise book which he had kept during one particular part of the War, but I had never fully read it because of the difficulty in reading the handwriting and a lack of knowledge of the history behind the episode meant that its significance was somewhat lost on me.

I have obtained a lot of information from the Army Records Office and The National Archive, who have supplied copies of his papers and from those I managed to put together a brief outline of what he did during the War. Since doing that I have also carried out research on the internet and read articles which are pertinent to his history. I have pulled together as many facts as I have been able to find and what has emerged is a story of incredible endurance and fortitude which so many of our brave service personnel had to go through at this time. What they went through is barely credible to us now and the reason for recording this particular story is that I am determined that no-one ever forgets the personal sacrifices and suffering they went through on our behalf to protect our freedom.

My father never talked about the war and my mother always said that she was told very little. I was not aware of what happened during these years and it never occurred to me to ask questions when I was young. The reluctance to talk is a common recurrence in stories of PoWs, most of whom were suffering for years after from the traumatic experiences they endured, the appalling conditions in which they were kept and the totally inadequate diets. With the exception of some notes he made for a talk to the Rotary Club in Leighton Buzzard in the early 1950s there is no other record of his experiences during the war. All the personal letters written to my mother were destroyed at her request following her death in 2003, without anyone else ever having viewed them.

The emerging story made me want to find out much more and to become as close to his experiences as I could. I have found the process to be cathartic.....my father died when I was fifteen years old and I would have dearly loved to have found out more from him directly.

I spent a considerable amount of time in trying to decipher his diary which was written during The Long March at the end of the war, when Allied Prisoners of War were forcibly marched from the East by the Germans when the Russians were rapidly moving westwards.... a well-documented march of terrible conditions, suffering and loss of life. In particular the place names were difficult to establish because the German place names have now been replaced by Polish and Czech names. However careful research of historical documents has enabled me to build up an accurate picture of route. The descriptive content of the diary is not expansive because of the risk of the diary being found by the Germans with consequent reprimand. Whilst I am sure about his movements through his records, retrieved war diaries of his Division and Company there is little or no personal reaction to his experiences other than guarded comments in his diary of The Long March in winter and spring 1945. Many prisoners later compiled their recollections into books and these have proved interesting background reading into their experiences, many of which Gordon would have shared. Internet groups such as The Online Museum of Prisoners of War curated by Philip Baker have also been an invaluable resource for the collection of information of other prisoners and background detail.

In 2012, with much of the route confirmed as accurate, we visited Poland and the sites of the prisoner of war camps in which he was detained and then followed the route of his Long March in our motorhome back through south west Poland, the Czech Republic and southern Germany to Nuremburg and beyond. The scale of the PoWs undertaking, in one of the coldest winters on record, defies belief.

2 Early years

Gordon Leslie Hines was born in Doncaster in 1918, the son of George and Eva (nee Anderton) Hines. He had an elder sister called Marjorie, who was a school friend of my mother, Mary Vaux Wells. George Albert Hines joined the police force in 1914, firstly

in Dewesbury and then in Doncaster and police record shows that in May 1928 he was reported for being guilty of 'discreditable conduct'. The chief constable submitted the report to the Watch Committee, which decided to postpone decision for two months. However the record shows that he resigned from the force on 15 July 1928. abandoned the family and left Eva to bring up the children on her own. I have not been able to find out what conduct was discreditable but would love to know! There was no trace of George in the ensuing years and he never made contact with his children. The 1921 census shows that he had moved back to the family home in Colchester but no other census information has been found.

After leaving school he became an apprentice electrician. He was denied his aspiration to go to university by his domineering mother who insisted that he go out to work to earn money to maintain the family. Eva had managed to keep the family together despite financial hardship when her husband left. My mother recalled that her mother and grandparents took pity on the family and provided them with food for several years. My mother's weekends were spent with Gordon and Marjorie at an uncle's farm in what sounds like an idyllic period of their lives. During this time Gordon became a strong swimmer and played water polo.

At the age of 20 Gordon was called up for war time military service. He joined the Royal Engineers and became a driver in 235th Field Park Company, part of what was to become the 50th (Northumbria) Infantry Division.

3 Call-up and the British Expeditionary Force

With war on the continent looming the Military Training Act of May 1939 compelled all British men reaching the age of 20 to serve in the armed forces for six months, with a further three and a half years in the reserve. This was followed by the National Service Act in September 1939, which required all men aged 18 to 41 to serve. By the end of 1939, more than 1.5 million men had been conscripted to join the armed forces. Of those, just over 1.1 million went to the Army. The rest were split between the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force.

Gordon was called up for military service on 16 October 1939. He joined the Royal Engineers as a driver and was attached to A Company, 1st Motor Depot based in Tyneside. Following basic training he was posted to Aldershot on 13 December 1939 to join 50th (Northumbrian) Motor Infantry Division for further training. This was a 1st Line Territorial Army (UK) division which later became 50th (Northumbrian) Infantry Division. The two Ts in its insignia represent the two boundaries to its recruitment area, the rivers Tyne and Tees. The division served in almost all of the major engagements of the European War from 1940-1945.

The Division had planned to conduct combined infantry-armour training throughout 1939. This valuable training did not occur, however, due to an army-wide lack of equipment. In September, 1939, only four regular army divisions could be fully equipped, forcing the Territorial Army divisions (which included the 50th) to train with

just rifles, personal equipment, and uniforms as they waited for the rest of their supplies which, in some cases, took months to arrive. The Company was then posted to Witney for further training purposes with exercises including bridging works at Pangbourne on the River Thames. Even without the desired combined infantry-armour training and desperate lack of equipment, orders were received on 15 January to prepare to move, followed by a visit and inspection from HM The King. On 19 January the Division commenced the move, with 235 F P Coy travelling by train and embarking at Southampton on 22 January, to make final preparations for the movement to France to join the infamous British Expeditionary Force (B.E.F.) in an attempt to stop the Germans' sweep westwards through Belgium and France towards the coast of the English Channel.

Gordon was a member of 235th Field Park Company, Royal Engineers, which was attached to the 50th Division and by now a corporal. The Company at that time consisted of 3 officers and 160 Other Ranks. Field Park Companies provided the workshop and stores elements of the engineering provision for an infantry division. Each infantry division had one Royal Engineers field park company on its establishment, which provided the heavy equipment, workshop and stores provision for the division as a whole. A Major commanded each field company, with a Captain as his second-in-command.. Each company or squadron comprised three platoons; each platoon consisting of a headquarters and four sections commanded by a subaltern. The nature of the trades held by the sappers within each section was variable and determined according to the tasks to which they were allocated. Each section was issued with one Bren gun, one Sten gun (usually carried by the section commander), and ten Lee-Enfield rifles, so were very lightly armed for defence rather than attack.

Following the German invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939, the first units of the British Expeditionary Force was sent to the Franco-Belgian border in mid-September. Backup areas for training were also planned and following disembarkation at Cherbourg with military equipment 235FPCoy was posted to an 'assembly area' at Evron 20 kms west of Le Mans on 23 January 1940. Although the bulk of the Division travelled by train it would seem likely that Gordon, as a driver, would have formed part of road based convoys of military transport.

A period of intense training followed until 20 February 1940 when the Division received orders to relocate to a 'forward area' towards the Franco-Belgian border. The route took them north east through Mortagne, Evreux and Breteuil , assembling other units of the 50th Division en route. 235FPCoy was located at Pissy, near to Amiens in the north of France. Until 28 March the Company was involved in organising field stores and other duties as directed by the Division, leaving to join the 'forward area' meeting point at Wavrin in south west Lille, arriving on 30 March . Immediate duties included arranging billets, unloading stores etc. and April 1940 was spent carrying out further training and preparing for a state of readiness.

The German attack to push into France through Belgium commenced on May 10 1940. The 50th Division, however, remained the corps reserve and continued to train and,

on occasion, conduct searches for reported enemy paratroopers. On May 17, however, the Division and 235FPCoy left Wavrin to move east towards Brussels and positioned themselves at Mont d'Ellezelles. Having occupied this position for only 12 hours the Division was ordered to retreat because of heavy losses to the BEF and advancement by the Germans, who had effectively encircled the allied forces by reaching the French coast. During the movement back to the west through Lille the BEF ordered an attack on Arras to break through the German corridor, disrupt lines of communication, and ultimately link up with Allied forces in the south. For the attack, the British provided the 5th and 50th Divisions and the 1st Army Tank Brigade. The final elements of the 50th arrived near Arras in the early hours of May 21. The attack was scheduled for later that day and despite early successes the Germans proved too strong and the British were forced to withdraw. On May 22, following the failed Battle of Arras, the 50th Division withdrew north towards Dunkirk to avoid complete encirclement. German forces had reached the English Channel, effectively isolating the B.E.F. from the rest of the Allied armies to the south. 235FPCoy left Vimy to the south of Arras on 22May, passing through Lens on 23rd, La Chapelle on 26th and Popperhinge on 28th. On May 25, the 50th and 5th Divisions had moved to fill a gap in the Dunkirk perimeter left by crumbling Belgian forces. In two days of bitter fighting, the 50th successfully held the line, preventing a strong German thrust towards Dunkirk. On May 28, the 50th Division moved into the Dunkirk perimeter for the evacuation to Great Britain. For the next three days, the division held its part in the defensive line while the Royal Navy, aided by small boats, evacuated over 300,000 British and French soldiers to Britain under the code name 'Operation Dynamo'. Much military equipment was abandoned or destroyed, including vehicles, ammunition and fuel.

Gordon was evacuated on 1st June 1941, swimming out to waiting small boats from the sandy beach. During the night of June 2, 1940, the 50th Division completed its embarkation and sailed for England, one of the last divisions to leave Dunkirk. Many lessons were learnt from the experiences and tragedies of the BEF and it is generally recognised that the British were under-equipped and under-trained. Many thousands were taken prisoner or killed.

Much of this and the following information has been obtained from 235FPCoy War Diaries at The National Archives

4 Home Defences

Following arrival back in England following the evacuation from Dunkirk home leave was granted until 22 June, when the Division and 235FPCoy were re-established and re-equipped. All equipment had been abandoned in Dunkirk. The division reorganized as an infantry division, receiving the 69th Brigade from the recently disbanded 23rd (Northumbrian) Division. Now reformed with three infantry brigades from a base in Knutsford, Cheshire, the Division was moved to the south in anticipation of invasion by the Germans along the south coast. The Division was initially based in Chard in Somerset until 29 June, during which further reforming, training of reinforcements and drill were carried out. 29 June saw a further move to new headquarters at Spettisbury,

near Blandford, Dorset, where they were based for nearly 6 months. The duties here included preparing new billets, defence works (as it was feared the Germans would invade England primarily through the South Coast), vehicle maintenance and preparation, bomb damage clearance in Weymouth and further training. Gordon was in hospital from 1-18 October, but the reason is unknown. On 22 November 1940 orders were received to relocate to Weston-Super-Mare and on arrival duties included bomb damage demolition in Bristol as well as exercises and further training. In April 1941 advance warning was given for mobilisation to North Africa.

5 Middle East

Between 17 April and 19 April vehicles were loaded and preparation for movement took place. Embarkation took place on 21 April (port unknown, but probably Bristol or Liverpool?), the journey via troop ship (most likely a cruise liner in peacetime) would have taken them via South Africa and the Cape of Good Hope.

On 10 July the ship arrived at Port Tufiq at the southern end of the Suez Canal. The Division then moved north to Qassassin in Egypt, where reorganisation took place until 24 July. On 26 July they embarked at Port Said having been ordered to proceed to Cyprus and to hold the island at all costs on the threat of a German invasion following the fall of Greece and Crete. Arriving at Famagusta, Cyprus on 27 July the Division entrained for Nicosia, where camp was set up and equipment unloaded. Throughout August, September and October they were involved in building huge defences, organising stores and general duties. Gordon was once again in hospital from 2 September to 30 September for unknown reasons.

On November 1 1941 the Division was relieved in Cyprus and the order came to transfer to Famagusta and embark for Palestine, landing at Az Zeeb (now Geshar Ha Ziv, Israel) on 4 November. On 6 November the Division convoyed to At Tirah in Palestine, believed to be 8kms south west of Ramallah where they were based throughout November through to January 1942, mainly involved in the construction of defences. Due to lack of equipment and maintenance only part of the Division proceeded to Syria at that time, with the intention of stopping any German advance through what was then Persia, It is believed that Gordon remained at At Tira with the 150th Brigade from the notes on his records. On 21 January 235PFCoy was posted to Rayak in Syria, which appears to have been an airbase near Baalbek. Further defence construction works were carried out, along with the management of stores and provisions. On 9 February 1942 the order was received to prepare for movement to North Africa.

6 North Africa

Control of the eastern Mediterranean was seen as vital to Britain's interests. A large garrison of British and Commonwealth troops was based in Egypt. Its main role was to defend the Suez Canal and protect Britain's oil supplies from the Persian Gulf. On 11 June 1940 Italy declared war on Britain and France. Seeking to expand their African Empire, on 13 September the Italians invaded Egypt from their colony Libya. After a

limited advance the Italians halted and set up a series of fortified camps around Sidi Barrani. In December 1940 the Western Desert Force of 36,000 men attacked the Italians, who were outflanked at Beda Fomm and pursued for 840 km (500 miles) back to Libya. It ended with the destruction of nine Italian divisions and the capture of 130,000 men.

Hitler realised that he would have to support the Italians and on 11 February 1941 Major-General Erwin Rommel's Afrika Korps landed at Tripoli. The British won some spectacular victories over the Italians, but found the Germans a much tougher nut to crack. Logistics were a key factor in the desert war. Throughout the campaign both sides found that the further they advanced, the harder it was to keep their forces supplied. Both suffered shortages of fuel at crucial moments. Rapid advances were often followed by equally rapid retreats. Rough terrain and constant sand abrasion on engines made vehicles break down. In the desert natural water supplies were almost non-existent. Water had to be transported in vehicles like this bowser. Half of each man's daily ration of 4.5 litres went for cooking and topping up vehicle radiators. The rest was for drinking, washing and shaving. Visibility in the desert was hampered by heat haze, dust and sandstorms. Although troops were kept fit by their officers, adequate drinking water and medical supplies were not always available. Troops had to survive extremely high daytime temperatures and very cold nights. Newly arrived men generally spent time acclimatising in the Nile delta before moving into the desert. Disease also took a toll on the troops, who were constantly irritated by millions of flies attracted by food, human waste and dead bodies.

Through superior tactics Rommel's forces made significant advances . The main problem for the British was the lack of co-operation between their armour and infantry, which resulted in them fighting almost separate battles The result was that the infantry did not receive the support it might have done and the armour frequently fell victim to co-ordinated enemy attacks.

On 24 March 1941 Rommel attacked Tobruk, cutting off the British 3rd Armoured Brigade. Wavell's force had already been weakened by the transfer of troops to Greece and East Africa. By 13 April the British had been forced back to the Egyptian frontier, leaving the 9th Australian Division besieged in Tobruk. They held out, but after two attempts to relieve Tobruk failed. In January 1942 Rommel pushed forward again. The British were overextended and had not replaced their earlier losses. Rommel was able to advance beyond Benghazi. From early February to late May 1942 Rommel was halted by the heavily mined British defensive line, which ran from Gazala in the north to Bir Hacheim in the south.

The Battle of Gazala and the fall of Tobruk in Libya were important milestones of the War in North Africa. The Axis forces (Germany and Italy) were making way moving eastwards towards Tobruk, a strategically important port on the Mediterranean coast. The aim was to prevent the Germans from gaining control over North Africa and in particular Egypt with the strategically important Suez Canal. Despite changing

occupying hands several times in 1941 the Axis forces had finally forced the British to withdraw westwards to a line running North/South between Gazala on the coast and Bir Hacheim in the South. This line was very roughly half way between Benghazi and the Egyptian Frontier. Then came a lull in fighting during which both sides reorganised their men and equipment.

The 50th Division had been ordered on 9 February to travel to North Africa from Syria as additional resources to prevent the Axis forces' movement further west towards the Suez Canal. 12 February saw an overnight stop at Az Zeeb on the coast near Haifa, then Al Khelesa (?), arriving in Moascar Egypt at the southern end of the Suez Canal on 14 February. Essential vehicle maintenance was carried out here along with the application of camouflage paint. Further movement on 16 February saw them arrive at Wadi Natrum between Cairo and Alexandria, Adabia on the 17th and Marsah Matruh on 18 February. On 20 February the convoy arrived at El Adem, an air base 15 miles south of Tobruk in Libya. Here they stayed until April 21 1942, carrying out the distribution of stores, manufacturing booby traps, maintenance of water points and bomb clearance. On 21 April they moved to a camp 10 miles to the south.

The War Diaries of 235 Field Park Company are then sadly lacking any information until the 26 May 1942, the day that General Rommel's forces attacked the Gazala line where around 100,000 troops were based in a static series of heavily fortified 'Boxes' on the Gazala line awaiting an anticipated attack. Rommel was determined that this time his forces would capture Tobruk and continue to Cairo, Alexandria and the Suez Canal.

The 235FPCoy Diaries state on 26 May "*State of readiness orders received. Heavy shelling in defended area. German columns sighted north, west and east*" On 27 May it states "*German columns moving north from Bir Hakheim. 17.00-19.00 sounds of heavy fighting to south. 21.00 German columns surrounding position. 21.30 orders received to evacuate position to 69th Brigade box. Men and equipment loaded onto vehicles. Patrol sent to recce route around enemy to 69 Brigade. 23.00 Position attacked by two tanks and infantry, area overrun*"

Gordon's records state that he was captured by Axis forces on 28 May so it is most likely that he was taken in the early hours following this attack.



Gordon on right on motorbike, presumably in the Western Desert. He has sergeant's stripes, so sometime between July 1941 and May 1942

7 Prisoner of War

Following capture the Prisoners of War were handed over to the Italians and were transported to Derna on the Mediterranean coast. There is little information available other than Gordon's notes in which he records "*Two days spent in Derna Jail. Dysentery and foul conditions*". They were then transported by ship to Taranto in Italy and "*cattle truck to camp. Form of transit camp. Only clothes were what we stood in. Italian rations. Medical exam and hair do*". My mother records in her notes and reminiscences written in 1991 that when captured Gordon and his fellow PoWs were forced at gunpoint to walk through a minefield in order to secure safe passage for their captors

PG65 Gravina near Altamura June 1942 –Early 1943

From the transit camp (unknown location) the prisoners were transported to Prigioniero di Guerra 65 near Altamura in Southern Italy, 50km inland from Bari. It came into operation in March 1942 and would seem to have been a purpose built army barracks hastily converted to use as a PoW camp. Gordon's notes state "*within three weeks able to write home and confirm I was alive. Italian rations (rice/macaroni and 200g bread) and later food parcels. Wintry November before any Red Cross parcels arrived. Reasonably small camp, perhaps 6,000 men. Stone built huts split into bays of 48 men. Camp commandant was lawyer and very fair. Bathing facilities and portable hot showers....*"

The remains of PG65 as it is now. Preservation and restoration is currently proposed



Other reports confirm that the quarters were roomy and designed so as to be cool and airy in the summer months. Although not all the camp had been completed there were well built ablutions and latrines, served with a good water supply and a proper infirmary. Sheets on the beds were the biggest surprise to the new arrivals and conditions were an immense improvement for those who had endured capture and imprisonment in North Africa. Gordon mentions a wintry November so it must be assumed that he spent around 6-8 months at this location.

In early 1943 the prisoners were loaded once again into cattle trucks and moved north towards the east coast of Italy. Gordon mentioned in his notes that the train was targeted and strafed , presumably by Allied air forces who could not distinguish between goods trains carrying essential supplies for the Italian war effort and those carrying Prisoners of War. This seems to have been a regular occurrence both in Italy and in Germany.

PG 53 Sforzacosta Early 1943- July1943

Sforzacosta is on the railway line 12 miles south of Macerata, close to the east coast of Italy in the Marche region. The camp itself was about one mile from the town railway station on the western edge of the town and was a fairly modern building having been built as a linen factory. The north and south parts of the camp consisted of storage buildings which housed about 800 prisoners each on just the one floor with no room divisions. Later, severe overcrowding meant that there were 2,000 men in the same area.

Between these large buildings were another two smaller ones which had previously been the factory's administration blocks. They also now housed prisoners. In total the camp housed 8,000 inmates at its peak. The buildings were fairly modern and were made of thick concrete. To the west of the factory was an open area of about six acres, the fencing consisted of an outer fence about 30 feet high and an inner one 15 feet from that and 10 feet high. The space between was filled with barbed wire. At the corners of this wire and every 50 yards were wooden sentry posts with machine guns.

There was only one small crude toilet block and only three stand pipes providing water for the entire camp, so conditions were appalling.

These photos were taken during our visit in 2015



An official Red Cross Report quoted in July 1943:

There are over 7,000 prisoners here, about 6,000 of them are English and the camp is filled to capacity. All the Prisoners of War use three-tier bunks. Ventilation is inadequate and light in the dormitories is too weak to enable the men to read. As in most camps in Italy, there was a complaint that outgoing mail was held up, though incoming mail is fairly regular. The wood ration is smaller than at most camps. The water supply is insufficient, some of the taps are unusable and the showers do not work. The infirmary is rather small for the number of patients, a great many of whom are suffering from skin troubles. There is a fairly large sports ground, but no recreation room or place where lectures could be organised and run successfully. An English Roman Catholic priest holds religious services in the camp.

At the threat of invasion by Allied Troops and the imminent fall of Italy the camp woke one morning to find that all the guards had disappeared leaving the camp open. Many PoWs took the opportunity to escape, but this was strictly against War Department orders, believing that the Allied forces should remain to reinforce the invasion of Italy which was quickly becoming a reality. The Germans were obviously aware of this and the remaining Allied PoWs, who had obeyed orders and not escaped, were evacuated from Italy to Germany in July 1943 by train in cattle trucks, again in appalling conditions. Gordon is recorded to have left Sforzacosta on 20 July 1943 so was likely to have been in PG53 for only a couple of months. He also recorded that they were told they were moving into better conditions and that they would not be going to Germany. After a few days in the cattle trucks they arrived at the Brenner Pass on the border between Austria and Italy, where they were handed over to the Germans. **Appendix 1** is an internet researched story of this journey and although not by Gordon they travelled at the same time and might well have travelled together. It gives a particularly good description of the conditions endured during this journey and their arrival in Germany

STALAG IV-B PoW CAMP

The train journey in July 1943 took the prisoners of war to Stalag IVB, which was one of the largest prisoner of war camps in Germany during World War II. Stalag is an abbreviation of the German noun "Stammlager" meaning main camp. It was located 8km NE of the town Mühlberg in Brandenburg, just east of the Elbe river and about 30 miles (50 km) north of Dresden. This camp covering about 30ha (75 acres) was built in September 1939. Here the PoWs were processed, issued with PoW cards' had their heads shaven and clothes deloused before being transferred to other camps in Germany and what is now Poland. It is believed Gordon was here for two or three weeks.

Prisoner of War card issues at Stalag IV B

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25

Personalkarte I: Personelle Angaben

Wiederholung der Gefangenschafts-



Nr. 9-1441

Kriegsgefangenen-Stammlager:

Kapitel: IV B

S Name: Hines. Staatsangehörigkeit: England.
 Vorname: Gordon, Leslie. Dienstgrad: Sergeant.
 Geburtsort und -tag: 20-11-1918 Dancaster (Y) Truppenteil: _____ Stomp. Nr.: _____
 Religion: Church of England. Dienstberuf: Elektriker. Berufskategorie: _____
 Matrikel Nr. (Stammrolle des Heimatlandes): 1884039.
 Vorname des Vaters: George Albert. Gefangennahme (Ort und Datum): Lybich 28-5-1942.
 Familienname der Mutter: Anderston. Ob gefaub, krank, verwundet eingeliefert:

Des Kriegsgefangenen

Vorbild		Nähere Personalsbeschreibung	
Größe	Haarfarbe	Besondere Kennzeichen:	
	<u>175</u>	<u>Dunkel.</u>	<u>1884039.</u>
Abdruck des rechten Zeigefingers		Name und Wohnort der in Deutschland lebenden Person in der Heimat des Kriegsgefangenen	
		<u>Mrs E. Hines.</u> <u>36. Saltwill. Way.</u> <u>Slough</u> <u>Bucks. England.</u>	

Die Bekanntgabe des Verbots
des Verkehrs mit Deutschen
Frauen vom 10. 1. 40
ist erfolgt.
Für Monat April
1942

Bestätigung der Identifizierung Nr. 9-1441 Lager: ST IV B Name: Hines Gordon
 Datum: 10.11.1942 Best: 101111

Bezeichnung der Einweisungsmasse Nr. <i>1221441</i>		Charaktereigenschaften u. a.		Verteidere Abkürzungen		Erschließung		Höhepunkt	
Bayer: <i>17 B</i>									

Erfahren im Kriegsdienst	Datum	Grund der Verletzung	Erstmaß	Verbleib, Datum

Schwefelungen während der Gefangenschaft gegen			Erkrankungen			
Beden	Geistige Anstrengungen (z.B. Paratyph, Ruhr, Cholera usw.)		Steifheit	von Steife	bis	Vergiftung - Schwermetalle von
am	am	am				
Erfolg	gegen	gegen				
am	am	am				
Erfolg	gegen	gegen				
am	am	am				
Erfolg	gegen	gegen				
am	am	am				
gegen	gegen	gegen				

Verletzung	Datum	Grund der Verletzung	Nachst. St.-Verl.-Lager	Verbleib	Datum	Grund der Verletzung	Nachst. St.-Verl.-Lager
	<i>9.8.43</i>	<i>abg. an Stalag VIII B</i>			<i>8.12.43</i>	<i>verbleibt im Lager 8/5.</i>	

Kommandos		
Datum	Art des Kommandos	Platzverteilung
<i>25.9.44</i>	<i>WE 409 Hohenwerder</i>	

STALAG VIII-B (344) POW CAMP

On 9 August 1943 Gordon was transferred to Stalag VIII-B, which was situated 3 km from Lamsdorf (Lambinowice), Silesia (now Western Poland). It was opened in 1939 to house Polish prisoners from the German September 1939 offensive. Later approximately 100,000 prisoners from Australia, Belgium, Great Britain, Canada, France, Greece, Italy, New Zealand, Netherlands, Poland, South Africa, Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and the United States passed through this camp. In 1941 a separate camp, Stalag VIII-F was set up close by to house the Soviet prisoners. The camp was renamed Stalag 344 in 1943 to cope with the over-crowding at Lamsdorf and at the same time divide the work of administering its numerous Arbeitskommandos (workcamps), transferred administrative staff to form new base camps at Teschen and Sagan. These became known as Stalag VIII B and Stalag VIII C respectively, the original camp at Lamsdorf being renumbered Stalag 344. The

Silesian working camps were divided between Stalag 344 and Stalags VIIIA, B, and C, all coalmining Arbeitskommandos coming under Stalag VIIIB at Teschen. These very soon held 11,000 British Commonwealth prisoners (including nearly 1,000 New Zealanders); but only a little over 200 of these were at the base camp, The majority of men held in Stalag VIII B were not in the main camp but in smaller working camps known as arbeits kommandos. (See Blechhammer later).

I have several books written by former Prisoners of War which describe everyday life in Stalag VIIIB. They are worth reading to give some detail as to the conditions, diet and regime they endured. The PoWs organised many activities to keep themselves occupied, including all sorts of sports, theatre groups, music and learning amongst many others. There was a thriving black market in the camps, the main currency for which appeared to be cigarettes and food issued through Red Cross parcels. My mother records that Gordon took part in many camp theatricals, notably alongside Denholme Elliot who went on to be a famous TV and film actor.

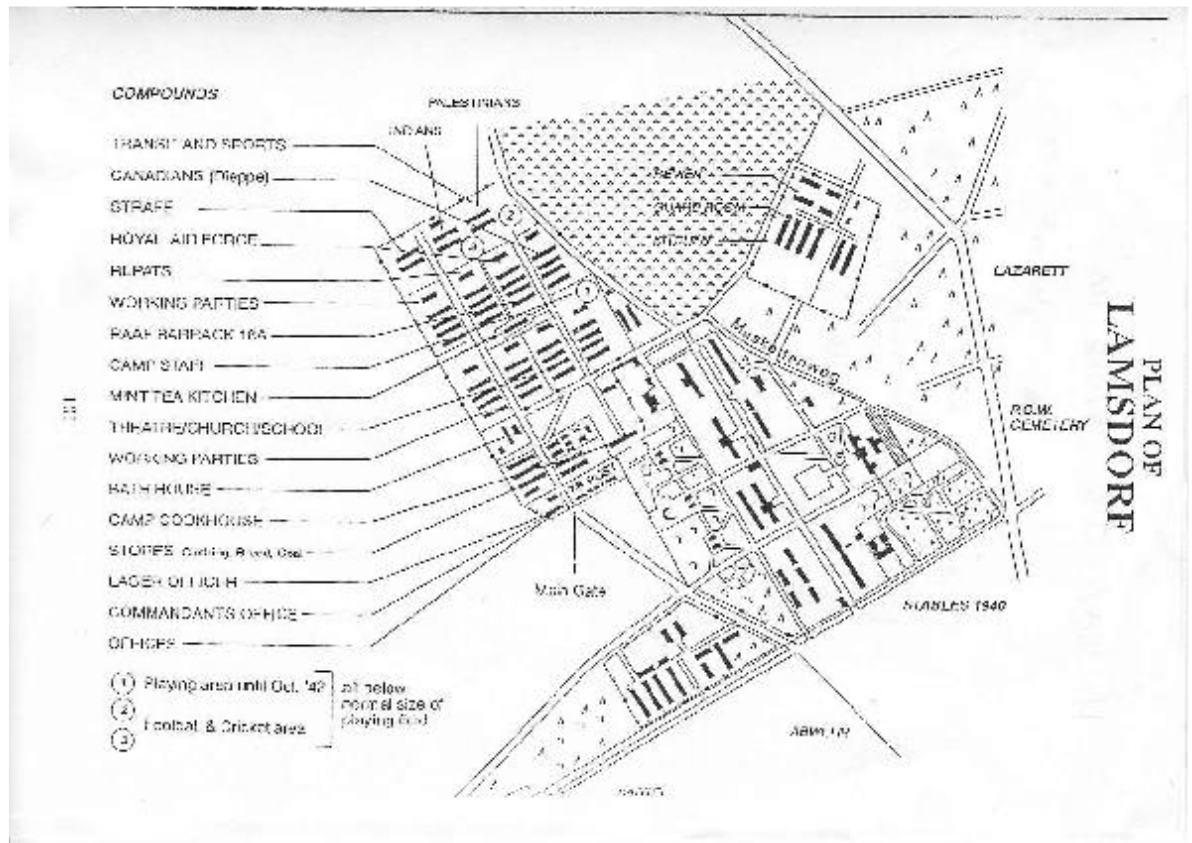
As an NCO (acting sergeant) Gordon volunteered to lead a Working Party which was sent to Blechhammer in September 1944.

Today the site is a museum dedicated to the memory of the prisoners who were held there. Lamsdorf was one of the largest complexes of PoW camps run by the Germans. It is estimated that the camps saw about 300,000 POWs of different nationalities..After the war the Lamsdorf camp was used by the Soviets to house Germans, both prisoners of war and civilians. Polish army personnel being repatriated from POW camps were also processed through Lamsdorf and sometimes held here as prisoners for several months. Some were later released, others sent to Gulags in Siberia.

We visited Poland in 2012 and went to the museum which is housed in what was the German HQ at Lamsdorf, walked around the now overgrown location of Stalag VIIIB as well as visiting Blechhammer and the location of E769, prior to following the route of Gordon's Long March through Poland, Czech Republic and Germany all the way to Bietenfeld where he was eventually liberated by the American troops.



April 15th 1944 in Stalag VIII B



Library photographs of life inside Stalag VIII B



BLECHHAMMER

The Blechhammer area at Heydebreck in what is now Poland was the location of German chemical plants, prisoner of war camps, and forced labour camps . Labour camp prisoners began arriving as early as June 17, 1942 and in 1944 400-500 men were transferred from Stalag VIII-B to Blechhammer (my father one of them). Blechhammer produced synthetic oil from locally mined coal and was heavily targeted by both USAF and RAF bombers as being the possible source of a considerable quantity of fuel.

Two plants in the area, Blechhammer North (south of Sławięcice) and Blechhammer South at Azoty were nicknamed "Black Hammer" by Allied bomber aircrews. The facilities were approximately 2 miles (3.2 km) apart with each occupying a 3,000 x 5,000 feet area in open country. Various Nazi companies constructed and attempted to operate the refineries

Gordon was transferred to Blechhammer South run by IG Farben and in a work group called E769, a small camp holding about 300 men constructed in 1944 almost certainly situated close to the southern edge of the complex and close to a village called Reigersfeld (now called Bierawa). I have not established what work he was made to do but it is likely that as an NCO (acting sergeant by this time) his role was more supervisory within the camp, for example managing the men, the Red Cross parcels containing food and cigarettes, and organising shelter during the air raids. His POW card states that was an electrician and it might be guessed that his work camp was used by the Germans in the IG Farben chemical plant to clear up after US bombing raids. It is also known that many prisoners were killed in these air raids on Blechhammer North but it is not believed many were killed in raids on Blechhammer South. Both were largely destroyed by these raids and the prisoners were allowed to run into adjoining woods for cover. The German Commanding Officer would not remove men from the target area, a crime for which he was subsequently tried and sentenced.

The following are extracts of emails sent to me by an author researching Heydebreck and the Blechhammer plants. These areas are in what is now known as Kedzierzyn-Kozle.

Although I've been researching the camps in the area of Heydebreck for some years, very little is known, or has been written about E769. It was a small camp and held about 300 men most of whom had originally been in Italian POW camps. The camp was constructed in 1944 at Reigersfeld (sometimes referred to as Heydebreck or Blechhammer South) and the men were used as labour on the IG Farben synthetic oil facility. The complex was a priority bombing target during WW2 and information can be found on various web sites.

Although your father's camp was very close to the facility, it didn't receive any direct hits. Nevertheless your father's experiences would have been harrowing and he

would have worked on the site during the frequent bombing missions when the men were allowed to run for their lives into the nearby forest.

I began to realise that nobody had recorded the history of the Heydebreck camps and so I've been working on this project for some time. Of all the camps, your Dad's camp, E769 has been the most difficult to research. It is a testament to your father's "spirit" and courage that he was able to keep the diary going under such terrible conditions. Veterans have told me how as the marches progressed they discarded anything which was not necessary to their survival.

I'm sending a link to a video which shows the forest which surrounded your Dad's camp. You will notice concrete structures which were built during the war, bomb craters, a ditch, used as protection by POW's and a small conical shaped concrete structure. (This was one of the many "one man" bunkers which were dotted around the area). Guards who were caught out in the air raids could take shelter there. POW's such as your father and mine, were forced to, I quote, "run like hell and pray". Although some casualties occurred in my father's camp, I have found no information which would indicate that losses were suffered from the men in your Dad's camp. That, however, does not mean that some of the men did not suffer from nervous breakdown due to the unbearable conditions in which they found themselves. The hair of several of the men in my father's camp turned white overnight due to "shock" during the bombing missions when, as many as 400 bombers at a time, flew their missions to bomb IG Farben.

In contravention to the Geneva Agreement, the German in charge would not remove the men from the target area. He was subsequently tried and sentenced for this War Crime. It is really interesting to learn that your father was sent to E769 at such a late stage. Perhaps you already know this but, anyone with the rank of NCO or above did not have to go to a working party. Your father must have volunteered to leave Lamsdorf for a work camp. This was not unusual as the rations in a work camp, although poor, were nevertheless superior to the totally inadequate German provisions of a Stalag. As a sergeant he would not have worked at the baustelle but remained in camp in an administrative position. As it was such a small camp I think it probable that many of the organisational duties would have fallen to him (tasks such as resolving disputes between the men, dealing with mail, storing Red Cross parcels, maintaining morale, dealing with health issues etc). In short, he would have shouldered a heavy responsibility for the well being and safety of the men. This could be a tricky job at any time but during the months of bombing, it would have been an extremely difficult task. Although the Germans refused to move the men from their dangerous position, your father could as an NCO, have chosen to return to Lamsdorf at any time he wished. The fact that he didn't take this option is a testament to his courage and concern for the men.

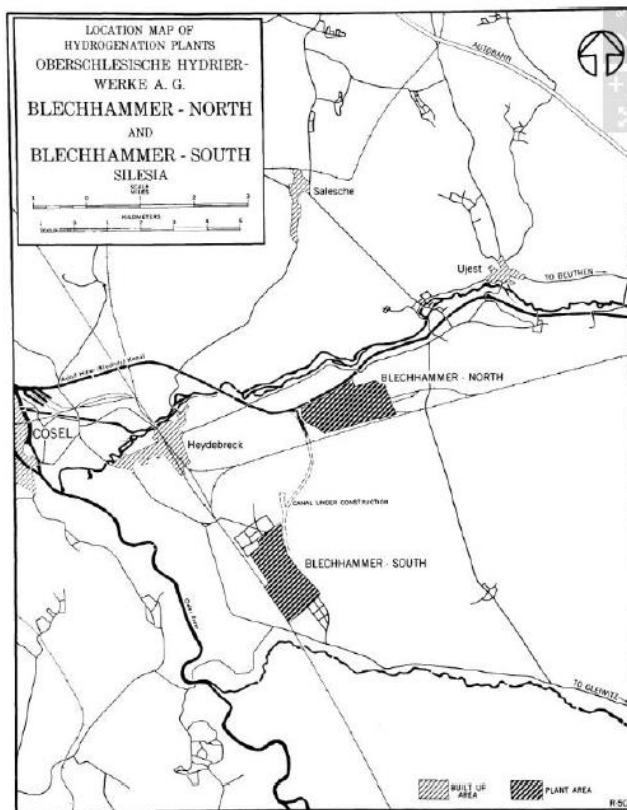
E769 was very close to E711 and E711a and the men from E769 visited E711 to hear church sermons. A concert of carols was organised for them on 25th December, 1944. Because E769 was so small, it did not have a doctor on site nor a

clergyman. In fact I don't know of any commissioned officer being held in the camp. This put a heavy duty onto NCO's such as your father, as they would have liaised with the unhelpful German authorities, taken responsibility for fire pickets and organised the exodus from the camp (into the woods) during the bombing raids and the "Death March" of 1945.

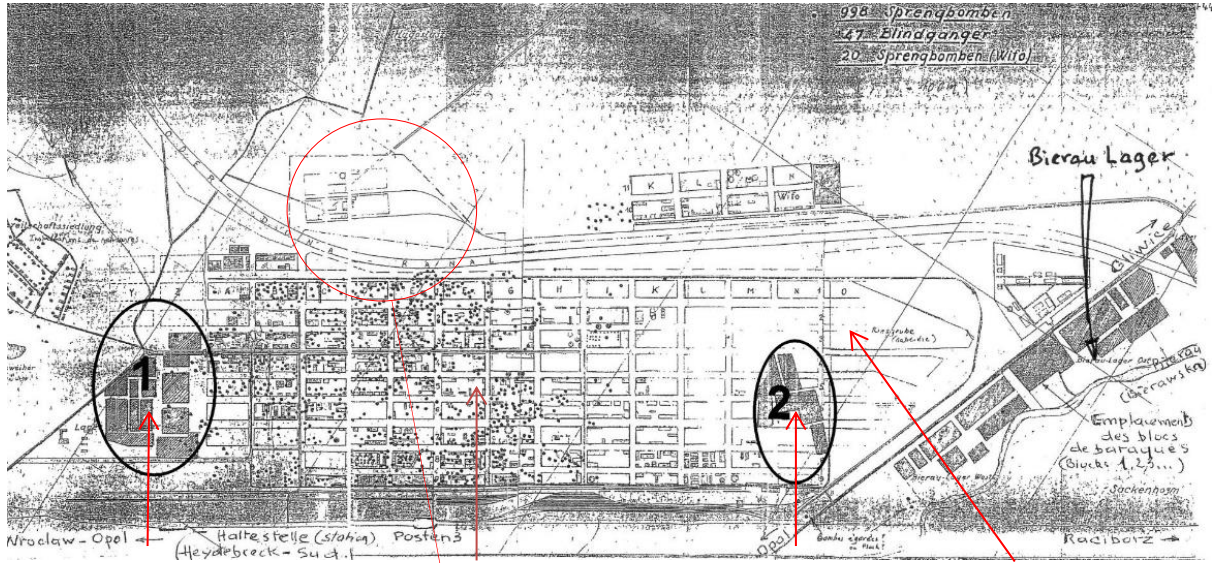
In January 1945, as the Soviet armies resumed their offensive and advanced into Germany, many of the prisoners were force-marched westward by the Germans in groups of 200 to 300 in the so-called Long March. Many of them died from the bitter cold and exhaustion. The lucky ones got far enough to the west to be liberated by the American army. The unlucky ones got "liberated" by the Soviets, who instead of turning them over quickly to the western allies, held them as virtual hostages for several more months. Many of them were finally repatriated towards the end of 1945 through the port of Odessa on the Black Sea. There were many different routes taken, depending on the starting point.

Gordon left Arbeitskommando E769 at Blechhammer on 22 January 1945 and force-marched westwards on The Long March back towards Germany.

LOCATION OF BLECHHAMMER NORTH AND SOUTH



BLECHHAMMER SOUTH PoW CAMPS



Forced Labour camp

Black dots are bomb strikes

BAB 20 (E794)

E769

USAAF BOMBING OF BLECHHAMMER



8 The Long March

The Long March refers to a series of enforced marches during the final stages of the Second World War in Europe. As the Soviet army was advancing on Poland, the Nazis made the decision to evacuate the PoW camps to prevent the liberation of the prisoners by the Russians. During this period, also hundreds of thousands of German civilians, most of them women and children, as well as civilians of other countries were made to endure the march towards the west.

Over 80,000 Allied PoWs were forced to march westward across Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Germany in appalling winter conditions, lasting about four months from January to April 1945 (a total of 257,000 British and American prisoners of war were in German prisons). Many of the men started the March from their Work Camps, Gordon starting from Blechhammer. The march from Stalag VIII-B was called "The Lamsdorf Death March" resulting in very high mortality rates. Blechhammer was some way east of Lamsdorf and the route taken was completely different to that taken from Lamsdorf.

There were many but three main Allied PoW evacuation routes to the west, which included:-

- The northern route starting from Stalag Luft VI at Heydekrug in East Prussia, via Stalag Luft IV at Gross Tychow, Pomerania via Stettin to Stalag XI-B and Stalag 357 at Fallingbommel. Some prisoners were marched from here at the end of the war towards Lübeck.
- The central route started from Stalag Luft 7 at Bankau, near Kreuzburg in Silesia (now Poland), via Stalag 344 at Lamsdorf, to Stalag VIII-A Görlitz, then ending at Stalag III-A at Luckenwalde, 30 km south of Berlin.
- The southern route started at Stalag VIII-B and the satellite arbeitskommandos which led through Czechoslovakia, towards Stalag XIII-D at Nuremberg and then onto Stalag VII-A at Moosburg in Bavaria. This was broadly the route taken by Gordon.

On 22 January 1945 Arbeitskommando E769 at Blechhammer was evacuated, along with other work camps and Stalag 8B and 344 over a period of days, the marchers being assembled into groups of several hundred men.

January and February 1945 were among the coldest winter months of the twentieth century, with blizzards and temperatures as low as -25 °C (-13 °F), and even until the middle of March, temperatures were well below 0 °C (32 °F). Most of the PoWs were ill-prepared for the evacuation, having suffered years of poor rations and wearing clothing ill-suited to the appalling winter conditions.

In most camps, the PoWs were broken up in groups of 250 to 300 men and because of the inadequate roads and the flow of battle, not all the prisoners followed the same route. The groups would march 20 to 40 kilometres a day - resting in factories, churches, barns and even in the open. Soon long columns of PoWs were wandering

over the northern part of what was then Germany with little or nothing in the way of food, clothing, shelter or medical care.

Prisoners from different camps had different experiences: sometimes the Germans provided farm wagons for those unable to walk. There seldom were horses available, so teams of PoWs pulled the wagons through the snow. Sometimes the guards and prisoners became dependent on each other, other times the guards became increasingly hostile. Passing through some villages, the residents would throw bricks and stones, and in others, the residents would share their last food. Some groups of prisoners were joined by German civilians who were also fleeing from the Russians. Some who tried to escape or could not go on were shot by guards.

With so little food they were reduced to scavenging to survive. Some were reduced to eating dogs and cats—and even rats and grass—anything they could lay their hands on. Already underweight from years of prison rations, some were at half their prewar body weight by the end. Because of the unsanitary conditions and a near starvation diet, hundreds of PoWs died along the way from exhaustion as well as pneumonia, diphtheria, pellagra, and other diseases. Typhus was spread by body lice. Sleeping outside on frozen ground resulted in frostbite that in many cases required the amputation of extremities. In addition to these conditions were the dangers from air attack by Allied forces mistaking the POWs for retreating columns of German troops, with several cases of large loss of life.

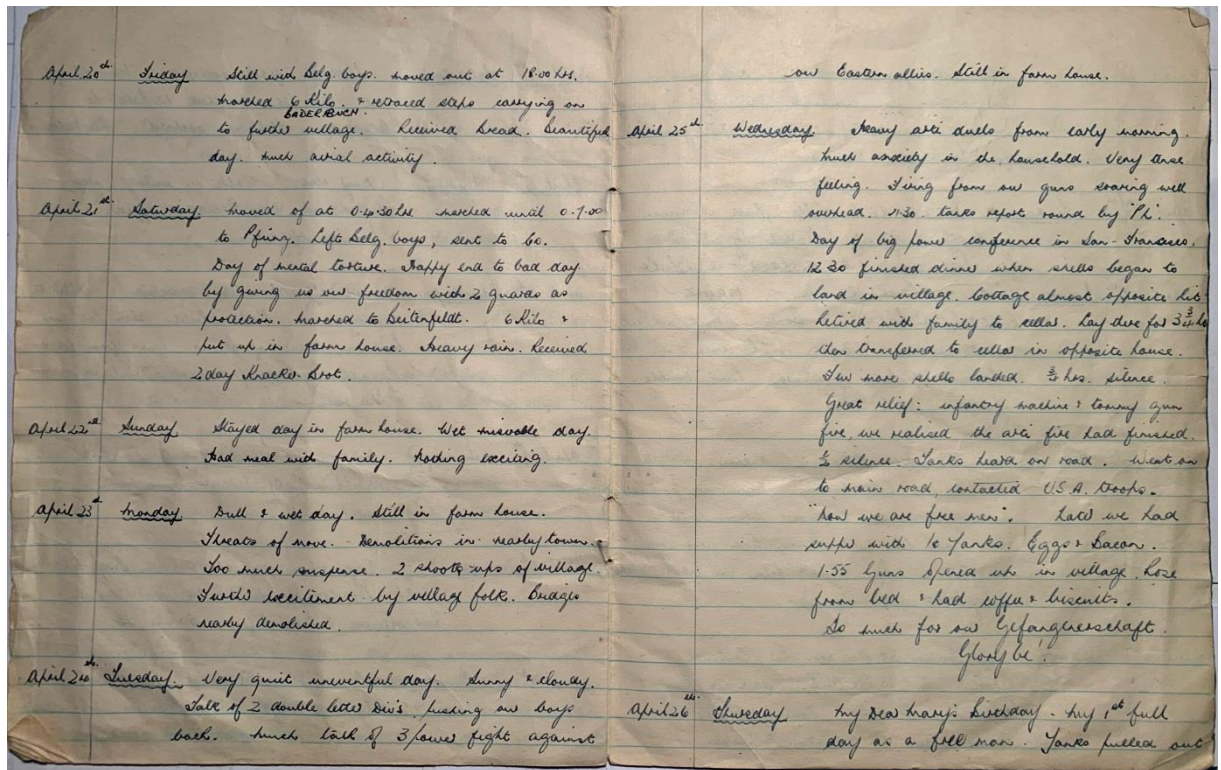
As winter drew to a close, suffering from the cold abated and some of the German guards became less harsh in their treatment of PoWs as they realised that Germany was about to be defeated. As the columns reached the western side of Germany they ran into the advancing British and American armies. For some, this brought liberation. Others were not so lucky. Some were marched towards the Baltic Sea, where Nazis were said to be using PoWs as human shields and hostages. It was later estimated that a large number of PoWs had marched over five hundred miles by the time they were liberated, and some had walked nearly a thousand miles.

DIARY OF THE LONG MARCH : GORDON LESLIE HINES

This is a copy of notes hand written in an exercise book during the March, probably secretly. Some of the writing is difficult to interpret, especially the German place names. Subsequent research and the use of maps with place names in both German and Polish/Czech has enabled an accurate plot of the route to be established. The following is a link to the map with place names and dates available on Google Maps:

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=15emK3FrDgA9rFDweCECPXQi9z9U&hl=en&usp=sharing>

Photo of part of Gordon's handwritten Diary



- January 22 1945 Left E769 about 17.30. Walked 25k to Katerina Hof Stayed 2 days.
- Jan 25 Marched 16k to Schanau. 1 night.
- Jan 26 Marched 25k to Buchaldorf. 1 night.
- Jan 27 Marched 12k to Ludwicksdorf, 1 night in stable.
- Jan 28 Marched 25k over mountains to Scheinsdof, stayed 2 days, bitterly cold.
- Jan 29 DAY REST
- Jan 30 Marched 25k to Reichenstein, 1 night.
- Jan 31 Marched 26k to Marzdorf, 2 days
- Feb 1 DAY REST
- Feb 2 Marched 26k to Kamnitz, 1 night.
- Feb 3 Marched 26k to Ottendorf, 2 days
- Feb 4 DAY REST
- Feb 5 Marched 7k to Braunau (Weckersdorf)
- Feb 6 DAY REST
- Feb 7 DAY REST
- Feb 8 DAY REST
- Feb 9 Marched 25k to Merkelsdorf towards Troppenau, 1 night.
- Feb 10 Marched 16k to Albendorf, 2 nights

Feb 11 DAY REST

Feb 12 Marched off at 4.45am and marched 25k through Trottenau to Altenbuch

Feb 13 Crossed Sudentanland border into ???, marched 27k to Ischust (?)

Feb 14 Marched 27k to Dobritz. Civilian reception marvellous.

Feb 15 REST DAY Billious during night. More gifts from civvies.

Feb 16 Marched 15k to Sameria. More gifts.

Feb 17 Marched 20k to Suchrowitz. At this stage gifts were forbidden. Weather has warmed up, snow melting.

Feb 18 REST DAY

Feb 19 Left Chesy (?), back into Sudentanland. Marched 21k to Jesowai. Beautiful weather.

Feb 20 Marched 20k to Reichstadt. Sunny and warm.

Feb 21 Marched 20k to Strausonitz. Snowing all day.

Feb 22 Marched 40k to Kleau Priesen, very bad billets.

Feb 23 Marched 18k through Ausrig to Auchine.

Feb 24 Started 10.00am Marched 14k to Probstau near Leplitz

Feb 25 DAY REST. RED CROSS ISSUE .1/8 INVALID

Feb 26 Marched 15k to Ossigg

Feb 27 Marched 28k to Neusdorf. Through big fabric which had heavy bombing.

Feb 28 DAY REST

March 1 Marched 30k to Wistnitz. Sunny day.

March 2 Marched 15k to Roschwitz. Saw many Yank planes above.

March 3 Marched 35k to Gfall, not far from Karlsbad. Windy, snowy and cold.

March 4 DAY REST

March 5 Marched 22k to Wintersgrun. Saw a lot of Yanks bombing Banos??? And Dresden

March 6 Marched 18k to Falkenau

March 7 REST DAY

March 8 Marched 15k to Dobrez

March 9 DAY REST Promise of parcel and cigs

March 10 Marched 18k to Zetendorf through Ege. PARCEL ISSUE 1 +1/5 +1/10 + 18 cigs.

March 11 DAY REST

March 12 DAY REST

March 13 Marched 13k to Rothingenlubersbach

March 14 Marched 14k to Rosliau. Entered Bavaria. Weather good.

March 15 DAY REST

March 16 Marched 10k to Neuenhammer

March 17 Marched 12k to Gefrus

March 18 Marched 18k to Ramsenthal

March 19 DAY REST

March 20	DAY REST Much aerial activity
March 21	DAY REST Talk of train
March 22	DAY REST Half parcel and 50 cigs
March 23	DAY REST
March 24	DAY REST
March 25	DAY REST PALM SUNDAY Packed our wagon on railway. Move at 4am
March 26	Called at 6am Move cancelled. Unload wagon.
March 27	Called at 6am. Move on Loaded Wagon. One parcel. March 5k to Bindlach Station. Left Bindlach 2pm Bayreuth 2.15. Arrived at Nurmberg East stayed all night. Rainy and cold. Open trucks.
March 28	Arrived at X111 D about 2pm
March 29	Went to delouser. Into new compound. Bread 1/7
March 30	GOOD FRIDAY News very good indeed. Half parcel and 50 cigs. Bread 1/7
March 31	Quiet day in X111D. Bread 1/7
April 1	EASTER SUNDAY Had to register. Wrote home. Talk of move. Received new boots.
April 2	EASTER MONDAY Called at 4am moved off at 6am. Received half parcel as we left Stalag. Moved from siding at 8.30am. Did 20k in 12 hours, turned back and arrived in Lager about midnight.
April 3	Slept in open during night (Bread 1/7 and 1/14) Told we were marching out. One parcel and 50 cigs.
April 4	All NCOs and WOs told to parade to move. Dodged this. Jerry pulling out. 3am. Further orders to stand by for 8am ready to move. No bread. 20 cigs.
April 5	Settled in Tent 3. No bread. Heard of NCOs and WOs being strafed. Heavy air raid. 25 Yanks dead
April 6	Typhus scare. No evacuation of Lager owing to Typhus. No bread.
April 7	Weather very bad. Heavy strafing by Yanks. Bread 1/8. News very good.
April 8	Weather much better. More strafing. Distant gunfire. No bread
April 9	Weather very hot. (Moved to Luft 6) No bread no soup. No news of our front.
April 10	Weather very hot. Had hot bath. Plenty of air activity (Quarter American parcel) Bread 1/12 Still no news
April 11	Weather very hot. Good rations Issued with knacker-brot. Heavy air raid. Gunfire very plain. News very good
April 12	Dull and wet day. No aerial activity. Bread 1/8
April 13	Dull and wet. Did my washing. Half parcel. Came in with move order at 18.15hrs, moved at 20.18 hrs.

Marched 27k to Altenfelden. No bread. Further parcel issued. Marched until 06.30hrs
 April 14 Slept in farm orchard. Moved off at 17.00hrs. Marched 12k to Ebenreich. Slept in orchard. No rations.
 April 15 Day rest. Walk in village, was picked up by Grenadier officer. Dull and promise of rain.
 April 16 Moved off at 05.00hrs Marched to Shutzendorf. Slept in field. Very hot day. Continuous service of planes. Guns from front very active. Heard of fall of Nurburg. No rations.
 April 17 Day rest. Weather beautiful. Had bath. Much aerial activity, also ground activity. Lay up No rations.
 April 18 Day in barn Out at 17.00hrs Had good meal Marched off at 23.00 hrs Marched with Russian officers to Erkerzhofen 15k
 April 19 Arrived in at 07.30hrs. Spent day with Belgian boys. Good time. German troop rations. Beautiful day Not too much activity.
 April 20 Still with Belgian boys Moved out at 18.00hrs Marched 6 k and retraced steps carrying on to further village BADERBUCH Received bread Beautiful day Much aerial activity
 April 21 Moved off at 04.30 hrs Marched until 07.00 to Pfunz. Left Belgian boys. Sent to CO Day of mental torture. Happy end to bad day by giving us our freedom with two guards as protection. Marched to Beitenfeldt 6k and put up in farm house Heavy rain. Received 2 day knacker-brot
 April 22 Stayed day in farm house. Wet miserable day. Had meal with family. Nothing exciting.
 April 23 Dull and wet day Still in farm house. Threats of move. Demolitions in nearby town Too much suspense 2 shoot ups of village Further excitement by village folk . Bridges nearby demolished
 April 24 Very quiet uneventful day Sunny and cloudy Talk of 2 double letter Div's ??)pushing our boys back Much talk of 3 power fight against out eastern allies Still in farm house
 April 25 Heavy artillery duels from early morning Much anxiety in the household. Very tense feeling. Firing from our guns soaring well overhead 21.30 tanks report round by "PL" Day of big power conference in San Francisco 12.30 finished dinner when shells began to land in village. Cottage almost opposite hit Retired with family to cellar Lay there for 3 ¾ hours then transferred to cellar in opposite house.Few more shells landed. ¾ hour silence Great relief,:infantry machine and tommy gun fire had

finished, we realised the arti fire had finished. ½ hr silence. Tanks heard on road. Went on to main road, contacted USA troops "Now we are free men" Later we had supper with 10 Yanks Eggs and bacon 1.55 guns opened up in village Rose from bed and had coffee and biscuits. So much for our Gefangenschaft . Glory be!

- April 26 My dear Mary's birthday. My first full day as a free man. Yanks pulled out early morning. Had bath and did washing. Two posterns gave themselves up. Front going well. No sound of arti duels. Did guard for Yanks.
- April 27 DETTENGEN Had car given by Yank officer Started off at 13.00 from PIETENSFELD to ANSBACH -WURZBURG
- April 28 HANUA - FRANKFURTa/mMAINZ – BINGEN COBLENZ. Put up at Wesseling. Distance to date 520 k. Put up at house of robbers. Petrol trouble. Fixed in ½ hr
- April 29 Proceeded from Koln to Aachen Stopped at Deutch – Belg border Driven to Eupen Made quarters at displaced persons centre. Had good time with Yanks Had first doughnuts and coffee Saw film "Hi diddle diddle" Very cold, snowing.
- April 30 Left Eupen at 11.00 hrs for Antwerp Reported to 163 Field Ambulance. Had tea Caught train to Brussels Arrived at 19.15 hrs. Received new kit and taken to hotel. Had supper at local rest. Had local rag given
- May 1 Drew 10/- and 850 francs Spent day in Brussels sightseeing Weather too bad for flights
- May 2 Left rest centre and proceeded by truck to airfield 12k from Brussels Boarded Lancaster bomber at about 13.30hrs Plane took off, flew through snowstorm, landed at Wescot near Aylesbury at 16.30. Grand to be in England again, after having been away from May 21st 1941. Taken to Army reception camp. Grand reception all the way.
- May 3 Left reception camp for Baldwin's End, Eton. Arrived at 16.30hrs

Library photographs of the Long March



Elderly German guards preparing to accompany prisoner



Prisoners passing through a bomb-damaged town



A column of prisoners passing through a town



PoWs resting on a German farm



A column of British PoWs



Prisoners during a brief respite

My mother in her notes records the following:

Gordon and two New Zealanders managed to get away (from the column....location not mentioned) I believe they lay in a ditch until their column had passed. They spent the night in a hay loft and the next morning an old woman came up to collect the eggs, a cockling hen made her suspicious and she betrayed the three of them. They went back to the column. The next bit in the blue book and notes is very guarded. What actually happened was that Gordon and the two New Zealanders 'warmed' two German guards telling them no harm would come to them if they travelled along with them. The Germans were more than willing to go along. Eventually they were taken in to a farm in Bavaria. They lived in the cellar but sat at the table with two SS guards! No questions were asked. The village was under heavy shelling. When it was over the Americans arrived and they gave Gordon and his pals a car and they drove up to the Belgian border.

Gordon was invited to give a talk about his experiences to the local Rotary Club in Leighton Buzzard in the early 1950s. This is a transcript of his hand written notes:

Describe evening of capture and following few evenings

Two days spent in Derna jail dysentery and foul conditions. Trip over to Italy arriving at Taranto in Gulf of Taranto

Cattle truck transport to camp. Form of transit camp. Only clothes were what we stood in.

Italian rations. Medical exam and hair do.

In all camps our Senior NCOs

Move to 65 and with 3 weeks able to write home and confirm I was alive. Italian rations (rice/macaroni and 200g bread) and later food parcels. Wintry November before ant Red Cross parcels arrived. Reasonably small camp, perhaps 6,000 men. Stone built huts split into bays of 48 men. Camp Commandant was a lawyer and very fair. Story of old guard. Bathing facilities and portable hot showers, and shower under latrine taps.

Sector orchestra. Gramophone records (Isobel Bailey , 'I Know that my Redeemer Liveth').

Like the army barrack where there is always a raffle taking place, there was always someone wandering round flogging something.

Deals made with Italian guards, salmon tins. When parcels arrived, forms of cooking. Open fires. Bellow type blowers, then piston and the rotary blowers. Very efficient and economical. Embers obtained from cookhouse. RAF Sergeants balancing bully beef. Working in pairs or syndicates. Stone party extra loaf.

After a few months another first class trip in cattle trucks. Railway straffing. Arrived at Camp 53. Life rather dull, split and move came in a few weeks. Told we were moving

north into better conditions. General swore on heart we were not going to Germans. Few days train ride in carriages and early one morning in Brennerisimo (?) were taken over by Germans. Into 4B near Berlin. More medical exams and hair do. Again form of transit camp. Time was July 1943. Further move to Lamsdorf 344.

Much more organised camp of about 12,000 men. Lots of 1939 fellows there, willing to help and put us right. Barracks of 150 men in two tier bunks, with Comm(anders?) in separate bunks.

Nightly gramophone recitals. Much bridge. Hootch brewed by Aussies. Some died and some blinded.

Change of army in RAF. Old Geo and razor.

Much more interest. Markets and purchases and sales with Germans. Pen bought for 200 cigs. Currency in camp was mainly cigs. Tobacco and cigs from home, plus Red Cross issue. Some Canadians were worth thousands of cigs.

International football, netball matches. Various feasts and fiestas were held by the various nationalities. Canadians from Dieppe landings and handcuffs. French Canadian thought to be put down latrine.

Tunnel activity and method of refilling.

Organised hot baths and duty of NCO to see every man indulged at least once per week.

Camp school and inability to concentrate. Idea to take up camp theatricals to regain concentration. Boy Came Home. Macbeth and G&S Mikado.

Christmas really was Christmas with appropriate Red Cross parcels. Comforts from home in personal parcels.

As opposed to Italy, when only a may preach, we had well organised church padres.

Men of all ranks, mainly privates, for W/P. Volunteered of command of W/P. Blechammer, edge of synthetic petrol plant. Much bombing.

Organised band, concert and dances. Took concert to another camp, first met.....?Time to move. Jan 21st 1945 when Russians were advancing westwards. 1 foot of snow, moved out 4.30pm not knowing where. Marched on and on, passing hundreds of Jews on roadside. Perhaps marched 10k or 50k, over frozen mountains, some men losing ears, toes or fingers from frostbite. Very erratic feeding and often having to buy or steal potatoes to boil in their jackets. Special treat was to save some for next day's journey, when they were frozen in centre.

Glad to sleep anywhere, with any animals for warmth. As days grew warmer, very nice spring, we slept outside.

Escape into hayloft. Ukraine woman gave us away over chicken. Good meal in public.

March with French and Belgians. Decision to march us 3 with 2 guards to rejoin our columns.

Stay in Bavaria with hausfrau.

Arrival of Americans. Car given to us. Journey to Belgian border.

Stays in houses. Trouble with Provost Marshal. Light in Church Army hostel. Breakfast with GIs. Stay in Brussels. Flight home.

10 The Post War years

Victory in Europe (VE Day) was 8th May 1945. Following a period of home leave and a tearful reunion with my mother at Doncaster station marking almost four years since they last met Gordon was posted to various locations around England until final discharge from the Army in May 1946, although he was enlisted in the Royal Army Reserves. There is very little information available for this period so it must be assumed that his postings were to areas to assist in the clearance of bomb damage and the reinstatement of essential infrastructure.

During the war years Gordons mother had had moved to Slough in Berkshire to become a House Matron at Eton College, hence the reference at the end of Gordon's diary to Baldwin's End and which is still one of the many houses within the campus. She had also recovered from her precarious financial position caused by her husband leaving the family in 1928 sufficiently to buy a house in Salt Hill Way, Slough. It was here that Gordon based himself following discharge from the Army.

It was extremely difficult to find any sort of job in 1946, even for an electrical engineer. For some time he and a friend tried to set up an electrical contracting business but with no capital and being unable to borrow Gordon eventually found a job as a maintenance electrician at Optical Measuring Tools, a factory in Slough.. It was at this point that my father and mother married in Doncaster in 1946. Housing, of course, was in extremely short supply and they moved into Gordon's mother's house in Salt Hill Way, Slough. I was born in this house in September 1947. Shortly after they chose to become independent and purchased a caravan on a site in Dedworth Road , Windsor



In about 1950 Gordon moved to a firm called Enfield Cables in Luton and commuted from Windsor every day. In the early 1950's my father and mother decided that this daily journey was not sustainable and purchased a plot of land in Leighton Buzzard, not far from Luton, in the grounds of a large house. We moved around 1952, living in the caravan on the building site along with my maternal grandmother in another caravan. He organised the construction whilst continuing to work and I have very clear memories of this period.

Shortly after moving to Leighton Buzzard he was offered a job at English Electric Navigational Projects Division in Luton and more latterly at Stevenage. His role was as a Liaison Engineer working with various subcontract companies in the design and manufacture of guided missile systems and as such was subject to the Official Secrets Act. Little was known about the products but later research would suggest that he was involved with the Blue Water missile and the English Electric Lightning jet fighter. The job entailed a lot of travelling to other aircraft manufacturers and suppliers throughout the country.

My mother recalled that they never really settled in Leighton Buzzard and about 1956 a plot of land was purchased in an idyllic village called Great Brickhill, five miles from Leighton Buzzard. He designed a single storey building on the site and once again procured and managed all the labour required, whilst doing a considerable amount of the work himself. I have clear memories of accompanying him to the site at weekends and 'helping' as much as I could.

However Gordon began to suffer from ill health in the early 1960s just as he had reached a senior position at English Electric. By late October 1962, after spending the entire year in the London Hospital in Whitechapel and Stoke Mandeville Hospital, he resigned from his position as he was unable to carry on fulfilling his role, leaving in December 1962. My mother and father had decided to purchase the local village shop and Post Office, had paid the deposit and decided that this would be the future means of income for them. Over the Christmas period Gordon's health deteriorated rapidly and he died in Stoke Mandeville Hospital, Aylesbury on January 15th 1963. His kidneys had failed and of course this was before dialysis and transplants were common practice. We can never be sure but the four years of ill-treatment and poor diet whilst a Prisoner of War most likely was a cause of his premature death.

Gordon is buried in an unmarked grave at St Marys Churchyard in Great Brickhill.

10 Appendices

1 Brief Summary and Timeline of Events in Gordon's War

- Called up for war time military service on 16 October 1939 to Royal Engineers, army number 1184039. Joined A Company, 1st Motor Depot (believed to be based in Tyneside)
- Posted to Aldershot to join 50th Motor Division (later to become 50th (Northumbrian) Infantry Division), 235 Field Park Company as Driver on 13 Dec 1939
- Posted to France as part of British Expeditionary Force, 23 January 1940 part of British 2 Corps, 50th (Northumbrian) Infantry Division
- Evacuated from Dunkirk during Operation Dynamo on 1 June 1940, swimming out to waiting small boats.
- Rejoined 235 Field Park Company on 29 June 1940,
- Appointed Acting Lance Corporal 13 July 1940
- In hospital 1st to 18th October 1940.
- Attended 8th Corps Vehicle maintenance course 10 March 1941 to 31 March 1941
- Appointed Acting Corporal 15 April 1941
- Embarked for Egypt 21 May 1941 as part of Middle East Forces
- Disembarked Egypt 10 July 1941
- Appointed Acting Sergeant 19 July 1941
- Embarked 25 July 41 for Cyprus, disembarked 26 July 1941
- In hospital 2 Sept 41 to 30 September 1941
- Cyprus to Palestine Jan 1942
- Palestine to Syria 21 Jan 1942
- From Syria to Egypt 14 Feb 1942
- Libya, captured 28 May 1942, posted as missing in Western Desert 30 May 1942
- Confirmed PoW on 30 May 1942, in Italian hands
- Held Italy, Campo PG 65 at Gravina near Bari (holding camp) then PG 53 near Sforzacosta on east coast
- Transferred to Germany by train in July 1943 to Stalag IV-B 50 km north of Dresden, Germany, for 3 weeks, PoW number 221441
- Transferred to Stalag VIII-B (later called 344) in Lamsdorf, Poland (then Silesia) on 9 August 1943
- Transferred to Working Party E769, Heydebreck, Poland (IG Farben chemical plant, Blechhammer South) on 23 Sep 1944
- Commenced 'Long March' from E769 on 22 Jan 1945, through Poland, Czechoslovakia and south west Germany

- Arrived at Stalag XIII-D, Nuremburg on 28 March 1945
- Left Stalag XII-ID on 2 April 1945 marching south from Nuremburg, believed to be towards Moosburg POW camp. Believed escaped from column and was hidden in farmhouse during American bombardment.
- Liberated by Americans 25 April 1945 at Pietenfeld
- Car given by Americans on 27 April 1945. Drove north through Wurzburg, Frankfurt and Coblenz to Aachen on Dutch/Belgian border.
- Transferred to Antwerp and Brussels on 30 April 1945
- Boarded Lancaster bomber in Brussels and arrived in UK 2 May 1945
- 12 July 45 posted to 2 Div Transport Unit
- Posted to 1 Batt RAOC
- UK service from 2 May 45 and release leave 26 Jan 1946. Discharged 13 May 46
- Into royal army reserves 14 May 1946

The following link to a Google map shows a summary and dates of this timeline:

<http://maps.google.co.uk/maps/ms?msid=203042998168204453429.0004be5b2ba97eed703a8&msa=0&hl=en&ie=UTF8&ll=41.343825,19.467773&spn=28.130329,45.175781&t=m&z=5&vpsrc=1>>

WARTIME SERVICE AN... 🔍

Gordon Leslie Hines
24 VIEWS
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Untitled layer

- 📍 Dunkirk
- 📍 Egypt
- 📍 Cyprus
- 📍 Palestine
- 📍 Syria
- 📍 Egypt
- 📍 Libya
- 📍 Derna Jail
- 📍 PG 65 Gravina Italy
- 📍 PG 53 Sforzacosta Italy
- 📍 Stalag IWB Germany
- 📍 Stalag VIII B Germany
- 📍 E769 Blechhammer, Poland
- 📍 Stalag XIII D Nurnberg, Germany

This map displays various wartime locations and PoW camps across Europe and the Mediterranean. Red pins mark locations such as Dunkirk, Egypt, Cyprus, Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Libya, Derna Jail, PG 65 Gravina Italy, PG 53 Sforzacosta Italy, Stalag IWB Germany, Stalag VIII B Germany, E769 Blechhammer, Poland, and Stalag XIII D Nurnberg, Germany. Blue pins mark locations including Dunkirk, Egypt, Cyprus, Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Libya, Derna Jail, PG 65 Gravina Italy, PG 53 Sforzacosta Italy, Stalag IWB Germany, Stalag VIII B Germany, E769 Blechhammer, Poland, and Stalag XIII D Nurnberg, Germany.

2 Wartime locations and PoW camps

3 Further reading and information

1 The On-line Museum of Prisoners-of-War

www.prisonersofwarmuseum.com

This is an excellent collection of information and contains many individual stories of life inside PoW camps and also of the Long March, an invaluable resource.

2 The Long Way Home

www.lamsdorflongmarch.com

The Long Way Home, a website set up to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Long March. Here are individual stories and detailed maps of a large number of PoW's routes, Gordon's route included. Interesting background information is also included.

3 The Long March to Freedom

This is a TV documentary available on DVD and occasionally on digital TV stations such as Yesterdays and includes many interviews with (then) surviving PoWs.

4 Lamsdorf in their own Words by Philip Baker

A book of personal recollections about Stalag VIII B, or 344 as it later became known.

5 Captivity in British Uniforms by Anna Wickiewicz,

Anna is the curator of the Lamsdorf Museum at the site of Stalag VIII B in Poland. It contains a wealth of background information.

6 The RAAF PoWs of Lamsdorf edited by JE Holliday and DA Radke

Another collection of stories from Australian prisoners, with much detail of day to day life within the camp.

