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German one man Molch Submarine and other exhibits
on display at the Ditsong National Museum of Military
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In oorleg met die
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The aim of the Military History Journal (incorporating Museum Review), established in 1967, is to publish articles of interest concerning military history, personal accounts of military events, book reviews, letters, and news of the activities of South African military heritage organisations.

The Ditsong National Museum of Military History and the South African Military History Society are not responsible for the statements made by the various authors, whose views are based on their research, experience and findings, and are published in good faith in the interest of further research.

'To provide a permanent and tangible record of the efforts, sacrifices and heroism of the men and women of all races in defence of the Union of South Africa; to foster national pride in their achievements and to maintain the traditions which they thus established

To display exhibits which will record the traditions of the past and present units of the Union Defence Forces and other services which assisted in the Union's efforts in time of War

To collect and preserve material for the above objects and for the use of historians and students of military history, and

To educate future generations towards a realisation of the wastefulness of war and its disastrous effects on civilisation and to emphasise the necessity of eliminating all possible causes of strife between nations

The South African National War Museum, Johannesburg, is established.'

George H van Rhyen, 1948



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passed on and the number of Second World War veterans is steadily diminishing. As a consequence of this, we are losing a knowledge resource of the war. Some veterans leave diaries or written accounts, but most experiences will be lost forever. Oral history programmes can capture memories but the material so garnered is accessible to but few and, as Echoing Green Press have discovered, a considerable amount of work is needed to turn oral history into readable history. Fortunately, in this book they have succeeded at a difficult task. It is all the more important because, over the years, there have very few accounts of South African prisoners of war. Largely as a result of the battle of Sidi Rezegh and the fall of Tobruk, 14 583 South Africans became prisoners of war. Cyril Crompton was captured at Sidi Rezegh and Peter Johnson was taken at Tobruk.

Both accounts tell of the shock of becoming a prisoner of war and the unpleasant journey from North Africa to Italy. This is a riveting part of the story and one which will attract the most interest. However, future historians may prove more interested in the learning of the motivations which led Cyril Crompton and Peter Johnson to enlist with South Africa's volunteer army and their subsequent efforts to get to the scene of the fighting. It is a pity that some parts of this process are missing from Peter Johnson's account.

Especially valuable are the narratives of what it was like to be a prisoner of the Italians. The literature has focused on the experiences of those who were prisoners of the Germans. While it was unpleasant for a member of the Western Allies to be a prisoner of the Germans, at least until the death marches began, they did not experience the depths of neglect of those held by the Italians. Prisoners held by the Italians received very meagre rations and their uniforms were spitefully daubed with red paint. It is little wonder then that the Italian government sought to

make amends by acknowledging the very different, humanitarian approach of South Africa's Colonel H F Prinsloo, Commandant of Zonderwater Prisoner of War Camp near Cullinan, towards the Italian POWs held there.

The Italian surrender in September 1943 marked the end of both Cyril Crompton and Peter Johnson's captivity in Italy. Yet their fates were to be very different. Crompton was captured by the Germans after a brief spell of liberty. He was then sent to Germany and forced to work on a sugar beet farm. This had the advantage that at least he was reasonably fed. He survived the aptly named death marches and, in this book, recounts his harrowing attempt to survive at a time when some historians glibly describe the Second World War as being almost over. The rest of his story describes his return to a normal life and to his pre-War occupation.

Peter Johnson, on the other hand, was one of the prisoners who succeeded in reaching the Allied lines. He was recruited for the South African POW repatriation unit. This precipitated him into a traumatic experience which accounts for the guarded nature of his narrative. For the first time in his life, he met his father, his parents having been divorced shortly after his birth. He also had to deal with the death of his elder brother, who had been killed earlier in the war. His ability to build relationships and his account of being subjected to V1 and V2 attacks, an uncommon experience for a South African serviceman, are notable parts of his story.

Both stories are rounded off, and agreeably so, with a brief account of the authors' lives after the war. ***Luck's Favours*** is a most welcome addition to the small body of writing on the experiences of South African prisoners of war. Highly Recommended.

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Cyril Crompton and Peter Johnson, ***Luck's Favours – Two South African Second World War Memoirs: Cyril Crompton, For the Adventure of It; Peter Johnson, On the run in wartime Italy***, Echoing Green Press, Fish Hoek, 2010, 12 photographs, two sketches/ paintings, one poster, five maps, bibliography, 309 pages.

The last of the Commonwealth's First World War veterans have