

Volume 2 Section 358

Prisoners of War

Enemy POW Camps

Introduction

This section is about the several prisoner of war camps which are known to have held a member of the Royal Berkshire Regiment. There were a very large number of camps in Germany, Austria, Bulgaria and Turkey where British POWs were held but it is not really feasible to try to include all of them.

POW Camps

Most prisoners 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

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

Dulmen

Where Sgt Page spent a few months

Schneidemuhl - Posen

The main camp where Pte Cousins was confined.

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.

Schwelm**Soltau**

There were two camps here separated by a road

Friedrichshall

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

Sud Edeweicht Moor

A labour camp described by Cpl Fulton

Gottinghem**Torgau near Dresden**

See Major Turners account

Guterslohe

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

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.

Halle

The worst of the five prisons for Major Turner.

Wittenburg

The home of Sgt Denham before he was repatriated.

Hesepe

described by Lt Langston as not too bad

Holzmuenden

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

Manheim**Munster - Westphalia**

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

Nurnberg**Pattersbach****Rastatt - Baden**