



# THE BATTLE AT CAMP BOWMANVILLE

Although there were several hundred POW camps in Britain, the majority of German prisoners of war were despatched to the Dominions – Canada and Australia – and, after the United States entered the war, to America. One particular camp in the Canadian town of Bowmanville held several hundred enemy officers and other ranks in accommodation that was closer to a country club than a POW camp. The tedium of incarcerated life and a yearning to return home nevertheless prompted several ingenious escape attempts, including one containing a carefully orchestrated rendezvous with a U-Boat.

The most notorious incident, however, was triggered by Winston Churchill's order to shackle German prisoners in response to Berlin's decision to fetter British prisoners after the aborted Dieppe raid and commando raid on the Channel island of Sark. The reprisal precipitated a three-day riot at Camp 30 – remembered as the 'Battle of Bowmanville'. The only skirmish on Canadian soil during the war, it had the potential to have worsened an already tense international situation over the accepted treatment of prisoners of war.

## THE POW 'SHACKLING CRISIS'

The treatment of prisoners during the Second World War, in principle, should have followed international law. States present at the 1907 Hague Convention agreed that prisoners of war 'must be humanely treated', an outcome that most subsequently ratified in the 1929 Geneva Convention, which decreed in detail the expectations of captor states. Several incidents concerning Britain's maltreatment of German prisoners during the Second World War – including the unsatisfactory POW conditions at Fort Henry, Ontario, Canada; the imprisonment of German civilians in Iran; the ill-treatment of prisoners at Latrun Camp, Palestine (August 1942-May 1943), and the victimisation of officers aboard

HMT *Pasteur* en route from Port Said to Durban in March 1942 – infuriated Berlin and precipitated reprisals.

By David Mitchelhill-Green



Both Bruce Ogden Smith (*above*) and his brother Colin participated in Operation 'Basalt'. When we spoke to Bruce in his London flat in February 1981 surrounded by relics and mementoes (he took the ashtray from the annexe for his collection), he still had a clear recollection of what took place: 'We had taken a grey-coloured cord with us specifically to tie the Germans up as the purpose of the raid was to bring back prisoners. We were all armed with .45 Colts. In the fight my prisoner got away and when the Germans started pouring from the hotel we ran like hell to the boat – it was every man for himself. The prisoner held us up; he was still in his pyjamas. Afterwards we never thought any more about the significance of what we had done until the Press took it up. I believe Major Appleyard reported direct to the Prime Minister himself who was not in the least worried.'

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**Bruce was interviewed by Channel Television on the actual spot where the fight that resulted in two Germans being shot had taken place in October 1942. (Major Appleyard was posted missing on an SAS operation to Sicily in July 1943 and Bruce's brother Colin was killed fighting with the Maquis in Brittany in July 1944.)**

By far the worst crisis in Anglo-German POW affairs erupted after a copy of the operational plan for the Allied raid on the French channel town of Dieppe — Operation 'Jubilee' on August 19, 1942 (see *After the Battle* No. 5) fell into German hands as contained within were instructions that enemy prisoners were to be bound to prevent them from destroying secret papers. Then, following the British commando raid on the island of Sark on the night of October 3/4, two German soldiers were found dead with their hands tied with cord, a flagrant breach of Article 3 of the Geneva Convention which specified the humane treatment of prisoners at all times. (The two men had been captured while asleep in their quarters at the Dixcart Hotel, and their hands had been secured merely to get them to the boat. However, once outside the hotel, they started shouting to raise the alarm so one was shot and another knifed. (See Operation 'Basalt' recounted in *The War in the Channel Islands Then and Now*.)

This provoked Berlin to issue a communiqué stating that the men had been illegitimately bound when they were shot. Despite the British response of 'never [having] countenanced any general order for the tying up of prisoners on the field of battle', Germany followed with a declaration that 107 officers and 1,268 NCOs, mainly Canadian, captured at Dieppe were to be fettered in retaliation for the binding of captured German soldiers. On October 10, Churchill announced that Britain would match Germany's reprisal. Berlin's immediate response was to immediately up the ante with a three-fold increase in the number of prisoners shackled. Hitler clearly believed, because of the disproportionate number of prisoners Germany held, that he held the upper hand. Churchill, though, stood his ground and within days some 3,000 men on both sides were in manacles.

As the crisis deepened with Britain's refusal to back down, Hitler's Foreign Minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, instructed the German ambassador in Tokyo, General Eugene Ott, to seek Japanese support and, possibly, introduce similar reprisals against British POWs held by Japan. Tokyo, how-

ever, felt that the shackling of prisoners ran counter to the spirit of Bushido, disingenuously claiming that its treatment of prisoners 'has so far corresponded to generous and unbounded humanity!' Lukewarm Japanese support was received on October 24 while all approaches to Rome fell on deaf ears, Italy holding significantly fewer British prisoners than its Axis partners.

Meanwhile, the Canadian press voiced its concern over a local breach of the Geneva Convention should the shackling of POWs occur on home soil, while Canada's Department of External Affairs saw the reprisal as an opportunity for Germany 'to play off one part of the Commonwealth against another'. Besides, as Ottawa cabled London, weren't there already sufficient German POWs in Britain? Did Canada even have to participate in the illegal activity?



RICHARD HEAUME, MBE

**When the two men were found dead with their hands tied behind their backs, Hitler perceived their deaths as an execution which triggered an escalating tit-for-tat backlash. The Germans shackled Allied prisoners, mostly Canadians taken at Dieppe, while Britain similarly retaliated, instructing Canada to handcuff German prisoners in their custody. Then Hitler went one stage further by personally issuing his 'Commando Order' which provided that in future all Allied servicemen who took part in commando raids and were captured would be put to death. The two Germans were buried in the German War Cemetery at Fort George, Guernsey. They were Gefreiter Heinrich Esslinger and Unteroffizier August Bleyer.**

However, the Dominion's Office saw matters differently. Canada would actively partake in the reprisal by chaining up to 2,000 prisoners held by them. Following Germany's lead in handcuffing more than 4,100 prisoners, the Canadian government was requested to approve the handcuffing of 3,888 prisoners on October 10.

A note from Winston Churchill to the Canadian Prime Minister, Mackenzie King, called for him to 'stand by us in this anxious business'. Both Canada's High Commissioner in London, Vincent Massey, and Minister of National Defence, James L. Ralston, voiced their concerns after Clement Attlee, the Dominions Secretary, informed them of the contentious decision. Ralston felt that Germany should be allowed to back down without losing face; Massey suggested that Switzerland, as the protecting power, should intervene to defuse the situation. Canada's Cabinet War Committee, also opposed to the chaining, approved lodging a protest with Switzerland over this breach of the Geneva Convention.

King, however, had additional reason for proceeding cautiously. Earlier, on September 4, Ross Munro, a Canadian Press reporter, had delivered Berlin a propaganda windfall. In recounting heroic details of the Dieppe raid to a packed rally in Montreal, Munro spoke openly of German soldiers who were shot, if not murdered, after being captured at a coastal defence battery. Munro's provocative speech made front-page headlines the following day while Canadian military intelligence moved to quickly quash the antagonistic claim.

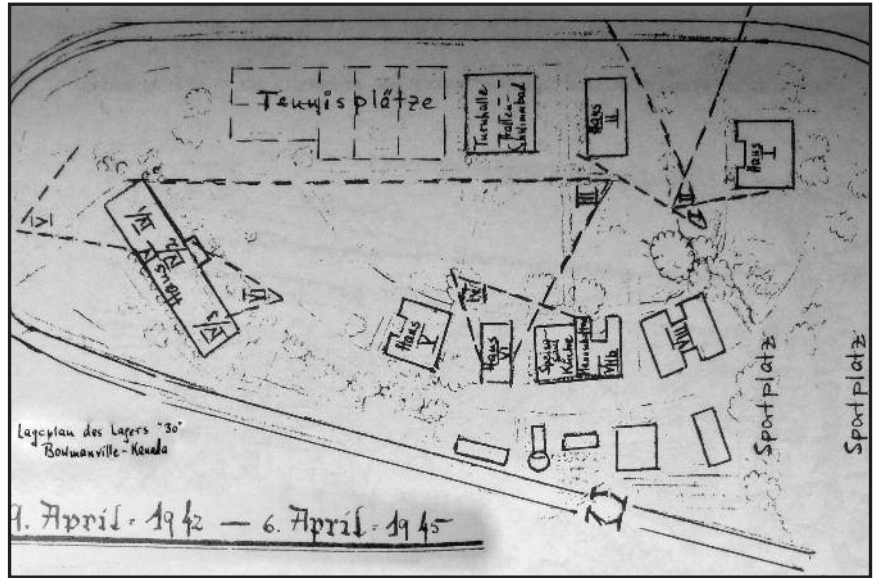
Rather than openly challenge Churchill over the matter, King acquiesced, though with minimal enthusiasm. 'We feel that we have been committed without proper consultation to a course of doubtful wisdom.' The assessment that Germany would always win such a vexed contest was expressed in telegram, concluding that Canadian compliance in the handcuffing of German prisoners was 'decided with regret in order to avert a major difference with Britain'.

Four Canadian camps were nominated to implement the shackling request: No. 20 Gravenhurst, No. 21 Espanola, No. 23 Monteith and No. 30 Bowmanville. Opposition to the cuffing varied from passive resistance at the Monteith and Espanola camps, to outright defiance at Gravenhurst where the prisoners threw their 'shackles into the stoves, rendering them useless', to an outright riot at Bowmanville.





Until the mid-20th century, it was a long-standing convention among the officer class of all armies that capture was related to dishonour, but with the advent of the fast-moving battles, particularly in the air, the chances of capture had increased and corresponding disgrace diminished. *Left*: Generalmajor Georg Friemel was captured at Ypenburg airfield in the Netherlands during the German airborne invasion on May 10, 1940. Until then an Oberst



in command of Infanterie-Regiment 65 of the 22. Luftlande-Division, Friemel was subsequently promoted while in captivity, remaining the highest-ranking POW held by the British until Generalmajor (later Generalleutnant) Johann von Ravenstein was captured by New Zealand troops in North Africa on November 29, 1941. Sent to Canada, he was the first prisoner to occupy Camp 30 at Bowmanville, Ontario (*right*).

### BOWMANVILLE: THE 'MOST LUXURIOUS' CAMP IN THE WORLD

Canada declared war against Germany on September 10, 1939. Shortly thereafter the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, responsible for the country's intelligence and security service, began incarcerating Canadian civilians of German descent deemed to have dubious loyalty, as a precaution against espionage and the emergence of a 'Fifth Column'. The number of internees grew considerably following Winston Churchill's request in June 1940 for Canada to receive German POWs. Existing facilities were hurriedly pressed into service while new purpose-built POW camps were constructed to house the 35,046 German prisoners and internees eventually held during the course of the war. One of the smallest was Camp 30 located in a former school for wayward boys in the small town of Bowmanville, some 50 miles east of Toronto. The first entry inscribed in the camp war diary on October 15, 1941 records the arrival of the commandant, Lieutenant Colonel Charles J. Whebell. Several hundred civilian workers were still on site transforming the former correctional facility into a camp with guard huts, nine perimeter towers and double-apron fencing, 12 feet high, enclosing an area of approximately 14 acres.

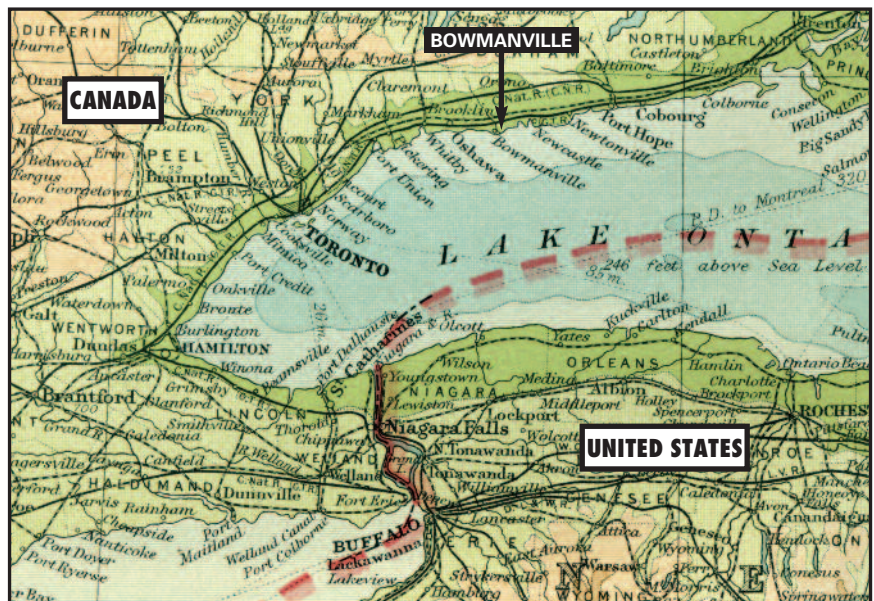
Mindful of possible escape attempts, a meeting was held with the local Chief of Police to formulate plans for recapturing absconded prisoners. Meanwhile orders were received on November 17 to begin transferring prisoners to Bowmanville, the first inmate being Great Britain's highest-ranking prisoner at the time, Generalmajor Georg Friemel, and his adjutant, both relocated from a camp at Kingston in eastern Ontario ahead of the first wave of prisoners.

Two officers and 71 other ranks of the Veterans' Guard of Canada (VGC), a new corps of mostly First World War veterans, arrived from Fort Henry on November 19 ready to escort the first wave of POWs: a non-commissioned officer and ten other ranks transferred from Camp 21 at Espanola. A further 403 German officers and 115 other ranks followed this lead group. Generals were allocated their own room; officers, between two to eight men, were accommodated in a single room, while other ranks were housed in groups of 60 men to a single barrack.

Another 33 prisoners captured in Europe and North Africa, 'all young and vigorous', arrived at the camp on September 20, 1942. Much to their delight, as the camp diary recorded, they were 'very pleased at themselves for drawing such a comfortable billet'. Indeed, a Canadian newspaper editorial described the camp as the 'most luxurious' in the world, complete with swimming pool, library, gymnasium and playing field. A small-scale zoo was even built in mid-1942. It was little wonder, then, that the Canadian War Office deemed the standard of comfort as 'unique'.

Time, especially for the large cohort of POW officers for whom work was forbidden under the Geneva Convention, was passed by a variety of sports, elaborately staged theatrical productions and orchestral performances. Further education was provided by the University of Toronto under YMCA supervision.

Writing home to his mother in the autumn of 1942, one prisoner described his daily camp routine: 'I take an English and Spanish lesson for an hour each, then read until dinner at eleven-thirty; from one to one-thirty I often swim, and until our second roll-call at three, we read or walk. Occasionally we have a coffee party in the dining room, and after we have talked ourselves out there, we go back to our rooms to work for an hour. By that time it is nearly a quarter to six and time for supper. In the evenings we read or write letters. Sometimes we play *Doppelkopf* in the old German fashion with a great deal of talking, or sometimes we drink a glass or more of beer [freely available from the wet canteen, provided the patrons remained "orderly and sober"]. The daily routine includes sports, concerts and lectures. Since we manage the whole camp ourselves, we have similar food to what we had at home.'



The location of Bowmanville, 50 miles east of Toronto, near the shore of Lake Ontario, was a godsend to German prisoners seeking to escape to the United States as the frontier bisected the lake.





Camp 30 was formerly a boys' home built on the grounds of a 300-acre farm donated to the Ontario government by local businessman John H. H. Jury for 'unadjusted boys' who were not considered 'inherently delinquent'. The Boys' Welfare Home and School, later the Ontario Training School for Boys, opened in 1925. Formal regulations stipulated a range of punishments for the boys that were in excess of those the later POWs would receive including solitary confinement for up to 12 hours with a bread and water diet (though an apology could

mitigate this detention); up to ten strokes by a strap as well as expulsion. Boys with an IQ of more than 80 between the ages of ten and 15 were accepted for a maximum period of two years before being placed back into the community at 16. Later in the 1930s the age range was broadened from eight to 18. Despite local protests against the closure of the school and the likely depreciation of local farm prices, a delegation comprising the Department of National Defence, the Swiss Consul and the Red Cross approved the use of the facility as a POW camp.

#### EARLY ESCAPE ATTEMPTS

The first recorded break from Bowmanville was an opportunistic flight by three officers from a train en route to the camp on November 23, 1941 but all were soon recaptured. To their astonishment, the first wave of prisoners discovered that the camp was still under construction and without 'towers and machine guns'. Leutenants Jürgen von Krause and Ulrich Steinhilper seized the opportunity to escape the next day (November 24), followed by a Leutnant Schmidt who was caught crawling under the perimeter wire on November 25. Steinhilper escaped again on December 17 only to be recaptured in Montreal the next day and returned to the camp where he was given 28 days' detention. These early escape attempts led to the daily roll-calls increased from two to three, at 0700, 1500 and 2215 hours, as well as 'unexpected' counts.

The first tunnel was discovered in No. 2 Dormitory on February 9, 1941 originating from a new bathroom in the building's basement. Already 61 feet in length, the tunnel measured 22 inches wide and 27 inches high and ran some 13 feet beneath the road to near the No. 4 guard tower. Leutenants Schmidt and Lüderitz received 21 days in detention for their abortive escape effort, officially described as 'not very successful . . . filled with water'. Engineers subsequently destroyed the tunnel with explosives on February 19.

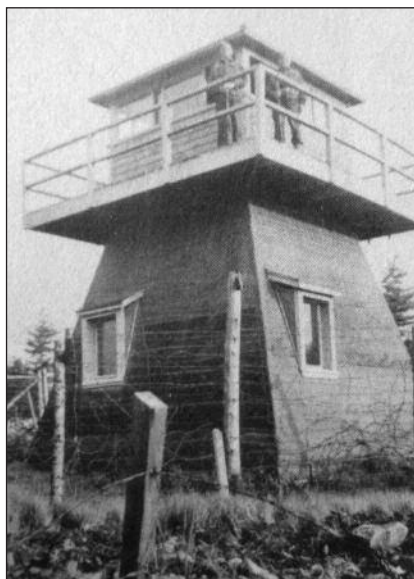
Oberleutnant Hans Peter Krug and Leutnant Erich Boehle brazenly escaped from the camp in broad daylight on April 16, 1942 dressed as civilian workers using clothing supplied by the camp's theatrical troupe. With a crowd of prisoners enthusiastically cheering at a football match which distracted the guards in the nearby towers, Krug and Boehle, armed with two ladders, paint and brushes, proceeded to nonchalantly mend the perimeter barbed-wire fence, painting the posts. A ladder was hoisted up and over to the outside to enable them to paint the

outer side of the posts. After working on several posts, the men calmly descended to freedom. 'We were both scared as we walked away', Krug recounted later, 'but the hardest part then was to keep from running. We knew that if we were too eager, it would be all over. We would be shot.'

The pair carried forged documents to support their new identities: Boehle was now a pilot from No. 5 Squadron, Free Norwegian Air Force, on leave in Toronto; Krug was a Frenchman from the liner SS *Normandie* which had capsized in New York harbour only weeks earlier. Back in the camp, an elaborate ruse was underway to assist the escape. Two dummies, basically Luftwaffe uniforms packed with newspaper and straw with papier-mâché heads and officer's hats, were successfully paraded at two roll-calls before

the ploy was discovered. In the meantime, the two escapees had hitched a ride on a freight train before they separated at Toronto's busy Union Station. Boehle boarded a train for the United States only to be recaptured the next morning in Niagara Falls.

Krug's good fortune, however, continued to hold. Convincing several people, including a military policeman, of his supposed plight, Krug was in turn directed to a Catholic priest who provided him with the money needed for a bus ticket to Windsor on the US-Canadian border. Hiding in bushes until nightfall, Krug made a paddle for a rowboat that he stole before crossing the Detroit river, which marks the border between Canada and America, to Belle Isle, an island park in the middle of the river, before walking across the bridge to the city on the far side.



**Left: Encircling an area of around 14 acres, the perimeter was formed by a double apron of wire 12 feet high with nine guard towers. Three men were assigned to each tower with one of the three on duty at any one time. Camp guards were initially regular army or local militia units until the establishment of the Veterans Guard of Canada (VGC), a new corps of mostly First World War veterans formed on May 24, 1940. Although the maximum age was 50, many men merely lied about their true age; the veterans of the South African campaigns were barred from wearing their ribbons which would be a tell-tale sign of their advancing years. It was reported in mid-June 1942 that since the opening of the camp, seven months earlier, 18 POW officers had already been involved in 12 attempts to escape. This prompted orders to be issued for guards to be 'vigilant and alert always, and suspicious of anything that happens outside of the normal routine'. Guards who thwarted an escape attempt would be rewarded with six days leave.**



During the escape attempt by Oberleutnant Peter Krug (left) and Leutnant Erich Boehle, a 'dummy' was used during roll-call as a substitute prisoner, as demonstrated (right) by two Canadian guards. A report by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police on April 21, 1942 found that the 'two prisoners had been aided in their escape by means of two dummies. These had been constructed of paper-mache. They were made life-size and were dressed in German airforce officer's uniform. The face and features were almost perfect, while hair had been used for eyebrows and the lips appeared to have been coloured with regular lipstick. The frames had been built by means of stuffing paper into a suit of underwear so tightly that the dummy would stand without bending. The dummies were complete from boots to officer's peak cap.' Boehle was quickly captured trying to cross to the States at Niagara Falls but Krug managed to reach San Antonio in Texas before he was apprehended. (The only German POW to successfully escape from Canada was Oberleutnant Franz von Werra — see *After the Battle* No. 2.)



Krug had memorised four addresses in the German community in south-east Detroit from parcels sent to the prisoners by German-American groups such as the 'Red Cross Ladies'. This apparently innocuous activity remained legal even after the US declaration of war in December 1941. However, the parcels would sometimes contain contraband items such as ink and paper which the POWs would use to forge identification documents for use during escapes. Consequently, the US Government requested that all parcels were to carry a return address. It was in this way that Krug was able to make contact with a German immigrant, Margareta Bertelmann; Max Stephan, a German-born restaurant proprietor and member of the pro-Nazi German-American Bund, and Theodore Donay, another Nazi-sympathiser and owner of the Europe (previously the German-American) Import Company. Krug's new associates outfitted him with new clothes and sufficient money to get him a Greyhound bus ticket to an address in Philadelphia via Chicago. However, in the meantime at least one informant, possibly Dietrich Rintelin, Donay's assistant, had reported Krug's presence to the Detroit office of the FBI. The restaurant was raided and Stephan arrested together with his wife Agnes. Bertelmann and Donay were also arrested though the FBI lost track of Krug's whereabouts.

From Philadelphia he travelled north to New York City in the hope of stowing away on a neutral Swedish ship. After this option proved impracticable, he journeyed through Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Nashville and Dallas before arriving in San Antonio, Texas, with plans to cross into neutral Mexico. There Krug hoped to receive assistance from the German embassy. His plan, however, was thwarted after a suspicious hotel owner called the FBI. Arrested shortly afterwards, the fugitive airman was returned to Canada.

Back in Detroit, Stephan was initially charged with harbouring an illegal alien before the US Attorney General, Nicholas Biddle, proclaimed that he would be indicted for treason. Krug, the prosecution's key witness, also recently promoted to Oberleutnant, was brought back to the US as a volunteer witness for the trial that began on June 29, 1942. The case caused a sensation. Resplendent in his blue Luftwaffe dress uniform, Krug entered the court, clicking his heels and saluting an 'astonished bailiff'. His explanation that he had escaped in order to 'return to duty and to inform the German government of conditions in the camp and of the shooting and murder of a comrade offi-

cer' was dismissed by the District Attorney, John C. Lehr, as fanciful. His testament against Stephan, however, was inexplicably damning. Having failed to breach 'his duty of allegiance' to the US as a naturalised citizen, Stephan was ultimately found guilty by the jury of high treason as proscribed in Article III, Section 3, of the US Constitution, and on August 6 Judge Arthur J. Tuttle sentenced him to death.

Although the state of Michigan had long since abolished the death penalty, this was a federal crime and only the second time in US history that a defendant had been given a death sentence for treason. (The first was during the 1790s Whiskey Rebellion although the two convicted men were subsequently pardoned by President George Washington.)

Appeals, however, delayed the execution until July 1943. Judge Tuttle received hundreds of letters supporting his decision, but also some requesting leniency. The Michigan Governor [and US Supreme Court justice] Frank Murphy and US Circuit Court of Appeals Judge Billings Learned Hand and

Solicitor General Charles H. Fahy all wrote to President Franklin D. Roosevelt requesting clemency and just seven hours before he was due to be hanged, the President commuted Stephan's sentence to life imprisonment. Newspapers reported how the 'pudgy restaurateur' stood sullenly in court, a far cry from the former First World War corporal who, on sentencing, had warned his jailers that 'a victorious Germany will not leave Stephan in jail . . . I will never be hanged . . . Germany will win'.

It remains a mystery why Krug chose to testify. Was it a way to escape from the boredom of a POW camp or simply the vain attraction of assisting the FBI? In May 1943 Krug was again brought to Detroit to testify in Theodore Donay's trial. Once again, he was no friend to the defendant, who was convicted of assisting in the act of treason and given a jail sentence of seven-and-a-half years. Bertelmann, a resident alien, was sent to an internment camp for the remainder of the war. Krug was returned to Canada to the camp at Gravenhurst from which he also escaped before being re-captured.



A German restaurant owner, Max Stephan, had been arrested by the FBI for assisting an illegal alien, a charge later increased to treason. In June 1942 Krug, resplendent in his Luftwaffe uniform, was returned to the US to appear as a witness in Stephan's trial.





The cafeteria — Haus I to the Germans — had been the very first building constructed on the site back in 1924. Even though the Boys' Training School began with only 16 youngsters, the cafeteria was provided to serve 300 at one sitting in anticipation of the school's future role as Ontario's largest boys' training institute. However, during its tenure as a prisoner of war camp, it was the

only dining hall on the grounds, which became a problem when Camp 30 reached a peak population of 800. Consequently, a meal rota had to be introduced that included two sittings for each meal throughout the day. It was at this building that the 'battle of Bowmanville' began subsequent to the measure of the shackling of prisoners in October 1942.

#### THE BATTLE OF BOWMANVILLE: DAY ONE

Despite the weather at Bowmanville on October 10 being recorded as 'mild and bright', a storm was brewing inside the camp. A letter marked 'Most Secret' was delivered on the morning of October 10 to the current commandant, Lieutenant Colonel James M. Taylor, informing him of the shackling directive. The highest-ranking German officer, Generalmajor Georg Friemel, and his adjutant, were then directed to provide prisoners for fettering. Friemel flatly refused, replying by letter that no further communication would occur until the order was rescinded. The senior army officer, Generalleutnant Johann von Ravenstein, senior Luftwaffe officer Oberstleutnant Hans Hefe and senior Kriegsmarine officer Korvettenkapitän Otto Kretschmer also refused to cooperate.

Meanwhile, word of the shackling directive had spread and POWs began barricading themselves inside barracks, armed with broom handles and hockey sticks. Luftwaffe and Kriegsmarine personnel discussed switching uniforms so no individual would be shamed wearing their own uniform should the order be carried out. Roll-call that afternoon at 1500 hours was boycotted by the prisoners in a direct challenge to the Canadians.

With tension mounting, Taylor sent for reinforcements but the VGC guards trying to dislodge the barricaded prisoners were met with a fusillade of tableware, glass and clubs as they attempted to rush the barracks. Breaking a hole in the roof, guards trained a fire-hose onto the rioters below. A contingent then stormed the kitchen, armed with unloaded rifles with fixed bayonets. A fierce 'battle' ensued before the guards retreated, unable to

enter the building as the doors and windows had been barricaded with mattresses.

'We were determined', Oberleutnant Horst Elfe, the former commander of *U-93*, recalled, 'but a little frightened too. We thought the Canadians would come in with machine guns and tear gas and grenades, because that is what would have happened in Europe. So we were shattered when we looked from our windows and saw the Canadians marching in with no guns, no gas, just baseball bats on their shoulders.'

Former artillery officer and survivor from the battleship *Bismarck*, Kapitänleutnant Burkard von Müllenheim-Rechberg, recounted what happened next. 'We observed through the fence a company of younger, front-line soldiers. They formed up outside where they were required to turn in live ammunition and were armed instead



DAVID MITCHELL-HILL-GREEN

David Green visited Camp 30 with Charles Taws in 2014: they were disappointed to find the cafeteria had been boarded-up.





DAVID MITCHELL-GREEN

**Anxious to find any traces of the riot that October, Charles inspects the building to see if it had been struck by a bullet.**

with billy clubs, baseball bats, and the like. The Canadians' first objective was the cook-house which stood nearest to the camp gate and also contained the big dining hall. In this stone structure [in reality, brick and stucco] our enlisted men, whose wooden barracks would have been too flimsy for the approaching "operations", had barricaded themselves. They had placed up-ended tables against the windows and posted themselves behind, armed with hockey sticks, chair legs and soup ladles; as projectiles they had readied crockery, cutlery and marmalade jars. And then the Canadians attacked. They broke the window mullions with battering rams and stuck their heads cautiously into the cook-house but the defenders' blows on their steel helmets checked their initial élan. Then one of them made a daring leap into the house. The superior force inside quickly put him out of action and was delighted to have his helmet as booty. But soon fighting broke out at every window, blows landed on heads and shoulders, marmalade jars and other projectiles flew, soon there were injuries on both sides, bloody and in part marmalade-smearred faces, which were easy to confuse. The fight swayed back and forth, but in the end the Canadians, with their superior numbers, succeeded in making a decisive breakthrough into the cook-house and overwhelming its occupants, the "conquest" of their operational objective.

'Among the occupants of the cook-house were the army enlisted men whom the Canadians sought to handcuff, but they had not yet found a single officer. The army officers would still have to be hauled out of the other houses, one house after the other to be stormed. The next operational objective that presented itself was House VI, which was right beside the cook-house. As it served as the hospital, however, it was spared from the "prosecution" of war.'

In his memoirs, Müllenheim-Rechberg described how the Canadians next 'attacked House V, an officers' quarters beside House VI. Its occupants had withdrawn into the cellar and barricaded themselves there. The Canadians thereupon decided upon a different tactic. From outside, they used fire-hoses to flood the cellar. And as only a few Canadians were needed for this operation, many of them had the unexpected, welcome opportunity to look through the rooms on the ground

floor. And there were so many things to discover: beer, cigarettes, Germans medals, rank badges, cockades, valuable objects of every sort. Stimulated by beer, they took these "souvenirs" home in their pockets.'

'In the meanwhile, the water had nearly filled the cellar and done its job; the German officers climbed out, dripping wet, with "hands up", the way the Canadian had shouted at them to do. Their captors, whom

the alcohol had got out of control, greeted them with blows, shoves and kicks, readying a regular gauntlet for the [surrendering] Germans to run, with the aim of avenging the injuries their comrades had received during the conquest of the cook-house; it was not a very sporting conclusion to the capitulation of House V. The Canadian camp technical [engineering] officer, Captain [in fact Lieutenant G. E.] Brent, especially aroused the Germans' anger. In an absurd victor's pose, he let his swagger stick dance indiscriminately on the heads of the German officers as they came up.'

The Canadians separated out the German army officers from House V and handcuffed them. The first day's fighting had concluded, though the battle had not yet been won. Taylor, in the meantime, had contacted Military District No. 3 in Kingston; the camp war diary noted the arrival of three officers and 50 other ranks from the Royal Canadian Ordnance Corps (RCOC) at about 1945 hours. A second convoy arrived from Ordnance Training School at 2210 hours to bolster Taylor's force.

#### DAY TWO

During a transfer of prisoners to neighbouring Darch House at approximately 0520 hours, it was discovered that two officers had escaped. Just over an hour later a shot was heard from a guard firing at the escapees who had refused to stop when challenged. Both men were subsequently recaptured and returned to camp.

In the morning, Taylor proposed a deal whereby if the selected army officers voluntarily reported to be fettered, then some of the captured officers from House V being held as security would be allowed to return to their quarters but the overture was refused. Moreover Brent's actions the previous day had generated considerable acrimony within the prisoners' ranks.



DAVID MITCHELL-GREEN

**Bowmanville is the only wartime POW camp still standing in Canada and is increasingly falling prey to vandals. Despite local efforts to have the site preserved, it is becoming more and more derelict. This is again the dining hall.**





FORBES WILSON

Kretschmer (the former commander of *U-99*) advised that it would be unwise for the despised Canadian officer to enter the compound. Müllenheim-Rechberg explained that the 'situation remained at this stalemate, even after the visit of a representative of the Swiss protecting power, who had rushed to the scene from Ottawa. The latter's attempts at mediation also failed for by now passions were running high.'

Brent, a marked man, entered the compound in the morning, accompanied by a VGC guard. Word of his presence quickly spread within the camp. Kretschmer, in the company of Luftwaffe pilots Oberleutnant Erwin Moll and Oberst Artur von Casimir (CO of KG 100) confronted him in front of House IV, a position out of sight from the perimeter guard towers. Oberführer Volkmann König (deck-gun officer from *U-99*) afterwards told how Brent's 'Good morning, commander' was met with a 'fist into Brent's face while Leutnant Moll knocked the guard to the ground. Captain Brent was dragged into House IV. He was bleeding from his nose and mouth. And he was reviled by us. I was standing beside Captain Brent and was ordered: "Quick, shackle this man! We will parade him through the camp!" I tied his hands behind his back and pushed him ahead of me towards one of the exits at the rear of our house along which the perimeter wire fence stretched. I was accompanied by a "patrol" of House IV inmates. As we exited into the open, Captain Brent and I first, we were challenged from the opposite guard

**This is Haus IV, the Generals' House, as it appears today. Burkard von Müllenheim-Rechberg described his arrival at the camp: 'The first glimpse was highly agreeable. We saw pleasant, low houses and one or other higher utilitarian structures, all built of solid stones, with pretty grounds planted in between with the trees and shrubs. As a senior Kapitänleutnant — together with a Luftwaffe major — I enjoyed the advantage of being able to take possession of a double room in a long building. Besides a bed, we each had a table and, for the two of us, a separate bathroom with tub and sink, all centrally heated, and with hot water out of the tap. I knew right away that I now found myself in a camp, which later and quite justifiably became known as "unquestionably the finest on this or that side of the ocean".'**



**Victoria Hall — known as Haus IV — was home to the generals and it was here, outside the building, that the confrontation took place between Oberst Artur von Casimir (left) and Lieutenant Brent on the second day of the riot. The second largest of the camp's barrack buildings, it also contained a 16-bed hospital and a fully-equipped dental clinic. Located close to the camp perimeter, it was from this building that two tunnels were dug, the spoil hidden within the building's attic. At one point, part of the ceiling collapsed under the weight though the prisoners were able to patch up the hole before the next routine inspection.**

tower: "Back into the building!" Simultaneously rifles were pointed at us from the tower. Captain Brent threw himself immediately on the ground. We jumped back into the building, I was the last one. As I was in the doorway a number of shots rang out. One went into the left door-frame at a height of six feet, another at about 32 inches hit the masonry wall left of the door. This bullet disintegrated and I was wounded in my left side by a number of bullet fragments and masonry pieces. As I was diving head first through the doorway another shot rang out. I received a gunshot that penetrated clean through my left thigh.'

The subsequent war diary entry, however, states that 'POW 84882 Ensign Koenig received a GSW [gunshot] wound in leg, having been shot by Sentry Corporal J. E. Morrison, also seized and beaten and then left alone and returned himself to Scout Centre'. This is at odds with the German accounts specifying that the rifle shots originated from a guard tower.

### DAY THREE

Day three of the rebellion — October 12 — began with the arrival of No. 4 Detachment, RCOC, at 0545 hours under the command of Major D. F. Adams. No morning roll-call was held. A delegation including members of the Swiss Consul conferred with Friemel at 1100 hours informing him that the attitude of the prisoners was wrong and could lead to further trouble.

Forty-five minutes later, Taylor directed

the 400 Canadian troops, hungry for action and armed with clubs and unloaded rifles with fixed bayonets, to storm Houses I to V in what became a bloody six-hour mêlée. As the war diary recorded, 'operations continued until about 1730, when all POWs were on parade ground, in detention, or in hospital . . . four POWs in hospital, 80 in camp hospital and 55 balance held for handcuffing'.

Revenge was exacted by the captors. According to one of the Canadian troops, Bill Kennedy: 'We tried to herd the prisoners out of each building. As we did this, we were told not to touch or hurt them in any way. But by this time some of the fellows from Kingston were pretty worked up. One of them, who had been punched in the eye by a prisoner, was clubbing the inmates over the head as they came out the door. Then an officer ordered him to not to hit anyone whose hands were up. "Okay, Sir", this chap answered. But when the next German came out with his hands up, the same man yelled: "Put your gaddamned hands down!" The POW did so and was slugged on the back of the head with a tent peg. There was a lot of that sort of thing.' As submariner Siegfried Bruse (*U-35*) added, 'we had no choice because we were unarmed. Then the Canadians made sort of a barrier away from the front door. There were two lines of guards there and we had to walk down the centre. As we did so, they hit us on the head with clubs. It wasn't fair, but they were mad because it had taken three days to end the whole thing.'



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L-R: Oberleutnants Karl Heschl, Krange-Toskau, Linné, Groothus and Oberfähnrich-zur-See Volkmar König.



L-R: Oberfähnrich-zur-See Sarolowsky, König (again), Günter Rubahn, Scheider and Stührenberg.

#### AFTERMATH

Generalmajor Friemel wasted no time writing to the Swiss Consul General about the incident. 'Forty-six prisoners of war suffered casualties up until the time the resistance was stopped', he protested. 'I do not fail to recognise that the authorities have tried to avoid bloodshed. However, I must confirm that only after resistance ended not less than 107 prisoners of war (officers and men), while a great part put up their hands, were beaten with sticks and rifles or were injured with bayonets. Among these defenceless were found a doctor distinguishable by a Red Cross armband and a lieutenant wounded before and lying on a stretcher. One officer suffered a head wound with concussion of the brain and probably a fractured shoulder blade. Another an injury of the lungs through a stab with a bayonet. It must be pointed out that some Canadian officers and soldiers, especially those of the present staff, tried to protect the defenceless prisoners of war against mistreatment. I petition you to make complaints to the Canadian Government with regard to the treatment of German soldiers after the cessation of the fight.'

Responding to Friemel's protest, Lieutenant-Colonel Taylor's moderated response described the 'considerable confusion and excitement' during the riot. 'Most of the fighting was at close quarters, and because of the nature of the buildings the space, available for action in most cases, was rather limited, and it was during the mêlée that went on in each of the buildings in turn, and before the prisoners surrendered and agreed to come out voluntarily, that most of the

casualties on both sides took place. It should be realised, that while in some instances the prisoners in one or two rooms would surrender, fighting continued in other parts of the same buildings, adding to the confusion, in so far as the troops were concerned.'

The camp diary recorded that prisoners were afterwards busily engaged in cleaning up the debris from the riot while 22 officers and 33 other ranks were taken to nearby White House and Darch House, respectively, where they were handcuffed without opposition. Three officers and 183 other ranks from the RCOC returned to Kingston with two troops remaining behind in hospital. The Germans defiantly presented the Canadians with a bill for \$12,000 for their plundered wardrobes, destroyed uniforms and liberated medals and wrist watches. The Canadians countered with a \$12,000 charge to cover the damage to camp property.

The three-day riot shocked Prime Minister King who was incensed by a disingenuous article on the insurrection that appeared in America's *Time* magazine on October 26, 1942. According to the article, 'the Canadians came with the manacles, the big blond Nazi boys at Camp Bowmanville put up an awful fight. In the mêlée one was bayoneted (severely), another shot (not seriously); 400 barricaded themselves in the camp's main hall.' Especially worrying was a description how guards — in the Brent incident — had fired 'a couple of tentative machine-gun blasts and the prisoners ducked back. After 35 minutes of high-pressure water and tear gas, the Nazis marched out smartly in military fashion.'

The Canadian legation in Washington made official representations to US authori-

ties through fear of the incident having 'dramatic repercussions on the lives of Canadian prisoners of war in Germany'. King noted in his diary that it 'gives Hitler just the kind of ammunition he wants. All goes to show the folly of shackling prisoners at the outset and the wisdom of our decision not to attempt it on more than the present scale.'

While the publisher of *Time* defended the story's accuracy, Ralston downplayed both the incident and the errors in the article, stating that 'no machine-gun fire was used nor was there tear gas or any other form of gas resorted to throughout the trouble'. Berlin, though, had received all details of the 'battle' including the beating of prisoners and the theft of their medals courtesy of the Swiss consul. For some reason, perhaps not to escalate the situation and jeopardise ongoing negotiations in Switzerland, Germany chose not to use the incident for propaganda purposes.

Kretschmer escaped punishment while Casimir was mistakenly charged on November 9 with having assaulted Lieutenant Brent. London eventually declared an end to the shackling a month later on December 8 and Berlin briefly reciprocated by unshackling prisoners over the Christmas and New Year period.

After shackling at Bowmanville ceased on December 11, 1942, a number of the ring-leaders were removed to a camp at Farnham, and from there to Grand Ligne, north-east of Montreal, in an attempt to avert future trouble. The shackling crisis finally ended in November 1943 when Germany finally began unshackling British and Canadian prisoners.



The group photos appear to have been taken outside this building.

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Korvettenkapitän Otto Kretschmer (left) had been captured on March 17, 1941 when *U-99* was brought to the surface. He first spent time at No. 1 POW Camp at Grizedale Hall in Cumberland — known as the 'U-Boat Hotel' — but later in Canada in 1943 an



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elaborate attempt was planned to rescue him along with other valuable U-Boat captains held at Bowmanville. Right: Two tunnels were dug from Haus IV to the perimeter in the foreground, the second one begun specifically for Kretschmer's U-Boat break-out.

#### OPERATION 'KIEBITZ'

An elaborate escape plan was hatched in 1943 to liberate some of Germany's top submariners from Bowmanville including Otto Kretschmer, Kapitänleutnant Hans Ey (*U-433*), Kapitänleutnant Horst Elfe (*U-93*), Kapitänleutnant Wolfgang Heyda (*U-434*) and Joachim von Knebel-Döberitz, Kretschmer's executive officer and former adjutant to Grossadmiral Karl Dönitz, the commander-in-chief of the Kriegsmarine. If successful, 'Kiebitz' would be a strategic and propaganda windfall for Berlin at a time when the tide of the war had swung heavily in the Allies' favour.

Senior naval officers at Bowmanville were in regular contact with Dönitz via a cunningly simple written cipher, known as Code Irland. Seemingly invisible to the censors examining the mail passing through Red Cross channels, coded messages could be easily encrypted using words beginning with the appropriate first letter. A simple transposition of particular letters of the alphabet into Morse code meant the letters A to I represented a dot; J to R a dash and S to Z a space. In this way, an innocent letter written by a prisoner to his family could convey vital information.

Although the code was soon exposed by the Canadian Naval Intelligence Division responsible for the interrogation of POWs, the exchange of POW mail was still permitted. One particular decoded letter alerted Canadian authorities to a planned break-out from Bowmanville coupled with a rendezvous with a U-Boat at an isolated spot on the New Brunswick coast.

A similar plan, code-named 'Elster', involving two U-Boats (*U-376* and *U-262*) in early May 1943 to rescue escaped prisoners from Camp 70 on Prince Edward Island in the Gulf of St Lawrence had already failed but the senior officers at Bowmanville had received confirmation from Dönitz regarding the new rendezvous. Kapitänleutnant Rolf Schauenburg, commanding officer of *U-536*, received orders to carry out the rescue attempt on September 12, although the U-Boat initially assigned to the operation (*U-669*) had been attacked, either by the RCAF's No. 407 Squadron on September 7 or by No. 612 Squadron of the RAF, five days earlier.

Canadian Naval Intelligence pieced together the ambitious escape plan following a fortuitous discovery by Staff Sergeant Stephen Lett of the Crime Detection Laboratory at Regina. Carefully examining the binding of an Arnold Ulitz novel (*Die Braut des Berühmten*) posted from Germany, Lett discovered a number of escape documents including a map of the eastern Canadian coastline revealing the rendezvous point, a forged National Registration card and Canadian and US currency secreted inside the book's cover. A 300-foot tunnel — 'a masterpiece of engineering' — had already been discovered at the camp after an RCMP team had probed the Bowmanville compound at night after hearing digging sounds.

Lett's chance discovery spurred Admiral Leonard W. Murray, Commander-in-Chief Canadian Northwest Atlantic, to form a party comprising himself, Lieutenant Leslie 'Rocky' Hill, Captain William L. Puxley and Lieutenant-Commander Desmond Piers to board and capture the waiting U-Boat. A late inclusion was Lieutenant-Commander Ansten Anstensen, a fluent German speaker who would impersonate a senior army officer, of superior rank to the U-Boat's captain, and 'assume some kind of control'. Two mobile radar units would be used to detect the submarine.

Once the prisoners had been apprehended as they emerged from a tunnel exit beyond the perimeter fence, a news item would be broadcast to deceive Schauenburg that the escape was successful. Then seven volunteers, impersonating the escapees, would meet the U-Boat at the rendezvous point. Once aboard the submarine, Murray's men were to capture it by heaving a heavy chain down the conning tower hatch to prevent it closing and attacking the crew with an assortment of weapons comprising smoke grenades, hand-grenades, revolvers and daggers. However, the proposal was cancelled as the British Admiralty asked the Canadian Navy to sink the submarine.

Back inside Camp 30, once Kretschmer learned of the rendezvous he requested use of a tunnel already in progress, only to have his appeal vetoed. This led to the digging of a second tunnel, also originating from under Hut IV, with friendly rivalry developing between the two tunnelling gangs with the

sharing of information, tools and manpower. Plans, however, went awry after the discovery of soil in the attic of the hut on August 30, 1943 just as the first tunnel was nearing completion. To keep the project alive, Kretschmer allowed 'his' shaft to be discovered on the same morning so that the original one could continue. However, the guards quickly realised that the volume of secreted spoil must indicate that there was a second passage, and this 'missing' tunnel was located the next morning during a comprehensive search.

#### HEYDA'S ESCAPE

With the tunnelling project effectively terminated, Kapitänleutnant Heyda convinced Kretschmer to allow him to escape via a plan he had developed independently. Donning a badly-fitting Canadian Army sergeant's uniform, Heyda cleared the perimeter wire by jury-rigging a bosun's chair to run along the telegraph wires. As Horst Elfe recalled after the war, there was a 'painful moment' on the night of September 24/25 when 'Heyda's legs were dangling in a searchlight beam'.

With a man missing, the prisoners were held on the parade ground until 0500 hours the following morning (September 25), and although an identification parade was held, it proved impossible to tell who the missing prisoner was. The local police were notified but a second identification parade held that afternoon had to be halted after it became apparent that prisoners were switching uniforms. The POWs were duly informed that they would remain on the parade ground until 'their nonsense' stopped. Finally, at 1800 hours the prisoners agreed to cooperate and, reassembled at 1930 hours, Heyda's absence was confirmed and a description passed on to the police.

In the intervening period, Heyda had travelled by train to Montreal and then on by foot to Point de Maisonette. It appears that he either carried a forged document authorising him to conduct a geological survey on the Point for the Royal Canadian Navy or papers showing that he had been discharged from the Royal Canadian Engineers in order to join the Northern Electric Company to make anti-submarine equipment.





The plan was to rendezvous with a U-Boat on the coast and after the war, Kretschner (who rejoined the German navy in 1955) explained his thinking behind his choice of a rendezvous point: 'I had an atlas that I got in England; it was a nice school atlas that we could use to study the Canadian Atlantic shoreline. At the point where the St Lawrence empties into the sea, along the shores of its wide mouth, we located a large number of bays. One of them, called Chaleur Bay, attracted our attention because of a cape that protruded into it and which would

favour an escape. We could easily reach Pointe Maisonnette in three or four days and once there, it would be possible to board a submarine'. In the event, it was Kapitänleutnant Wolfgang Heyda (right) who took the escape forward after the tunnels were discovered. His idea was to swing over the wire using telegraph wires to run a bosun's chair to freedom. Heyda successfully got to within a few hundred yards of the coast before being captured. Six weeks later the U-Boat sent to pick them up was sent to the bottom.

Waiting at the lighthouse, Lieutenant-Commander Piers and his party, with an anti-submarine task force waiting offshore, were now aware that although the group break-out had failed, a single prisoner had successfully escaped and was most probably making his way to the rendezvous point. Heyda was finally apprehended on the evening of September 28 just half a mile from the coast.

According to a later interrogation of the survivors from *U-536* after it was sunk on November 20, 1943, Schauenburg had provided only a brief outline of the mission to his crew. Proceeding to Canada, he told them that they were to pick up three escaped U-Boat prisoners, one of whom the crew assumed to be the ace captain Kretschmer.

The submarine arrived in the Gulf of St Lawrence around September 16 with orders to be alert for the escapees from September

23 onward. Oberleutnant Wolfgang von Bartenwerfer and another crewman were to proceed to the rendezvous in a motorboat. Having arrived in Chaleur Bay, from 200 yards off the beach Schauenburg scanned the shoreline through his periscope but he was concerned as his chart showed a solitary building where now there were several. He also had a feeling of being trapped when a signal in German — *komm, komm* — was flashed from the shore. Convinced that the plan had been compromised, Schauenburg lay submerged on the seabed throughout September 27. As he knew the enemy warships could not use depth-charges in shallow water without risk of damage to themselves, he thought they would try to force him into deeper waters before attacking. Remaining stationary in shallow water until the night of September 27/28, *U-536* crept out of Chaleur Bay at a depth of 65 feet. In water just deep

enough to cover the U-Boat's conning tower and periscope, the submarine became briefly snared in a fishing trawler's net as it made for open sea. Upon reaching the Cabot Straits, Schauenburg sighted a destroyer and, it is believed, fired three torpedoes at it but all missed their target.

Six weeks later, on November 20, *U-536* was sunk by the frigate *HMS Nene* and the Canadian corvettes *HMCS Calgary* and *Snowberry*. Schauenburg, together with 16 other survivors from his crew of 55, was captured and, ironically, sent to a POW camp in Canada.

Over the next two years there were further smaller-scale escape attempts at Bowmanville before it closed in April 1945. Although the prisoners were repatriated to Britain, and then onwards to Germany, in later years a number chose to return to Canada.



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Jim Thompson, who was serving as a former staff member at the boys' training school on the outbreak of war, recalled the haste in which the transformation of Bowmanville into a POW camp had to take place. Jim says that 'we were given exactly 24 hours from the time word came down from Ottawa to the time when we had to have all of the boys out of the place. It was not easy to do. There was one hell of a lot of scrambling.

Then, as soon as possible after the war ended and the POWs were out, our boys were brought back.' Camp 30 subsequently reverted to provincial government control and operated as an educational centre under various guises until it was closed in 2008. Today the former camp buildings lie abandoned while local activists endeavour to preserve this unique piece of Canadian wartime history.