P. 0. W. CAMP 17

This camp was the largest prisoner of war camp in Great Britain. It housed some of the most dangerous and fanatical prisoners, not just from the second world war, but also the Great War.

The camp was situated to the west of Sheffield, at Lodge Moor and it was known as camp 17. There is not much to see today, but when in use there were in excess of 80 barracks buildings. It had a crucial role as a transit and interrogation station for some of the more fanatical and dangerous prisoners. Lodge Moor was one of the most important and, according to its inmates, the unhappiest P. 0. W. Camp in Britain.

World War 1

In this war the notorious U Boat commander Karl Donitz was captured by allied forces when his submarine U 68 was forced to the surface in October 1918. He was detained in Camp 17 for several weeks but he feigned mental illness and was sent to the Wythenshawe Hospital Psychiatric Unit in Manchester. Donitz was eventually repatriated where his mental health miraculously recovered.

It is believed that it was while detained at Camp 17 that he formulated his dreaded *rudeltaktic* (The pack tactic or 'wolf-pack'). Promoted to Admiral, he went on to command Hitler' s World War II U Boat fleet. He was thus able to put his Wolf-pack tactics into effect, nearly bringing Britain to her knees by sinking so many ships of the Atlantic convoys.

He was further promoted to head of the German navy and, following Hitler's suicide, briefly became leader of the Third Reich.

World War II

The camp contained German, Italian and Ukrainian prisoners, and those who were most enthusiastic about escaping were called ' blacks' by the guards. Many escape attempts were made, including tunnels.

On 20th December 1944 a group of German prisoners successfully breached the perimeter of the camp, only to be captured 24 hours later in nearby Rotherham.

In March 1945 the prisoners believed that Gerhardt Rettig, a fellow inmate, had tipped off the prison guards about a planned break-out. He was so badly beaten that he died. Two men were put on trial and found guilty of his murder. They were hanged in Pentonville prison, London, in November 1945.

The end of the war did not mean the end of the camp. The repatriation of German prisoners didn't start until September 1946 - partly because the Italians were repatriated first. It was also because the economy of bombed out Germany was in such a mess it couldn't support an extra 400,000 returning soldiers.

By 1947 the restrictions on the prisoners were almost completely removed and they could leave the camp unescorted and mix with the civilian population, visit cafes, cinemas and attend church services.

 Submitted by Howard Stendall