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News

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'I was one of lucky few to be liberated'

By Mark Taylor



MENU

ARTHUR Jack Hodgins braced himself as British planes bombed the train tracks he was forced to lay as a Second World War captive.

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But he knew not to lose hope.

Despite being detained inside one of Germany's most notorious camps he was "among the lucky ones", and in 1945 walked free.

The Bicester Private, born in Stoke Lyne, returned to the village after the war to write down his experiences as a book for his family.



All the former PoWs hailed the project and said they hoped their tales of capture would never be lost.

Private Hodgins joined the Royal Berkshire Regiment in 1942, and was sent to North Africa and served in Italy.

It was here in 1943 he was captured during a fierce battle in Anzio, Northern Italy, aged just 19.

He was moved to Stalag VII-A; Germany's largest Second World War prisoner camp, in southern Bavaria.

In two years he went from larking around with friends to working back-breaking stretches under the gaze of brutal armed Nazi guards.

The infamous PoW camp near Moosburg, a few miles outside Munich, contained more than 110,000 prisoners.

Thousands of English, French, Russian and American PoWs were split into sub-camps by nationality.

A sub-section of these were labour camps, where the young private was put to work carrying and laying railway lines. The 89-year-old said: "I didn't have a happy time, I really didn't.

"We were bussed out into the countryside in cattle trucks, you would watch the scenery go by and wonder what happened.

"They had me working on the railway in Munich.

"The airmen would come over and bomb it as we laid it down, and then you'd have to start over again.

"By the end there was only 19 left out of 120 of my group in the camp. I was lucky to survive."

Two harrowing years in the camp passed by.

He said: "I will never forget being liberated by the Americans, it was wonderful to be free again."

Upon his return to Bicester he worked as a builder and then secured regular work at the Morris car plant in Cowley.

He said he never forgot the horrors of war, adding: "I hope that no one has to go through what I went through, it was pointless and futile, and so many young men needlessly died."

For more about the Soldiers of Oxfordshire Museum see sofo.org.uk

The stories of Private George Pollard and radar technician Stan Vaisey, and more brave former prisoners of war, will feature in coming editions of the *Oxford Mail*.



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