

## Volume 3 Section 354-20

### Life as a Prisoner of War

## 9997 LCpl Isaac Adams

### Introduction

Isaac Adams enlisted 18/8/1913 as a regular with number 9997. He went to France 17/12/1914 and was reported missing in the Reading Mercury of 6/11/1915. He was confirmed as a POW in the Reading Mercury of 4/3/1916 and later reported in the Reading Standard of 15/6/1918 as being interned in Holland.

Adams is mentioned in the report of 111227 Pte Hicks of the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Mounted Rifles. They were at the Augusta Victoria Mine together. Hicks was there from August 8<sup>th</sup> 1916 to 5<sup>th</sup> March 1918. The account is recorded in WO161/100 page 2789 to 2791.

After the war Adams returned to his Regiment and obtained Army number 5328345

### The Augusta Victoria Mine

Hicks' account gives an excellent description of the Augusta Victoria mine. He was sent there from the camp at Dülmen on August 8<sup>th</sup> 1916. The mine was described as being close to the station at Sinson, about 20 km from Dülmen. His account reads:-

Augusta Victoria mine in no 47 working camp of Münster II. On our arrival we were put in a barrack with all the British prisoners of whom there were about 150. The men who were already there told us that when they first came they had refused to work in the mines but they had been so ill-treated and beaten that they had had to give in. Our party of 20 Canadians made up their minds to refuse to go below; but the interpreter, Private Young of the Scots Guards, who accompanied us, undertook to do what he could, promised to lodge our protest, so we agreed to go down for one shift only. I went down the mine with the night shift on the first evening after we arrived.

There were about 600 prisoners working at Augusta Victoria mine in August 1916 when I first went there - 300 Frenchmen, 150 British and about 150 Russians. Each nationality had a barrack. Our barrack was close to the shaft and was a long narrow building fitted with two tiers of bunks. We tried to keep the place fairly clean but it was infested with fleas. At first each man was given two blankets but in the Autumn of 1917 one of these blankets was withdrawn. The latrines were very bad and smelt horribly. The facilities for washing were provided at the pit mouth and were the same as those used by the civilian miners. The food was no better than

at Dülmen and until we got our parcels we suffered great hardship. No food could be bought at the canteen. Parcels began to arrive in October but we did not get them regularly before November 1916.

The first night that we began work a man was killed in the mine - Private Flanagan, and on the day following his death about 50 British prisoners - the 20 men who came with me and some 30 others, refused to work in the mine or to go in the yard. I believe that Private Flanagan's death was accidental but I do not know the cause. We were driven out of the barrack by the guard and made to stand at attention for 24 hours without food. Many of the men fainted and fell down and at last we had to give in and went to work. The following day the Spanish Ambassador's representative visited the mine, to whom we appealed and he promised to take up the matter and to do what he could to make things better for us. After that we had to settle down to work.

I had to stand at the bottom of the shaft to help send up the coal, unloading it from trucks. The British prisoners were very badly treated in the mine. The foreman used to kick them and beat them with sticks and pieces of rubber hose. I was frequently kicked and cuffed but the foreman never beat me. The civilians and the prisoners worked together. Our pay was four marks a week. On Saturdays there was a double shift. We never went underground on Sundays. Each shift was for eight hours. As soon as we received our parcels we took our food down with us, but before the parcels arrived we had to go through the eight hours' shift without food.

The punishments were frequent and if the men worked badly they were sent to shovel coal in the coal ovens. This was the principal and in fact almost the only form of punishment, but it was most severe and accompanied often by kicks and blows. The treatment of the prisoners got worse in March 1917 and there was no improvement up to the time that I escaped. The foreman and the guards tried to get more and more work out of the prisoners and they were given longer and more frequent spells at the coke ovens as it was necessary to increase the output of the mines. Prisoners had to work at the coke ovens on alternate Sundays in addition to the work done during the week.

When the Dutch Minister's representative visited Augusta Victoria in August 1917 we complained bitterly to him of the amount of work we were forced to do and also of the hardship of having to work at the coke ovens. We also complained of the latrines which were in a most

insanitary state; of the want of fuel; that our parcels had been broken open and of the great discomfort which we suffered through the barrack being over-crowded. We asked him to try to arrange that the men employed on night shift should not sleep in the same barrack as those working on the day shift for our nights were always much disturbed owing to prisoners returning from their work when others were in bed and of our deprivation of sleep in consequence.

Some of the prisoners who had tried to escape were made to work almost continuously at the coke ovens. Also others who had got into trouble with the guards and this punishment was most severe. I can mention the names of the following on whom this very trying form of punishment is imposed viz Private J N Nicholson 4th CMR, Private M Johnson, 4th CMR and Private Baker 1st CMR and who I believe are still working continuously in the coke ovens.