

# Another Double Amputee Escapes Colditz Castle...

Most people are aware of the exploits of Double Amputee 'Group Captain Sir Douglas Bader' during and after the Second World War including his stay at Colditz Castle.

Sir Douglas was sent to Colditz Castle as a result of his multiple escape attempts about a year after being shot down and captured in August 1941. He remained at Colditz Castle until being liberated at the end of the war (see photo right dated 18<sup>th</sup> April 1945 – Sir Douglas is pictured stood in the centre).



I know myself, as a double above knee amputee how difficult simple task(s) can be and or become, and whilst I know that Sir Douglas had lost both of his legs he did in fact have the benefit of one knee and whilst this doesn't in anyway distract from how difficult it must have been for him; I was intrigued to understand how, if at all a double amputee could and to what extent function in what I can only imagine must have been a difficult environment specifically that of Colditz Castle.

So, on a recent trip to Saxony in Germany I could not help my curiosity and was compelled to visit Colditz Castle. This was if only to see and try and understand the conditions and the scale of some of the challenges that another double amputee would have faced over the years in which Sir Douglas was a guest!

I remember as a child playing the game 'Escape from Colditz Castle' and the old black and white films depicting its difficult terrain and tight security, which can in part be seen from a photo I brought back shown on the right.



So on to my visit!

I was actually staying in Leipzig, and had specifically arranged this day in order that I had enough time to visit Colditz Castle.

Colditz, the town was approximately 32 miles or 50km from Leipzig so I had a choice of how to get there. I could have taken the train from Leipzig to Großbothen (a nearby village) and then taken a bus, or as I actually did I took the bus from Leipzig to the Colditz sports ground (the terminus) on the outskirts of the town.

So the bus left Leipzig at 11:45AM costing me 6,50 Euro or about £6, which then arrived on time at 1:15PM.

This meant I had to walk or should I say 'plod' the few hundred yards into the market square; where on turning into the street leading to the square I noticed two things immediately!



The first being how quaint and pretty the market square was and with such an inviting atmosphere, and then secondly you could not miss Colditz Castle set high in the sky at the back of the square (see photo left).

Anyway I carried on and I chatted to a couple of locals (in my very best broken German) before ultimately arriving at the Castle late for the castle tour. I now know that the tour lasts for 2 hours and starts at about 1PM!!

Anyway on arriving at the castle I chatted (again in my best broken German) to the very friendly staff, who realising my efforts to get to the castle (I had shorts on so they couldn't miss my 2 prosthetic legs!!) I was allowed directly and with some personal guidance into and around the museum (see photo – "Colditz Castle – History and Research of the Buildings"). This photo is of a plaque on a wall denoting that now the castle appears to be run as a charity in order to bring it back to its former glory whilst also

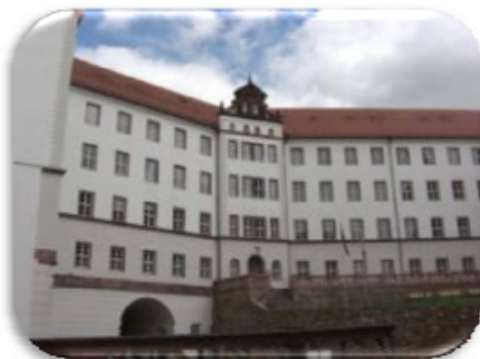


recognising and remembering its long history, which I understand dates back to the 10<sup>th</sup> Century.

Anyway, I also took the opportunity of viewing the inner courtyards, and higher parts of the castle that were open and accessible. Clearly accessing the tunnels and underground items for example were impractical for me at this time!

Anyway I learnt a great deal about what and how Sir Douglas and the other prisoners must have lived. I have to say that I am astonished at how well Sir Douglas seemed to have thrived here in what I can only describe as a very difficult environment.

If I am being a little philosophical now, I suppose Sir Douglas did what all individuals do with any sort of long term condition, that being..... ***he learnt just to get on with it!!***



In order to try and give some scale to Colditz Castle and show some of the terrain; I have enclosed a few photos above and below.

These are in the order I experienced them, and just show how by walking through one entrance into one courtyard this then allows you to walk through another entrance into another courtyard.





I have to say that these photographs DO NOT do justice to the difficulty of the terrain. Cobble stones everywhere with the ground

sloping in many directions. I personally found it a very difficult terrain and struggled to move around with any ease. With most movements from A to B being considered and thought about ahead of any physical action.



Anyway having visited the museum and read and learnt about some of the endeavours of the prisoners and in part the serving soldiers; I can only admire the ingenuity, courage, personal resolve and determination of all the men held at Colditz Castle.

Also, I cannot imagine it is widely known but only one soldier was every killed at Colditz Castle. I think this was because the Nazi (National Socialists) Government used Colditz Castle as an example or a show case of what concentration camps were like under this regime. However history now affords us the truth.

Anyway towards the end of my visit to Colditz Castle, and having discussed in part the exploits of Sir Douglas with the staff; I may have inadvertently mentioned to one of the members of staff that I had met Lady Bader and was in regular contact with the Douglas Bader Foundation. To which later I was then asked pass on the best wishes and greetings to both Lady Bader and the Douglas Bader Foundation from all at Colditz Castle. This I have now done, and it was my pleasure to do so.

Personally I thought this was a very nice ending to a very interesting and informative day.

I felt the town folk of Colditz and its Castle were very helpful and most welcoming and I would recommend anyway visiting the area to take an afternoon and visit such a place steeped in over a 1000 years of history.

I hope this little snippet of my visit to Colditz Castle was of interest.

steve

PS: Part of the Castle has been refurbished and is now a youth hostel. So should you fancy staying at Colditz Castle with some assurance of being allowed out in the morning (assuming you pay the bill) the opportunity is there.

PPS: I escaped unharmed being allowed to continue my visit to Saxony; so I wonder if I am only the second double lower limb amputee to escape Colditz Castle?... ha ha ha