Improving access to WO 416: German Index cards of British and Commonwealth Prisoners of War, Second World War

Roger Kershaw
22 November 2016
Background

- Series transferred from Ministry of Defence in December 2014
- 417 pieces (boxes) of German index cards relating to some 200,000 Allied Prisoners of War
- Bulk of series relate to British Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force personnel (Officers and men)
- Also include Merchant Navy Officers and Ratings, South African, Palestinian, New Zealand, Australian personnel, and other nationalities
- Series arranged by surname ranges
- Numbers of cards for each person range from 1 up to 7
- Series Doesn’t include all ex-POWs
What the cards contain

- Country of origin.
- Surname.
- First name/s.
- Place and Date of birth.
- Father's first name.
- Mother's maiden name.
- Name and Address of Next of Kin.
- Religion.

- Service (e.g. Army, Air, Navy).
- Service Rank/number.
- Camp name/number.
- Date and Place of Capture.
- Details of deaths by use of symbols such as blue and red crosses.
- Photographs
- X-rays
- Fingerprints
Access history

• Series contains detailed personal information and 50% may relate to living people (i.e. people born less than 100 years ago)

• Currently series is Closed whilst access is reviewed
  o FOI Requests are made through the FOI Centre in line with other closed records
  o In agreement with MoD we can provide information if the individual was born more than 100 years ago (require proof of death if born after 1916)
  o DPA requests are also handled by the FOI Centre
Issues identified

- Loose cards missing envelopes
- Cards unsecured/misfiled
- Some include x-rays
- Some cards in English; others in German
- Some cards are stapled together/others loose.
Our plans to improve access

- Using FTNA Cataloguing volunteers we will:
  - Sort cards in each piece and ensure each case (item) has a secure envelope
  - Capture some personal information and create an item for each record (c. 200,000 items)
  - Open those records relating to known deceased individuals and those born more than 100 years ago (up to 50% of the collection).
  - Annual releases up to 2027
  - Consider death matching exercise with GRO (similar to 1939 Register)
  - Retract item descriptions for those who may still be alive (i.e. closed records)
Catalogue descriptions

• Current
  o WO 416/20 Prisoners of War: Sidney BARNETT - Patrick BARRY

• Future – **Expanded open records** (to be discussed and agreed)
  o WO 416/20/1
    • Sergeant Sidney Richard Thomas Barnett, 5567818, Leicestershire Regiment
    • Born 27 August 1909, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire.
    • Camp Stalag XX A
    • Prisoner number 5151
    • Capture date 11 April 1940
    • Died 12 November 1942
    • Includes photograph
Catalogue descriptions

- Future – **Retracted closed records** (to be discussed and agreed)
  - WO 416/20/1
    - Barnett, S R T. Year of birth 1919
Examples of cards
Photographs and Fingerprints
Some notable faces
Personalkarte I: Personelle Angaben

Kriegsgefangenen-Stammlager: Stalag Luft 3

Name: Butterworth
Vorname: Peter W.
Geburtsort und Ort: 4.2.15 Branhill/Glasg.
Religion: C.M.
Vorname des Vaters: William
Familienname der Mutter: Morgan

Staatsangehörigkeit: England
Dienstgrad: Lt No 53t R.N.
Zivilberuf: F.O. Beruf: Gr.
Matrikel Nr. (Stammsorte des Heimatstaates): keine
Gefangennahme (Ort und Datum): Texel21.6.40
Ob gesund, krank, verwundet eingeliefert: gesund

Lichtbild

Gesicht: St. 1.69
Haarfarbe: d. blond

Besondere Kennzeichen:

Name und Anschrift der ausländischen Person in der Heimat:

W. W. Butterworth
29 Prince Street
Ulverston

Butterworth, W. Ulverston