# EPILOGUE
## Going Bad, Abroad

On 1 November 1944, the most important people involved in interrogation attended a meeting in Camp 020's Latchmere House. They included the commandants of Britain's three interrogation units: CSDIC's Colonel Thomas Kendrick along with his second-in-command, Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Rawlinson; Camp 020's Colonel Robin Stephens; and PWIS(H)'s Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Scotland. Also in attendance were other senior figures from MI5, the War Office and the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF), the central command of the Allied forces in north-western Europe. At that point, and although war still raged, everyone's focus was beginning to shift towards peace. In the House of Commons that very morning, the first questions put to the government concerned German war criminals, post-war reparations and the terms of a hypothetical armistice. In Latchmere House, the question was whether to set up a new interrogation camp on the Continent. While the camps in Britain were at their busiest and no one knew how much longer the war would continue, it was clear that plans had to be in place for moving operations to the Continent in the near future.

For the War Office, the reason a camp would still be needed even after the war ended was to deal with the large numbers of soldiers

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that were being captured and would continue to be captured whenever Germany surrendered. For MI5, the concern was that the Abwehr would go underground; that Nazi organs, such as the SS and Hitler Youth, would reorganise; and that there was even a prospect of Nazi-Soviet collaboration against the West.[1] And indeed, once an interrogation camp did start to operate in Germany in 1945, one of its first tasks was to find out what kind of 'testament' and instructions Hitler had left behind. The prospect of a 'Fourth Reich' was dismissed fairly quickly after those interrogations, but in 1944 it was seen as a serious possibility. A week on from that meeting in Latchmere House, Stephens and Rawlinson travelled to the Continent to discuss likely locations for this camp as well as other details about its staff numbers and the seniority of their ranks. They returned on 20 November and put a proposal for an establishment to both SHAEF and the 21st Army Group.[2] It was agreed to set up a 'hybrid' camp as soon as possible, combining the microphones of CSDIC and the counter-espionage experience of Camp 020.

It would nevertheless be about a year before a permanent camp was actually opened, mainly due to the turmoil that existed on the ground in defeated Germany, long after the surrender.[3] Millions were left homeless, sick and starving, and all this before even considering the psychological impact of the conflict – grief, depression, suicide and the uncertainty of what lay ahead. An enormous number of surrendered soldiers were held in Allied camps, hundreds of thousands of soldiers who made up the Allied invading armies were also there and so were the thousands of Allied officials being sent to establish the occupation. A country in which large parts were bombed out, where food and fuel were scarce, was now overcrowded. Famine and typhus were some of the problems that followed.[4] For Britain, the task was finding a balance between imposing an occupation, guarding against Soviet infiltration of their Zone or a Nazi resurgence in Germany, and managing the food and health crises affecting millions.[5]

Finding that balance had much to do with identifying those who posed a threat while allowing the majority of the German population to resume some kind of normality. This had important implications for the role of intelligence. While in war it was there to support operations, in peace it would be at the forefront of international security. Interrogation in particular rose in prominence at this moment, because the other methods relied upon extensively in the recent conflict – air

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reconnaissance, signals intelligence – would not be as useful without a state of war. Even spies – the quintessential feature of the emerging Cold War – could not be expected to be as useful in the initial stages of peace, because new agent networks had to be established. In contrast, there was much opportunity for interrogation, with millions of prisoners and internees under British control.[6]

While some of these concerns were anticipated in the Latchmere House meeting in 1944, priorities had changed by the time it was possible for the camp to open in September 1945. Whereas initially the War Office wanted the camp to interrogate selected prisoners of war for operational intelligence as a matter of procedure – much like CSDIC in Britain – by September, and with demobilisation underway, they had limited interest in such an operation. They still wanted some soldiers to be interrogated, but these would be specific individuals with something in their past that needed to be investigated. The counter-intelligence needs of MI5, on the other hand, now took centre stage.

The camp that was to accommodate all of this was CSDIC(WEA: Western European Area).[7] It was established in the spa town of Bad Nenndorf, near Hanover and its Commandant was Camp 020's Robin Stephens.[8] Yet the camp was closed down after about a year and a half following revelations about its abusive practices. In the interim, 416 detainees (including 44 women) passed through it. Those detainees reflected the changing priorities of the occupation: denazification, neo-Nazi activities and Soviet espionage. Some detainees were high-profile individuals, such as men who were in Hitler's *Führerbunker* and whose testimony it was hoped would shed light on what went on there in the spring of 1945. Others were former officers or Nazi Party functionaries, some of whom were implicated in war crimes but who were taken to this camp for intelligence on how the regime functioned. Others were caught in the cross-currents of the early Cold War and were for various reasons suspected of working for the Soviets. Some warranted detailed interrogation, but others were taken there on little evidence or denunciations.

Thus, while the camp was meant to be a continuation of wartime practice, in reality it marked a radical departure. During the war there was a clear distinction between the interrogation of civilians and of prisoners of war, but no such distinction was made here. Civilians who had played no significant role in the regime were confined with SS and Gestapo officers. How people came to be

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held in this camp was also no longer the result of careful screening. There was, in fact, no screening system in place. Instead, there was only this one camp for anyone who required detailed interrogation. People would be detained there not through a single route but by several ones, including being sent there by MI5, the police or the War Office. Nor was it clear who had ultimate responsibility for the camp's running: it was not under the War Office (as with the wartime CSDIC) nor could it be under the Home Office (as in the case of the wartime Camp 020), being in Germany. Since the camp was an intelligence matter, it was under the Intelligence Division of the British Control Commission, which was under the Foreign Office.[9] Obviously though, civil servants were not interrogating prisoners; the camp was still staffed by MI5 and the War Office. This administrative structure was to prove highly significant, because it resulted in the camp not being subject to inspections and oversight, which the wartime camps regularly had been.

With the external context and framework destined to cause problems, the camp's internal arrangements were also doomed in their own way. While in 1945 some of the personnel of the wartime CSDIC and Camp 020 had travelled to Germany to join CSDIC(WEA), demobilisation soon replaced most of them with new, unsuitable recruits. One reason why they proved to be unsuitable was that the salaries assigned to those in the camp were very low, which affected the type of candidate prepared to work there. The original proposals drawn up by MI5 and the War Office were later assessed to be 'too luxurious' for 1945 standards, and so the number of higher ranks was reduced in order to save money.[10] The quality of this new staff was a source of frustration for Stephens who, two months in, reported that 'We are having considerable difficulty in obtaining reinforcements of good character, and up to the present have had no less than 15 suspended sentence personnel sent to us … Quite clearly a large number of such personnel create a dangerous element'.[11]

With some of the staff already having been tried by the army for crimes, discipline was unsurprisingly a problem, with recorded cases of warders stealing detainees' property.[12] Also, not all staff were replaced. The resulting shortages necessitated several ad hoc measures, such as German prisoners of war being used to help with various tasks around the camp, including a doctor who assisted the camp's medical officer. With the camp seeking intelligence on Soviet espionage, it also

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employed some Red Army deserters, despite the UK having agreed to turn all Soviet prisoners over to the USSR.

With the likelihood for escalation being arguably self-evident, it is impossible to pinpoint exactly when things started going wrong. But the particularly severe winter of 1946–47 across the Continent revealed the degree to which things had gone astray. So severe was the cold that it froze and destroyed the camp's water system. Even the prized microphones that were hidden across the camp were destroyed due to the leaks at this point; nor does it appear that they were used much before then. More seriously, without water everyone in the camp (staff and detainees) had to use bucket latrines instead of proper lavatories, rendering the place not only 'in an extremely dirty and neglected state', but full of disease.[13] While people across Europe were struggling to heat their homes, in the Bad Nenndorf camp prisoners were also staying in cells with broken windows and on beds without mattresses.

Cold and material shortages did not account for everything. The psychological strain in the camp was severe. Solitary confinement was common and many detainees spent days or weeks entirely alone. Solitary confinement was formally allowed, as it had been in Camp 020 during the war, but here it was pushed to extremes. And whereas in the war physical abuse of any type was prohibited, in this case some detainees spoke of being stripped and left naked in their cells as a form of humiliation and exposure. Sleep deprivation was also reported, with guards waking prisoners during the night to prevent rest. Food was another problem. Formally, detainees were on the scale set for non-working prisoners of war (2,200 calories per day), yet many lost weight incredibly rapidly. Across Germany shortages were severe, with rations much lower than 2,200 calories, but within the camp the problem was made worse by deliberate neglect. Four men upon release weighed between 49 and 56 kilos (108 to 123 pounds). These conditions combined to weaken prisoners physically and mentally before they entered the interrogation room.

Beyond neglect and intimidation, there is evidence that outright violence was also contemplated and likely used. An inquiry into the camp in 1947 found 'documentary evidence of an agreed plan' between three interrogators to 'go beyond mental pressure' when dealing with two detainees, suspected of planning a rising in Hanover on the anniversary of Hitler's birthday:[14] 'the guards had apparently been instructed to carry out physical assaults on certain prisoners with the

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object of reducing them to a state of physical collapse and making them more amenable to interrogation'.[15] Details of the plan were recorded on the intelligence file of the prisoners which was available to Stephens and his senior interrogating officer, suggesting that it was neither taboo nor extraordinary practice. The timing also matters, as it indicates that the deterioration in standards did not merely come about in the harsh winter of 1946–47; the plan was dated 10 April 1946, seven months into the camp's existence.

The cumulative effect of cold, hunger and mistreatment was fatal for some. At least two deaths were directly attributed to those conditions. The first was Franz Österreicher, who had been detained for about three months after crossing over from the Soviet Zone with fake identity documents.[16] He died in hospital in February 1947 because 'his organs and the muscles were atrophic' and his body had no 'resistance against infection'.[17] And yet the medical report that accompanied him to hospital from the camp claimed that he was simply suffering from indigestion.[18] Another detainee who died in hospital soon after was Walter Bergmann, who arrived in such a state that it was impossible to hold him up to measure his weight.[19] He died of 'severe malnutrition and severe tuberculosis of the lungs'; his medical report from the camp reported him as suffering from 'debility'.[20] While Bergmann was held in relation to Hitler Youth activities,[21] it was later believed that he had 'no Nazi record', he had entered the camp 'quite voluntarily in order to give us valuable information' and yet he 'was so abominably treated that he died'.[22] His mother was given an unofficial ex gratia payment for her loss. Other fatalities might have followed had a scandal not erupted soon after these deaths. At that point in early 1947, several other detainees had to be transported to hospital when their health problems were exacerbated by the extreme weather. Some were taken to a neighbouring British camp's hospital. The (British) Governor of the camp, Major Morgan-Jones, was made aware of those cases in February by his medical staff, and he visited to see their state for himself. The sight of Adolf Galla, a German in his thirties, suspected of underground Nazi activities, 'was one of the most disgusting sights' of Morgan-Jones's life, and 'a figure which may well have been one of the Belsen inmates'.[23]

His comments were confirmed by the medical report, which described Galla as being unable to speak and having 'no sign of any fat under his skin'; in the four months he had been in the camp he lost 30 kg

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(66 pounds).[24] A second detainee, Robert Buttlar, who had swallowed a spoon handle in order to end his life, was in the hospital too. Upon admission, it was found that he was suffering from frostbite and had to have some of his toes amputated, even though this had apparently gone unnoticed by CSDIC(WEA)'s medical officer. Some of Buttlar's health issues were caused by being forced to stand still for long periods of time, being chased by the guards around the camp – even after he was diagnosed with inflammation on his legs – then having to scrub the walls of his cell with water and sleep on the wet floor. In between such instances, he was called in for interrogation.[25] Other detainees reported similar treatment, designed to weaken them before interrogation. Like Buttlar, at least four others had tried to kill themselves and more were diagnosed with depression.[26] A fifth man, university student Hans Habenicht, took his life by hanging in June 1946. Month-long delays ensued before his family were informed, with his body secretly buried beneath the camp's football pitch. Two years on, the family was still unable to establish the circumstances surrounding his death.[27]

It was Major Morgan-Jones who, shocked by what he saw, asked the hospital's doctor to write a report detailing all cases brought to him in the three months to February 1947. Soon after, in a meeting with other camp governors, Morgan-Jones was joined by another governor who said that several individuals sent to him from CSDIC(WEA) were also 'in a deplorable condition which indicated serious ill-treatment'.[28] Shortly after, a British medical inspector was sent to this second camp to examine the patients. In his report, he described having seen up to eight malnourished individuals, one of whom was close to dying; this inspector too joined the governors in calling for an investigation into the camp.[29] The evidence quickly reached the Military Governor, Air Marshal Sir William Sholto Douglas, who ordered a court of inquiry into the camp within a week and the removal of the camp's current administration. Together with Stephens, this affected Captain Smith, who was the medical officer, and Lieutenant Colonel Short, who was the camp's senior interrogating officer – effectively Stephens's second-in-command, as he had been in Camp 020 during the war. No other member of staff was allowed to leave Germany, and responsibility for the camp was passed from the Intelligence to the Legal Division of the British Control Commission.[30]

The investigators visited the camp and interviewed both staff and prisoners. Their bottom line was that the camp's aim was 'to extract

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information from internees at all costs'. Faced with these allegations, the government back home needed to act, because this was unfolding against the backdrop of British claims that Germany had to be rebuilt and democratised, neither of which sat well with a British camp using torture. The government responded with a court martial, that decision being taken at the highest level by Ernest Bevin (the Foreign Secretary) and his deputy, Lord Pakenham, in order to show the Germans that such behaviour was unacceptable, whatever the nationality of the perpetrator. As a result, Robin Stephens, along with his medical officer and an interrogator – who had received intelligence training for only two weeks, and who in CSDIC(WEA) was ordered to 'use mental pressure, but no bodily violence' – were court-martialled for breaching various clauses of the Army Act.[31]

Nevertheless, Stephens was acquitted, his defence being that he had explicitly prohibited the use of violence and there was no proof that he had authorised the actions in question. The acquittal lead to his dispatch to the Gold Coast as MI5 security liaison officer, a form of demotion. The interrogator was also acquitted because the defence failed to present enough evidence against him personally. It was the medical officer, Captain Smith, who was singled out for repeatedly ignoring obvious cases of frostbite and malnutrition. He was found guilty of neglect and dismissed; his own responsibility was more difficult to defend given the misleading medical reports he had issued. But considering that Stephens was conducting some of the interrogations, he must have seen with his own eyes the state many individuals were in, even if he had not ordered them to be in that condition. However, unlike the medical officer, he also knew better than to leave a paper trail behind.

The court martial did not end British interrogations, but it did force a change in Germany where the political stakes were high: Britain's reputation as an occupying power mattered not only for how it was perceived by the Germans but also internationally. As a result, the interrogation centres that followed in the British Zone and in West Germany were placed under much tighter oversight, with procedures clarified and premises regularly inspected. This shift did not mean that coercion disappeared entirely. Isolation and mental pressure continued to be used, but they were highly regulated and the abuses that had characterised Bad Nenndorf – starvation, illness and deaths in custody – were avoided. Yet while the immediate reputational damage

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was managed, in recent years this history has been appropriated by neo-Nazi groups for revisionist commemoration of CSDIC(WEA)'s prisoners, many of whom were communists, a detail which many of the neo-Nazi marchers are possibly unaware: from 1946 onwards, many held there were suspected of communist activities, or interrogated to give intelligence on Soviet-occupied Germany.

The question nevertheless remains: if abuse and torture were so alien to Britain during the war, how had they taken place almost immediately after it? In many ways, the potential for escalation was always embedded in the logic of interrogation camps: the basic idea was to assert superiority over a detainee. This was also the aim in Camp 020. But there, the institutional constraints of wartime Britain imposed limits on how far such behaviour could go. Here, without oversight, the boundaries changed. They might have changed even further due to the perceived criminality of the prisoners, even though the prisoners of the wartime Camp 020 had also not been seen as legitimate combatants.[32] Some non-intelligence personnel in the camp in Bad Nenndorf, such as guards and warders, nevertheless did seem to operate on the assumption that these were Nazi criminals – and some of them were, but not everyone was.[33] The investigators in 1947 noted that a number of the prisoners 'had committed no offence, the purpose of their detention being that they were believed to hold information of security interest'.[34]

The answer lies in the fact that structural problems created the environment, but within that environment, individuals acted with cruelty. It is clear that the British Zone was under extraordinary strain. Food and fuel were short everywhere, not only in camps. The winter of 1946–47 brought widespread hunger and cold across Europe, not only in Bad Nenndorf. In this context, the suffering inside the camp reflected the wider shortages and conditions of the time, made worse by the lack of inspections and external support. Yet there was clear evidence of individuals choosing cruelty within this context. Medical treatment was refused even when problems were obvious. Food was withheld not because there was a shortage but as a means to weaken the prisoners ahead of interrogation. The mere thought of being called in for interrogation was meant to instil fear.

That the government acted so quickly and completely reformed the camp's successors in West Germany could demonstrate that torture did, actually, remain 'un-British' – a claim held widely during the war.

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When those being interrogated during the war were captured soldiers, harsh methods of any kind were out of the question and treatment had to be good, so that the Axis would reciprocate (a policy that was left as an instruction in the aftermath of the First World War).[35] When those being interrogated during the war were spies rather than soldiers, the bar was lower but confined to threats and intimidation. With Alexander Scotland, too, abuse in the form of 'discipline' affected a small proportion of prisoners that passed through his hands during and after the war, and there too some of the allegations were investigated by a court of inquiry. And so one could say that while CSDIC(WEA) did mark a stark departure from those legacies, it was not condoned. From the time when Morgan-Jones blew the whistle to the matter reaching the prime minister and the Foreign Secretary, action was swift and decisive.

Yet similar camps resurfaced in other contexts, mainly in the British Empire during the process of decolonisation where coercive interrogation techniques became part of counter-insurgency operations, conducted by makeshift and badly organised Special Branches. Similar allegations emerged in 1950s Cyprus, 1950s Kenya and 1960s Aden.[36] In all of these cases, there is ample proof that beatings, stress positions and humiliation were systematically used during interrogation. In Northern Ireland in the 1970s, Britain faced renewed allegations of torture for using the so-called five techniques – standing, hooding, noise, sleep deprivation and food deprivation – against detainees suspected of IRA involvement.[37] The parallels with CSDIC(WEA) are clear, not just in the methods used but also in the administrative setups involved and in perceptions of the enemy's legitimacy. Seen in this light, the camp in Bad Nenndorf was not an anomaly – an 'un-British' affair that can be explained by its post-war context – but an early episode in a longer pattern of abusive practices occurring in British interrogation camps.

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