


# Wartime West Sussex 1939 - 1945 The Great Escape case study

## Source B - The British Prisoners of War Association News Sheet

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BRITISH PRISONERS OF WAR RELATIVES' ASSOCIATION

**NEWS SHEET**



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### The Plight of the Prisoner

Last March fifty British and Allied airmen were shot after an attempt to escape from Stalag Luft III. The news of their fate created widespread grief and anxiety. A prisoner of war, however able-bodied, becomes a helpless victim of circumstances. He is no longer responsible for what active combatants are doing. He is the last person, therefore, on whom vengeance should fall.

War is a brutal state of affairs. Every major war has been fought with the resolve that it shall be the last. But man is still prone to war, and so, through the centuries, efforts have been made to conduct wars in a civilised manner. There has grown up a code of honour both for the prisoner and for his captors. For the twentieth century that code has been enshrined in the Geneva Convention.

**Standing by his Rights.**

The Geneva Convention has many faults. It has been based upon hitherto imperfect experience. It needs in some ways to be revised. None the less, it enshrines the code of honour. It represents something tangible. Armed with the Geneva Convention,

the prisoner, whether Allied or German, can stand by his rights. It is well-known that British prisoners in their disputes with the German authorities have made very effective use of the Geneva Convention.

Mr. Eden has given the House of Commons a full account, as far as it was possible for him to do so, of the shooting at Stalag Luft III. None of the prisoners deserved to fall into the hands of the Gestapo.

**Waste and Shame.**

For some time we had to wait until the full facts were known. It is all a waste and a shame. For more than four years some of the dead airmen lived daily in the hope of liberation and of seeing their homeland again. The strain was great. Hearts were young.

**Wild Stories.**

The British press might have been expected to suspend judgment. The more responsible newspapers reported the incidents coldly, as they were known. Other newspapers published wild stories, and at least one had to

be flatly contradicted by the Air Ministry. The wild stories inflicted quite unnecessary sufferings upon the prisoners' relatives.

It is a thousand pities that the press did not seize a grand opportunity for demanding the establishment of a prisoners of war inter-departmental committee under the chairmanship of a Minister. An inter-departmental committee did invaluable work during the last war.

In this war the problems of the prisoner of war are far more complex. The number of prisoners on either side is mounting daily. Still no effective move towards establishing an inter-departmental committee has been made. One day this procrastination will be deeply regretted — not least by the prisoner of war.

**A Bitter Phase.**

We have swung fully into the bitterest phase of the war. June 6th, 1944—the day on which we launched the long awaited Second Front—will live long in the annals of European history. One stirring event followed hard upon another. In Normandy, in