



Official Newsletter of the Michigan Company of Military Historians & Collectors
July 13, 2015

“While the American people might well be conquered by well-disciplined European troops, the country of America was unconquerable.” **Comment by Charles James Fox, a member of the Opposition in the House of Commons, February 22, 1782, proposing that the American war be abandoned. Shortly thereafter Lord North resigned and his administration dissolved.**

“Texans are usually quite good at seeing the importance of Texas; the problem is getting them to see the importance of anything else.” **Akhil Reed Amar, *The Law of The Land*, 2010**

General George S. Patton’s comment when asked for his views on de-Nazifying German POWs *“Trying to do that would be like trying to fertilize a forty acre field with a fart.”*

“That’s the way it is in war. You win or lose, live or die - and the difference is just an eyelash.” **General Douglas MacArthur *Reminiscences*, 1964**

Our July speaker is Mr. Mike Keenan a WW II PBY crewman who served searching for and depth charging enemy (presumably) subs. Their plane definitely avoided subs on the surface with their 20mm guns as opposed to the .50 cal "pea shooters" that a PBY carried.

MEETINGS take place the second Monday of every month at the **Riverfront Hotel Grand Rapids** 270 Ann St NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49504 (616) 363-9001. Socializing begins at 6:00 (1800), dinner at 7:00 (1900), business meeting 7:15 (1915), and program at 8:00 (2000).

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Company Notes

- ◆ **Fern Obeshaw will stand for full membership this meeting. We will also select a new Adjutant. Any objections, contact Gary before next meeting.**

Merchant Aircraft Carrier MAC

At the onset of WWII in September, 1939 England imported slightly over 50% of the foodstuff needed to sustain her population. Most of her agriculture was dependent on small and largely inefficient family farms. Large estates took up a substantial portion of the arable land and had very little impact on contributing to the local food supply. With the commencement of U-Boat attacks the available food supply was greatly threatened. Government action to put more land into production would take time but with the shortage of labor in combination with Victorian era farming methods any increase in production was negligible. Over 75% of the farms did not even have electricity. The country needed the grains and other already harvested viands to support herself. The convoy system was restarted and warships were initially used to escort the 15 to 25 ship convoys which originated in Halifax, Nova Scotia. As the war progressed the escorting destroyers and cruisers were needed elsewhere and convoy defense suffered.

As a stopgap measure England developed the CAM or Catapult Aircraft Merchant ship which provided some protection for the ships. Initially most of the merchant sinkings took place close to the British Isles but the Germans soon realized that sending her boats out far enough into the Atlantic where land based search aircraft could not be used proved to be a very rewarding tactic. Shipping losses averaged over 15% with some convoys losing over half of their ships. While the loss of the cargoes was immediately felt it was the sinking of the ships that really threatened the nation. Replacements could not be produced fast enough and the British soon found themselves in dire straits. Even when the US agreed to escort some of the convoys halfway across the Atlantic prior to her entry into the war it was not enough. When Germany declared war on America England faced another threat from US Admiral Ernest King, who not only greatly disliked the English but felt that the real threat to America was from the Japanese and directed his resources accordingly. He foot dragged any request by the English for succor. Eventually he was forced to acquiesce to England's need for continual air cover and he agreed to build escort carriers to accompany the convoys.

Before the carriers could be built a hybrid concept emerged early in 1942 when, in the face of mounting losses from U-boat attacks, it became apparent that escort carriers could not be delivered quickly enough in the numbers required. A merchant aircraft carrier (also known as a MAC) was a limited purpose aircraft carrier built on a British hull designed for bulk grain ships and oil tankers was envisioned. By adding a flight deck, this modified transport could launch anti-submarine aircraft in support of Allied convoys during the Battle of the Atlantic. Sir James Lithgow, Controller of Merchant Shipbuilding and Repair and joint-owner of Lithgows Ltd, the Clyde-based shipbuilders, helped overcome reservations about MACs. Lithgow is said to have sketched a rough design for one on the back of an envelope and offered to convert two ships about to be built at his family's shipyard on condition that "I am not interfered with by the Admiralty". The first two MACs were ordered in June 1942. Despite their military appearance and combatant function, MACs were civilian ships that did not appear in the Navy List nor were they commanded by commissioned officers. This unusual status is one of their defining characteristics. The hybrid nature of the MACs raised from the outset the question of whether they would be commissioned warships like the new escort carriers, or if they would operate as merchant ships under the Red Ensign like the earlier CAM ships. The Admiralty's preference was to operate them as regular warships but it soon became clear that there were not enough personnel available to man them to naval standards without causing serious shortfalls in other areas, in particular the large numbers of escort carriers that would soon arrive.

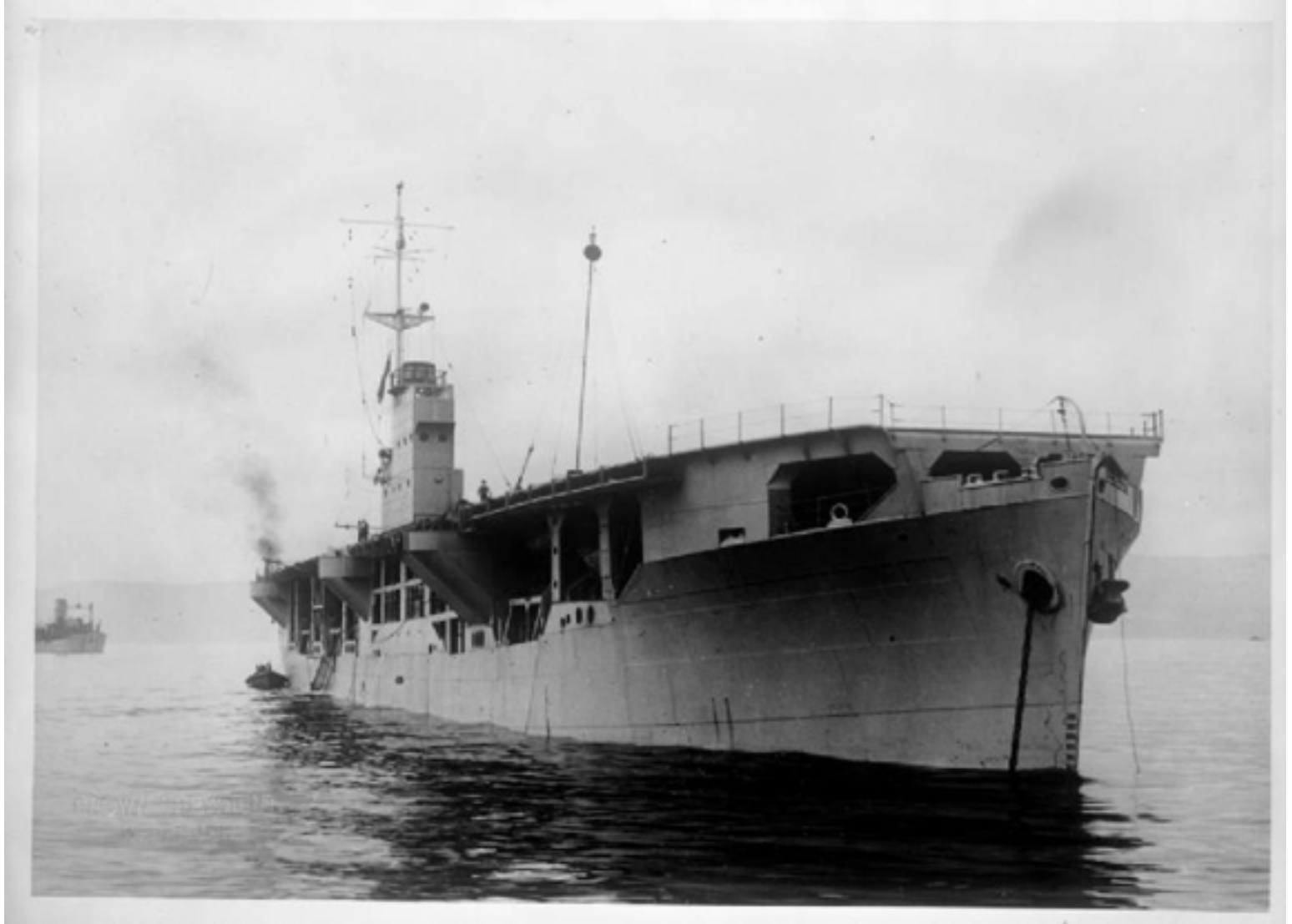
The Admiralty and Ministry of War Transport therefore agreed that the MACs would be civilian-manned. Serious reservations about the proposed civilian status were raised by Foreign Office officials. They were concerned that the ships would be *de facto* warships under international

law but without the protection afforded by the 1907 Hague Convention which applied only to members of the armed forces. Their civilian crews would be liable to be treated as unlawful combatants, or *francs-tireurs* (free shooters). The potential for such action had been clearly demonstrated by the execution in 1916 of Captain Fryatt, who attempted to ram a U-boat with his cross-Channel ferry. (Charles Algernon Fryatt, a British mariner, was executed by the Germans for attempting to ram a U-boat in 1915. When his ship, the *SS Brussels*, was captured off the Netherlands in 1916. He was court-martialed and sentenced to death although he was a civilian non-combatant. International outrage followed his execution near Bruges, Belgium. In 1919, his body was reburied with full honors in the United Kingdom.)

The newly-build grain ship MACs were based on the Ministry of War Transport's standard tramp hull which could just accommodate the Admiralty's revised requirement for a flight deck of not less than 390 ft. length and 62 ft. breadth: they were eventually built with flight decks of between 413 ft. and 424 ft. The standard design used for the newly built tankers enabled a longer flight deck of approximately 460 ft. with minor variations between individual ships. The most obvious modification was the flight deck and its supporting structure which was arranged in sections (three on the grain ships; four in the case of tankers) with expansion joints in between. The flight deck was built at the level that would normally have been occupied by the wheelhouse, this entailed removal of the existing wheelhouse and the funnel. The space immediately under the flight deck was utilized for the arrester gear mechanisms, four wires to each MAC with an additional unit fitted to the tankers to operate the trickle wire and safety barrier. A small island structure contained the bridge and wheelhouse and, in the tanker MACs, a chartroom that could be used as a pilots' briefing room. Less apparent modifications included; accommodation for 107 crew (about 50 more than normal); improved internal subdivision; additional ventilation, including exhaust arrangements that could be adjusted to vent to the leeward side; changes to lifeboat positions; and magazines for the safe stowage of bombs, depth charges, ammunition and pyrotechnics.

The most significant difference between the grain ship and tanker MACs was the provision of hangar space within the grain ships. The three after holds were converted to provide a hangar 142 ft. long, 38 ft. wide to a height of 24 ft. in which the ship's full complement of four Fairey Swordfish aircraft could be stowed with wings folded. An elevator platform could lift a fully loaded aircraft from hangar to deck level in less than a minute. It was impracticable to fit tanker MACs with a hangar as this would have entailed very extensive structural alterations and a significant reduction in cargo capacity. Although capable of operating four aircraft, tanker MACs normally embarked three. All had to be kept on deck. Parked aircraft had to be moved to the forward end when other aircraft were landing, and a collapsible safety barrier was fitted to prevent collisions. Hinged side screens or 'palisades' were fitted around the aft end of the flight deck to provide weather protection for parked aircraft but with only limited effect. The net result of the modifications was a reduction in cargo capacity of about 10 per cent in the case of the tankers but almost 30 per cent for the grain ships, the higher figure due to the space taken up by the hanger.

MAC crews were substantially larger than ordinary merchant ships of similar types. In addition to the air party, they carried extra Merchant Navy radio officers, engineer officers (to maintain and operate the arrester gear), catering staff and, because the total number of crew would exceed 100, a doctor as required by the Merchant Shipping Act. In practice it proved difficult to find civilian doctors so medical officers were normally provided by the Royal Navy. The air party was responsible for flying and supporting the aircraft. The official manning scale comprised a lieutenant commander RN or RNVN who, as Air Staff Officer, was the master's principal adviser on naval and aviation matters; a pilot, observer and air gunner for each aircraft carried; three signalmen; five communications and armament ratings; and at least seventeen aircraft fitters. A seventeen-strong Defensively Equipped



Merchant Ship team of RN and Royal Artillery personnel looked after the MAC's substantial defensive armament. To comply with the Board of Trade regulations, all naval and military personnel were signed onto the ship's Articles as supernumerary crew members, for which they received a nominal payment of one shilling per month and the more tangible reward of one can of beer per day. They also received a small 'Merchant Navy' badge, which they apparently wore on their uniforms with cheerful disregard for regulations.

By the time all the MACs entered service the Battle of the Atlantic had already swung permanently in the Allies' favor through a variety of converging factors. From the beginning of 1944 almost every ON (Outbound from the British Isles to North America) and HX (east-bound convoys that originated in Halifax, Nova Scotia from where they sailed to ports in the United Kingdom) had at least one MAC. Later the HX convoys that began at New York contained frequently more. Although they carried out a number of attacks, no U-boat was ever destroyed by one of their aircraft. Nevertheless, according to the official Naval Staff History: "Frequently when there were no kills it was the very presence of aircraft, carrier-borne or shore-based, or both which prevented the development of any attack by a concentration of U-boats on the convoy and which allowed it to continue on its way unmolested." It is sometimes claimed that MACs enjoyed a near-perfect record in preventing U-boat attacks. But in fact, a number of ships were lost to U-boats while sailing in convoys protected by MACs, including six merchantmen and three escorts from the combined convoys ONS18/ON202, and two merchantmen and an escort from SC143 (Sydney, Nova Scotia to Liverpool). There can be little doubt, however, that the MACs' contribution to the Battle of the Atlantic was important and highly valued by the seafarers they protected. Merchant ship masters at a

pre-convoy conference are said to have cheered when told that a MAC ship would be sailing with their convoy.

Early in 1944 it was agreed that MACs could be used to help clear a backlog of more than 500 aircraft awaiting shipment to the United Kingdom and, as the year progressed, a number of MACs made non-operational ferry crossings with full deck cargoes of aircraft. In September 1944, some MACs were fitted with equipment to refuel escorts by means of a hose streamed over the stern. By this time it was becoming apparent that all nineteen MACs were no longer required to protect Atlantic convoys. The possibility of using them in the Pacific as aircraft carriers or fleet oilers had been considered earlier but rejected on the grounds of cost-effectiveness and in September/October 1944, four ships were taken out of service for reinstatement as conventional merchants. The remaining MACs were released at the end of May 1945.

It must be mentioned that the Royal Navy, faced with little resources, managed to surmount many of the problems her country faced in combating the Nazis. They were very innovative and thought outside the box. Unlike the Americans, who faced with a problem, threw money at it and hoped that the solution would come from within the USN. On the other hand the English came up with remedies that did not require copious amounts of resources: CAM and MAC ships, baby flattops (escort carriers), the convoy system, various submarine detection devices and others. Even post-war developments like the angled flight deck on carriers and the ski-jump or inclined runway that launched aircraft and spawned the jump jet or Harrier aircraft. There is much to be admired by a nation whose needs are driven by the military and not the defense industry.

F-35 or the Plane Nobody Wants

There was a time when we hoped military leaders modeled themselves after Cincinnatus, the Roman leader (519-430 BC) whose immediate resignation of his near-absolute authority at the end of a crisis had often been cited as an example of outstanding leadership, service to the greater good, civic virtue, lack of personal ambition and modesty. He had inspired a number of organizations and other entities, many of which were named in his honor, but most important the concepts of duty, honor and country were the guidelines that inspired our future military officers. There will always be a Douglas MacArthur in any military organization but hopefully they are few and will not achieve prominence in their fields. However, the last generation of military officers have revealed that the ideals promoted by Cincinnatus have been replaced by the behaviors exhibited by our most egregious American CEOs. It seems that a military retirement is not enough to ensure a lifestyle that some of these men and women have been accustomed to enjoying.

I first noticed a trend when the United States Coast Guard was made part of the Department of Homeland Security. A rather large number (20+) of recently retired officers took jobs in the private sector that directly impacted the various projects the Coast Guard was developing. Although no conflicts of interest were immediately pursued the Inspector General forced a provision upon retiring officers that in order to continue receiving their military pensions they must disclose any outside income received from military contractors. Interestingly, a number of officers ceased outside employment and several refused to continue receiving their military pensions. Soon after the IG stopped further investigations into potential conflicts of interest.

Today we have another situation that greatly affects our men under arms. Close Air Support (CAS) is defined as air action by fixed or rotary-winged aircraft against hostile targets that are close to friendly ground or naval forces, and which require detailed integration of each air mission with fire and movement of these forces. Presently the A-10 has proven to be the best friend our ground troops have ever had. But the Air Force claims shutting down the A-10 program would save \$4.2 billion over five years, but a new report from the Government Accountability Office shoots that down, finding USAF analysis incomplete. More worrying (and unsurprising, to anyone who's been paying attention), the GAO report says dropping the A-10 would "create potential gaps" in close air support. Even though every A-10 flying is more than thirty years old, it remains "the only or the best Air Force platform to conduct certain missions" like escorting helicopters (the Warthog can fly really slowly, making it effective at protecting the pokey choppers) or engaging small boats that could threaten US ships.

Close air support is a vital job that, when properly executed, can mean the difference between life and death for soldiers. It's highly dangerous, because it requires flying at altitudes low enough to discern friend from foe, leaving the plane particularly vulnerable to ground-based anti-aircraft fire. The Warthog was specifically designed for close air support: the cockpit sits in a 1,200 pound titanium tub, specifically designed to withstand fire from anti-aircraft shells at close range. Every system is double or triple redundant, and it can take a ridiculous amount of abuse. It can continue flying if it's lost an entire engine, part of its tail, or even half a wing. And, because the A-10's role is so important, it's designed for easy repairs to keep it in the air. Entire engines can be quickly and easily replaced. Most repairs can even be made in the field. Many parts are interchangeable between the left and right sides of the plane, and the A-10 can take off from rough and unpaved runways. Because it has huge wings, a high wing aspect ratio and huge ailerons (almost 50 percent of its wingspan), it's incredibly maneuverable. The Warthog is basically a flying gatling gun, and it's terrifying if you're on the angry end.

The USAF believes that the still underdevelopment supersonic F-35 will fill the role of the A-10. They claim that this 21st century stealth fighter will be able to seamlessly perform not only as a fighter but also as a CAS weapon. Recent tests have revealed that the F-35A was out-performed by a F-16D in a mock dogfight in January, 2015. The newer jet failed to maneuver fast or agile enough to defeat the older fighter, despite the F-16 flying with two external fuel tanks. The unnamed pilot listed numerous serious problems with the fighter, including a low nose climb rate and a cramped cockpit space, as well as other maneuverability issues reducing the ability of the pilot to see and kill the older jet, an issue that has come up before. The US Army and Marine Corps are so concerned with the loss of CAS with the A-10 and the yet unproven ability of the F-35 that the Army has petitioned to take over the A-10 Program. The USAF refused, fearing the advent of non-USAF pilots.

Furthermore, the Air Force has been experiencing many programs with the F-35. The cost of an F-35A engine fire last June has been calculated at \$50 million by the investigation board responsible for looking into the failure of the third-stage rotor of the engine fan module, with the fire resulting in significant damage to the aircraft. The fire temporarily grounded the F-35 fleet worldwide and led to red faces when the Marine Corp was prevented from demonstrating their F-35B at Farnborough. Nevertheless, the prime contractor, Lockheed Martin was awarded a \$920.4 million advanced acquisition contract for 94 planes whose design has yet to be finalized.

A-10 divestment results in an overall capacity decrease in the Air Force's CAS-capable fleet. This capacity reduction is mitigated by phasing A-10 divestment over several years and by introducing the F-35 into the fleet. However, Air Force documentation shows that the F-35's CAS capability will be limited for several years. Air Force analysis also shows that the divestment of the A-10 would increase operational risks in one DOD planning scenario set in 2020. Divestiture of the A-10 could

also contribute to gaps due to the training focus of its aircrews, its wide range of weapons, and its operational capabilities, including its ability to operate in austere environments and under the weather. Further, the A-10 has been used extensively to support the training of Joint Terminal Attack Controllers (JTAC)—the individuals who request and control CAS strikes. A-10 divestment could therefore reduce the ability of JTACs to gain and retain their qualifications. The A-10 is currently the only Air Force fighter that conducts the Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) Sandy role, a complex mission requiring aircraft specifically trained to coordinate rescue missions, escort helicopters, and suppress enemy forces. Air Force analysis also indicates that the A-10 is the best Air Force platform for countering swarming small boats that could pose a threat to U.S. ships. In order to mitigate the loss of the A-10, the Air Force is considering a number of steps including transitioning A-10 personnel to F-16 and F-15E units that will have an increased focus on CAS and studying whether the F-16 or F-15E can even replace the A-10 in its CSAR role.

Like the Big Gun Admirals in the USN and the Bomber Generals in the USAF, there has been a concerted effort by various factions to see the F-35 continue despite its \$10 million/plane price tag. Remembering Eisenhower's admonition about the merchants of death, they have covered all their bases. Retired USAF officers are often hired and put into positions with subcontractors who have facilities in Congressional Districts whose representatives feel obligated to maintain jobs, regardless of military need. Select members in the USAF have put our nation into jeopardy in their continual pursuance of the fabricated need for the F-35 despite evidence to the contrary. Monies spent on a program that has yet to be justified is money not spent where there is clearly a need. Contact your Congressman and Senators and help Senator John McCain stop this USAF folly.

Hitler's Last Army

Prior to D-Day there were never more than 2000 German Prisoners of War in Britain, mostly Luftwaffe crews and U-Boat sailors. Almost 9000 POWs were sent to Canada prior to August, 1943. England could barely provide for her own population let alone enemy combatants. When the German and Italian armies were defeated in North Africa, May, 1943 housing and feeding the prisoners proved difficult. The Germans were kept in the Middle East and the Italians were shipped to England. When Italy surrendered in September of that year the status of the Italian POWs changed dramatically. Those who agreed to remain in Britain as voluntary workers were classified as 'co-operators' and lived under a comparatively relaxed regimen with minimal security. Many were relocated to hostels near farms where they were employed; some even lived at the farms themselves.

At the beginning of 1943, Britain and America had agreed that any prisoners captured during joint campaigns would be shared on a 50-50 basis (all POWs captured in North Africa were split in ownership even though the majority had been taken by the British). However, as the war progressed and thousands more surrendered Britain balked at looking after her share. The country was woefully lacking in accommodation, food and many other necessities of life. The USA, on the other hand, was a wide-open country and with seemingly limitless resources. Churchill therefore asked its ally to accept - in addition to the half-share already agreed upon - a further 130,000 prisoners who would be held in America, while still technically British-owned. And so all the Germans captured in North Africa crossed the Atlantic and came to America. One of the consequences of this sharing was that many prisoners would later experience an appreciable extension of their imprisonment at the end of hostilities.

Not until the Normandy invasion in June 1944 would German POWs arrive in substantial numbers and be detained for an extended period of time in England. As more Germans were captured the Italians were moved on to the farms where they worked. From mid-1944 on as space became available in the camps this excess capacity was taken up by German prisoners who were beginning to arrive in significant numbers. However the two groups were kept well apart. The Germans felt the Italians stabbed them in the back when they switched sides and they had to go in and defend Italy for them. The Italians believed they were the victims of the Germans who had dragged them into a war they did not want.

There were over 200 POW camps and they were soon designated as GWCs or German Working Camps. They varied in size from 200 prisoners to several thousand with the average being 750. The camps were run by the military and the POWs were subjected to a regimen every bit as strict as in the *Wehrmacht*. Overall command was usually by a retired British Lieutenant Colonel or Major who had seen action in WWI. British soldiers looked after the running of the camps while a contingent of Polish troops in British army uniforms patrolled the perimeters.

The submarine blockade seriously limited the importation of materials into the country which meant that the British farms now needed to double production. And all of this came when men who normally would have worked in agriculture and related occupations were away fighting. The risk that Britain might starve prompted the government to take over responsibility for all agriculture production for the duration. By 1942 the country's chances of survival seemed poor. The Minister of Agriculture asserted that the harvest this year "might be a critical factor not only in the history of this country but in the history of the world...Every ounce of foodstuff that we can produce at home will release *pro tanto* our shipping - shipping so sorely needed for so many other purposes vital to our final victory."

When Italian POWs had first been used as labor it was found that many came from farming backgrounds and had skills that the British farmers could exploit. But their innate abilities were outweighed by a distinct unwillingness to apply themselves to the job at hand. Early in 1944 a small-scale experiment was held in strict secrecy where 969 select German POWs were earmarked for agricultural work under military supervision. The trial was successful and by November an extensive program was started. Farmers were concerned about the "idleness of the Italian POWs and began asking the local War Agricultural Executive Committee to replace them with Germans "who work much better and are under the proper discipline." The POWs themselves wondered whether they should be working for the British at all while Germany and Britain were still at war. Opinions were varied and long and violent discussions took place within the camps. At one camp a POW willing to work was beaten and died for suborning treason. Two men were tried by the British and hanged for his murder. But screening and segregation soon ensured that the POWs who were prepared to work were not attacked or intimidated by other POWs. These measures made it possible for Britain to use most of its German POWs as a consenting (if somewhat reluctant) workforce. But there was one more hurdle to overcome before the POWs could work, a compromise had to be reached with the National Farmers' Union. POWs could not be used if British workers were available; and the farmer must pay the minimum union rate of £4 per week for each prisoner. This avoided any accusation that POW labor was undercutting union members.

After the Allies captured Cherbourg all enemy combatants were sent to America. There were more than 370,000 German POWs including the already mentioned 130,000 who, under the Anglo-American agreement were technically prisoners of the British. Living conditions within the USA were relatively unaffected by the war, and the Americans kept their POWs in a degree of comfort which Britain could not have provided and which would have been unimaginable in the German forces they served in prior to capture. One German soldier reported that: "When I was captured I weighed 128 pounds, after two years I had gotten so fat you could no longer see my eyes." When they were not

eating, drinking or smoking, prisoners could pass the time watching movies, pursue hobbies such as woodwork and attend classes in a variety of subjects. But their staying in an American POW camp, comfortable as it may have been, did not only consist of recreation. Like their counterparts in Britain, the prisoners had to work. Thousands were sent to southern states to pick cotton for 80 cents a day (the same pay as a soldier in the American army). One POW stated; "It's the worst thing you can imagine. In the open sky, no trees, no shade, very hot. And cotton weighs almost nothing - and we were supposed to pick forty pounds of it a day. Forty pounds! To make up the weight we put sand in it, we'd pee in it. But they found out we were doing this swindle and transferred us elsewhere." Sometimes they worked alongside African-Americans, who had been doing this work for generations. The Germans were shocked by the discrimination shown towards the black farmworkers and appalled by the conditions in which they existed. "They used to say to us, "You're the slaves now, but when you go home we'll be slaves again."

Until April, 1945 most prisoners clung to the perception that paratroopers would soon land to occupy England from the air and set the POWs free. When Hitler's suicide was announced, most now felt an overpowering sense of relief. In Nazi Germany every soldier had to swear a solemn oath when enlisting: "I swear by God this sacred oath, that I will give unconditional allegiance to Adolf Hitler, Führer of the nation and people, and that, as a courageous soldier. I will lay down my life at any time for this oath."

Hitler's death released them from this vow and most of them now felt they could renounce the Führer without being perceived as traitors. When the surrender was announced 1.4 million men were taken prisoner. They were not POWs now but Surrendered Enemy Personnel (SEP), the Americans labeled them Disarmed Enemy Forces (DEF). Either way they were not covered under the Geneva Convention and were put in camps where food and water were in short supply and shelter was entirely lacking in some instances. Reports vary as to the death toll in these camps but in the end the only solution was to let the captives go as soon as possible. By November 1945 all SEPs and DEFs were freed. This was in stark contrast to the POWs in England and the US, who - for the time - would be held without so much as a hint of when they might be set free.

At the end of 1945 the US was holding 313,000 German POWs, most had been working in agriculture and proved to be a vital source of labor. But now those jobs were needed for returning GIs and the POWs had to go. Truman insisted every POW must be sent home by the end of June 1946. As the POWs left America and expecting to return to Germany, their first stop was Liverpool. They were ordered to take all their belongings and line up on deck. A number of British personnel came on board and shook hands with their American counterparts; then Germans were marched down the gangway. They were told the boat had broken down. In fact, every boat with German prisoners from America rolled down in Liverpool.

Following Italy's surrender and change of allegiance, Britain could scarcely justify keeping the 157,000 Italian POWs any longer. All of them were repatriated between December 1945 and October 1946. But their removal left a gaping hole in Britain's manpower once again. The POWs who had been kept in America on Britain's behalf would now be used to fill the gap. 126,000 German prisoners arrived in Britain from North America during the first half of 1946. They soon realized they were there to help rebuild the country, in retaliation for destroying much of it. Most of the Germans were used in agriculture, when the farmers had no fieldwork to be done the men were sent out ditching. Throughout the war there had been no cleaning up of the irrigation channels at the side of the roads. Every time it rained there was flooding. Ditching was a fall-back, full-time job during the winter. There was always work to be done for the Germans.

Rubble-filled bomb sites scarred almost every street in the cities. Some 800,000 houses had been severely damaged or destroyed. There was insufficient labor to clear the debris, let alone repair or

rebuild the homes. 24,000 Germans were just engaged in preparing building sites for new homes and roads throughout southern England. The winters from 1940 to 1946 were extremely harsh. German POWs were employed on snow clearance duties during the Blizzard of 1946-47 and coal had to be rationed for all. As Britain gradually eased itself into the postwar era, POW labor helped put the country back on its feet. People wondered how was it possible that England, as a victorious nation, had been overtaken by such a calamity. England's losses in the war had been on an unimaginable scale and the nation was impoverished.

At the conclusion of hostilities It would be no exaggeration to say that German prisoners played a pivotal role in saving Britain from economic collapse and famine. Britain's darkest hour came not during the war, when her Empire and allies stood ready to support her in her time of need: the most critical point came immediately afterwards, when the country, alone, weakened by her wartime exertions and battered by cataclysmic weather, came perilously close to the abyss. That is when thousands of Britain's former enemies helped fill the breach.

Perhaps the nation could have rounded up a labor force elsewhere: but, in practical terms, where in the world would a near-bankrupt nation have found 400,000 fit, strong and reasonably willing workers for a shilling a day per head? It was suggested in early 1946 that the POWs were a burden on the nation. Deputy Prime Minister Herbert Morrison immediately refuted the accusation, saying: "The great majority of these prisoners, both German and Italians, are engaged on work of the highest importance, for which British labour is not available."

For the most part, the former prisoners of war who stayed on have blended quietly into society. Britain's now been their home for three-quarters of their lives. A surprising number have lived for decades within just a few miles of the camp where they were detained. They have absorbed the language and customs of their adopted country. About one-third of the former POWs who stayed in Britain eventually became citizens and they fared better than their compatriots held in other countries. France held around 900,00 German prisoners in total, 740,000 of whom were transferred from the US in 1945-46. As many as 50,000 were put to work clearing the millions of landmines around France's coastline and tons of other dangerous materials left from the war. Others were sent to work in coal mining and similar hazardous occupations. Deaths and injuries among the prisoners reached such high proportions that the US - which considered itself responsible, at least in part, for their welfare - made urgent representations to France over the treatment of the prisoners.

Approximately 23,000 German POWs died in French captivity between 1944-46, a death rate of 2.5%. The situation in the East was much worse with as many as a million German servicemen dying while in Russian captivity. Tens of thousands were held in the USSR until as late as 1955. The death rate among POWs in British hands was only 0.03%.

In November 1947 the British government began repatriating the POWs and on July 12, 1948 the last of the German prisoners were released and sent back to Germany. Some stayed and signed on to finish during the harvest season. Many were offered a chance to stay permanently in the country and 25,000 were accepted, an ironic fate for former enemies.

Much of this information was culled from Robin Quinn's book **HILTER'S LAST ARMY - GERMAN POWs IN BRITAIN**. It gives a more complete story of the treatment of German POWs in Britain during the war and how the Reparation Deceit saved the country.

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