

## Captain James ALP

James Alp's NZDF personnel file states that Vatican Radio reported him at Campo 75, (Bari) on 7 September 1942; Campo 78 (Sulmona) on 12 September 1942 (reported in NZ on 19 Sep 1942), and then transferred to Campo 47 (Modena) on 27 November 1942. In Alp's Personnel file is a 'Report of Medical Examination (P.W.)', dated 1 May 1945, in which it is recorded that Alp stated: 'P.G. 75 – 2 mths: P.G. 78 – 3mths: P.G. 47 – 10mths: Stalag IVB – 2 mths: Oflag VIIIIF – 4 mths: Oflag 79 – 12 mths: Total} 2yrs 9mths.' The discrepancy in the time calculation would be accounted for by his time in North Africa.

This firmly places him among a group of 53 New Zealand officers at Sulmona in 1942. I currently know that Captain Wood and R D Campbell were there during this time, and subsequently taken to Modena. They are recorded in the camp reports written by the Swiss Legation (acting as the Protecting Power<sup>1</sup>) on 25 September 1942, and the International Committee of the Red Cross on 17 October 1942. They have left by the time of the next report on 8 January 1943.<sup>2</sup> Captain Robert Wood, who was part of this group, records in his memoir that he was captured on the 15 July 1942, and went to Bari and Sulmona before arriving at Modena, from which he escaped in September 1943.<sup>3</sup> I am hoping to compile a complete list of these men.

Groups of prisoners were frequently moved during 1942 and 1943 as new permanent and work camps were established, and the numbers of prisoners of war in Italy grew substantially after Tobruk. There was a policy of trying to place nationalities together: for example, Modena was predominately a New Zealand and South African camp, as Gruppignano was predominately a New Zealand and Australian camp (Campo 57, Udine, near Venice). Sulmona was mainly a British camp with compounds of Yugoslavs, French and other groups at various times. But it was also used as a transit camp for other groups as prisoners were moved between the camps.

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<sup>1</sup> The 'Protecting Power' represented interests of the prisoners of war under the 'Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War' (the Geneva Convention) of 1929, making regular reports on conditions in the camps. The United States of America fulfilled this duty until their entry into the war in December 1941, when this duty was undertaken by Switzerland.

<sup>2</sup> WO 224/134, 25 Sep 1942, 17 Oct 1942 and 8 Jan 1943, The National Archives, Kew.

<sup>3</sup> R M Wood, 'The Diary of Captain R M Wood', unpublished manuscript, 2003.

There was no system of POW registration numbers for Italy, as there was in Germany, so it is not possible to establish the original permanent camp of the prisoner, or their potential date of arrival based on the number they were allocated. Alp's German number, 228382, confirms that his first permanent camp in Germany was probably Stalag IVB, or a sub-camp thereof in the vicinity, as the 200000 series of numbers comes from that area. From my records I cannot confirm the accuracy of the date of arrival in Germany as the men from the Sulmona camps in my database all arrived at Stalag IVB in mid to late December and were allocated later numbers in this series.

My experience to date has been that the reports broadcast by Vatican Radio are generally reliable, and the dates as transcribed by myself would show a movement northwards to a more permanent camp as would be expected. I do have examples of southwards movements but they have rarely occurred in these circumstances, or as closely together as these reports, at a time when the men are being moved to the more permanent camps in central and northern Italy.

The lists of names were compiled in the camps by the camp management and sent to the Red Cross and the authorities in Rome. Bishop Francesco Borgongini Duca, who was appointed as Papal Nuncio for Italy in 1940 –and charged with overseeing the welfare of prisoners of war in Italian territory – visited the camps regularly, and the lists and messages were given to his party on these visits. An Irish priest, Monsignor Hugh O'Flaherty, was appointed Duca's secretary and translator. They met the prisoners and brought gifts – medallions, Christmas cards, diaries, musical instruments, and money for the purchase of fruit and extra supplies. O'Flaherty met with the prisoners, gathered messages for their families, many of whom had no idea of their whereabouts, particularly after increasing numbers were taken prisoner in North Africa in 1942. Whenever possible, he travelled back to Rome overnight, handed the messages over to the Vatican Radio for broadcast around the world, and rejoined the Papal Nuncio the next morning. He also arranged for winter clothing supplies, library books, and compiled a prayer book for the prisoners.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> J P Gallagher, *Scarlet Pimpernel of the Vatican*, London, Souvenir Press, 1967.

The messages for Australia and New Zealand were broadcast by Fr Owen Snedden,<sup>5</sup> generally for one and half hours on Wednesdays and Fridays at 6.30am GMT.<sup>6</sup> They were monitored by the Apostolic Delegation in Sydney who conveyed any messages to families. The broadcasts were also monitored by the National Broadcasting Service in New Zealand, who had the service details checked and ‘if no prior notification [had] been received through official sources’ the POW’s next-of-kin were advised. The information received was considered to be ‘very reliable’, and my own research to date confirms that Vatican Radio was one of the most reliable means of locating prisoners of war in Italy.<sup>7</sup> This service was supplemented by the ‘Vatican Family Messages Scheme for Prisoners of War’ which relayed written messages around the world through the Vatican diplomatic bags.

To date I have been unable to compile a complete list of camp visits by the Papal Nuncio throughout Italy as I am relying on diaries for this type of information: they do not always state the date of the visit, often just mentioning a visit and what happened. However, I have established that Duca visited Sulmona on 28 Jul 1941, 22 Dec 1941 and 27 Dec 1942, but there were probably more visits.<sup>8</sup> Until a more complete list of the visits has been compiled it will not be possible to completely verify the notifications on Alp’s personnel file.

Duca’s report of the visit on 27 Dec 1942 is reproduced in *Inter Arma Caritas*.<sup>9</sup> Undated photographs of a visit to Campo 78 are at: <http://www.smpe.it/photos/campo78.asp>. Duca mentions in his report that Mons Hugh O’Flaherty accompanied him on the Dec 1942 visit, which possibly makes this his last visit before he was stood down from this

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<sup>5</sup> Father Owen Noel Snedden, b 11 Dec 1917, Auckland; ordained 24 Feb 1941; Auxiliary Bishop of Wellington, New Zealand, 23 May 1962; Appointed Bishop of New Zealand, Military, 28 Oct 1976; d 17 Apr 1981: <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/bishop/bsnedden.html>. For events in Rome see: Susan Jacobs, *Fighting with the Enemy: New Zealand POWs and the Italian Resistance*, Auckland, Penguin Books, 2003. ‘Father Snedden was always prepared to add, unknown to the Vatican authorities who prepared his broadcast script, a few messages each week to next-of-kin, especially in the case of airmen who made forced landings in enemy country, evaded capture and were unable to communicate with their next-of-kin.’ (WO 208/3396, p 4, The National Archives, Kew).

<sup>6</sup> Secretary of the Apostolic Delegation, Sydney to Rt Hon Peter Fraser, 5 Dec 1942, EA 1 88/4/5 part 1, Archives New Zealand, Wellington.

<sup>7</sup> Outward Telegram, the Prime Minister, Wellington to the High Commissioner, London, EA 1 88/4/5 part 1, Archives New Zealand, Wellington.

<sup>8</sup> J F Dover, IWM 99/82/1, pp 15, 19, 27, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>9</sup> *Inter Arma Caritas: L’Ufficio Informazioni Vaticano per i Prigionieri di Guerra Istituto da Pio XII, 1939-1947*, vol II, Città del Vaticano, Archivio segreto Vaticano, 2004, pp 935–7.

position.<sup>10</sup> O'Flaherty is identifiable in the photographs on the website which means that they were taken before Dec 1942. However, the clothing in the photographs would suggest that this is a summer visit. The compounds are also full which would suggest that it may be summer 1942, after Tobruk.

The surviving liberation reports written by the released prisoners of war in 1945 on arrival in the United Kingdom are held at the National Archives at Kew. My first search of them has not revealed one written by Alp, and nor has his name appeared in any other archival file examined to date, either in London or New Zealand. The majority of the 2NZEF ex-prisoners of war certainly completed these three page forms on their return to the United Kingdom: some have been found in London with copies in the New Zealand files, and others have only one copy in either place. To my knowledge they were not placed on their individual personnel files. The only New Zealand form that could give some indication of their places/dates of internment is a cyclostyled sheet which deals mainly with medical matters and appears to have survived in the files only where there was potential war injury/pension claims – it is very inconsistent (Alp's is quoted from in the first paragraph).

The other document of interest that I have found is a report by the last Commandant at Campo 47 (attached).<sup>11</sup> This Foreign Office file contains his version of events in the immediate aftermath of the Italian Armistice. The provenance of the document is unclear, and it is difficult to ascertain why and how it was written. It has been shown to Wood on my behalf, and he says it is inaccurate. As Modena is not in my immediate purview, except insofar as it pertains to those men I can prove were at Sulmona, it is probable that I will not pursue this line of enquiry too much further.

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<sup>10</sup> See Maureen R West, 'Hiding in Central Italy: The Rome and Sulmona Organisations, 1943-44', Stout Research Centre, 22 Nov 2006.

<sup>11</sup> 'Report on Events at British Prisoners of War Camp No. 47 at Modena', FO 916/982, The National Archives, Kew.