SOME EXPERIENCES OF A PRISONER OF WAR IN GERMANY, WITH REMARKS ON FOUR PRISONERS' CAMPS.

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The writer feels that these experiences may be of interest to readers of this Journal, and that they will be of value in helping them to form a clearer and more correct opinion of the German character.

One of the many things that has struck the writer most forcibly during the past month—that is, since his liberation—is the misconception of the German character displayed by the average Englishman, whether civil or military.

Some fourteen medical officers, all belonging to mobile medical units, were captured on August 26, 1914, at Landrecies, where there had been a fight during the night (25th to 26th). We had formed three hospitals in the town, and were in charge of severely wounded men.

The German officers and men who captured us, and practically all the others who visited us from time to time, were quite polite. They took nothing from us. They were very suspicious and very particular about collecting all the arms of the wounded. One medical officer took some dressings, but returned them later upon the order of a senior officer.

The officers asked few questions, assured us that the British Army was destroyed, and that Paris would fall in a few days.

The town was looted, private houses were broken into, and the furniture wantonly destroyed. There was some difficulty in obtaining supplies for our personnel and wounded.

Most of the local inhabitants had fled, including the doctor and the mayor. At the time one was inclined to blame these people for deserting their posts. In the light of later events one is forced to acknowledge that they were quite right. On the 28th the mayoress returned, and was exceedingly kind and helpful in obtaining supplies for the wounded.

Our Senior Medical Officer now made an official application to the General Officer in Command of the nearest Army Corps for our return either to our own lines or to a neutral country. He was informed that we should be returned, but must first pass through a German base. Orders were given for a move on the morrow (the 29th), and to take with us all wounded capable of travelling.
On the 29th the very severe cases were collected in a school which had been converted into a hospital. Two medical officers and some men were left in charge, the remainder set out for Bavai about 2 p.m. with an escort.

The commander of our escort was a Feldwebel (a warrant officer), and was very good on the whole. He saved some of our horses from being taken by passing troops, and carried off a difficult position with much tact and good humour.

The journey was uneventful. We stopped two nights and a day at Bavai to rest the wounded, who were cared for in the French hospital, and then proceeded to Mons.

The feeding of the personnel was difficult, but we were able to obtain a certain amount of bread on requisition and some live pigs. Pork in August cooked before it is cold is not an ideal ration, but was most acceptable under the circumstances. The Mayor of Bavai (long may he live!) gave us a barrel of beer.

We arrived at Mons on the evening of the 31st. Here our treatment completely changed. The column with wounded was marched twice round the town. The local inhabitants were most kind, and gave the men chocolate, cigarettes, cigars, and tobacco, till stopped by the German soldiers. We were finally hustled into a large barrack yard, and were ordered into a large dormitory over the stables, personnel and wounded all together. We were made to wade through stable drainage to reach this haven, the boards which were used to cross it being kicked away by our new guards. No food or water was supplied either to the personnel or the wounded.

Through the kindness of a sentry we were enabled to get some water in our dixies, which we fortunately brought with us. The wounded received a light meal of milk and biscuits supplied from our panniers. This was the last meal many of them received for some time. We did not get much sleep as the place was so dirty.

At 4 a.m. on the 1st we were aroused and ordered to start at 6 a.m., leaving our wounded. One biscuit per man was issued, and we marched to the station under a guard with fixed bayonets. Hitherto our escort had not fixed bayonets. After waiting some two hours in the square we were separated from our transport and interned in a shed in the station yard. We were given no food, nor were we allowed to get food from our transport. All requests, including a request to see the Commandant, were met by insults. We spent a very unpleasant day and were ordered to entrain about
6 p.m. The officers were entrained in a second-class carriage. The personnel and transport were left behind. Before entraining all knives and razors were taken from us.

The journey was uneventful, only marked by the absence of food, until 6 p.m. on the 2nd, when we arrived at Achen.

Here a mob of drunken Uhlans and railway employees were incited by a German officer—a colonel—to take us out of our carriage. He said it was scandalous that we who had gouged out the eyes of German wounded with the marlin spikes of our clasp-knives should travel in a second-class carriage, while German wounded were in trucks. Several of the mob had these English clasp-knives and were threatening to practise upon us, some tried to hit us through the windows, and some were making efforts to get into the corridor, when a younger officer came up and quelled them.

The howl of an angry mob is most unpleasant and terrifying. The writer for one never wishes to hear it again, the song of the shell is far preferable. We were now given a special guard who were very suspicious and standoffish at first, but rapidly thawed. We owe this guard much, for by their kind offices we obtained some food. The German Red Cross give no food to prisoners, wounded or otherwise. At times it is shown to them and then withdrawn, with kindly remarks that its not for swine.

We were visited by a German officer and complaints were made of our treatment, and a demand made to see the German Commandant or the American Consul at Colne. We were informed that there were various charges against us, and that we should be searched and examined later.

At about 6 a.m. on the 3rd, we arrived at Dortmund, and under a very heavy guard we were marched to the Station Kommandatur. Here our Senior Medical Officer had an interview with the Commandant, who was very polite and accepted our word that all charges of ill-treatment of German wounded were false, and further ordered the Red Cross to give us food. This they did very unwillingly. One lady, when asked if she could speak English replied: "I can, but I won't." After our meal our journey recommenced, but under better conditions. The guard protected us from insults and we were allowed to buy a meal at Kriensen, about 9 p.m., the first meat we had had since Bavai on the 31st. We were given another meal on the morning of the 4th, and arrived at Torgau about 1 p.m., after nearly eighty hours in the train.

Torgau is an old fortress where French prisoners were interned in 1870. The writer has vivid memories of the first night when he
was driven from his bed by bugs. After a dour struggle he capitulated and spent a fairly peaceful night on the floor.

A general outline of conditions at Torgau follows. Torgau is a lager for officers. There were some sixty British officers and some hundreds of French officers already there on our arrival.

**Housing.**—Officers were housed in soldiers’ barrack-rooms. Each had a bed and most of them had a soldier’s cupboard. The bed consisted of a straw mattress on boards supported on an iron frame. Bedding consisted of two blankets, one sheet, pillow slip, and blanket bag. The latter acted as a second sheet. Linen was changed monthly. Later, when prisoners became more numerous, huts were put up and the junior officers were housed in these. Here they had no cupboards and very little furniture. The rooms were warmed by stoves.

**Messing.**—There was a small kitchen and a very small and dirty canteen. At first the kitchen was managed by a staff of German women. Later it was taken over by the French who managed all the messing. Food was bad but cheap. One could buy extras such as jam, ham and sausage at the canteen. With extras one lived on between 2 marks and 2 marks 50 pf. per day.

We were formed into messes of twelve to sixteen and dined in the corridors. One large dining-hall was erected but was insufficient to hold all and was used by the French. We had to buy all our own cutlery and crockery. The kitchen was much too small to cook for 1,100 officers.

**Latrines.**—We used the same latrines as the German Guard. Extra ones were built later. They were very dirty and only cleaned out when absolutely necessary—urinals were usually allowed to overflow.

**Ablution.**—There was a good system of shower-baths with hot and cold water. We could get a daily bath. It was necessary to pay the caretaker. We had hand bowls and a pump in the yard for washing our hands. One towel was supplied to each prisoner.

**Exercise.**—At first we only had a small yard about one hundred by sixty yards, but later the outer court was opened, where we had ample room and could play football, rounders, and tennis. The tour of our domain was nearly a kilometre.

**Work.**—Medical work, *nil*. At first we had to do all the work of the place, i.e., clean our rooms, clean the courtyard and the drains, wash up crockery, draw rations, wash clothes, carry coal, and peel potatoes. On September 17 some orderlies arrived, one for about sixteen officers. This relieved us of the most unpleasant
fatigues, such as washing up and the care of drains. We still had to help a good deal, and the early morning potato peeling roster persisted almost to the end. Peeling potatoes at 7 a.m. in the open on a cold November morning is not a desirable occupation.

Discipline was not strict—we had one roll-call a day at 10 a.m., except for a short period when we had two as a punishment for some offence.

Several petitions for release were sent in by the medical officers, of whom there were thirty British. All were unsuccessful. We were not allowed to see any newspapers with the exception of the official Extrablatts posted in the camp. Later we were allowed to buy the local paper. No letters were allowed to be sent off till October 6. The writer got no news from home till October 19, when a telegram arrived. It was sent off on September 2.

The following letter to the Senior British Officer from the German Commandant is worth recording:

"Every day applications from British officers reach me which are so entirely without justification that it is not worth my while to take any notice of them. Officers appear still not to realize the fact that as prisoners of war they have not so much rights as duties. They are not to take up my time with the expression of foolish wishes. If this state of things, which betrays a certain bumptiousness on the part of British officers, does not cease immediately, I shall take the opportunity to put into each room a French sub-lieutenant risen from the ranks, and I shall further apply that a proportion of your Allies, the Russian officers, may share your rooms. This order of mine is to be posted up in the British quarters. Will you please, Colonel, report to me in German the fact that these instructions have been complied with.

"(Signed) BRAUN, Captain.

"Officer Commanding, Prisoners' Depot."

Here is a reply to one of our petitions for release:—

"Torgau, September 18, 1914.

"Colonel Gordon,—The doctors and chaplain are not, as was communicated to you in the beginning, looked upon as prisoners of war, and are not being treated as such. They have rather fallen into our hands and are to follow their avocation under our direction. We are only at the beginning of the enormous World War and shall still have many thousands of English wounded to care for, for which purpose the accumulation of English doctors will be detailed. The same is the case with the chaplain, who can, and does, already carry out his duty. Only when the personnel of the
Red Cross is no longer required—that can only be towards the end of the War—can there be any talk of return to England. If the gentlemen imagine that they cannot move freely in the town is a breach of the Convention, so must it be mentioned that the Convention expressly demands that doctors should be protected. Their detention is protective, as our populace is particularly bitter against the English as the promoters of this War. It would be almost impossible for the authorities to protect them in the interior of the town. At any rate, the above-mentioned officers obtain the same rate of pay as officers of the same rank in the German Army.

"(Signed) E. BRANDE."

With reference to the above letter it is worth noting that medical officers at this time received 100 marks a month. The writer received pay at the rate of 100 marks a month for five months, and at 595 marks a month for the second five months.

As regards employment, the writer was not employed in any way till February 11, 1915. From February 11 he was nominally employed in the care of some seventy British prisoners, whose wounds were practically healed, in a camp where there were two German, two Russian, and twelve French doctors.

On September 22 a notice was posted asking British officers to subscribe to the German Red Cross. Many officers subscribed by cheque. The receipt of these cheques by the London banks was the first intimation received in England that these officers were alive. The writer’s wife was notified on October 7, having been without news of any kind since the middle of August.

An extract from a German paper, the LEIPSIGER, No. 247, published from September 3 to 10, is worth reproduction:—

"Unworthy Behaviour towards Prisoners of War.—In the first few days several hundreds of persons have thronged to the prisoners of war in the most persistent manner and have helped them with "presents of love" (Lebensgeben), especially tobacco, money, and flowers. Further, professional and amateur photographers have appeared in such numbers that it almost seems as if it was the most important task of the German photographer to obtain pictures of French prisoners. It is pitiable and incomprehensible that the earnest recommendations that have hitherto been issued have not sufficed to put an end to behaviour which amounts to hysteria.

"The Commanding Officer of the Bavarian Army Corps is compelled to forbid photography. Further care has been taken that the names of those people who, devoid of any patriotic feeling and
devoid of tact, have provided the prisoners with gifts should be at once taken and published in prominent places in the daily papers."

Life at Torgau was monotonous. One learnt French and taught English, but one got sufficient exercise. The writer spent five months there grousing at his lot, and a second five months elsewhere wishing he were back again.

One British officer called a German workman "a Schwein" because he dropped a hammer on him. The officer later got five months' imprisonment for this offence.

On November 25 and 26 all British officers were transferred to Burg. The procession from the camp to the station was unforgettable. Very limited transport was allowed, so each officer carried nearly all his worldly possessions. These were packed in anything between a Wolsey valise and a jam bucket. It was snowing hard too. We had a great send-off from our French Allies and many of us left behind very good friends. The writer was fortunate in only remaining at Burg some ten days.

General Conditions at Burg.—All knives and razors which we had bought at Torgau were taken from us. All ranks were mixed up, colonels receiving the same treatment as subalterns. Equal numbers of Russians and English were placed in each room, and no two English officers were permitted to sleep side by side.

Housing.—We were lodged in converted gunsheds and stores. Some rooms were fairly good, others were very bad. The lower rooms were quite unfit for occupation. Here are particulars of one room. It had accommodation for about forty officers. Windows on one side only. The window space was about a quarter of that allowed for a common lodging-house in England. These windows were hermetically sealed by large iron doors for twelve hours out of the twenty-four, i.e., from about 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. Ablutions were performed in the passage or in the room. All meals were taken in the room. The bedding was better than at Torgau, officers' sheets and iron bedsteads with a sort of spring mattress were provided.

Discipline was strict and oppressive. There were some thirty-nine rules. Roll-call took place at uncertain hours, sometimes once, sometimes three times a day. Beds had to be made in a fixed way. It was forbidden to sit or lie on the beds during the day. Walking in the courtyard after dark was forbidden, but we could go to the latrine one at a time up to 9 o'clock. A German non-commissioned officer was in charge of each room to enforce discipline. One officer who possessed a deck-chair was permitted to sit on it, but not to lounge in it fully extended. All the German
officers were very hostile to the British, but were much less so to
the Russians and the few French who were there. All windows
had to be shut at night.

_Latrines._—Deep trenches, very dirty and quite insufficient.
Only eight seats were provided for about four hundred officers,
situated fifteen yards from one canteen and about forty yards from
the other. Urinal usually overflowing and the urine permeating
into the soil.

_Ablution._—One small bathroom with two baths, quite in-
sufficient. One bath a week only allowed. In addition we had
basins in our rooms.

_Messing._—Three official meals a day were provided by the adminis-
tration. The price of this was stopped from our pay. The food
was generally eatable but the quantity was insufficient. There were
two good and clean canteens where at first one could buy excellent
food. By degrees nearly everything was forbidden.

_Exercise._—The courtyard available was about two hundred
yards long by thirty yards wide, for about five hundred officers and
men. Further, we were not allowed to cross it at the lower end, so
had to walk up and down instead of making a round.

_Work._—Medical work, _nil_. We had sufficient orderlies to do
our other work. Washing was sent out to a laundry.

Irish Roman Catholics were separated from the rest with a
view to preferential treatment. When it was realized that they
were not inclined to espouse the German cause the matter was
dropped. Some thirty-seven of us left Burg for Halle on
December 6. The writer, for one, had no regrets.

_General Conditions at Halle._—Halle is a large, dirty manu-
facturing town. The lager was an old factory converted. Dirt
was the prevailing feature.

_Housing._—British, French, Belgian and Russian officers were
all lodged together in large dormitories. Numbers varied; in the
writer’s room there were thirty-four. In some rooms the beds were
two-deckers, and all were of the same type as at Torgau. No
cupboards of any kind were provided and some of us had no shelves
or even hooks. The rooms were very dirty and ill-ventilated,
with windows on one side only. The number of orderlies provided
was quite insufficient to keep the place approximately clean.
The bedding was the same as at Torgau, and linen was supposed
to be changed monthly. The writer had the same linen for nearly
two months. Lice were fairly plentiful.

_Latrine._—Deep trench, very dirty, insufficient, and only cleaned
out as a last resource.
Exercise.—The factory yard, dirty and rough; the round was some three hundred yards.

Work.—Medical work, nil. We had to clean our own boots and help with the messing arrangements, as the number of orderlies was insufficient, and further, they were constantly taken away by the Germans for fatigues. Washing was sent out to a laundry which was good and cheap.

Messing.—We messed in an enormous old workshop which was filthy. We formed messes of about ten. The food was cheap and very bad. Certain extras such as sausage, ham, jam and margarine were procurable at the canteen. All luxuries were strictly forbidden.

Ablution.—A good and fairly clean bathroom with shower-baths, also a lavatory not too clean. One could have a daily bath.

Discipline.—Not so strict as at Burg, two roll-calls a day. The German officers were quite agreeable and polite. Life at Halle when one got used to the dirt became bearable. Several incidents are worthy of being recorded.

During December and part of January all foodstuffs were taken from our parcels "for the Red Cross." We were unable to obtain a receipt from the Red Cross. It was heartrending to see plum puddings and cakes go away like that.

The sale of tobacco at the canteen was forbidden and on the last day we all laid in large supplies. Two days later, on January 4, all smoking was forbidden, and on January 5 all the tobacco we had bought was taken from us, that is to say, all that was found.

Twice, on December 19 and January 26, we were stripped to the skin by civilian detectives in the presence of private soldiers without the presence of an officer. Dogs also assisted. We thought they were searching for gold, they did not find much. They took a few other items such as field-glasses. We were searched on another occasion by the military authorities for maps and note-books. Some of the latter were probably interesting as critiques on German methods. We were all disinfected and our clothes were baked. This procedure ruined many uniforms, particularly breeches, and was quite useless from a practical point of view. Many articles of clothing were lost altogether. Several officers were sent to prison for disobeying the smoking edict. One medical officer who had undergone two months' solitary confinement was in this lager. The writer was on February 11 transferred to Quedlinburg, a man's camp, where he was nominally in medical charge of the English prisoners.

Condition of Medical Officers at Quedlinburg.—We, that is
twelve French, two Russians, and the writer, were housed in small wooden huts. For some time there were eight of us in a hut, seven metres by five. We each had a chair and there were two small tables. No cupboards or shelves were provided. No baths were available, so we had to tub in the room. We had one fairly good meal a day at the kitchen, for which we paid 1 mark 50 pf. We made and cooked our own breakfast and supper, from the contents of parcels and from such food as we could buy locally. Later we were given a third hut, so that we only had five in a hut. That was a great improvement. The duties were very light, as most of the wounds were healed, and with the exception of tubercle, which was prevalent in every form, the health of prisoners was good. The writer’s official capacity was Reserve Medical Officer for “Feld III.” Practically he looked after the English, whose numbers varied between sixty-one and eighty-one. For exercise we had the “Feld” yards, which were about two hundred yards long. We could move freely from one “Feld” to another, but were forbidden to enter the men’s hutments. When the new “infirmary”—really a medical inspection room—was completed, good baths were available.

There were about ten thousand prisoners, Russian, French and English. They were all inoculated by us against cholera and typhoid.

Smoking was for a time forbidden, but later was allowed with certain restrictions as to time and place. For medical officers latterly there was practically no restriction. We were not allowed to leave the camp except to proceed to the camp hospital, when we were accompanied by an armed guard.

Conditions of the Prisoners at Quedlinburg.—The camp is administered by a general. The prisoners are divided into two battalions of four companies each. Each battalion is commanded by a major, and each company by a captain or subaltern. Each company is a separate unit with a permanent staff of German N.C.O.’s.

The companies are divided by barbed wire fences. One kitchen cooks for two companies. The main latrines are well away from the kitchens. They are deep trenches, cleaned out by hand into carrying barrows which are by no means watertight. Considerable soiling of the camp occurs in the process of cleaning. There are smaller latrines in close proximity to the kitchens. Some latrines are now emptied by a kind of pump.

Housing.—The men are housed in long wooden huts which are not rainproof. There are two types of room. One is 75 feet by
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35 feet and holds about 150 men. The air space in the other type is similar. Mattresses stuffed with shavings are allowed in the proportion of four mattresses for six men. Two blankets per man are issued. The rooms are heated by stoves and have sufficient windows.

Food is meagre and very unappetizing, in fact at times uneatable. The writer believes that counting it in calories it is sufficient to support life. The warning with reference to overloading of the stomach mentioned in paragraph 7 of the German official instructions is faithfully carried out. The potato bread is very nasty, it is rather like india-rubber; all the same, a larger ration would be very acceptable to the prisoners.

Breakfast consists of black coffee. The coffee is said to be made from acorns.

Dinner.—A vegetable stew flavoured with meat or fish. It would often be better to leave out the meat or fish.

Supper consists of a “soup” made of starch in some form and water. Rice, flour and beans are usually employed. Two hundred and fifty grammes of potato bread is issued daily. Fresh milk was not available at Quedlinburg. Tinned milk, sardines, potatoes and inferior kinds of sausage can be bought in the canteens. Without parcels from home the men would almost starve. The Russians suffer badly in this way and their health is not nearly so good as that of the British and French. The feeding has improved somewhat since the administration have taken over the messing in place of contractors.

Work.—The fatigues are not now heavy. While the camp was in the making and the weather bad the work was hard. Men who are ill or incapacitated by wounds can obtain exemption tickets from the medical officer in charge.

Medical arrangements are satisfactory. There are ample dressings, drugs are occasionally short. The new hospital is good. The old one left much to be desired. An isolation hospital is ready in case of an epidemic.

Health.—General health fairly good. Tuberculosis in every form is rife, also pneumonia and bronchitis are common. All this is due to the overcrowding in the huts and deficient food. Much of the overcrowding might be prevented by local organization, as there are often empty huts available. Out of one hundred and one deaths in the hospital up to May 10, 1915, forty were due to tubercle, and there have been others since then. No isolation of tubercle patients is carried out. There are many men of all nationalities quite incapable of serving who should be exchanged.
Clothing.—Practically no clothing is provided by the German administration and it is very difficult even to obtain clothing sent out from England for the British prisoners. Clogs made of solid wood or of wood and leather are issued from time to time to men who have no footwear whatever. Smoking is allowed in the open at certain hours. Tobacco is now sold in the canteens. Parcels arrive fairly well. Few are lost. They usually take about a month to arrive. Letters are variable and many are lost. On one occasion I know a simple method of censoring was employed, a sackful being burnt.

Discipline is fairly strict and is enforced sometimes in an unpleasant manner.

One may gather from these remarks that the lot of a prisoner of war is not a pleasant one, but it is much better now than during the early months of the war.

The British owe a great debt of gratitude to the American Ambassador at Berlin who, in the face of much obstruction and subterfuge, has done so much to relieve the sufferings of our prisoners. Much yet remains to be done, and it must always be remembered that an inspection of a camp is a set piece, much forethought being expended by the authorities as to the staging.

The writer himself owes much to his French and Russian colleagues at Quedlinburg and to the many good friends in the French rank and file. Arriving at Quedlinburg alone, the only British officer, he was welcomed like a brother and everything possible was done to make his lot as comfortable and happy as possible. He left Quedlinburg feeling quite certain that the interests of the British prisoners would be thoroughly well looked after by their French Allies. A French adjutant was left officially in charge of British interests and he has done much good work already and is willing to do any amount more.