

The Most Bizarre POW Camp During WWII – Curragh

by Unknown Author*

During World War II, a Canadian bomber flying from a base in Scotland crashed in what the crew thought was the vicinity of their airfield. Spotting a pub, they entered to celebrate their survival with a quick drink but were stunned to see a group of soldiers wearing Nazi uniforms and singing in German. Even more confusingly, the Germans responded to their entry by shouting at them to “go to their own bar.” The crew was soon given an explanation: after getting lost they had crashed in the Republic of Ireland . . . and now they were captured, just like the Jerries.



German Prisoners Drinking at Local Irish Pub

Having negligible military power, Ireland was a neutral nation during the war; Prime Minister Éamon de Valera went to great lengths to maintain that neutrality. As part of this policy, he made a deal with both the British and German governments: combatants of either country could be detained if found in Ireland and interned there for the duration of the war.

Technically, the men were not prisoners of war but “guests of the State,” with an obligation on the state to prevent them from returning to the war. A 19th century military camp named Curragh Camp or “K-Lines” was designated to hold “guests” of both nationalities – along with a much

higher number of Irish citizens who were imprisoned because they were considered a threat to the country's neutrality, such as IRA men and pro-Nazi activists.

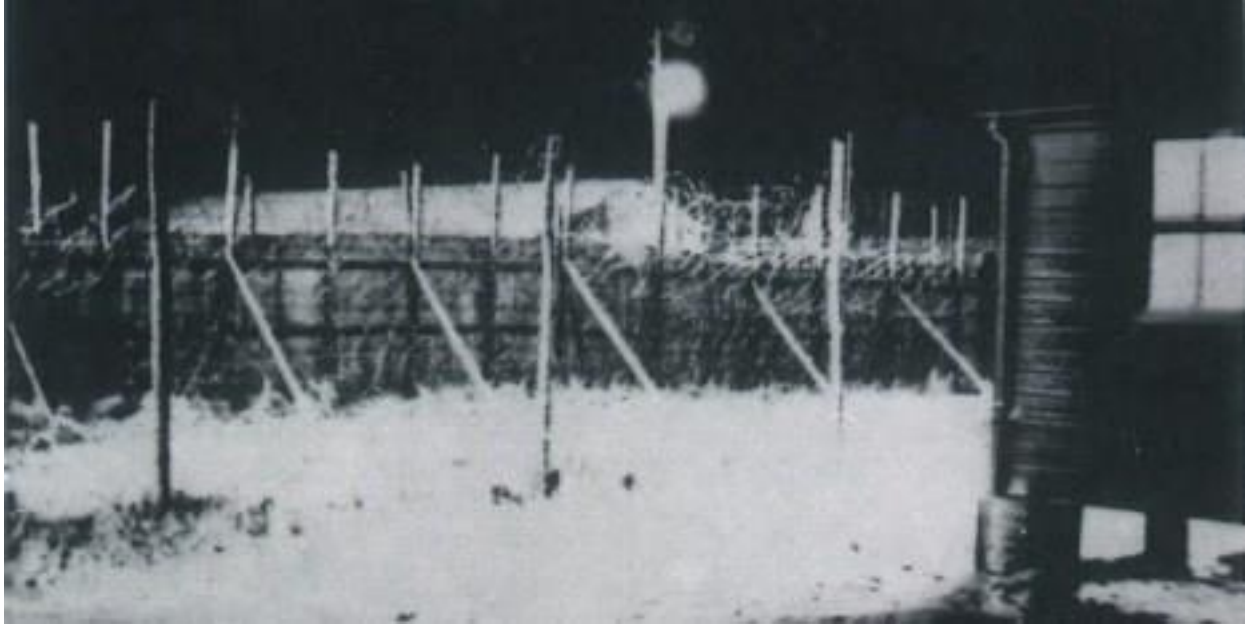
At first, authorities looked the other way when British aircraft crashed or emergency landed in Ireland, allowing the crews to make their way home. The appearance of a German aircrew in 1940, however, forced them to start taking their job seriously. Lieutenant Kurt Mollenhauer's Focke-Wulf Fw 200 Condor aircraft was taking meteorological readings off the Irish coast when the pilot got lost in the mist and hit a mountain, with two crewmen suffering injuries.



Models crafted

by a German airman during internment at Curragh

They were captured and taken to Curragh. They experienced some harsh treatment first but the Department of External Affairs quickly requested the army to improve their living conditions. With some Germans in actual custody, it was now also necessary to detain British pilots who landed in Ireland to maintain neutrality and the two sides had to be given the same treatment – preferably a lenient one to avoid angering Britain.



Exterior view of K-Lines. Being neutral, Ireland had no nighttime blackouts and spotlights made it much harder to escape at night.

Between 1940 and 1943, some 40 British and 200 German military personnel were taken to K-Lines, mainly aircrews and men from shipwrecked U-boats. In appearance, the camp was a regular POW camp with guard towers, barbed wire, and huts built on short stilts to prevent tunneling to freedom, though the fence separating the British and German sides was a mere four feet tall. Unlike in most camps, however, the guards had blank rounds in their rifles and the prisoners were allowed to run their own bars with duty-free alcohol.

The British bar was run on an honor system, with everyone pouring for themselves and recording their consumption in a book. Prisoners were also allowed to borrow bicycles and leave the camp, provided they signed a parole paper at the guardhouse, giving their word of honor not to escape and to return in time.

Pub visits, with separate bars for groups of different nationalities, evening dances with the locals, fishing and golfing trips and fox hunts were the norm, with one English officer even having his horse transported there from home and others having their families join them in Ireland for the duration of the war. Some prisoners ended up marrying local girls and one German prisoner, Georg Fleischmann, stayed and became an important figure in Irish film industry.



Former German soldier Kurt Kyck with his Irish wife, Kyck spent most of his post-war life in Ireland.

While both sides enjoyed the chance to sit out the war in reasonable comfort and without dishonorable behavior such as desertion, the Germans were generally more uptight about their situation. Despite being given some money to buy themselves civilian clothes for trips to nearby towns, they preferred to stay in uniform inside the camp, planted gardens, made tennis courts, held exercise classes. On one occasion, they even set up a court to convict a comrade for treason, though the defendant couldn't be executed, as the Irish refused to furnish the Germans with a rifle and a single bullet. Sometimes, German prisoners sang Nazi songs just to piss off of their British co-internees. The two nations held boxing and soccer matches, with a historical record noting a German victory of 8-2 at one.



Some of the camp's German inhabitants

Escape attempts were rare. The Germans had no easy way of reaching continental Europe and the British had their own special problem, best demonstrated through the story of Roland "Bud" Wolfe. An American citizen, Wolfe signed up with the RAF before the U.S. entered the war, getting stripped of his American citizenship as a consequence. After flying cover for a ship convoy off Ireland, his Spitfire's engine overheated and he had to land in the Republic of Ireland, where he was taken to the Curragh.

Unwilling to sit out the war, he made his move two weeks after his capture, in December 1941. One day he walked out of the camp, deliberately "forgetting" his gloves. He quickly went back for them and left again without signing a new parole paper, so he now considered his escape to be a legitimate one. He had lunch at a nearby hotel, left without paying and made his way to nearby Dublin, where he boarded the first train to Belfast in Northern Ireland. To his surprise, his superiors were far from pleased when he reported at his base and he was quickly sent back across the border to the internment camp.



Roland “Bud” Wolfe

The reason was that Ireland’s neutrality was important not only to the Irish but to Great Britain as well. Though Churchill considered Ireland’s refusal to fight a betrayal, he understood that a pro-Nazi Ireland would have allowed the Kriegsmarine to use its Atlantic ports and wreak havoc on vital convoys from America. In order to guarantee Ireland’s neutrality, however, the British also had to play fair and prevent K-Line internees from jeopardizing the diplomatic status quo by escaping whenever they pleased.

As a result, attempts were sparse: Wolfe tried to escape again only to be captured this time around as well, finally settling into the relaxed life of the camp. There was an aborted tunneling attempt and a successful mass rush on the gate, which the Irish decided was a “legal” escape and the men who made it back to British territory were not returned.



British prisoners at the camp

In 1943 it became clear that the Allies were slowly winning, British airmen were moved to a separate camp and secretly freed, while 20 Germans were allowed to rent residences in Dublin and attend the local colleges. All remaining German prisoners were repatriated after the war, ending the history of what might well have been history's strangest, and possibly most comfortable, POW camp.



Inmates making use of the camp's gym

The story of the British and German prisoners living together in Ireland, hushed up during and after the war, only came to light in the 1980s, when English novelist John Clive heard the story

from a taxi driver who had served as a guard at Curragh, and decided to research the matter for a novel. It was later turned into a movie, titled, "[The Brylcreem Boys](#)", which comes from a popular nickname for the [RAF](#) personnel during WWII. It can be found on [IMDB](#).