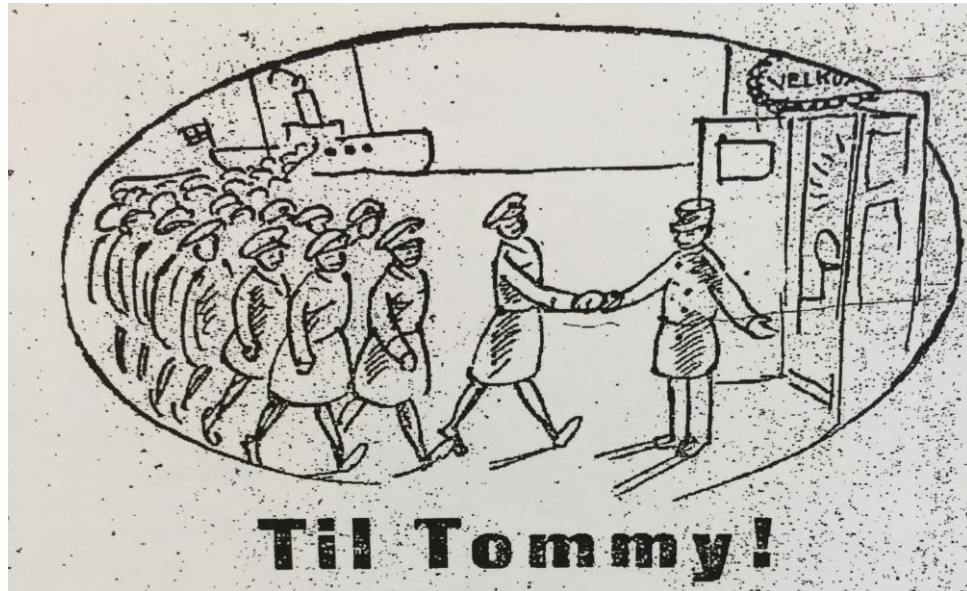


From Dänholm to Leith via Denmark

- leaving Stralsund camp on 30 November and 5 December 1918

30.11.17



It must have been a strange experience for the first group of 61 officers who left the German POW camp at Dänholm on Saturday 30 November 1918 on their way back to the UK. Firstly, they had only been given a few hours warning and secondly they were not on the list of names of those who were supposed to leave first – they were on the second list. This second list contained the names of men who had spent only a few months as pows whilst some of those named on the first list had been prisoners for very much longer. The planned departure of the first group had been cancelled a few days earlier, the reason is not clear. Some of those who had been interned for years felt this keenly, understandably so. Some took the opportunity to write Christmas cards home handing them over to those leaving assuming this would be the quickest postal route to the UK. Capt. Witherington “entrusted” two to 2Lt Hilary Heelis¹ to post on his arrival in England.

I have so far identified the names of 25 who must have been among this select few to leave on the 30th. Fortunately one of them, 2Lt Cyril Victor Longland, Lancashire Fusiliers, wrote home from Copenhagen and his parents kept the letter which is now in the Imperial War Museum (IWM).

“We left the Camp at Stralsund on the 30-11 going through Germany to Stettin the same day and were to catch a boat that night but for the railroad we would have done, but when only 25 km out of Stettin, we had to branch off and wait for an Engine which time taking 3 hours so we lost the boat. On arrival at Stettin we were taken to different hotels by the Red X representative of course we were more or less free men but nothing certain you understand about this I will tell you more when we meet.”

¹ 2Lt Hilary Loraine Heelis', Lancashire Fusiliers, uncle was married to Beatrix Potter.

It was Captain Hjort of the Danish army and still working for the International Red Cross who was in charge of repatriation at the port of Stettin in early December. The departure which the Dänholm group missed on the 30 November/1 December was the first to take British former pows from Stettin. However, the ships "Queen Maud" and "King Haakon" were filled to their maximum; there were plenty of others to take the places of the delayed Dänholm officers. The men on these sailings were the first to stay in Denmark, at the camps at Greve and Barfredshøj, whilst awaiting transport to the UK. They were given an overwhelming welcome on arrival at Copenhagen by both British and Danish senior repatriation officials and a large crowd of Danes, controlled by police on horseback, who had been waiting at the quay side to greet them. Despite the reception sounding somewhat chaotic it appears it was organized well enough to allow the men the opportunity to send telegrams home. Sgt. Davies² wrote "*Left Germany and will be home in 10 days*", and he wasn't far wrong. After disembarking their passengers in Free Harbour the "Queen Maud" and "King Haakon" were back in Stettin by 3 December.



The empty camps in Denmark

Denmark was neutral during the First World War. A defense force of 50,000 men was mobilized in August 1914 and steps were taken to strengthen the defense of Copenhagen. An extra line of defense around Copenhagen "Tunestillingen" was built with camps with wooden barracks at Greve and Barfredshøj ready for use by 1 April 1917. There were some problems to be dealt with at these camps, one major one being an insufficient and unreliable water supply at Barfredshøj and insufficient heating and drafts in the barracks at Greve. The officer's barracks had central heating and shower facilities but the men's had only stoves and water taps. The men were sent once a fortnight to the local dairy to have a warm shower and their clothes

² Sgt. Daniel Harton Davies RFA

were sent to a laundry to be cleaned but lack of soap resulted in problems with lice. Early in 1918 in both camps half a barrack was taken over and a hot water system and 8 showers were installed for the men's use. There were a number of other problems with the buildings, but since they had always been thought of as being temporary and the end of the war was in sight their occupants coped as well as they could. 5 smaller camps were also built on Amager; Forrest/Skov, Ullerup, Baggesminde, Længstehøj and Krudttårnslejren.

The defense force was sent home as soon as possible after the armistice was proclaimed and so the camps were more or less empty by the 1 December.

Dänholm officers "arriving on 4th" Copenhagen

2Lt Longland continues in his letter *"We left Stettin on the 3rd and were to have gone straight on a boat for England from Copenhagen but a thick fog came on just outside the mine fields so we had to drop anchor for a few hours this caused another delay, and arriving in here on the 4th we and the men were taken from the Quay by train to Lillerød a distance of about 20 kms. all the way down having the finest reception we could wish for.. "*

No ship actually left Copenhagen for the UK on 3 December, but as can be seen the plans made for ship transports to the UK the logistics were difficult and plans were changed as the situation demanded.

The ships "Queen Maud" and "King Haakon" brought their second shiploads from Stettin docking at Free Harbour at 7 o'clock in the evening on Wednesday 4 December. They too were met and greeted as they arrived but being later in the day than the first group, by a smaller crowd. The two ships contained 1500 passengers of which the Dänholm group of 61 were the only officers. The others were Other Ranks (OR) who had been interned in Altdamm and Döberitz camps. The repatriation staff divided them into groups, the Dänholm group being split up and spread amongst 4 the groups, each with a different destination. There were railway tracks at the harbour and trains were ready and waiting to take the men on to their billets in Denmark. The newspaper "Politiken" reported the next morning that the men had appeared to be in good health and that only 20 had been taken to the hospital ship "Formosa"³ which was docked nearby.

2Lt Longland was in a group of 30 officers from Dänholm who together with 679 OR were billeted at **Sandholm**, a camp to the north of Copenhagen. Another group made up of 25 officers from Dänholm and 357 OR went to **Greve** camp to the south of Copenhagen. The remainder were billeted on the island of Amager. These were divided into 2 groups; one group made up of 3 officers and 198 OR went to the camp at **Ullerup**. While the remaining 2 officers and 219 OR went to **Forrest** camp/Skovlejren. This only accounts for 60 officers; it is possible that the "missing" officer volunteered on arrival and stayed with the repatriation staff in Copenhagen.

³ HMAT Formosa was a Royal Naval Hospital ship which had been redesignated an ambulance transport following the targetting of British hospital ships by the Germans. She was diverted from her work taking casualties back to the UK across the English Channel, arriving in Copenhagen on 23 November being the first British ship to arrive in Copenhagen harbour since the armistice. Her crew contained 8 British officers and 13 nursing sisters. She sailed twice for Leith with sick but spent most of the time moored in Copenhagen acting as a base hospital until she left on 19 January 1919.

Group 1 - 25 officers to Greve camp

Groups 2 and 3 - 3 officers to Ullerup camp, 2 officers to Forrest camp/Skovlejren

Group 4 - 30 officers to Sandholm camp

“The entertaining committee for British soldiers”

The Danes were willing to do more than just wave a welcome and help with luggage. Certainly with regard to the British officers there was an interest in having them to stay in private homes. As soon as the news was out that British officers were to be billeted at the camp at Sandholm at least one family immediately contacted the British Legation with an offer to do just that. As Andreas Hansen a wealthy merchant explained in his letter dated 3 December, they lived near Sandholm and his wife Muriel being English, Stockton born, they were interested in anything they could do to help. They would be happy to have 5 officers staying with them at their country house Hestkjøbgaard. There was another family member already involved in the repatriation scheme. Andreas Hansen's sister's husband Captain Ivan Carstensen, Danish Army, had been in Germany since 24 November assisting “The British Commission” in Berlin by checking the pow camps.

It was noted on Andreas Hansen's letter that it was answered by a telephone call the next day. If a go ahead was given an office would be set up in Copenhagen to organize this type of help, and they would accept his offer with thanks.

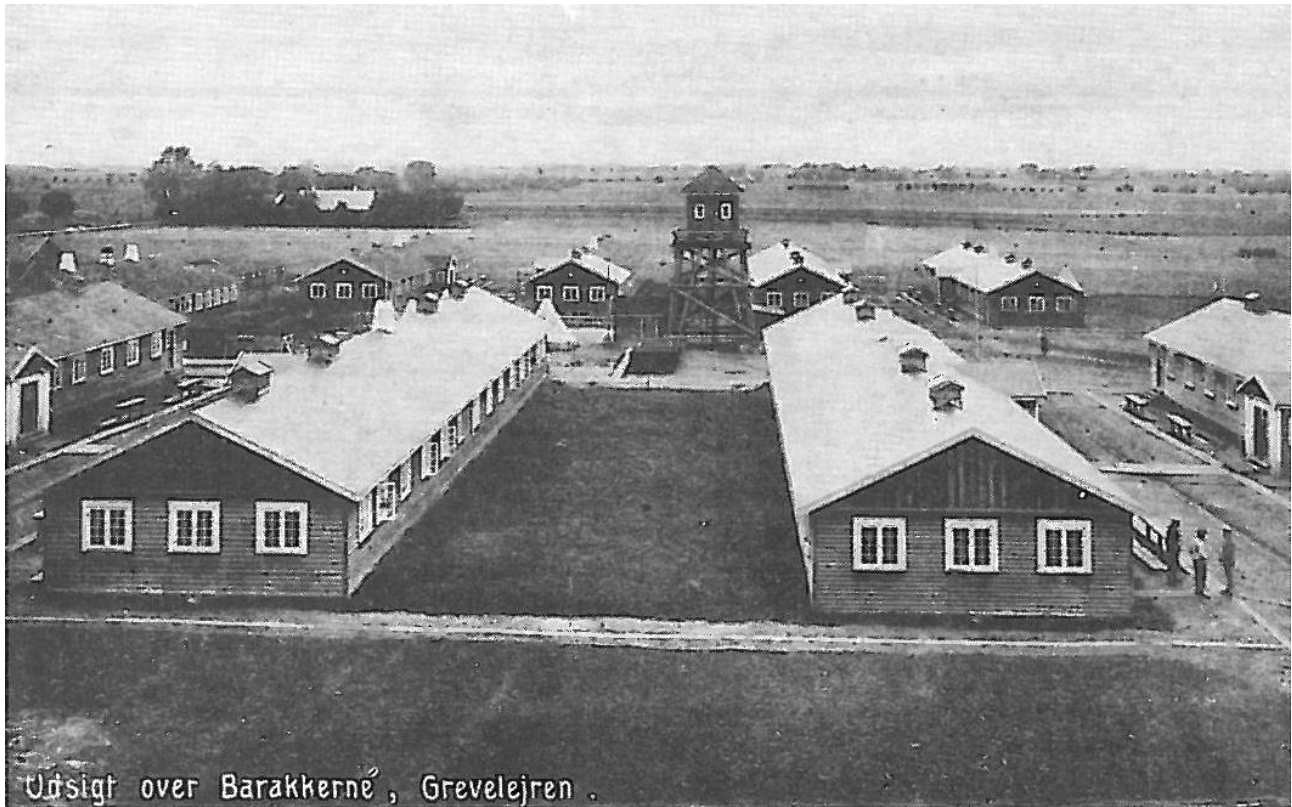
Hestkjøbgaard



On 5th December a national newspaper printed a short article with an appeal to the people of Copenhagen from “The entertaining committee for British soldiers”. It was explained that insufficient accommodation had been found for the British officers who were to come from the prisoner of war camps in Germany. Anyone willing to open their home or in any other way receive a British officer was to contact their offices at the Hotel Phønix, Dr. Tværgade 1. This hotel was on the opposite side of the street from the British Legation.

Others wrote in offering to take an officer or two e.g. Count Scheel offered to receive two officers in his home over the Christmas holidays while shop owner Carl Solberg and his wife, Blyth born Essie, could also take two preferably coming from her native Newcastle area. But it appears that the Danish Government decided not to allow the homeward bound allied officers to be taken into private homes. Arrangements were being made for the next and much larger groups of officers to stay in seaside hotels. An amusing article in the Ekstra Bladet on 16 December stated the official reason why the scheme for allied officers staying at private homes had been dropped; it was because of administrative difficulties. It then went on to describe the underlying concern: that the officers would be so overwhelmed by the beauty and charm of the Danish women after months at war and internment that they wouldn't want to go home, to the despair of both their families in England and of Danish husbands and fathers.

The “Greve camp” – who was already there?

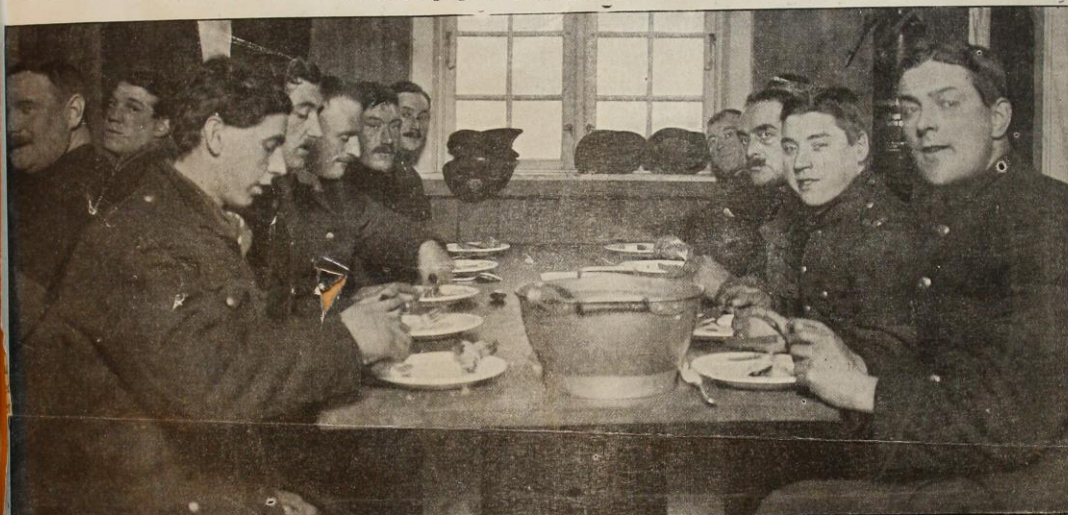


The camp at Greve commanded by Lt Col Hallerup and Capt. Jensen was ready for the task of accommodating their British guests. When the first group arrived at the station in Taastrup on 1 December a crowd of 1,000 towns' people were ready to welcome them. Pastor Wagner spoke *“As a proof how welcome you are among us, we will bring you a Danish cheer”* and then everyone hurraed loudly and with spirit. The soldiers were surprised and delighted by this show of friendliness. And they answered with their own loud cheer. The original plan was for a local band to have played a musical greeting but due the British soldiers delayed arrival and because it had turned very cold the vicar organized instead an improvised choir who sang *“God Save the King”*. Cigarettes and fruit were distributed. Volunteers were waiting with 15 wagons to transport the weaker former prisoners while the rest marched the 7.2 kilometers to the camp *“in high spirits”*. It was late and dark, and the lack of light on route was found to be a problem so extra lamps were ordered ready for future evening movements.

At Greve the men were welcomed by the commandant and then shown to their billet. Bookbinder Nielsen, from Taastrup, had had a busy afternoon. When it had been made known at 2 o'clock that afternoon that the British soldiers were on their way he sprang into action. Nielsen took the train to Copenhagen, stocked up on decorations and then returned back to Taastrup and then on to Greve camp to get everything ready for the evening. He had bought Danish and British flags and paper chains to decorate the dining room. And so, divided into sittings, the men could enjoy a good solid meal of stew and sandwiches with beer or tea followed by chocolate and fruit, to the accompaniment of music in a festively decorated dining room; and then a good nights' sleep in comfortable beds with clean sheets.



Danske Jenser og engelske Tommy'er paa Taastrup Stations Perron

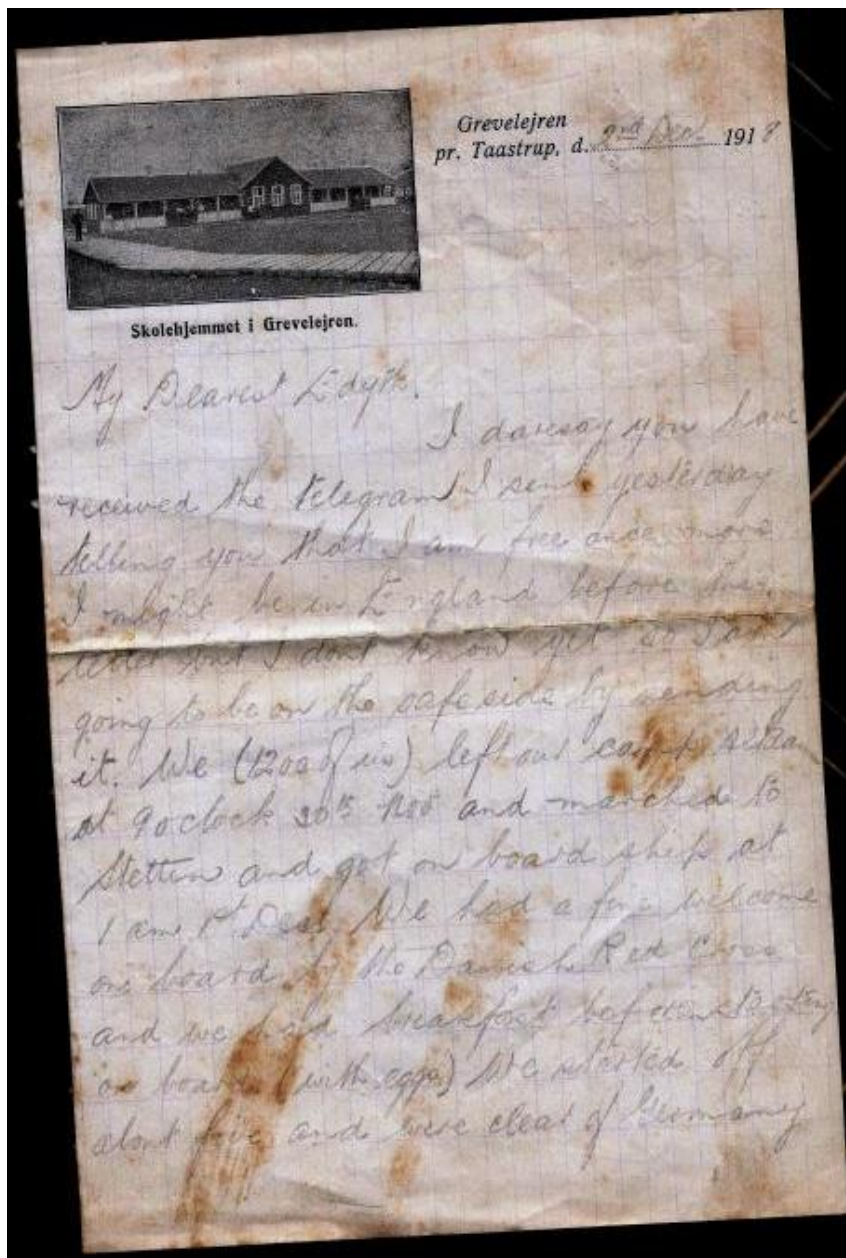


Det første Middagsmaaltid paa dansk Jord



Mætte og tilfredse ovenpaa Middagen

Captain Start, 6th battalion (bn) Connaught Rangers was posted as Senior British Officer(SBO) at Greve together with another, so far unnamed, British officer. Bertram James Start was one of 9 officers from Holzminden camp who had volunteered for repatriation duty and had been fast-tracked along with their batmen to Denmark. The 1st group accommodated in Greve were 642 OR from Altdamm. Sgt. Davies who had sent a telegram on arrival to Denmark the evening before had been taken prisoner on 21 March 1918. The next day settled in at the camp at Greve Daniel Harton Davies wrote a long letter to his wife telling of their "great reception" at Copenhagen and that they were "having a fine time now with plenty of everything they wanted". He was "full of joy" and could "hardly believe that it is true and am afraid of waking up again to find it a dream". No wonder he was excited about going home to Cardigan, Wales for there waiting for him was not only his wife Edyth but his 3 month old son whom he had yet to meet.



Sgt. Davies



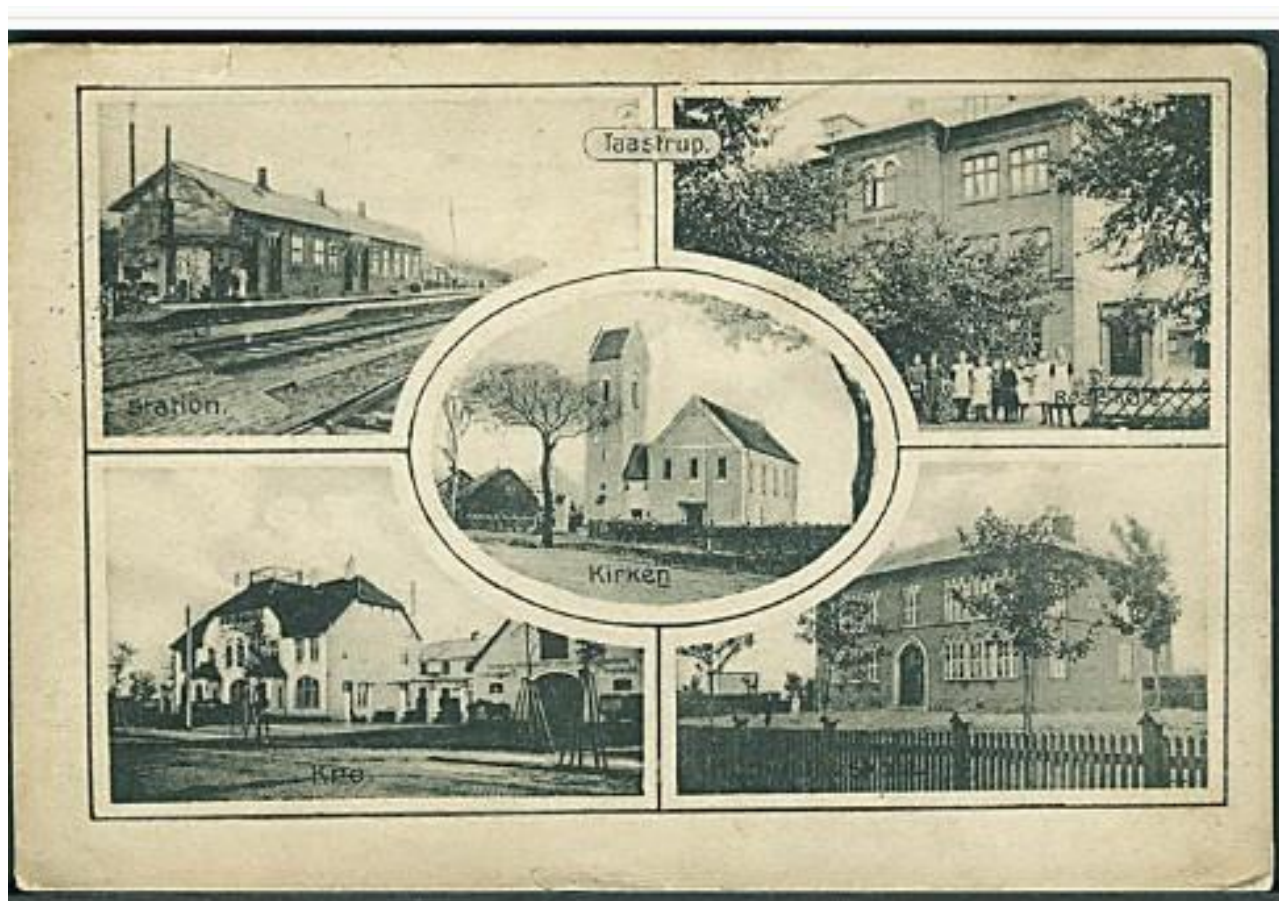
Several articles about the British soldiers at Greve, with photos, appeared in the Danish newspapers over the next couple of days. According to the newspapers their first taste of Danish food, on the ships and in the camp, good fresh food as opposed to the lack of food or the tinned food they had eaten in Germany, had given them tummy ache. But there had also been some concern that they may have brought various illnesses with them. They quickly got used to the food and they were, it was said, looking forward to an evening meal of the classic Danish dish of yellow pea soup with salted beef. One thing they didn't have to eat was Danish rye bread for the "Bread Bureau" in Copenhagen sent large batches of fresh white bread to the camp. The bathing facilities at the camp weren't adequate for the numbers and arrangements were made for groups to take the train to Copenhagen. 200 went on the 3rd and visited the public baths at "København Gaard". They were divided into groups of 50 and allowed 20 minutes for a bath. Reassured that the Tommies weren't carrying contagious diseases an "open day" was held on the 4th for locals to visit Greve camp and say hello to the British soldiers. The word was out too that any books or magazines in English would be welcome and the appeal was heard.



“Dänholm” officers at Greve camp

In the evening of the 4 December the second group arrived at Greve camp i.e. 25 officers from the camp at Dänholm and 357 OR. They had been welcomed in Copenhagen on arrival and again at the station at Taastrup, but it was later in the evening and there were fewer people cheering. Once shown their quarters and after ½ an hour to settle in, the Danish officers at Greve welcomed the British officers with a glass of wine in the officers' mess. One can imagine their conversation and wonder if they found it a bit uncomfortable explaining that they had only been prisoners of war for a few months and yet were among the first to be repatriated, but then they were just following orders. It was known that many, it was said approximately 100 of the OR from Altdamm staying at Greve had been taken prisoner just a few days into the war.

One of the OR who had arrived with the Dänholm officers was Lance Corporal (LCpl) Stansfield, 4th (Queen's Own) Hussars. 35 year old bachelor Richard Stansfield had joined the army at 18, and as a regular soldier was one of the first to fight, one of the Old Contemptibles. He was wounded and taken prisoner on 26 August 1914. Richard sent a postcard to his mother on 5 December *“a little surprise for you, am in Denmark”*! He was only just in time to catch the mail and would write a letter later: one wonders if that meant he had bought the postcard with views of Taastrup in a shop in the town and actually wrote it at the post office.



With the arrival of the second group the camp at Greve was full, holding 27 British officers and 999 OR.

The party at Taastrup

A group of 10 businessmen/professionals from Taastrup “The Albion Committee” pooled resources and invited 400 of the British soldiers at Greve to a party held at Taastrup on 5 December. One wonders how it was decided who could go, perhaps it was the first group and some of the Dänholm officers. Lorenzen, director of the cinema in Taastrup, had apparently taken the initiative in organizing the festivities and the entertainment started at 3 o’ clock in the afternoon at the cinema. The cinema wasn’t very big and they were divided into two sittings. They were welcomed in English, the first group by Egekvist, headmaster at the local school, while it was Miss Dagny Brink MA who addressed the second group and otherwise acted as translator. The choice of film may seem strange; it was an English war film. The accompanying music played during the film included “Tipperary” and “God Save the King” to which there was much cheering from the audience. A couple of very funny short films finished off the afternoon at the cinema, with the newspapers recording that the men laughed so much it caused cracks to appear in the ceiling.

The British guests were then invited over to Nykro – New Inn⁴ where hosts Mr. and Mrs. Frederiksen were kept busy ensuring that coffee cups were filled, plates filled with cake, and cigars and beer were served in abundance although no-one got drunk. Pastor Wagner gave a welcome speech, they were entertained by Harvigs Orchestra and there was an opportunity to dance with the local girls. For many of the locals popped in, including the vet Mr. Hansen with his lovely daughters. Later Mrs. Høyer from the British Legation sang a couple of songs and a couple of the British officers, having done so many times during internment, entertained with some popular songs and a comedy routine. They ended their slot with “God Save the King” and a Lieutenant came forward and gave a speech of thanks for the fantastic reception they had been given in Denmark and in particular thanking the people of Taastrup. There was a lot of cheering and the official part of the party was over. Many of the soldiers were invited home by Danes for dinner and it was late before they got back to the camp at Greve.



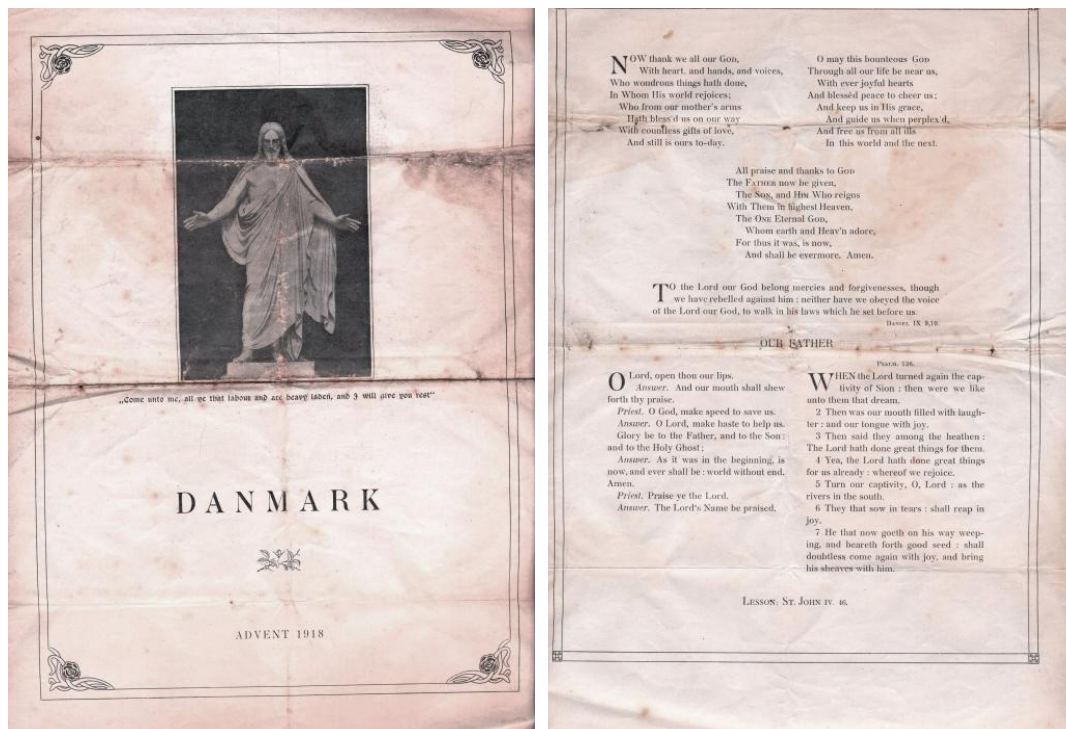
⁴ Nykro – New Inn was an inn near the station, rebuilt after a fire in 1902. It is used today as a community centre.

The next week

The following week the men relaxed at the camp at Greve. The “Dänholm” officers used to socializing carried on having improvised tea parties with their friends and visitors, in their rooms, with the Lipton tea they had in their luggage and sandwiches and biscuits they obtained from the officers mess. The men walked into Taastrup looked at the shops and chatted to the inhabitants; packets of Lipton tea and uniform button were given as souvenirs to the young ladies and children. Others, with a free pass for the trains, went to Copenhagen, to the baths and to see the city. However the cafés that a number of organizations opened for the foreigners awaiting a ship home didn’t open until a week or so later.

A couple of journalists from the national newspaper the “Politiken” visited the camp at Greve on the Saturday afternoon and an article appeared in the paper the next day. They interviewed SBO Capt. Start who was very eager to thank the Danes for the kindness that had been shown by all to the men. After the soldiers had finished their tasty evening meal they flocked around the journalists wanting to hear the latest news from abroad. They wanted news of the coming election in England and the journalists were curious whether the war had made them Bolsheviks. The feeling among the men was that reforms would come but that the war had made everyone a patriot.

One of the souvenirs Sgt. Daniel Harton Davies took home with him was a service sheet for an Advent service, presumably held on Sunday 8 December. Printed in English, it has a photo on the front of Thorvaldsen’s famous sculpture of Christ. Unfortunately it doesn’t say where the service was held. It has yet to be clarified if an advent service was held at the Greve camp that Sunday; vicars did visit the camp at later dates and held services. Davies may have gone to the Vor Frue Church in Copenhagen where the Thorvaldsen statue is. He could also have gone to a service in the English St. Albans Church in Copenhagen, but one wonders whether they would have used the Thorvaldsen picture on a service sheet.



According to the newspapers the men were expecting to sail home on the “Frederik VIII” on Monday 9 December but there were no transport journeys home from Copenhagen on that date. It wasn’t until two days later that Greve camp was emptied of both groups of British soldiers. The Movement Order of 11 December specifies that the Greve officers and men were to be at the station at Taastrup ready for entrainment at 11am with the train leaving at 11.25 and arriving at Free Harbour at 12.28. Left behind in camp to take charge of the next group was a staff of 4 British officers and 6 OR. Captain Smart had handed over to another SBO and was on his way home.

Groups 2 and 3 officers from Dänholm went to Amager

Back to the evening of 4th December: 5 of the officers from Dänholm and 407 OR from their transport left Free Harbour and travelled the short distance by train to Amagerbro where they then took an Amagerbanen train to the island of Amager. One group made up of 3 officers and 198 OR then alighted at Tømmerup station and continued to the camp at **Ullerup**. The remaining 2 officers and 219 OR continued to St. Magleby station where they got off and continued to **Forrest** camp (Skovlejren). Here on Amager too, to the British’ “*surprise and delight*” locals had been waiting to help transport them to the camps.

The camps on Amager were all smaller than the camp at Greve. They too didn’t have sufficient bathing facilities and groups went to the baths in Copenhagen. The camps at Forrest/Skov, Ullerup and Baggesminde were all in the neighbourhood of today’s Copenhagen airport. The Baggesminde camp still exists pretty much in its original form. It is now owned and used by “Frelsens Hær” - the Danish “Salvation Army”.

2Lt N.H. Marshall RAF was one of the 5 officers who went to an Amager camp. He had been shot down and taken prisoner on 14 July 1918 and arrived via Karlsruhe at Dänholm on 4 August. Nelson Hepburn Marshall was only 19 years old, but must have been a mature and responsible type, for he was taken on as repatriation staff on 5 December. When the groups at Ullerup and Skovlejren left for home on 11th December Marshall stayed behind.



Baggesminde Camp in 2008

Group 4 to Sandholm – *“I am seeing the world and will still be home for Christmas”.*

The last 30, the largest group of British officers from Dänholm, who arrived at Copenhagen in the evening of the 4 December, went with 679 OR from the ships to Sandholm. A train took them to Lillerød and as 2Lt Longland continued in his letter to his parents *“On arriving at Lillerød, there were conveyances both for us and the men to some Danish barracks about 4 miles out”*. As opposed to the other camps – Greve, Ullerup and Skovlejre were more or less temporary constructions, built in wood, for the Defense Army. The camp at Sandholm was a modern army barracks. It had been built between 1909 and 1912 with brick buildings and adequate modern facilities and was base for the “Livgarden” (Life Guards) of the regular army. They had been hastily relocated for the duration of the repatriation scheme to Kronborg and only the necessary staff was left to assist the “foreign guests”.

The Danish officers at **Sandholm** obviously wanted to make a good impression and had a good dinner ready for them *“the first time English officers have been their guests”* and a festive evening followed. Longland wrote his letter the next morning and commented *“We had a right royal time and are continuing to have one, these are splendid barracks, also the mess”*. 22 year old Cyril Victor Longland who had been taken prisoner on 8 August 1918 was a bit dubious about how his tummy would cope with first *“being starved 4 months ago - then bully beef for 3 months – now living on Danish Butter and cream”*. But he thought he *“could put up with it”*. Longland planned to go to Copenhagen the next day and was expecting to have *“a great time”*. He expected to be in Denmark for about 5 days and as he finished his letter *“I am seeing the world and will still be home for Christmas”*.



Sandholm Camp



Capt. Christie billeted at Sandholm

An extraordinary day

The 11 December was an interesting day for the British billeted at Sandholm. Both for a group of 100 who were invited for the day out to Hillerød and for those who stayed in the camp and had a chance to see the King of Denmark. The next day a short account of the king’s visit appeared in British newspapers:

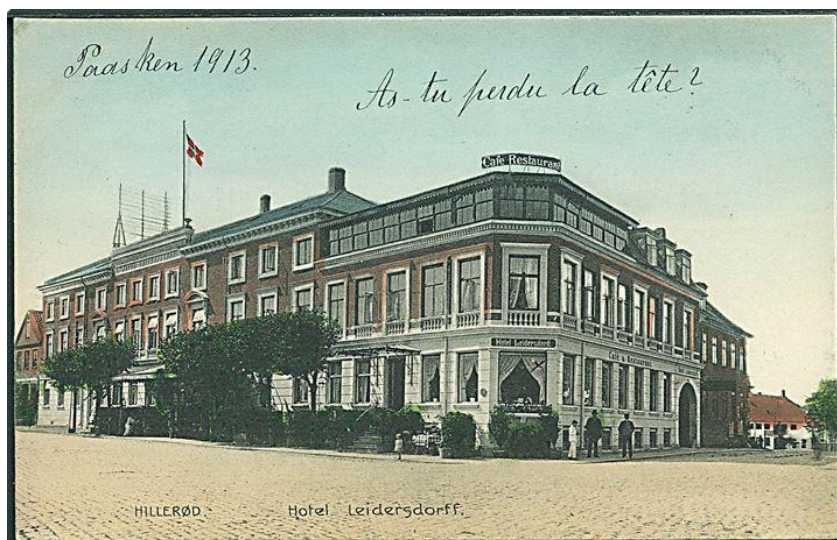
“On occasion of the visit of King Christian to British repatriated prisoners of war at Sandholm Camp, the following incident took place: The King, who is honorary colonel of the Buffs, inquired whether, there were any men of his regiment in the camp. This proving to be the case, his Majesty expressed a wish to meet them all.

The Buffs accordingly lined up on the parade ground, then suddenly a lieutenant, stepping forward, and removing his regimental badge from his cap, asked the King's acceptance of it as a token of gratitude for what His Majesty had done for the prisoners of war of his regiment. The gift was graciously accepted and much appreciated by His Majesty."

There were 4 Buffs/East Kent Regiment officers⁵ from the camp at Dänholm who could have been among the British officers at Sandholm, i.e. they were all taken prisoner the 5/6 August 1918. Lt J.W. Bryant could be seen as the likely candidate for the one giving the king his badge; the 24 year old Londoner certainly volunteered and stayed on as repatriation staff.



It was Hr. Sorensen from the Hotel Leidersdorff, who had lived in England for a number of years, who had taken the initiative to invite the soldiers for a day out at Hillerød, 11 km north of Sandholm. The wonderful 17th century renaissance castle at Hillerød, Frederiksborg Slot, houses a national history museum with many portraits of national importance.



"A hundred British soldiers from Sandholm Camp yesterday paid a visit to Frederiksborg Castle at Hilleroed, and displayed great interest in the beautiful museum there, which numbers two fine paintings of King Edward and Queen Alexandra among its exhibits. The soldiers were then given tea, cakes, wines and cigars at the Hotel Leidersdorff, and were entertained with songs and music. All the buildings in Hilleroed were beflagged in honour of the guests."

The soldiers were met at the station and the local people accompanied them through the flag decorated streets to the castle. Museums director Holck showed the men around where, as mentioned in the

⁵ Lt John William Bryant, Lt Robert Plumb, Lt Harold Stanley Watson and Capt Henry Tupper

newspaper article, they had been delighted to see the portraits of Edward and Alexandra. Afterward the men, led by a band, marched to the hotel that was also decorated with English and Danish flags. Hr. Sorensen gave a fine speech to the men expressing the deep affection he had for the British people and congratulating them on their victory.

3 officers left Sandholm on 6 December, presumably to stay in a hotel in Copenhagen while 9 of the officers at Sandholm appear to have left the camp on the 12 and have possibly stayed the night in Copenhagen before joining up with other officers and OR from Sandholm the next day in Free Harbour to board ship for home. The remaining 18 officers appear to have stayed at the camp leaving Denmark on 16 December.

The “absconders” from Dänholm

12 officers⁶ had left the camp at Dänholm without permission on 5 December, this was the same evening the shooting incident took place. It was against orders to abscond in this way but it was also agreed that it could not be described as escaping. In fact they probably very quickly came to regret they had gone off on their own as it was a very difficult, uncomfortable and in the circumstances a dangerous journey to Denmark.

The group was made up of 4 officers from the Aachen group i.e. officers who had been interned for over 2 years while the rest apart for one had been taken prisoner in March or May 1918. I have found no information about 2Lt M. J. Anderson, Labour Corps. According to Lieutenant Colonel (Lt Col) De Renzie Martin at least 6 of these officers were from Hut F at Dänholm. The most senior officer in the group was Major Eric Chester Hillman MC, Royal Engineers (RE) a soldier in the regular army.

3 of the officers had been involved in the excellent Dänholm camp magazine “The Outlook”. Lt Joseph Johnson Holme, Northumberland Fusiliers (North Fus.) had been its editor: it was his profession before the war, Lt William Sommerville Beaumont, R. E. pre-war an architect who had been the art editor whilst Lt David McChleary, Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, also an architect, seems to have provided sketches for the magazine signing them “DMC”. It is very frustrating that none of these three professional men, so used to using the printed form to communicate, seems to have left us a first person account of their adventures. The only believable accounts appear as small snippets in the newspapers after their arrival home.

The “Western Daily Press” reported on 20 December that Lt Beaumont – *“has arrived after an exciting experience in escaping from captivity at Stralsund. He with 11 other officers, got away in a boat on December 5, but during the night they got stranded on the shallow waters which are so common in that part of the Baltic. After 1 ½ hours efforts they got off, after being played on by the shore searchlights and reached Denmark in safety after 2 ½ days’ voyage. There they were hospitably treated and sent on to Leith”*.

⁶ Lt Michael Couchman, West Yorkshire regiment (West Yorks), Lt Ernest Cola Carroll RAF, Lt Frederick William Griffiths, RAF, Lt Ernest W. Marchant, Middlesex Regiment, Lt Harold Ernest Townsend, RAF, Lt Joseph Johnson Holme, North Fus., 2Lt M. J. Anderson, Lab. Corps., Lt John A.G. Stuart, Royal Garrison Artillery (RGA), Lt William Sommerville Beaumont, RE, Lt William Leonard Barrett, Army Service Corps (ASC) attached Devons, Lt David McChleary, Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and Major Eric Chester Hillman, RE

A longer, more colourful and in most of its details incorrect, article appeared in the “Northern Whig” on 30 December. William Stuart had received a letter from his son Lt John A.G. Stuart, Royal Garrison Artillery – *“He relates that he and eleven of his comrades succeeded in escaping in a fishing vessel. Starting from their place of captivity they pushed along in the little fishing boat in the Baltic, where they were continuously rowing for two nights and a day. After enduring many hardships during this period they arrived at a Danish island, but were refused a landing. The adventures took place a few days before the signing of the armistice. After considerable trouble Lieut. Stuart reached the mainland, and finally landed at Copenhagen, where after identification, they were hospitably entertained by Danish officers, and the Danish authorities procured for them a vessel and had them landed in a place of safety. To this charitable act of the Danish authorities Lieut. Stuart pays a glowing tribute. The latter part of Lieut. Stuart’s letter is filled with tragedy and sorrow, as he informed his father that another party of interned officers, being apparently animated with the success attained by him and his colleagues, tried a similar avenue of escape but unfortunately their plans were frustrated from the start. They were captured, and one officer was shot dead and another wounded.”*

Since the absconders/adventurers don’t turn up in any of the camps in Denmark, there are two possibilities as to their billets in Denmark. The most likely is that they arrived in Copenhagen very late on the 7 December and that they were the 12 officers who stayed the night on the Barracks ship the Fynen⁷. Over the next two days they moved, 3 then 9, off the Fynen, presumably to stay in a hotel in Copenhagen. The other possibility was that the Dänholm group once they had been officially identified and registered by the British repatriation staff in Copenhagen, had been installed in hotels in central Copenhagen and the officers billeted on the Fynen were a different group altogether. Major Hillman MC is mentioned in one document as being in the company of 3 other high ranking VIP officers who were staying at the Hotel Phønix, so he too may have moved into this swanky hotel.



⁷ More about the Funen in Appendix C

Other VIP officers were starting to arrive in Copenhagen, not on their own initiative on a fishing vessel, but having been identified as such they were offered a fast track home, officially organized and travelling by the regular train and ferry services! Arrangements were being made for groups of officers to stay at seaside hotels but this scheme wasn't quite ready a week into December.

Captain Leefe Robinson VC

Captain Leefe Robinson VC famous for shooting down the first German airship over England in September 1916 had been taken prisoner in April 1917. He had had a rather tough time as a POW, tried to escape several times and was moved to a number of different camps, the last being Holzminden. His celebrity gave him a high profile and at the beginning of December it was mentioned in the newspapers that William Leefe Robinson was in a hotel in Berlin. Leefe Robinson appears to have taken the train and ferry from Berlin to Copenhagen, presumably together with another couple of officers.



Terminus Hotel

Leefe Robinson had been one of the many British POWs who had received food parcels from Denmark, either financed by family/friends in the UK or by a Danish "godmother"⁸. In Raymond Laurence Rimell's biography "The Airship VC" about William Leefe Robinson he briefly mentions his stay in Denmark on his way home. Rimell writes;

"One citizen, the notable pre-war pilot Erik Hildesheim, specified that the recipient of his parcels should be an airman. In due course he received a grateful letter from Robinson, who when repatriated via Denmark, received an invitation from his benefactor. The "committee in charge of arrangements" would not permit

⁸ Many Danes had "adopted" one or more prisoners of war and sent them letters and parcels with food and socks etc. which they funded themselves. They were known as "godmothers". Others, typically well off prisoner's families refunded the bill when Danish acquaintances or business associates sent parcels on their behalf.

this, and Robinson was booked into the Terminus Hotel opposite Copenhagen's main railway station. Nevertheless, Hildesheim stood him a dinner:

"He was not much for wet wares, but enjoyed the rich Danish food and particularly succumbed to whipped cream. I told him that I did not begrudge him any amount he could enjoy and stand. However, I warned him that he had better go a bit easy after the diet that his stomach had to endure for so long.

It was a very sick Leefe Robinson and a sad sight I met when calling for him the next morning to take him for the sights of the town. He was in bed and groaning, his head swollen, and his skin very red. I quickly called a doctor and for the rest of his four-day stay in Copenhagen, poor Leefe was permitted to consume nothing but water wherein potatoes had been boiled".

Capt. Leefe Robinson V.C.



While the Hildesheim anecdote was genuine a short article in a Danish newspaper which appeared a couple of weeks later seems more like nice "hygge" story, not completely if at all true, but associating him with similar Danish stories relating to the repatriation of foreign soldiers during this period. It describes how a young lady from a fine family, Miss J., had been "godmother" to Capt. Robertson as they called him. She had apparently been in England during the first war years and she had been his fan after seeing him shoot down the zeppelin. Back in Denmark she had been doing voluntary work for the correspondence department of the Red Cross. Here she had seen that he was interned at the Ulm fortress under harsh terms after trying to escape. Miss J. had written to him telling him that he had been her hero since she had seen the "zeppelin action" and that she asked to be allowed to have the honour of sending him some kilos of butter and a basket of eggs. The gallant captain had replied that he had no need for butter and eggs but he would appreciate it the young lady would write to him and so cheer him up in his dull imprisonment. And so they had had a lively correspondence. Miss J. was said to have

met him on his arrival in Copenhagen on the "Queen Maud". What a lovely romantic story to read on Christmas Day.

However one can fully imagine that had any of the Dänholm officers' had connections with a Danish "godmother" that they too would have been wined and dined and shown the sights as Leefe Robinson was by Hildesheim. Those staying in a hotel in central Copenhagen had every opportunity of celebrating their freedom as their fancy took them visiting the sights, restaurants and entertainments, and they probably made the most of these unexpected opportunities.

Groups 1, 2 and 3 - From Copenhagen to Leith on the “Porto”

The “Porto”⁹ arrived at Copenhagen in the evening of the 9 December. The next day a “movement order” was typed up with details of the numbers of officers and men and which camps they were to be taken from, details of their transport to Free Harbour and how they were to be billeted on the ship; 1st class saloon for the officers and “other saloons” for the NCOs and for the men. The officers numbered 85, including 18 “Dänholm” officers¹⁰, 3 of whom had been staying at the Amager camps and 15 who had been at Greve camp. There were also a “miscellaneous” group of 50 British officers with 25 orderlies who had arrived by train¹¹ on the 10th and gone straight onboard. The others on the list were a mix of a few civilians and Belgians and 221 Indians who had been billeted on the Fynen. In addition to them was added in a note, that 150 British officers were to arrive on the Malmø and to transfer immediately to the Porto.

The 11 December turned out to be a busy day at Free harbour. The “Queen Maud” and the “King Haakon” arrived from Stettin and their 1600 passengers were transferred straight onto to “Frederik VIII”. There was some panic over news that the Danish stokers had decided to strike, but by 10 o’ clock things were sorted out and “Frederik VIII” left for Hull. The “Malmø” coming from Lübeck had a difficult journey avoiding mines and arrived 4 hours later than expected. There were only 10 British officers onboard the rest were French.

If ex Dänholm pows hadn’t bumped into each other in Copenhagen then it was reunion time when they met onboard, both those who had left on 30 November and those who had “absconded” on the 5 December. From their repatriation dates six¹² of the “absconders” must have been on the “Porto”. Captain Leefe Robinson was too, along with Lt Col Frank Flemming RFA, who had been a prisoner at Beeskow. He sent a telegram from the ship telling his father Sir John Fleming that they had sailed from Copenhagen for Leith.

Unfortunately no description of the Porto’s journey has turned up. According to the Scottish evening newspapers of Saturday 14 December the “Porto” had arrived at Leith during the night; the passengers had comprised 119 British officers, 1686 men, 2 civilians and 3 women, 121 French and Italians. That 216¹³ of them were Indians apparently wasn’t of interest as they weren’t mentioned. Celebrity Captain Leefe Robinson was, but he declined telling his experiences as a pow to the journalists: perhaps he was still having tummy problems or he could have found it all rather overwhelming. It was mentioned that a number of the returning had been in France in the first days of the war and had been taken prisoner at Mons. The party was given an official welcome by Major-General Sir E. Fanshawe, Forth Garrison and

⁹ Porto was used as a transport ship. Was being used first on the Rotterdam Hull route was diverted to Copenhagen Leith route by the Ministry of Shipping

¹⁰ Lt Michael Harry Kirkpatrick Kane RAF, Lt Andrew Jackson, 34, Machine Gun Corps (MGC), Lt John J. Mann, Royal Scots, 2Lt Harold Walter Burry, RAF, Lt John Anthony Chubb, RAF, Lt Arthur Reginald Jones, RAF, 2Lt. Grenfell Henry Glasspoole, RAF and 2Lt. Alexander R. Cowan, RAF all have the relevant repatriation date for this sailing.

¹¹ Notes on train transports registered 54 British officers and 16 OR for 10th December. No info on their identity or of which camp/camps they came from.

¹² Lt. David McChleary, Lt. William Leonard Barrett, Lt. John Alexander G. Stuart, Lt. Harold Ernest Townsend, - Lt. Ernest W. Marchant, Lt. Ernest Cola Carroll

¹³ 5 of the Indians on the Fynen had been taken to hospital in Copenhagen with dysentery.

Provost Lindsay of Leith. According to the newspaper the Marchioness of Linlithgow was *“assisting in the shed at Imperial Dock, in waiting at the tables”*.

Both officers and men went on to be de-briefed and have a medical check-up before being sent home on leave. Sgt. Daniel Harton Davies sent a telegram home on 14th from Leith saying that he had *“arrived in Scotland”*. Even better was the telegram to Edyth sent on 17th December *“coming by midday train”* Dani. It wasn't only his family who welcomed him home, a couple of weeks later the Mayor of Cardigan invited him to lunch and he was presented with a small token of appreciation of the services rendered by him to King and Country. L Cpl Stansfield from Blackley, taken prisoner on 26 August 1914, must have been down on one knee as soon as he got home. He married Elsie Grace on 16 January 1919.

Lt W. Leonard Barrett, A.S.C. attached to the Devons arrived home in Barnstable on Monday the 16th. A brief note in the local newspaper described how he with 11 other officers from Dänholm *“recently crossed the Baltic in a small fishing boat and after 36 hours on the water reached Copenhagen”* and the cordial welcome he had received on arriving home. And so Lt Barrett pow at Dänholm when the war ended was one of the first to reach home and could get back to his job in the family business as a chartered accountant. The happiness of homecoming was short-lived for Captain Leefe Robinson and his family; he contracted the Spanish flu and died on New Year's Eve.

Group 4 – From Copenhagen to Leith on the “Ajax”

The first group of Dänholm officers who had been billeted at Sandholm left Copenhagen on the 13 December on the “Ajax”. So far I have found the names of ten¹⁴ officers whose repatriation date of 17 December indicate that they stayed at Sandholm and sailed on this ship. Lt C.V. Longland was one of them. Surprisingly his telegram to his parents sent from Leith *“Going to Ripon for a day then home”* didn't reach them until the 19th. In his “Leave or Duty Ration Book” from Ripon his leave started 20th December.



Some of the VIP officers in Copenhagen apparently left Denmark earlier than was planned. Some effort had gone into fast tracking Lt Col Lord Farnham¹⁵ home. He travelled from Berlin by regular train and ferry, and had been billeted at the Hotel Phønix in Copenhagen. His name appears on a movement order dated 15 December for repatriation on the “Plassey” together with Lt Col Howard-Bury, Major Hillman and Lt Knott; Major Hillman being one of the “absconders” from Dänholm. In fact these four had already left on the “Ajax” a couple of days earlier. So there was some crossed communication somewhere.

¹⁴ 2Lt Cyril Victor Longland, Lancashire Fusiliers, Capt. James R. Christie, Gordon Highlanders, Major James Norman Ritchie, RFA, Capt. Cecil P. Haward, Royal West Surrey Regiment, 2Lt Malcolm J. Henderson, Lancashire. Fusiliers, 2Lt Percy Henry Horsley, Royal Warwickshire Regiment, Lt George Morgan Gray, RAF, 2Lt Richard O. Lockhead, Cameronians, 2Lt Robert Henry Dunn, RAF, Lt Alan James Fricker, RAF

¹⁵ A Northern Ireland politician

The "Ajax" left Copenhagen in snowy weather. According to the movement order of the 12 December with a passenger list of 77 NCO, 1195 men including 2 merchant seamen and 24 Roumanians and what must have ended up being approximately 18 officers. When the men left the ship in Leith on the 17th they were welcomed by Provost Lindsay who addressed them with a few cheering words and after a meal they went on to Ripon. No details of passenger numbers were given in the Scottish newspapers.

"Disobedience of Orders"

One reason why the British Military Repatriation Office in Copenhagen constantly had to keep updating and modifying its transport plans and movement orders was because the less savoury matter of cheating was going on!

A note was sent on 17 December to all the S.B.O.s at the camps, all the S.B.O.s on the ships between Germany and Copenhagen and for information to the French Legation and the War Office in London signed by Lt Col Hazard Officer Commanding British Troops in Denmark.

1. There have been several instances where returning Prisoners of War have attempted to get on board ships for England, without being officially detailed to go. It is to be regretted that not only men, but officers have been detected in this.
2. All ranks, officers and men, must be warned that by such conduct, they are not conducting themselves as soldiers, are attempting to take a mean advantage, and are seriously impeding arrangements which have been made to expedite their repatriation in rotation. Any further cases of this nature will be rigorously dealt with on the grounds of "Disobedience of Orders"

This probably explains the notice which appeared in some Danish newspapers the same day.

**Det Britiske Militær Hjemsendelses Kontor
beder indtrængende om, at ingen britisk Soldat
maa faa nogensomhelst Assistance, naar han
rejser fra sin Lejr til København, undtagen
han kan fremvise et officielt Pas, som giver
Tilladelse til Rejsen, og underskrevet af en
Officer ved Lejren.**

**The British Military Repatriation Office
earnestly requests that no British Soldier
be given any assistance whatsoever in travel-
ling from his camp to Copenhagen unless he
can produce an official pass duly signed by
an officer of the camp authorizing the journey.**

Group 4 – From Copenhagen to Leith on the “Plassy”

According to the Plassy movement order, eight¹⁶ officers should have come from Sandholm, sailing from Copenhagen in the evening of 16 December for Leith. These were likely to be Dänholm officers. The entire listing of passengers was noted to be 291 officers, 64 Marine officers, 37 NCO, 885 OR and 71 civilians. All the men came from Greve camp.

They disembarked at Leith on 19 December. Neither Danish nor British newspapers wrote much about this transport however one of the passengers wrote in his diary about their journey. 16 year old Australian Keith Harris, had been a deck hand on the S.S. Matunga when taken prisoner a year earlier. He had been interned at Gustrow and had spent a few days at Greve camp before this part of his long journey home.

“The next morning we left camp at about 9 a.m. and arrived at Copenhagen at 10.30 a.m. and after some delay we were shipped on board the English ship “H.M.S. Plassey” and at 4 p.m. we left the wharf. We had a lovely send off. Thousands of Danish people cheering us and wishing us a safe voyage and we returned it with cheers and songs.

When we got outside we were ordered to wear our life belts from 8 p.m. that night until 6 a.m. the following morning on account of the danger of floating mines. We also had boat drill.

We had a cruiser escorting us on account of the ships firemen, they got drunk and mutinied, also slashed several of the crew with knives, and it ended by five of the mutineers being taken on board the cruiser and put in irons, and about twenty naval mariners were put on board the “Plassey” to keep order.

On 17th December we passed a floating mine, only about 200 yards away. When we were at a safe distance the cruisers went back and exploded the mine. It was a fine sight and well worth seeing. Later in the day we passed three more mines within an hour all of which were sunk by the cruiser. To wards evening we came a breast of another mine and the marines from our ship began firing at it with rifles but they were unsuccessful, the cruiser did not go back and explode it either.

We arrived at Leith Dockland at 11 p.m. on 18th December and dropped anchor and waited for the tide. We did not go alongside the docks until 2 p.m. on 19th December. There was two Scottish bands on the Docks to meet us and hundreds of school children and lots of her people. We didn’t get a chance to cheer. We had to be content to listen to them.



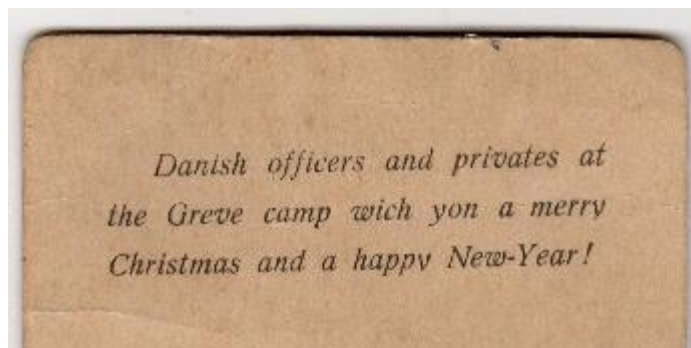
¹⁶ Possibles with repatriation date of 18.12.18; Lt Geoffrey Castle RAF and absconder Lt Michael Couchman 10bn West Yorkshire regiment. Possibles with only December for repatriation date; absconder Lt Joseph Johnson Holme, Northumberland Fusiliers, Lt Harold Stanley Watson, East Kent regiment, Lt Douglas Daintry Warren, Bedfordshire Regiment, Capt. Frederic F. Waugh, Lancashire Fusiliers, Lt Arthur Francis Woodford, Bedfordshire Regiment, Lt George Balance RAF, 2Lt Joseph Leslie Smith, RAF, 2Lt Patrick Leonard Howard, Royal Berkshire regiment.

We went ashore at 5.30 p.m. and we were given something to eat by the Red Cross and we were given railway passes to London. On the way to the station lots of kiddies flocked around us for souvenirs. We gave them what we had and then my mate and I caught our train for London”.

The diary concludes when Keith Harris arrived in London on 20 December 1918. The military passengers would have gone to Ripon before going home on leave a day or two later. And so the majority of the first group of 61 officers who had left Dänholm on 30 November and the “absconders” on 5 December must have arrived home by this time too.

Hard work for the Danes on duty at Greve

In Denmark it had become clear that staff working in the camps receiving “foreign guests” needed to be willing and flexible in order to cope with the unusual circumstances, i.e. large numbers of men arriving and leaving at short notice and at inconvenient hours. Catering for them was found to be demanding in having sufficient food available and prepared as and when wanted. In particular the women working in the kitchens who were literally at work at all hours did a fantastic job. At the camp at Greve they were given a bonus of 25 kr on top of their monthly wage of 150 kr. The ladies running the coffee bar and mini shop there also put in extra hours, which was much appreciated and they were also given a similar bonus.



It had been expensive for the Danish officers at Greve too; what with the hello and goodbye glasses of wine they gave their British colleagues and then the British helping themselves to snacks in the officers’ mess without thinking who paid. The Danish officers were subsequently compensated for this extra expense. The camps at Greve and on Amager had British OR billeted a week into January while the last didn’t leave Barfredshøj and Sandholm until the 12th January 1919. Today Sandholm is run by the Red Cross as a refugee centre.

As already mentioned 2Lt Marshall at Amager camp and Lt Bryant at Sandholm stayed on as repatriation staff, so did Lt Lewis Howel Pearson, Leicestershire Regiment, 2Lt Ernest Richard Storry, West Riding Regiment, 2Lt Harold Edgar Hinchcliffe, RAF, Lt John Errol Sydnie, RAF and 2Lt Hilary Lorraine Heelis, Lancashire Fusiliers. All of these men stayed in Denmark until well into January before they were repatriated to the UK. 2Lt Heelis was first repatriated, on 21 January 1919. One hopes that he handed over the Christmas cards Capt. Witherington had “entrusted” to him, to another, to be posted in time for Christmas in England.

For the other officers and orderlies from Dänholm their time in Denmark differs somewhat from what the above experienced. See the following appendix.

Sources

Archives

IWM – de Renzy Martin, Longland,

Rigsarkivet, Copenhagen

Other

Captain James Reid Christie family

Newspapers – diverse

Fyns Frimærke Service - Postcard sent by Stansfield – owner unknown

Fyns Frimærke Service - Postcard of Hotel Leidesdorff – owner unknown

Fyns Frimærke Service – Postcard of Hotel Terminus

Websites

<http://www.archifdy-ceredigion.org.uk/galadx375.php>

[http://www.vestvolden.info/Tune lejre.htm](http://www.vestvolden.info/Tune_lejre.htm)

<http://acms.sl.nsw.gov.au/item/itemDetailPaged.aspx?itemID=865465>

Books

Raymond Laurence Rimell: “The Airship VC”