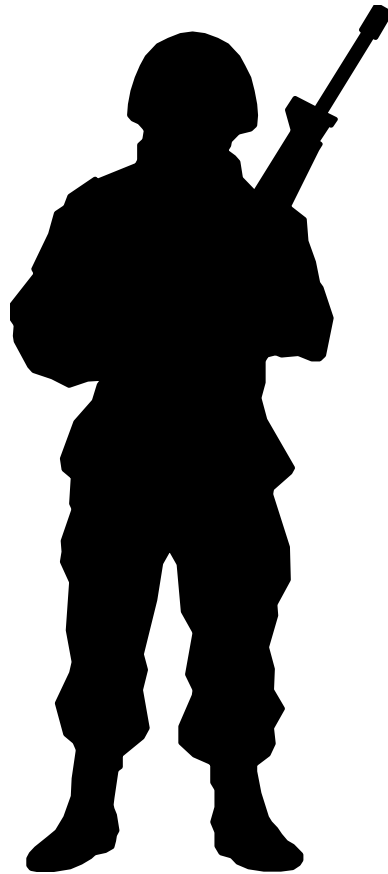


**Private
John B. Shivas**



World War II Recollections

By John Bertram Shivas

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Introduction

In 1973, English Class, Markham District High School, Markham Ontario, my class was studying the book called "The Silver Sword". This book was related to World War II families and their survival.

My English Teacher, Mr. Dickson asked the class if anyone's parents or grandparents were in the war. I was the only student in my class who raised their hand.

Mr. Dickson asked if my Dad would answer some questions regarding the war. I said that I would ask, however I wasn't sure if he would or not.

Pamela Shivas

The following is an excerpt from my father's letter to Mr. Dickson.

"Dear Mr. Dickson;

The following pages will probably bore you and I hasten to include my apologies for failing to adhere to the questions asked and which after all required only a short, concise answer. I seldom attempt to write even a letter to my relatives but I found myself being carried away as it were and try as I may I just had to write of these things. Perhaps you may be able to glean something useful or interesting from it all. As I say, I am not a writer so I hope that this does not prove too, too much for your eyesight or credibility. Again, my apologies".

John Shivas

Compiled by Pamela Shivas January 1996 / Revised January 2015

Questions and Answers

1. How were you captured, and where was the camp?

I was captured on the 12th of June 1940. Having withdrawn from our positions between the Maginot and Siegfried lines, we were forced to fight a rear-guard action as the enemy had broken through Belgium. This was also to allow as many soldiers as possible to get away from France to Norway and Britain, by delaying the enemy advance. Dunkirk had fallen on the 28th of May and we had little hope of effectively stopping the enemy led by General Rommel. Finally, we reached St. Valery to see the smoke of the last two ships on the horizon heading for Britain. We were completely surrounded that night and in the morning the French raised the white flag and within an hour or so we got orders to unload and lay down our weapons. We were forced marched to the borders of Holland and thence by coal barge on canals to Germany where we boarded cattle trucks en route for Poland. Arriving at Lamsdorf, a large prison camp known as "Stalag VIII B".

2. Could you tell us what the prison routine was?

In the first months of POW life we were interrogated and the "riot act" was read to us several times. Roll call was around 07:00 A.M.. Barracks had to be cleaned and our one blanket folded. Some POWs worked in the area surrounding in the German quarters. Some of the NCO's were given so called responsible positions and endeavoured to establish fitness drills and games etc. Which weren't too successful because of our extreme weakness through lack of nourishment. Soon, parasites such as lice as well as dysentery demanded all our time and energy. We were subjected to searches for such things as weapons, radios, escape attire, tunnels etc. Roll call again in the afternoon and again prior to lights out.

3. What were you given for food and how often were you served?

For food we were offered coffee in the morning, this was made from nuts (such as acorn) toasted and ground which acted on the system like a diuretic and only added to discomfort but we couldn't drink the camp water because of contamination. At noon we were issued soup made from fish, mullet or horseflesh. The fish soup was merely salt water, the mullet always tasted moldy and thin and seldom did we see any meat in the latter. We also received potatoes, which were very soggy and had a peculiar "sweet" taste. Our camp doctor advised us to re-cook them, which we did by slicing them and sticking them on the stovepipe. At 18:00 approximately, we were again given coffee and between ¼ and ½ lb. of black, sour tasting bread with a small portion of lard or a spoon of jam or a piece of cheese (a slimy, smelly sort of mess) we got used to this gradually. Hunger forced me to volunteer for work and was taken several miles from Stalag VIII B where food improved slightly.

After a year we began to receive Red Cross parcels, which came as a god-send although the contents were meted out by our captors in such a way that one couldn't save anything, which may help him, survive should he escape. I began to regain some semblance of health from the vitamins contained in those parcels.

4. *Do you remember, and if so tell us how much you weighed when you went in and how much you weighed when you came out?*

I guess I was approximately 140 lb. At time of capture. During the first year I must have been about 115 lb. I can't recall my weight on release. I may have been around 125 lb.

5. *How were you treated by the German guards?*

If a camp commandant showed leniency, then most guards seemed to follow suit. However, young Nazis showed their disdain etc., and were quite brutal at times. Those who had been to the battlefield seemed to understand our situation. The Volkssturm (kind of Home Guard) were unpredictable and trigger happy and enjoyed letting you know that they had the gun. I have met one or two guards though who tried to help me such as offer me a cigarette or sandwich.

6. *What was the form of punishment and why would most people get it?*

The worst form of punishment was when all rations were reduced, sometimes cut off all together. This usually followed an escape attempt. When the commando raids were made on St. Nazaire and Dieppe etc., all POWs had their mail cut off for long periods and in Stalags the men were handcuffed with string or rope, this in reprisal for the prisoners taken back to Britain by the commandos for questioning. Then of course we were always trying to delay the war effort by moving very slowly or even sabotaging the rolling stock by putting sand in axle boxes etc., if suspected but not proven of this then again the food was cut off and privileges if any were stopped. The most cruel form of punishment was having to stand outside under guard unable to move from the spot. I saw one man who stood all of one day and night and came on rather tottered into the billet about noon next day. The weather in Poland is like here (Unionville, Ontario) and this was in January. He suffered this because he wouldn't divulge the identity of one who had stolen some food. The other fellow owned up and was taken away by the guards but what happened to him I never did find out.

7. *How much news did you get about the outside of the camp and how did you get your news?*

New arrivals brought in lots of information to us, but we had a radio of some kind rigged up in one or another of the camps. The most successful was while I was at Krakow, a coal mine. In fact very few knew the whereabouts of this radio.

I only knew that guards were set up to watch for the Germans and only newscasts were listened to. This was taken down short hand by an Australian and discretely mentioned to us though at the time of the 2nd front we felt like cheering. This certainly bolstered our hopes. Then for a long time there was the hold up at Calais and Caen which created problems among us because of the tension building up as to whether the battle was to prove successful or not.

Eventually, through the news and seeing the bombers daily and the destruction increasing in volume we were certain of the success, in spite of Jerry installing a speaker to allow us hear "Lord Haw Haw" or Joyce as his name was known with the propaganda. This session is what could have been called our "laugh in" nobody believed it.

8. What objects of clothing or how much clothing would you get from the Red Cross?

Through no fault of the Red Cross we received very little clothing apart from some underclothes and maybe socks or mitts. Civilians would riot if they thought that Britain and its Allies could provide such luxury contrary to the propaganda they were being "fed". I was captured in my denims, my battle dress had gone into the sea at St. Valery with my Bren Gun Carrier. My boots had been confiscated and wooden clogs handed to me, with 2 squares of blanket to wrap my feet in as socks. The first winter was the worst I'd ever suffered. I got 2 cement bags (paper) and had one on my back and one on my chest this provided me with a warmth I would otherwise never have had and probably suffered from many ailments associated with cold and dampness. Wooden clogs are dangerous in that snow builds up on the heels and soles and my ankles showed the scars and indentation for a long time.

The Red Cross however did a wonderful job all through by providing food parcels and in the final week of the war when all Allied prisoners were moving westward in front of the advancing Russian Army many groups of them were meeting what we called "The White Wagons". This was a fleet of trucks loaded with food, which was taken to Germany by Swiss drivers, and I believe German drivers then took over and met up with groups of POWs on the march. I was lucky and made contact with one at a time when Germany could no longer feed us. The last meal I got was a small handful of dirty looking flour, to do what I could with it. You can imagine my relief to enjoy such food as chocolate etc.

9. Were you assigned any work? If so what kind?

I have worked against Geneva Convention regulations on airfields laying sewers down either side of the runways. I layed railway track. I was put to work on a coal mine but because of deafness related to firing grenades in France, I got a job shunting and coupling coal cars on the surface. Then there were the sand quarries, telephone lines and also worked in a glass factory in Valdenburg where all kinds of glass is manufactured including mirrors. An extremely hot and parching job.

10. Could you tell us of any escape attempts from your camp?

Escapes occurred now and again. One man joined our camp and eventually we discovered that he was an R.A.F. Pilot who had changed identity with a soldier for the sole purpose of escape. He got away but whether he succeeded or not I don't know. Two pals of mine escaped and a letter received from a former Teacher of mine conveyed the news that one was in Spain and the other in Portugal. Eventually both got home. John Cross of Invergordon, Scotland became a Captain and was killed while taking a machine gun port at Anzio. For this action he was posthumously awarded the M.M. (Military Medal). My other pal Sgt. Reid Ross was to survive the rest of the war. A fellow called Morran escaped by dyeing his uniform black. He was caught next day about 20 miles away and was returned to our camp at 01:30 A.M. to be yelled at and buffeted about by a German Ober Lieutenant. We suffered the usual drastic cuts in food and discipline because very strict with very frequent Gestapo searches.

11. Did you make any good friends in your camp?

Because of stress and tension, such circumstances and environment friendships weren't too easy cultivated but when you had a friend he was a good one. There was a Polish engine driver at the coal mine who slipped me cigarettes, which he rolled and always spoke kindly to me. He brought me music sheets for our camp band such as it was and at Xmas gave me cakes, which his wife had baked. He himself had been in a concentration camp and had suffered the insults and spits of the Berlin people when being marched in tatters through that city after the fall of Poland. He and his pal crushed the bowl of one pipe in order to smoke another between them. I wrote him after the war but got no reply so I'm still wondering what fate befell him.

In the 5 years of captivity, three German Guards stand out as exceptionally humane and understanding. One from Berlin liked music and would come in to the billet and quietly play a violin and pass us a cigarette or two. Then there was a slim, elderly and very quiet and apparently war shocked veteran who would slip a sandwich to a POW if he saw him stumble or was weak while on the march.

The last but not least was a Feldtfabel (Sergeant) he was actually Czechoslovakian and was with us on the long march from Krakow in Poland to near Regensburg, Germany. While waiting to enter the cellars of a disused brewery which was to be our shelter for a couple of days, we had to stand outside in the cold. It seemed like hours. This sergeant was talking to a girl of 18 or 19 years of age who was accompanied by her sister of 10 or 11 years. I approached this little girl and handed her my tin cup and said "Vodda". I only learned two words of Czechish the other was Kleba I understood this to be "water" and "bread". The little girl came back with the cup full of water. Shortly after that they, all three were about to move off when suddenly the girl pointed to me and I wondered why then the Sergeant looked and beckoned me over saying "komm". I followed them into the a house and was given cake and coffee as was the Sergeant. He then took me back to the group of POWs. When we left there, rather just prior to leaving there while being lined up on the street the little girl came over to me and took hold of my water bottle and I gave it to her.

I thought that whatever she intended she was going to be too late but just as we started to move away she came back and along with the bottle handed me a parcel about 5 inch square. I thanked her in German and hoped she understood. We started off into the mountains, climbing through deep snow. The Russian prisoners in front in a long extended line their blankets over their heads and just the eyes and nose showing. It was a long slow climb into Sudetenland.

A halt was called and my pal and I had a drink from the water bottle to discover that it contained coffee and either cognac or schnapps, what a surprise this was and then the parcel contained ginger bread - the best I have ever tasted. I only know that little girl by the name of "Lida" but I will never forget that face or the kindness. In 28 years, she must be so changed now yet I feel I could still recognize her. I would surely like to show my gratitude and wish it were possible. I would like to thank the Feldtfabel too for allowing this to have happened.

12. Has been in prison camp affected your life?

Naturally, five years as a POW certainly upset the plans I had in mind prior to the war. My father had lost his motor and cycle business because of the earlier depression and I had intended to start this up again and he was going to help. When I returned I discovered that several other agents had started up and with scarcity of material my father advised against it. Then too there were others already in former jobs and rehabilitation proved difficult. Deafness didn't help and I found that there still seemed to be a fence around me or a guard. Aircraft caused me to look up - for what I don't know. Actually I suppose it had taken me a long time to realize that the whole free wide world was open to me - and it kind of scared me because of the vast changes. Women smoked openly also drank a lot and all the young ones were grown up or gone away. I hardly recognized my younger sister.

A doctor friend of the family asked me how I fared and I was glad to get some of it off my chest but began to realize that he found it hard to believe. After all who could seriously believe the films of "The Wooden Horse" or "Stalag 17" etc. Only when I meet with some old POW pals can I really talk of it all. I was a POW when I was 21 years old and by the time I came out, a lot of enthusiasm had drained away.

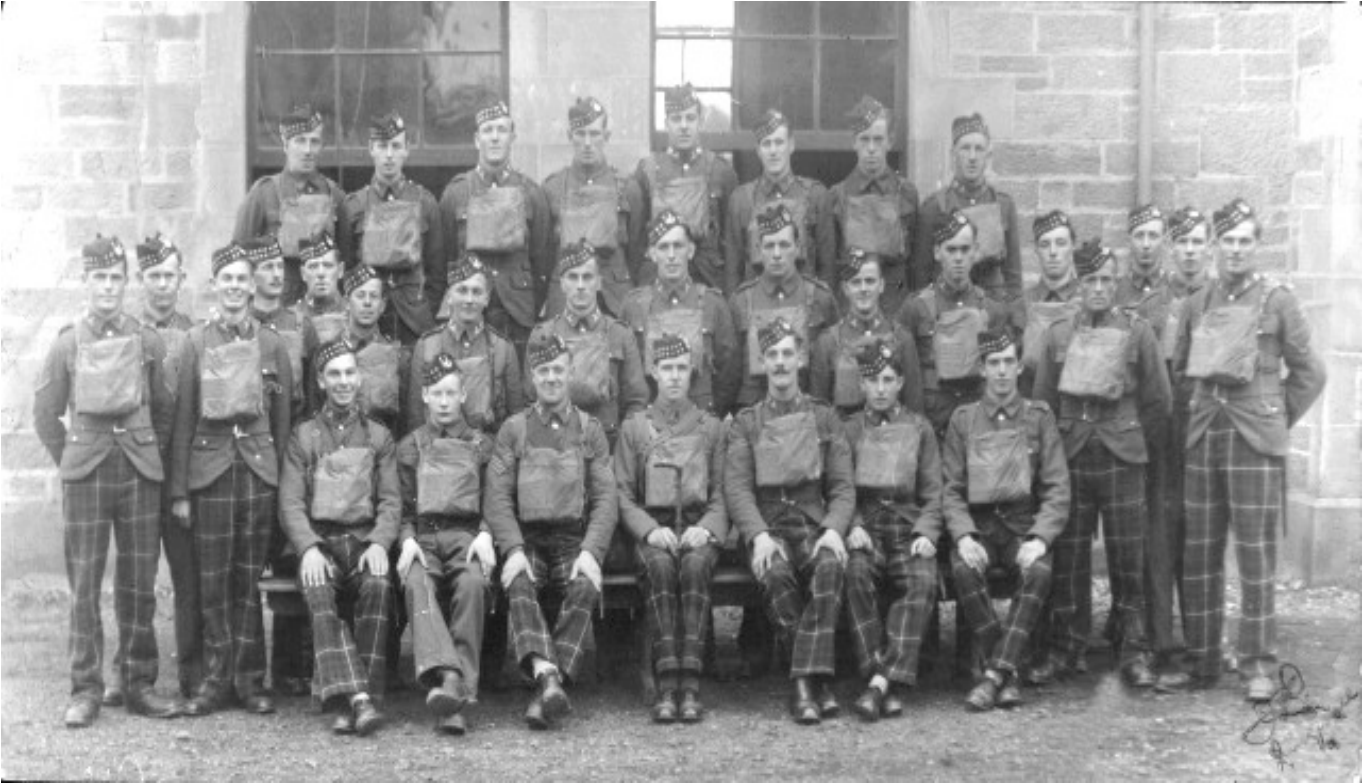
Private John B. Shivas

Pte. John B. Shivas, Seaforth Highlanders 4th Battalion, 51st Division, Line Infantry

B. April 19, 1919 Invergordon, Scotland - D. January 31, 1983 High River, Alberta



4th Battalion Seaforth Highlanders 51st Division, Line Infantry



Picture taken at Dingwall Academy Scotland in 1939.

Back Row: Ackie Ross (Millcraig), Richard Geddes, Murdo Murray, Dune MacDonald, Colin Ross (Saltburn), ?, Ronnie Fraser.

Middle Row: Willie Ross (Decko), Ackie Urquhart (Saltburn), Andrew Shivas, Jack Rhind, Dave McCulloch, George Munro (Alness), Bobby Speed, Arthur Riach, Hugh Morrison, Sandy MacLennan, Paul Calder, Dune Urquhart, Ali Mitchell (Alness), Jocky Duff, Davie Ross, Andrew Fraser, Roddie MacDonald.

Front Row: Johnny Shivas, Colin Urquhart, Sgt. Kenny Ross, Capt. McBeath, Reid Ross, Davie Beaumont, Willie Pirie.

Notes:

Pte. John B. Shivas / Camp No. 344 Lamsdorf Poland / P.O.W. No. 17006 / Army No. 2820489

Pte. Andrew Shivas / Camp No. 8B Teschen / P.O.W. No. 17046 / Army No. 2820984

Cap Badge of the Seaforth Highlanders

Active:	1881 - 1961
Country:	Great Britain
Branch:	British Army
Type:	Line Infantry
Part of:	Highland Brigade
Garrison / HQ:	Fort George, Highalnd
Motto:	Cuidich 'n Righ (Aid the King)
Tartan:	Mackenzie

The Seaforth Highlanders were amalgamated with the Cameron Highlanders and then became the Queens Own Highlanders in 1961. In 2006 all Scottish Infantry Regiments merged to form The Royal Regiment of Scotland. The Highlanders became the 4th Battalion of the new Regiment.



Stalag VIIIB / 344 Lamsdorf Poland

Pte. John B. Shivas / Camp No. 344 Lamsdorf / P.O.W. No. 17006 / Army No. 2820489

A postcard John sent to his mother Aimée Shivas in Invergordon, Scotland from Stalag VIIIB / 344. John is sitting far right.



A black and white group photograph of 28 soldiers in military uniforms, arranged in four rows against a wooden wall. The soldiers are posed in a formal group portrait. The first row consists of 8 soldiers kneeling or sitting on the ground. The second row has 8 soldiers standing behind them. The third row has 8 soldiers standing, and the fourth row has 4 soldiers standing at the back. The soldiers are wearing dark uniforms with collared shirts and ties. The background is a wooden wall with vertical planks. There are some stains and a small white mark on the left side of the image.



Before Going to WWII

John B. Shivas middle row 2nd from right. Andrew Shivas front row far left.



John B. Shivas front row far right. Andrew Shivas front row 2nd from left.



News article from the Ross-Shire Journal



Four sons of Mr and Mrs J. Shivas, 4 Murray Road, Invergordon, serving in the forces. Above—John and Andrew, both Seaforths, prisoners in Germany. Below—Cpl. C. Shivas, R.A.M.C., and B. Shivas, ex-Seaforths, now in the Home Guard. Mr Shivas himself was in the last war. A daughter, Margaret, is working on munitions.



Note: John and Andrew were both captured on June 12, 1940 and were POW's at Stalag VIIIB Lamsdorf, Poland. Andrew was moved to Teschen, Polish / Czech border in 1943.

Sgt. Charles Shivas was with the R.E.M.E. (Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers) stationed in West Africa and India during the war.

James ("Beam") Shivas served with the Air Ministry abroad.

History of the Numbering Changes of Stalag VIII B and Stalag 344

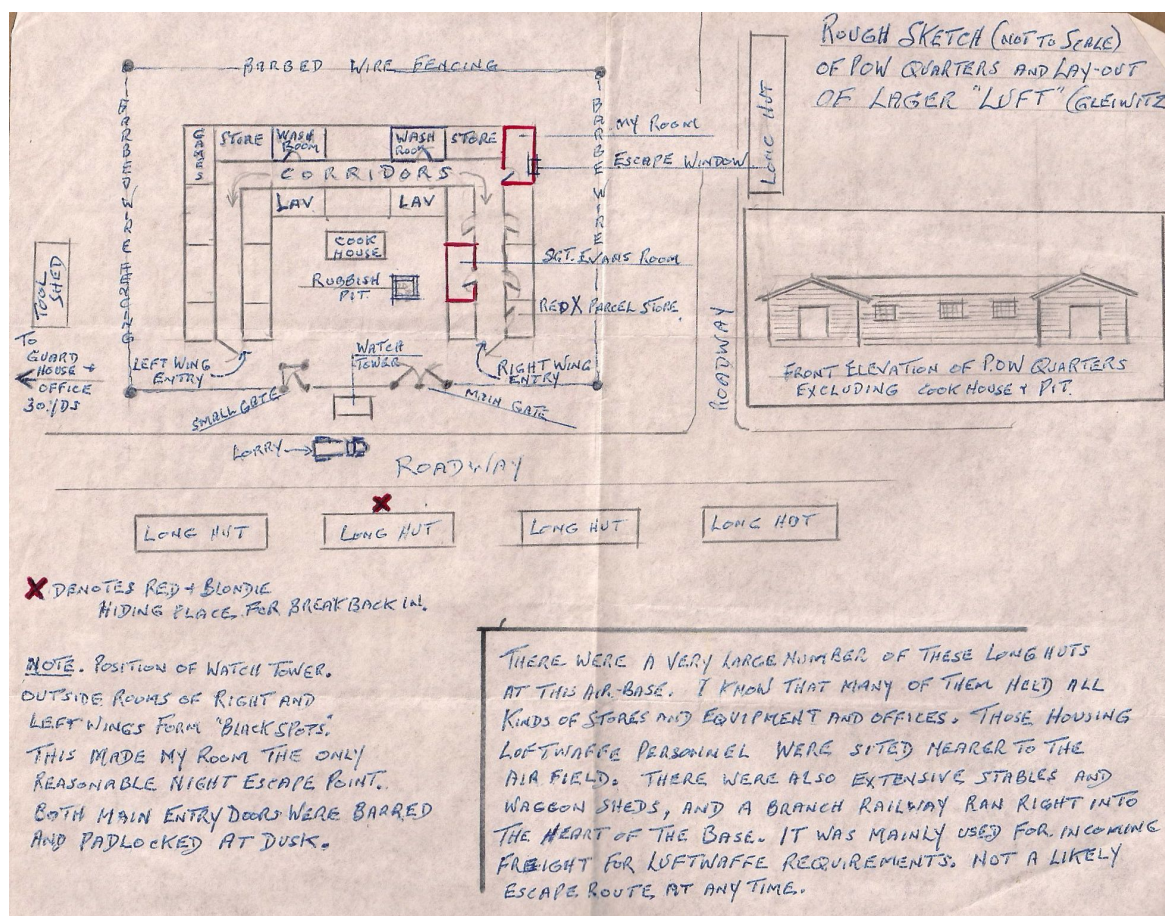
The camp at Lamsdorf was numbered Stalag VIIIB from early in the war. Thousands of prisoners passed through this camp. In May 1941 a camp numbered Stalag VIID was set up at Teschen on the Polish / Czech border. This Stalag was responsible for housing about 7,000 prisoners, mainly French but also Belgian, Yugoslavian and British. It was joined with Stalag VIIIB Lamsdorf in September 1942 as a branch camp and was then called Stalag VIIIB Teschen. By 1943 this Stalag VIIIB handled about 120,000 prisoners in the camps.

December 1943 the camps Teschen and Lamsdorf were then separated and the number Stalag VIIIB was applied to Teschen camp and Lamsdorf became Stalag 344.

Pte. Andrew Shivas was moved to Stalag VIIIB Teschen during 1943.

Pte. John B. Shivas remained at Stalag 344 Lamsdorf.

Diagram of Stalag VIIIB Compound Lamsdorf by John B. Shivas



Glossary

1. Stalag: short for Stammlager, which is German for base camp. A German prison camp for noncommissioned officers or enlisted men.
2. POW - Prisoner of War.
3. N.C.O. - Non Commissioned Officer.
4. Mullet - Red or Golden Fishes.
5. Nazi - A member of a German fascist party controlling Germany from 1933 - 1945 under Adolf Hitler.
6. Billet - To assign lodging to (as soldiers) by a billet. To have quarters.
7. "Lord Haw Haw" - German Radio announcer.
8. Sudetenland - The German name for the border regions and mountain range of Czechoslovakia.
9. Feldtfabel - German Sergeant.
10. Volkssturm - German Home Guard. It was a German national militia of the last months of World War II. It was set up, not by the by the Nazi Party on the orders of Adolf Hitler and its official existence was not announced until October 18, 1944.

Acknowledgments

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has helped me to complete this project.

A special honorary mention to my father the late John B. Shivas. I would never have been able to begin a project as such without his extensive work in helping my Grade 9 English class 1973.

I would also like to thank my mother Jane Shivas who worked with me to compile the story in 1996 on her visit when I lived in Calgary, Alberta. She deciphered my fathers hand writing and I was then able to compile the story on the computer.

Recently, I decided to review the document and noticed it needed some editing. I felt it was important to scan some of the pictures my father passed on to me and add them to the story.

I would like to thank Vanda Zawinski Hardy my cousin in Invergordon, Scotland. She recently mailed important documentation regarding my father and his brother Andrew while they were POW's in Poland. The documents contained information that I never knew before, their POW Numbers along with their Army Numbers and the prisoner of war camps they were assigned after 1943. She has also provided many pictures and details to the Invergordon Archives the past several years. This is an incredible website with so much history and invaluable information!

Last but not least and another special honorary mention to the late Davie Ross. On my last trip to Scotland July 2005, my Mom and I went to visit Davie at his home in Invergordon, Scotland. Davie was a very close friend of my Dad's and they both served together along with Andrew in the Seaforth Highlanders and were POW's at Stalag VIIIB Lamsdorf, Poland. It was an honour and a privilege to have met and visit with him.

Davie Ross along with other veteran soldiers from the Seaforth Highlanders assisted the Pupils of Park School to compile a book called "Invergordon a Town at War". This book reflects their experiences during WWII and their life in the prison camp. The book is a valuable source of information to help educate future pupils studying Invergordon during WWII.

In closing, this has been an incredible project with overwhelming information and history of WWII. I am so very proud of my father, his brothers and all the soldiers who served with the Seaforth Highlanders.

We must never forget the ultimate sacrifice these brave soldiers gave in WWII.

"Lest we Forget"

Pamela Shivas
January 2015