

Patrick Finn

An Irish Prisoner of War during WW2

By Libby Woods

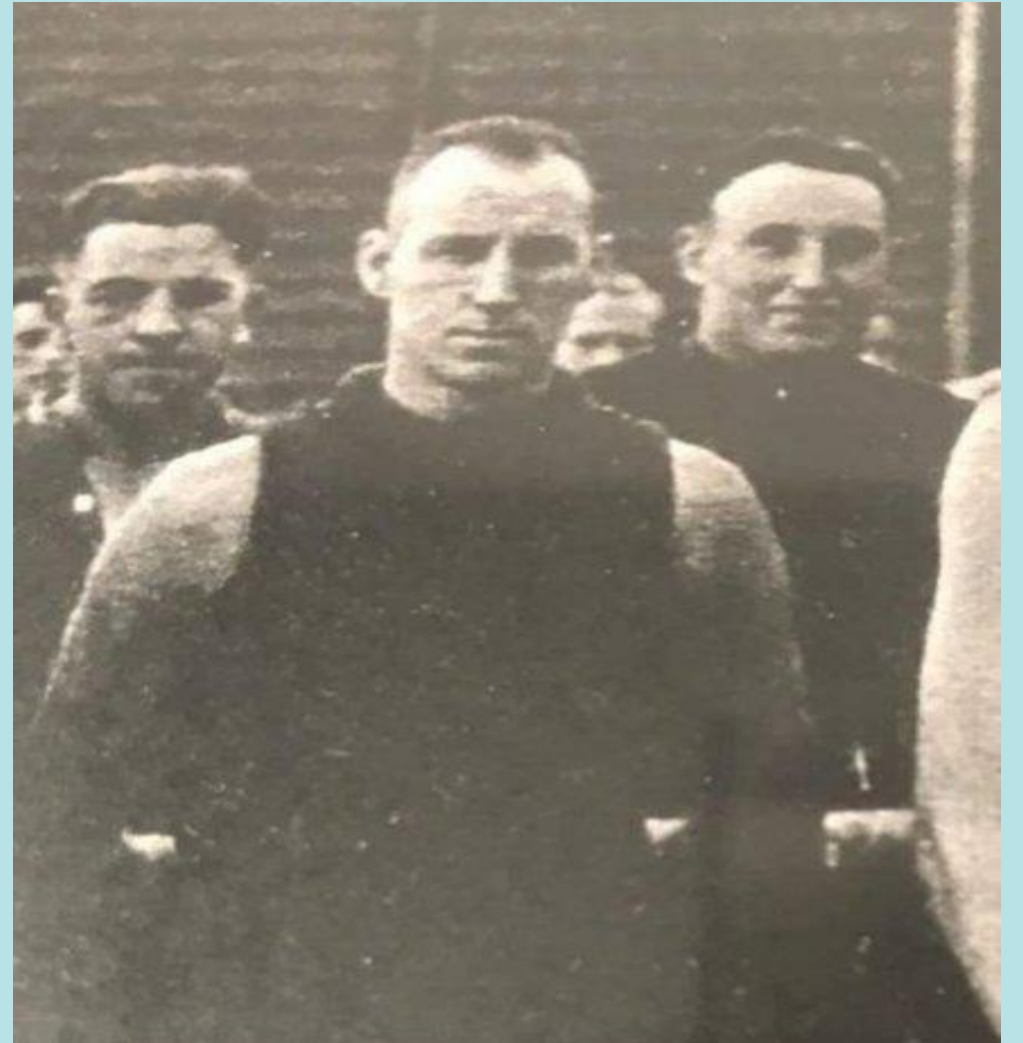


Define and Justify

- I have decided to do my great granddad, Patrick Finn. He was an Irish prisoner of war in Auschwitz during World War 2.
- I have chosen this topic as he was an extremely brave man and like many Irish soldiers in World War 2 his story goes untold even though he has done extraordinary things.
- I am very proud of my family and always grew up with stories from my mother and my (late) grandmother who was his daughter.

His life before the war:

- Patrick Finn grew up in Dublin, near the liberties in Ireland.
- He was married to Ellen Finn (he called her Helen).
- He had five children with Ellen, his children's names were- Bridget (my nanny), Tommy, Shamo, Peter, Teresa.



Ireland's involvement in World War 2.

- While Ireland was a neutral country during World War 2, many Irish men actually served in the war under the British Army and the Allies.
- It is estimated around 70,000 Irish men went to fight in the war.
- According to Trinity College Dublin around 3617 died in the Republic and 3890 died in Northern Ireland on active service.



Why he joined WW2

- Like many men in Ireland they hated the injustice of the World War and how people were being treated.
- Also like many Wars it was a difficult time for jobs and with a large family like his Patrick Finn went to war so he could provide for his family.

Imprisoned and marched

- Him and some of the men he was with were captured almost immediately in France.
- This meant that he was captured as a Prisoner of War (P.O.W) for a total of 5 years between 1940-1945.
- He was imprisoned in Stalag VIII-A, near today's Polish town of Zgorzelec.
- I'm a little unsure of what happened there but what I do know is not long after he was death marched over to the place he'd stay for the rest of his time as a POW, Auschwitz.

The History of Auschwitz

- Auschwitz is an extremely well-known concentration camp from World War 2.
- It was known for its cruelty and horrors the prisoners there endured. It is estimated by historians that about 1.1 Million people were killed in this camp. Around 1 Million of them being Jews.
- This did not mean there was only Jewish prisoners though. There were many prisoners of ethnic groups and P.O.W (Prisoner Of War) kept in Auschwitz.



His time in Auschwitz

- Patrick Finn as stated before spent a whole five years in concentration camps.
- Instead of being scared and worried about what will happen next, he decided to spread some hope. Patrick Finn started his own boxing club in the concentration camps he stayed at.
- He did this to keep people strong but also keep people sane. Turns out the guards actually found out about it. Instead of shutting it down they watched it as entertainment.
- This meant that some prisoners got more food if they were fighting and sometimes Patrick Finn would lie about who was fighting to sneak more food to people. This meant that he saved some people's lives to not starve.
- Patrick Finn survived and made it home to his family when he was rescued from the horrific camp.
- His name is on the plaque in Auschwitz as proof.

Heydebreck Blechhammes

- Due to a letter I was researching I made a connection that a lot of people in my family actually didn't notice. There was mention of him leaving a place called "Heydebreck Blechhammer".
- After more research I realized it was another concentration camp. We never realized that towards the end of the war he was actually transferred to it.
- This was a concentration camp that a lot of P.O.W.s were sent to from Auschwitz. While we don't know much from his time there we do know his travel from there and how he was saved from a letter he sent to his wife. (Slide: The Letter)



The Family

- Patrick Finn was my Nanny's father, she was the oldest of five.
While at war my Nanny took on most of the responsibility to try and keep the family fed and safe because her mother had tuberculosis and was mostly in hospital.
- My Nanny had an extremely hard childhood starting from when she was incredibly young.
- This worsened as the military made a mistake. There was two families in the liberties that had a Patrick Finn at war. This meant that when he while he was imprisoned and unable to respond to letters the other Patrick Finn in the area passed away. There was a mix up and our family was told he was dead when it turns out he wasn't, the other Patrick Finn had died.
- This made life even harder for my Nanny as she believed her Daddy was never going to return home from the war.

The Return:

- One day, my Nanny was wondering the streets, beyond exhausted and starving.
- She was in such shock when she ended up seeing Patrick Finn, her Daddy.
- He looked sickly, traumatized and so very skinny (quote from Elizabeth Woods) "He was like a skeleton, barely recognizable" from the brutal conditions he faced while in the concentration camp.
- As mentioned in the previous slide, there had been a mix up and our family was told that Patrick Finn had died in battle.
- My Nanny and her family was deeply religious and grew up with a very strict belief system of heaven and hell. She thought she was dying and that he was coming down from heaven to get her. It was then that he brought her home and the family reunited finally after the long, cruel war.
- Obviously, this was a very emotional time for the family.

The Letter

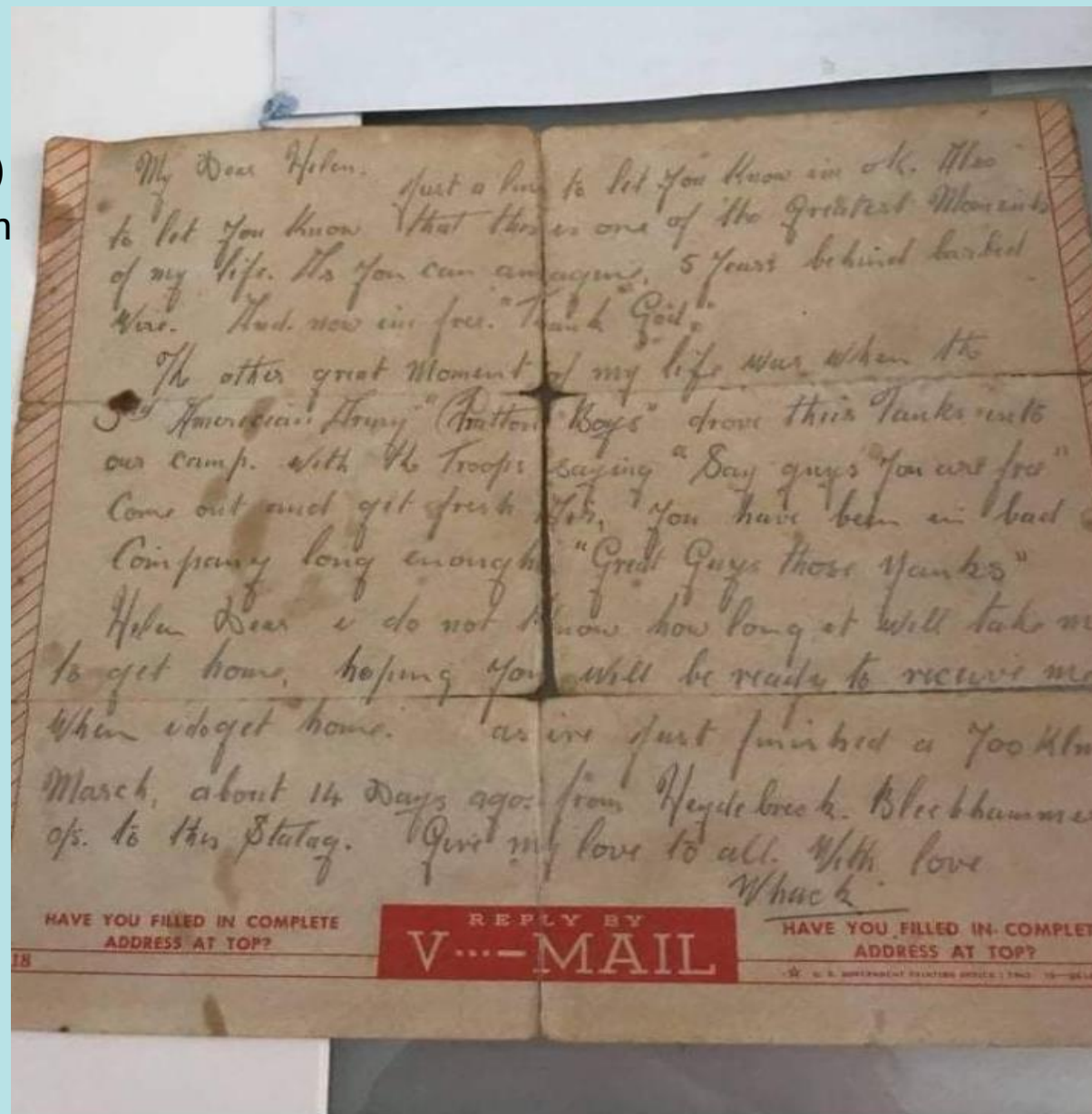
- He actually sent a letter to his wife (My great grandmother) ended up arriving after he got back. (Whack was a nickname)

"My Dear Helen,

Just a (blank) to let you know I'm ok. Also to let you know that this is one of the Greatest Moments of my life. As you can imagine, five years behind barbed wire. And now I'm free, Thank God.

The other Greatest Moment of my life is when the American Army "(blank) Boys" drove their tanks into our camp. With the troops saying " Say guys you are free, Come out and get fresh air, you've been in bad company for long enough" Great guys those yanks.

*Helen dear, I do not know how long it will take me to get home. Hoping you will be ready to receive me when I do get home. As I'm just finished a 700 klm march, about 14 days ago from Heydebreck, Blechhammer to this Stalag. Give my love to all with love,
Whack"*

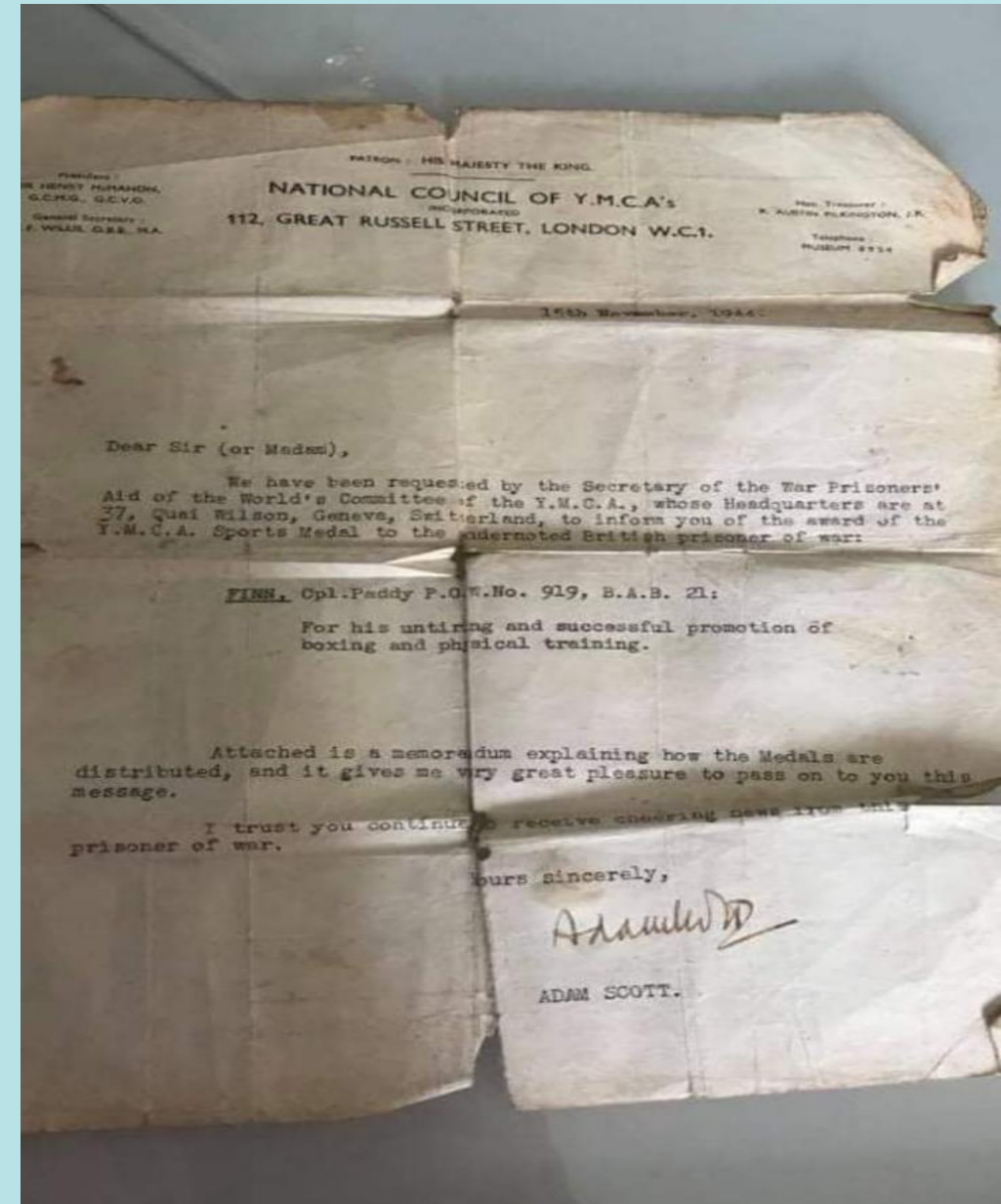


The Trauma and Death of Patrick Finn

- Even though Patrick Finn survived the war he was traumatized by the horrors he faced. This includes horrors like starvation, watching people die or be treated completely inhumane and much more that we may never know.
- Each night he slept with a knife under his pillow out of fear and could not sleep well without it. That is because during the night Nazi's would come into the camps and take them, the next morning they'd be dead.
- He suffered severe PTSD and survivors' guilt from his experience which haunted him to his death even after the war had long ended.
- One night in his early sixties, "he went to the back bedroom lay down and died. His heart just gave out it was 1971" (quoted from Elizabeth Woods). It is believed it was due to his PTSD, stress and trauma he endured.
- For years after his wife still got a widowers pension for his service.

His Medal

- Patrick Finn was awarded a medal for his actions in the concentration camp called the "Y.M.C.A Sports Medal."
- This document is so important as not only does it help solidify his actions and hardships, but it also shows the reward and how he was actually recognized by important people and respected for it.
- I would say that this is one of the best primary sources I have of his actions and how much it truly meant.
- (Document is typed out just in case on the next slide)



PATRON – HIS MAJESTY THE KING.

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF Y.M.C.A's

Incorporated

112, GREAT RUSSEL STREET, LONDON W.C.1

Dear Sir (or Madam),

We have been requested by the Secretary of War Prisoners' Aid of the World's Committee of the Y.M.C.A, whose headquarters are at 37, Quai Wilson, Geneve, Switzerland, to inform you of the reward of the Y.M.C.A Sports Medal to the (undernoted?) British Prisoner Of War:

FINN Cpl. Paddy P.O.W. No. 919, B.A.B. 21:

For his untiring and successful promotion of boxing and physical training.

Attached is a memorandum explaining how Medals are distributed, it gives me very great pleasure to pass you on this message.

I trust you to continue to receive cheering news from this prisoner of war.

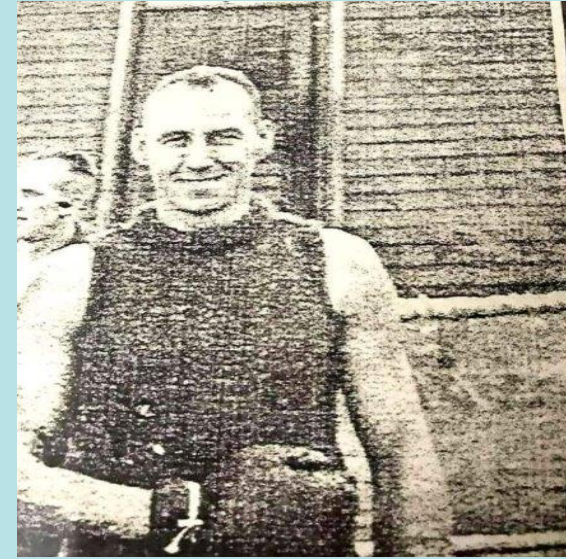
Yours sincerely,

ADAM SCOTT.



The History of Boxing in my family that followed.

- Boxing has stayed a big part of my family's lives, after the war Patrick Finn made a boxing club for underprivileged children in the Liberties, Dublin. His son Tommy Finn grew up to become a boxing coach and took over his father's footsteps, he opened the Sacred Heart Boxing Club in Donor Avenue, Dublin.
- My Uncles (Mammy's brothers) were members of this growing up. My Uncle Paddy (named after Patrick Finn), opened the Golden Cobra boxing club in Tallaght, Dublin. His three sons (my cousins) became very successful boxers all 3 having held all Ireland belts and fought in World Title fights.
- The Golden Cobra boxing club is now run by my cousins, Edward, Patrick and Paul.
- My Mammy, Elizabeth Woods has also done a boxing match.
- So, Patrick Finns strength lives through us.



Reflection

- Overall, I am very proud to be sharing the story of Patrick Finn and his family. It is truly a remarkable story and being related to him means a lot to me.
- Young Historians has helped me research more deeply, cross reference, learn and try to decipher letters and what they mean, recover past experiences even I didn't know about and more.
- My aim for this project was to give credit to an Irish Prisoner Of War who spent and lived his life haunted by the war even afterwards, the impact on families but also the hope and lives he changed in the process.
- I feel like I have referenced good primary and secondary sources. (an example of each is the official documentation and interviewing his granddaughter, my mammy).
- Thank you so much for your time.

Sources

- <https://journals.openedition.org/etudesirlandaises/4451?lang=en>
- <https://www.auschwitz.org/en/history/auschwitz-and-shoah/the-number-of-victims/>
- https://www.tcd.ie/news_events/articles/roll-of-honour-acknowledging-irelands-contribution-in-world-war-ii-presented-to-tcd-library/#:~:text=The%20list%20details%20the%203%2C617,during%20the%20Second%20World%20War.
- <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/blechhammer>
- https://portal.sds.ox.ac.uk/articles/online_resource/January_1939_to_April_1945_BEF_to_Captivity_and_back_to_Blighty/2592345

Slide "THE RETURN" was specifically interviewed from my mammy who told me about how they actually reunited.

Stories from my (late) Nanny, Bridget Hyland (Finn), and my Mammy, Elizabeth Woods (Hyland).

Documentation.

Photo evidence.

They are all here but they are also scattered across the presentation.

