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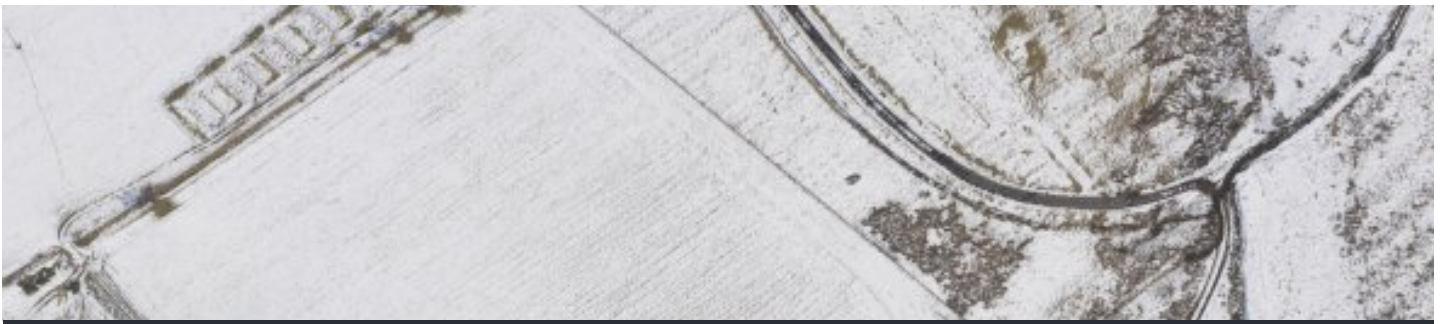


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Stobs Camp, Hawick





In The Beginning

In 1903 the British Army bought the Stobs Estate near Hawick in the Borders. Its plan was to turn the 3615 acres, which included a Castle, into one of the largest military training grounds in the UK. It was also intended that it should operate as the permanent base of the Sixth Army Corps, but by 1904 this plan had been abandoned.

Over the next few years the estate was used extensively by territorial soldiers as a summer camp, with 20,000 men trained during this period. The camp site and training ground occupied a large area and although there were lots of facilities the soldiers lived under canvas. What was once moorland and farmland became firing ranges and practice trenches. New buildings for equipment and stores were constructed and serviced by a network of roads and even a tramway. Some barrack huts were built, perhaps as part of the original plan, but not on the scale that had been first envisaged. However, due to its lack of permanent accommodation, its climate and its location, the camp was not popular with many in the military.

Territorial soldiers were in occupation when news came in the summer of 1914 that war had been declared with Germany. Thereafter, the camp was to become quite a different place in the years that followed. At the start of the war, the British rounded up all the German citizens then living in the UK and interned them. Stobs Camp was adapted and opened in this new role on the 2nd November 1914. Civilians had to be treated well and given suitable accommodation. They were billeted in the few barrack huts that had already been built, although there was now a wire fence surrounding the perimeter with a guard patrolling outside. However, the first facility soon became too small and the decision was taken to build a replacement that would be larger and better equipped.





A home from home?

Construction of the new camp started in late 1914 and was completed by early 1915 at a cost of £51,500. The design now allowed for German military prisoners to be held at the camp also. Initially, there were few German soldiers or sailors, but as the war dragged on, the number increased. The camp was divided into 4 smaller blocks, A-D, each containing 20 barrack buildings, cookhouses, dining rooms and stores. These were encircled by high barbed wire fences overlooked by watch towers. The camp also had recreation grounds, two American funded YMCA huts and a large hospital of six wards. It had its own bakery, which supplied not only the Germans but also the Guard and the various troops from Britain and the Empire undertaking their training at the camp.

By 1916 the last of the internees had been either freed or sent to internment camps on the Isle of Man. Stobs was now devoted exclusively to Prisoners of War and in this capacity it acted as the main administrative centre in the north. From here, German soldiers or sailors were sent to work-camps across Scotland, where they helped with the construction of the hydro-electric scheme at Kinlochleven, dam building at Linlithgow, road building at Loch Doon and forestry operations more widely - among many other useful tasks. Reports by American diplomats who inspected the camps for the German government reported that the institution was well run and the prisoners were satisfied with the British administration. When the war officially ended in 1919, the German prisoners were all sent home, although 45 individuals who had died during their internment were left at peace in the camp cemetery. Most of the PoW buildings were sold, but some barracks were retained and one survives to this day amongst a collection of contemporary structures. Many of those that were sold can still be seen dotted about farms throughout the Scottish Borders.

Nevertheless, Stobs remained in use as an active training camp. It played a valuable role in the instruction of the D-Day troops and those that later participated in the Korean War; and it continued to perform this role until 1955 – the year that the Duke of Edinburgh paid a visit to a battalion of the Queen's Own Highlanders. The land was finally sold off in 1962.

Today, much of the camp and the training ground survives, although local people have on occasion put it to new uses – for instance, the roads were once utilised for motor racing. However, an understanding of the camp's importance during the First World War has now sparked a new Centennial project in which all aspects of the site are to be properly recorded. This began in 2017 and will also attempt to measure the influence it had on the neighbouring town of Hawick, as well as further afield.

A visitor today can readily appreciate both the size and layout of the PoW buildings within the camp; but he or she can also reflect here upon a conflict that took so many lives, while acknowledging that some of the prisoners who were interned possibly found a degree of welcome respite from a dreadful war and its many lamentable tribulations.

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