

In this way we could, for a few days, hide the fact of a couple having escaped to give them a good break.

The Italian Commandant was a bit lenient and allowed us to get various items of clothing etc. into the camp through some merchant and these items were debited against our account, for we drew no money. He was, however, thought by the authorities to be too lenient and was moved.

From the Red Cross we got a number of musical instruments, the piano the Commandant had obtained from the town, and very soon had a very fine orchestra which was able to give us an occasional concert.

Red Cross Parcels, clothing and books began to gradually come in and slowly became organised.

There had to be a number of committees in the camp. The escape which had to vet your escape plan and decide whether, if feasible to help and to what extent. You can imagine there were all sorts of plans, some real Heath Robinson. I served on this committee which also mobilised the engravers - and what stamps and passports they produced - the tailors who turned out some wonderful clothing not only for escape purposes but also for our theatre costumes. They could turn out costumes out of some of our Itl sheets, blankets etc. There were the tin bashers who manufactured all sorts of things - bellows for pumping air into the tunnels being dug through dozens of Kilm tins which they joined. This air pipe line could even hold water without a leak. What some of these chaps were doing wasting their time as bank clerks etc. when they could start a lucrative tinware business etc!

When the Red Cross Parcels arrived each man received a parcel a week but from these had been extracted by the Committee certain items which went into our store to supplement the Italian Rations. These items were all the tinned meats bully, rabbit from Australia, etc, and any other item which could be used in the kitchen. Another was porridge which was very popular. The items such as tea, chocolates, sweets, egg powder the men retained.

I was catering officer and at times very unpopular when I worked up a good store. We had been instructed by the British authorities to try and have a reserve supply of foodstuffs so that in the case of an invasion we should then be able to break out and assist the troops but must have supplies. I came in for a lot of criticism as a hoarder. But when I announced that "Tomorrow we are to have porridge, and a good ration for breakfast," there general approval. Then we would release a supply of Bully Beef or Tinned Rabbit or some other meat dish. Our meat ration was very small but fortunately we were able to get quite a good supply of fresh vegetables and fresh milk. The old chap who supplied the vegetables and milk was very good in taking out messages in the milk cans and now and again bringing us news from the outside world.

Our sports and entertainment committee got on the go and arranged all sorts of entertainments. There were for instance football matches on a three quarter sized soccer field, baseball using a tennis ball, and on one day we actually ran a sports meeting. Among the items were hurdles, with the chairs as hurdles, flat races, tug of war, and an over-forty hundred yards. The forty year man was scratch and the others received a yard for every year over forty as handicap. In this race, being fifty, I received ten yards, and managed to come third, the race being won by a well-known Springbok Cricketer, Bob Catteral.

Then there was the theatrical committee and what a fine lot of plays they produced. The first play produced, I well remember, was "Of Mice and men".