

Patrick Linehan's Red Cross Parcel Chess Set – The Keep; Cornwall's Regimental Museum



It's 1944 and Private Patrick Linehan of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry (DCLI) is a Prisoner of War in Munich. In a recent oral history recording, at the grand age of 100, we learnt from Patrick about his time as a PoW and what life was like. He recounts that this wasn't actually too bad an experience, with everyone having a job to do, Patrick being part of a crew making concrete lintels. On completing his recording, we were pleased to accept an object in to the museum collection which was given to him during his time as a prisoner.



The object is a small chess set, which would have formed part of a Red Cross parcel. Patrick recalls being given this chess set by a South African Prisoner of War. When the South Africans entered the camp, they decided (being ex-prisoners) that in order to stop the Americans from taking control of divvying up the parcels, they would throw them all in the latrines! It would seem that this practice didn't happen too often, a PoW camp relied heavily on these parcels, which supplemented food supplies (all food from the parcels was given to the communal kitchen to be mixed with other food available), and gave the men something to look forward to in the form of chocolate or cigarettes (which were also a good barter product with guards and prisoners alike!).

Designed by American company, W.M.F. Drueke & Sons, the chess sets were designed as 'pocket' sets, small enough to be carried by servicemen (and easier to ship out in large quantities). With plastic playing pieces contained in a drawer below a small wooden board, the compact set would have been light enough to carry in a soldier's kit. The idea of keeping themselves occupied in this way, through games, would have been incredibly important to the soldiers' mental health when considering their situation and to keep them from getting bored!



Patrick's chess set is in fantastic condition, with only a couple of pieces having been replaced with a button and a popper! To think this little set has survived so well, having been given to Patrick in 1945 and carried back with him on a Lancaster home to Britain, on being released from the camp, makes this a wonderful object with a truly fantastic story.