

Communications regarding the conditions in the Civilian
Interment Camp at Fort Henry W. Kingston, Canada.

1. The camp contains about 350 men of whom about 280 are Germans, one is a Turk, and the remainder Austrians and Hungarians besides a few persons of neutral or uncertain nationality. The prisoners are lodged in the casemates of the fort which are situated one above the other, both being underground. The casemates assigned to the ordinary prisoners are 5½ metres broad 10-70 metres long and contain 13 to 15 men each. The flooring consists of unplanned boards which form likewise the roof of the lower casemates. The floor of these lower casemates consists partly of boards, partly of masonry or reinforced concrete. When the upper rooms are cleaned the water does not drip but pours through the cracks and holes, which in places are as wide as your finger, straight down into the rooms below on to the beds or the heads of the inmates. Snow water, which penetrates through the vaulting, and the rain in many places force their way through the masonry and when it rains heavily or when the snow melts the water trickles down the walls in a continuous stream and even drips from the roof. The sliding windows are not in the least weather-proof and the wind passing through them and the door at one end of the casemate, to the loopholes on the other side and through the cracks in the doors sets up a continual draught. If the door and the windows are shut and made wind-proof however, the atmosphere in the room soon becomes insufferably bad particularly in winter when the prisoners are shut into the casemate from dusk (4.30 p.m.) till 7 o'clock next morning.

Those

Those whose place in the casemate is near the iron stove in the middle often find it unbearably hot, while those further away freeze; often the draught in every part of the room is unendurable. The result of this is that very many of the prisoners suffer from rheumatism which they have developed since they have been there.

2. Each man has the following issued to him, one wooden bedstead with a straw mattress and in winter 3 or in summer 2 blankets; no pillow and no bed linen or bed cover. Most of the bedsteads and very many of the mattresses are far from new. Many of the mattresses are simply thick with dirt and the prisoners cannot even wash them themselves as there are no spare ones. Newly arrived prisoners have to take over old mattresses from other prisoners, not always too clean, who have been removed to another camp. These old mattresses and bedsteads are nearly always extraordinarily dirty and full of vermin. Cockroaches, bugs etc., live in the old walls of most of the casemates and in the rotten woodwork in such great numbers that it is impossible to exterminate them. Many prisoners have to take their beds to pieces every two or three months, disinfect the pieces, and nail them together again; whenever this happens hundred of fresh bugs come out. The woollen blankets are exchanged for newly cleaned ones about every 3 months. A few prisoners have their own pillows and bed linen, others made themselves pillows by stuffing potato sacks with straw and others again by folding together their clothes, but neither pillows, bed linen or bed covers were issued. Each man has a section of about one or two metres of a shelf running along the wall-nothing more; such boxes or trunks as there were were private property. There are no cupboards. In each casemate there is only one table, one or two metres square and two benches of the same length for the common

use of all 15 men. In some of the casemates there are two smaller tables but there are never any chairs, except those which the prisoners have made themselves. There are 3 to 5 washing basins for each 15 men. This comprises the entire furniture of the casemates.

3. The clothes given to the prisoners are in some respects good, but an exception to this is formed by the shirts and underclothes which are so unpleasantly rough that persons with delicate skins cannot wear them at all. Besides this one often had to wait for weeks, even months, and make repeated applications before one obtained new clothes in place of others which were long since worn out. This applies particularly in the place of foot gear. If boots needed repairing which was often the case on account of their poor quality it took 2 to 4 weeks, or even longer, as both the cobblers were over-burdened with work and besides this, were often left for weeks without leather. Pocket handkerchiefs were considered an unnecessary luxury not to be given to prisoners.

The food is good as regards quality, as there are German cooks in the kitchen who prepare it in the German manner and do for their fellow countrymen as well as the imperfect apparatus permits. There are only 3 meals, in the morning every day a slice of bread and butter, a slice of bread and jam and 50 grammes of bacon. The Mid-day meal is good but often under-cooked, because the food is delivered from the town to the kitchens too late in the morning. At 5 o'clock in the evening the prisoners are given one slice of bread and butter and every second day 40 grammes of cheese. Once or twice a week they get something warm, bread and milk or mince-meat. The coffee in the morning and the tea at mid-day and in the evening is very bad "judged by all canons of cookery". One often needed to have a very delicate

delicate palate to discover whether it was tea, coffee or slops. This was not the fault of the cooks however, but of the cheapness and insufficient quantity of the material supplied to them. Some of the bigger eaters found the food insufficient and many of them considered that, taken all in all we were underfed, with the result that our general state of health suffered thereby. A canteen was installed to supply the private wants of individuals, but the prisoners have no cash and received none. The money taken from them is administered by the Canadian Government at Ottawa. The prisoners are given cheques on the canteen for their needs. An ordinary prisoner who has nine dollars and upwards deposited with the Government at Ottawa is allowed cheques for the purchase of goods in the canteen up to the amount of five dollars; one who has eight dollars private money may buy for two dollars, one who has only six dollars or less may buy for one dollar each month. Those who have no private means at Ottawa are allowed canteen cheques to the amount of one dollar monthly as a "Government advance". One dollar a month naturally does not go far and hardly suffices for pipe tobacco for a heavy smoker apart from the fact that the high Canadian prices have to be paid. A prisoner who cannot make use of private money and does not wish to forego all pleasures such as smoking etc., must undertake work of some sort for the Canadian Government in the Fort. Such work is paid twenty five cents for each working day irrespective of the nature of the work.

4. The lighting arrangements in the casemates were utterly insufficient for the first year and a half. The only light which entered coming through two small windows at one end of the long shaped casemates. In the lower casemates

casemates it is often impossible to see to read even at mid-day except in the neighbourhood of the window, further back in the room no bright daylight ever penetrates. For the long evenings the prisoners were, till latterly, supplied with only two lamps for each casemate, lamps with flat wicks and burning petroleum. By the light of these poor lamps one could only see to read over half the length of the table, many of the prisoners in consequence bought lamps in the town but they were prohibited from obtaining petroleum although they were prepared to pay for it themselves. Quite recently two good new lamps with circular wicks have been provided for each casemate but for a year and a half the prisoners had to put up with the old utterly inadequate lamps, which meant that in winter all of them had to sit in the dark from 4 o'clock onwards except two or four in the immediate vicinity of the lamps. There is little doubt that the majority have had their eyesight seriously weakened if not permanently damaged there by. The harm to their eyesight is particularly serious in the case of the numerous sailors whose eyes ^{with} more than a year and a half of imprisonment in the deep courtyard of the casemates which allow no ^{distinct views,} ~~views~~ have lost to a greater or less extent their capacity for seeing objects afar off etc.

6. The water supply also is in urgent need of improvement. As the Fort is situated on a hill standing on a promontory in the middle of the Saint Lawrence it has no natural water supply. For washing, baths and household purposes water is pumped into a well in the courtyard by means of pumping works connected with the river. Out of this well the prisoners have themselves to draw water with the help of a bucket at the end of a rope about 4 metres long

5. The latrine arrangements are miserable. They consist for 340 men of two little wooden huts standing in the compound, each containing 9 seats in a row consisting merely of one long plank with holes cut in it, and a pail placed under each hole. In front of this stand four or five pails for urinary purposes. The pails are emptied once a day only, by a refuse contractor, although it often happens that they are full to the brim by midday, so that when they continue to be used, the narrow passage-way inside the hut, becomes a bog of mud and urine. In winter the snow drives in through the holes and cracks and half fills the huts. In summer when the sun beats down on the courtyard, the huts swarm with innumerable flies; these and the stench render even a short visit to the huts a veritable torture. The unhealthy living conditions give rise among many of the prisoners, to intestinal disturbances so that they suffer alternately from constipation from constipation and diarrhoea. From dusk (7.0 p.m. in summer and 4.30 p.m. in winter) till the following morning the prisoners are locked and bolted into the casemates. Anyone desiring to relieve himself must go to the window and call the guard and ask to be let out. There are only two guards for the 340 ordinary prisoners and not more than three men at a time are allowed to leave the casemate. Consequently one frequently has to wait for half an hour after summoning the guard till it comes to one's turn to be let out. There is in each casemate

casement a tin pail for urinary purposes during the period when the prisoners are shut in. On account of the lack of room this pail has nearly always to stand near the only table in the room which serves the other prisoners for the consumption and the preparation of their supper. If a prisoner therefore has a sudden call of nature it may actually happen that he may have to relieve himself in the immediate vicinity of his comrades plates. The pails are not even provided with close fitting tops but merely have loose covers laid on them. Also there are no means of disinfecting the contents and the pails remain for 12 or 15 hours in the casemates, that is in the living and sleeping rooms of 15 men till the following morning when the prisoners themselves are made to take them away and empty them.

6. The water supply also is in urgent need of improvement. As the fort is situated on a hill standing on a promontary in the middle of the Saint Lawrence it has no natural water supply. For washing baths and household purposes, water is pumped into a well in the courtyard by means of pumping works connected with the river. Out of this well the prisoners have themselves to draw water with the help of a bucket at the end of a rope about 4 metres

long, whenever the little hand pump is not working which happens three or four times every month for several days on end. Water for the kitchen and drinking purposes is brought from the town about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an hour away in water carts. When the weather is bad their arrival is delayed and sometimes the whole water cart or water sledge capsizes on the road where it is thick with snow, in which case a working gang of prisoners is brought from the Fort and have to upright the sledge again. Is it surprising that at times there is not even enough good drinking water in the kitchen for the preparation of coffee for breakfast so that the prisoners get nothing to drink till mid-day?

7. As regards the general position of the camp, the following observations may be made. As already mentioned Fort Henry is built on the summit of a hill at the extremity of a peninsular running out into the river. From outside, only the buildings occupied by the Canadian Garrison are visible, the camp itself lies in a deep depression so that it is invisible from outside and those within can see nothing. It consists of a rectangular courtyard with an area of about 110 by 50 metres. The facades of the casemates with their barred windows and doors form three sides of the square and the fourth side is closed by a wall 8 metres high. Leading from the lower to the upper courtyards of the Fort is a rather dark and narrow wooden staircase boarded in with planks. The storms coming up from the lake of Ontario and beating with unbroken violence on the Fort whirl with them in the Winter immense quantities of snow and in summer dense dust which fills the courtyard. Nowhere in the camp is it possible to draw a breath of
fresh

fresh air and recently the moat surrounding the casemates has been closely shut in with a thick wall of wooden boards. When it rains hard the whole courtyard becomes a bog, when the sun beats down on to it the heat and suffocating atmosphere in the courtyard become insufferable and the prisoners have to take refuge all day long in the casemates in order to find a little shade and coolness. To such conditions of life, if life it can be called, the prisoners are banned some of them since 18 months ago. Furthermore the air in this deep pit is fouled by the burning, for a few hours daily, of all the refuse in an open fire in the courtyard.

For a year and a half the prisoners have been boxed in this hole. During this time they have not seen a tree or a green blade, the clouds of heaven above them and the eight-metre grey wall around them are all that meet their gaze. On the wall above eight sentries continually patrol with loaded rifles which they load with ball cartridge before the eyes of the prisoners when they are relieved. Do not such conditions read like the old-time accounts of criminals being thrown into dungeons? This is the way in which Canada treats peaceable civilian prisoners. Is it any wonder that seven or eight men already have been taken from Fort Henry to a lunatic asylum and that probably many another will follow them to the same place? About one man in twenty of the prisoners may often be seen sitting motionless for hours on end and staring dimly in front of him or on the ground.

8. The camp hospital which is 6½ metres by 6 and is usually occupied by about eight men contains several other prisoners who are certainly candidates for death unless matters are changed. The so-called hospital is likewise
a casemate.

a comrade no better than the others, the men in hospital too are given no better clothes etc., than the rest of their comrades, for instance men suffering severely from chills or rheumatism have to borrow extra blankets from their well comrades and now prisoners in health are voluntarily suffering cold for the sake of the ill comrades.

A large number of the prisoners ~~are~~ suffering permanently from catarrh of the stomach and other chronic complaints rheumatism, tooth-ache etc. One's teeth decay unnaturally fast in the climate of Canada but only those who can pay can have their teeth stopped, for an ordinary cement stopping three dollars is charged and for a gold crown eighteen. These are the prices that are charged to the prisoners while the Canadian Government only advance them one dollar a month.

9. What sort of people are they who are thus confined in Fort Henry like desperate criminals? About half of them are seamen of German birth who without knowing anything about the war were taken from British or neutral ships when these touched at Canadian ports or entered Canadian waters. Besides these there are in the Fort a good dozen men who had been settled, some of them for many years, in the United States as independant business men, employess, artisans etc., some of whom had even taken out their preliminary papers of American naturalisation. These were forcibly dragged out of trains by the American authorities while travelling on business some even pulled at night-time out of their bunks ^{in the} and sleeping ^{compartments} carriages although they held through or return tickets to one of the large American towns, and could prove themselves to be peaceful

peaceful folk pursuing their own business. Others again were peaceful inhabitants of Canada who were without warning arrested and taken out of their restaurants in the middle of their dinner, or from their private houses, or the street, or the places where they were working and interned in some cases without learning the reason, and without being allowed themselves to send news to their families or employers.

*Without their
relatives being
informed*