

## Volume 2 Section 354-12

### Life as a Prisoner of War

## 10094 LCpl Herbert Lewin

### Introduction

Lance Corporal Robert Lewin [10094]  
1st battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment  
7 Ditton Road Datchet Bucks  
captured at Loos 28th September 1915  
wounded behind left knee

### Lille

#### Sept 28th to Oct 11th 1915

I am 23 years of age and was taken prisoner together with Sergeant Major Summers at Loos on the 25th September 1915. I was taken to Lille where my wound was merely painted with iodine. I was not allowed to write home from here.

### Journey

#### Oct 11th-13th 1915

On the 11th October I was sent off into Germany. The journey lasted 36 hours and during this time I was only given one meal at Dusseldorf. The meal consisted of bread and sausage. I was not molested in any way by the guards who were Red Cross men.

### Munster II

#### Oct 13th 1915 to Aug 8th 1916

en route I was taken to Munster II Westphalia where I arrived on the 13th October 1915. There were about 4000 prisoners in this camp. The sanitary arrangements were very bad; refuse lying about everywhere. The French and the Russians were treated far better by the guards than we British were. I was inoculated six times and vaccinated six times by a Russian doctor.

The Commandant was General von Steinneich who was very humane and did his best for the prisoners. He had fought in the 1870 war and had two sons prisoners in England and as he was satisfied with the way they were treated he tried to do his best for us. He was however subsequently transferred.

I slept on the floor with a paliasse and two blankets but once they were taken away for three days, apparently for no reason. There was one washhouse. Our employment consisted of looking after the 7th Army Corps Reserve Horse Depot. The Germans tried to force prisoners to work on munitions and also to work in convoys, but they refused and returned to the lager in a terrible

condition. The food consisted of coffee the first thing in the morning; dinner barley and potatoes and maize soup about 6 pm. We could buy sausage and condensed milk at the canteen; the milk was 1 mark per tin. Food arrived in good condition from England. The Germans did not supply us with any proper boots, only a pair of rags for the feet and no socks. We were allowed out of doors every morning for one hour's recreation. Smoking was allowed and was never stopped while I was at Munster. I was never in the camp hospital and heard nothing of any epidemics. Religious services were held by an English prisoner every Sunday. We were allowed to write four postcards and two letters a month. I received my parcels fairly regularly. They were opened in our presence by the German censor and nothing was taken from them except of course prohibited articles such as wines, spirits, matches, candles, newspapers and compasses which were all confiscated.

The general treatment at this camp was very rough. Complaints of cruelty were received from different men who would not go to the stables. They were taken out and sent to prison. I have seen many treated thus but did not know their names. As I have mentioned before the French and Russians were better treated than the British. No steps were taken to inform us of the regulations; we had to find them out for ourselves. There was however one notice proclaiming martial law which we could read. It was considered an offence to run down Germany and for so doing the punishment was three days imprisonment. Now I believe the punishment for this offence is six months' imprisonment. The American Ambassador and a representative of the American Embassy both visited Munster once. We were not allowed to speak to either of these representatives except in the presence of German officers. Special preparations were made for these visits - extra cleaning and better food - but nothing improved after. No improvement was made during my captivity as regards treatment of prisoners; in fact the cruelty got worse, particularly towards British prisoners.

### Hanenhorst

#### Aug 8th 1916 to Oct 19th 1917

On the 8th August 1916 I left Munster and was taken to Hanenhorst, the parent camp of which is Burgsteinfurt. This was a Prussian military discipline camp. There were 275 prisoners there when I arrived - French, Russian and British. There were 47 English prisoners who were kept apart from the French and Russians. There was no hospital here if we were ill and anyone

taken bad was sent to Burgsteinfurt. Unter-offizier Sanitater Dapier (I am not quite sure as to the spelling of this name) an ex-prisoner of war from Morocco acted as doctor. This medical officer would never admit that any of the prisoners were too ill to work unless they had a high temperature and I have seen many men who were really too ill made to work. He used to get men out of bed by hitting them with a bayonet. Originally the doctor had been an unter-offizier in the 7th Landsturm Corps. The only medical treatment received in the camp consisted of what could be done with asperin and paper bandages. No clothing was supplied, the Germans refusing to do so on the grounds that we received sufficient from England.

The commandant of this camp was Lieut-Feldwebel Daub, the second in command Unter-offizier Dapier and at one time there was another officer - Unter-offizier Maranker - but he was transferred afterwards to Minden. We slept in hammocks and were given a palliasse and two blankets each. We were 100 men in one barrack which was built into the ground, the roof only being above ground. The floor was of sand. This barrack was heated by one small oil stove which gave no warmth. Icicles hung from the walls and from the roof and when these thawed all the water ran onto the floor and onto the beds. We washed under two taps when the water was not frozen. There was a bathhouse. The sanitation was fairly good. We were employed making canals to drain the land and cutting down trees in order to clean the land for cultivation. The pay was 30 pfennigs a day and we worked 12 hours a day. Some prisoners were sent out to work apparently on the land but on arrival at their destination they were forced to make munitions or work in mines. The food consisted of coffee in the morning; midday soup made from cabbages and a few potatoes also ground down fish bones blood sausage or sauerkraut; about 6 pm maize soup more like water. There was a canteen but only matches and cigarettes could be purchased. Parcels arrived in excellent condition from England. Smoking was allowed and was never stopped for any reason. At one time the prisoners were allowed to play games but all sports when I arrived had been stopped because two of our men had got drunk. Dysentery broke out in this camp at the beginning of September 1917. Two prisoners died, a Frenchman and a Belgian also four sentries. We had no religious services. There was no camp hospital.

The postal arrangements were the same as at Munster. We bought our ink, paper and postcards from the canteen. Letters and parcels arrived as regularly as could be expected but when a big reprisal was made by the French, the French prisoners' parcels were stopped and also ours at the same time for a week. There was at one time a three weeks' stoppage of the parcels owing to the Burgsteinfurt camp being broken up. The parcels were opened by two Unter-Offiziers and in the presence of the addressee. I was the head of the British prisoners at the camp and in consequence all parcels for the British

were censored in front of me as well as the addressee. All tinned food was taken out of the parcels and distributed daily; the empty tins were all taken away and smashed up. Paper and cardboard were also confiscated.

The general treatment was very bad. I know of one case of cruelty. Private Mack of the Manchester Regiment was struck by a German officer one morning for running down Germany. The next morning when on parade the officer singled out Mack as not standing to attention (which I know was incorrect) and the Feldwebel stood him out in front of the remainder of the men. Later he was arrested and sent to prison and in the prison was set on by four guards with sticks and brooms. He complained to the Feldwebel but no notice was taken of his complaint. His left eye was all black and blue and he had a bayonet wound in his left side. It was a frequent occurrence to be struck in the back with rifles and made to stand at attention for 12 hours. The Feldwebel too was very cruel to the Russians. Unter-offizier Dapier and Unter-offizier Maranker were cruel to the British and French. The Russians were far better treated than the other prisoners except by Feldwebel Daub. No steps were taken to inform the prisoners of the regulations with the exception of a notice proclaiming German martial law. For running down Germany or not obeying orders the punishment generally was standing to attention for 12 hours or five days imprisonment. During imprisonment we were only given bread and water and soup once in five days. If a man complained he was sick and it was found that there was nothing wrong with him, he would be given five days cells and then made to work.

No Ambassador ever visited the camp. A few Russians and Frenchmen went insane, also a man named Storey of the Cameron Highlanders. I was never asked to assume German nationality. The treatment of prisoners is deteriorating and has been doing so every day since I was first captured.

The camp was guarded by by men over 45 years of age, wounded and unfit. I heard from some of the guards that there had been a bread riot in Hamburg and that some women and children had been killed.

I escaped on the 19th October 1917

### Opinion of Examiner

The witness seems very intelligent and is sensibly impressed as to the bad economic and social conditions prevailing in Germany

November 22nd 1917

F LINSLEY SUTTON

