

Foreword

In 1940 Wick suffered two bomb attacks by German aircraft. The first attack in Lower Pulteney caused the grievous loss of many children. The second, though casualties were far fewer, was disastrous for my father. Our house near the aerodrome was so seriously damaged that we were ordered to leave immediately and given temporary accommodation at the Station Hotel. Eventually my father found a house, and he moved to Watten several months later.

Life was fairly peaceful after the Wick bombings and my family gradually settled down to enjoy the community living in a small friendly village.

When we learned there was to be a prisoner of war camp in our midst, there were mixed feelings of apprehension, even fear. As the weeks passed into months though, without fearful incidents of dangerous prisoners roaming the countryside, villagers accepted the presence of the camp. As the book elaborates, in time some prisoners were allowed outside to work on neighbouring farms. Those who met and employed the prisoners found them harmless enough and acknowledged them as good and willing workers. But in truth we knew very little about the prisoners.

This was a story waiting to be told and who better to tell it than Valerie Campbell, the honours degree historian with Caithness connections. It is from *Camp 165 Watten* that we learn that all prisoners were carefully screened and only those of Class 'A' category were allowed out of the Camp. The garbled story we knew of a German escape was in fact the true story of several escapes which is now told accurately and in detail.

Little did we know that Camp 165 Watten was Britain's most secretive prisoner of war camp. Nor did we know that senior Nazi officers, some of them close to Hitler were imprisoned there. The life history of these men has been carefully researched and makes fascinating reading.

I knew both Lt.-Colonel 'Tishy' Murray and his junior officer, Captain Tim Gunn, well. Yet on the many occasions I met them, neither spoke of life in the camp. It was from the book that I learned both men had themselves been prisoners of war, a fact that had a bearing on the running of the camp.

Valerie Campbell told me that her interest in World War II came from her father's accounts of the war having been in North Africa with Montgomery and also seeing action in Sicily, Italy, France and Germany. How fortunate for us that she was inspired to write the history of Camp 165 Watten, which will remain part of the heritage of the village, but also an important piece of the wartime history of a camp in the North of Scotland – the most secretive prisoner of war camp in Britain.

Margaret Thurso