

## Volume 2 Section 351

# Prisoners of War

### Royal Berkshiremen

*In this section we record some of the incidents in which a large number of Royal Berkshiremen were taken prisoner as a result of losses in a battle. Many more were captured by patrols who set out from both sides to gather prisoners and intelligence.*

#### Royal Berkshiremen taken Prisoner

Individual reports of Berkshiremen taken prisoner were rare. The amount of information that they were able to include in messages home meant that little more than their name and number was recorded in the official lists exchanged through the Red Cross in Holland.

It was not until January 1916 that the first lists of POWs began to appear in the papers. Many of the men had been reported missing and a good number as killed so the news of their captivity came as a great relief to their relatives. In the list which forms section 500 we include those of the Royal Berkshires who names were reported. It is by no means complete as from the 8th Battalion alone 461 men and 13 officers were eventually listed as POWs.

#### Deaths in Captivity

A number of Berkshiremen died in captivity, but as most of the men of the Kitchener battalions were captured after the intervention of the Red Cross and the establishment of the parcel system, not so high a proportion of them succumbed as for those captured in the early months of the war. For example of the 474 men from the 8th who were captured, only 11 died in captivity. Among the 11 were Pte JS Freeman of Wallingford and Pte WE Millson [10543] of Pangbourne who died of dysentery 29/5/18. (B&W 4/894)

#### Slave Labour

Many Other Ranks were put to work by the Germans to replace men who had been called to serve in the German Army. The treatment they received varied enormously. For example men who were forced into the German mining industry suffered appallingly, especially those who were sent to the salt mines.

Frank Bates of Reading was lucky. He was put to work on a farm in Germany and was treated well. Many of the other prisoners who ended up on farms were just as lucky. On the whole they had good accommodation

although often just a barn to sleep in and generally food was plentiful in the rural areas, in sharp contrast to the towns where the German civilians suffered terribly from the consequences of the Allied blockade.

#### POW Camps

Most prisoners however were held in Prisoner of War Camps in Germany or Austria. Others were held by the Bulgarians. Thankfully no Royal Berkshireman was held by the Turks

There were three quite different types of camp:-

- Reception or holding camps to which men were taken shortly after capture. Here they were interrogated and classified.
- Main Camps - usually well within the country whose troops had effected the capture
- Internment Camps - mostly in Holland and Switzerland where men were paroled not to engage in further hostilities

The Camps varied enormously, depending to a large extent upon the Commandant and the regime he established.

The Germans went to extraordinary lengths sometimes to use them to counter the tales of mistreatment that were abounding. Men were made to smarten themselves and then had their photograph taken looking well and contented either singly or in groups. These photos were then made into postcards which were mailed back to families in England. Many of these were published in the Reading newspapers and collected together after the war in *Berkshire and the War*.

The Camps were inspected by both the Red Cross and, in the earlier years, by the American Ambassador while the USA was still neutral. Generally conditions were reported as having improved after such visits.

A Committee was established to enquire about the treatment of prisoners and when a man was released or escaped he was questioned and a report filed. These reports are described in more detail in section 355. A number of themes emerge.

- First for most of the war, but especially towards the end, the Germans were suffering extreme shortages of almost everything. The civilians especially were often starving and many of the guards were very envious of what seemed to them better treatment for prisoners than their own families were receiving. Prisoners were supplied with parcels from the Red Cross and from home and were fed on the same rations, although usually smaller quantities, as the German troops were provided with. By British standards this was pretty poor fare but the extras enjoyed by the British prisoners were often the trigger for brutality or looting, but more often provided the opportunity for the guards to purchase things from the prisoners to send home to their families.
- Second the Germans did not seem to set much store by good sanitation. Water supplies were limited and there was usually no soap or proper means of washing. This applied to both the prisoners and their own troops. The result was outbreaks of dysentery and other sicknesses which probably had a more serious effect upon the Germans than upon the prisoners.
- Finally there seemed to little evidence that German medical facilities for prisoners were inferior to that provided for their own troops and civilians. Many German doctors went out of their way to provide the best care they could, despite the shortage of medicines and surgical supplies, One prisoner reported that German bandages were just strips of tissue paper. In the hospitals, captured RAMC men were often used to treat both Germans and British without favour.

## The Individual Camps

It is not possible to list all the camps that housed men from the Royal Berkshire Regiment but the following comments come from interrogation and newspaper reports - see section 354..'

### **Altdam**

reported by Pte Cousins

### **Antoing**

One of the camps near Tournai where Sgt Page worked

### **Augustabad**

The best of the prisons in which Major Turner was confined.

### **Burge**

A temporary camp for Major Turner

### **Dulmen**

Where Sgt Page spent a few months

### **Fort Macdonald**

This was a holding camp on the outskirts of Lille. Cpl Fulton described conditions as 'bad in every way' British prisoners were confined to cells whereas the Italians were generally free to roam. Pte Waters was also there.

### **Friedrichshall**

A labour camp for a salt mine where Pte Stanley worked.

### **Guterslohe**

Cpl Fulton was in one camp there and referred to an officers camp nearby.

### **Halle**

The worst of the five prisons for Major Turner.

### **Hesepe**

described by Lt Langston as not too bad

### **Holzmunten**

A camp near Hanover - used by Major Turner

### **Le Quesnoy**

A holding camp north of Cambrai - Where Sgt Page was first taken.

### **Linden**

near Hanover where Pte Stanley was confined

### **Munster - Westphalia**

Cpl Fulton reported it was not too bad although the food was insufficient.

### **Rastatt - Baden**

described by Lt Langston as very bad with the officers treated like dogs

### **Schneidemuhl - Posen**

The main camp where Pte Cousins was confined.

### **Soltau**

There were two camps here separated by a road

### **Sud Edewecht Moor**

A labour camp described by Cpl Fulton

### **Torgau near Dresden**

See Major Turners account

### Tournai

In Belgium - Sgt Page was here on working parties. There were several smaller camps in the area where they stayed while on particular jobs.

### Wittenburg

The home of Sgt Denham before he was repatriated.

## The Captures

It is impossible to document all the occasions when men were captured. The following table lists the occasions reported in Petre when men (other ranks) were captured in battle. The captured were among the missing who also included men whose death could not be accounted for at the time

Date	Bat	K	W	M	location
25-8-14	1	2	35	22	Maroilles
10-3-15	2	75	220	17	Neuve Chapelle
8-5-15	2	52	185	39	Bac St Maur
15-5-15	1	49	290	75	Cuinchy
23-8-15	2	124	201	60	Le Bridoux
28-9-15	1	17	115	143	Fosse 8
15-5-16	1/4	18	51	29	Hebuterne
1-7-16	2	73	251	93	Ovillers
28-7-16	1	37	182	37	Delville Wood
15-8-16	1/4	28	81	31	Avenue trench
27-8-16	1/4	9	48	32	
23-10-16	2	50	143	10	Zenith trench
17-2-17	1	10	83	1	Boom Ravine
4-3-17	2	63	170	16	Pallas trench
5-4-17	1/4	7	39	2	Ronnasay
29-4-17	1	15	89	47	Oppy
1-8-17	2	26	107	15	Glencourse Wood
16-8-17	2	24	223	120	Zonnebeke
17-8-17	1/4	34	133	5	St Julien
30-11-17	1	12	25	21	Bourlon Wood
2-12-17	2	35	83	33	Passchendaele
27-3-18	1	19	83	62	Martinsart
25-4-18	2	66	183	8	Villers Bret.
27-5-18	2	2	51	653	Ville au Bois
24-8-18	1	24	196	7	Ervillers
27-8-18	1/4	1	72	4	Asiego
29-8-18	2	7	26	8	Bailleul
23-9-18	2	8	31	5	Hollow Copse
8-10-18	1	16	86	12	Nine Wood
16-10-18	1	10	66	7	Bermerain

## 1914

In the retreat from Mons many men who were injured ha

to be left behind and several were captured during the skirmishes as the BEF tried to stem the German advance. By the time the line had stabilised after the battles of the Marne the majority of prisoners taken were on patrol or were caught by raiding German parties

## 1915

## 1916

## 1917

## 1918

It was during the German Spring Offensive of March 1918 that the vast majority of the prisoners were taken



