



British Army Private Ronald Hopper

Ronald Hopper was born in 1919, the youngest of 7 children. He attended secondary school, where amongst other subjects he studied German and shorthand - both of which were to prove useful during the war. He signed up for the Territorial Army in April 1939, and on 1st September he joined the 50th (N) Division R.A.S.C. (TA). One of his first duties was clerical work in the No. 1 Echelon Office. On 16th January 1940 the 50th Division left England to join the B. E. F. in France. After a successful evacuation from Dunkirk he served in Cyprus, Palestine, Iraq and North Africa.

On 29th June 1942, while in North Africa he was captured by the Afrika Corps and became a Prisoner of War. He was transported to Camp 82 in Laterina, North Italy where his talents for typing, shorthand and languages were put to use. He was put to work in the Italian Camp Office, outside the camp and received extra rations (including cigarettes). While working in the office he wrote that he didn't feel like a prisoner, quite different from his experience in Germany. During this time he was taken into the Red Cross Hospital at Lucca with abscessed tonsils (later discovered to be diphtheria). He became involved in organising entertainment and the Doctor made an excuse to keep him in hospital for a total of five months.

On 8th September 1943 Italy capitulated. Ronald was free - until a German garrison arrived one week later on 15th September. Soon after he was transferred (in a cattle truck) to M - Stammlager VIII C in Germany, where he was forced to work first in a sugar beet factory and then when the season ended, in a concrete factory. On 20th March 1944 he was transferred to a mining camp in Waldenburg. The work was hard and the conditions depressing. However light relief was provided by the entertainment group, 'The Moles'. Ronald was instrumental in setting this up, and went on to produce many of the group's productions. He remained there until the war ended and was Mentioned in Despatches, for his entertainment work.

The Centre is proud to preserve Ronald's letters home, letters from his family, his memoir and associated items of memorabilia.



August 1941 in Cyprus - outside Famagusta, Ron Hopper (left) with Ernie Howell





S/81240 Pte. R.J. Hopper
No. 8 Ward
St Martins Hospital
Bath

25.7.40

My dear Mother,

Just a very short note. It happens that in the ward there is a German Jew - who poor chap has been in a concentration camp - he has been in England about 18 months & speaks very good English. He heard I knew a little German & so between us we have arranged to teach each other German & English respectively, it will be most useful later on when we capture Hamburg & Berlin. He is in the British Army in the A.M.P.C. & is very nice. This evening we have been speaking about the peculiarities of both languages & believe me when you look for them there are many. . . Can you send immediately 3 of my German books out of the bookcase. They are "Deutsches Leben", Das "Gespensterschiff" & another red book with exercises. He tells me my pronunciation is excellent & that I have a pretty good knowledge of this language. Do your best will you please!



A letter to Mother

I am feeling very well & have been getting up for the afternoons for the last few days. My legs are a lot stronger & I can get to the lavatory unaided & quite well. I don't expect I shall be here for much longer than another week, then I hope I shall have leave, of course, not half as strong as I used to be which is expected. . .

Did I tell you we had four Australians in our ward & there are a number of others scattered about the hospital. So we have now:- Navy - Army - Airforce & Dominions in No. 8 Ward everyone the best of pals.

We have a good wireless which is on all day nearly, & yesterday we had Radio Eire & including the records on the B.B.C. broadcasts heard "You are my hearts delight". . . Also from R. Eire we heard Caruso on a Record. They have some good programmes similar to Radio Luxembourg, so sometimes if there is nothing particular on the B.B.C. I should tune in & see if you like it.

Now as this is my last sheet I must bring this letter to a close.

Au revoir,
Heaps of love & x's from your affectionate son
Ronald



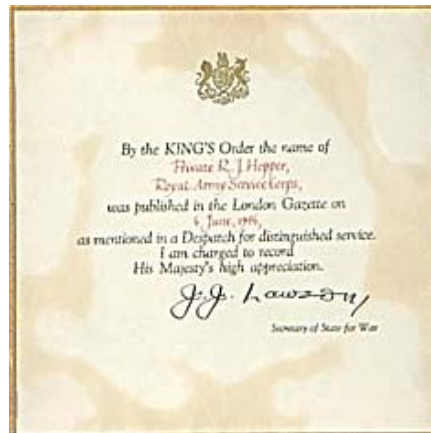
Nazi Armband and Badge



Private Hopper's Dog Tags

Inventory of the Donation

- letters home 1939-45
- letters to Hopper 1937-45
- Certificate noting "distinguished service" and "His Majesty's high appreciation"
- Book, *The National Fire Service Drill Book*
- POW camp map
- Typescript memoir, *There Will be a Short Interlude*
- Address books
- Composition book with play scripts
- 1 original article and several photocopied articles
- Nazi armband and badge
- Medal and various buttons
- Certificate of Trade Testing
- 3 telegrams
- Authority for payment of discharge leave
- Letter and leaflet from Dunkirk Veterans Association
- 2 magazines, *Prisoner of War* and *The Battle of Egypt*
- 2 autograph books
- 1 notebook, *Songs by the Cheerful Boys* and 1 notebook with programs of entertainment
- photograph album
- Plastic wallet containing maps, German leaflet and part of memoir (all photocopied/typescript)
- Envelope containing various tickets





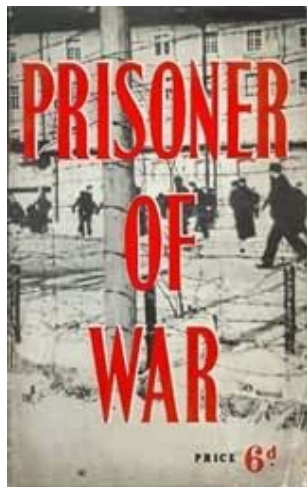
The Second World War Experience Centre
Reproduction of an article from the Centre's website
<http://www.war-experience.org/collections/land/alliedbrit/hopper/default.asp>



The National Fire Service Drill Book



Saluting (National Fire Service Instruction No. 3, 1942) from 'The National Fire Service Drill Book'



POW Magazine



Members of the Moles Concert party in Waldenburg coalmining camp (about 1.5 miles from pit) 1944. Hopper was producer etc. for most of the concert party's 'existence' concerts. The party was made up of Australians, New Zealanders, South Africans and British 1944 - 45.



British and Dominion
Prisoners of War: Some
Questions Answered

1. How can food be sent? Only by this Organisation, which aims at providing each prisoner and interned civilian in German or Italian hands with one food parcel per week.
2. What does a food parcel contain? Biscuits, cheese, chocolate, fish, fruit or puddings, jam or other preserves, margarine, 2 meats, milk, sugar, tea, vegetables, soap and a vitaminised food are sent in every parcel. Also selections from other commodities such as Bemax, cocoa, creamed rice, curry powder, custard, Marmite, meat paste, mustard, oatmeal, Ovaltine, pepper, sweets, etc., as space permits. The food is specially planned to supply what is lacking in the German camp rations.
3. What is the cost of the weekly parcel? Including tobacco and cigarettes (see paragraph 13) the price to the Red Cross and St. John is approximately 10s. 0d. This does not include the cost of conveyence by Red Cross ships from Lisbon to Marseilles and cost of insurance against losses due to enemy action.
4. If a donation cannot be given, will a Prisoner of War be sent a parcel? Yes, food parcels are sent for all Prisoners of War and interned civilians, and are paid for from the general funds of the Red Cross and St. John.
5. How are the parcels addressed? They are sent to the International Red Cross Committee at Geneva which forwards them to the camps for distribution by the British Camp Leader.
6. Why are parcels not addressed to individual Prisoners?
 - (a) Because prisoners may be moved from camp to camp.
 - (b) If part of a consignment of parcels is lost, the remainder can be divided between camps.
 - (c) To ensure that new prisoners may receive parcels before their names reach London.
 - (d) As the parcels sent in each consignment contain similar articles, there is no advantage gained by addressing each parcel to a Prisoner of War by name.