

World War II - PoW Escape Routes in Italy 1943/44

It is now over sixty years since the last Allied escaper or evader was hidden and cared for by the 'contadini' of the Italian countryside. Many of these fugitives were taken through enemy occupied territory, and eventually reached Great Britain and freedom. Many more were hidden in the country villages to await the advancing troops. Sir Winston Churchill wrote in his History of the Second World War, "some 10,000 POWs in German occupied Italy were fed, hidden, and guided by the Italian people, often the poorest from the Italian countryside. Many were shot for this great spontaneous gesture of humanity".

At the end of the war the 'helpers' throughout Europe were able to relax, and the final cost of their actions were becoming known. The cost was appalling. Across all the former occupied territories it is thought that four helpers died for every escaper or evader who reached freedom. They died under the worst possible conditions. Execution, torture, or simply from starvation and disease in the subhuman concentration camps. In Italy their homes were burnt to the ground and their livestock killed. In Pietraseri, a town in the Sulmona valley, the town's people were murdered and only one child survived. Their crime was assisting escapers. The German army was particularly harsh on the Italian people after the 1943 Armistice.

Some of the Allied POWs in Italy had been moved from France in 1942, but the majority had been captured in the North African campaign, in Libya or Egypt. A very small number escaped prior to the armistice of 8th September 1943. When the armistice was announced, it was expected that a German withdrawal from Italy would take place, and orders had gone out to all POWs to stay put and await the Allies' arrival. The reverse happened. German troops poured into Italy, taking over the POW camps together with most of the country. In the north the camps mostly contained Australians, New Zealanders and South Africans, and many escaped in the confusion and headed for Switzerland. Further south, thousands of escapers made their escape towards the Allied lines to the south. At the officers' camp at Fontellato, 600 men marched out of the main gate, aided by their Italian guards, just one hour before the Germans arrived.

With little escape and evasion knowledge, no kit or equipment, each escaper organised his own 'orders for the day', mapped out his route as best he could, and headed out. Reluctant to make contact with local people at first, they soon learnt that the prosperous looking farms were generally fascist, while the smaller, older farms were home to the ordinary people of the Italian countryside, the 'contadini'. Once contact had been made, these people hid, clothed and fed the escapers, sharing what limited food they had. Under a German proclamation, the same rule applied to the Italians as the rest of occupied Europe. For anyone caught assisting escaping or evading allied troops, the men would be shot, and the women sent to concentration camps. They forgot to add that they would be harshly interrogated and tortured first, their homes burnt to the ground and their livestock killed. The escaper could expect to return to a POW camp.

By Christmas Day 1943, the Allied front line had settled on the Sangro River, and Allied escapers from the north tended to head towards the less populated but mountainous east coast region. Escapers were already heading south from the camps at Servigliano, and from three camps in the Tenna valley near Pescara. Many were given shelter by charcoal burners in the woods, others who were taken ill were nursed in the mountain villages. Many escapers joined up with the partisans, and others worked the land as payment to their helpers.

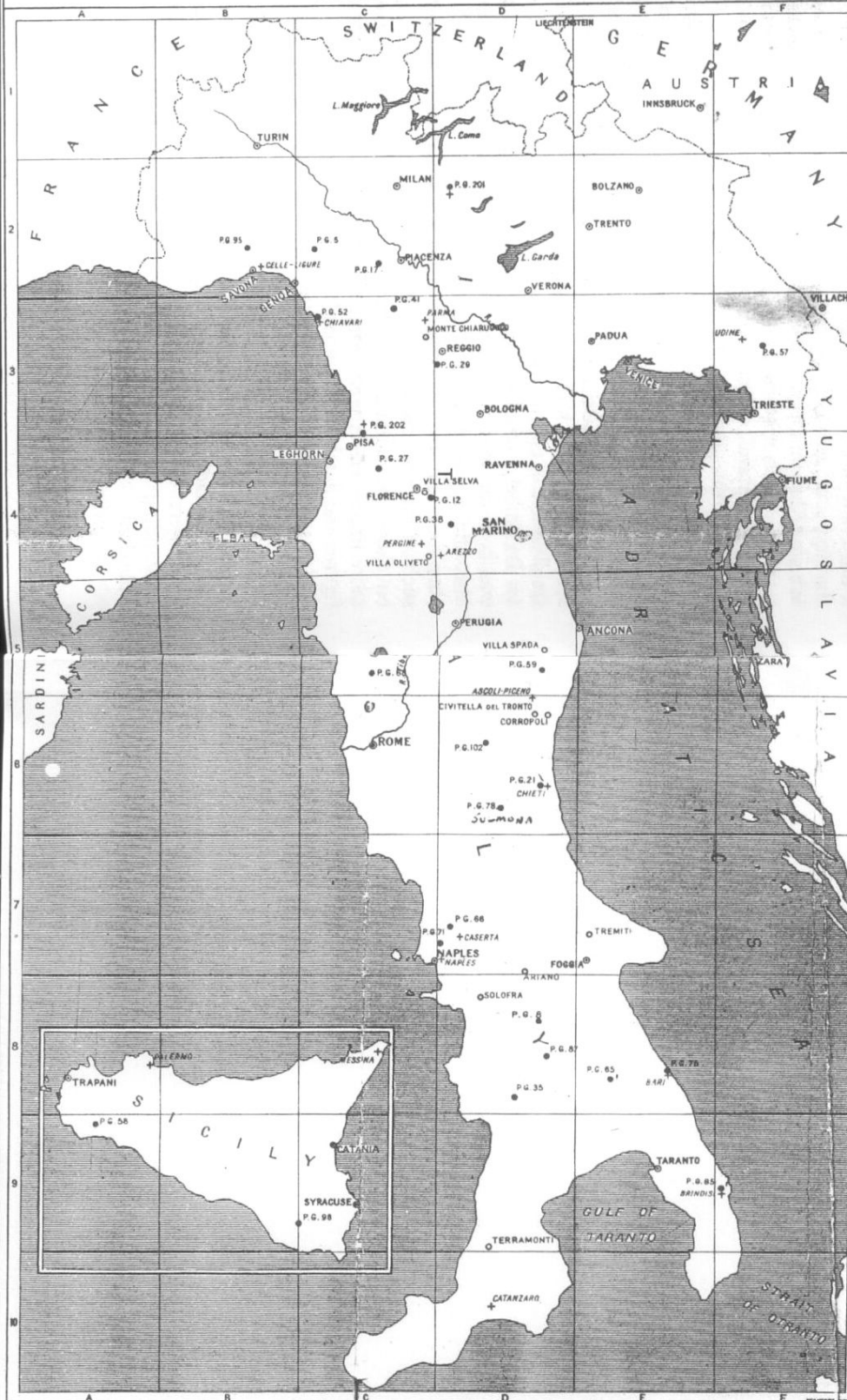
With the exception of the Rome Network, no organised assistance was given to escapers in Italy. The Rome network was run by an Irish Priest in the Vatican who found safe-houses, distributed food and offered money. In PG 78 at Sulmona (which is still in location today), many men had escaped and were heading south along the Sulmona valley. Other prisoners were rounded up and put on trains for camps in Germany. But this was not the end of escaping - many POWs jumped from trains, and others escaped through the floors of cattle trucks. Once free, they also went south. Many headed for the villages in the Sulmona triangle of Anversa to the west, Campo di Giovi to the east, with Castèl Di Sangro as the southern point. When a village became occupied, escapers were moved to the mountains and food was taken to them by the villagers. Others were taken through deep snow to the Allied lines. Most escapers headed for Castèl Di Sangro where the River Sangro was fordable. Once across the river they had to make themselves known to the Allied troops as there was the real threat of being shot.

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Source: <http://www.conscript-heroes.com/escapelines/EscapeLines.htm>



BRITISH
PRISONER OF WAR CAMPS
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Note: The public are reminded that when communicating or sending parcels to Prisoners of War, the geographical location must not be added. The Camp number and P.M. number only should be used.

Camp	Location	Notes
		German

[Dulag 226](#)

[Dulag 339](#) [Mantua](#)

[Stalag 339](#) [Trieste](#)

Italian

P.G. 5	Gavi-Serravalle Scrivia	Piedmont . Some 20 miles north of Genoa
P.G. 10	Acquapendente	Viterbo
P.G. 12	Candeli / Vincigliata	13th century castle near Florence . Several British Generals were imprisoned here.
P.G. 17	Rezzanello	Near Turin , Piacenza
P.G. 19	Bologna	
P.G. 21	Chieti	Old convent; Officers Camp. After the Armistice, anybody wishing to leave the camp was forcibly prevented from doing so under the orders of the senior British officer who was following to the letter the orders of Allied HQ to remain in the camp and await the arrival of Allied forces. Consequently the Germans were able to capture them all. They were subsequently transferred to PG78 just outside Sulmona and thence to camps in Germany where they remained until the end of the war.
P.G. 23	Vestone near Brescia	
P.G. 26	Cortemaggiore	Piacenza
P.G. 27	San Romano	Pisa
P.G. 29	Veano	Lombardy , near Piacenza
P.G. 32	Bogliaco Garda lake near Salò , Brescia	
P.G. 35	Certosa di Padula	Monastery, near Salerno
P.G. 38	Poppi	Monastery near Arezzo
P.G. 41	Montalbo	
P.G. 43	Garessio	Cuneo
P.G. 47	Modena	Officers, mainly from New Zealand
P.G. 49	Fontanellato	Orphanage near Parma . Reggio Emilia .
P.G. 50	Caserna Genova Cavalleria - storage centre -	Rome
P.G. 51	Altamura Villa Serena	Bari - Transit camp
P.G. 52	Pian di Coreglia - Lucca	Uscany
P.G. 53	Sforzacosta	Liguria . Over 10,000 prisoners - http://www.riggwelter.co.uk/RogerCollinson.html#F
P.G. 54	Passo Corese, Fara in Sabina	35 km from Rome
P.G. 55	Busseto	Near Piacenza . 4 satellite labour camps.
P.G. 57	Gruppignano	Near Udine . Mostly Australian and New Zealand other ranks.
P.G. 59	Servigliano	Ascoli Piceno - http://www.casadellamemoria.org/

P.G. 60	Colle Compito	Lucca	
P.G. 62	Grumello del Piano		Near Bergamo . Mostly Indians and Cypriots. Seven satellite work camps, including Gamba , Cremona and Torbole
P.G. 63	Marinaro Aversa		Near Arezzo . Mostly Indians.
P.G. 65	Gravina-Altamura	Bari	
P.G. 66	Capua		Transit camp - http://www.riggwelter.co.uk/RogerCollinson.html#C
P.G. 68	Vetralla		
P.G. 70	Monteurano		Near Fermo Ascoli Piceno
P.G. 71	Aversa		Near Naples
P.G. 73	Fossoli of Carpi		Near Modena
P.G. 75			
Torre Tresca	Bari		Transit camp. One work camp.
P.G. 77	Pissignano / Campello?		Tent camp - Foligno Fonte d'amore - including senior officers. This camp remains intact ^[1] .
P.G. 78	Sulmona		L'Aquila
P.G. 78/1	Aquafredda		Work camp Many New Zealanders.
P.G. 80	Villa Marina		Near Rome
P.G. 82	Laterina		Near Arezzo . 8,000 prisoners. 50% escaped. (2.720 from secret Italia armi document SMRE Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito Italiano)
P.G. 83	Fiume		
P.G. 85	Tuturano		Transit camp - http://www.tuturano.com/modules.php?name=Il_Campo_PG85
P.G. 87	Stalia		6000 in camp
P.G. 91	Avezzano		
P.G. 98	San Giuseppe Jato	Sicily	
P.G. 102	Near Aquila		Transit camp
P.G. 103	Monigo	Treviso	
P.G. 103/6	Ampezzo		
P.G. 103/7	La Maina		
P.G. 106	Vercelli		25 work camps, mostly Australians and New Zealanders
P.G. 106/20	Arro	Salussola	
P.G. 107	Torviscosa		Udine - Five work camps, including Prati, San Donà di Piave, Torre di Confine, La Salute. Mostly New Zealanders and South Africans
P.G. 107/2	Prati		
P.G. 107/4	San Donà di Piave		
P.G. 107/5	Torre do Confine		
P.G.	?		

- 107/6
- P.G. [La Salute di](#)
107/7 [Livenza](#)
- P.G. 110 [Carbonia](#)
- P.G. 112 [Turin](#)
- P.G. 113 [Avio](#) Near [Marsciano](#), [Rovereto](#)
- P.G. 115 [Marciano](#) Near [Perugia](#)
- P.G. 118 [Prato all'Isarco](#) Near [Bolzano](#)
- P.G. 120 [Chiesanuova](#) [Padova](#) - work camps at Fattoria Bianco, Cetona, Abano, Fogolana.
- P.G. 120/4 ?
- P.G. 120/5 [Abano](#)
- P.G. 120/8 [Fogolana](#)
- P.G. 122 [Cinecittà](#) Near [Rome](#) - several work camps
- P.G. 127 [Locano](#) [Aosta](#)
[Canavese](#)
- P.G. 129 [Montelupone](#) [Macerata](#)
- P.G. 132 [Foggia](#)
- P.G. 133 [Novara](#)
- P.G. 136 [Bologna](#)
- C.A.R.E.
- P.G. 145 [Campotosto /](#)
[Montorio al](#)
[Vomano](#)
- P.G. 146 [Mortara](#) [Pavia](#)
Near [Verona](#). Labour camp for 250 prisoners, mostly [New Zealanders](#), but also English, Scottish, Egyptians, South Africans, Americans, Indians. 14 satellite work camps at Isola della Scala, Lazise, Mozzecane, Vigasio at San Bernardino, Montecchia di Crosara in the Cava Basalti stone farm, Legnago/Vangadizza at Rosta, Zevio at Villa da Lisca, San Martino Buon Albergo, Bonavigo, Oppeano in the Mazzantica Village, Mozzecane near the church, Angiari. Closed following the mass outbreak of prisoners in the days after the Italian Armistice was announced on [8 September 1943](#).
- See relevant Italian website of [movie director Mauro Vittorio Quattrina](#)
- P.G. 201 Bergamo hospital in an almshouse
- P.G. 202 Lucca hospital in a monastery in Bergamo district.
- P.G. 203 Bologna hospital in Castel S Pietro
- P.G. 204 Altamura hospital in a school
- P.G. 206? Teramo hospital
- P.G. 206 Nocera hospital near [Rovello](#)
- P.G. 207 Milan hospital
- P.G. 339 [Pisa](#)
- P.G. 339 [Pisa](#)
- P.G. 454 [Brindisi](#) Mainly Indians

An English prisoner of war camp existed near Caoria - Canal San Bovo (Trento). It was closed on [8 September 1943](#).