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**THE ENEMY DISARMED**  
**PRISONERS OF WAR AND THE VIOLENCE OF**  
**WARTIME: BRITAIN, FRANCE AND GERMANY,**  
**1914-1920.**

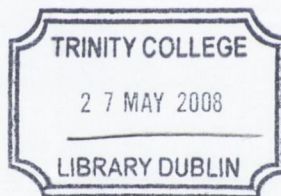


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THIS DISSERTATION IS SUBMITTED TO THE  
UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN, TRINITY COLLEGE,  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DUBLIN, DECEMBER 2005

**VOLUME 2**



*THESIS*

*8561.2*



## INTRODUCTION TO SECTION THREE: MEMORY

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By November 1918, there had been radical changes in how the prisoner of war was represented and how prisoners of war were treated. Violence against prisoners had evolved during the conflict to reach a point, in 1918, where it had become a significant military *problem*: it had reached irrational levels in the German army and was spiralling out of control. Violent practices against prisoners had now come full circle, to pose a threat to the captor army as well as to the captives. Labour was vital to armies by 1918 – the radicalisation of violent practices against prisoner workers in the German army was counter-productive and inefficient. The primary function of an army is to control the implementation of violence. By 1918, this control over violent practice was breaking down in the German army in relation to prisoners of war.

Given this scenario there was no longer any meaningful attempt to refer to pre-war international law, which had accorded the prisoner of war legal protections and cultural non-combatant status. The only laws which still retained any validity were the agreements made between belligerents on the basis of reciprocity at The Hague and Berne in 1917 and 1918. However, these were far from satisfactory. Parts of these agreements had still not been implemented by the end of the war, and those aspects which had come into force – such as the thirty kilometre rule – had not been uniformly kept.

This is not to say that prisoners everywhere experienced the same *level* of violence by 1918. It is very important to emphasise that the situation that evolved on the western front was always more extreme than the similar processes of radicalisation towards prisoners occurring in home front camps in Germany, France and Britain, as the previous section has shown. But, between 1917 and the Armistice the limits and boundaries that demarcated areas where prisoners were well-treated came under increasing strain.

This was the situation when the ceasefire came into force on 11 November 1918. Yet the radicalisation process operating in relation to violence against prisoners of war did not cease with the silencing of the guns. Rather it entered a new phase – one in which radical



representations of violence against prisoners again dominated. The ensuing period between November 1918 and the return of the last German prisoners of war from France in spring 1920 was enormously complex. It was during this phase that the representation of violence against prisoners interacted with the fraught question of how prisoners were to be remembered. It was in 1919-1920 that the key initial post-war *memory* of the prisoner of war experience was formed. The impressions which populations and governments gained of prisoners of war between 11 November 1918 and spring 1920 fixed the way the wartime treatment of prisoners was initially remembered. These immediate first post-war impressions were radical and extreme, as the opening chapter of section three will show. It will examine this phase in detail to show how an initial popular memory of prisoner of war treatment developed.

However, as the post-war period continued, remembering wartime violence became hugely problematic. Different strategies were adopted which channelled the memory of the war away from remembering violence itself and towards remembering the consequences of that violence – the war dead, the destroyed landscape, and in the German case, the lost territories. The initial radicalisation of post-war memory, which emphasised violent prisoner treatment during the war, was suppressed in Britain, France and Germany during the later interwar period. How this transition from radicalisation of memory to suppression occurred will be explored in the following section.

Memory added a new dimension to the representation of prisoners. Only once the war ended could countries begin to interpret how their prisoners had been treated in a collective historical sense. Questions arose which had not been relevant while the war continued, such as how the treatment of prisoners of war should be historicized. Ultimately, as the following section shows, interwar societies were unable to construct a historical narrative of the war that included the prisoner experience. Remembering the prisoner of war raised the problem of how to deal with the memory of violence against prisoners. This in turn raised the question of who were the *perpetrators* of that violence. In an interwar Europe that lionized ex-servicemen, few were comfortable facing that question.



CHAPTER SIX**CONTESTED HOMECOMINGS: PRISONER REPATRIATION AND THE  
FORMATION OF MEMORY, 1918-1921.**

**Fig. 17.** Bocherie. Le prisonnier: “Ils ont été bien gentils: quelle cochonnerie vais-je leur faire avant de m’en aller?” 22 June 1919. Drawing by the French artist Hermann-Paul (Hermann Paul René Georges, 1864-1940).<sup>1056</sup>

<sup>1056</sup> BDIC, Les Invalides, Or F2425 (F) “Hun behaviour. The prisoner: They have been really kind: what filthy trick can I play on them before I go? 22 June 1919.”



It is completely natural that the tombs of your compatriots, as those of all the Allied soldiers, should receive the same consideration as our own. Although fate wished it that these comrades should rest in foreign soil, they will find fraternal hands to decorate their sanctuary and piously remember them. Our only wish is that, as a mark of thanks and recognition, those of our own whom we had to leave behind us should also receive from their Allied comrades this mark of friendship.

Extract from a letter sent to the French Consul in Nuremburg by the Association of Ex-Prisoners of War, Nuremburg Branch (*Vereinigung ehemaliger Kriegsgefangener, Ortsgruppe Nuremberg*), explaining why they had laid wreaths on the tombs of French prisoners of war, 29.11.1921.<sup>1057</sup>

### Introduction

Just days before the signing of the Versailles Treaty, the French artist Hermann-Paul, a well-established illustrator whose work appeared in leading journals such as *Le Figaro*, *Le Rire* and *Les droits de l'Homme*, drew the striking depiction of a German prisoner of war which opens this chapter. Hermann-Paul portrayed the prisoner as evil and malevolent, a preying figure lurking in the background to destroy French happiness as symbolised by the French mother and her daughter. The title of the picture, “*Bocherie*,” draws upon the derogatory name for the Germans, “*Boche*,” and is an obvious pun on the French word “*Boucherie*” or butchery. The prisoner also represents a clear sexual threat – the French male is absent from this scene, where French womanhood is at the mercy of the dangerous German usurper. The word “*cochonnerie*” with its plural meanings of dirty trick, obscenity or smut, is deeply ambiguous. Clearly, for Hermann-Paul, the German prisoner remained an inherently dangerous figure even eight months after the fighting had ceased. Hermann-Paul’s depiction of the imagined dangers of German prisoner repatriation in 1919 and the reality which ensued of former German prisoners chivalrously laying wreaths on the graves of their French counterparts two years later neatly exemplify the gap between French and German understandings on the repatriation issue.

Hermann-Paul’s picture directly implies that any kindness shown to German prisoners would only be repaid with evil and rebound to harm France. It highlights the French view

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<sup>1057</sup> MAE, Série Z, Europe Allemagne 1918-1929, no. 187, f. 135, 29.11.1921.



that German prisoners of war were perpetrators, not victims and, as such, deserved no compassion. Most importantly, it reveals the mood in France during the key year following the Armistice, when the initial ‘memory’ of prisoner of war treatment was formed across Europe. This chapter focuses upon this period to illustrate how the first post-war impressions of prisoner treatment were formed in Britain, France and Germany. The purpose is to illustrate how the question of violence against prisoners during the war made the transition into peacetime society, re-emerging in the form of bitter clashes over prisoners of war between 1918 and 1921. These clashes frequently revolved around the question of how to remember prisoners.

How violence against prisoners was initially remembered following the Armistice played a fundamental role in stoking European divisions. In France and Britain, as in Germany, public opinion mobilized around particularly radical understandings of how their prisoners of war had been mistreated – understandings which provided a legitimate platform for societies to express extreme and pent-up feelings of grievance towards the enemy. This process attributed new values to the violence of the war in all three countries, justifying it in retrospect on the basis of the revelations of late 1918 and 1919 regarding prisoner mistreatment. A corollary of this process was that by 1919 the figure of the prisoner was entirely dissociated, for his compatriots, from his previous role as combatant and perpetrator of wartime violence. Between November 1918 and the Leipzig trials, the prisoner of war became a symbol of innocence and of suffering.

At first glance it seems extraordinary that Hermann-Paul could display such hatred towards prisoners of war on the eve of a peace treaty. Yet, Hermann-Paul’s picture accurately illustrates the 1919 climate in France. In spring 1919, France held 392,425 German prisoners. A further 320,000 German prisoners were in British captivity.<sup>1058</sup> For France, German prisoners represented security, ensuring German compliance with French demands. They also represented a sizeable army of military men to whom Germany had no access. As early as April 1918, the French believed that Germany wanted its prisoners

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<sup>1058</sup> SHAT, 16 N 525, Number of German prisoners in France on 1.2.1919; TNA, WO 394 and War Office, *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War, 1914-1920* (London, 1922).



back “because she wishes to get back military instructors of which she has need.”<sup>1059</sup> This mentality continued to govern French perceptions after the Armistice. An emasculated France, which had lost so many men in the war, would be more vulnerable once German prisoners returned home. The repatriation of these prisoners was, as Hermann-Paul illustrated, a lurking issue that threatened French happiness.

In addition, Britain and France regarded German prisoners as a bargaining tool and saw their labour as a form of living war reparation. Thus, according to Article Ten of the Armistice Treaty, Germany was obliged to release all Allied prisoners immediately whereas the release date of German prisoners in Allied hands remained indefinite. Initially, the German negotiators viewed this as a temporary stay on German prisoner repatriation which would be remedied as soon as all Allied prisoners reached home. The French viewed the situation rather differently. Immediately following the Armistice, the French army immediately enlarged its prisoner of war labour company system, sending German prisoners of war from all across the country to reconstruct the war damaged regions in the North. This had the added advantage of removing prisoners from jobs to which demobilized French soldiers were returning. For France, this use of German prisoners on reconstruction work - and Germany’s reaction to it – represented a test of how much the new German regime really wished to atone for the deeds of its wartime predecessor. This cultural understanding framed the initial French retributive narrative on the repatriation of German prisoners of war.

However, the Allies’ continued refusal to repatriate German prisoners was also profoundly influenced by their first post-war impressions of how Germany had treated its own captives.<sup>1060</sup> The debates about prisoner repatriation concerned far more than merely bringing prisoners of war home. They were also fundamentally about how prisoners had been treated during the war as the former belligerents built their initial demobilization identities, each invoking an ideal of justice. The Allies based their right to delay the repatriation of German prisoners upon what they claimed was their morally superior

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<sup>1059</sup> SHAT, 6 N 114, no. 12, H.O., A.S. échange des prisonniers français et allemand, 30.4.1918.

<sup>1060</sup> Although strictly speaking the term Allies refers to all the Allied and Associated Powers involved in the war against the Central Powers, it is used in this chapter to refer to the British and French only.



prisoner treatment during the conflict. In a note on 10 May 1919, they refused a German request that German prisoners of war be released on the grounds that “no comparison is possible between the treatment of prisoners of war by the German government and that of the Allied and Associated powers.”<sup>1061</sup> The Allies’ own experience of prisoner repatriation in November-January 1919 led them to conclude that Germany had mistreated prisoners and deserved to be punished. How this understanding emerged will now be explored.

### **Creating Post-War Memory Narratives: the British and French View**

Two important developments in late 1918 fuelled the British and French belief in their superior treatment of prisoners. First, as the war concluded in November 1918 a range of Allied wartime eschatological fears regarding their prisoners in Germany appeared to be coming true. The superimposition of the Allies’ *expectations* of the state in which they would find their men in German hands at the end of the war on the real events of 1918-1919 led to several misinterpretations of what was actually happening in Germany. Second, the repatriation of Allied prisoners from Germany occurred in a situation of unprecedented chaos. This strongly influenced prisoners’ memories of their captivity.

To turn first to the Allies’ eschatological fears in 1918: Annette Becker and Stéphane Audoin Rouzeau have highlighted the importance of an eschatological framework during the war which saw the conflict in terms of God’s judgement upon the world. This framework relied heavily upon certain expectations of an improved, purified or even utopian post-war world which peace would bring.<sup>1062</sup> As important, however, as such eschatological hopes, built around the idea of peace, were the concomitant eschatological fears associated with the war ending. One such expectation was that the enemy would suffer apocalyptic collapse. Neither governments nor populations were sure how prisoners of war would emerge from any total defeat.

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<sup>1061</sup> Wilhelm Doegen, *Kriegsgefangene Völker*, vol. 1, *Der Kriegsgefangenen Schicksal und Haltung in Deutschland*, bearbeitet in Verbindung mit Theodor Kappstein und herausgegeben im Amtliche Auftrage des Reichswehrministeriums (Berlin, 1921), p. 1.

<sup>1062</sup> Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14-18, Retrouver la Guerre* (Paris, 2000), p. 182.



There were several recurring Allied expectations regarding the end of the war. First, there was anxiety that Allied prisoners in Germany and the occupied territories would starve to death. There was a widespread fear that peace would reveal that large numbers of Allied prisoners had died during their captivity. Second, there was a popular belief that large numbers of men reported as missing in action would turn out to have been held incommunicado in secret German prisons. One letter writer to the *Times* suggested that such secret British prisoners were working in hidden German mines.<sup>1063</sup> This belief was also very prevalent in France where many families clung to the hope that their missing relative would surface as an unreported prisoner in Germany.<sup>1064</sup> Baron d'Anthouard of the French Red Cross blamed this irrational belief on the events of 1914 where many French and British soldiers cut off by the German advance had gone into hiding in the occupied territories.<sup>1065</sup> In fact, this belief is likely to have a more obvious and rational origin - the large numbers of prisoners held by Germany whose names had not been passed on to France and Britain.

Third, the French feared that many Allied prisoners would be infected with potentially lethal diseases with which they could infect the French home population.<sup>1066</sup> Fourth, the British feared that the German population in revolution would storm the prison camps to pillage parcels, spread bolshevism and massacre the prisoners. As Robert Wallace, an Emeritus Professor at the University of Edinburgh, wrote to Woodrow Wilson in 1916, a frustrated Germany might "at whatever cost of blood and treasure [...] murder all the British prisoners in their hands."<sup>1067</sup> In sum, the Allies' expectations were that prisoner repatriation could prove a very disappointing and upsetting experience.

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<sup>1063</sup> *Times*, 27.12.1918, Letters to the Editor, p. 7.

<sup>1064</sup> One French widow's hope that her missing husband is a prisoner forms the basis of the Bernard Tavernier film "La Vie et Rien d'Autre" [1989].

<sup>1065</sup> A. d'Anthouard, *Les Prisonniers de Guerre Français en Allemagne, leur ravitaillement depuis l'Armistice, leur rapatriement, les réparations qui leur sont dues* (Paris, 1919), pp. 4-5.

<sup>1066</sup> Dr de Christmas, *Le traitement des prisonniers français en Allemagne d'après l'interrogatoire des prisonniers ramenés d'Allemagne en Suisse* (Paris, 1917), pp. 1-7.

<sup>1067</sup> Robert Wallace, *Letters to Woodrow Wilson* (London, 1931), p. 11.



These expectations provided the template for how the Allies interpreted events in November and December 1918. Of the four main imagined ‘expectations’ the Allies had about the repatriation of their prisoners held by Germany, many appeared in November 1918 to be coming true. The appalling condition of the British and French prisoners liberated in Northern France and Belgium, outlined in the previous chapter, proved that the fears of prisoners starving were justified. The *Times* concluded on 27 November on the basis of the liberation of the occupied territories that “the shortage of food in Germany in recent months has been much worse than we could have imagined, but this said, it is clear that British prisoners have suffered more than the rest of the population.”<sup>1068</sup> The influenza epidemic which spread throughout the German prison camps in two successive waves in July and in November 1918 appeared to confirm the French fear that prisoners might carry infectious diseases – from July 1918 all ceremonies of welcome in Lyons for French prisoners repatriated from Germany and Switzerland were stopped due to the fear that the prisoners might spread the disease.<sup>1069</sup> The German revolution with its similar appearance to what had occurred in Russia the previous year led the British to believe their fears about the bolshevization and murder of their prisoners were also being realised. Following the Armistice, there was an immediate breakdown of discipline in German prison camps, which led to prisoner shootings by guards trying to restore order at Langensalza, Stralsund and Mannheim. The Allies quickly interpreted this in the light of their existing expectations: the massacre of their prisoners was imminent.

The deterioration in prisoner of war living standards in Germany in the second half of 1918 further fed British and French premonitions of disaster. As the previous chapter showed, there is evidence that conditions in officer prisoner of war camps remained relatively good in 1918 and that generally conditions in other rank camps within Germany were better during the first half of 1918 than those in the German-occupied

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<sup>1068</sup> Annette Becker, “Le retour des prisonniers,” *Cahiers de la Paix (finir la guerre)*, 7 (Verdun, 2000) p. 69.

<sup>1069</sup> Bruno Fouillet, “La ville de Lyon au centre des échanges de prisonniers de guerre (1915-1919),” *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d’Histoire*, 86 (avril-juin 2005), pp. 25-42, p.37. On the two waves of influenza in German prisoner of war camps see: August Gärtner, “Einrichtung und Hygiene der Kriegsgefangenenlager” in Professor Dr Otto von Schjerning, ed., *Handbuch der Ärztlichen Erfahrungen im Weltkriege 1914/18*, vol. 7 (Leipzig, 1922), p. 254.



territories of France and Belgium. There were three main reasons why conditions for other rank prisoners *in Germany* deteriorated in the second half of 1918, all of which the British and French interpreted as German violence against captives. First, the system of parcel delivery to camps began to break down. However, this occurred remarkably late in the year given the food shortages which German civilians were enduring and only affected other rank prisoners. Captive officers were continually able to buy food on the black market. The worst breakdown in parcel deliveries resulted from the onset of the German revolution – something which was beyond the control of the German government or military. Second, the influenza epidemic brought about a massive increase in prisoner deaths, which the Allies interpreted as due to direct German mistreatment. Third, with the outbreak of revolution all discipline in prisoner of war camps collapsed as guards left, leaving prisoners to fend for themselves. The British and French repatriation efforts were unable to respond adequately to this chaos. These developments were understood in terms of German violence against helpless captives. They encouraged existing British and French beliefs that Germany had mistreated its prisoners, and created a strong post-war Allied sense of grievance.

These Allied interpretations were based on a mixture of exaggeration, rumour and reality. This becomes clear from a case study of one predominant Allied post-Armistice belief – that British and French prisoners in Germany starved in 1918. The enormous number of geographically, culturally and economically diverse prisoner of war camps and work *Kommandos* in Germany, containing 2.4 million prisoners of war in 1918, are impossible to assess definitively here.<sup>1070</sup> However, although conditions in mines, quarries and industry were bad, and there were some reports of malnourishment among overworked prisoners in these areas, a study of the parcel system in 1918 reveals that there were not mass British and French deaths from hunger. Other prisoner nationalities, and some German civilians, starved to death; the British and French largely continued to receive

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<sup>1070</sup> Figure of 2.4 million prisoners is taken from Uta Hinz, “Kriegsgefangene,” in Gerhard Hirschfeld, Gerd Krumeich and Irina Renz, eds, *Enzyklopädie Erster Weltkrieg* (Paderborn, Munich, Vienna, Zurich, 2003), pp. 641-646.



parcels.<sup>1071</sup> Kai Rawe estimates that parcels raised the daily ration of prisoners working in mines in the Ruhr by between 950 and 1,200 calories.<sup>1072</sup>

After the Armistice, the British and French governments blamed Germany for not feeding its captives adequately. The Entente pointed out that it had facilitated food from outside Germany being sent to prisoners. The British and French governments were aware of the danger that if large numbers of French and British prisoners starved Allied public opinion might rebound against their leaders and blame the blockade. This was one motivation behind the French paying for collective bread to be sent to German camps from Copenhagen and Berne. The French government also funded collective deliveries of biscuits from abroad to French prisoners. Resentful of this expense, the Allies accused Germany of failing to meet its obligations to feed prisoners under international law. Starvation became the initial prisoner 'memory' in Britain and France.

How justified was this accusation? From 1915, the German military began deliberately to rely on the parcel system to feed its British and French prisoner labourers. Parcels saved Germany food and enabled prisoners to work better for the German war effort. The German administration had recognised early in the war that feeding the prisoners of war presented an enormous challenge and prisoners' food was seen as an area where the Reich needed to keep a tight reign on resources. Prisoner rations were continually reduced during 1915 and 1916. In June 1915, General von Friedrich, head of the *Unterkunft* Department at the Prussian *Kriegsministerium* responsible for prisoner affairs, organised a conference for all prison camp food officers in the Reich on how to feed prisoners as thriftily as possible.<sup>1073</sup> In April 1916, the *Reichsstelle für die Versorgung mit Vieh and Fleisch* advised the Prussian *Kriegsministerium* that the meat rations for prisoners be reduced to 250 grams of meat weekly for working prisoners, and 200 grams

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<sup>1071</sup> ACICR, 432/II/26,2, Bd, c.44. Exposé de la situation des prisonniers de guerre russes telle qu'elle est comme par l'enquête préliminaire faite en décembre à Berlin par le délégation du comité internationale de la Croix-Rouge.

<sup>1072</sup> Kai Rawe, 'wir werden sie schon zur Arbeit bringen!' *Ausländerbeschäftigung und Zwangsarbeit im Ruhrkohlenbergbau während des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Essen, 2005), pp. 105-106.

<sup>1073</sup> Kriegsministerium, *Die Ernährung der Kriegsgefangenen im Deutschen Reiche. Bericht über den Kursus für Verpflegungsoffiziere der Gefangenenlager vom 22. bis 25. Juni 1915 in Berlin*. Im Auftrage des Kriegsministeriums erstattet von Prof. Dr Backhaus, Oberleutnant d.L.a.D. (Berlin, 1915).

for non-workers, in addition to a standard weekly ration of 200 grams of sausage for both groups, as the civilian ration had already been reduced and “it was not evident why the prisoners should receive such better meat rations than the civilian population.”<sup>1074</sup> A similar order that prisoners were not to be better fed than civilians was issued by the *Stellvertretendes Generalkommando* VII in March 1916.<sup>1075</sup> This was a breach of the Hague Convention which stipulated that prisoners be fed the same amount as the captor nation’s soldiers – not its civilians. The meat situation continued to deteriorate. By August 1918 prisoner miners in the Ruhr received a meat ration of 200 grams and 175 grams of sausage per week.<sup>1076</sup>

In 1917 the parcel system was crucial to prisoners’ survival. Spanish delegations who inspected camps attested to its importance.<sup>1077</sup> During an inspection of French prisoners at the Deutsche Holzplattenfabrik at Rehfelde, in June 1917, the prisoners told the Spanish delegate that they received 280 grams of bread per day and were surviving “solely thanks to the parcels that they received.”<sup>1078</sup> Spanish inspectors found that in some *Kommandos* prisoners were not receiving regular parcels or the collective bread or biscuit deliveries and were suffering from malnourishment as a result.<sup>1079</sup> Lack of parcels posed a serious health risk to such men due to inadequate German rations, very heavy labour and long hours. Even with parcels, reports by Spanish neutral inspectors show that the food to work ratio for prisoners working in mines or factories was poor.<sup>1080</sup> Without parcels, prisoners’ health deteriorated. Lance-Corporal Edward Burley recalled that British prisoners who did not receive parcels were hospitalised at Minden camp in 1917

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<sup>1074</sup> GstA PK, Habt.I.87B.16102, f. 55, Abschrift to Herrn Minister für Landwirtschaft, Domänen und Forsten, Ernährung der Gefangenen, 14.4.1916.

<sup>1075</sup> Rawe, ‘*wir werden sie schon zur Arbeit bringen*,’ p. 104.

<sup>1076</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 105-106.

<sup>1077</sup> *Rapports des Délégués du gouvernement espagnol sur leurs visites dans les camps de prisonniers français en Allemagne, 1914-1917* (Paris, 1917).

<sup>1078</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 344, p. 372.

<sup>1079</sup> *Rapports des délégués espagnols*, Usine à gaz de Spandau, 23 May 1917, p. 335; Bützow, Mullverwertung [Brandenburg], 31.5.1917, p. 338.

<sup>1080</sup> *Rapports des délégués espagnols*, p. 158, p. 233, p. 289.



due to hunger.<sup>1081</sup> He stated that “the prisoners got frightfully hungry here and were reduced to eating potato peelings.”<sup>1082</sup>

German sources, however, tried to claim that it was the prisoners’ choice to live off parcels. Professor Engelbert Krebs, a theologian from the University of Freiburg, acting on behalf of the Committee for the Defence of German and Roman Catholic Interests in the World War (*Arbeitsausschuss zur Verteidigung deutscher und katholischer Interessen im Weltkrieg*) published a detailed propaganda monograph on the treatment of prisoners in Germany in which he outlined the system for delivering food from abroad to German prison camps.<sup>1083</sup> Krebs described how, alongside the foreign food arriving from Depot reserves and the collective bread and biscuit deliveries from abroad,

Daily innumerable individual parcels were forwarded to each of the camps. [...] When one takes all of this into account [...] then one can understand how it was possible for the prisoners in Germany to totally discard their prisoner of war ration and nourish themselves entirely upon the delicacies which they received from their homeland and cooked themselves. One can then understand that the prisoners on work *Kommandos* in German working-class areas had better food than the surrounding population who, as a result of the hunger blockade by the *Kulturmächte* England and France [...] had to deal with a greatly limited and simplified diet. If the prisoner believes that he has nothing to thank Germans for then he should consider what would have happened to his delicacies if our parcel transport system in Germany had suffered the kind of delays and carelessness that the Russian and French systems manifested.<sup>1084</sup>

For Krebs, Germans could

With a clear conscience allow the world to judge if anyone could have done more than Germany did, which, in spite of the measures taken by its enemies to starve it, let not one single enemy prisoner die, but instead, through wise measures using the means available to it, was able to provide a sufficient diet for its one and a half million prisoners.<sup>1085</sup>

<sup>1081</sup> TNA, WO 161/99, no. 1032, Lance-Corporal Edward Burley, 7.11.17.

<sup>1082</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1083</sup> Kurt Flasch, *Die geistige Mobilmachung. Die deutschen Intellektuellen und der erste Weltkrieg* (Berlin, 2000), p. 352.

Engelbert Krebs, *Die Behandlung der Kriegsgefangenen in Deutschland dargestellt auf Grund amtlichen Materials* (Freiburg, 1917).

<sup>1084</sup> Krebs, *Die Behandlung der Kriegsgefangenen*, pp. 135-136.

<sup>1085</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

Wilhelm Doegen referred bitterly to the fact that “hungry German guards” had to watch as French and British prisoners received goods from home which were no longer available in Germany.<sup>1086</sup>

By autumn 1918, an estimated 1.5 million prisoners of war were working for the German war economy.<sup>1087</sup> The vast majority of prisoners were now located in working *Kommandos* and were no longer in *Stammlager*.<sup>1088</sup> However, importantly, not all these men were dependent on parcels for food. On 10 September 1917 there were 856,062 prisoners of war of all nationalities working in agricultural *Kommandos*, and 392,562 in Industry – 170,000 of whom were working in mines.<sup>1089</sup> Prisoners working in agriculture in 1918 were often treated more as normal agricultural labourers than as captives.<sup>1090</sup> Working on farms, these prisoners had access to food and for those from rural backgrounds, particularly the many French peasant prisoners, the work was reassuringly familiar. A British prisoner, Arthur Leggett, pointed out that “on some farms you are entirely free if you get the people’s confidence.”<sup>1091</sup> The International Red Cross inspecting prisoners from *Kommandos* after the Armistice found that prisoners living with German peasant farmers had fared the best of all non-officer prisoners.<sup>1092</sup> Therefore, a substantial proportion of those prisoners in Germany in 1918 were not totally parcel dependent.

For prisoners working in mines, quarries and factories or remaining in the *Stammlager*, however, parcels were vital. These men were totally dependent on foodstuffs from abroad supplementing the German ration. Ex-prisoner Lance-Corporal Bertram Nicols stated,

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<sup>1086</sup> Doegen, *Kriegsgefangene Völker*, p. 62.

<sup>1087</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1088</sup> *Rapports des délégués espagnol*, pp. xiii-xiv.

<sup>1089</sup> Jochen Oltmer, “Zwangsmigration und Zwangsarbeit – Ausländische Arbeitskräfte und bäuerliche Ökonomie im Ersten Weltkrieg,” *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte*, 27 (1998), p. 153.

<sup>1090</sup> Katja Mitze, *Das Kriegsgefangenenlager Ingolstadt während des Ersten Weltkriegs*, Doctoral thesis, Westfälischen Wilhelms-Universität zu Münster (Munster, 1999), p. 366.

<sup>1091</sup> TNA, WO 161/100, Interview no. 1804, Private Arthur Leggett, 6.5.1918.

<sup>1092</sup> ACICR, 432/II/26, 2, c.44, Inspections of Cottbus I, and Cottbus II camps by Siegfried Horneffer and Theodor Aubert, 18.12.1918.



“we could not have lived if it had not been for our parcels.”<sup>1093</sup> Veteran prisoners of war confirmed this: “I doubt if we’d have survived without them, we were getting so thin. I’ll tell you it was the British Red Cross that kept us going definitely.”<sup>1094</sup> Prior to the revolution in 1918 the German parcel system upon which they depended was largely intact. But it faced two growing problems: increasing delays due to bureaucracy and theft. *Stammlager* were often located in a different geographical region from work *Kommandos*, yet all parcels had to pass through a prisoner’s *Stammlager* for censorship before being forwarded, delaying or disrupting delivery. This meant that the parcel situation could vary dramatically between prison camps and *Kommandos* located in the same region – Cottbus II in Merzdorff, Brandenburg received no parcels from May 1918 on, whereas prisoners at Brandenburg an der Havel received parcels well into November.<sup>1095</sup> Some camp commandants stockpiled parcels rather than distributing them: at Soltau camp in 1918, 200,000 undelivered packets were discovered after the revolution.<sup>1096</sup> The collective biscuit and bread deliveries were also not always sent to the *Kommandos*.<sup>1097</sup> This was also attested to by British prisoners.<sup>1098</sup> Private Arthur Robinson, a former British prisoner reported that while he was in Münster camp in June 1918 he witnessed

several working prisoners coming from the salt mines and coal mines, who were in a very shocking condition being starved and over worked. [...] One working prisoner named Jones, [no.] 8799, told me that he had been knocked around by a German civilian in the mines and complained of long hours and having little food. He worked 12 hours a day on 6 ozs. bread and received one mark a day for it.<sup>1099</sup>

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<sup>1093</sup> TNA, WO 161/99, Interview no. 1067, Lance-Corporal Bertram Nichols, repatriated 1.1.1918.

<sup>1094</sup> Interview with Jack Rodgers in Richard van Emden, *Prisoners of the Kaiser. The Last POWs of the Great War* (Barnsley, 2000), p. 137.

<sup>1095</sup> ACICR, 432/II/26 Be, Aubert and Horneffer, Inspections of Cottbus II and Brandenburg a.d.Havel.

<sup>1096</sup> Emden, *Prisoners of the Kaiser*, p. 129. See also: *Rapports des délégués espagnols*, p. 48, report on Neuburg-sur-Kammel camp, Bavaria.

<sup>1097</sup> *Rapports des délégués espagnols*, p. 158; TNA, WO 161/99, no. 1060, p. 2200, Interview with Private Edward Page, 15.12.1917.

<sup>1098</sup> TNA, WO 161/99, no. 1083, Private Collingwood Schreiber, 16.1.1918.

<sup>1099</sup> TNA, WO 161/100, no. 1790, Private Arthur Robinson, Interview n.d.

An elderly veteran recalled how “by November [...] I had gone down from twelve to six or seven stone, [...] my head was covered in sores from malnutrition [...] and my one thought was how much longer was this going to last.”<sup>1100</sup>

Conditions in some work *Kommandos* were clearly poor. Arthur Hall, a British prisoner sent to work in a mine at Laurenburg near Holzappel, wrote in his diary in April 1918: “In a mine again. God help us here.”<sup>1101</sup> On 6 May he wrote to his camp commandant in Giessen “re [sic] my position in hell,” asking to be returned to the *Stammlager*.<sup>1102</sup> The British prisoner Arthur Leggett reported how at Friedrichsfeld camp a Russian prisoner would inject men in the leg with benzine, causing them to be hospitalised, so that they could avoid being sent to Wülfrath punishment *Kommando*. Significantly, this punishment *Kommando*, which worked long hours breaking and loading stone in a quarry, was for recalcitrant German sentries as well as prisoners who had committed an offence.<sup>1103</sup> In this case prisoners were being punished in the same way as German soldiers.

One reason why the British were so angered at their prisoners’ treatment in German mines was because German prisoners in Britain were not employed in mining. This was because of the British trade unions who opposed prisoner labour, fearing it would undercut British miners’ wages. Austen Chamberlain pointed out to Lloyd George: “There is of course no ground in international law for not so employing prisoners and it is only the Trade Union feeling which prevents us from doing it.”<sup>1104</sup> In September 1918, Chamberlain suggested that a “judicious supply to the press of information about the brutal treatment of British miner prisoners of war in the German mines” might “start among our Scottish, Welsh or North-country miners a demand for reprisals which might enable us to set apart certain mines to be worked by German prisoners under British foremen.”<sup>1105</sup> Chamberlain felt the only way that the trade unions would accept German

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<sup>1100</sup> Interview with Percy Williams, Emden, *Prisoners of the Kaiser*, p. 164.

<sup>1101</sup> Malcolm Hall, *In Enemy Hands. A British Territorial Soldier in Germany, 1915-1919* (Stroud, 2002) p. 104.

<sup>1102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1103</sup> TNA, WO 161/100, Interview no. 1804, Private Arthur Leggett, 6.5.1918.

<sup>1104</sup> HLRO, LG F/7/2/16, Underlining in original.

<sup>1105</sup> *Ibid.*



prisoners working in British mines was if they were persuaded it was a necessary reprisal to protect British prisoners abroad. However, nothing came of the suggestion and German prisoners never worked in the mines.

If the Allies could justly accuse the German military of not providing adequate prisoner rations, they failed to recognise that until the last two months of the war it also maintained the safe delivery of prisoner parcels against a backdrop of considerable civilian hunger in Germany. Theft from parcel and collective bread and biscuit deliveries was increasingly evident in late-1917 and 1918.<sup>1106</sup> The French collective biscuit deliveries were weighed leaving Berne and Copenhagen and weighed again on their arrival which allowed prisoners and the Spanish inspectors to assess the amount stolen en route.<sup>1107</sup> Prison camp guards often stole from the prisoners' food supplies; one British prisoner noted that "it is quite a common thing to see a German sentry walking round with his pocket full of French biscuits which must have been stolen from their supplies."<sup>1108</sup> Soap was frequently stolen from the parcels.<sup>1109</sup> By 1917, soap had "practically disappeared in Germany" according to a Canadian prisoner at Friedrichsfeld:

The sentries used to watch us wash in the morning looking at the suds. [...] It's a wonder we weren't killed half a dozen times for we used to jolly these poor chaps outrageously. 'Is there lots of soap in England?' they would ask. And when we would of course answer 'Yes,' they would say, rather disgustedly: 'no soap in Germany. Everything all gone. No meat, no bread. No potatoes. Everybody's crazy in Germany.'<sup>1110</sup>

The International Committee of the Red Cross began to receive remarkably precise information from the French Red Cross from mid-1917 regarding increasing thefts from parcels sent to Germany.<sup>1111</sup> For example, the French prisoner *comité de secours* at Altengrabow camp reported that between 23 January 1917 and 10 May 1918 the total amount of material plundered en route amounted to 1,699 boxes of tins, 85 soup tablets, 1

<sup>1106</sup> See: *Rapports des délégués espagnols*, p. 336.

<sup>1107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>1108</sup> TNA, WO 161/99, no. 1032, Interview with Lance-Corporal Edward Burley.

<sup>1109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1110</sup> Fred McMullen and Jack Evans, *Out of the Jaws of Hunland. The stories of Corporal Fred McMullen, Sniper, Private Jack Evans, Bomber* (N.Y. and London, 1918), p. 119.

<sup>1111</sup> ACICR, 432/II/26.d.

saucisson, 88.25 kilograms of lard, 500 grams of chocolate, 750 grams of rice, 1.625 kilograms of soap and 1 box of 50 Kilograms of chocolate sent specially for Christmas.<sup>1112</sup> Königsbrück camp reported in March 1918 that 59 crates had been stolen en route.<sup>1113</sup> In January and February 1918, French prisoners at Parchim camp reported the theft of 22 kilograms of soap.<sup>1114</sup> The *Oeuvre Toulousaine de recherches et d'assistance aux prisonniers nécessiteux du Midi* complained to the International Red Cross on 3 October 1918 that it was receiving more and more complaints from Germany about parcels not arriving: “the parcels of food sent from France do not arrive to our prisoners and deliveries are considerably delayed.”<sup>1115</sup> It believed that this was a “systematic” action by Germany against the prisoners.<sup>1116</sup> Theft from parcels in Germany occurred not only en route to the *Stammlager*, but also on the journey from the *Stammlager* to the work *Kommandos*.<sup>1117</sup> Yet although theft was widespread, it was mainly partial pilfering of parcels; most of the food sent still reached the *Stammlager*. Moreover, the items which were arriving in the prison camps from France are revealing. Prisoners were receiving chocolate, soap, lentils, breton sausage, sardines, corned beef, jams, figs, salmon and pâté de foie.<sup>1118</sup> These were luxurious foodstuffs in Germany in 1918.

Importantly, in 1918 there was also some parcel pilfering in France. One German letter writer from Idstein complained in June 1918 to a relative in French captivity that “I have sent you two more parcels in the hope that they will not again go to the pilferers. When the parcels arrive for the prisoners here the best contents are also found to have been taken. There should be an investigation on this subject.”<sup>1119</sup> However, because prisoner rations were better in French camps, theft from parcels had more of an effect on the German prisoners’ morale than on their health.

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<sup>1112</sup> Ibid., Altengrabow.

<sup>1113</sup> Ibid., Königsbrück.

<sup>1114</sup> Ibid., Parchim.

<sup>1115</sup> ACICR 432/II/26,1.c.44.

<sup>1116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1117</sup> TNA, WO 161/99, no. 1083, Private Schreiber Collingwood, 16.1.1918.

<sup>1118</sup> ACICR, 432/II/26,2.d.c.44.

<sup>1119</sup> SHAT, 16 N 1224, Rapport Mensuel sur les renseignements recueillis dans la correspondance des PG de la DE du GAC au courant du mois d’août 1918, QG, 14.9.1918, Extract of letter from Idstein, Hesse-Nassau to German prisoner in French PG cie 20.



Theft from parcels in Germany was due to one simple reality: those prisoners working in factories, industry, mines or quarries in 1918, who were receiving parcels, were actually better fed than their working class German civilian co-workers. A British prisoner, working near Hagen in late 1917, recalled: “We worked in company with some civilians, three or four old men and the rest women and girls who seemed astonished at the food we brought with us to eat and complained that they were starving themselves and they certainly looked like it.”<sup>1120</sup> Another prisoner was told by a guard “that his children were starving, and that he hoped the war would finish very soon.”<sup>1121</sup> Middle-class German civilians began to barter for food from British other rank prisoners:

There were a considerable number of rich Germans who by subscribing to war loans etc. got soft jobs e.g. in censor’s offices. As their money ran out they were taken away to serve. These men at first would not look at a British prisoner but now they are glad to get a piece of food from our parcels and beg for it.<sup>1122</sup>

Former prisoner Private Arthur Leggett declared in interview in 1918: “Our prisoners are healthy looking compared to the Germans. There is no doubt they are suffering. The only conversation you hear is about food when you are going about.”<sup>1123</sup> The French postal censor noted in August 1918 that as regarded food, French prisoners in Germany were “better treated than the locals.”<sup>1124</sup> The censor went on to relate a complaint from a priest in Gondringen who said the five prisoners in his parish ate better than anyone else.<sup>1125</sup> Indeed, British and French officer prisoners maintained a comparatively high standard of living when measured against that of middle and working class German civilians. Throughout 1918 fraternization between prisoners in work *Kommandos* and their German co-workers grew sharply, fuelled by German civilian discontent with food shortages and the ongoing war.<sup>1126</sup> A French prisoner Louis Bonneteau recalled in late 1918 that the German guards’ morale dropped in “July-August last. Their noisy triumphalism [*la*

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<sup>1120</sup> TNA, WO 161/99, Interview no. 1082, Private Arthur Filder.

<sup>1121</sup> *Ibid.*, Interview no. 1090, Private Ernest Atkinson, 9.1.1918.

<sup>1122</sup> *Ibid.*, Interview no. 1060 with Private Edward Page, 15.12.1917.

<sup>1123</sup> TNA, WO 161/100, Interview no. 1804, Private Arthur Leggett, 6.5.1918.

<sup>1124</sup> SHAT, 16 N 1224, Rapport Mensuel de l’Interprète stagiaire de la DE Nord du GAE, août 1918, GAE, Nord, 1er Bureau.

<sup>1125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1126</sup> TNA, WO 161/100.

*glorial bruyante*] gave way to a profound depression when they were obliged to take the American intervention seriously. The failure of their march on Paris had a disastrous effect on them: peace at any price."<sup>1127</sup>

British and French prisoners were often better fed than their guards. The guards' behaviour does not support the Allies' fears that the prisoners were facing catastrophe. With regard to the *Stammlager*, from mid-1917 on, relations between prisoners and guards had begun to change. A German civilian, Dr Schlittenbauer from Regensburg, wrote to the Bavarian *Kriegsministerium* in July to warn them that *Landsturm* guards in prisoner of war camps were becoming dissatisfied: "The guards are so badly treated that some have lost their love for the Fatherland. Their pay is atrocious."<sup>1128</sup> During the winter of 1917-1918 British prisoner interviews reveal that amicable conversations began to occur more frequently between camp guards and the British prisoners.<sup>1129</sup> One prisoner recalled, "all the German guards told me they dreaded going to the western front as the fighting there was so terrific, and several told me they intended to escape through to the British lines."<sup>1130</sup> Private J. McGinlay was told by his guards in autumn-winter 1917 that

They were underfed: that they had practically the same food as the prisoners, but the soup was slightly superior. They were all discontented and spoke quite freely of it to me. They told me everybody was discontented about food. [...] The guards spoke to me about Liebknecht's imprisonment. They said they thought it a shame that a man should be arrested for telling the truth about Germany. They were all in his favour and they are beginning to lose confidence in the local papers.<sup>1131</sup>

A British private, W. H. Dorsett, at Ohrdruf camp during the winter of 1917, described how "a German sergeant got two months' leave to go and see his wife who had been taken very ill owing to standing for hours in the snow waiting for food. When he came back he said that his children were quite changed – lifeless and run down owing to lack

<sup>1127</sup> SHAT, 16 N 1224, Interview with PG Louis Bonneteau, 8.12.1918.

<sup>1128</sup> BK, M Kr 1687, no. 115286, Dr S. Schlittenbauer, Regensburg to KM München, Armee Abteilung, 12.7.1917.

<sup>1129</sup> TNA WO 161/99 and TNA WO 161/100. See, as an example, WO 161/99, no. 1032, Edward Burley, 7.11.1917.

<sup>1130</sup> TNA, WO 161/99, no. 1090, Private Ernest Atkinson, 9.1.1918.

<sup>1131</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 1092, Private J. McGinlay, January 1918.



of food.”<sup>1132</sup> Fewer beatings of prisoners were reported – paradoxically the inverse of what was occurring for prisoners working in occupied Belgium and France.<sup>1133</sup>

The increase in fraternization between guards and prisoners in Germany was due in part to the food shortages in Germany which led guards and civilians to barter ever more frequently for the contents of prisoners’ parcels. A British prisoner, Lance-Corporal Edward Burley, recalled that “A German will offer 80 marks for a pair of boots and 7 or 8 marks for a tablet of soap.”<sup>1134</sup> Burley described how, while working at a brickworks, “sometimes I talked a little with the civilians who passed by and occasionally the children would bring us a couple of apples and ask if we had a pot of fat to give them or a piece of soap.”<sup>1135</sup> The Berne Accords also had an effect as they were widely publicised in the camps and work *Kommandos* and established new standardised regulations for prisoner punishments across Germany and France. They were also intended to launch large scale Franco-German prisoner exchanges which made guards wary that any mistreatment would be reported by prisoners after their exchange. The Accords initially provided French prisoners with great hope. French prisoners at Nuremberg camp discontinued their camp newspaper *Le Canard de Nuremberg* in July in anticipation of their imminent exchange.<sup>1136</sup> “*Le Canard va mourir*,” they wrote, “the moment has come – the exiles are going to return to their *Patrie*.”<sup>1137</sup> In fact, few of the planned exchanges actually took place before the end of the war. Clemenceau had no intention of keeping the Accords, admitting to the British in a private conversation that he had agreed to them only to quiet public opinion in France, which was clamouring for the government to do something to assist French prisoners.<sup>1138</sup> Clemenceau told the British that “it would never do for [...] people who are counting on their relatives being returned, finding out they had been

<sup>1132</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 1093, W.H. Dorsett, Private, 12.1.1918

<sup>1133</sup> TNA, WO 161/99 and WO 161/100.

<sup>1134</sup> TNA, WO 161/99, no. 1032, Edward Burley, 7.11.1917.

<sup>1135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1136</sup> *Le Canard de Nuremberg*, nr.34, Nuremberg camp, 15.8.1918.

<sup>1137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1138</sup> HLRO, LG/F/52/1/33, British Embassy, Paris, confidential, Lord Derby to Arthur J. Balfour, 18.5.1918.

hoodwinked.”<sup>1139</sup> Clemenceau had no intention of allowing German prisoners to be repatriated from France, even in return for his own troops.

The increase in prisoner-guard fraternization in 1918 was also due to the change in the make-up of the camp guards as in many camps old men and young boys replaced guards who were removed to fight at the front. “The guards in Germany [...] are all men who are totally unfit to go back to the front or else they are composed of civilians with a band round the arm or young boys about 16,” one former British prisoner stated.<sup>1140</sup> Another said that the guards were young boys of 16 or older men aged from 45 – 70.<sup>1141</sup> One guard told a British prisoner that he had fought in 1870.<sup>1142</sup> In some places in early 1918 prisoner of war camp guards were even replaced temporarily by untrained civilians in uniform. As it became clear in early autumn 1918 that Germany was likely to lose the war, guards became more aware that prisoner mistreatment could have unwelcome consequences. Prisoners reported a softening of attitudes coupled with considerable war weariness on the part of prison camp personnel. Alec Waugh, a British officer prisoner, wrote of how in 1918 a German soldier told him

You are not a father, so you will not understand [...] but it is a most terrible thing to watch, as I have watched during the last four years, a little boy growing weaker and paler month after month; and I can tell you that when I look at my little boy, all that I want is that this war should end, I do not care how.<sup>1143</sup>

For prison camp guards the impact of the food shortages on the German home front was all too near at hand. These men, dissatisfied, inexperienced and either very young or old were those charged with maintaining order when revolution broke out in November and the camp commandants and officers fled or were deposed by local workers’ and soldiers’ councils. They were also faced with the worst crisis to hit the German prisoner of war system since the typhus epidemics of 1915 – influenza. If starvation dominated the initial post-war Allied memory of German captivity, death was also powerfully present.

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<sup>1139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1140</sup> TNA, WO 161/99, no. 1032, Edward Burley, 7.11.17; Also no. 1060, Private Edward Page, 15.12.1917 and no. 1085, Private James Harold, 8.1.1918.

<sup>1141</sup> Ibid., no. 1060, Private Edward Page, 15.12.1917.

<sup>1142</sup> TNA, WO 161/99, no. 1090, Private Ernest Atkinson, 9.1.1918.

<sup>1143</sup> Waugh, *The Prisoners of Mainz*, pp. 229-230.



It was influenza which was behind the increased deaths of British and French prisoners in Germany in 1918. Perhaps the most revealing information about prisoners' experiences in Germany comes not from prisoner accounts but from prisoner graves. In 1922, the British Imperial War Graves Commission amalgamated the graves of British prisoners into four major graveyards at Kassel, Berlin, Hamburg and Cologne, with over a thousand burials each, and thirteen other minor burial sites with fewer graves. As British prisoners' bodies were not repatriated, these graves offer a representative sample of British prisoner deaths. The grave records for 1,159 prisoners of war who died between 1914 and 1919, buried at one of the four major graveyards, Berlin South Western Cemetery, provide a sample from which death rates across the war, and more particularly, in 1918, can be calculated. Importantly, too, the age of the prisoner at time of death and the cause of death can also be analysed in many cases.

Several points emerge from this survey which help explain the negative post-Armistice British and French understanding of German captivity. First, by far the most deadly year of the war for British prisoners was 1918. For example, more prisoners died in May 1918 than died in the whole of 1915 or 1917.

**Table 12. Number of British prisoner deaths for each year of the war according to burials in Berlin South Western Cemetery.**

1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919
14	98	19	75	943	10

**Number of graves in total sample: 1159**

Second, the enormous majority of those dying were other rank prisoners – officer prisoners scarcely featured. This illustrates the difference which the long working hours and the extremely difficult working conditions made to a prisoner's health and to his

ability to resist disease.<sup>1144</sup> However, why officer prisoners appear to have been spared the ravages of the influenza epidemic is unclear. Better hygiene conditions in officer camps may have been a factor.

The increase in deaths in 1918 was not simply due to an overall increase in the number of British prisoners, though Germany did dramatically increase the number of British captives it held in 1918. According to Wilhelm Doegen between 10 June 1917 and 10 October 1918 the number of other rank British prisoners increased from 45,863 to 177,553.<sup>1145</sup> Yet, as the previous chapter illustrated, a massive proportion of these new captures remained in the French and Belgian occupied territories after 21 March 1918. Those who died in the occupied territories were buried there – not in graveyards in Germany.<sup>1146</sup> Moreover, the jump in the death rate revealed from the grave sample is greater than the jump in the number of prisoners held overall - Germany by October 1918 held four times as many British prisoners as in June 1917, but the grave sample shows the number of deaths in 1918 was 12.6 times higher than 1917.

It is possible that during the latter half of the year some prisoners evacuated from working in German-occupied France and Belgium began to be sent to *Stammlager* in Germany and that this influenced the death rate. The mortality rate for these prisoners was high, according to British prisoner eyewitnesses. As the previous chapter has shown, however, the vast majority of the prisoners working in occupied France and Belgium who fell ill were hospitalised and died there. Therefore, although prisoners from the occupied territories may have influenced the higher death rate slightly, they alone cannot explain the massive increase. British prisoners working in Germany, therefore, account for most of these deaths. Why did their death rate soar in 1918?

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<sup>1144</sup> Giovanna Procacci found a similar gap between Italian other rank prisoner death rates and officer prisoner mortality. Giovanna Procacci, *Soldati e prigionieri italiani nella Grande Guerra* (Turin, 2000), p. 172.

<sup>1145</sup> Doegen, *Kriegsgefangene Völker*, p. 28.

<sup>1146</sup> See chapters four and five on deaths in the occupied territories. See case of Private Mowbray Meades, prisoner of war who died of pneumonia in July 1918, buried at Lille.

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/war/wwone/humanfaceofwar\\_gallery\\_06.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/war/wwone/humanfaceofwar_gallery_06.shtml), accessed 17.6.2005.



**Table 13. Number of officer prisoner deaths and other rank prisoner deaths in Berlin South Western Cemetery.**

Officer Deaths	Other Rank Deaths	Total Deaths in Sample
17	1143	1159

There is one obvious answer – influenza. There were two periods of 1918 which saw a higher mortality among prisoners than the remainder of the year: May to July saw the first high wave of deaths; October to November produced the second. This correlates exactly with two waves of influenza which swept Germany in 1918, referred to respectively as the summer epidemic and the autumn epidemic by August Gärtner in the official German medical history of the war.<sup>1147</sup> Gärtner, however, grossly underestimates the influenza mortality rate among prisoners in 1918, claiming that of the 2.4 million prisoners of war held by Germany, *in the whole year* only 217 prisoners died.<sup>1148</sup> Gärtner's figure is totally incorrect given that in just one Army Corps area alone, the *I. Bayerisches Armee-Korps*, between 11 October 1918 and 10 November 1918, 291 prisoners died of pneumonia resulting from the influenza epidemic.<sup>1149</sup> He appears to have both underestimated influenza deaths and failed to count deaths from influenza complications such as pneumonia or bronchitis.

Early post-war German histories appear to have underestimated the number of prisoners who died from the influenza epidemic – particularly during the second flu wave in October-November 1918, which coincided exactly with the outbreak of revolution.<sup>1150</sup> In part, this post-war omission may be explained by revolutionary confusion. The chaos of prison camp administration during this period meant that the records were not always accurate. This chaos was largely due to the transfer of control of the prison camps to local Soldiers' Councils (*Soldatenräte*) who dismissed officers and commandants and left the running of the camps in the hands of German N.C.O.s and ordinary soldiers. Record-

<sup>1147</sup> Gärtner, "Einrichtung und Hygiene der Kriegsgefangenenlager," p. 254. Jay Winter pinpoints three influenza waves in Europe and North America in 1918, occurring in March, October and after the Armistice. According to Winter the post-Armistice influenza wave saw the deadliest form of the virus. See: Jay Winter, "La Grippe Espagnole" in Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Jean-Jacques Becker, eds, *Encyclopédie de la Grande Guerre, 1914-1918. Histoire et culture* (Paris, 2004), pp. 943-948.

<sup>1148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1149</sup> BK, M Kr 13785, Nachweisung der Sterbefälle von Kriegsgefangene im Kriege, 1914-1921.

<sup>1150</sup> Wilhelm Doegen, for example, makes little mention of the influenza epidemic.

keeping suffered as a result. However, the information that has survived points to a serious rise in prisoner mortality during the influenza waves:

**Table 14. British prisoner death patterns across 1918 based on Berlin South Western Cemetery sample.**

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Deaths	8	5	3	44	117	116	122	41	66	178	163	80



**Fig. 18.** British prisoner death rate in 1918 based upon an analysis of 1159 prisoner graves in Berlin, South Western Cemetery.<sup>1151</sup>

The two peak mortality periods revealed from the survey of prisoner graves match other sources. Letters from Germany to German prisoners of war in France described an

<sup>1151</sup> Records supplied by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, Ieper.



influenza epidemic among German civilians and in prisoner of war camps in July 1918. "There is a very large number of sick in the prisoner of war camps, hospitals and forts. A lot have already died. Today again we buried three young Frenchmen aged between 23 and 28 years old," a correspondent from Gmünd in Württemberg wrote.<sup>1152</sup> "In the industrial towns many people are dying of flu; usually they develop pneumonia and die in a very short time" another writer from Westphalia stated on 11 August.<sup>1153</sup> The French censor noted in his September report on letters from July and August, that "the flu, known as 'Spanish' is raging all across Germany. The announcements of deaths from pneumonia are very numerous."<sup>1154</sup> 187,000 Germans are estimated to have died of the flu.<sup>1155</sup> In comparison, the national death tolls for civilians in France and Britain were estimated at 200,000 and 112,000 respectively.<sup>1156</sup>

The influenza killed prisoners of war all across the country. A French prisoner, Louis Bochet, interviewed in December 1918, recalled how "around the 20 November 1918 there were a lot of sick in Stuttgart camp. Every day there were 7 or 8 deaths from Spanish influenza."<sup>1157</sup> An Italian prisoner repatriated from Kassel camp reported "in October there were epidemics of Spanish influenza. There were a lot of deaths, French, English."<sup>1158</sup> On 8 December, the 17<sup>th</sup> German Army requested a British ambulance train to evacuate 500 sick British prisoners of war being held in a camp at Meschede. The war diary noted that there was an epidemic there, reportedly "due to overcrowding."<sup>1159</sup> In Sprottau prisoner of war hospital in Posen between 5-7 December 1918, 13 prisoners died of flu related respiratory illnesses.<sup>1160</sup> In the first two weeks of December, in the same region, approximately 52 French prisoners died from influenza or a subsequent lung

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<sup>1152</sup> SHAT, 16 N 1224, DE du GAE, État-Major, no. 20, Rapport Mensuel de l'officier interprète de la DE du GAE, 14.11.1918.

<sup>1153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1155</sup> Gregor Dallas, 1918. *War and Peace* (London, 2000), p. 199.

<sup>1156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1157</sup> SHAT 16 N 1224, Centre de rapatriement de Sarrebourg, Compte rendu des interrogatoires, Interrogatoire de Bochet, Louis, vient du camp de Stuttgart, travaillait dans un Kommando à Röhlingen, 7.12.1918.

<sup>1158</sup> Ibid., Interrogatoire Dominico Radia, Italian, 12.1.1919.

<sup>1159</sup> TNA, WO 95/287, Original War Diary, Director of Medical Services, Second Army, October 1918, 8.12.1918

<sup>1160</sup> SHAT, 7 N 327-1, Kriegsgefangenenlazarett, Sprottau dem Sanitätsamt VAK, Posen, 7.12.1918.

infection at Sagan Reserve *Lazarett*.<sup>1161</sup> There was also an epidemic at Schneidemühl camp.<sup>1162</sup> Most died within days of entering the *Lazarett*. The influenza killed remarkably quickly. The International Red Cross, assessing the post-Armistice situation, stated that influenza morbidity rates reached 90% among prisoners in some areas.<sup>1163</sup> In contrast, the rate of infection generally among belligerent populations has been estimated at 20% by Jay Winter.<sup>1164</sup> Prisoners, in German prison camps, therefore, had a much higher rate of infection than civilian populations. The prisoner mortality rate was estimated at 25% in the cases where the patient went on to develop pneumonia.<sup>1165</sup>

The influenza epidemic was particularly shocking because it frequently killed young people. Indeed, the grave statistics show that throughout the war, the youngest prisoners had the highest mortality rate. Youth appears to have offered little protection from disease in the prison camp environment. Without figures for average age breakdown of all prisoners, including both camp survivors and deceased, it is not possible to assess whether the low number of deaths of men over 35 corresponds proportionately with the lower number of men of this age serving in the British army and captured during the war.

**Table 15. Prisoners' age at time of death analysed for 674 graves where the age record is available, 1914-1918.**

Age	18-25	26-35	36-40	41-55	Over 55
Number	328	274	59	12	1

<sup>1161</sup> SHAT, 7 N 327-1, Death certificates for prisoners from Sagan Reserve Lazarett. For an account of deaths from flu by a veteran see: Emden, *Prisoners of the Kaiser*, p. 165.

<sup>1162</sup> SHAT, 15 N 15, Tgm, Copenhagen, 8.12.1918.

<sup>1163</sup> Drs Frédéric Guyot, René Guillermin and Albert Meyer, "La situation sanitaire des prisonniers de guerre de l'Entente en Allemagne pendant la période de l'armistice (Décembre 1918 – Janvier 1919)," in *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Première année, Février 1919 (Geneva, 1919), pp. 137-144, p. 141. See also ACICR 432/II/26, 2 c.44 which reports influenza among French prisoners at Münchenberg and Puchheim camps.

<sup>1164</sup> Winter, "La Grippe Espagnole," p. 944.

<sup>1165</sup> Guyot, Guillermin and Meyer, "La situation sanitaire des prisonniers de guerre de l'Entente en Allemagne, pendant la période de l'armistice," p. 141. In France 200,000 people died from influenza – 100,000 of these were civilians. Nicole Dabernat-Poitevin, ed., *Les Carnets de captivité de Charles Gueugnier* (Midi-Pyrénées, 1998), p. 221.



A final point of importance is that the influenza epidemic was not the sole reason why prisoners died in 1918. Unfortunately, only a small sample of grave records – 212 – provided information as to the cause of death so this analysis must remain only partial. However, it is clear that in 1918 there was an increase in prisoners dying as a result of old wounds received at the front. There was also an increase in dysentery deaths. The increase in prisoner deaths from wounds can be attributed to the massive shortage of medical supplies in Germany, which meant that operations, nursing and medical intervention that earlier in the war had saved prisoners' lives were no longer possible. One wounded British prisoner treated at Giessen hospital in June and July 1918 reported that "There were no drinking vessels; we used the parcel tins. There were no basins to wash in but there were two baths, and on one occasion there was hot water. [...] There was no cotton wool."<sup>1166</sup> He also reported vermin.<sup>1167</sup>

The shortage of medicine was also perceived by contemporaries as a major problem in dealing with the influenza epidemic.<sup>1168</sup> In reality the virulence of the virus meant that there was no medical remedy available even in countries not suffering from war shortages.<sup>1169</sup> However, the hygiene problems in prisoner of war camps did contribute to infection rates. At the most basic level prison camps and prison camp sick bays lacked soap for washing, which caused hygiene to deteriorate. The shortage of coal to heat camps was also a problem in some areas – especially as the second flu epidemic among the prisoners broke out in October-November.<sup>1170</sup> This shortage of supplies was compounded by a shortage of medical personnel – in November, due to the revolution and German demobilisation military doctors stopped visiting prisoner of war camps.<sup>1171</sup> There were local variations, however. A French prisoner, Constant Hallereau, recalled

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<sup>1166</sup> TNA, WO 161/100, Private Harvey Pink.

<sup>1167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1168</sup> SHAT, 16 N 1224, Centre de rapatriement de Sarrebourg, Compte Rendu des interrogatoires, 27.11.1918. The shortage of medicines was reported in some camps in the summer of 1917. TNA, WO 161/99, no. 1032, Interview with Lance-Corporal Edward Burley who reports that there were no medicines in Minden camp hospital in June-July 1917. Also: WO 161/99, no. 1085, Private James Harrold who was told by a doctor at Kassel hospital in 1917 that "there were no medicines in Germany."

<sup>1169</sup> Winter, "La Grippe Espagnole," pp. 947-948.

<sup>1170</sup> This was the case at Parchim camp. See: Guyot, Guillermin and Meyer, "La situation sanitaire des prisonniers de guerre de l'Entente en Allemagne, pendant la période de l'armistice," p. 141.

<sup>1171</sup> BA, R. 904.77, f. 29, Regelung betreffend Kriegsgefangene, 16.12.1918.

how in his camp at Freiburg “before the Armistice the sick were neglected and visits by the doctor were rare; after the 11 November the sick were better treated.”<sup>1172</sup> In some cases German civilian doctors in local areas were too preoccupied with the civilian flu epidemic to assist. The shortage of medical personnel meant that new infections were not diagnosed and quarantine areas not established.

**Table 16. Cause of death in 1918 analysed for the 212 British prisoner graves in Berlin South Western Cemetery where the cause of death was recorded.**

<b>Cause</b>	Wounds	Influenza	Pneumonia	Dysentery	Heart failure	Other – TB, Diphtheria, Accident
<b>Number</b>	79	20	57	12	5	39

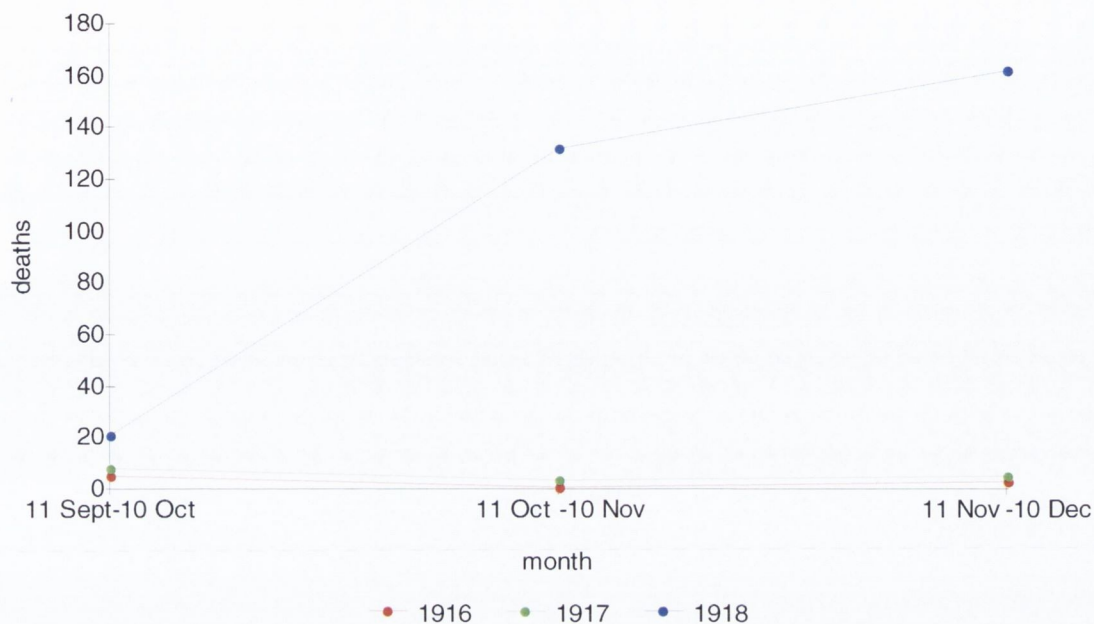
How representative is this sample based solely on 1159 British prisoner graves? It is possible to compare the results produced from this study with the records of French and British prisoner deaths in the First Bavarian Army Corps region in 1918. These records show that in Bavaria too there was a massive jump in prisoner of war deaths in 1918 compared with earlier years. However, there were regional variations in which period of 1918 witnessed the greatest mortality rates. The summer influenza epidemic was less deadly in Bavaria. There, it was the winter epidemic of 1918, which saw the death rates among prisoners soar:

<sup>1172</sup> SHAT, 16 N 1224, Interrogatoire du PG français rapatrié, Constant Hallereau, 41e regiment d’infanterie.



### Stellv.IBAK PoW Deaths, 1916,1917,1918

French and British prisoner deaths



**Fig. 19.** Comparison of French and British prisoner death rates in Stellv. General Kommando I.b.A.K. [Bavaria] in September-December period, 1916, 1917, 1918.<sup>1173</sup>

As the above graph illustrates, the death rate for French and British prisoners of war jumped sharply in the autumn and winter of 1918 compared with the same period in 1916 and 1917. The massive rise in prison camp mortality in 1918 becomes clearer if the deaths of other prisoner nationalities such as Russians and Italians are considered as Table 17 shows:

<sup>1173</sup> From: BK, M Kr 13785, Nachweisung der Sterbefälle von Kriegsgefangenen im Kriege, 1914-1921.

**Table 17. Death patterns of British, French and other nationalities in prisoner of war camps in the First Bavarian Army Corps area.**<sup>1174</sup>

Week	British Deaths	French Deaths	Number of British and French Deaths	Total Prisoner Deaths – all Nationalities
11 March 1916 -10 April 1916	0	3	3	16
11 April 1916 – 10 May 1916	0	3	3	10
11 May 1916 – 11 June 1916	0	7	7	23
11 September 1916 – 10 October 1916	0	5	5	15
11 October 1916 – 10 November 1916	0	1	1	9
11 November 1916 – 10 December 1916	0	3	3	7
11 February 1917-10 March 1917	0	2	2	11
11 July 1917 – 10 August 1917	0	1	1	30
11 August 1917 – 10 September 1917	0	2	2	19
11 September 1917 – 10 October 1917	0	3	3	16
11 October 1917 – 10 November 1917	1	2	3	21
11 November 1917 – 10 December 1917	1	1	2	98 [82 italians]
11 February 1918-10 March 1918	3	8	11	58
11 June 1918 –	7	11	18	65

<sup>1174</sup> BK, M Kr 13785 Nachweisung der Sterbefälle von Kriegsgefangenen im Kriege, 1914-1921, Death rates in Stellv.GeneralKommando I.b.A.K. [Bavaria] The table is as complete as the file information allowed.



10 July 1918				
11 August 1918 – 10 September 1918	3	3	<b>6</b>	63 [41 Italians]
11 September 1918 – 10 October 1918	2	11	<b>13</b>	60
11 October 1918 – 10 November 1918	0	128	<b>128</b> [almost all of pneumonia]	317 [291 are of pneumonia]
11 November 1918 – 10 December 1918	3	154	<b>157</b> [pneumonia]	394
11 December 1918 – 10 January 1919	4	197	<b>201</b>	608 [583 of pneumonia]
11 January 1919 – 10 February 1919	0 All British have been repatriated	0 All French have been repatriated	<b>0</b>	194 [165 of pneumonia]
11 February 1919 – 10 March 1919	0	0	<b>0 – all French repatriated</b>	9

It is extremely difficult to say whether this increase in prisoner deaths paralleled a large increase in the number of prisoners of war present in the First Bavarian Army Corps region due to a lack of documentation. Bavaria was divided into three Army Corps regions with their headquarters at Munich (First Bavarian Army Corps), Nuremberg (Second Bavarian Army Corps) and Würzburg (Third Bavarian Army Corps), respectively. Two of the largest prisoner camps in the First Bavarian Army Corps region were at Lechfeld and Puchheim.<sup>1175</sup> At Puchheim camp 240 prisoners caught influenza in October 1918, of whom 58 died.<sup>1176</sup> From Table 17 it is clear that the British prisoner death rate in Bavaria remained low throughout the war, reflecting the far lower numbers of British prisoners in this region.

<sup>1175</sup> Doegen, *Kriegsgefangene Völker*, pp. 12-23, Verzeichnis der deutschen Kriegsgefangenenlager, deren Kommandanten und die Verteilung der Weltvölker auf die Lager nach dem Stande vom 10 Oktober 1918.

<sup>1176</sup> ACICR, 432/II/26, 2, c.44, Abschrift, Munich, Dr Lukas Oberstabärzt to Dr Guyot and Dr Guillemin, 4.1.1918.

**Table 18. Number of French and British prisoners of war in Bavaria on 10 October 1918.**<sup>1177</sup>

French officers	French soldiers	British officers	British soldiers
722	46,912	221	3,704

There were a considerable number of French prisoners in the whole of Bavaria. On 10 October 1918, in all three Bavarian Army Corps regions there were 46,085 French soldiers and 17 French officers in soldiers' camps and 705 French officers and 827 French other rank prisoners [orderlies] in officers' camps.<sup>1178</sup> There were 10 British officers and 3,635 British other rank prisoners in Bavarian camps for ordinary soldier prisoners and 211 British officers and 69 British other rank prisoners [orderlies] in Bavarian officer camps.<sup>1179</sup> This represented an overall total of 47,634 French military prisoners in Bavaria in contrast to only 3,925 British, which explains the very low British death rate in 1918 in the First Bavarian Army Corps region.

Between 11 October 1918 and 10 January 1919, 479 French prisoners died in the First Bavarian Army Corps region. Without overall figures for how many French and British prisoners were in the First Bavarian Army Corps region it is not possible to say whether this increase in deaths was proportional to an increase in prisoners. Given the huge number of deaths from pneumonia it appears plausible to argue, however, that the increase was due to the influenza epidemic and not a simple increase in prisoner numbers. Importantly, the International Red Cross did not attribute the increase in prisoner deaths in Germany to an increase in the number of prisoners in the country.<sup>1180</sup> Most observers blamed influenza, with prisoners believing that malnutrition made captives more susceptible to the epidemic.<sup>1181</sup>

<sup>1177</sup> Doegen, *Kriegsgefangene Völker*, pp. 12-23, Verzeichnis der deutschen Kriegsgefangenenlager, deren Kommandanten und die Verteilung der Weltvölker auf die Lager nach dem Stande vom 10 Oktober 1918.

<sup>1178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1180</sup> See for the International Red Cross assessment: Guyot, Guillermin and Meyer, "La situation sanitaire des prisonniers de guerre de l'Entente en Allemagne, pendant la période de l'armistice," pp. 137-144.

<sup>1181</sup> In fact, malnutrition is unlikely to have been a factor as influenza killed indiscriminately. The highest death tolls worldwide were in the United States, Switzerland and Asia, areas which had not suffered from wartime food shortages. Dallas, 1918, p. 199.



There are several final points which should be made regarding this analysis of prisoner deaths in 1918 in Germany. First, it is important to note that the increase in prisoner deaths began prior to the Armistice and revolution in Germany. It began *before* the large scale disruption of the German postal and transport system occurred, at a time when parcels and collective bread and biscuit deliveries were, for the most part, still arriving. Moreover, there was an increase in the death rate in the First Bavarian Corps in late 1918 for prisoners of *all* nationalities – both the British and French prisoners who were receiving parcels and those nationalities which did not have access to parcel food such as the Russians and Italians. Second, the fact that the death rates rose sharply prior to the revolution shows that prisoner of war mortality was already a problem before the change of regime. By the time the Kaiser abdicated on 9 November the epidemic in the German camps was a month old. Third, the continual movement of prisoners which was a feature of the German prison camp and *Kommando* work system helps to explain the spread of the influenza. The fact that prisoners lived in such close proximity also explains the speed of infection. How the influenza first reached the camps remains an open question, although August Gärtner claimed that the civilian population passed on the flu to the prisoners.<sup>1182</sup>

The influenza epidemic fitted perfectly with the eschatological fears harboured by many civilians and prisoners that the war might end in apocalypse. Influenza appeared as a plague, as God's punishment, and it killed extremely rapidly. Its symptoms were terrifying: "The disease might begin with a violent nosebleed, followed by a high fever, wheezing and finally a choking rattle that sounded like strangulation – for the sick person was indeed being strangled."<sup>1183</sup> Often at the last stage of the illness the patient went black in the face with bleeding from the nostrils. At a merely practical level these deaths had an impact on prisoners and their guards. Funerals, grave-digging and an increase in the size of cemeteries had a significant effect on prisoners' mood. Even without access to statistics it was blatantly obvious to observers that there were a larger number of bodies to bury in 1918 than in previous years. For the prisoners of war, these deaths caused

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<sup>1182</sup> Gärtner, "Einrichtung und Hygiene der Kriegsgefangenenlager," p. 254.

<sup>1183</sup> Dallas, 1918, p. 199.

panic. French and British prisoners witnessed with consternation as camp graveyards filled from influenza. However, the morbid mood among French and British prisoners of war was augmented by the fact that other prisoner nationalities in 1918 were dying of malnutrition. The Danish Red Cross representative Captain Lehrbach reported that “the Russians are dying like flies.”<sup>1184</sup> French prisoners reported to delegates of the International Red Cross that the state of the Russians was “unimaginable” or that “they could not understand how these prisoners were still alive.”<sup>1185</sup> The news of the Armistice only increased prisoners’ alarm – to die a prisoner after the war had actually ended was seen as desperately futile. One British prisoner wrote of the death of a friend on 1 November from

a disease called *Grippe*. [...] How he suffered only God knows. The last 3 days or so he turned delirious. His last night was bad indeed, in his unconsciousness he gave history from Drake, Wellington etc, then singing and finally praying. A prisoner from September 1914, how hard to die with peace so near at hand.<sup>1186</sup>

The prisoners’ perception, passed on in letters and in interviews on their return home, was that captives in German camps were dying in huge numbers. Two former French prisoners arriving back in France described the situation in Puchheim camp as “deplorable. Sanitary conditions extremely bad and around 20 deaths a day from influenza epidemic.”<sup>1187</sup> It was this perception that dominated in Allied military and government circles from mid-summer 1918 to early spring 1919. The British and French, post-Armistice, were left with a highly negative ‘memory’ of German prisoner of war camps in 1918.

This negative view was compounded by the collapse of the German prison camp system following the revolution. The system of transporting food from outside Germany to the prisoners disintegrated. The deliveries of collective bread from Berne, paid for by the

<sup>1184</sup> ACICR 432/II/26,2, B d, c.44, Exposé de la situation des prisonniers de guerre russe telle qu’elle est comme par l’enquête préliminaire faite en décembre 1918 à Berlin par le délégation du comité international de la Croix-Rouge.

<sup>1185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1186</sup> Extract from the diary of H. J. Clarke describing the death of Private Charles Kelly, in: Hall, *In Enemy Hands*, p. 108.

<sup>1187</sup> SHAT, 15 N 15, Rapatriement, Inspection des PG. Inévacuables, nov. 1918 – déc. 1919, Tgm to French QQG, 18.12.1918.



French government, were suspended on 8 November “due to fears of pillaging.”<sup>1188</sup> Parcel delivery to camps ceased in many areas; in others the parcels arrived plundered.<sup>1189</sup> Even delivery of the insufficient local rations provided by Germany was disrupted.<sup>1190</sup> Both the new German government and the Prussian *Kriegsministerium* lost control of the situation. Although still staffed by members of the old regime, the *Kriegsministerium* had lost its administrative power: “the action of the ministry was practically useless.”<sup>1191</sup> The death of the head of the *Kriegsministerium* prisoner of war department, General von Friedrich, in late-August 1918, added to the difficulties; his successor, General von Fransecky, was not long in the job when the revolution broke out.<sup>1192</sup> According to the Danish Red Cross representative in Berlin, Captain Lehrbach: “Colonel Franzseky [sic] is supposed to be in command of the prisoners’ department of the war office but the former sergeant Schlesinger, [...] is the real Commander in Chief the War Office [sic], as the representative of the workmen’s and soldiers’ council.”<sup>1193</sup>

The dual command structure at the *Kriegsministerium* was mirrored by the situation on the ground. In some areas camp guards elected their own soldiers’ council, while in others the workers’ and soldiers’ council of the nearest town took charge. One French prisoner described how “power is shared between the soldiers’ councils and the former commandants and as a result there is anarchy almost everywhere.”<sup>1194</sup> Some soldiers’ councils allowed German officers to continue to administer prison camps provided they followed its orders.<sup>1195</sup> Others drove the German officers from the camps and left the running of the camp to the N.C.O.s among the guard. At Mainz prisoner of war camp the

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<sup>1188</sup> MAE, Série Z, Europe 1918-1929, Allemagne 181, Prisonniers de Guerre I, Avril 1918-May 1921, Tgm from French consul, Bern, to Affaires Etrangères, Paris, 8.11.1918.

<sup>1189</sup> General Dupont, “Une mission en Allemagne. Le rapatriement des prisonniers” in *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 3 (Paris, 1920), pp. 144-166.

<sup>1190</sup> Guyot, Guillermin and Meyer, “La situation sanitaire des prisonniers de guerre de l’Entente en Allemagne, pendant la période de l’armistice,” p. 140.

<sup>1191</sup> Dupont, “Une mission en Allemagne,” pp. 144-146.

<sup>1192</sup> Thomas Newton, *Retrospection* (London, 1941), p. 263.

<sup>1193</sup> The National Archives, Washington, M 367/312 Oct 1918-Jan 1919, f. 0330, American Chargé d’Affaires, Copenhagen to Secretary of State, US, 28.11.1918.

<sup>1194</sup> SHAT 16 N 1224, Centre de rapatriement de Sarrebourg, Interrogatoire, Sous-Lieutenant Gindre.

<sup>1195</sup> Guyot, Guillermin and Meyer, “La situation sanitaire des prisonniers de guerre de l’Entente en Allemagne, pendant la période de l’armistice,” p. 140.

commandant was deposed by the local soldiers' council.<sup>1196</sup> In Rastatt prisoner of war camp the use of the bayonet against prisoners was suppressed and guards had their insignia removed.<sup>1197</sup> On 21 November the gates of the camp were opened and prisoners were given permission to leave.<sup>1198</sup> Some camp guards simply self-demobilised, leaving their posts to return home.<sup>1199</sup> The functioning of prisoner of war camps and *Kommandos*, some of which contained over 10,000 men, deteriorated. In Bavaria, Kurt Eisner, the leader of the revolution in Munich, sent a telegram to France asking for help, declaring that the Bavarian prisoner of war camps were in crisis.<sup>1200</sup>

Across Germany guards stopped enforcing discipline or hygiene regulations – there was a massive increase in slacking.<sup>1201</sup> In some areas medical orderlies were given long periods of leave by the local workers' and soldiers' council, leaving sick prisoners without adequate care.<sup>1202</sup> Red Cross observers found that German medical orderlies “refused” to assist the sick prisoners, whereas German doctors continued to care for them “almost without exception.”<sup>1203</sup> However, “almost everywhere the buildings were dirty; the toilets in particular were completely overflowing and the medical care was insufficient.”<sup>1204</sup> There was overcrowding in the hospitals and those with mild influenza were mixed in with serious cases, causing the disease to spread.<sup>1205</sup> International Red Cross observers stated that the “negligence of the soldiers' councils in failing to observe the recommendations of the doctors aggravated the situation.”<sup>1206</sup>

Given the power vacuum, the prisoners reacted to the revolution in ways which significantly worsened conditions. They self-mobilised in reaction. Many prisoners upon

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<sup>1196</sup> Waugh, *The Prisoners of Mainz*, p. 241.

<sup>1197</sup> SHAT, 7 N 338 Suppl. f. 28, État-Major de l'Armée, Bulletin de renseignements, no. 25, Bade, 25.11.1918.

<sup>1198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1199</sup> Dupont, “Une mission en Allemagne,” pp. 144-166.

<sup>1200</sup> SHAT, 15 N 15, Radiogramme allemand, 10.12.1918, provenance – Nauen.

<sup>1201</sup> ACICR, 432/II/26, 2, c.44, Siegfried Horneffer and Theodore Aubert inspection of Döberitz camp, 20.12.1918.

<sup>1202</sup> Guyot, Guillermin and Meyer, “La situation sanitaire des prisonniers de guerre de l'Entente en Allemagne, pendant la période de l'armistice,” p. 140.

<sup>1203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1206</sup> Ibid.



hearing of the Armistice refused to continue working for their guards, including work that was for their own benefit such as cleaning their camp or cutting firewood. As a result camp hygiene collapsed.<sup>1207</sup> A Red Cross inspection of Cottbus I and II camps on 18 December 1918 found overcrowding, insufficient food, insufficient fuel for heating, complete shortage of medical supplies, hygiene regulations abandoned and total disorder.<sup>1208</sup> At Döberitz camp prisoners were using the floor boards of their barracks for firewood.<sup>1209</sup> Prisoners refused to take any orders from camp guards – encouraged by the knowledge that the guards were highly unlikely to enforce them.<sup>1210</sup> A *Kommando* attached to Landau camp working at the Suker factory refused to continue working on 12 November despite the manager's best efforts.<sup>1211</sup> Another *Kommando* attached to the same camp at Wilhelmsfeld continued to work when offered more pay.<sup>1212</sup> Some local soldiers' and workers' councils liberated prisoners in their area to create jobs for German workers.<sup>1213</sup>

Prisoners of all nationalities on working *Kommandos* flooded back to the nearest *Stammlager* [parent camp] in the belief that those in a *Stammlager* would be repatriated more quickly and, in the case of those prisoners on *Kommandos* where food had been scarce, because they thought that in the *Stammlager* they would be better fed.<sup>1214</sup> This had disastrous consequences as it caused severe overcrowding, administrative chaos and a complete break-down in discipline. Worse still, it increased the spread of the deadly influenza. This in turn increased the panic of the prisoners and their desperation to leave Germany at once. One of the most serious consequences was that prisoners who developed symptoms kept them secret in the fear that if admitted to hospital it would

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<sup>1207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1208</sup> ACICR, 432/II/26, 2, c.44, Inspection of Cottbus I and Cottbus II camps by Siegfried Horneffer and Theodore Aubert. 18.12.1918.

<sup>1209</sup> Ibid., Inspection of Döberitz camp, 20.12.1918.

<sup>1210</sup> Guyot, Guillermin and Meyer, "La situation sanitaire des prisonniers de guerre de l'Entente en Allemagne, pendant la période de l'armistice," p. 140.

<sup>1211</sup> SHAT, 16 N 1224, Centre de rapatriement de Sarrebourg, Interrogatoire d'André Delanne, 27.11.1918.

<sup>1212</sup> Ibid., Interrogatoire de Armand Merlet et Louis Gorgoux, 11.12.1918.

<sup>1213</sup> Dupont, "Une mission en Allemagne," p. 147.

<sup>1214</sup> Katja Mitze, *Das Kriegsgefangenenlager Ingolstadt während des Ersten Weltkriegs*, pp. 375-377.

delay their repatriation.<sup>1215</sup> The International Red Cross found that “fearing they will miss the departure of the repatriation trains, prisoners only declare they are sick at the very last moment, thus infecting their comrades in the barracks and not receiving until very late the necessary medical care.”<sup>1216</sup>

French prisoners, hungry, in overcrowded parent camps and faced with an influenza epidemic became extremely frustrated at not being repatriated at once. They began to taunt guards and even to riot. In some camps, such as Friedrichsfeld, Dänholm and Eutin, order collapsed.<sup>1217</sup> Prisoners in Strasbourg mutinied and liberated themselves.<sup>1218</sup> Danzig was flooded with thousands of destitute released prisoners from camps and *Kommandos* in East Prussia. Two hundred thousand Russian prisoners were reported looting in the city.<sup>1219</sup> The German government feared prisoners in Germany would revolt en masse.<sup>1220</sup> The International Red Cross sent a medical mission into Germany consisting of three doctors and emergency medical supplies. It found in many camps “a state of depression and discouragement” among the French prisoners due to their disappointed expectation of immediate repatriation following the Armistice.<sup>1221</sup> The revolution also meant that prisoners were no longer receiving letters from home, which impacted severely on their morale.<sup>1222</sup>

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<sup>1215</sup> Guyot, Guillermin and Meyer, “La situation sanitaire des prisonniers de guerre de l’Entente en Allemagne, pendant la période de l’armistice,” p. 142. See also: SHAT 16 N 1224, Centre de rapatriement de Sarrebourg, Interrogatoire de André Luncau.

<sup>1216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1217</sup> BA, R 901.77, f. 14, Waffenstillstandskommission, Gef. no. 2194 to Erzberger, Ergebnis der Besprechung vom 10.12.18 über Kriegsgefangenenangelegenheiten, 11.12.1918; Doegen, *Kriegsgefangene Völker*, p. 10.

<sup>1218</sup> SHAT 10 N 218, CIPA, sous-commission des PG, 18.11.1918, Procès-verbal de la conférence du 18.11.1918.

<sup>1219</sup> National Archives, Washington, M367/312, Oct 1918 – Jan 1919, f. 403, Tgm from Copenhagen to US Secretary of State, 3.12.1918.

<sup>1220</sup> Dupont, “Une mission en Allemagne,” p. 147. Also: SHAT, 15 N 15, Tgm, M. de la Guerre to Em. Basch at Spa.

<sup>1221</sup> Guyot, Guillermin and Meyer, “La situation sanitaire des prisonniers de guerre de l’Entente en Allemagne pendant la période de l’armistice,” p. 143.

<sup>1222</sup> Dupont, “Une mission en Allemagne. Le rapatriement des prisonniers,” pp. 145-147.



Some soldiers' councils decided to allow prisoners freedom to come and go from their camps as they pleased.<sup>1223</sup> This led to prisoners causing problems in local towns as, free in public after months or years of captivity, many behaved in an antisocial manner, becoming drunk, disorderly, and harassing local women in the street. French prisoners' behaviour was far worse in this regard than that of other nationalities. The French prisoners were the most difficult to control and were swift to riot.<sup>1224</sup> International Red Cross observers reported how at Stuttgart camp the French prisoners "at the moment of their departure destroyed and burned everything they could not bring with them, including things that could have helped the Russians who have nothing. We tried to tell them this but they would not listen."<sup>1225</sup> A French general described French prisoners as difficult to discipline because they were "*exaltés par notre victoire*."<sup>1226</sup> There was marked triumphalist behaviour from French prisoners which was directed at local German civilians and camp guards. It appears to have been caused by a mixture of vengeance, frustration at their slow repatriation and a desire to compensate for the fact that they had not been in arms defeating Germany at the point of the Armistice.

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<sup>1223</sup> Guyot, Guillermin and Meyer, "La situation sanitaire des prisonniers de guerre de l'Entente en Allemagne, pendant la période de l'armistice," pp. 137-144. Also: SHAT 16 N 1224, Centre de rapatriement de Sarrebourg, Compte rendu des interrogatoires, 27.11.1918.

<sup>1224</sup> SHAT, 15 N 15, Commission allemande d'armistice, Spa, Le Président de la Commission allemande d'Armistice au Président de la Commission Interalliée de l'Armistice, Général Nudant, 7.12.1918.

<sup>1225</sup> ACICR, 432/II/26, 2, c.44, B f B, Rapport présenté par MM. Correvon et Ch. Müller au CICR sur la mission qui leur fut confiée en Allemagne. Italian prisoners also burnt furniture etc. at Ingolstadt camp Fort VIII prior to leaving. Mitze, *Das Kriegsgefangenenlager Ingolstadt während des Ersten Weltkriegs*, p. 377.

<sup>1226</sup> Dupont, "Une mission en Allemagne," pp. 144-146.





**Fig. 20.** French prisoners of war in a Bavarian bar after the Armistice.<sup>1227</sup>

As a result of the prisoners' disorder, several indiscriminate shootings occurred at camps at Langensalza, Mannheim, Sagan, Stralsund and Stuttgart in the six week period after the Armistice.<sup>1228</sup> In the incident at Langensalza, 15 prisoners were shot dead and 14 wounded when guards panicked at prisoners carrying wood.<sup>1229</sup> Each of these incidents followed a similar pattern. Prison camp guards who had become increasingly nervous of their charges were annoyed by prisoners who were hungry and disorderly, until finally an incident triggered a guard shooting one or more prisoners attempting either to leave a

<sup>1227</sup> *Derrière les barbelés. Scènes de la vie des prisonniers de guerre. Camps de Lechfeld, Landshut, Puchheim, Ingolstadt, Mannheim.* Sketches made during captivity by a French Prisoner 'Belot,' F pièce 114 (F), BDIC, Nanterre.

<sup>1228</sup> Hankel, *Die Leipziger Prozesse*, p. 328.

<sup>1229</sup> *Ibid.*



camp, to taunt or to riot. Ironically, in shooting, guards were to a certain extent using the last resort open to them to restore camp discipline – exactly what the Allies were demanding.

The French military were simply overwhelmed by the task of prisoner repatriation. Neither they nor the new German government had exact figures on how many French prisoners were in Germany - the International Red Cross estimated there were 475,000.<sup>1230</sup> Other French sources put the figure much higher, at 844,000.<sup>1231</sup> In contrast, the British had approximately 190,000 military prisoners to bring home.<sup>1232</sup> In addition there was an unknown number of prisoners in the liberated areas of northern France and Belgium. Within five days of the Armistice, 22,354 French prisoners of war and 2,246 British prisoners liberated from the former German-occupied territories had arrived at the French army front.<sup>1233</sup> The French army also faced the daunting reality of the liberation of all prisoners in camps on the left bank of the Rhine, which they were due to occupy, as the Germans withdrew in haste under the terms of the Armistice.<sup>1234</sup> On 18 November, the French still had no precise information on how many prisoners or camps were located on the left bank of the Rhine.<sup>1235</sup> Recognising that getting food through to these prisoners by train was impossible, the first Inter-Allied Armistice Commission repatriation plan,

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<sup>1230</sup> Guyot, Guillermin and Meyer, “La situation sanitaire des prisonniers de guerre de l’Entente en Allemagne, pendant la période de l’armistice,” p. 139.

<sup>1231</sup> SHAT, 15 N 15, Rapatriement. Inspection des PG. Inévacuables. nov 1918 – décembre 1918. Commission interalliée permanente d’armistice, 19.11.1918; *Bulletin de l’Office d’Information*, Office d’Information des Oeuvres de secours aux prisonniers de Guerre rattaché à l’Agence des Prisonniers de Guerre de la Croix-Rouge française, 1918, p. 3002, cited in Bruno Cabanes, “Finir la guerre. L’expérience des soldats français (été 1918 – printemps 1920),” vol. 2, le retour organisé et célébré, Doctoral thesis, Université de Paris 1 (2002), p. 416.

<sup>1232</sup> Statistics on the number of British prisoners vary. See Table 1.1 for further details. Alan Bowgen of The National Archives, London, estimates there were 140,000 British prisoners in Germany at the time of the Armistice and that overall 174,800 British prisoners were captured on the Western Front. Alan Bowgen, “British Army POWs of the First World War,” in *Ancestors. The Family History Magazine of the Public Record Office*, 6 (Feb/March 2002), p. 34. Wilhelm Doegen states that on 10.10.1918 there were 182,009 British prisoners in Germany. Doegen, *Kriegsgefangene Völker*, p. 28. Given that Doegen’s figure cannot include prisoners evacuated from the front between 10.10.1918 and 11.11.1918 or prisoners evacuated from prisoner of war labour companies it appears likely that the real number of British prisoners in Germany at the Armistice was higher.

<sup>1233</sup> SHAT, 16 N 2380, Tgm, État récapitulatif du personnel passé dans nos lignes depuis le 11 novembre, 12 heures jusqu’au 16 novembre, 12 heures.

<sup>1234</sup> SHAT, 16 N 2380, Maréchal Foch to US, Belgian and French Commanders in Chief, 16.11.1918, stated that “the prisoners in the zone being evacuated [by the Germans] have been liberated en masse.”

<sup>1235</sup> SHAT, 10 N 218, CIPA, sous-commission des PG, 18.11.18, Procès-verbal de la conférence du 18.11.1918.



drafted on 19 November, stated that these men would simply have to stay put and rely on the local population for food until the Allied troops took over the running of their camps.<sup>1236</sup> The French threatened reprisals if the Germans did not ensure medical care and food for their prisoners on the left bank of the Rhine until their handover.<sup>1237</sup> Naturally, the prisoners caught in this situation opted to try to reach France on foot, flooding an already overwhelmed French army which rushed to establish repatriation centres for them.<sup>1238</sup> The distances prisoners attempted to travel were enormous. Some officer prisoners who had left camps in East Prussia arrived at the Swiss border where they were refused entry and finally ended up in Berlin.<sup>1239</sup> Amid the chaos, however, certain continuities remained – Wilhelm Doegen’s last phonogram recording of prisoners in German camps was made in late-December 1918.<sup>1240</sup>

France turned to Britain for assistance but the British initially refused to lend them extra ships.<sup>1241</sup> The British also would not agree to the use of German ships in the Baltic, manned by German crews, to repatriate prisoners.<sup>1242</sup> The French then turned to the Swiss, who began to repatriate French prisoners using Swiss trains and agreed to send two trainloads of food a day to feed French prisoners in Germany.<sup>1243</sup> It was a totally inadequate response to the food needs of the French prisoners in Germany, particularly as upon the Armistice the French had prohibited the sending of all individual parcels. In contrast, the British Red Cross sent trainloads of parcels from Rotterdam immediately

<sup>1236</sup> SHAT, 15 N 15, Commission Interalliée permanente d’Armistice, Note au sujet des dispositions relatives aux prisonniers de guerre, 19.11.1918.

<sup>1237</sup> Ibid., Réponse aux demandes du mémoire du général Nudant au sujet des prisonniers de guerre, C. en Chef des armées alliées, 21.11.1918.

<sup>1238</sup> SHAT, 16 N 2380, GQG des armées du nord et du nord-est, État communiqué des centres de triage des PG français venant d’Allemagne, 18.11.1918.

<sup>1239</sup> Dupont, “Une mission en Allemagne. Le rapatriement des prisonniers,” pp. 144-146.

<sup>1240</sup> Jürgen-K. Mahrenholz, “Zum Lautarchiv und seiner wissenschaftlichen Erschliessung durch die Datenbank IMAGO” in Marianne Bröcker, ed., *Berichte aus dem ICTM-Nationalkomitee Deutschland, Band XII, Bericht über die Jahrestagung des Nationalkomitees der Bundesrepublik Deutschland im International Council for Traditional Music [Unesco] am 08. und 09. März 2002 in Köln (Bamberg, 2002)*, p. 139.

<sup>1241</sup> SHAT, 15 N 15, Commandant Poupinel, Compte-rendu des questions traités à la conférence du 18 décembre sur le rapatriement des prisonniers de guerre.

<sup>1242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1243</sup> SHAT, 10 N 218, CIPA, sous-commission des PG, Commission Interalliée d’Armistice, Ravitaillement des PG, 20.11.1918.



after the Armistice direct to the camps.<sup>1244</sup> 60-70% of these convoys reached their destination.<sup>1245</sup>

The French had totally unrealistic expectations of the German government and army, insisting that Germany was still obliged to feed prisoners and to provide them with medical care: “the German government is charged with the entire responsibility for the feeding and medical care of the Entente prisoners until they are handed over to the Allies [...]. At the same time, the Allies will continue to assure additional sources of food and clothing for prisoners as in the past.”<sup>1246</sup> The French desire to avoid all dealings with the German administration also delayed matters. Georges Cahen-Salvador head of the French *Service des Prisonniers de Guerre* told a delegate from the International Red Cross that “on no account did he desire any involvement of the Germans in the repatriation of French prisoners except for their provision of military escorts for trains delivering foodstuffs.”<sup>1247</sup> Also out of a feeling of “delicacy” the French initially asked the International Red Cross to organise medical supplies to camps rather than sending in French army medical personnel.<sup>1248</sup> There was also an over-reliance upon the new Inter-Allied Armistice Commission which set up a prisoners of war sub-commission to organise repatriation with the Germans. In conjunction with this sub-commission the French produced three different plans for repatriation on 19 and 28 November and on 4 December.<sup>1249</sup> It was only on 6 December that General Dupont arrived in Berlin to begin French repatriation efforts. In contrast, the British Red Cross was already in Berlin and British delegations were already at all the major German and Dutch ports organising loading prisoners onto ships.

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<sup>1244</sup> “Prisoners’ Parcels,” *Times*, 31.12.1918, p. 4.

<sup>1245</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1246</sup> SHAT 15 N 15, Rapatriement des prisonniers de guerre, nov 1918 – déc 1919, Ministre de la guerre to MM. le Général Commandant en Chef des Armées du nord et du nord est, 4.12.1918. See also: Général Mangin commandant le 10e Armée to Mr le Général Fayolle, Commandant le Groupe d’Armées, 12.12.1918. Underlining in original.

<sup>1247</sup> ACICR, 419/XX, Mission Clouzot à Paris, Fontenay sous bois, 8.12.1918.

<sup>1248</sup> Guyot, Guillermin and Meyer, “La situation sanitaire des prisonniers de guerre de l’Entente en Allemagne, pendant la période de l’armistice,” pp.137-144.

<sup>1249</sup> SHAT 15 N 15 and 16 N 2380.



General Dupont, in charge of French prisoner repatriation, informed Paris on 19 December that the existing French plan of feeding camps by rail from Switzerland was a disaster.<sup>1250</sup> Finally, the French government realised that their approach was not working and the sub-commission for prisoners of war at Spa was abolished as the French decided on a more direct approach, imitating the British whose prisoner repatriation was by now well under way.<sup>1251</sup> General Nudant, President of the Inter-Allied Armistice Commission, wrote on 15 December 1918 that “the slowness of the evacuation of our prisoners, due largely to the fact that transport by sea has not yet started together with the critical physical and mental state of our exasperated prisoners makes it absolutely necessary that new methods of evacuation be found.”<sup>1252</sup> Nothing serves as a better indictment of the French repatriation failure than the fact that over 174,710 French prisoners had effectively walked home before the first organised repatriation began in mid-December 1918.<sup>1253</sup> The chaos was almost total: the head of the French Red Cross admitted that neither the number nor the identity of repatriated prisoners was checked.<sup>1254</sup>

In contrast, the British reacted decisively to prisoner repatriation, even threatening to renew hostilities if the Germans did not re-establish order in their prisoner of war camps. The Württemberg *Kriegsministerium* was informed by Berlin that

A large number of French and British prisoners have been set free either due to orders given by local units or as a result of the carelessness of their guards. A number of them have reached the enemy armies by foot, arriving exhausted and inadequately fed. The British government has protested in the strongest manner and threatened to use force against such a deplorable state of affairs. If, in the future, prisoners of war are not handed over in an orderly manner, a breakdown of the Armistice is to be expected.<sup>1255</sup>

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<sup>1250</sup> Cahen-Salvador, *Les Prisonniers de Guerre*, p. 279.

<sup>1251</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 281; Dupont, “Une mission en Allemagne. Le rapatriement des prisonniers,” pp. 144-166.

<sup>1252</sup> SHAT, 16 N 2380, GQG, État-Major, 1e bureau, General Nudant, Tgm 15.12.1918.

<sup>1253</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.12.1918, Transmis au 1er bureau du GQG pour attribution, 2361/DA states that 152,356 French prisoners entered French lines between 18.11.1918 and 9.12.1918. SHAT, 16 N 2380, Tgm, État récapitulatif du personnel passé dans nos lignes depuis le 11 novembre, 12 heures jusqu’au 16 novembre 12 heures states that 22,354 French prisoners arrived between 11.11.1918 and 16.11.1918.

<sup>1254</sup> A. d’Anthouard, *Les Prisonniers de Guerre Français en Allemagne, leur ravitaillement depuis l’Armistice, leur rapatriement, les réparations qui leur sont dues* (Paris, 1919), pp. 3-5.

<sup>1255</sup> HStA, STUTT, M1/8, Bü. 230, Abschrift, SS. Berlin to Würtemb. Ministerium für militärischen Angelegenheiten, 27.11.1918.



It was rumoured among British prisoners of war that the British army had issued “a general order [...] that no further returning prisoners were to pass through advancing British troops in the west. Apparently the sight of starving prisoners of war working on light railways behind the German lines had dismayed and greatly angered British troops on their way to occupy Germany, and retaliation was feared.”<sup>1256</sup>

While the French tried to plan repatriation through the Inter-Allied Armistice Commission, the British government had circumvented this entire negotiation process, deciding not to appoint representatives to the sub-commission for prisoners of war at Spa.<sup>1257</sup> Instead the British handed over the organisation of repatriation to the War Office, which set up an inter-departmental committee with Admiralty, transport, military and civilian input to get repatriation going. This committee did not wait for the results of negotiations with the German Armistice Commission at Spa or for the British military representative, General Ewart, to reach Berlin. Immediately after the Armistice the British Red Cross sent a team to Berlin to coordinate repatriation and food supply to camps with another British Red Cross section in Holland.<sup>1258</sup> This led to a far quicker improvement in camp conditions for British prisoners than occurred for the French. By 24 December there was “ample food” reported in all camps in Germany where British prisoners were located and British medical officers had arrived in prisoner camps.<sup>1259</sup> The British had repatriated 119,915 prisoners by 31 December – over half their prisoners.<sup>1260</sup> In contrast, organised repatriation of many French prisoners in Germany did not begin until mid-December – no French officers even appeared in the prison camps until this point. In 14 German regions French repatriation had not yet begun on 19 December.<sup>1261</sup> The first French ship only arrived on 24 December.<sup>1262</sup> Georges Cahen-Salvador, head of the French *Service des Prisonniers de Guerre*, in his post-war account lauded Allied

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<sup>1256</sup> Interview with Norman Cowan, Emden, *Prisoners of the Kaiser*, p. 168.

<sup>1257</sup> SHAT, 15 N 15, Note pour M. le directeur général des communications et des ravitaillements aux armées, 13.12.1918.

<sup>1258</sup> Dupont, “Une mission en Allemagne. Le rapatriement des prisonniers,” p. 160.

<sup>1259</sup> *Times*, 24.12.1918, p. 8.

<sup>1260</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.12.1918.

<sup>1261</sup> SHAT, 16 N 2380, GQG, 2e bureau, Maréchal Commandant en Chef armées françaises de l'est à Maréchal Foch, 19.12.1918.

<sup>1262</sup> Dupont, “Une mission en Allemagne. Le rapatriement des prisonniers,” p. 153.

cooperation in organising collectively the repatriation of their prisoners of war from Germany; in reality the relationship between the British and the French was not unproblematic.<sup>1263</sup> It was not until 14 January 1919, that all French prisoners fit enough to travel were removed from Germany.<sup>1264</sup>

The British saw their prisoners of war as heroic victims and even abandoned certain formalities in order that the men could reach home as soon as possible – clearing the interview and quarantine process to just a day or two at the main repatriation centres set up at Dover, Leith, Canterbury and Ripon.<sup>1265</sup> Returned prisoners of war received a specially extended two month leave; initially their French counterparts only received 30 days.<sup>1266</sup> Weekly bulletins on the number of British prisoners repatriated were published by *The Times*. Prisoners were honoured by the nation upon their return: train platforms were decorated, bands played on their arrival.<sup>1267</sup> The King issued each of the repatriated men with a letter welcoming them home. He also issued a statement to *The Times* in December apologising to those still in Germany for Christmas and assuring them that they would be brought home soon: “The King greatly regrets that they should not have returned home before Christmas [...] He sends them his best wishes for as merry a Christmas as possible under the circumstances and a happy New Year at home.”<sup>1268</sup> Queen Alexandra and Princess Victoria gave out presents and food to repatriated prisoners in London Bridge Station the same month.<sup>1269</sup>

The first ships of repatriated British prisoners received a warm welcome at Dover. All the harbour boats sounded their sirens and the town was bedecked with flags.<sup>1270</sup> One prisoner described how “when I got to Peckham they made a hell of a fuss of me, Union Jacks were flying up the street where I used to live. From one bedroom to another strung

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<sup>1263</sup> Cahen-Salvador, *Les Prisonniers de Guerre*, p. 277.

<sup>1264</sup> SHAT, 6 N 114, Fonds Clemenceau, Message from Général Dupont received 14.1.1919.

<sup>1265</sup> W.A. Tucker, *The Lousier War* (London, 1974), p. 123.

<sup>1266</sup> SHAT, 16 N 2380, M. de la Guerre, État-major de l'armée, 14.11.1918, Clemenceau to MM. les généraux gouverneurs de Paris, Lyon, les régions 1-13, 18-20 et 21. This was later extended to 60 days.

<sup>1267</sup> Dallas, 1918, p. 240.

<sup>1268</sup> “To British Prisoners in Germany,” *Times*, 27.12.1918.

<sup>1269</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1270</sup> Brown, *The Imperial War Museum Book of 1918*, p. 326.



across the road was one Union Jack with “welcome home Tom.”<sup>1271</sup> Former prisoner, W.A. Tucker reported that

all prisoners [...] suffer a sense of humiliation for having been captured and if only for that reason we did not look for or expect any tumultous reception on our return home. When on the contrary this did happen it was so totally unexpected [...] it invoked in us an overwhelming sense of relief and gratitude [...] The sympathy shown to returned prisoners in Britain took extraordinary turns.<sup>1272</sup>

Tucker recalled how waitresses refused to charge him and how “prisoner-of-war” was even cited on his Army Discharge Certificate in the section listing his military qualifications: “I know of no other Army which regards capture by the enemy as a military *Qualification* [...] the intention was compassionate.”<sup>1273</sup> Following their return home every single British prisoner received a letter thanking them for their contribution to the war from the King that described them as “our gallant officers and men.”<sup>1274</sup>

In contrast, French prisoners’ of war liberated from the occupied territories were initially quarantined for four days, whereas liberated civilian prisoners were not quarantined at all.<sup>1275</sup> Reports even appeared in the French press criticising conditions for those prisoners being repatriated from the army zone who were being held in dirty overcrowded camps, often waiting over a week for a train home.<sup>1276</sup> One prisoner complained that while waiting they were being treated like pariahs.<sup>1277</sup> The press reports matched internal army criticism of the condition of the repatriation centres. One report noted: “the hygiene installations are poor. The men sleep in barracks on a very thin layer of straw. They only receive cold food because there are no beakers or mess kits available to distribute anything else.”<sup>1278</sup> In February 1919 the issue was raised in the *Chambre des Députés*, where *Député* Léon Pasqual complained at how the repatriated prisoners were treated, demanding that they be spoken to as “sons of France” and not as “half-

<sup>1271</sup> Interview with Tommy Gay, Emden, *Prisoners of the Kaiser*, p. 184.

<sup>1272</sup> Tucker, *The Lousier War*, pp. 122-123.

<sup>1273</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1274</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>1275</sup> SHAT, 15 N 15, C. en Chef des Armées Alliées, no. 747/CR. 23.11.1918.

<sup>1276</sup> SHAT, 16 N 2380, Extract from *Le Populaire*, “Comment on traite nos prisonniers,” 19.12.1918.

<sup>1277</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1278</sup> *Ibid.*, Compte rendu de mission du médecin principal Raymond, Visite du centre de triage des prisonniers rapatriés de Woippy.

Boches.”<sup>1279</sup> The International Red Cross also criticised the lack of heating and poor conditions on the trains repatriating French prisoners.<sup>1280</sup> Prisoners received a muted welcome. One former French prisoner stated: “at Dunkerque I have to admit it was a disappointment; with all the crowds no one paid any attention to us.”<sup>1281</sup>

There was one additional outcome from the confusion of repatriation. The chaos of the French repatriation meant that men arrived home before their families had been notified that they were on the way. Some even avoided the *centres du rapatriement* altogether, making their own way straight home.<sup>1282</sup> This gave the families of the missing further hope. After all, tens of thousands of Allied prisoners, almost all of whom had not been registered and were presumed dead, emerged from the occupied territories upon their liberation from German prisoner of war labour companies. Hopes were fed by accounts from repatriated prisoners that described the continual transfers of prisoners between camps and *Kommandos*, and by accounts of prisoners of war trapped in Polish regions of Germany by the outbreak of the Polish civil war.<sup>1283</sup> It was little wonder that other families began to hope for a similar unexpected arrival. Precisely because hopes had been aroused anew in Britain and France, their disappointment proved particularly difficult for families to accept.

To satisfy the demands of the families of the missing, the French government increased the staff of its military mission in Berlin and set them to work locating and registering the graves of dead prisoners and searching for any lost prisoners still in Germany. They only found one, who, ill in hospital, and overlooked during repatriation, was still in Germany against his will.<sup>1284</sup> The small number of other former French prisoners discovered had

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<sup>1279</sup> Odon Abbal, “Les Prisonniers de la Grande Guerre,” in Jean-Marie d’Hoop, ed., *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, 145 (1987), p. 20.

<sup>1280</sup> Cabanes, “Finir la guerre,” vol. 2, p. 435.

<sup>1281</sup> Fernand Relange, *Huit mois dans les lignes allemandes. Souvenirs d’un prisonnier de Belleherbe* (Besançon, 1919), p. 13.

<sup>1282</sup> SHAT, 16 N 2380, No.27.510 1/11. M. de la G. Bureau de l’organisation et de la mobilisation de l’armée, 22.12.1918.

<sup>1283</sup> Dupont, “Une mission en Allemagne. Le rapatriement des prisonniers,” pp. 148-153.

<sup>1284</sup> See the case of Felix Grea, SHAT, 7 N 327-1, Mission Militaire Française, Le médecin-major Rodolphe Strauss to Mr le Général Dupont, Berlin, 13.9.1919.



remained in Germany by choice. The vast majority of families of the missing were destined to be bitterly disappointed.

The British reacted similarly to the French, sending Adelaide Livingstone to assist the British military mission in Berlin to search for prisoner graves and locate the missing.<sup>1285</sup> It was an almost impossible task. More efficient than the French, the British had carefully recorded the name and details of each repatriated British prisoner. On 9 January 1919, the British, cross referencing their lists of registered prisoners which had been kept throughout the war, insisted that the Germans should have another 36,000 British prisoners still to repatriate. The Germans had only 13,579.<sup>1286</sup> The fate of the 22,421 missing prisoners remained unknown – it is likely that unregistered labour company deaths account for most of them. The Allies' perception that their men had simply disappeared within the German camp system caused anger.

The negative experience of revolution and repatriation left the British and French with a strong impression that there had been massive prisoner mistreatment in Germany. They blamed Germany for the post-Armistice chaos of the camps. The initial 'memory' formed in late-1918 of German captivity was, therefore, a radically negative one. The disintegration of the prison camps after the Armistice also impacted on how ex-prisoners recalled their captivity. This initial post-war memory was violently anti-German and resentful. Although little actual violence occurred in prison camps in Germany after the Armistice, ex-prisoners interpreted the delay in their repatriation and the breakdown in the parcel system as an act of wartime violence against them. Coupled with the anger at the condition of the prisoners liberated in the occupied territories, this made for considerable anger in Britain and France at German prisoner treatment. This helps to explain why the British and French felt morally justified in withholding their German prisoners.

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<sup>1285</sup> TNA, TS 26/21, German War Trials, Records of Prisoner of War Committee. See also: WO 141/41.

<sup>1286</sup> Emden, *Prisoners of the Kaiser*, p. 10.

### Creating Post-War Memory Narratives: The German View

The Armistice brought major changes for German prisoners of war in France. Given the chaos of the French effort to repatriate their own prisoners from Germany and the strains of demobilisation and the influenza epidemic, it seems remarkable that the French government would have attempted an additional mass transport project. But it did. In order to release jobs for returning French soldiers, the decision was made the day after the Armistice to move 100,000 German prisoners from camps in the French interior to the devastated northern regions to work on reconstruction and de-mining projects. This was to free up jobs in the interior for returning French servicemen.<sup>1287</sup> The decision was taken to move these prisoners despite the protests by several prefects in the devastated areas that they did not want any prisoner labourers in their area as there was no way of feeding them.<sup>1288</sup> These German prisoners joined those already in the army zone in French prisoner of war labour companies. In addition, those prisoners taken in the massive captures of August, September and October 1918 were also put directly into army zone prisoner of war labour companies. The men who by their mass surrenders had helped bring the war to a close were now the very Germans upon whom France would exact her revenge. Once again rank was a decisive factor in determining prisoners' fates – officer prisoners remained in their more comfortable camps in the French interior.

The existing French prisoner of war labour company system in the army zone was massively expanded and its units were symbolically re-named as P.G.R.L. companies, which stood for *Prisonniers de Guerre des Régions Libérées*. The administration of prisoner labour companies also changed: the P.G.R.L. were placed under the direct authority of the French Prime Minister, Georges Clemenceau, and the French military.<sup>1289</sup> The bitterness the French felt at the treatment of their own men in Germany is illustrated

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<sup>1287</sup> SHAT, 16 N 2466, Compte-rendu de mission, Officier Capitaine de Terrier-Santans, Comité de répartition des prisonniers de guerre en sous-secrétariat de la présidence du conseil, 12.11.1918.

<sup>1288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1289</sup> Bernard Delpal, "Entre culpabilité et réparation. La douloureuse situation des prisonniers de guerre allemands maintenus en France au temps du traité de Versailles" in Nicolas Beaupré and Christian Ingrao, eds, *14-18. Aujourd'hui, Today, Heute, Marginaux Marginalité Marginalisation*, 4 (Paris, 2001), p. 129.



by the decision to employ repatriated French prisoners as guards over these German captives.<sup>1290</sup> Similarly, in some areas German prisoners clearing the battlefields were forbidden to touch the French dead lest their touch dishonour them.<sup>1291</sup> For Clemenceau the return of the German prisoners was not to take place until Germany handed over those the French accused of war crimes.<sup>1292</sup> There was considerable support in France in the winter of 1918/1919 for this stance.<sup>1293</sup> The view was that if French soldiers and civilians had to clear the battlefields, then German prisoners should too.

Conditions in the French prisoner labour companies in the winter of 1918 and spring of 1919 were atrocious. The massive influx of prisoners overwhelmed the French prisoner labour company system, which by spring 1919 contained over 270,000 prisoners.<sup>1294</sup> At Connantre camp on 8 November 1918 there were no washing facilities or disinfecting facilities for 1,800 Germans who were “in a disgustingly dirty condition.”<sup>1295</sup> An investigation by General Anthoine on 24 December 1918 found that “the present organisation of the prisoner labour companies is completely deficient.”<sup>1296</sup> Anthoine reported that there was no system of command in place – company commanders were acting completely independently.<sup>1297</sup> There was inadequate inspection of work camps.<sup>1298</sup> The prisoners had no soap, bandages, access to showers or clean clothes.<sup>1299</sup> A military report from the Department of the Somme on 18 March 1919, stated that “In the whole of the second region there are 78,000 prisoners of whom 16,000 are sick or mentally ill. Their output is far lower than it should be. In addition the lack of shoes is so bad that

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<sup>1290</sup> SHAT, 16 N 2380, Compte-rendu de Mission, Officier Capitaine de Terrier-Santans, 18 et 19.12.1918.

<sup>1291</sup> Delpal, “Entre Culpabilité et réparation,” p. 131.

<sup>1292</sup> *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*, E.L. Woodward and Rohan Butler, eds, First series, vol. 1, 1919, (London, 1947), no. 25, Notes of a Meeting of the Heads of Delegations of the Five Great Powers, 1.8.1919.

<sup>1293</sup> Delpal, “Entre culpabilité et réparation,” p. 130.

<sup>1294</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>1295</sup> SHAT, 16 N 2466, 3599/DA, 8.11.1918.

<sup>1296</sup> *Ibid.*, GQG Des armées de l’est, État-major, Inspection générale du travail aux armées, No.58 s/IGT, P. Anthoine, 24.12.1918.

<sup>1297</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1298</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1299</sup> *Ibid.*

among the prisoners at the Amiens citadel, 60 out of 600 could not go to work.”<sup>1300</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel Maquard, inspecting the prisoner labour company 113 on 12 February 1919, found that although bedding and water were satisfactory “of 338 prisoners there is an average of 60 – 70 sick per day. In my opinion this high number is due to the lack of cleanliness.”<sup>1301</sup> The International Red Cross described the situation in the winter of 1918/1919 as “distressing [...] caused by the too hasty sending of prisoners to the zone devastated by war.”<sup>1302</sup>

The prisoners were sent to areas of the former battlefields where there was no habitation, road network or access to clean water. The work demanded of them was dangerous and their morale was extremely low as they faced an ongoing captivity with no fixed date of departure. Suicide rates jumped in the P.G.R.L.<sup>1303</sup> There were also strikes and riots by the prisoners, and shootings by guards to restore discipline. An average of 1,500-2,000 “incidents” occurred per month in 1919.<sup>1304</sup> The International Red Cross was denied access to the P.G.R.L. until May 1919. During its first inspection its delegates reported that ten prisoners had been killed by the explosion of shells while clearing the battlefields.<sup>1305</sup> As the postal service was non-existent, many prisoners had received no news of their families for months.<sup>1306</sup> General Anthoine was placed in charge of the P.G.R.L. in May 1919, and he set about improving the prisoners’ living conditions. He reported the prisoners’ mood as “sceptical. They say they have been betrayed by the governments and by the German government in particular.”<sup>1307</sup> An International Red Cross inspection in the winter of 1919 found that the prisoners were well-fed and in good

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<sup>1300</sup> SHAT, 16 N 1663, Visite du 18 mars 1919, reconstitution des régions libérées dans le département de la Somme et la partie ouest de la 2e région, Le général de division Dauvin, Aide-major general du personnel, P.O. Fontenay.

<sup>1301</sup> SHAT, 16 N 2732, Rapport du Lt .Col. Maquard, a/s de la cie PG 113 à St Dizier, no.794, 12.2.1919.

<sup>1302</sup> Comité International de la Croix-Rouge, *Documents publiés à l’occasion de la Guerre (1914-1919). Rapport de MM. Théodore Aubert et lieutenant-colonel Bordier sur leurs visites aux compagnies de prisonniers de guerre des régions libérées en France, Mai-Juin 1919, 22e série, juillet 1919* (Geneva, 1919) p. 13.

<sup>1303</sup> Delpal, “Entre Culpabilité et réparation,” p. 132.

<sup>1304</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1305</sup> C.I.C.R. *Rapport de MM. Théodore Aubert et Lieutenant-Colonel Bordier sur leurs visites aux compagnies de prisonniers de guerre des régions libérées de France*, p. 17.

<sup>1306</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>1307</sup> ACICR, FAW 1, Rentrée des prisonniers allemands chez eux, 1919, août-déc 1919, Rapport de M. Théodore Aubert sur son voyage à Paris, 26 octobre au 1er novembre 1919.



physical health, but were still lodged in poor conditions: “Well-built camps are really the exception. [...] When it rains mud gets in everywhere. Although the barracks and tents are heated there were many camps where the prisoners suffered from cold at night. Almost everywhere there is no floor which is very regrettable during the wet winter months. But when one sees how the local civilians live, often in an even more precarious state then one realises that it was not possible to do any better.”<sup>1308</sup> The prisoners’ letters were less understanding: “I can barely move, and in the camp one sinks up to the knees in filth, food bad, very thin, [...] the doctor comes here rarely if at all [...] thus the prisoners are slowly dying and when will we be released?”<sup>1309</sup> As always, however, some prisoners made the best of the situation: one wrote in 1967 of how prisoners awaiting repatriation enjoyed helping locals with the grape harvest in the French interior in 1919.<sup>1310</sup>

Following the Armistice, the British and French declared all previous wartime prisoner exchange agreements null and void, leaving those prisoners due to be exchanged under the Berne Accords bitterly disappointed.<sup>1311</sup> Worse, wounded or sick prisoners who would previously have qualified for exchange as *Grands Blessés* now remained in French or British captivity. The British did finally accept, after international pressure, the repatriation of a small number of wounded and sick prisoners in spring 1919.<sup>1312</sup> However, the British and French continued to delay repatriating their German prisoners. Initially, it was stated that repatriation would occur after a Peace Treaty had been signed. Yet when the Treaty of Versailles was finalised, Article 214 specified that German prisoners would not be repatriated until after the ratification of the treaty by Germany and by three of the other powers involved.<sup>1313</sup> Clemenceau also continued to delay any

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<sup>1308</sup> ACICR, FAW 1, Rentrée des prisonniers allemands chez eux, 1920, Rapport sur la mission en France du Major G. Marcaud [nov. 1919-fév. 1920]

<sup>1309</sup> Ibid., 7.12.1919, Fitz Heine Cie PGRL 233 forwarded to CICR by Volksbund zum Schutze der deutschen Kriegs- und Zivilgefangenen, Ortsgruppe Seelze bei Hannover, 6.1.1920.

<sup>1310</sup> BA-MA, Msg 200 / 1187. Account by Carl Schmidt, p. 23.

<sup>1311</sup> Annette Becker, “Le retour des prisonniers,” p. 71.

<sup>1312</sup> Jakob Reinhardt, “Die Ruckführung der Gefangenen aus Frankreich,” *Süddeutsche Monatsheft*, Heft 11, JG 22 (August 1925), p. 11.

<sup>1313</sup> ACICR, FAW 1, Rentrée des prisonniers allemands chez-eux, Protest note by CICR to Supreme Interallied Council, 22.8.1919.

planning for the repatriation of German prisoners by refusing to appoint a French representative to the repatriation commission planned for in Article 215 of the treaty.<sup>1314</sup>

It took some time before the German government realised that France saw the prisoners as long-term reconstruction labourers. The new German government initially reacted optimistically to the situation, with Matthias Erzberger, the German representative to the Armistice Commission, proclaiming in December 1918 that the repatriation delay was only a temporary short-term disruption.<sup>1315</sup> Having already repatriated British and French prisoners from Germany, it was no longer possible to inflict reprisals on Allied prisoners to improve French prisoner treatment. All the German government could do was issue verbal protests. This, in turn, led prisoners and their families to suspect that the Weimar government actually did not wish for the prisoners back and saw them as potential counter-revolutionaries.<sup>1316</sup> It was an unfair slur given Erzberger's frustration with the repatriation delay, but it had considerable impact. The prisoners and their families became increasingly alienated from the new German Republic.<sup>1317</sup>

Britain initially supported the French stance, moving 10,000 prisoners from the U.K. to France following the Armistice.<sup>1318</sup> These men joined 192,298 German prisoners working in France and Belgium in British prisoner of war labour companies.<sup>1319</sup> As a result of the massive captures in the last three months of the war, conditions in British prisoner of war labour companies deteriorated in winter 1918. The R.A.M.C. officer commanding the Fourth Prisoner of War Convalescent Depot at Trouville described the arrival on 7 March 1919 of German prisoners who had been working in British labour companies: "They were obviously unfit [...] Mostly emaciated and melancholie [sic] in appearance."<sup>1320</sup> At

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<sup>1314</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1315</sup> ACICR, FAW 1, Reconstruction des régions dévastées, Bulletin de l'office d'information, 15.12.1918, communiqué officiel allemand, signed Erzberger, published in *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 23.11.1918.

<sup>1316</sup> Gerhard Rose, *Krieg nach dem Kriege. Der Kampf des deutschen Volkes um die Heimkehr seiner Kriegsgefangenen* (Dortmund, 1920), pp. 9-11.

<sup>1317</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>1318</sup> TNA, WO 95/26, Adjutant General's War Diary, March 1919.

<sup>1319</sup> TNA, WO 161/82, No. of prisoners in prisoner of war labour companies on 6.12.1918, p. 161.

<sup>1320</sup> TNA, WO 95/4/23, War Diary No. 4 Prisoner of War Convalescent Depot, Trouville, 7.3.1919.



his convalescent depot these prisoners enjoyed a milder regime, with circus performances and a Whit-Monday sports day.<sup>1321</sup>

Once the Treaty of Versailles was signed the British and the American mood changed. They were now keen to return their German charges. On 24 July 1919, the liberal press in Britain began to call for the repatriation of the German prisoners.<sup>1322</sup> The International Red Cross also issued a formal protest letter to the Supreme Inter-Allied Council on 22 August 1919.<sup>1323</sup> At a meeting of the delegates of the five Allied and Associated powers on 27 August 1919, the British and Americans pressed the French to allow prisoner repatriation begin before the Versailles Treaty was ratified.<sup>1324</sup> The British representative Sir Arthur Balfour stated that the retention of the prisoners was costing the British and Americans “over £150,000 a day.”<sup>1325</sup> Clemenceau refused to compromise, asking the British and Americans to give France their German prisoners instead of repatriating them. The outcome of the meeting was an agreement that “an Inter-Allied Commission of one military and one civil member from each of the five Powers be set up at once to begin repatriation of German prisoners, starting with prisoners held by the British and American armies.”<sup>1326</sup>

The British began repatriation in September 1919 and it was completed on 1 November 1919.<sup>1327</sup> Clemenceau, however, remained obstinate, despite pressure from both Generalissimo Foch and General Anthoine to repatriate.<sup>1328</sup> By October 1919, many in the French army were now in favour of repatriation. General Anthoine told the International Red Cross in October 1919:

Only the action of the Président du Conseil is required [to start repatriation]. His restraint is due to motives of internal order, elections, labour needs [...] or due to questions of international diplomacy, retention

<sup>1321</sup> Ibid., 8.6.1919; 10.6.1919.

<sup>1322</sup> ACICR, FAW 1, Rentrée des PG allemands chez eux, Memo, n.d.

<sup>1323</sup> ACICR, FAW 1, CICR to Conseil suprême Interalliée, Paris, 22.8.1919.

<sup>1324</sup> *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, 1<sup>st</sup> Series, vol.1, (London, 1947) no. 44, Notes of a Meeting of the Heads of Delegations of the Five Great Powers held in M. Pichon’s room at the Quai d’Orsay, 27.8.1919.

<sup>1325</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1326</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1327</sup> TNA, WO 161/82, p. 634.

<sup>1328</sup> SHAT, 6 N 114, Foch to Erzberger, 16.1.1919.

as a means of pressure [...] These are the rumours that one hears. It is the affair of Clemenceau alone. In any case the prisoners are profoundly unhappy and the excess of unhappiness makes them eloquent.<sup>1329</sup>

French officers in charge of prisoners felt “separated from their loved ones and were the prisoners of the prisoners of war.”<sup>1330</sup> The French position on repatriation had become internationally isolated following the signing of the Peace Treaty and the repatriation of German prisoners by France’s Allies. Yet Clemenceau remained adamant:

If the repatriation of prisoners by our Allies began in September it is because the French government was unable to oppose it. None of our Allies was as badly injured in its emotions and its interests as the population of the north of France was. How can this population, wandering in the ruins of their homes [...] accept to see the German prisoners, employed upon work of the utmost urgency [...] leave France before the time appointed by the Treaty of Versailles, which fixed the end of their captivity on the definitive ratification - the entry into force of the treaty?<sup>1331</sup>

It was not until 21 January 1920 that France finally began to repatriate her German prisoners of war.<sup>1332</sup> For some on the French right, the prisoners’ anger towards France remained incomprehensible. Maurice Barrès reported that the repatriated prisoners left with a powerful and “deaf” hatred for France: “These German prisoners have no reason to hate us. They hate us all the same.”<sup>1333</sup>

In Germany, the Allies’ retention of German prisoners of war was seen as irrational, cruel and motivated purely by a vindictive victor’s desire for revenge. A massive public campaign was launched to bring the prisoners home. In many cases this campaign was spearheaded by women who wrote to neutral states, to the International Red Cross and even to Clemenceau himself to ask for their menfolk to be returned. The following

<sup>1329</sup> ACICR, FAW 1, Rentrée des prisonniers allemands chez eux, 1919, Rapport de M. Théodore Aubert sur son voyage à Paris le 26 octobre 1919, Meeting with General Anthoine, 30.10.1919, p. 11.

<sup>1330</sup> Ibid., Rentrée des prisonniers allemands chez eux 1920.1/1, Rapport au CICR sur la mission en France du Major G. Marcaud [nov. 1919- fév. 1920].

<sup>1331</sup> Becker, “Le retour des prisonniers,” p. 73.

<sup>1332</sup> Cabanes, “Finir la guerre,” vol. 2, p. 460.

<sup>1333</sup> Maurice Barrès, “Dans quel esprit les prisonniers allemands quittent la France,” *Echo de Paris*, 8.3.1920.



extract is typical of the letters written to the International Red Cross on behalf of the ill relatives of prisoners: “His two brothers fell in the war and his mother suffers greatly. [...] Her health appears very bad.”<sup>1334</sup> Often the letters to the Red Cross took the form of all female petitions from German women.<sup>1335</sup> Such petitions were a significant form of female political mobilisation. Even children wrote asking for prisoners to be released. The five Loffler siblings living in Rübgarten, near Tübingen, in Germany, wrote on 9 December 1919 to the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva to ask for the return of their eldest brother Wilhelm from France, as a Christmas present as: “Our mother is always crying over our Wilhelm because he still has not come home. [...] We five siblings beg so dearly for help so that our good Wilhelm can come home to us by Christmas. We wish for no other presents if our brother comes home so that our mother will be well again.”<sup>1336</sup> The International Red Cross was no Father Christmas. To all such letters it replied that it could not intervene unless a prisoner was sick.

The anger which Germans felt at the withholding of their prisoners cannot be underestimated. The French chargé d'affaires in Berlin stated “there is not a day when women do not come to complain in the name of the prisoners’ families.”<sup>1337</sup> Erzberger received pleading letters from across the country.<sup>1338</sup> One correspondent wrote in February 1919:

My son was captured after being wounded by shrapnel in October 1918. [...] According to his last letter, of 25 December 1918, he was in a British hospital in France. The Prisoner of War Information Association in Wiesbaden told us on the 18th of this month that he is sick with a fever of unknown cause. We are deeply worried about the fate of our 19 year old boy who is scarcely out of *Kinderschuhen* (children’s shoes).<sup>1339</sup>

<sup>1334</sup> ACICR, FAW 1, Rentrée des prisonniers allemands chez eux, 1919, Elisabeth Müller to CICR, 14.12.1919.

<sup>1335</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1336</sup> Ibid., no1/1 August-décembre 1919, Loffler.

<sup>1337</sup> Cabanes, “Finir la guerre,” vol.2, p. 454.

<sup>1338</sup> BA, WAKO R 904.89 and BA, WAKO R 904.83

<sup>1339</sup> Ibid., Altenkirchen, L. Hilger to M. Erzberger, 22.2.1919.

The son of one prisoner wrote to the International Red Cross to ask if he could take his father's place.<sup>1340</sup> Other writers pleaded for the return of prisoners whose mothers or wives were dying, some enclosing medical certificates.<sup>1341</sup> A nurse wrote to the International Red Cross:

The wife of the prisoner Ersatz Reservist Friedrich Güth [...] in Lille depot France is gravely sick and has according to the doctor only a short while left to live. She cries and frets the whole day to see her husband one last time and there are two dependent children who are robbed of their father and provider through the withholding of the prisoners [...] the children will be without protection or help after the death of their mother.<sup>1342</sup>

The financial hardship suffered by the families of prisoners led to the Weimar government making a one-off payment of 200 Marks to prisoners' dependants in December 1919.<sup>1343</sup>

Demonstrations for the prisoners' return were held in many German urban centres in 1919, often attended by thousands of people.<sup>1344</sup> A demonstration held in the 55 largest towns in Württemberg on 16 November 1919 attracted over 50,000 people according to the *Volkshilfe für Württ. Kriegs- und Zivilgefangene*.<sup>1345</sup> On 9 November 1919, a demonstration at Cologne-Nippes town hall attracted several thousand families.<sup>1346</sup> Public mobilisation was swift and occurred at grass roots level. Gerhard Rose, a former leader of the *Volksbund zum Schutze der deutschen Kriegs- und Zivilgefangenen*, described the French refusal to repatriate German prisoners as an action carried out "to satisfy their hate."<sup>1347</sup> In making this observation Rose spoke for many Germans. Founded after the Armistice, the *Volksbund* he led had 3,173 local branches across Germany and five million members by October 1919, a remarkable popular mobilisation

<sup>1340</sup> ACICR, FAW 1, Rentrée des prisonniers allemands chez eux, 1920, 1/1. Red Cross Hannover, to CICR, case of August Theile. 22.1.1920.

<sup>1341</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1342</sup> Ibid., Heidelberg, Frau Güth to CICR, 20.11.1919.

<sup>1343</sup> *Kölnische Zeitung*, 15.12.1919.

<sup>1344</sup> See the letters outlining protests in BA, WAKO R 904.83; ACICR, FAW 1, Rentrée des prisonniers allemands chez eux, dossiers 1919 and 1920; SHAT 6 N 114.

<sup>1345</sup> ACICR, FAW 1, Rentrée des prisonniers allemands chez eux, 1919, Tgm Stuttgart to CICR, 18.11.1919.

<sup>1346</sup> SHAT, 6 N 114, Le Maréchal Foch to Mr le Président du Conseil, Ministre de la Guerre, 15.11.1919.

<sup>1347</sup> Rose, *Krieg nach dem Kriege*, p. 54.



in a country in revolution.<sup>1348</sup> Those Germans signing up to the *Volksbund* supported its campaign to get the prisoners home, and shared a perception that the French action was unjust. This perception was endorsed by leading German politicians. Walther Rathenau wrote: "It is outrageous [...] that our prisoner fellow citizens do not return home."<sup>1349</sup> He described the situation as "slavery."<sup>1350</sup> Philipp Scheidemann stated: "I believe the whole world must join with us in crying out against this last insult to all humanity."<sup>1351</sup> There was considerable hostile German press coverage of the French decision throughout 1919, with headlines such as "the heartless war against German mothers and women."<sup>1352</sup> The year following the war saw a radicalisation of the German war memory around the image of the suffering innocent prisoner. The retention of the German prisoner became a popular metaphor for what Germans perceived as the wider unjust punishment of their country by their enemies. Remembering prisoners of war in this context was less about investigating wartime violence than it was about politically reinterpreting it in order to revalidate Germany's war against France.

If Hermann-Paul's picture conveys the French cultural narrative that was built around the repatriation of German prisoners of war following the Armistice, the letter from the Nuremberg Ex-Prisoners of War Association (*Vereinigung ehemaliger Kriegsgefangener*), cited at the opening of this chapter, represents its German counterpart. For one of the key developments between the Armistice on 11 November 1918 and the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in June the following year was the emergence of a powerful German narrative in popular publications, press and political circles about prisoner of war repatriation that portrayed German wartime prisoner treatment as uniformly chivalrous, honourable and generous. The Allies were decried for refusing to return German prisoners to their families. In this narrative, unlike its French equivalent, the German prisoners were not perpetrators but entirely powerless victims.

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<sup>1348</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>1349</sup> *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 1.2.1919.

<sup>1350</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1351</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1352</sup> *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, 16.8.1919.

Between 1919 and 1921, a variety of official reports on prisoner treatment were produced in Germany and France as each side sought to definitively prove its case against the other. The British, in contrast, chose not to publish their post-war report into prisoner mistreatment in Germany.<sup>1353</sup> In France, the Inter-ministerial Commission, led by the Député, Gratien Candace, investigating German treatment of French prisoners, presented its report to the National Assembly on 11 February 1919.<sup>1354</sup> The report severely condemned Germany's prisoner of war treatment.

During the same period, the new German government attempted to defend Germany's prisoner treatment during the war by launching an independent investigation. In November 1918, only weeks after the Armistice, Matthias Erzberger, head of the German Armistice Commission, appointed the well-known pacifist, Professor Walther Schücking of Marburg University to lead an enquiry into Allied accusations of prisoner mistreatment.<sup>1355</sup> Erzberger declared that the commission was to "provide evidence that the new Republican German government has decided to act harshly and without regard for rank or position against each individual who is guilty of breaching either the orders of the authorities or the laws of humanity in his treatment of prisoners."<sup>1356</sup> Erzberger's comments revealed the problem that was to dog the commission – it could not conceive that prisoner mistreatment might actually have been ordered by the German High Command. The Schücking Commission was initially relatively objective, setting out to establish whether international law had been broken in each case. Indeed, Schücking admitted that "it was modelled on the British Government Committee on the Treatment by the Enemy of Prisoners of War" which had impressed German observers during the

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<sup>1353</sup> Part of the report produced for the British government by the Interdepartmental Committee on prisoners of war (based on the evidence collected by the Government Committee on the Treatment by the Enemy of British Prisoners of War) was eventually published for the first time in 1945 in J.H. Morgan, *Assize of Arms, being the story of the disarmament of Germany and her rearmament*, vol. 1 (London, 1945), Appendix 4, pp. 261-263.

<sup>1354</sup> Gratien Candace, *Rapport fait au nom de la Commission des affaires extérieures* (Paris, 1919), no. 5676, Chambre des Députés, onzième législature, Session de 1919, Annexe au procès-verbal de la 2e séance du 11 février 1919.

<sup>1355</sup> For a brief history of the commission see: Hankel, *Die Leipziger Prozesse*, pp. 321-332. On Schücking's pacifism during the war see: David Welch, *Germany, Propaganda and Total War, 1914-1918. The Sins of Omission* (London, 2000), p. 137.

<sup>1356</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 325.



conflict.<sup>1357</sup> It drew on the Reichstag peace movement's work during the war to investigate and criticize crimes against Allied prisoners of war.<sup>1358</sup> In December 1918, Professor Schücking had accumulated 1,100 volumes of individual cases of complaints.<sup>1359</sup> Faced with an overwhelming task of investigation, the commission narrowed its field of enquiry to serious cases where prisoners had died or cases where the Allies had issued diplomatic protest notes.<sup>1360</sup> However, by 1920, when it published its first report into prisoner abuses, it had become partisan, consulting few Allied witnesses and accepting the word of senior German military figures without question. It found individual prison camp guards guilty of breaching international law in four cases, three of which occurred after the Armistice.<sup>1361</sup> In twenty one cases the commission was unable to reach a conclusion due to insufficient evidence and in eleven cases the commission found no breach of international law had taken place.<sup>1362</sup> Deference to the German military was a major problem for the civilians sitting on the commission. Its report almost entirely exonerated Germany.<sup>1363</sup>

At the same time as the Schücking Commission was established, representatives of the German army at the *Kriegsministerium* asked an outsider to produce a book defending German prisoner treatment. General von Fransecky, the post-war head of the prisoner of war department at the *Kriegsministerium*, asked Wilhelm Doegen – a former *Gymnasium* teacher who had spent the war visiting prisoner of war camps to research prisoner languages with the Prussian Phonogram Commission – to produce a book on Germany's prisoner treatment.<sup>1364</sup> Doegen was provided with access to *Kriegsministerium* files and in 1919 published *Kriegsgefangene Völker. Der Kriegsgefangene Haltung und Schicksal in Deutschland*, a whitewash defence of Germany's prison camp system which promoted

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<sup>1357</sup> ACICR, 431.iii.j.c.31, Walther Schücking, "Die deutsche Untersuchungskommission. Völkerrechtswidrige Behandlung der Kriegsgefangenen," *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23.12.1918.

<sup>1358</sup> ACICR, 432/II/26,2.c.44, Commission neutre a Berlin – 1918, 432/II/26.B.b, Mission Bossier, 17.12.1918.

<sup>1359</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1360</sup> Hankel, *Die Leipziger Prozesse*, p. 326.

<sup>1361</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 329-332.

<sup>1362</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1363</sup> *Die Behandlung der feindlichen Kriegsgefangenen. Amtlicher Bericht der Kommission zur Untersuchung der Anklagen wegen völkerrechtswidriger Behandlung der Kriegsgefangenen in Deutschland* (Berlin, 1920).

<sup>1364</sup> Doegen, *Kriegsgefangene Völker*, p. 1.

the idea that French prisoners sabotaged the German war effort. The French Ambassador to Holland described the book in damning terms as “a pamphlet which illustrates the extent of the violence which the Berlin Government is using to excite the German people against France.”<sup>1365</sup> A second edition of Doegen’s book was published in 1921. Some of Doegen’s statistical information about the principal prisoner of war camps in Germany is useful. However, his statistics on prisoner deaths are incomplete. They do not appear to include deaths in the occupied French and Belgian territories. In fact, prisoners in labour companies in France and Belgium are scarcely mentioned in this work. Doegen’s figures on the number of Allied soldiers captured during the German retreat, July – November 1918, are probably also incomplete, owing to administrative chaos.

The purpose of Doegen’s book was to exonerate Germany both morally and financially. Allied accusations were not merely rhetorical. Annex One to Part VIII of the Treaty of Versailles held Germany responsible (under Article 232) for “the damage caused by any kind of mistreatment of prisoners of war,” and for “the cost of assistance by the Government of the Allied and Associated Powers to prisoners of war and their families.”<sup>1366</sup> This financial demand, coupled with the Allies’ refusal to return German prisoners - until after the signing of the Peace Treaty in the British case and until the spring of 1920 in the French - fed the creation of a distinctive early post-war German historical narrative on prisoners of war.

Doegen’s work was representative of a number of post-war German publications which sought to defend or deflect attention from Germany’s treatment of Allied prisoners. In 1919, the *Auswärtiges Amt* published an English translation of a 1918 book, *Die Gefangen-Mißhandlungen in den Entente-Ländern*, on the mistreatment of German

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<sup>1365</sup> MAE, Série Z Europe 1918-1929, Allemagne 181, Prisonniers de Guerre I, Avril 1918-May 1921, no.186, légation de la République Française aux Pays-Bas, M. Charles Benoît, Ministre de la Rep. Française aux Pays-Bas à son Excellence Mr le Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, 24.12.1919.

<sup>1366</sup> Doegen, *Kriegsgefangene Völker*, pp. 1-2; Versailles Treaty, Annex 1, Articles 214-224, no. 1 and no. 6. See also: Institute of International Affairs, *A History of the Peace Conference of Paris*, vol. 3 (London, 1920), Appendix 1, pp. 209-211.



prisoners in Allied countries in an effort to make Germany's case abroad.<sup>1367</sup> In 1921, with the active support of the Reich Association of Ex-Prisoners of War (*Reichsverein ehemaliger Kriegsgefangener*), Clemens Plassmann published a book indicting French treatment of German prisoners.<sup>1368</sup> Walther Schücking also wrote a book on the need to restore international law which he considered to be "in crisis" following the war.<sup>1369</sup> The German campaign to prove it had treated its prisoners of war in accordance with international law continued until well into the 1920s. One and a half volumes of the Reichstag's 1919-1928 investigation into Germany's conduct during the war, *Völkerrecht im Weltkrieg*, were dedicated to the subject.<sup>1370</sup>

This German historical narrative was inherently contradictory. It claimed that Germany had treated Allied prisoners humanely, while also arguing simultaneously that any German mistreatment only mirrored prisoner abuses carried out by all belligerents.<sup>1371</sup> The 1917 spring reprisals and the bad treatment of prisoner workers in the occupied territories were played down or simply ignored. In particular, in Germany, following the Armistice, there were calls for a restoration of the reciprocity principle. Germany had released all Allied prisoners, including those serving jail terms for serious crimes, under the terms of Article Ten of the Armistice Treaty. The Allies were seen as behaving unjustly by not responding in kind and repatriating their German prisoners of war. Similarly, the Allies' insistence on prosecuting Germans who had mistreated Allied prisoners was seen as hugely unfair. The German response was to call for reciprocity, claiming that the Allies too had committed prisoner abuses against Germany.

Although Germany was violently politically fragmented between 1919 and 1921, the narrative on the prisoner of war issue remained relatively unified. This narrative was

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<sup>1367</sup> Auswärtiges Amt, *Die Gefangen-Mißhandlungen in den Entente-Ländern. Noten der Deutschen Regierung an die Neutralen Staaten* (Berlin, 1918). Translated as: *German Government. Maltreatment of Prisoners in Allied Countries: notes by the German government to neutral states* (Berlin, 1919).

<sup>1368</sup> Clemens Plassmann, *Die Deutschen Kriegsgefangenen in Frankreich 1914-1920. Beiträge zur Handhabung und zum Ausbau des internationalen Kriegsgefangenenrechtes* (Berlin, 1921).

<sup>1369</sup> Walther Schücking, *Die Völkerrechtliche Lehre des Weltkrieges* (Leipzig, 1918), pp. 1-2.

<sup>1370</sup> *Das Werk des Untersuchungsausschusses der Verfassunggebenden Deutschen Nationalversammlung und des Deutschen Reichstages, 1919-1928*, Third Series, *Völkerrecht in Weltkrieg*, vol. 3, (in two parts) part 1, *Verletzungen des Kriegsgefangenenrechts* (Berlin, 1927).

<sup>1371</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2-6.

fuelled by propaganda campaigns led by many different German groups – Republican politicians, army sources, the mainstream and right-wing press, prisoner of war associations and members of the old regime. For these groups, Germany's honour was being slandered post-war by false Allied accusations that Allied prisoners had been mistreated. Many of these groups genuinely believed that the Allied accusations were entirely fabricated. Gerhard Rose, of the *Volksbund zum Schutze der deutschen Kriegs- und Zivilgefangenen*, attributed all the reports of starving British prisoners which appeared in the British press at the Armistice to “*Greuelpropaganda*,” planned and invented by the British government in order to convince the British public to support its desire to detain German prisoners of war.<sup>1372</sup> The idea that the reports may have been based on the condition of prisoners emerging from the German-occupied territories of France and Belgium was simply unfathomable. Thus Germans were unable to understand the wave of anger that swept Britain at this point regarding the way their prisoners had been treated. They did not realise that accounts of mistreatment by newly liberated prisoners from the occupied territories had radicalised the British call for war crimes trials.<sup>1373</sup>

Only a few lone left-wing German voices challenged this popular discourse, such as the pacifist, Walter Oehme, who wrote in 1920 of terrible conditions endured by Russian prisoners in German prison camps after the Armistice or Lilli Jannasch, who tried to inform the German public of Allied evidence of German prisoner atrocities.<sup>1374</sup> A former prison camp guard, Frank Furter, in a strong critique of the punishment of low-ranking German individuals for prisoner mistreatment at the Leipzig Trials, admitted in *Das Tagebuch* that prisoner beating was widespread and that the senior commanders were responsible for it: “In a Field *Lazarett* I saw prisoners who, after weeks of work behind the front, were literally skeletons, lousy and beaten, in a state of collapse. [...]

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<sup>1372</sup> Rose, *Krieg nach dem Kriege*, p. 29.

<sup>1373</sup> Dallas, 1918, p. 240.

<sup>1374</sup> Walter Oehme, ed., *Ein Bekenntnis deutscher Schuld. Beiträge zur deutschen Kriegsführung* (Berlin, 1920), pp. 70-73; Lilli Jannasch, *Untaten des preussisch-deutschen Militarismus* (Wiesbaden, 1924), pp. 16-27.



*Hungertyphus* the doctor called it. However, he did not report it as this ‘would bring nothing but useless trouble.’”<sup>1375</sup>

The author Kurt Tucholsky writing in *Die Welt am Montag* in 1921 in the context of the Leipzig Trials, decried the general trend of propagating information about atrocities against German prisoners, without considering Germany’s own prisoner treatment:

War and the military are to blame both for the culprits and the victims of such atrocities. It is not possible to tell people that killing and gassing each other on the battlefield is fine, while the enemy has to be treated with respect in the camps. All countries are guilty of committing atrocities and one has to start with oneself. Thousands upon thousands of atrocities have been committed against helpless men and the French refuse to follow up those crimes. However, what about ourselves? Nobody who admits that German soldiers committed crimes as well can expect others to sentence their war criminals if we ignore ours.<sup>1376</sup>

Such rhetoric attempted to suggest to the German public that German prisoner mistreatment had occurred. It met with little success. By 1921, with German hostility to the Leipzig Trials at its height, the dominant attitude was one of denial that Germany had mistreated Allied prisoners. This was reinforced by such right-wing authors as August von Gallinger who the same year published *Die Gegenrechnung*, a book containing accusations by former German prisoners of the Allies, damning Britain and France for their prisoner treatment.<sup>1377</sup> A special edition of the *Süddeutsche Monatshefte*, devoted entirely to Gallinger’s accusations, accused the Allies of spreading lies about German prisoner treatment. “We know how the enemy prisoners in Germany were treated” the editor stated in its introduction, “I was myself during the war asked to donate to help provide foreign language books for prisoners in Germany.”<sup>1378</sup> The implication was clear – the German reader should trust his or her own memory above the Allied accusations and prisoner testimony. The subjective individual experience of seeing several prisoners

<sup>1375</sup> Frank Furter, “Sergeant Heynen und das Völkerrecht,” *Das Tagebuch*, JG 2, Heft 22, 4.6.1921.

<sup>1376</sup> Kurt Tucholsky, writing under the pseudonym, Ignaz Wrobel, “Gegenrechnung,” *Die Welt am Montag*, 27 JG, Nr 31, 1.8.1921. I am grateful to Vanessa Ther for drawing my attention to this source.

<sup>1377</sup> August von Gallinger, *The Countercharge. The Matter of War Criminals from the German Side*. (Munich, 1922), [German edition, 1921].

<sup>1378</sup> Vorwort by Paul Nikolaus Cossmann, Prof. Dr. August Gallinger “Gegenrechnung,” *Süddeutsche Monatshefte* (Juni, 1921).

well-treated locally was enough from which to generalize the overall situation of all 2.4 million Allied prisoners in Germany and the occupied territories. This was a perfect means of ensuring that a collective amnesia developed as regarded wartime prisoner treatment in mines, factories and in the occupied zones.

The German mood in December 1918 was recorded by a British journalist in Cologne who told locals that “whereas German prisoners sent back from England are in the best of physical condition, our own prisoners came back to us in a terrible state due to starvation and ill-treatment,” only to receive the reply that “they may have suffered somewhat general food shortage and in isolated instances may have been harshly used, but the French treated our prisoners abominably and what went on at Stratford camp would make one’s hair stand on end.”<sup>1379</sup> There was no recognition of the mistreatment of Allied prisoners in the occupied territories: in the German version of events, the Allied food blockade had brought suffering to all, prisoners and German civilians alike. The British journalist concluded that he had “carried on conversations like this literally for hours with Germans of high education, men in position to know the facts and have not extracted a single admission that the German nation is anything but the innocent victim of aggression and slanders of jealous rivals.”<sup>1380</sup> The head of the French military mission in Berlin after the Armistice found the same attitude:

Germans living in the interior of the country, who only saw the prisoners from the main camps, relatively well housed, sufficiently fed thanks to food deliveries from France, were sometimes surprised at our reproaches and did not want to believe they were well-founded. It was still the ‘*es ist nicht wahr*’ of the Manifesto of 93. There is no one more deaf than he who does not wish to hear.<sup>1381</sup>

An American Lieutenant sent to Germany to supervise the repatriation of Allied prisoners of war summed up the mood in Berlin in December in the words of a popular street song: “The war is over now. We are at peace. Let us forget, Comrade.”<sup>1382</sup>

<sup>1379</sup> “Impenitent Germany,” *Times*, 30.12.1918, p. 7.

<sup>1380</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1381</sup> Dupont, “Une mission en Allemagne,” p. 159.

<sup>1382</sup> Dallas, 1918, p. 328.



The Allies' own actions in the immediate post-Armistice period had done nothing to help Germany address the question of its own prisoner mistreatment. They failed to support the initial efforts of German moderates to investigate violence against prisoners that had occurred under the old regime. In the first weeks following the Armistice the German attitude towards Allied prisoners in many cases was one of goodwill. The reaction to released British and French prisoners was one of indifference or even welcome. French prisoner, Georges Caubet, wrote in his journal how on 10 January en route for France his trainload of prisoners was welcomed at German stations by "children to whom we gave biscuits, women who said 'Bonjour' or blew us kisses. What a population! They cried 'Vive La France!' It was touching."<sup>1383</sup> At Frankfurt he described the same behaviour by the local population. The prisoners threw biscuits and sweets to the local women and children.<sup>1384</sup>

Civilian violence against prisoners during the German revolution was extremely rare. This appears to have been due to two factors. First, the German revolution had with the Armistice already achieved its primary aim. In its initial phase it was a mass movement to end the war. With this obtained it moved into a phase of relative stasis in December aided by the Provisional Government's efforts to calm the situation. The International Red Cross observers were amazed at the indifference of German civilians to the former prisoners visiting their towns.<sup>1385</sup> The only incidents of violence witnessed by prisoners were German civilians' and soldiers' actions against German army officers.

Second, both the pacifist and the more socialist soldiers' and workers' councils initially saw the Allied prisoners of war as victims. There was an initial openness in the first month of the revolution to the idea of Allied prisoners' sufferings. In one German town, civilians voluntarily stepped off the pavement and symbolically walked in the gutter to make way for newly liberated British prisoners.<sup>1386</sup> In other camps guards and prisoners

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<sup>1383</sup> Georges Caubet, *Instituteur et Sergent. Mémoires de guerre et de captivité* (Carcassonne, 1991), pp. 88-89.

<sup>1384</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1385</sup> Guyot, Guillermin and Meyer, "La situation sanitaire des prisonniers de guerre de l'Entente en Allemagne, pendant la période de l'armistice," p. 139.

<sup>1386</sup> Interview with Ernie Stevens, Emden, *Prisoners of the Kaiser*, p. 160.

celebrated together after the soldiers' council took over.<sup>1387</sup> The more radical socialists on the other hand believed that the prisoners were fellow victims of the imperialist capitalists' war and made friendly overtures towards prisoners in order that they would view socialism favourably. Their desire was to ensure that the prisoners saw the difference between their new revolutionary Germany and the old corrupt Kaiser's regime. One example of this was the leaflet in English "A Parting Word" distributed to thousands of British prisoners being repatriated across Germany.<sup>1388</sup> It appears to have been produced by the soldiers' and workers' councils and its text was an extraordinary revelation of how the German narrative on prisoner treatment had developed even among socialists. First, it revealed the construction of a German collective memory of prisoner mistreatment where mistreatment was explained away within the framework of civilian suffering from the blockade and reciprocal Allied behaviour. The leaflet addressed the prisoners as "Gentlemen" and informed them that

Your situation has been a difficult one. Our own has been desperate. [...] Under the circumstances we did our best to lessen the hardships of your lot, to ensure your comfort, to provide you with pastime, employment, mental and bodily recreation. It is not likely that you will ever know how difficult our circumstances have been. We know that errors have been committed and that there have been hardships for which the former system was to blame. There have been wrongs and evils on both sides. We hope that you will always think of that - and be just.<sup>1389</sup>

Second, the text invoked a common sacrifice for a future peaceful world:

We hope that every one of you will go home carrying a message of good will, of conciliation, of enlightenment. [...] The valiant dead who once fought against each other have long been sleeping as comrades side by side in the same earth. May the living who once fought against each other labour as comrades side by side upon this self-same earth.<sup>1390</sup>

This was equality of sacrifice, where the idea of one side being defeated was submerged into a narrative of universal suffering. Third, the text emphasised the resentment felt even by socialist supporters at German prisoners not being released: "When you are already

<sup>1387</sup> Brown, *The Imperial War Museum Book of 1918*, p. 240.

<sup>1388</sup> The text of "A Parting Word" is quoted here from Emden, *Prisoners of the Kaiser*, p. 163.

<sup>1389</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1390</sup> Ibid.



united to your families, thousands of our countrymen will still be pining in far-off prison-camps with hearts as hungry for home as yours.”<sup>1391</sup> Finally, the text emphasised the change of regime in Germany:

You entered the old empire of Germany; you leave the new Republic – the newest and as we hope to make it, the freest land in the world. We are sorry that you saw so little of what we were proud of in the former Germany – our arts, our sciences, our model cities, our theatres, schools, industries, our social institutions as well as the beauties of our scenery and the real soul of our people akin in so many things to your own. [...] Once the barriers of artificial hatred and misunderstanding have fallen, we hope that you will learn to know in happier times these grander features of the land whose unwilling guests you have been.

The leaflet called for fraternity between all men, blaming the war on imperialism, capitalism, militarism and journalistic propaganda. The British prisoners who received it did not understand its meaning or the revolutionary context that had produced it. They saw it as a final German insult.<sup>1392</sup>

One of the greatest ironies of this period was that the British and French prisoners completely failed to distinguish between the new revolutionary Germany and the old authoritarian regime of their former captors. The majority of prisoners conceived of Germany as a collective racial grouping which remained the same regardless of state or government. This attitude was shared by the French and British governments. One of the greatest failures in late-1918 was the Allies’ inability to grasp the opportunity offered by this initial month of the German revolution where a certain amount of goodwill existed towards them. The French eighth army, for example, reported that their soldiers were initially welcomed upon their arrival in the Rhineland, reporting “everywhere an enthusiastic welcome.”<sup>1393</sup> The move by Erzberger to establish the Schücking Commission to investigate war crimes against prisoners of war was initially carried out in good faith. One initial aspiration of the Schücking Commission was to inspire the Allies to also investigate crimes against prisoners and by so-doing to help reconstruct an

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<sup>1391</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1392</sup> Similar leaflets were handed out to prisoners in Württemberg by the Executive Ausschuss des Arbeiter- und Soldatenrats, Stuttgart. HStA, STUTT, E 135 b, no. 356.

<sup>1393</sup> SHAT, 16 N 2380, Rapport de mission à la 8e armée, GQG, 21.11.1918.

international consensus on how prisoners of war should be treated.<sup>1394</sup> It was initially felt by many left wing and centre liberal German observers of the prisoner question, lawyers, administrators and liberal politicians in November and December 1918 that the only way to heal the wounds of the war was to work together to rebuild anew international law.<sup>1395</sup>

The Allies failed utterly to support these short-lived attitudes among German moderates. Attitudes among the German public hardened towards the Allies, with a corresponding hardening of attitudes towards Allied prisoners. The continuing blockade of Germany after the war had ended which caused German civilians to suffer was seen as wanton cruelty.<sup>1396</sup> The refusal to investigate any war crimes against German prisoners was seen as Allied discrimination. The triumphalism of some Allied prisoners who marched waving flags through German towns during their repatriation was another. The failure of the French to maintain discipline among some of their troops was also a problem – German prisoner guards were beaten by French soldiers arriving in the Rhineland.<sup>1397</sup> Most importantly, the Allies' refusal to repatriate German prisoners of war caused anger. As a culture of retribution came to dominance in France and Britain, both countries totally failed to distinguish between the old German regime and the new. A letter from the French military mission in Berlin to the relative of a sick prisoner reveals this mentality: "I am sure that you will find consolation in knowing that he is well cared for *en pays ami* in a comfortable hospital by Danish doctors."<sup>1398</sup> The implication was clear: that Germans could not be trusted to care for sick French prisoners.

Why did the German refusal to accept that Allied prisoners had been mistreated actually matter? After all, the British and the French governments never considered investigating their own behaviour towards their German captives, even where mistreatment had occurred such as in French North Africa or in the French prisoner labour companies. However, the failure to acknowledge prisoner abuse on the German side was particularly

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<sup>1394</sup> Hankel, *Die Leipziger Prozesse*, p. 324.

<sup>1395</sup> See for example: Plassmann, *Die Deutschen Kriegsgefangenen in Frankreich 1914-1920*.

<sup>1396</sup> Dallas, 1918, p. 211.

<sup>1397</sup> Caubet, *Instituteur et sergent*, p. 89.

<sup>1398</sup> SHAT, 7 N 327 – 1, Mission militaire française à Berlin, Telegrams et correspondance, Dossier 1, Le médecin-major de 1<sup>ere</sup> classe REHM de la mission française, Berlin to Mme Cordhomme, St Lô, 22.2.1919.



significant for several reasons. First, as this thesis has shown, the German army treatment of prisoners of war as labourers and on reprisals was remarkably harsh – particularly in 1917 and 1918 – exceeding in scale any mistreatment patterns on the Allied side. Second, the failure to inform the German public about the mistreatment of Allied prisoners led to it attributing the Allies' accusations to propaganda. It meant that the German public and many of Germany's civilian politicians had no chance of understanding the real motivations behind the Allies' refusal to repatriate German captives. Third, the failure of the new German government to indict its predecessor for its prisoner of war treatment was another example of its reluctance to firmly discredit the Kaiser's regime or, more particularly, to discredit the German army – a failure which had serious long-term consequences. Loyalties to the old regime went unchallenged whereas a comprehensive Weimar government investigation of army practice could potentially have changed such pro-army attitudes. In particular, the Weimar failure to expose the German army's behaviour towards Allied prisoners in labour companies in 1918 left the *Dolchstoß* legend of a noble German army unquestioned.

Not only did the Weimar government fail to tarnish the old regime by denouncing its prisoner treatment but by failing to take the initiative it also allowed the right to remobilise around prisoner of war issues. The German right rapidly became involved in the broader German campaign to get the Allies to repatriate their German prisoners and used this to regain popular support. Through the question of prisoner treatment, the right established a pattern of manipulating the German public on how they perceived the war and its memory. For example, it publicised testimony about the Allies' mistreatment of German prisoners. The German right was also able to use the issue of prisoner treatment to indict the new Weimar Government for not doing enough to get the German prisoners home.

Finally, the failure to accept that any German mistreatment of prisoners had occurred was also a failure to accept defeat. By contesting the Allies' right to hold onto German captives, Germany was also contesting the Allies' right to treat it as a vanquished power. The Allies' refusal to repatriate their German prisoners brought home the reality of

Germany's military defeat, a reality which many Germans did not wish to face. A British officer prisoner, Alec Waugh, was told by a German teacher in November 1918 that "what hurts our pride more than anything is the thought that we release prisoners instead of exchanging them. It shows us so clearly that we are beaten."<sup>1399</sup> Nothing could more clearly symbolise the powerless military situation and diplomatic isolation of Germany following the Armistice.

### **Conclusion**

The different types of wartime violence perpetrated against prisoners of war re-emerged powerfully in the polemic and bitterness of the period 1918-1921. The British and French were enraged by what they interpreted in late 1918 as a deliberate German policy of mass death and starvation in German prisoner camps. Their reaction, the withholding of German prisoners in France, represented a form of mental violence enacted against German captives. In this context, former belligerents re-interpreted the war around new values attributed to their radicalized 'memories' of the enemy's prisoner treatment.

By November 1921, when the Nuremberg Ex-Prisoners of War veterans' association, laid their wreath on the graves of French prisoners in Germany, diametrically opposed Allied and German post-war narratives on prisoner of war treatment were well-established. The last German prisoners had been repatriated from France the previous year, but the ongoing Leipzig trials continued to anger Germany, which wanted Allied war crimes investigated too. The act of wreath-laying epitomised a general German post-war desire to portray Germans as honourable and chivalrous by nature. The letter from the Nuremberg Ex-Prisoners of War Association, cited at the opening of this chapter, emphasised the reciprocity principle by asking the French to respond in kind at the graves of Germans in France and clearly attempted to link the experience of German prisoners of war with that of their Allied counterparts and "brothers." In many ways it was a heartfelt act: these former prisoners were using the graves of the French in Germany as proxy sites of mourning for their own lost comrades who now lay in enemy soil. In addition,

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<sup>1399</sup> Waugh, *The Prisoners of Mainz*, pp. 232-238.



however, the wreath-laying also amply reflected the popular German narrative that Germany had made – and was making – real efforts at reconciliation.

This action by German prisoner of war veterans reveals the disparity in understanding between the two sides. By claiming brotherhood with the French dead, the Nuremberg Ex-Prisoners of War Association implied a universality of prisoner suffering. It equated French prisoner treatment with German prisoner treatment. This was at direct odds with the Allied contention in 1921 that Germany had treated its prisoners far worse than the Allies had behaved towards their captives. The Allies were insisting that their prisoners' sufferings in Germany were war crimes, while the mistreatment of German prisoners in Allied hands in their view did not even warrant an investigation. For the Allies in 1921 the key issue remained how British and French prisoners had ended up in graves in Germany, rather than how those graves were honoured.

The wreath-laying at Nuremberg was not the only gesture of its kind that year; other local German Prisoners of War Veterans' Associations also laid wreaths on Allied prisoners' tombs.<sup>1400</sup> The gap between Hermann-Paul's imagined depiction of the dangers of German prisoner repatriation in 1919 and the reality which ensued, of former German prisoners chivalrously laying wreaths on the graves of their French counterparts two years later, could not be wider. It reveals how little common understanding existed in the immediate aftermath of the war between the Allies and Germany about what the repatriation of prisoners actually meant. This difference in understanding was exacerbated by ignorance on the Allied side of the real political and economic conditions prevailing in Germany and the huge emotional impact of the retention of German prisoners upon a population already bitterly disappointed by defeat and the failure of Wilson's fourteen points to materialise as a basis for negotiations. On the German side, the gap in understanding was exacerbated by the failure to recognise the very real grievances the British and French felt at how their men had been treated while prisoners of war – grievances which were all too real, as the previous chapter has shown. With the

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<sup>1400</sup> MAE, Série Z Europe 1918-1929, Allemagne 181, Prisonniers de Guerre I, avril 1918 - mai 1921, no. 186, légation de la République Française aux Pays-Bas, M. Charles Benoît, Ministre de la Rép. Française aux Pays-Bas à son Excellence Mr le Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, 24.12.1919.

issue of prisoner repatriation such a source of contention and rival discourses between November 1918 and 1921, it is little wonder that the reality of what had happened to prisoners during the war itself also became shrouded in confusion and polemic, ironically at the very point where national investigations were taking place. The contested narratives about repatriation fed into the overall highly contested post-war question of what had actually happened to prisoners in belligerent countries during the war.

The highly contested nature of prisoner 'homecomings' following the Armistice and the real difficulty in matching cultural expectations of the peace with what actually occurred following 11 November 1918 reveal why remembering prisoners of war was such a major issue immediately after the war. The different meanings placed upon the issue of prisoner repatriation in Germany, France and Britain are crucial to any analysis of the bitterness of the immediate post-war years. How this initial, violently radical, memory of prisoner treatment evolved across the interwar period is the subject of the following chapter.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### **LA GRANDE ILLUSION: THE INTERWAR MEMORY OF PRISONERS OF WAR, 1920-1939**

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We three can do nothing until we meet again.

Inscription on a British prisoner of war grave at Kassel-Niederzwehren Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery, Kassel, Hessen, Germany.

#### Introduction

*Rauffenstein*: I do not know who is going to win this war, but I do know one thing: the end of it, whatever it may be, will be the end of the Rauffensteins and the Boeldieus.

*De Boeldieu*: But perhaps there is no more need of us.

Extract from the film *La Grande Illusion*, directed by Jean Renoir, 1937.<sup>1401</sup>

In the most famous interwar portrayal of First World War prisoners of war, the film *La Grande Illusion*, French director Jean Renoir depicts a conversation in a German prisoner of war camp between a French aristocratic officer, de Boeldieu, and his class counterpart, an aristocratic German camp commandant, von Rauffenstein, played by Erich von Stroheim. The conversation is revealing - an attempt to retrospectively analyse class within a fictional prison camp world. The German commandant, von Rauffenstein, tries to win the friendship of his prisoner, de Boeldieu, by explaining the meaning of the war as the death knell of a pan-European aristocracy. In turn, de Boeldieu rejects von Rauffenstein's argument of shared aristocratic loyalties and deliberately sacrifices his life in order that two middle-class French officers can escape. The meaning is clear. National ties triumph over pre-war aristocratic kinships. The death of the aristocracy liberates the middle classes.

This film, influenced by the Popular Front political culture in France at the time it was made, incorporates 1930s beliefs about the war's consequences and origins into its

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<sup>1401</sup> Jean Renoir, *La Grande Illusion*, trans. M. Alexander and A. Sinclair (London, 1968), p. 71.

narrative. The conflict is now seen as a caesura in the history of the class system – it is no longer interpreted through the prism of prisoner mistreatment. Through this depiction of a prison camp, Renoir subtly reinscribes the memory of the prisoner of war experience. It is no longer a military phenomenon, but rather a social one. The war itself, in this 1930s French reading, is not fought over questions of German aggression, occupation or military atrocities. Rather, it is the product of failing social structures; in particular, the pre-war power of European aristocracies whose eclipse it signified. Through this shift in emphasis, one of the most important issues during the war, violence against prisoners of war, is completely occluded.

This rejection of certain wartime discourses in favour of a class interpretation of the conflict was a conscious process not only for Renoir, a war veteran, but also for the former prisoners of war he contacted to research the film. Renoir wrote that

The goal of this film is not to describe the life of French prisoners in German camps during the war. It is a confrontation between different types of men. [...] The President of the League of Wartime Escapees, Mr Richard, and a commission of escapees with whom we had important discussions before starting the film, know this very well as we agreed with them that the scenes which later would allow Commandant von Rauffenstein and Capt de Boeldieu to confront each other had no place in a purely documentary account of the lives of the prisoners.<sup>1402</sup>

In other words, this artistic interpretation of the memory of the prisoner of war, which departed from the wartime reality of commandant-prisoner relations, had the support and collusion of former prisoners. Why?

Although they consciously decided to invent a Franco-German dialogue on class, the filmmakers appeared unaware of the real paradox their work created. On the one hand, wartime hatreds were to be deliberately excised from their interpretation. Renoir wrote, “in our film, there is no ‘boche’ guard; there is a *German* guard.”<sup>1403</sup> These were to be prison camps without any perpetrators; conflict without any hatred. The war itself is

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<sup>1402</sup> Letter from Jean Renoir to Albin Michel and Jean des Vallières, June 1937, “Origins of scenes from *La Grande Illusion* called into question by Albin Michel and Des Vallières,” in David Thompson and Lorraine LoBianco, eds, *Jean Renoir. Letters* (Boston and London, 1994), p. 32.

<sup>1403</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.



practically absent from the film. On the other hand, Renoir also desired that the “framework” of captivity “be reconstructed with the greatest possible exactitude” out of “respect for the men who suffered in these prisons.”<sup>1404</sup> The inadvertent reference to suffering by Renoir is revealing. He could acknowledge that prison camps were places where men suffered but the nature of that suffering, how these prison camps came to exist or who perpetrated the suffering were not to be dealt with. The narrative version of the war created in the film was all about European reconciliation based on socialist internationalist precepts. In this, the history of prisoner mistreatment had no role as it risked proving too divisive. The memory of the prisoner of war had merged with interwar perceptions of why the war occurred, understood in the light of its class consequences.

Yet one of the great ironies of *La Grande Illusion*'s class-based interpretation is the absence of the working class soldier from the world of Renoir's prison camp. *La Grande Illusion* is precisely that – an illusion, for it represents the prison camp world of the officer. The deterioration in other rank prison camp life in Germany in 1917 and 1918 is not depicted, apart from a brief scene with angry, hungry Russians. The darker side of life for other rank prisoners – harsh labour in the occupied territories, the factory, the mine, reprisal camps - is absent. French, British and German use of prisoner of war labour companies is not alluded to. Instead, prison life in an officers' camp is portrayed as tolerable, with excellent parcel supplies from home and Germans whose behaviour is largely defined by old code of honour niceties. The central French officer prisoners of the film are also airmen whose capture experience was markedly more chivalrous than of front line infantry.<sup>1405</sup> The film, therefore, represents the capture experience and imprisonment of a minority. Insofar as it narrates the officer prisoners' experience it is historically accurate. The difficulty comes from the fact that the officer prisoners' experience was very unrepresentative of prison camp life in the First World War. The film's excellence in other regards – cinematography, narrative, use of symbolism and its

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<sup>1404</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>1405</sup> See the many accounts of capture by British airmen who were taken prisoner in: TNA, AIR 1/501/15/333/1 Interrogative reports by escaped or repatriated prisoners of war, R.F.C. or R.A.F., 1915-1918.

commercial and enduring success – meant that for generations of viewers it became the abiding image of the First World War prison camp.

### **The interwar period and the disruption of memory**

Historians agree that 1914-1918 prisoners have long been excluded from the memory of the war.<sup>1406</sup> What is less clear is when or how this process of exclusion began. It is necessary to turn to the interwar period for answers as it was during the interwar period that the events of 1914-1918 were first collectively codified as *history*. Renoir's film is just one example of a process of what might be termed 'memory disruption' which occurred in relation to prisoners of war. This interwar memory disruption produced a strange amnesia in Britain, France and Germany regarding major aspects of 1914-1918 captivity. It paralleled the gradual disappearance of prisoners from the history of the war, both popular and official. Even the most disturbing, large-scale and highly visible innovation in captivity – prisoner of war labour companies – were already ostensibly forgotten by the mid-1930s, despite having been an obvious feature of the conflict. This raises questions about how different the remembrance of the conflict was in each of the three countries. Perhaps the most remarkable point about this period is that, in all three, the memory of prisoners of war failed to enter into the long-term historical remembrance of the war.

Existing historiographical debate has long focused on interwar remembrance in terms of whether there was continuity with the traditional pre-war period or whether modernist

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<sup>1406</sup> On the absence of historiography on First World War prisoners of war until the 1990s see: Richard B. Speed III, *Prisoners, Diplomats and the Great War: A Study in the Diplomacy of Captivity* (New York and London, 1990), p. 8; Annette Becker, *Oubliés de la Grande Guerre. Humanitaire et Culture de Guerre, 1914-1918, Populations Occupées, Déportés Civils, Prisonniers de Guerre* (Paris, 1998), p. 15; Odon Abbal, *Soldats Oubliés. Les Prisonniers de Guerre Français* (Esparon, 2001), p. 7; Alon Rachamimov, *POWs and the Great War. Captivity on the Eastern Front* (Oxford and New York, 2002), p. 3 and Uta Hinz " 'Die Deutschen "Barbaren" sind doch die besseren Menschen.' Kriegsgefangenschaft und gefangene 'Feinde' in der Darstellung der deutschen Publizistik 1914-1918" in Rüdiger Overmans, ed., *In der Hand des Feindes. Kriegsgefangenschaft von der Antike bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Cologne, Weimar, Vienna, 1999), p. 340.



forms of expression predominated.<sup>1407</sup> Recently, the debate has moved on to discuss whether collective memory even exists.<sup>1408</sup> What I wish to do here is to approach memory in the interwar period from a different angle; to explore not the process of remembrance, but that of forgetting. Defining how a society ‘forgets’ is as difficult for the historian as defining the different ways a society collectively ‘remembers.’<sup>1409</sup> Forgetting is a multifaceted process. However, it can be defined as both the absence of the articulation of past experiences or discourses, or their suppression through the construction of an invented past. In this way, a subtle element of forgetting is present in any history. However, in relation to aspects of human history associated with cultural taboos such as the practice of violence, historical amnesia often appears more rapid, influential and deliberate. This was the case in the interwar period.

The gradual development of this interwar amnesia deserves detailed attention as it raises difficult questions about linkages, continuities and breaks in European history.<sup>1410</sup> For, it is important to point out that public amnesia can be deceptive. As Jay Winter has argued, there were many different “memory sites” through which the conflict was understood in the interwar years.<sup>1411</sup> However much interwar histories marginalised or omitted prisoners, there were many people living in Europe at the outbreak of the Second World

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<sup>1407</sup> See: Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory. Armistice Day 1919-1946* (Oxford and Providence, 1994), pp. 2-4; Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning. The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge, 1995), introduction pp. 1-11; Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London, 1990); George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: reshaping the memory of the World Wars* (Oxford, 1990); Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (London, 1977); Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring. The Modern in Cultural History* (New York, 1989).

<sup>1408</sup> Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, eds, *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 1.

<sup>1409</sup> On the concept of ‘collective memory’ see: Pierre Nora, ed., *Realms of Memory. The Construction of the French Past*, vol. 1, *Conflicts and Divisions* (New York, 1996), p. 1; Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago and London, 1992 [1941]); Etienne François and Hagen Schulze, eds, *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, 3 vols (Munich, 2001); Winter and Sivan, eds, *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*.

<sup>1410</sup> The historiography cited in footnote 1406 is deeply divided on this subject of links between the two world wars, with Annette Becker arguing that French military and civilian prisoners of war were marginalised in the interwar period, but that their severe treatment served as a precedent for World War Two atrocities against prisoners in Germany. Odon Abbai argues against viewing the two wars as linked. Richard Speed interprets prisoner treatment in World War Two as a clear break with prisoner treatment in the First World War, which he concludes was humane, governed by entirely benevolent attitudes towards prisoners in Germany, France and Britain.

<sup>1411</sup> Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning. The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 1.



War who still had private personal memories of prisoner treatment during the First. Clearly too, memory not only emerges in textual or public discourse, but also in practical military and administrative behaviour. It is a key component of what Isabel V. Hull has defined as “habitual practices, default programs, hidden assumptions and unreflective cognitive frames” which underlie organisational and military action.<sup>1412</sup> In this practical sense, the memory of the 1914-1918 prisoner treatment did bequeath certain legacies to 1939-45. Even the administrative language such as Stalag, an abbreviation of *Stammlager*, reveals hidden continuities. A physical memory also existed – in some countries the same camps were used again. Britain resurrected its First World War Isle of Man camp for the internment of aliens.<sup>1413</sup> Mauthausen in Austria and Ohrdruf in Germany, two important 1914-1918 prisoner of war camps, became concentration camps in 1939-45.<sup>1414</sup> If prisoner of war treatment was truly completely forgotten in the interwar period then it could not have influenced any practices or attitudes in 1939. It seems of immense importance to ask what happened to the memory of First World War prisoners in Britain, France and Germany in the interwar years. How complete or partial was the collective amnesia that developed? What exactly was forgotten by 1939?

The memory of the prisoner of war experience did not disappear instantly, rather it mutated. To examine this process of ‘forgetting’ it is necessary to look at both the official historical discourse and the realm of popular public remembrance of the war for, as Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan have pointed out, the two represent very different means of narrating the past.<sup>1415</sup> Prisoners of war did establish their own sites of memory between 1919 and 1939 through memoirs and, in France and Germany, veterans’ associations. These were active in disrupting prisoner memory by projecting particular versions of captivity. As the example of *La Grande Illusion* reveals, what presaged the ‘forgetting’ was a form of memory disruption, a reinvention or reselection of what aspects of prisoner of war life would be remembered. This reselection was based upon what interwar

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<sup>1412</sup> Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction. Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca and London, 2005), p. 2.

<sup>1413</sup> J. Anthony Hellen, “Temporary settlements and transient populations. The legacy of Britain’s prisoner of war camps 1940-1948,” *Erkunde*, 53 (1999), 191-219, p. 197.

<sup>1414</sup> Marie-Anne Matard-Bonucci and Edouard Lynch, *La Libération des Camps et le Retour des Déportés* (Paris, 1995), p. 63.

<sup>1415</sup> Winter and Sivan, eds, *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, p. 8.



societies valued and what they perceived as historically important. The most important aspect of this memory disruption was the discarding of the discourse of violence which had been so interwoven with the prisoner of war narrative during the war in Britain, France and Germany. This marked the major significant change in how interwar societies 'forgot' the wartime history of prisoners.

Almost all of the wartime references to prisoners of war explicitly or implicitly related acts of violence by the enemy towards them. Often, as the previous chapters have shown, these references were based on reality – prisoners in some cases *were* shot on the battlefield, beaten, tortured, given insufficient rations, forced to work under shellfire and to help their captor's war effort at personal cost to their own morale and their mental well-being. Such incidents happened to a greater or lesser extent to prisoners captured by all three countries under examination here. These events did give rise to myth and to exaggeration on occasion, but to a far lesser extent than some later commentators believed. It was this narrative of violent prisoner treatment that was privileged during the war; the experience of prisoners whose captivity was uneventful was marginalised. The interwar period saw a cultural renegotiation of this narrative of violence against prisoners.

### **The need to forget? British society and the memory of prisoner mistreatment**

One of the key reasons why the memory of violence against prisoners matters to a society is the likelihood of repetition. Where societies feel that violent imprisonment is likely to recur in the future, the memory of past prisoner mistreatment remains important. This was the case in the immediate post-war years. During this period, former prisoners and their societies openly engaged with the memory of violence against prisoners during 1914-1918. In particular, there was a sense among former prisoners that something had gone wrong with war, and indeed with European culture, that had led to the more violent forms of captivity that emerged during some periods of the conflict. Prisoner mistreatment was initially something to be solved rather than forgotten. In Britain and France this led to calls for war crimes trials. In Germany, there were demands that

international law be revised in order to protect prisoners more effectively. At the first sitting of the Schücking Commission, investigating prisoner treatment in Germany in December 1918, Walther Schücking spoke of the “general impression of the present day that only a return to the idea of law can save us all from the terrible misery caused to the civilized world by the war for power.”<sup>1416</sup>

On the British and the French side during 1919-1921 popular awareness of prisoner mistreatment fed the campaign to try the German perpetrators. Partly this came from the belief that Germany had acted with impunity towards Allied prisoners because it feared no punishment – during the war there were no established sanctions against war crimes in international law. War crimes trials would act as a deterrent. However, the support for war crimes trials in Britain was also fuelled by the belief that they would serve a didactic purpose. They would showcase the values of the Allies’ concept of justice in Germany. By punishing some guilty German perpetrators as an example, this would teach Germany as a whole the lessons of what Britain considered constituted civilized war practice. This didactic purpose explains why many British commentators were relatively satisfied with the Leipzig trials, in contrast with the French. As the British lawyer Claud Mullins wrote in his 1921 account of the trials: “When we come to judge the Leipzig War Criminals’ Trials as a whole and to consider what they achieved, it is necessary to consider the legal results separately from what may be termed the political or ethical results.”<sup>1417</sup> By 1921, the British view was that it was not necessary to try *all* perpetrators of prisoner mistreatment to avoid a repetition of their crimes. The three prisoner of war cases brought by the British at Leipzig were symbolic enough – Britain had made its moral point.<sup>1418</sup> For Mullins: “the punishment of individual wrong-doers is only part, in my opinion only a secondary part, of the vindication of Law and Humanity. Germany’s war criminals were part of the system which produced and encouraged them and the condemnation of

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<sup>1416</sup> *Berliner Tageblatt*, 5.12.18, “Die Behandlung der Kriegsgefangenen. Die erste Sitzung der Untersuchungskommission.”

<sup>1417</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1418</sup> Claud Mullins, *The Leipzig Trials. An account of the war criminals’ trials and a study of German mentality* (London, 1921), p. 209.



that system is of greater importance than the fate of any individual wrong-doers.”<sup>1419</sup> For Britain, the trials had served their didactic purpose.

Following the trials, the British public and establishment rapidly lost interest in accounts of violence against prisoners. The subject disappeared from public debate. For example, the final report by the Government Committee on the Treatment by the Enemy of British Prisoners of War, based on interviews with 70,000 former prisoners, which referred to a “system” of German mistreatment, was never published during the interwar years.<sup>1420</sup> This public silence occurred for three reasons in Britain: first, the Leipzig Trials created a sense that the issue had been dealt with; second, there was a change in attitudes, among the public and in political circles which served to silence the memory of prisoner mistreatment; and third, ex-prisoners in Britain did not mobilise to publicise their experience.

The interwar change in attitudes towards prisoners’ wartime experiences becomes clear if we examine two processes. First, an analysis of the key figures involved with the question of prisoner of war treatment during the war reveals that in the interwar period they changed how they wrote and spoke about prisoners to play down mistreatment issues. For example, Lieutenant-General Herbert E. Belfield, who had been head of the Department of Prisoners of War at the War Office, changed his tone markedly by the early 1920s. The wartime suspicions and animosities articulated in the diary he kept at the Hague Conference in June 1917 where he met with a German delegation to discuss prisoner treatment, were markedly different from his speech to the Grotius Society on 6 November 1923.<sup>1421</sup> In his 1917 diary he made continual anti-German comments, referring to “the brutal treatment” to which British prisoners had been subjected.<sup>1422</sup> In his 1923 speech, however, Belfield was far less critical of Germany, considering for

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<sup>1419</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>1420</sup> J.H. Morgan, *Assize of Arms. Being the Story of the Disarmament of Germany and her Rearmament*, vol.1 (London, 1945), p. 140.

<sup>1421</sup> IWM, 91/44/1 HEB 1/1 Papers of Lieutenant-General Sir Herbert Belfield, Director of Prisoners of War 1914-1920, Diary of the conference at The Hague, 23 June – 7 July 1917; Lieutenant-General Sir Herbert Belfield, “The Treatment of Prisoners of War” in *Transactions of the Grotius Society*, 9 (1923) pp. 131-147.

<sup>1422</sup> Ibid.

example, that the “infliction of heavy punishments” on British prisoners was legal as prisoners were subject to the German military code.<sup>1423</sup> Similarly revealing was a debate at the Grotius Society in London in 1922 where Sir Reginald Acland, a former member of the Government Committee on the Treatment by the Enemy of British Prisoners of War, challenged the former Home Secretary, Viscount George Cave, on his claim that there had been widespread prisoner mistreatment by Germany.<sup>1424</sup>

This change in attitude was not due to any post-war crisis of faith in the evidence of mistreatment gathered during the war. On the contrary, those who had compiled this evidence were rewarded in the interwar years. The head of the Committee on the Treatment by the Enemy of British Prisoners of War, Sir Robert Younger, was made Baron Blanesburgh for his part in collecting evidence of prisoner mistreatment. Adelaide Livingstone, the remarkable American woman who had coordinated the running of the Government Committee on the Treatment by the Enemy of British Prisoners of War from 1915-1918, was made a Dame in 1918 for her war work. She was appointed head of the War Office mission to search for the missing in France and Flanders 1919-20 and subsequently became Assistant Director of Graves Registration and Enquiries in Central Europe 1920-22.<sup>1425</sup> This was a truly remarkable career for a young woman and confirms that Livingstone’s wartime investigations and reports were well regarded.

Therefore, if the wartime evidence of mistreatment was not discredited, why did key administrative figures in the interwar period decide not to address it? The answer lies in the change of climate in Britain, in which promoting European reconciliation mattered more than wartime evidence. Adelaide Livingstone’s career is illustrative of this post-war shift to pacifism. Her experiences between 1914 and 1918 mobilised her to campaign vigorously for peace in the interwar years. She became involved with the League of Nations and later campaigned against European rearmament through the Peace Ballot of European populations in the 1930s which petitioned people to vote symbolically against

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<sup>1423</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1424</sup> Comments made by Sir Reginald Acland on a speech by Lord Cave, *Transactions of the Grotius Society*, 8 (1922), p. xxxvi.

<sup>1425</sup> Adelaide Livingstone died in 1970. From: *Who was Who, 1961-1970*, vol. 6 (London, 1972).



war. She was Director of Special Activities to the League of Nations Union between 1928 and 1934 and Secretary to the National Declaration Committee between 1934 and 1935, during which time she organised the peace ballot, publishing a book on its results.<sup>1426</sup> Later she served as secretary and subsequently vice-chairman of the International Peace Campaign, 1936-40. The promotion of peace was more important to Livingstone than the re-opening of old wounds about prisoners of war.

The second process which provides evidence of a change in popular attitudes in Britain is to be found in the absence of memoirs dealing with prisoner mistreatment. The discourse on violence against prisoners was virtually silenced in Britain between 1921 and 1939; officer prisoners' accounts of escape flourished in its place. These accounts were particularly noteworthy for their playful tone – many deliberately depicted prisoner of war camps as a kind of public school with barbed wire.<sup>1427</sup> One described escape as “very like one of those board games we used to play as boys – the game was tireless. The camp was the board.”<sup>1428</sup> In 1931, the B.B.C. even organised a series of sixteen talks by officers who had escaped from Germany during the Great War, most of whom in the 1920s had already written a memoir on their escape.<sup>1429</sup> It is a mark of the cultural shift that had occurred since the early 1920s that three German officer escapers who had broken out of British camps were included. Such was the interest in the radio talks that it was decided to edit them into a book, *Escapers All*, which duly appeared in 1932. The introduction by J.R. Ackerley is revealing. Ackerley openly acknowledged the narrative shift that had occurred since the war:

A good many of the books which have been published in all countries about escaping, especially those published during or soon after the war, are coloured with the animosities and prejudices of that time, and I believe that a number of their authors could now wish that otherwise. This book,

<sup>1426</sup> From: *Who was Who, 1961-1970*, vol. 6 (London, 1972); Adelaide Livingstone, *The Peace Ballot; the official history with a statistical survey of the results* (London, 1935).

<sup>1427</sup> For typical examples see: Godfrey Walter Phillimore, *Recollections of a Prisoner of War* (London, 1930); H.G. Durnford, *The Tunnellers of Holzminden* (Cambridge, 1930); Wallace Ellison, *Escapes and Adventures* (Edinburgh and London, 1928).

<sup>1428</sup> *Tunnelling to Freedom and Other Escape Narratives from World War I, Hugh Durnford and Others*, Introduction by J.R. Ackerley (New York, 2004). Unabridged reproduction of *Escapers All: Being the Personal Narratives of Fifteen Escapers from War-Time Prison Camps, 1914-1918* (London, 1932), p. 14.

<sup>1429</sup> *Ibid.*, publisher's note, p. 7.



however, will not concern itself with the treatment of prisoners of war or the conditions in which they lived, excepting in so far as these are a relevant background to their adventures of escape. Prisoners of war were treated the same in every country that took part in the war, and when they received – as they occasionally did receive in all countries – real kindness and consideration, then we may be surprised and grateful that such good qualities managed to survive the poison and the pettiness of those times. For war is not intended to bring out the best and kindest in men; the emotions it deliberately calls forth and fosters – hatred, fear, greed, revenge – are not pretty emotions and do not beget pretty manners.<sup>1430</sup>

The *treatment* of prisoners had become taboo, even though implicit in Ackerley's comments was the idea that prisoners were the target of enemy hatreds. In Britain, the narrative of violence gave way after the Leipzig Trials to a purely social narrative of officer prison camp life. This process becomes even clearer if one looks at the difference between statements made by officer prisoners during the war to the British Committee on the Treatment by the Enemy of British prisoners of war and their interwar memoirs.<sup>1431</sup> This shift to a more social narrative about prisoner camps also allowed British commentators to be reconciliatory towards Germany. In the 1932 collection *Escapers All*, the editor included three accounts of German officer escapes from officer prisoner of war camps in Britain.<sup>1432</sup> In contrast, the voice of British other rank prisoners, who had experienced a completely different and far harsher captivity than officers, was absent from interwar memoirs.

Such interwar amnesia was possible because unlike Germany and France, Britain had no significant separate prisoner of war veteran association to raise awareness of prisoners' wartime experiences.<sup>1433</sup> In Britain, five separate veterans' associations emerged in the wake of the war, none of which was specifically aimed at prisoners. These associations were initially divided by political outlook and class background. However, in 1921, four

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<sup>1430</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>1431</sup> TNA, WO 161/96, Interview no. 323 with Lieut. D. Grinnell-Milne; Ibid., Interview no. O.416, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. H.G. Durnford; Hugh Durnford, *The Tunnellers of Holzminden* (Cambridge, 1930); Duncan Grinnell-Milne, *An Escaper's Log* (London, 1926).

<sup>1432</sup> *Tunnelling to Freedom and Other Escape Narratives from World War I, Hugh Durnford and Others*, Introduction by J. R. Ackerley (New York, 2004).

<sup>1433</sup> BA, R 8095.3, ReK, Bericht aus der Besprechung mit Herrn von Hünefeld und Major Fitzmaurice (British Legion) am Montag den 25 Juni 1928 im Hotel Kaiserhof. Es sprachen vor die Kameraden von Lersner und Dr Givens; Graham Wootton, *The Official History of the British Legion* (London, 1956) Appendix 2, p. 313.



veterans' associations the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers; Comrades of the Great War; the National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers; and the Officers' Association merged to form the British Legion. The fifth veterans' association, the radical left-wing National Union of Ex-Servicemen, disappeared during the 1920s.<sup>1434</sup> The British Legion successfully united all British veterans, making no distinction between former prisoners and other ex-servicemen. The memory of captivity was submerged within an organisation that represented many different types of veterans: the maimed, the shellshocked, the ordinary soldier survivor. It appears that British ex-prisoners of war saw no reason to form their own national veterans' association. The only prisoner of war groups that emerged were a handful of small clubs set up around individual camps, and these, like the interwar memoirs, were almost exclusively focused upon officers. They organised reunions rather than campaigning for ex-prisoners' rights or concerning themselves with the history of prisoner treatment, and were modelled upon the gentlemen's clubs which were such an important part of British upper-class male socialisation.<sup>1435</sup> Overall British ex-prisoners did not develop any separate veteran group identity. In many ways this fits with the thesis of Adrian Gregory who argues that British veterans reintegrated into civil society remarkably well.<sup>1436</sup> Prisoners were no exception. Moreover, as Gregory points out, the British ex-servicemen were not the primary custodians of the memory of the war – in the U.K. the civilian bereaved “always came first in any clash of interests.”<sup>1437</sup> In general, British ex-servicemen had little control over public commemoration.

As the absence of any prisoner of war veterans' association shows, there was no distinction in British memory of the war between prisoners and other combatants. Prisoners were treated exactly the same as non-prisoner veterans by both the government and their peers. This is particularly clear in relation to prisoner of war graves which were laid out in Imperial War Grave war cemeteries in Germany which matched in every respect, the war cemeteries established for the battlefield dead in France. In contrast to

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<sup>1434</sup> Ibid., pp. 17-19.

<sup>1435</sup> John Davidson Ketchum, *Ruhleben. A Prison Camp Society* (Toronto and Oxford, 1965), p. 178.

<sup>1436</sup> Gregory, *The Silence of Memory*, p. 4, and pp. 51-52.

<sup>1437</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

the graves of French prisoners of war, British prisoners' cemeteries in Germany were honoured as *combatant* burial grounds. The British military mission in Berlin carried out a careful investigation into what had happened to missing prisoners and the Imperial War Graves Commission registered and amalgamated all British prisoner of war graves in Germany into four large graveyards at Kassel, Berlin, Hamburg and Cologne, with over a thousand burials, and thirteen other minor burial sites with fewer graves. There was some public opposition to leaving prisoners' graves in Germany. However, once it became clear that the Imperial War Graves Commission would establish cemeteries identical to those in France, the opposition died down.<sup>1438</sup> A Federal German Law in 1922 assured security for the cemeteries, which had a full-time British staff appointed to tend them.<sup>1439</sup> The British prisoner of war graveyards in Germany were laid out with the same headstone design and were maintained exactly as those in France. Families were able to request a personal inscription to be placed on the grave headstone. At Kassel graveyard, the cemetery entrance was flanked by two beehive style fort towers, symbolically protecting the sleeping dead within. In contrast, the graves of German prisoners of war who died in the U.K. received no special treatment and were only amalgamated into a centralised prisoner of war graveyard at Cannock Chase in 1964.<sup>1440</sup>

There was one final factor which influenced British memory of prisoners of war in the interwar period. In 1928, Member of Parliament, Sir Arthur Ponsonby, published *Falsehood in Wartime*, a book which contained "an assortment of lies circulated throughout the nations during the Great War."<sup>1441</sup> Ponsonby claimed that the British people had been manipulated by false wartime propaganda.<sup>1442</sup> His work discredited the testimony of prisoners of war: "Stories of the maltreatment of prisoners have to be circulated deliberately in order to prevent surrenders. This is done, of course, by both sides."<sup>1443</sup> He used examples of cases where undoubtedly the British government had

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<sup>1438</sup> Philip Langworth, *The Unending Vigil. The History of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (Barnsley, 1967 [2003]), p. 122.

<sup>1439</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1440</sup> <http://www.cannockchasedc.gov.uk/cannockchase/wargraves.htm>. Accessed 10.8.2005.

<sup>1441</sup> Arthur Ponsonby, *Falsehood in Wartime. Containing an assortment of lies circulated throughout the nations during the Great War* (London, 1928).

<sup>1442</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>1443</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.



invented or exaggerated atrocity tales, such as the story of the crucified Canadian, to argue that propaganda was largely invented. Ponsonby's work reflects the interwar attitude in Britain that propaganda lies, including those about prisoner mistreatment by the enemy, had kept people fighting in 1914-1918. All 1914-1918 atrocity accounts were now dismissed as war-mongering falsehoods.

Ponsonby's work was illustrative of the shift in how the war was understood and narrated in Britain by the early 1930s. It was seen as a catastrophic disaster and a needless waste of lives. The most important component of this shift in attitudes was the growth in popularity of the literature of disenchantment. Most revealingly, in this literature the prisoner of war served as a trope for man's common humanity. A remarkable range of writers from Vera Brittain to R.C. Sherriff used the German prisoner as the ultimate symbol of cultural demobilisation.<sup>1444</sup> When the young German, significantly described as the "BOY," appears on stage at the end of Sherriff's influential play, *Journey's End*, the purpose is to reveal the ludicrous nature of war where one boy dies in a raid to capture another:

[Suddenly the BOY falls on his knees and sobs out some words in broken English.]

GERMAN: Mercy – mister – mercy!

S-M: Come on lad, get up.

[With a huge fist he takes the BOY by the collar and draws him to his feet. The BOY sobs hysterically...] <sup>1445</sup>

A similar use of the German prisoner was also made powerfully by Siegfried Sassoon. For example, his poem "Atrocities" uses prisoners to depict the wartime enemy as victim:

You told me, in your drunken-boasting mood,  
How once you butchered prisoners. That was good!  
I'm sure you felt no pity while they stood  
Patient and cowed and scared, as prisoners should.

How did you do them in? Come don't be shy:  
You know I love to hear how Germans die,

<sup>1444</sup> Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth. An Autobiographical study of the Years 1900-1925* (London, 1978 [1933]), p. 376.

<sup>1445</sup> R.C. Sherriff, *Journey's End* (London, 1929), p. 74.

Downstairs in dug-outs. "Camerad!" they cry;  
Then squeal like stoats when bombs begin to fly.

And you? I know your record. You went sick  
When orders looked unwholesome: then, with trick  
And lie you wangled home. And here you are,  
Still talking big and boozing in a bar.<sup>1446</sup>

Yet ironically, while the literature of disenchantment made good use of the German prisoner, portraying him in a human light, it ignores the British prisoner completely. Left out of the iconic literature, which would go on to dominate British popular memory of the war, the British prisoner never entered the collective national consciousness. The wartime narrative of violence against British prisoners was deliberately 'forgotten' in the interwar period and former British prisoners acquiesced in this amnesia.

### **Poilus or prisonniers? The memory of prisoners of war in interwar France**

In contrast to the British case, many former prisoners in France and Germany mobilised collectively through prisoner of war veterans' associations. The main French ex-prisoners' association, the *Fédération nationale des anciens prisonniers de guerre*, (later re-named the *Fédération nationale des anciens prisonniers de guerre, évadés et otages*) had 60,000 members in 1935.<sup>1447</sup> Its German counterpart, the *Reichsverein ehemaliger Kriegsgefangener*, had 30,000 members by the late 1920s.<sup>1448</sup> Both organisations published newsletters aimed at former prisoners of war: the *Fédération* produced a monthly newsletter from 1921, which was still in existence in 1929; the *Reichsverein* produced a newsletter, *Der Heimkehrer*, from 1918 to 1929.<sup>1449</sup> Both prisoners'

<sup>1446</sup> This poem was originally published in 1919. Rupert Hart-Davis, ed., *The War Poems of Siegfried Sassoon* (London, 1983), p. 145. The poet Herbert Read makes similar use of the German prisoner in his poem "The Scene." Herbert Read, *Collected Poems 1913-1925* (London, 1927), p. 83.

<sup>1447</sup> Antoine Prost, *In the Wake of War. "Les Anciens Combattants" and French Society, 1914-1939* (Oxford and Providence, 1992), p. 40. Annette Becker, *Oubliés de la Grande Guerre*, p. 368. Many French former prisoners also joined other non-prisoner veterans' associations such as the *Union Fédérale* or the *Union Nationale de Combattants*.

<sup>1448</sup> BA, R 8095.5, 11. Bundestag der Reichsverein ehemaliger Kriegsgefangener, n.d.

<sup>1449</sup> BDIC, Nanterre, APJX pour prisonniers français en Allemagne. Lettre mensuelle de la Fédération Nationale des Anciens Prisonniers de Guerre, 1921- août/sept 1929, [no.s 1-86] G F P 708. Later became: *Journal des anciens prisonniers de guerre, évadés, otages*, Oct 1929. G F P 708; See also: Archives of the League of Nations, United Nations Library, Geneva, 1708 Registry International Labour Office, Refugees mixed archival group – Fonds Nansen, Registry files [1920-1924] Box R 1708, 73 files, *Der Heimkehrer*, 1920-1922. *Der Heimkehrer* was still in existence in 1929. See: BA, R 8095.1, Aktenvermerk, 21.6.1929,



associations were also right-leaning politically and campaigned on social welfare issues that concerned former prisoners. They were also deeply involved in how the prisoner of war experience was remembered.

It is in these former prisoners' associations that we see the first prisoner of war collective memory being formed in the early 1920s. In both the *Reichsverein* and the *Fédération* this initial group remembrance emphasised the violent experiences prisoners had endured in captivity. However, this concern with violence against prisoners emerged for different reasons. In Germany, the *Reichsverein ehemaliger Kriegsgefangener* maintained it had a responsibility to publicise the worst experiences of captivity as a warning to society about the horrors of war. The leader of the German prisoner of war veterans' association, the *Reichsverein ehemaliger Kriegsgefangener*, Wilhelm von Lersner, outlined in a speech in 1922 that

We former prisoners of war know all too well that we as the defeated will not win the trust of the victor with the call 'Never again war,' and we do not make this statement to convince the victor; but because we have recognised the greatness of this precept. [...] There is one thing we plan to do in this time of internal battle, and that is to ensure that the call 'Never again war' will apply to our own people!<sup>1450</sup>

In contrast, in France in the early 1920s, the reasons for publicising prisoner mistreatment during the war sprang from entirely different motivations. French ex-prisoners' accounts of mistreatment were challenged by Germany and by groups within France.

First, at the Leipzig trials the German defence had discredited the evidence of former French prisoners.<sup>1451</sup> Following harassment of French witnesses, the French abandoned the Leipzig trials in disgust to carry out their own trials of all known German war crimes

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Betr. Entschädigungsfragen. Rücksprache mit Kamerad Pfandner vom Reichsbund der Kriegsbeschädigten am 21. Juni 1929.

<sup>1450</sup> Wilfried Rogasch, "Zur Geschichte der Sammlung," in Rosmarie Beier and Bettina Biedermann, *Kriegsgefangen. Objekte aus der Sammlung des Archivs und Museums der Kriegsgefangenschaft, Berlin und des Verbandes der Heimkehrer, Kriegsgefangenen und Vermisstenangehörigen Deutschlands e.V., Bonn-Bad Godesberg im Deutschen Historischen Museum*, 30. Oktober 1990 bis 30. November 1990 (Berlin, 1990), p. 12.

<sup>1451</sup> John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914. A History of Denial* (New Haven and London, 2001), pp. 348-351.



*in absentia* in France.<sup>1452</sup> While the British interpreted the Leipzig trials as didactic and symbolic, the French understood them quantitatively. This was to be comprehensive punishment of all perpetrators – not just one or two token cases.<sup>1453</sup> For France, war crimes trials were not about proving to Germany in a court of law what constituted illegal wartime behaviour but about locking up all war criminals so that they could not repeat their offence.<sup>1454</sup> Former French prisoners of war were disappointed by the Leipzig trials. Their calls for justice had not been answered and their accounts of mistreatment had been challenged. In autumn 1921, Aristide Briand, the French Prime Minister, was lobbied by outraged French ex-prisoners of war associations who wanted renewed action against German war criminals.<sup>1455</sup>

Not only did Germany not recognise French ex-prisoners' accounts of harsh captivities, many groups within France also refused to do so. The elites of French interwar society were far more suspicious of prisoners of war in the 1920s than their British or German counterparts. The mood is illustrated by the title of a 1922 article in the *Almanach of Combatants and Victims of the War*: "The Prisoners were Combatants."<sup>1456</sup> In neither Britain nor Germany was it necessary to issue any such reminder. Former French prisoners of war found that the government and military circles did not categorise them as former combatants, seeing captivity as a boon: "After all, preserving one's life is quite something. To keep your life is worth suffering a little hunger" was how one French senator countered prisoners' demands for recognition in 1931.<sup>1457</sup> This long-standing suspicion that prisoners were cowards or deserters had its roots in the massive captures of August and September 1914 when France's military fate hung in the balance and the

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<sup>1452</sup> MAE, Série Y, internationale, 589, Archives de la mission de l'avocat général, Paul Matter, au procès de Leipzig 1921, f. 143, 8.7.1921; Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities*, pp. 351-353; Gerd Hankel, *Die Leipziger Prozesse. Deutsche Kriegsverbrechen und ihre strafrechtliche Verfolgung nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg* (Hamburg, 2003), pp. 481-485.

<sup>1453</sup> Jean-Jacques Becker, "Les Procès de Leipzig," in Annette Wieviorka, ed., *Les Procès de Nuremberg et de Tokyo* (Caen, 1996), pp. 51-59; Hankel, *Die Leipziger Prozesse*, pp. 481-485.

<sup>1454</sup> Eduard Clunet, "Les Criminels de guerre devant le Reichsgericht à Leipzig," *Journal du Droit International*, 48 (Paris, 1921), pp. 440-447.

<sup>1455</sup> Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities*, p. 351.

<sup>1456</sup> J. Segonzac-Volvey, "Les prisonniers furent des combattants" in *Almanach du combattant et des victimes de la guerre* (Paris, 1922), p. 187, cited in Odon Abbal, "Un combat d'après-guerre: le statut des prisonniers," *Revue du Nord* (1998) vol. 80, no. 325, pp. 405-416.

<sup>1457</sup> Becker, *Oubliés de la Grande Guerre*, p. 369.



large number of prisoners taken by Germany led to suspicions that French soldiers were letting themselves be captured too easily.<sup>1458</sup> On 28 November 1914, Joffre had decided that any combatant captured unwounded by the Germans would be the subject of a military investigation.<sup>1459</sup> The mud stuck. Prisoners were initially not seen as former combatants in France.

French prisoners had to fight throughout the 1920s to obtain the same rights that were accorded automatically to other non-captured former combatants. Repatriated prisoners received the non-combatant demobilisation allowance rate.<sup>1460</sup> French prisoners who died in captivity were initially refused the citation "*mort pour la France*."<sup>1461</sup> As a consequence their children were not entitled to the special status of *pupilles de la nation* accorded to the children of those who died at the front.<sup>1462</sup> It took three years before the law was modified on 26 January 1922 to allow those who had died in captivity the right to the same citation as battlefield dead. Prisoners also faced real difficulties obtaining a pension for injuries or illnesses caused by the war as in many cases they no longer had the necessary papers to prove the origin of their complaint.<sup>1463</sup> As late as 1929, Odon Abbal claims that only 60% of French ex-prisoners who were entitled to a pension because of sickness or wounds had been able to obtain one.<sup>1464</sup> During the 1920s, French ex-prisoners had to try to counter the growing focus upon the front combatant which now obscured all other war sacrifices.<sup>1465</sup> The cult of those who had fought and died on the battlefield was now glorified above all else. Relegated to a poor third place in terms of suffering behind the battlefield dead and the civilians of the devastated northern regions, French prisoners of war drew the conclusion that they were suspected of having had an easy war.

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<sup>1458</sup> SHAT, 7 N 143, E.M.A., 1er Bureau, Prisonniers de guerre français, Ministère de la Guerre, cabinet du ministre, Circular from Ministre de la Guerre, 16.12.1914.

<sup>1459</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1460</sup> Abbal, "Un combat d'après-guerre: le statut des prisonniers," p. 408.

<sup>1461</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 407.

<sup>1462</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1463</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 409-410.

<sup>1464</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 410.

<sup>1465</sup> Becker, *Oubliés de la Grande Guerre*, p. 367.

Suspicion against ex-prisoners in France continued into the 1930s. Most famously, 1936 saw the right-wing press, in particular *l'Action Française*, engage in a witch hunt against the French Minister of the Interior in Léon Blum's Popular Front government, Roger Salengro, because he was a former prisoner of war. The right-wing press accused him of deserting during the war. In fact, Salengro's only crime was to have been captured. Salengro was so tormented by the accusations that he committed suicide in November 1936. In his suicide note to Blum, he wrote: "the overwork and the calumny are too much. The one and the other and the shame have defeated me."<sup>1466</sup> The stigma ex-prisoners felt was very real. France was the only country where, in 1918, prisoners of war who had escaped from captivity formed their own veterans' association, the *Union des Évadés de Guerre*, solely for escapers, who, by successfully regaining *l'hexagone* believed that they had freed themselves of the disgrace of capture attached to those who had remained in Germany.<sup>1467</sup> With a maximum of 16,000 members the *Union des Évadés* was made up of former officer prisoners.<sup>1468</sup> The main French prisoner veterans' association, the *Fédération nationale des anciens prisonniers de guerre* regarded the *Union des Évadés de Guerre* as an illegitimate attempt to divide those who had suffered together in captivity, pointing out that one prisoner's escape often depended on the aid of many others who remained behind.<sup>1469</sup> The conflict between the two associations was at times bitter. In 1927 the *Union des Évadés* sent a declaration to the Senate, urging it to refuse to pass an indemnity that would compensate former prisoners for the money their families had spent on food parcels.<sup>1470</sup> It felt that those who had remained in prison camps deserved no such special compensation. In fact, prisoners did not receive any compensation during the interwar period for the money their families spent on parcels. The amount spent was considerable - a draft proposal for compensation in 1933 estimated that collectively the families of French prisoners had sent 1,254,308.125 francs' worth of

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<sup>1466</sup> <http://membres.lycos.fr/histoiredefrance/articles/personnalites/Salengro.htm> Accessed: 31.5.2005.

<sup>1467</sup> Abbal, "Un combat d'après-guerre: le statut des prisonniers," p. 412.

<sup>1468</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 413.

<sup>1469</sup> BDIC, Nanterre, O pièce 14505, Fédération nationale des anciens prisonniers de guerre, évadés et otages, Pamphlet, *Les Prisonniers de guerre*, n.d.

<sup>1470</sup> Abbal, "Un combat d'après-guerre: le statut des prisonniers," pp. 412-413.



parcels themselves and had paid Swiss agencies to send a further 6,144,000 francs' worth.<sup>1471</sup>

Not only were French ex-prisoners never compensated for the expense of parcels; the vast majority of them were never paid the wages that Germany owed them for their wartime labour. Prisoners were meant to receive a very small daily wage for their work which was recorded by their *Kommando* or camp administration in an account book. For security reasons prisoners could only receive a fraction of their wages each week in camp coupons. The rest was recorded as savings to be paid out to them when they were released at the end of the war. Because of the chaos of repatriation many Allied prisoners were never paid this money. In retaliation, German prisoners were not paid their outstanding wages on leaving France and Britain. Those leaving France were given certificates by the French government stating what money was owed them.<sup>1472</sup> In 1926, the French and German governments came to a deal on prisoner compensation, including compensation for these outstanding prisoner wages, which greatly favoured France: the French received 13 million francs in compensation for French ex-prisoners, the Germans received only 4.5 million francs in compensation for German ex-prisoners of the French.<sup>1473</sup> This included not only the pay due to German prisoners for 1914-1918 but also the wages due for the extra work carried out by German prisoners to restore the devastated regions of France between November 1918 and spring 1920. The wages promised for this reconstruction work at the time were already a fraction of what a French civilian labourer would have been paid. Despite this, in 1926, the French negotiators offered only partially to reimburse these prisoner wages.<sup>1474</sup> The French negotiators secretly admitted that the deal was unfair to Germany, which could have challenged it under international law.<sup>1475</sup> However, Germany gave in. Despite this

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<sup>1471</sup> SHAT, 6 N 442, no.1706, Chambre des Députés, Annexe au procès-verbal de la 2e séance du 31 mars 1933, Proposition de loi tendant à attribuer une indemnité de nourriture et d'entretien aux anciens prisonniers de guerre, pendant la durée de leur captivité au cours de la guerre, 1914-1918.

<sup>1472</sup> BA, R 8095.5, Reichsverein ehem. Kriegsgefangener e.v., Bundesleitung, 20.9.1926.

<sup>1473</sup> Centre des Archives Économiques et Financières, Savigny-le-Temple, B-0061026/1, Direction du mouvement général des fonds, 1919-1926, Compte spécial des échanges de monnaies allemandes, 1919-1926, Rapport au Ministre au sujet de l'accord signé à Berlin le 30 octobre 1926 concernant les avoirs des prisonniers de guerre.

<sup>1474</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1475</sup> Ibid.



successful deal, wrangling over how best to distribute this thirteen million in compensation meant that the money did not reach the individual French prisoners directly concerned. In sum, French prisoners in the interwar period felt both morally and financially discriminated against by their own government.<sup>1476</sup> They felt the memory of their war experience was not recognised in France. This view was supported by the former head of the French *Service des Prisonniers de Guerre*, Georges Cahen-Salvador, who, in 1929 wrote the only interwar French history of prisoners of war as part of the Carnegie Series. This was the only book in the whole series to deal with prisoners of war of any nationality.<sup>1477</sup> By 1929, Cahen-Salvador was a member of the French delegation to the League of Nations.<sup>1478</sup> He believed that

in the ten years since the peace has been signed we have not yet made known the long martyrdom of prisoners of war [...] This account is an act of witness and gratitude owed to those not spared the anguish of exile, to those who departed this life on foreign soil, those who suffered and those who through their dignity and courage taught the enemy to respect them.<sup>1479</sup>

French ex-prisoners reacted in two ways to the discrimination against them. First, they launched campaigns to win public support for their right to be treated in the same way as other former combatants, winning considerable support in parliament. There were 293 *Députés* in the parliamentary “Group for the Defence of Former Prisoners of War” in May 1923, who campaigned for greater compensation for ex-prisoners.<sup>1480</sup> The main prisoner veterans’ association, the *Fédération nationale des anciens prisonniers de guerre* also had the support of the main French veterans’ association the *Union Nationale des Combattants* in its campaigns for better compensation for prisoners.<sup>1481</sup>

Aside from certain cultural elites, the ex-prisoners’ campaigns did win some popular support. For example, they eventually managed to bring the French government to treat the graves of French prisoners the same as those of combatants who fell on the

<sup>1476</sup> Abbal, “Un combat d’après-guerre: le statut des prisonniers,” p. 416.

<sup>1477</sup> Georges Cahen-Salvador, *Les Prisonniers de Guerre (1914-1919)* (Paris, 1929).

<sup>1478</sup> *Dictionnaire Biographique, 1961-1962*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Paris 1963), Entry for Georges Cahen-Salvador (1875-1963) p. 636.

<sup>1479</sup> Cahen-Salvador, *Les Prisonniers de Guerre*, p. 8.

<sup>1480</sup> Abbal, “Un combat d’après-guerre: le statut des prisonniers,” p. 411.

<sup>1481</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 410.



battlefield. The government was forced to repatriate French prisoners' bodies from Germany in the 1920s, something it had initially declined to do.<sup>1482</sup> The ex-prisoners' campaign was highly emotive. As one former prisoner, Eugène-Louis Blanchet wrote:

Frenchmen, do you not think that German earth is too cold and heavy to guard such bodies? [...] We do not wish that French mothers and French wives should go each year on All Souls' Day to weep in German cemeteries in the midst of those who killed their fathers, their sons, their husbands.<sup>1483</sup>

The government had to allocate significant resources to finding the prisoners' graves scattered across Germany. The search was carried out by a large French military mission under General Dupont made up of 12 officers, 17 *sous-officiers* and 3 civilians sent to Berlin in 1919 to find missing prisoners.<sup>1484</sup> The French government requested the International Red Cross in Geneva to go through all its files to help locate the graves of French captives.<sup>1485</sup> Finally, the government gave an amnesty to all former French prisoners of war still in Germany in summer 1919 so that there was no longer any obstacle to former deserters returning to France.<sup>1486</sup> The French government estimated the cost of the repatriation of prisoners' bodies at 7,420,846 francs – 818 francs per body moved from Germany to a special prisoner of war graveyard at Sarrebourg and 1224 francs per body returned to its family for burial.<sup>1487</sup> In 1926, ex-prisoner campaigning ensured that the opening of the prisoner of war graveyard at Sarrebourg in Alsace, close to the battlefield where Major-General Stenger, one of the Leipzig accused, had shot French prisoners of war out of hand in 1914 was carried out with all the pomp and

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<sup>1482</sup> ACICR, 448/VII/c.65; See also: Francis Grandhomme, "Une Manifestation du Devoir de Mémoire: L'inauguration du cimetière des prisonniers de la grande guerre, Sarrebourg, 12 septembre 1926," Association Nationale du Souvenir de la Bataille de Verdun, *Les Cahiers de la Grande Guerre*, 28 (2001), pp. 35-37.

<sup>1483</sup> Becker, *Oubliés de la Grande Guerre*, p. 362.

<sup>1484</sup> SHAT, 7 N 362, supplément, Paris, Le Président du Conseil, M. de la G. à Mr le Maréchal Commandant en Chef les Armées Alliées, État nominatif du personnel désigné pour faire partie de la mission de recherche des disparus, 31.7.1919.

<sup>1485</sup> Gradimir Djurović, *L'Agence Centrale de Recherches du Comité International de la Croix-Rouge* (Geneva, 1981), p. 72.

<sup>1486</sup> General Dupont, "Une mission en Allemagne. Le rapatriement des prisonniers," *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 3 (Paris, 1920), p. 159.

<sup>1487</sup> SHAT, 10 N 194, D.1. Annexe.



ceremony due to dead combatants.<sup>1488</sup> Symbolically, the sculpture chosen for the cemetery was one of a man on his knees, his head thrown back in torment, which had been made during the war in Grafenwöhr camp in Bavaria.<sup>1489</sup> The establishment of this prisoner of war graveyard was a significant victory for ex-prisoners who fought throughout the 1920s against the marginalisation of their experience in official war remembrance.

The second way in which French ex-prisoners reacted to discrimination was to publicize their collective memory of imprisonment – a memory which emphasised German mistreatment. This largely occurred through memoirs which French prisoners produced prolifically during the interwar period.<sup>1490</sup> Memoirs created an inter-textual circle of debate. Former prisoners read each others' written accounts of captivity and wrote in response to them.<sup>1491</sup> One of the most unusual points in the French case was that this discussion was not restricted to officers. Ordinary soldier prisoners were also publishing personal histories of their lives as prisoners. This explains why the memory of the harsher experiences of captivity, which were almost all confined to other rank soldier prisoners, continued to exist in France long after it had vanished in Britain. Memoirs offered a means of commemorating prisoners' experiences and of attributing meaning to them. They were the main way ex-prisoners promoted remembrance of their experience.

For prisoners who had experienced violent or de-humanising treatment, memoir writing was also about articulating what could not otherwise be expressed and exorcising the ghosts of the humiliating experience of capture, punishment cells, beatings and forced labour. Robert d'Harcourt wrote in 1922 of his captivity in Germany: "In spite of our

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<sup>1488</sup> Grandhomme, "Une Manifestation du Devoir de Mémoire: L'inauguration du cimetière des prisonniers de la grande guerre, Sarrebourg, 12 septembre 1926," pp. 22-24; Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities*, p. 348.

<sup>1489</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>1490</sup> A survey of the original card catalogues of the BDIC, Nanterre; the Weltkriegsammlung in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin and the British Museum, London provides the titles of 170 memoirs published between 1919 and 1941 written by British and French prisoners captured by Germany and German prisoners held by Britain or France. Of these 73 were written by French ex-prisoners, 62 by German ex-prisoners and 35 by British ex-prisoners.

<sup>1491</sup> For example, Georges Connes wrote his memoir in response to *Le Purgatoire*, a memoir of captivity by Thierry Sandre. Georges Connes, *A POW's Memoir of the First World War. The Other Ordeal*, Lois Davis Vines, ed. (Oxford and New York, 2004), p. 1.



legitimate hatred of the German, I would say even because of this hatred so that it can be rigorously and exactly justified, it is an absolute duty for those of us who have seen them from up close, to only write and tell of them what is true.”<sup>1492</sup> Of his experience in punishment cells, he wrote: “Hunger makes an animal of man. When the soup was brought through the corridor, lapping in the buckets [...] the poor inmates scratched their fingers on the door of their cell so as not to be forgotten.”<sup>1493</sup> Harcourt’s memoir emphasised the harshness of captivity, outlining the horrific state of prisoners returning to Hammelburg camp after labouring for the Germans at the front:

They were moving skeletons, walking phantoms. I will never forget this Edgar Poe vision. These men – these soldiers – marched, but they were dead; above each blue coat there was a death head: eyes sunken, cheekbones standing out, the emaciated grin of skulls in the cemetery. [...] On their bodies there was no flesh [...]. This was what Germany had done to French soldiers.<sup>1494</sup>

For Harcourt, his memoir was a way of expressing his anger towards Germany and showing prisoners too had fought their own wartime battles. His attempts to escape, which were recounted in detail, highlight this. The violence of captivity was the overwhelming theme in interwar French prisoner memoirs. Fernand Relange’s memoir, *Huit mois dans les Lignes Allemandes*, published in 1919, is a typical example. Relange sought to prove that prisoners were not cowards, opening his memoir with extracts from his two citations for bravery prior to his capture.<sup>1495</sup> He went on to describe in detail the starvation and harsh labour conditions endured by French prisoners kept working for the German army in the occupied territories in 1918.

Ex-prisoners generally sought to portray the sufferings of captivity as a form of combat for France. An interwar pamphlet produced by the *Fédération nationale des anciens prisonniers de guerre* reveals this mentality. Its purpose was to depict captivity as honourable:

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<sup>1492</sup> Robert d’Harcourt, *Souvenirs de captivité et d’évasions* (Paris, 1922), p. 12.

<sup>1493</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.

<sup>1494</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194.

<sup>1495</sup> Fernand Relange, *Huit Mois dans les Lignes Allemandes. Souvenirs d’un prisonnier de Belleherbe* (Besançon, 1919).

In olden times the courage of each man was the essential factor in victory [...] But what was possible in olden times when hand to hand combat determined victory has become difficult with modern methods whose destructive power is unimaginable for those who have never lived the life of the trenches, who had not been involved in titanic battles or been on a lunar landscape in the middle of swathes of asphyxiating gas, under machine gun tornados, attacking determined men [...]. At a moment inscribed only on the wheel of fortune one of these adversaries may surrender not because of weakness but because he has no other means left of resisting.<sup>1496</sup>

The pamphlet emphasised how French prisoners of war fought on against Germany during their captivity, sabotaging crops and industry and seducing German women. Its intention was to highlight the bravery and courage shown by French prisoners who, despite enduring terrible hardships, never ceased to fight for France:

There are numerous facts which we could cite, because there were hundreds of thousands of isolated prisoners, left to their own resources, exposed to the reprisals of their captors who away from the limelight, magnificently carried out their duty [...].<sup>1497</sup>

Similarly, former prisoner Charles Chassé, an English teacher at the Lycée de Brest in a speech at the school prize-giving in 1919 described his front experience and his captivity in a way that emphasised prisoners' role as combatants. He outlined the lack of fear he felt during battle: "full of enthusiasm, [...] without a single reservation."<sup>1498</sup> This is the glorification of battle of the former prisoner, determined in his speech to allay any suspicions of cowardice. For Chassé, French prisoners had acted as "missionaries of the Republic," political indoctrinators of the German peasant population. They were not cowards but agents of French victory. It was their parcels that shattered local confidence that the German submarines were starving out the Allies; it was their table manners, teaching German peasants in some areas to eat from plates rather than from a collective shared pot, and their superior knowledge of farming, teaching German farmers how to sow seeds properly, that taught Germans to respect France.<sup>1499</sup> Above all they taught

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<sup>1496</sup> BDIC, Nanterre, O pièce 14505. Fédération nationale des anciens prisonniers de guerre, évadés et otages, Pamphlet, *Les Prisonniers de guerre*, n.d.

<sup>1497</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1498</sup> BDIC, Nanterre, O pièce 15505, Lycée de Brest, Année Scolaire 1918-1919, Discours prononcé à la distribution des Prix le 12 juillet 1919, par M. Chassé, pp. 1-20, p. 6-7.

<sup>1499</sup> Ibid., p. 16-18.



German civilians that France was a land of ease, without *ersatz*, where moderate work secured a comfortable life for all, because France “was a Republic; because France did not have a Kaiser or a Kronprinz.”<sup>1500</sup>

However, maintaining this ex-prisoners’ collective narrative of prisoner suffering was difficult precisely because not all prisoners had suffered in Germany. It was the contradictory nature of the different types of captivity experience that fed the idea in France that prisoners had had an easy time during the war. This gap between captivity experiences of ease and hardship was evident to ex-prisoners. In his speech, Charles Chassé pointed out that prisoners’ accounts often sounded contradictory because “certain forest *Kommandos* and almost all the mine *Kommandos* without exception (in particular the salt mines) were hell [*bagnes*] right up to the day of the Armistice; they did not ration the spade and bayonet blows.”<sup>1501</sup> However, “in certain peasant families in contrast [...] the prisoners were treated as children (and some as masters) of the house.”<sup>1502</sup> For some ex-prisoners this gap between different prisoner experiences led them to attribute accounts of violent captivities to false wartime propaganda. Georges Connes, a former officer prisoner in Germany, wrote in 1925<sup>1503</sup>

I am going to say something that might be considered shocking: if by our own choice and use of means to kill, we have been more monstrous in this war than ever before, the horror of the treatment of prisoners is far from having increased proportionately, and I am not at all certain that such treatment has not been better than ever, given the enormous number of prisoners.<sup>1504</sup>

Yet Connes, like Ackerley in *Escapers All*, raised inherent contradictions in his text. He sought to justify his position and, in so doing, alluded to a different wartime reality to the version of captivity he wished to present.

Basically, all prisoners witnessed the same things, minor incidents compared with the realities of war. Only a few have dared to create literary works out of

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<sup>1500</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>1501</sup> Ibid., pp. 1-20, p. 12.

<sup>1502</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>1503</sup> Connes, *A POWs Memoir of the First World War*; see also the reconciliatory narrative by Jacques Rivière, *L'Allemand: souvenirs et réflexions d'un prisonnier de guerre* (Paris, 1918).

<sup>1504</sup> Connes, *A POWs Memoir of the First World War*, p. 4.

these petty annoyances and the insignificant exchange of jabs that took place far from the real battlefield. When all is said and done, we must realise that prisoners of war slept most nights, away from the risk of mutilation and death, and we had something to put in our bellies almost every day. Being in the habit of only talking about what I know first-hand I will limit my account to the experiences of the officers, *referring only occasionally to the Russian officers, who practically starved to death by the thousands*. While not intending to underestimate the moral suffering of prisoners of war (*I know many did not make it back*), I remind myself that the proportion of fatalities among prisoners during and after captivity was much smaller than among the men who fought and were not captured.<sup>1505</sup>

The interwar privileging of the battlefield dead was internalised by Connes, altering how he saw the experience of captivity. Connes wished to argue that captivity was the better fate, but could not entirely reconcile this with his underlying knowledge of the darker aspects of imprisonment which he was spared. The desire to write a reconciliatory text, showing the enemy in a human light, lay behind Connes' textual inconsistencies: "It was in the other ordeal, in the prisoner of war camps, that we could learn, if we did not already know it, that a man is a man and nothing more. Nothing very admirable, whatever the colour or shape of his clothes or the language he speaks."<sup>1506</sup> Connes' attempt to reinterpret the war in a pacifist light was not unique. It bears some similarities to the process of reinventing the conflict which occurred in the work of Jean Norton Cru in 1929.<sup>1507</sup>

By the early 1930s pacifist attitudes had become more common. There were two reasons for this. First, the growth of the pacifist movement among veterans also had an influence upon ex-prisoners.<sup>1508</sup> The spirit of Locarno and the 1928 Luxembourg Congress, organised by the *Fédération Interalliée des Anciens Combattants* (FIDAC), where French and German ex-servicemen met, changed the cultural climate. Perhaps the most dramatic meeting was the enormous 12 July 1936 demonstration at Verdun where veterans from all over France, joined by German and Italian veterans, took an oath declaring their desire

<sup>1505</sup> Ibid., p. 1. Italic emphasis mine.

<sup>1506</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>1507</sup> Jean Norton Cru, *Témoins. Essai d'analyse et de critique des souvenirs de combattants édités en français de 1915 à 1928* (Paris, 1929).

<sup>1508</sup> Antoine Prost, *Les Anciens Combattants, 1914-1940* (Paris, 1977), pp. 121-123.



for peace.<sup>1509</sup> Pacifism led to a reassessment of the meaning of 1914-1918 captivity. The enemy of the prisoner was no longer perceived as Germany, but rather modern war itself. At a pacifist exhibition organized in the early 1930s by the Catholic activist Marc Sangnier, a photograph of French prisoners bore the caption: "They have known fatigue, neglect, reprisals and hunger. Question them, however; they have not learnt to hate men but to hate war."<sup>1510</sup>

Second, the signing of a new Geneva Convention dedicated totally to prisoner of war treatment, in 1929, restored former prisoners' faith in international law. In 1923, the tenth conference of the International Red Cross had laid the groundwork for the 1929 convention, which addressed in detail the precise abuses that had occurred during the First World War.<sup>1511</sup> The new convention had been written specifically because international and national observers of prisoners, such as the International Red Cross, knew that prisoner mistreatment had occurred during the war.<sup>1512</sup> Their acknowledgement of the need for a new convention was in itself a form of recognition for ex-prisoners and a vindication of the claims of those who stated they had been mistreated. The legacy of the prisoner abuses of the First World War was omnipresent during the drafting of the 1929 convention. Gustav Rasmussen, a Danish plenipotentiary at the conference and the Danish chargé d'affaires at Berne, dedicated his account of the conference to "the unknown prisoner of war."<sup>1513</sup> Ex-prisoners were strongly in favour of a revision of international law. The 1928 FIDAC meeting in Luxembourg, to which French and German veterans' associations sent representatives including Dr Joachim Givens from the *Reichsverein ehemaliger Kriegsgefangener*, drafted its own list of proposals for a new international law to protect prisoners, blaming the failure of international law during the war for their sufferings.<sup>1514</sup> Much of the text overlapped with the new Geneva

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<sup>1509</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>1510</sup> Becker, *Oubliés de la Grande Guerre*, p. 370.

<sup>1511</sup> "Le Code du Prisonnier. Rapport présenté par le Comité International à la Xme Conférence" *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, 3e Année, 26 (15 fév. 1921) in *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, 52e Année, 221-226 (janvier – juin 1921), pp. 100-129.

<sup>1512</sup> Ibid.; See also: Gustav Rasmussen, *Code des Prisonniers de Guerre. Commentaire de la Convention du 27 juillet 1929 relative au traitement des prisonniers de guerre* (Berlin, Copenhagen, Lausanne, Paris, 1931), pp. 1-11.

<sup>1513</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1514</sup> BA, R 8095.4.

Convention. The 1929 convention meant that observers felt reassured that prisoner mistreatment would not happen in future wars. The fear of repetition had been significantly reduced, allowing ex-prisoners to begin to culturally demobilise.

The rise of pacifism and the new Geneva Convention meant that the narrative of wartime violence against French prisoners became rarer in the late 1930s, as the French public sought to avoid another conflict. As Reid Mitchell has written of prisoner memory after the American Civil War, “The price of reconciliation was – as so often occurs – a blurring of the historical reality. It was easier to forget prisoners of war than to seek justice.”<sup>1515</sup> By the mid-1930s there was a shift away from a narrative of violent captivity to more social and reconciliatory portrayals of captivity. It is this shift that is reflected in *La Grande Illusion*. Ex-prisoners ceased trying to convey a memory of the hardships they had endured in 1914-1918 captivity to the French population.

The way prisoners were ‘forgotten’ in interwar France was very different to interwar Britain. Whereas in Britain the memory of prisoners was forgotten because it was amalgamated into a shared combatant memory, in France prisoners were forgotten because their memory was deliberately excluded. Amnesia in France was imposed upon prisoners from within their own society, which was suspicious of their surrender and wished to exalt the heroic front combatant dead. This amnesia was continually challenged and never total. In the 1920s, the French government was unwilling to commemorate the very prisoner mistreatment it had so carefully chronicled in its own propaganda. Against this cultural consensus French prisoners fought a courageous but ultimately unsuccessful battle for a place in the national memory throughout the interwar period using memoirs and their veterans’ associations.

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<sup>1515</sup> Reid Mitchell, “ ‘Our prison system supposing we had any, ’ Die Kriegsgefangenenpolitik der Konföderierten und der Unionisten im Amerikanischen Bürgerkrieg, ” in Rüdiger Overmanns, ed., *In der Hand des Feindes. Kriegsgefangenschaft von der Antike bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Cologne, Weimar, Vienna, 1999), p. 213.



### **Writing the history of prisoners of war in interwar Germany**

Ironically, it was German prisoners of war who enjoyed the most historical attention from their compatriots in the interwar years. At first glance this appears inexplicable. After all, the massive surrenders of 1918 were a major factor in Germany's defeat. However, no interwar stigma developed towards those who had returned from captivity. In fact, prisoners in Germany, far from being forgotten, enjoyed considerable historical and political attention and consideration. Why was this the case?

The circumstances surrounding the German prisoners' repatriation provide one explanation. German prisoners were a major political issue in 1919 and 1920 because of the Allies' decision to delay their release. As a result, as the previous chapter has shown, they became a symbolic rallying point, not only for the German right, but for the entire German political spectrum. Perhaps the only thing which all of Germany agreed on in 1919-1920 was that the Allies' refusal to let German prisoners home to their families over a year after the war had ended was morally wrong. This created a groundswell of popular goodwill towards prisoners among the general public. It also created an element of fear. The left felt it was necessary to reach out to former German prisoners who had missed the events of the revolution and were resentful that the new government had not obtained their release earlier. The right felt it was necessary to welcome German prisoners because they might make valuable reactionary fighters. In the early Weimar Republic, in which every political faction was eager to increase its support, there was no bloc that wished to alienate former prisoners. Given the various right-wing plans to carry out a putsch in Germany in 1919 and 1920, the German right saw the battle for the political soul of the former prisoners of war as extremely important.<sup>1516</sup>

Several factors defined the outcome of this battle. First, the French action in retaining German prisoners meant that many of them arrived back in Germany with a hatred of war, a hatred of France and a dislike of the Weimar State. As one pamphlet put it: "Embittered men are travelling home. Embittered against the foreign state which treated

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<sup>1516</sup> On putsch plans see: Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities*, pp. 337-341.

them harder than necessary and held them prisoner longer than was just; embittered also against the homeland whose indifference and lack of energy they believe to be partly responsible for their fate.”<sup>1517</sup> The German right saw these disgruntled men as potential allies. In contrast, it feared other prisoners, particularly those arriving from Russia, who returned with Bolshevik attitudes. These fears were not groundless. One contemporary pamphlet reported that

If a large number of those prisoners who have returned from Russia have joined with those elements of the population who have set about the most threatening resistance to the rebuilding of our economic and political life, it is not because of Bolshevik propaganda but rather [...] because of unwise and unfair treatment of these men by their homeland.<sup>1518</sup>

The belief was that providing support for prisoners would prevent them turning to Bolshevism. In the immediate aftermath of the war, the German political centre and right, therefore, endorsed an inclusive memory of the German combatant that did not discriminate against ex-prisoners. In particular, they supported the German prisoner of war veterans' association, the *Reichsverein ehemaliger Kriegsgefangener* (ReK), which was seen as a stabilising, bourgeois, conservative influence that would help stop former prisoners becoming Bolsheviks.

The ReK certainly had impeccable conservative credentials. Freiherr Wilhelm von Lersner, a former officer prisoner, founded it from one of the last trainloads of German prisoners exchanged by France in November 1918 to prevent looting in Constance during the German revolution.<sup>1519</sup> It rapidly became an ex-prisoner lobby group, agitating for the release of Germans still held by the Allies.<sup>1520</sup> The ReK campaigned alongside its sister lobby group, the *Volksbund zum Schutz der Deutschen Kriegs- und Zivilgefangenen*, an organisation for the families and friends of German prisoners. Together these two

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<sup>1517</sup> Gustav Boehmer, *Denkschrift über die Forderung der Kriegsgefangenen auf volle Gleichberechtigung mit den sonstigen Heeresangehörigen* (Berlin, Volksbund zum Schutze der deutschen Kriegs- und Zivilgefangenen, 1919), pp. 1-5.

<sup>1518</sup> *Ibid.* On repatriated prisoners becoming bolsheviks see: Ian Kershaw, *Hitler*, vol.1, *Hubris, 1889-1936* (London, 2001), p. 123.

<sup>1519</sup> Gerhard Rose, *Krieg nach dem Kriege. Der Kampf des deutschen Volkes um die Heimkehr seiner Kriegsgefangenen* (Berlin and Dortmund, 1920), p. 45.

<sup>1520</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.



organisations lobbied not only for prisoners' repatriation but also for prisoners' rights. The *Volksbund* campaigned to change what it viewed as discriminatory regulations against ex-prisoners, which meant that captivity only counted as a service period if the prisoner concerned had suffered particular danger to his life and health.<sup>1521</sup> It also campaigned for prisoners to be paid for their time in captivity, and for outstanding acts of bravery during captivity to be eligible for military awards.<sup>1522</sup> In 1919-1922, the ReK focused on assisting former prisoners to reintegrate into German society, advertising jobs and housing as shown by its newsletter, *Der Heimkehrer*.<sup>1523</sup>

With the repatriation of the final German prisoners of war from France in spring 1920 and from Russia in 1922, the ReK focused more on its role as a veterans' association. Examining its history in the interwar period offers an insight into the status of ex-prisoners in Weimar Germany. In contrast with France and Britain, the history of the ReK reveals that in Germany ex-prisoners took pride in their identity as former prisoners. The activities of the ReK were also one reason why the ex-prisoner of war was a prominent figure in the memory of the war in Weimar Germany.

In 1923 the ReK went bankrupt in the German inflation crisis and in 1924, von Lersner re-founded it.<sup>1524</sup> By the end of the 1920s, it had grown from 3,000 to approximately 30,000 members.<sup>1525</sup> Although this was only a fraction of former prisoners of war in Germany, the ReK enjoyed a very high profile. It described itself as a *Frontkämpferverband*, and, in contrast to France, this claim by German ex-prisoners to 'front combatant' status was never really challenged.<sup>1526</sup> However, despite the much more favourable cultural attitudes to ex-prisoners in Germany, there remained inequalities in the financial compensation offered to prisoner veterans for their time in

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<sup>1521</sup> Boehmer, *Denkschrift über die Forderung der Kriegsgefangenen auf volle Gleichberechtigung mit den sonstigen Heeresangehörigen*.

<sup>1522</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1523</sup> Archives of the League of Nations, United Nations Library, Geneva, 1708 Registry International Labour Office, Refugees mixed archival group – Fonds Nansen, Registry files [1920-1924] Box R 1708, 73 files 1920-1922, *Der Heimkehrer*.

<sup>1524</sup> BA, R 8095.5, 11. Bundestag der Reichsverein ehemaliger Kriegsgefangener, n.d.

<sup>1525</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1526</sup> BA, R 8095.1, Aktenvermerk. Betr. Rücksprache mit Ministerialrat Schreiber, Finanzministerium am 11.6.1929.



captivity in comparison with non-prisoner veterans.<sup>1527</sup> Through the ReK's lobbying for prisoners' rights on pension and other welfare issues, its leadership soon came to be seen as a stabilising political intermediary between the Weimar Government and ex-prisoners.

Unlike many other groups in Weimar the ReK managed to avoid a split in the early post-war years. An ReK memo noted: "We were all proud of the fact that despite revolution and internal conflicts, the ReK was the only organisation in which everyone was united. No other veterans' organisation could boast similar unity."<sup>1528</sup> The ReK managed to survive relatively undivided until the late 1920s. This was largely because of its unifying social work for the welfare of former prisoners. It lobbied political parties to adopt the issue of prisoner welfare.<sup>1529</sup> It held regular flag days to raise money and public awareness of former prisoners.<sup>1530</sup> It also liaised with the German equivalent of the Imperial War Commission, the *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, to ensure the upkeep of German prisoner of war graves in France and Russia.<sup>1531</sup> One of the ReK's patrons was Elsa Brändström, a Swedish woman, known to ex-prisoners as the "angel of Siberia" because of her work bringing supplies personally to prison camps in Russia during the war.<sup>1532</sup> During the early 1920s she was considered as a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize.<sup>1533</sup> Extremely popular with all former prisoners, she served as a unifying figure. Through her efforts, two sanatoria for disabled ex-prisoners and an orphanage called *Neusorge* for the children of prisoners who had died in captivity were established.<sup>1534</sup> However, despite the success of ReK social work, by 1926, it became impossible to avoid a split. Some members of the ReK branch in Bremen had broken away to found a much smaller rival association, the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Vereinigung ehemaliger Kriegsgefangener Deutschlands* (VeK).<sup>1535</sup> The split occurred because the

<sup>1527</sup> BA, R 8095.5, Anträge zum Bundestag 1926, 4.-6. Juni in Remagen am Rhein.

<sup>1528</sup> Ibid., Entwurf einer Aktennotiz, 20., ReK und VeK.

<sup>1529</sup> BA, R 8095.1, Aktenvermerk. Besprechung mit Fraulein Klante 29.12.1928.

<sup>1530</sup> BA, R 8095.5, 11. Bundestag der Reichsverein ehemaliger Kriegsgefangener, n.d.

<sup>1531</sup> BA, R 8095.1, Aktenvermerk. Besprechung mit Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, 19.12.28.

<sup>1532</sup> Rachamimov, *POWs and the Great War. Captivity on the Eastern Front*, p. 222, pp. 164-9, pp. 167-170.

<sup>1533</sup> Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>1534</sup> Ibid., p. 222; BA-MA, Msg 200 / 454, *Die Idee von Neusorge*.

<sup>1535</sup> BA, R 8095.5, Entwurf einer Aktennotiz, ReK und VeK. The ReK had over 400 local groups, the VeK 40. The VeK produced its own newsletter *Daheim*. BA, R 8095.5, Rundschreiben der VeK, n.d. [1926].



VeK viewed the ReK's programme as too nationalist and its campaign against the 'War Guilt' clause as reactionary.<sup>1536</sup>

To what extent the ReK ever really supported the Weimar state is difficult to assess. The ReK claimed to be politically neutral throughout its existence. However, in reality, this was not the case. Its focus was on providing political direction to former prisoners in the new Germany. Its leaders were typical early Weimar conservatives, initially supporting the new state out of fear of Bolshevism and staunchly opposing the Versailles Treaty. Von Lersner believed that no revision of Versailles could be achieved unless Germans from right and left united.<sup>1537</sup> For this reason the ReK claimed to be politically neutral and sought to unite veterans from across the political spectrum. From an initial centrist position in 1919, during the 1920s the ReK adopted more right wing political language. In 1919, it produced pamphlets in support of the new Weimar democracy, which were distributed to returning prisoners.<sup>1538</sup> It also produced propaganda against the Treaty of Versailles, such as its 1923 pamphlet, *Friedensdiktat, Rechtsungültigkeit. Das Friedensdiktat, seine Rechtsungültigkeit und die Mittel, sich von ihm zu befreien*.<sup>1539</sup> However, the ReK also espoused a kind of conservative pacifism, adopting the left wing mantra "Never again war" in 1922 and sending a delegation to the 1928 Luxembourg Congress of the *Fédération Interalliée des Anciens Combattants*. It also supported the plans to revise international law to provide better protection for prisoners and the 1929 Geneva Convention.<sup>1540</sup> For the ReK, conservative German nationalism and international pacifism were not incompatible. It believed that the injustice of the Treaty of Versailles was the barrier to reconciliation between the peoples of Europe and that a strong Germany on the international stage would lead to greater European harmony. By the late 1920s, it was promoting the idea of the German need for *Lebensraum*, at the same time as

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<sup>1536</sup> Ibid., Aktennotiz über die Tagung in Aschersleben am 29.1.1927.

<sup>1537</sup> BA, R. 8095.1, Aktennotiz, Freiherr von Lersner, 26.8.1929.

<sup>1538</sup> Freiherr Wilhelm von Lersner, *Gefangenschaft und Heimkehr* (Berlin, 1919); Freiherr Wilhelm von Lersner, *Wir Gefangenen und die Not der Heimat* (Berlin, 1919).

<sup>1539</sup> Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Weltkriegsammlung, Krieg – 1914, 26883, *Friedensdiktat Rechtsungültigkeit und die Mittel sich von ihm zu befreien*, Reichsverein ehemaliger Kriegsgefangener e.v., Bundesleitung (Berlin and Magdeburg, 1923).

<sup>1540</sup> Rogasch, "Zur Geschichte der Sammlung," p. 12; BA, R 8095.3; BA, R 8095.1, Aktenvermerk. Betr. Archiv und Museum der Kriegsgefangenschaft, Unterredung mit Herrn Rudolf Lissmann, 23.2.1929.



it put enormous efforts into proclaiming its antiwar message.<sup>1541</sup> It was this antiwar pacifism and its desire to engage with the German left that prevented the ReK from ever merging with any other conservative German groups, although it often borrowed from their ideological outlook. A political paradox right up to its dissolution in 1936, it remained a nationalist pacifist organisation even as it endorsed the *Lebensraum* ideology beloved of National Socialism.<sup>1542</sup>

The ReK's pacifism sprang from its very powerful need to believe that prisoner suffering in the First World War had a greater meaning and that something good might come of the bad experiences which prisoners had endured. At a meeting in January 1929, von Lersner stated that "in order to preserve the memory of the terrible experiences of captivity as a warning to future generations, it is absolutely necessary to collect everything which is needed as a basis for the historical examination of prisoner of war captivity."<sup>1543</sup> In contrast to British ex-prisoners who established no separate post-war group identity and French former prisoners who fought to be remembered as combatants, German ex-prisoners were happy to be seen as a distinctive veteran grouping and were proud of their ex-prisoner status. Ex-prisoners could, the ReK felt, teach society of the evils of war, thereby preventing its repetition. For this reason, it passionately promoted the memory of prisoners of war in every conceivable way during the interwar period, financially supporting the publication of studies on prisoner of war culture and setting up an archive for documents and artefacts from captivity.<sup>1544</sup> The ReK even planned to establish a scholarship for a university student to research the history of prisoners during the war.<sup>1545</sup> It also planned a national German monument to Germans who had died as prisoners. At one point the ReK considered adopting the memorial built by Allied prisoners at Soltau camp to those of their number who had died for this purpose, before deciding that a memorial to Allied prisoners would not work as a memorial to the "*Opfertod*" of German

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<sup>1541</sup> Freiherr von Lersner spoke of the "Deutsche Raumnot" as the greatest hindrance to peace at the 11th Bundestag der Reichsverein ehemaliger Kriegsgefangener: BA, R 8095.5, 11. Bundestag der Reichsverein ehemaliger Kriegsgefangener, n.d.

<sup>1542</sup> Rogasch, "Zur Geschichte der Sammlung," p. 13.

<sup>1543</sup> BA, R 8095.1, Aktenvermerk. Aussprache über Archiv und Museum der Kriegsgefangenschaft am 9. Januar 1929.

<sup>1544</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1545</sup> BA, R 8095.1, Aktenvermerk, Betr. Archiv und Museum der Kriegsgefangenschaft, Unterredung mit Herrn Rudolf Lissmann, 23.2.1929.



prisoners of war.<sup>1546</sup> The memorial plans ultimately came to nothing due to disagreements about financing the project.<sup>1547</sup> By 1929, the ReK was planning a prisoner of war museum.<sup>1548</sup> For former German prisoners, unable to visit the graves of their fellows who died in France, Britain or Russia, this historicisation of the prisoner experience was also a form of mourning and commemoration.

Supporting publications that would preserve the history of the prisoner experience was very important to the ReK. Moreover, the range of publications the ReK endorsed was very wide, reflecting its claim to be politically neutral. It did not limit its support to publications on the treatment of German prisoners abroad but was also interested in work on the social life of Allied prisoners in Germany. It had its own publishing company, Verlag ReK, and also worked with the Ost-Europa Verlag.<sup>1549</sup> Thus it was possible for the ReK to write a short foreword endorsing a nationalist collection of prisoner reminiscences in 1929, while at the same time sponsoring the publication of a key study of prisoner theatre, which presented a much milder version of First World War captivity.<sup>1550</sup>

The ReK's work overlapped with a broader cultural interest among Weimar academic circles in the prisoners of war of 1914-1918. Drawing on the earlier German wartime interest in camps as sociological and anthropological study sites, scientists, psychiatrists and social researchers in Weimar rushed to analyse the lessons on human sexuality, language and communication forms which the history of prisoner of war camps might reveal.<sup>1551</sup> The famous sexologist, Magnus Hirschfeld, was one example, studying

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<sup>1546</sup> Klaus Otte, *Lager Soltau. Das Kriegsgefangenen- und Interniertenlager des Ersten Weltkriegs (1914-1921). Geschichte und Geschichten* (Soltau, 1999), pp. 301-302.

<sup>1547</sup> BA, R 8095.5, Entwurf einer Aktennotiz, ReK und VeK.

<sup>1548</sup> BA, R 8095.1, Aktenvermerk Betr. Archiv und Museum der Kriegsgefangenschaft, Unterredung mit Herrn Rudolf Lissmann, Frankfurt a/m. 23.2.1929.

<sup>1549</sup> BA, R 8095.1, Aktenvermerk. Aussprache über Archiv und Museum der Kriegsgefangenschaft am 9. Januar 1929.

<sup>1550</sup> Fritz Ibrügger, ed., *PG. Feldgräue in Frankreichs Zuchthäusern* (Hamburg, 1929), p. 8; Hermann Pörzgen, *Theater ohne Frau. Das Bühnenleben der kriegsgefangenen Deutschen, 1914-1920* (Berlin and Königsberg, 1933).

<sup>1551</sup> Stefan Wangart, and Richard Hellmann, *Die Zeitung im deutschen Gefangenen- u. Interniertenlager. Eine bibliographie* (Buehl and Baden, 1920).



prisoner sexuality.<sup>1552</sup> Such sociological studies were often international in scope. They looked at the social life of Allied prisoners in German camps as well as at German prisoners abroad. These studies tended to be academic, aspired to impartial objectivity and shied away from nationalist politics. That some of this research was sponsored by the ReK shows that in this regard it was prepared to engage with many political viewpoints. In contrast to France and Britain, the debate about what captivity meant in Germany was not restricted to memoirs but was also expressed in multiple interwar historical studies.

In July 1933, the ReK organised a major exhibition on the prisoner of war in Hamburg.<sup>1553</sup> The purpose of the exhibition was to show “the terrible conditions of captivity in which hundreds of thousands of our people suffered through depression, homesickness, privation and strain.”<sup>1554</sup> It was also to counter the “false image” of captivity which Dr Jochaim Givens, the ReK exhibition organiser, claimed had developed in films.<sup>1555</sup> The exhibition opened with a speech by von Lersner, which illustrates the ReK’s attempt to adjust to the new National Socialist regime in Germany: “Our *Reichsverein*, in which from the beginning men of all classes and educational backgrounds, shoulder to shoulder as comrades shared the same fate, has always been the best example of National Socialism.”<sup>1556</sup> Despite von Lersner’s lip service to the new regime, however, in reality a large gulf remained between the Nazi state and the ReK. The ReK exhibition, after all, had an educational anti-war purpose. Following this Hamburg exhibition, in the new National Socialist Germany, the ReK found it impossible

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<sup>1552</sup> For German socio-cultural research on prisoners see: Magnus Hirschfeld, ed., *Sittengeschichte des Weltkrieges*, 2 vols, vol.2 (Leipzig and Vienna, 1930); Hans Bayer, *Das Presse- und Nachrichtenwesen der im Weltkrieg kriegsgefangenen Deutschen* (Berlin, 1938); Pörzgen, *Theater ohne Frau. Das Bühnenleben der kriegsgefangenen Deutschen, 1914-1920*; Karl Scharping, *In russischer Gefangenschaft. Die kulturellen und wirtschaftlichen Leistungen der Kriegsgefangenen in Russland* (Berlin, 1939); Prof. Dr. Christoph Beck, *Die Frau und die Kriegsgefangenen*, 2 vols (Nuremberg, 1919). An example of the international approach was the Austrian study of prisoners in all countries involved in the war *In Feindeshand*, the cover of which showed prisoners of all nationalities as the links in a circular chain – British, French, Japanese, American, German, Serb, Turkish etc. symbolically displayed united. Hans Weiland and Leopold Kern, eds, *In Feindeshand: Die Gefangenschaft im Weltkriege in Einzeldarstellungen*, vol.1 (Vienna, 1931). The ReK had a close relationship with the Austrian BeöK.

<sup>1553</sup> *Ibid.*; Rogasch, “Zur Geschichte der Sammlung,” p. 13.

<sup>1554</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1555</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1556</sup> *Ibid.*



to found their planned museum.<sup>1557</sup> Its patron, Elsa Brändström, emigrated to America in 1935 with her husband, a Christian Socialist politician, who opposed the Nazis.<sup>1558</sup>

The power of the ReK and its willingness to promote the memory of captivity was one important reason why the history of prisoners of war was so present in 1920s Germany. However, it was not the only one. It was the ReK's educational antiwar pacifism that distinguished the historical narrative which it constructed around the memory of prisoners of war from that created by more radical right-wing German conservatives. The German right was happy to endorse the ReK's work commemorating prisoner of war sufferings, if not its antiwar message, because it served its own ends: of discrediting Germany's former enemies, in particular, France. However, the German right also carried out its own work to sell a particular vitriolic 'memory' of Allied prisoner mistreatment to the German public.

For certain groups on the German right such as former army officers, and the civil servants at the German Foreign Ministry, who retained their positions following the revolution, German prisoners suddenly became immensely useful. They could provide accounts of Allied war crimes such as battlefield shootings of captives or cruelties during captivity, which could be used to counter the Allies' war crimes accusations against Germany. From 1914, the Prussian *Kriegsministerium* contained a section called the *Militär-Untersuchungstelle für Verletzungen des Kriegsrechts* (military office for the investigation of breaches of the laws of war) dedicated to collecting evidence on Allied war crimes, including the abuse of prisoners. From mid-1919, this section was instructed to sift the evidence it had gathered to find anything which could be used to defend Germans accused of war crimes and threatened with Allied extradition.<sup>1559</sup> The Weimar government was keen to protect these men:

The Cabinet cannot publicly act to protect the accused. Minister Erzberger believes it would be best if those who consider that they might be in

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<sup>1557</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1558</sup> See the Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon online at [www.bautz.de/bbkl](http://www.bautz.de/bbkl) for a full biography of Brändström: [http://www.bautz.de/bbkl/b/brandstroem\\_e.shtml](http://www.bautz.de/bbkl/b/brandstroem_e.shtml). Accessed: 30.12.2005.

<sup>1559</sup> BK, M Kr, 14128, Nr.5289, Ministerialrat Sperr, Stellv. Mitglied des Reichsrats to das Staatsministerium des Aussern, Vertraulich! 1.11.19.

danger disappear within the Reich. Minister Reinhard suggests that they should flee to neutral countries. Each individual must organise his own passport but no difficulty or hindrance will be put in his way [...] Both ministers have given assurances that funding will be provided. [...] The Ministry for Foreign Affairs will put no obstacles in the way of these individuals leaving the country.<sup>1560</sup>

Wartime archives on German prisoners held by the Allies were seen as a valuable source for German counter-propaganda. In January 1919, an official at the Bavarian *Ministerium für militärische Angelegenheiten* (formerly the Bavarian *Kriegsministerium*) fumed at an article in the French press that reported prisoner mistreatment at Parchim camp: “If we allow this campaign of lies to continue without defending ourselves, the same thing will happen as during the war – it will be believed.” He wrote that

The best approach is to strike back by opening the archives in which the sworn statements of our prisoners of war have been deposited and offer the French these huge amounts of monstrous material [...] No one from the Entente ever felt it incumbent upon himself to stop the Russians while they were still their ally, from using our prisoners to build the Murman railway, on which task thousands died. If the Entente knowingly falsely accuses us of the persecution of the Armenians then it is itself guilty by association of the murder of our prisoners in Romania and Russia. The French in any case have no right to protest, their treatment of our prisoners involved the devilish invention of physical and moral tortures worthy of their savage colonial troops.<sup>1561</sup>

Using the wartime prisoner archives in this way was official policy. In 1919 the German Foreign Ministry co-opted a group of ex-prisoners from the ReK to produce a white book on French treatment of German prisoners, giving them access to *Kriegsministerium* archives.<sup>1562</sup> The German Foreign Ministry produced its own official book of prisoner testimony based on extracts from the diplomatic notes it had sent to neutral governments in late-1918 to publicise Allied crimes against German prisoners.<sup>1563</sup> It also published a

<sup>1560</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1561</sup> BK, M Kr, 14128, Eilmittlung an AII, nr.4069, from Rosshaupter, 11.1.1919.

<sup>1562</sup> Rose, *Krieg nach dem Kriege*, p. 46. The white book which resulted from this collaboration was entitled *Deutsche Kriegsgefangene in Feindesland. Amtliches Material, Frankreich* (Berlin and Leipzig, 1919).

<sup>1563</sup> Auswärtiges Amt, *Die Gefangenen Misshandlungen in den Entente Ländern. Noten d. Deutschen Regierung* (Berlin, 1918).



propaganda tract accusing French colonial troops of killing Germans they had captured.<sup>1564</sup>

Archives were not only used for official propaganda. Large amounts of archival material were also leaked to right-wing writers. German prisoners of war were now the favoured sons of the German right. Their testimony appears in a 1921 book by August Gallinger, *Gegenrechnung. Verbrechen an kriegsgefangenen Deutschen*, which provided a German list of Allied ‘war criminals’ to counter the Allied extradition demands.<sup>1565</sup> Gallinger also published an English version of this work entitled *Countercharge* which reproduced statements by German prisoners on Allied atrocities.<sup>1566</sup> A special edition of the *Süddeutsche Monatshefte* entitled “Gegenrechnung” was produced with Gallinger’s collaboration.<sup>1567</sup> A similar work by Hans Weberstedt, *Frankreichs wahres Gesicht. Das Buch der blau-weiss-roten Schande*, published in 1926, reproduced statements on French atrocities against prisoners. The book was intended to “inform the German people and all people of the earth” of the truth about France’s war crimes against German prisoners who “felt the culture of the ‘Grande Nation’ on their own bodies.”<sup>1568</sup> Its political aim was clear: “Whoever reads this book will be finally healed of the germ of reconciliation between the peoples and will surely no longer believe in understanding and the madness of pacifist views (*pazifistische Wahngebilde*).”<sup>1569</sup> Many of the extracts it reproduced had been leaked from the archives of sworn official statements taken during the war. The international political climate was such that former German prisoners of war suddenly became a very welcome propaganda commodity in Germany.

<sup>1564</sup> Auswärtiges Amt, *Liste über Fälle, die sich auf planmäßige Ermordung und Misshandlung einer grösseren Zahl von deutschen Kriegsgefangenen durch farbige Truppen beziehen* (Berlin, 1919).

<sup>1565</sup> August Gallinger, *Gegenrechnung. Verbrechen an kriegsgefangenen Deutschen* (Leipzig and Munich, 1921).

<sup>1566</sup> August Gallinger, *The Countercharge: The Matter of War Criminals from the German Side* (Munich, 1922).

<sup>1567</sup> Prof. Dr. August Gallinger, “Gegenrechnung,” *Süddeutsche Monatshefte* (Juni 1921).

<sup>1568</sup> Hans Weberstedt, *Frankreichs wahres Gesicht. Das Buch der blau-weiss-roten Schande. Die Deutsche Gegenliste*, foreword (Erfurt, 1926). The appendix to the book included a counter list of Allied War Criminals.

<sup>1569</sup> *Ibid.*

This was not only a top-down debate in German society. Multiple right-wing memoirs by ex-prisoners supported the claims that the Allies had mistreated German captives.<sup>1570</sup> One typical example was Fritz Ibrügger's book, *PG. Feldgraue in Frankreichs Zuchthäusern*, a collection of accounts by German prisoners held by France, published in 1929. Ibrügger dedicated the book to "German youth, the bearer of the future Germany [...] called to bring the seed of 1914 to 1924 to fruit."<sup>1571</sup> He cited a proto-fascist poem that declared: "German brothers make room for the 'we'! Bury the little 'I' in you. That little 'I' it must go – Germany, Germany must remain! (*Gib, deutscher Bruder, Raum dem 'Wir'! Begrab das kleine 'Ich' in dir. Das kleine 'Ich' es muss vergehn – Deutschland, Deutschland muss bestehen!*)"<sup>1572</sup> The book went on to reproduce accusations of French cruelty to prisoners and to reassert the injustice of withholding prisoners after the war had ended.

Prisoner testimony could clearly be used to attack the Allies.<sup>1573</sup> This was the reason why senior figures on the German right openly endorsed prisoner commemoration. Ludendorff in his memoirs described German prisoners as "the very flesh of our flesh," and outlined how their mistreatment had created bitterness.<sup>1574</sup> In 1933, President Hindenburg officially received three representatives of the ReK at the Presidential Palace to commemorate the anniversary of the founding of their organisation.<sup>1575</sup> Hindenburg outlined how he believed that "the bravest and most courageous, who held out longest at the front" were those captured.<sup>1576</sup> The ReK later laid a wreath on his behalf in memory of the 165,000 German prisoners they claimed had died in captivity.<sup>1577</sup>

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<sup>1570</sup> See Ernst Hermann, *Kriegsgefangen im Westen. Nach dem Tagebuch eines Gefangenen der 249 POW Coy in France* (Jena, 1933); Ernst Oswald Mueller, *Gefesselt Heldentum. Erlebtes und erschautes als Gefangener in Frankreich u. Afrika* (Leipzig, 1933); Heinz Thuemmler, *P.G. 905. Frankreichs Verrat an der weissen Rasse* (Leipzig and Naunhof, 1933). In addition, according to Georg Wurzer some 150 memoirs were published by Germans who had been prisoners in Russia: Georg Wurzer, "Deutsche Kriegsgefangene in Russland im Ersten Weltkrieg" in Rüdiger Overmans, ed., *In der Hand des Feindes. Kriegsgefangenschaft von der Antike bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg*, p. 365.

<sup>1571</sup> Ibrügger, ed., *PG. Feldgraue in Frankreichs Zuchthäusern*, p. 8.

<sup>1572</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1573</sup> See for example: "die Bestie in Menschen," *Süddeutsche Monatsheft* (July 1923).

<sup>1574</sup> Erich von Ludendorff, *My War Memories*, 2 vols, vol. 2 (London, 1920), p. 453.

<sup>1575</sup> BA-MA, Msg 200 / 106. ff.1-3, text of the meeting between Hindenburg, and the ReK representatives, Freiherr Wilhelm von Lersner, Paul Peddinghaus and Prof. Gustav Boehmer, 20.12.1933.

<sup>1576</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1577</sup> *Ibid.*



Emphasising violence against Germans held captive by the Allies provided a defeated power with a noble narrative of victimhood at the hands of its victors and this narrative fitted well with popular German feeling in 1919-1921. This was as important to German internal self-esteem as it was for the propaganda war abroad. Part of the reason why this mattered was the unease among some SPD and Centre politicians about how to handle the Allies' accusations that the Germans had mistreated British and French prisoners. These accusations had unnerved some left-leaning groups in Germany who suspected they might be true, particularly in the first months after the war. This explains why Republicans made an attempt, through the Schücking Commission, to examine Germany's prisoner treatment as well as that of the Allies.<sup>1578</sup> The moderate Republican press admitted that abuses had occurred, but only as isolated incidents. It outlined during the Leipzig trials that it was the duty of civilised people to rejoice at the "harsh Leipzig judgments" insisting that they would reveal the cruelties which had occurred to be "isolated facts, not the result of a system. We are not a barbaric people."<sup>1579</sup> Reminders that the Allies had also committed abuses against prisoners were comforting to those who privately acknowledged that Germany had committed prisoner abuses.

Unlike France and Britain, because of the extradition controversy and the Leipzig Trials there was a real awareness throughout Germany of what prisoner abuses its own army stood accused of. While the issue of prisoner mistreatment in Britain and France concerned only one perpetrator, from a German viewpoint the question was much more complex, posing both an internal and external problem. First, Germany accused multiple nations of mistreating German prisoners: in order of the attention they were paid in the press, France, Romania, Russia, Italy and Britain. Second, there was the question of how to deal with the subject of German crimes against Allied prisoners. In short, the question of prisoner treatment was not only about remembrance in Germany, but also about forming political identities.

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<sup>1578</sup> Hankel, *Die Leipziger Prozesse*, pp. 326-332.

<sup>1579</sup> MAE, Europe 1918-1929, Allemagne 181, Prisonniers de Guerre I, avril 1918-May 1921, f. 296, Consulat général de France en Wurttemberg, Direction des affaires politiques Europe, to M. le Président du Conseil, Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, Paris, n.d. [1921].



The German left was faced with styling its own interpretation of prisoner mistreatment in 1914-1918 to combat that constructed by the German right and to combat the Allies' accusations. However, it was completely unable to agree on how to do this. Prior to the Leipzig trials, the left largely argued the contextualisation point – German prisoners were victims *too* – while the right re-mobilised around the persecution argument that German prisoners were victims because they were *Germans*. The first argument contended that German prisoners' suffering be seen as equal to that of other nationalities; the second racialised German suffering. The Weimar National Assembly dealt with the prisoner question by establishing a parliamentary commission of enquiry into the origins of the war, wartime peace initiatives and the causes of the defeat.<sup>1580</sup> The third subcommittee of this commission focused on the violation of the laws of war, including prisoner of war abuses. Its work resulted in a long and detailed multi-volume publication, *Völkerrecht im Weltkrieg*, where the Allies' war crimes accusations were countered by detailed German counter-accusations.<sup>1581</sup> The result thus largely reproduced the main Allied and German propaganda narratives of the war. However, the Independent Socialist (USPD) members of the subcommittee produced a sharply dissenting minority report which found that prisoners in Germany had suffered excessively harsh disciplinary measures and that German reprisals against prisoners had been unjustifiable in international law.<sup>1582</sup> The USPD went on to construct its own narrative around prisoner mistreatment in which it was the capitalist war that was to blame for all prisoner abuses. Several other left-wing Germans also accepted the Allies' accusations, attributing them to the evils of the Kaiser's regime and called for German mistreatment of Allied prisoners to be investigated.<sup>1583</sup> However, these left-wing voices remained isolated. As the 1920s went on, the discourse on violence against prisoners mirrored Germany's internal political polarisation. Due to the competition among political factions as to which political identity

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<sup>1580</sup> Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities*, pp. 338-339.

<sup>1581</sup> *Das Werk des Untersuchungsausschusses der Verfassunggebenden Deutschen Nationalversammlung und des Deutschen Reichstages, 1919-1928, Völkerrecht im Weltkrieg*, Johannes Bell, ed., Dritte Reihe im Werk des Untersuchungsausschusses, Im Auftrage des Dritten Unterausschusses, vol.3, Verletzungen des Kriegsgefangenenrechts (in 2 parts) (Berlin, 1927).

<sup>1582</sup> *Ibid.*, Dritte Reihe, vol. 3, part 1, pp. 24-27.

<sup>1583</sup> Lilli Jannasch, *Untaten des preussisch-deutschen Militarismus* (Wiesbaden, 1924); English translation, *German Militarism at Work: A Collection of Documents* (London, 1926); Walter Oehme, *Ein Bekenntnis deutscher Schuld. Beiträge zur deutschen Kriegsführung* (Berlin, 1920).



represented the true legitimate heir to the *Kaiserreich*, German ex-prisoners of war in the 1920s were not marginalised or silenced.

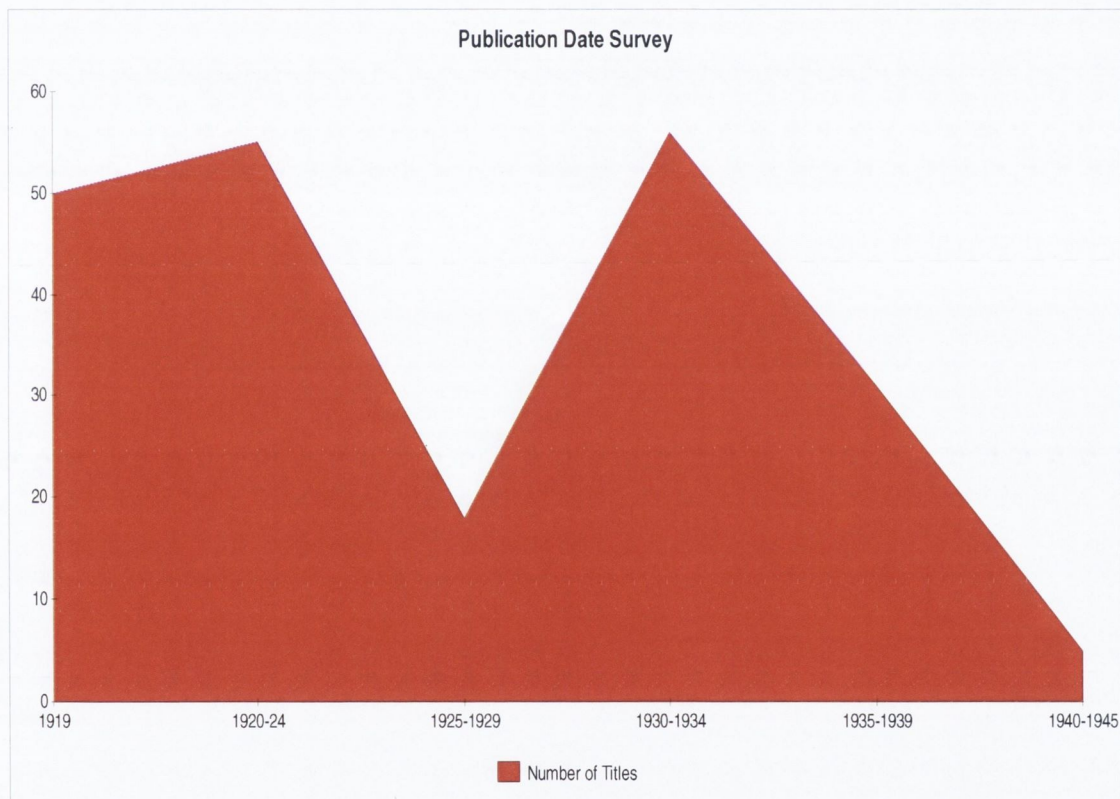
However, despite all this, a form of amnesia regarding prisoner of war treatment also emerged in Germany by the mid-1930s. Importantly, this was artificially imposed from above in 1936 when, as part of the *Gleichschaltung* policy of the Nazi state, the ReK was liquidated and the *Nationalsozialistische Kriegsoferversorgung* took over its role.<sup>1584</sup> The reasons behind this are not clear, but it seems likely that the ReK's anti-war stance was one factor. In addition, the ReK represented an independent political grouping and a potential moderate right-wing alternative to Nazi ideology which could not be allowed within a dictatorship. Moreover, the Nazi state set about dismantling the Treaty of Versailles, which had been a key mobilising reason for the German right to maintain its politicised discourse about Allied prisoner mistreatment. This ironically meant that the grievances of the old war were perceived as being dealt with. Former prisoners' fears of a repetition of 1914-1918 prisoner mistreatment were also suppressed as war was not meant to be feared but seen as glorious in the Nazi state. Finally, and most importantly, the memory of German surrenders in the First World War was no longer palatable: they undermined the *Dolchstoß* legend that the defeat was all the fault of German civilians. German soldiers who had been captured alive did not fit with the extreme warrior rhetoric of Nazism. Captivity after 1933 became a marginalised memory in Germany.

Three nations in 1918 emerged from a massive conflict with the fixed belief that the enemy had subjected prisoners of war to violent treatment. This belief, although occasionally exaggerated, was largely based on factual evidence of violence against some captives. But translating this understanding from a climate of war hatreds into peacetime history proved very difficult. It was a question of how to demobilize memory into history without jeopardizing Europe's uneasy peace. Ultimately, all three societies, Britain, France and Germany could not find a way to remember war violence against prisoners. Although the evolution of interwar memory was different in each country, they all came to the same conclusion by the mid-1930s. Certain war memories were not possible to

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<sup>1584</sup> Rogasch, "Zur Geschichte der Sammlung," p. 13.

maintain because they were too divisive either internationally or internally. By 1939, the memory of prisoners of war had been excised from the overall history of the war in all three countries. This is illustrated by the survey of publications relating to prisoners of war during the interwar period shown in Fig. 21. It reveals two peaks in prisoner publications occurring in 1920 and 1930 and a trough which corresponded with the spirit of Locarno period of *rapprochement*. From 1930 on, however, there was a steady decline in interest.



**Fig. 21.** Survey of the publication dates of 217 interwar titles on prisoners of war in Germany, Britain and France.<sup>1585</sup>

<sup>1585</sup> The titles surveyed were from the original card catalogues of Trinity College Library, Dublin; the BDIC, Nanterre; the Weltkriegsammlung in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin; and the British Museum.



Yet for all the amnesiac qualities of the late 1930s, the question of 1914-1918 prisoner treatment re-emerged once the Second World War began. Partly this was because the outbreak of a second conflict reawakened the fears of repetition which had been so instrumental in driving the narrative about violence against prisoners of war in the early 1920s. Partly too, it was because of the propaganda value of old atrocity stories for mobilising populations to fight. But ultimately, this re-emergence also testifies to the fact that interwar attempts to resolve the memory of prisoner of war treatment in the First World War had failed. There was no historical consensus about what had happened at the outbreak of the Second World War, precisely because societies had ultimately chosen to adopt an amnesiac approach. This meant that in 1939-45 much remained unknown, unclear and open to manipulation.

### **Epilogue: The memory of 1914-1918 and the Second World War**

What happened to interwar memory processes and disruptions once a new conflict broke out? What, ultimately, were the memory traces relating to 1914-1918 prisoners of war that appeared in 1939? To explore this, this chapter will now look at two areas where cultural memory becomes visible – textual discourses and personal frames of reference.

To turn first to texts: in Germany, and to a lesser extent in Britain, the Second World War saw a re-engagement with the question of how prisoners had been treated during the First. In 1939, an official German Wehrmacht publication, *Kriegsgefangene!*, reproduced documentary and photographic evidence of sabotage by Allied prisoners gathered during the First World War by the Prussian *Kriegsministerium*.<sup>1586</sup> Its introduction stated that the book should act as “an admonition and a warning for every member of the *Volk*. The enemy remains the enemy.”<sup>1587</sup> This text revived the early 1920s argument by Wilhelm Doegen and other right-wing commentators that prisoners of war had sabotaged the German home front and taken up too much of Germany’s scanty food resources. As Georges Connes wrote in 1925, “there are Germans who think that these prisoners were the cause of their country’s downfall.”<sup>1588</sup> In *Kriegsgefangene!* the prisoners’ actions, particularly in damaging crops, were blamed for food shortages and, by derivation in the Nazi view of why the war ended, for the collapse of the German home front. A skewed memory of 1914-1918 was constructed to harden attitudes to prisoners in 1939-45.

Not only did First World War prisoner sabotage matter in 1939. So too did 1914-1918 prisoner atrocity propaganda. The archives of the Prussian *Kriegsministerium* were again trawled. Their evidence of Allied prisoner mistreatment was cited in 1940 in a book whose title translates as *British ‘Humanity’ against the Unarmed* by Arthur Finck. Finck claimed that Britain had successfully concealed its war crimes of 1914-1918 because

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<sup>1586</sup> *Kriegsgefangene! Auf Grund d. Kriegsakten bearbeitet beim Oberkommando d. Wehrmacht* (Berlin, 1939).

<sup>1587</sup> *Ibid.*, Preface.

<sup>1588</sup> Connes, *A POWs Memoir of the First World War*, p. 5.



Germany at that time was not able to match the British propaganda. Its leaders did not recognise the danger and allowed this massive deception of humanity to occur. They had to hand material in abundance, which they could have used to reveal the truth. This would have shown the world that the accuser was himself the criminal, who accused his enemy of worse misdeeds, only to cover up his own outrages. We draw upon this material today which proves beyond doubt the real facts. [...] For this reason we are publishing the documents of the Foreign Ministry and the former Prussian Ministry of War on the fate of prisoners of war in England during the World War, and leaving it up to each reader to come to their own conclusion.<sup>1589</sup>

The Allied accusations that Germany had mistreated her prisoners of war clearly still rankled in 1940. A Ph.D. dissertation the same year sought to prove by studying newspapers produced in First World War prisoner of war camps in Germany that the Allied accusations “led principally by the French” were simply an unjust and immoral polemic.<sup>1590</sup> The fact that such newspapers were only produced in *Stammlager* or officers’ camps, whereas the majority of prisoners working in *Kommandos* by 1916 had no access to these, was not mentioned.

In a similar vein a number of memoirs by German ex-prisoners held in France during the First World War were published to emphasise the harshness of French captivity.<sup>1591</sup> One such memoir by Stefan Utsch published in 1940 described how during the interwar years

The youth saw and heard many times only of the shadow side of war and of the great loss of human life. It was hidden from them that their brothers and fathers eagerly and with joy went to fight for their fatherland and bled for it; that in innumerable victorious battles such as the world had never seen, they fought with heroism for home, people and fatherland against a world of enemies.<sup>1592</sup>

<sup>1589</sup> Arthur Finck, *Britische ‘Humanität’ gegen Wehrlose. Die Misshandlung deutscher Gefangener in England während des Weltkrieges* (Stuttgart and Berlin, 1940).

<sup>1590</sup> Rudolf Häußler, *Das Nachrichten- und Pressewesen der feindlichen Kriegsgefangenen in Deutschland, 1914-1918*, Doctoral thesis, University of Leipzig (Berlin, 1941).

<sup>1591</sup> See: Karl Kirchhoff, *Von Hölle zu Hölle. Erlebnis einer französischen Kriegsgefangenschaft* (Gütersloh, 1940); Carl Berger, *Sieben Jahre in Frankreichs Kerkern* (Berlin, 1940); Stefan Utsch, *Todesurteil in Tours 1917. Aufzeichnungen des deutschen Kriegsgefangenen 389* (Berlin, 1940); Karl Wilke, *Tage des Grauens. Frankreichs ‘Humanität’* (Berlin, 1940). Ibrügger’s book was also re-issued in 1941: Fritz Ibrügger, ed., *PG. Feldgraue in Frankreichs Zuchthäusern*, (Hamburg, [1929], 1941).

<sup>1592</sup> Utsch, *Todesurteil in Tours 1917*, p. 198.

The purpose of his memoir, Utsch stated, was to pass on love of the fatherland and manly courage to young readers.<sup>1593</sup> In reality, he also desired to pass on hatred of France.

In Britain too, there were those who looked to the 1914-1918 conflict for lessons. J. H. Morgan, the former British military representative on the Inter-Allied Council who had been in charge of a sub-commission of the control commission for the disarmament of Germany from 1919-1923, published a history of the “disarmament of Germany and her rearmament 1919-1939” in 1945.<sup>1594</sup> His book emphasised British foolishness in not pursuing the German perpetrators of crimes against British prisoners of war in 1914-1918. For Morgan, this German behaviour towards prisoners emanated from a particular German attitude towards war, based on the idea that during wartime all legal norms were suspended. Morgan identified the Leipzig trials as a major error by Britain.<sup>1595</sup> He also believed that the Reichstag committee set up by Weimar to investigate the conduct of the war had failed:

It was sitting at the time of our arrival in Berlin. A pertinacious Reichstag deputy pressed Bethmann-Hollweg as to why, when Chancellor, he had tolerated these iniquities in Belgium. [...] The Imperial Chancellor [...] let the cat out of the bag. The German High Command, he pleaded, had silenced all his protests with the curt reply, ‘*In war we must stop at nothing.*’ It was the voice of tradition.<sup>1596</sup>

Morgan saw the origins of the 1939-45 conflict in German military culture during the previous conflict: “As it was in 1914, so it was in 1919. So it is now. [...] The inflammatory passages of *Mein Kampf* in which he [Hitler], declares that Germany would never rest until she had achieved ‘the annihilation (*die Vernichtung*) of France are neither as new nor as transient as some amongst us fondly believed in the years of ‘appeasement.’”<sup>1597</sup> Morgan is obviously not an objective commentator. But it is revealing that one of the key practices of the First World War which he chose to identify as an ominous portent that should have been pursued in the interwar period rather than

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<sup>1593</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1594</sup> J.H. Morgan, *Assize of Arms. Being the Story of the Disarmament of Germany and her Rearmament*, pp. 139-141.

<sup>1595</sup> Ibid., pp. 139-141.

<sup>1596</sup> Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>1597</sup> Ibid.



being forgotten was German mistreatment of British prisoners. To emphasise this he included the unpublished final report of the Government Committee on the Treatment by the Enemy of British Prisoners of War as an appendix to his first volume.

Importantly, a narrative of violence against First World War prisoners of war did not re-emerge in French texts in 1939-45. This may have been due to the occupation situation, which hardly lent itself to textual accounts of German mistreatment of French prisoners. However, a re-engagement with the subject did occur in the United States. In 1941, James Morgan Read published a detailed analysis of how “atrocities propaganda” had influenced the behaviour of governments and populations during the First World War.<sup>1598</sup> While giving the appearance of thorough research, using sources from many European countries, Read wished to alert the American public to the dangers of believing wartime propaganda with regard to maintaining America’s neutrality in the Second World War. On occasion he quoted selectively and his purpose in returning to the question of 1914-1918 prisoner of war mistreatment was largely to show that it was “exaggerated.”<sup>1599</sup>

This revival of discussion about violence against prisoners of war in texts, however, is only one aspect of the presence of 1914-1918 memory in 1939-1945. There is a second type of ‘memory’ presence which must be considered – ‘memory’ as a cultural frame of reference for individuals and institutions. For, it is in this way that memory most often emerges as *practice*. None of the three national armies – British, French or German – had been forced to reform the cultural assumptions which they had developed towards prisoners of war during the First World War. In all three, unconscious attitudes remained intact, if buried, during the interwar period. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to carry out any large-scale analysis of these memory traces. All that is possible here is to point out that they existed. The beliefs and practices, which had evolved in 1914-1918, were an

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<sup>1598</sup> James Morgan Read, *Atrocities Propaganda, 1914-1919* (New Jersey, 1941).

<sup>1599</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 285. For example, Read only quoted the opening words of Reginald Acland to the Grotius Society when Acland stated that he did not believe that widespread prisoner mistreatment had occurred during the war, omitting the second half of Acland’s comments where he went on to state that he recognised two exceptions: the 1916 eastern front reprisals and the treatment of prisoners in the occupied territories in 1918. Moreover, Acland also admitted that the other members of the Government Committee on the Treatment by the Enemy of British Prisoners of War did believe that widespread mistreatment had occurred, something Read excluded. See: *Transactions of the Grotius Society*, 8 (1922), p. 36 and Read, *Atrocities Propaganda*, p. 233.



implicit frame of reference to which armies turned in 1939-45. These frameworks were so embedded in cognitive processes that often individuals and armies were not consciously aware of them. Yet they emerged each time armies in 1939-45 faced new decisions about how to deal with prisoners: they subconsciously interpreted them against the old reference frameworks of 1914-18. For example, in February 1940, the British Minister for War was asked in the House of Commons whether arrangements were being made “*as in the last war*, for German prisoners to be hired out for manual labour on estates and farms, or by contractors for works of afforestation, agricultural operations, land drainage, road making etc.”<sup>1600</sup> The response was negative, but the terms of the question are revealing. Even where decisions were being made to break with the patterns established in the First World War, they were always framed in reference to it.

The continuity of personnel between the wars enhanced this process. For example, some British interrogators working with German prisoners in 1939-45 had worked in the same job in 1914-1918. One attributed the silence of Second World War German prisoners to the previous conflict: “After the Great War, the German General Staff declared our Intelligence to be the best in the World, and it appears that this praise is well justified judging from the prudent way in which present German P.W. conduct themselves when under interrogation.”<sup>1601</sup> In another case, the head of a British torture centre for German prisoners of war at Kensington Palace Gardens, Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Scotland, had been awarded an OBE for his services interrogating German prisoners of war during the First World War.<sup>1602</sup>

The same frame of reference emerges among some Second World War prisoners. For example, a German prisoner held by the British army in the Rhineland wrote in 1946 of how, almost thirty years before, he had been captured by the British and that he viewed

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<sup>1600</sup> J. Anthony Hellen, “Temporary settlements and transient populations. The legacy of Britain’s prisoner of war camps 1940-1948,” *Erdkunde*, 53 (1999), p. 197. Italics mine.

<sup>1601</sup> George Eckert Institut, Brunswick, Nachlass T.J. Leonard, Box 8, folder “Anweisungen über Behandlung von Kriegsgefangenen,” n.d. lecture notes for instructing British troops on interrogating German prisoners, 1939-45.

<sup>1602</sup> Ian Cobain, “The Secrets of the London Cage,” *The Guardian*, 12 November 2005.



the de-nazification camp at Wilton Park in terms of his earlier First World War captivity at Donnington Hall officers' camp:

The aims which the work in Wilton Park serves are not strange to me. At Donnington Hall, Nottingham, my officer's camp at that time, which obviously in many respects resembled the Wilton Park course camp, interest for me and many other comrades especially the younger ones was awakened in the problems which now stand on the Wilton Park syllabus.<sup>1603</sup>

He was forever "thankful" for the noble way the British had accepted the surrender of his unit in 1916 when they had been overpowered.<sup>1604</sup> A German woman writing in 1946 to the International Red Cross at Geneva of her brother Emil, aged 49, a prisoner of war of the Soviets, outlined how: "he took part in the 1914 World War and was only released in 1920 from French captivity. He has sacrificed many years for a Fatherland that today lies in ruins, precisely through the fault of people without a conscience (*eben durch die Schuld gewissenloser Menschen*)."<sup>1605</sup> Subconsciously, individuals were referring to 1914-1918 to interpret 1939-45.

Practical continuities not only concerned those former prisoners of 1914-1918 who returned to front combat in 1939-45. They also may have influenced ex-prisoners who held important positions during the Second World War. That Charles de Gaulle was a prisoner in Germany in 1914-1918 is well-known.<sup>1606</sup> Less well-known is that Adolf Hitler served at one point as a guard at Traunstein prisoner of war camp between November 1918 and late January 1919, precisely the period when conditions in Bavarian camps deteriorated rapidly, as the previous chapter has shown.<sup>1607</sup> A large number of the prisoners of war in Traunstein camp at this time were Russians. In August 1919, Hitler worked on a German army propaganda course designed to re-indoctrinate German prisoners of war who had recently been repatriated and who had arrived back in Germany

<sup>1603</sup> TNA, FO 371/55689, C3783, A. Münzebrock to Major-General Strong, F.O. I am grateful to Dr Riccarda Torriani for alerting me to this source.

<sup>1604</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1605</sup> ACICR, G 25/36, *Plaintes générales*, France 1946-1947, v.669, G17/134/13, Letter from Trude Fuhr-Keller, 30.10.1946.

<sup>1606</sup> Annette Becker, "Charles de Gaulle, Prisonnier," in *De Gaulle soldat 1914-1918* (Paris, 1999), pp. 98-115.

<sup>1607</sup> Kershaw, *Hitler*, vol.1, *Hubris*, p. 117.

with what were termed 'Bolshevik' political tendencies.<sup>1608</sup> Hitler's subsequent attitudes to both Russian prisoners of war and German prisoners of war taken prisoner by the enemy must have been influenced by these encounters. The terrible condition of Russian prisoners in Germany after the Armistice was likely to reinforce prejudices against Slavs as uncivilized. The fact that German prisoners of war were repatriated to Germany having picked up left-leaning political views in captivity may have been a factor in his later contempt for German troops who surrendered.

Hitler's adversary, Winston Churchill, brought his own 1914-1918 lessons on prisoner treatment to the Second World War. As outlined in chapter two, in 1915 Churchill was involved in the policy of reprisals launched against German submarine prisoners which badly backfired.<sup>1609</sup> While First Lord of the Admiralty he was also exposed to the ideas of the First Sea Lord, Sir John Fisher, who wanted to shoot German prisoners of war as a reprisal for German Zeppelin attacks on Britain.<sup>1610</sup> Robert Vansittart, the viscerally anti-German Permanent Undersecretary at the Foreign Office during the Second World War had formed his dislike of Germany while working in the Foreign Office Department of Prisoners of War under Lord Newton between 1916 and 1918.<sup>1611</sup>

Moreover, there was a significant number of former prisoners of war among the fifteen top officials of the German ministerial bureaucracy and the S.S. who met with Reinhard Heydrich at the infamous Wannsee conference in 1942, where the escalation of the Holocaust was planned. Of the six who had served in the 1914-1918 conflict, four had been prisoners of war.<sup>1612</sup> Two were held by the French and two by Russia. One of those present, Dr Alfred Meyer, Reich Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories, had been a prisoner of the French from 1917-1920. In 1942, he was a key figure in the mass

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<sup>1608</sup> Ibid., p.123.

<sup>1609</sup> Martin Gilbert, *Churchill. A Life* (London, 2000) p. 296.

<sup>1610</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1611</sup> Robert Vansittart, *Black Record: Germans Past and Present* (Melbourne, 1941); Robert Vansittart, *The Mist Procession. The autobiography of Lord Vansittart* (London, 1958).

<sup>1612</sup> They were: Otto Hofmann [1896-1982] SS Race and Settlement; Wilhelm Kritzinger [1890-1947] Reich Chancellery; Dr Roland Freisler [1893-1945] Reich Ministry of Justice and Dr Alfred Meyer [1891-1945] Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories. Gerhard Schoenberner and Mira Bihaly, eds, *House of the Wannsee Conference. Permanent Exhibit, Guide and Reader*, English version (Berlin, 2000), pp. 54-67. I am grateful to Mark Jones for bringing this source to my attention.



deportations of Soviet forced labourers.<sup>1613</sup> Having been a prisoner of war in the Great War clearly did not necessarily inspire individuals with empathy for those in captivity in 1939-45.

It is worth asking what kind of practical influence the memory of 1914-1918 had. How much did Dr Alfred Meyer, for example, draw upon the organisational structure of the prisoner of war labour company of 1914-1918 when setting up the much harsher slave labour system he organised in 1942? And what of post-war patterns that repeated themselves? The French in 1945-1948 used German prisoners as a source of reparations labour in a similar way to 1918-1920.<sup>1614</sup> Once again, the organisation of food for these prisoners proved problematic. It was only in 1947 that the International Red Cross found their food situation had normalised.<sup>1615</sup> Again, too, after the Second World War there was a period of memory disruption, a series of silences and amnesias. How these related to military prisoners of war and whether they followed the same patterns as 1919-1939 merits further research.

It is not the intention here to overstate the direct links between the two wars. Rather it is to suggest that First World War captivity influenced attitudes and decisions in practical ways which deserve further attention. It is to highlight the fact that although the memory of prisoners of the 1914-1918 conflict was not often overtly referred to, it was present in the cognitive frame of reference of many involved in the 1939-45 war, particularly at the outset. This explains why the invading German army in 1940 destroyed the monuments at Monceau-sur-Sambre and Marchienne-au-Pont erected to Yvonne Vieslet, the Belgian child shot trying to give a ration card to a prisoner in 1918.<sup>1616</sup> The politics of memory were hugely important to this 1940 invasion – not only were monuments destroyed, but large amounts of war archives relating to prisoners of war were removed to Germany

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<sup>1613</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1614</sup> Fabien Théofilakis, "Les prisonniers de guerre allemands en mains françaises au sortir de la Seconde Guerre mondiale: gestion et enjeux," p.2. Unpublished paper kindly provided by the author.

<sup>1615</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>1616</sup> I am grateful to Leen Engeleen for this information.

from Belgium and France.<sup>1617</sup> The historical image of the 1914-1918 conflict and German prisoner treatment in particular, was still being defined a year into the Second World War.

Despite the above identified links, however, prisoner treatment in the two world wars was very different in many ways. The patterns of fighting and of capture differed in 1939-45. Britain had very few German prisoners until 1942 and the French none at all until 1944.<sup>1618</sup> The German-Soviet front saw a policy of no quarter and harsh prisoner treatment widely practised by both sides.<sup>1619</sup> Those who were taken prisoner were treated appallingly. During the Second World War, 5,754,000 Soviet prisoners were captured by the Germans, of whom between 3,290,000 and 3,700,000 died.<sup>1620</sup> The ideological motivations were very different to 1914-1918. But it is worth looking more closely at how former prisoners of war and those who had been involved in prisoner administration as officials or guards demobilised in the interwar period. The relationship between interwar amnesia and the memory of individuals deserves further attention.

### Conclusion

Interwar attempts to deal with the memory of prisoner treatment ended in failure. There was no consensus on what had happened during the First World War. No society was capable of coming to terms with the divisive and difficult memory of prisoner treatment. In each country contemporary cultural structures served to repress or distort the history of captivity: in Britain, class hierarchies repressed the memory of other rank ex-prisoners; in France, the clash over who had the right to be remembered as a combatant eclipsed any debate over prisoner treatment; and in Germany, the whole issue became subordinated to

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<sup>1617</sup> Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities*, p. 404. Among the archives stolen were files from the Service Historique de l'Armée de la Terre; the Archives of the French Foreign Ministry; and the war library collection at the Musée des Armées (today the BDIC).

<sup>1618</sup> Hellen, "Temporary settlements and transient populations. The legacy of Britain's prisoner of war camps 1940-1948," p. 197; Fabien Théofilakis, "Les prisonniers de guerre allemands en mains françaises au sortir de la Seconde Guerre mondiale: gestion et enjeux," p. 2. Paper kindly provided by the author.

<sup>1619</sup> Stefan Karner, "Konzentrations- und Kriegsgefangenenlager in Deutschland und in der Sowjetunion. Ansätze zu einem Vergleich von Lagern in totalitären Regimen" in Rüdiger Overmans, ed., *In der Hand des Feindes. Kriegsgefangenschaft von der Antike bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg*, pp. 387-412.

<sup>1620</sup> Speed, *Prisoners, Diplomats and the Great War*, p. 2.



the propaganda needs of the German right. By the 1930s, collective forms of amnesia had been adopted in all three countries because the topic of prisoner treatment had proved impossible to resolve.

The point here is not to claim that interwar testimonies or recollections were false. Rather it is to show that there was an important privileging of certain narratives of prisoner treatment over others. It was not the case as some commentators have concluded from the interwar period, that once the war ended the stories of prisoner of war mistreatment were found to have been invented or untrue. In fact, societies in the interwar period were incapable of carrying out any such examination. Instead the whole debate entered a new phase, one which avoided any real engagement with the violences of 1914-1918 and ultimately resulted in the construction of collective amnesias. It was this failure to resolve the prisoner of war issue of 1914-1918 that was the key legacy of the interwar period. The confusion and uncertainty in 1939 about what had actually happened to prisoners in 1914-1918 left a discursive space to be filled by individuals or propagandists with whatever constructed memory they desired. In 1939, the First World War was a murky, subjective frame of reference for those involved with prisoner issues in the Second. And as a result, we still do not know enough about the extent of the continuities and breaks that occurred.

How does the disruption of prisoner memory described here fit with the ongoing debate among cultural historians about continuity and change in how the war was remembered in the interwar period? Clearly, in one regard the amnesia regarding prisoners was a radical process, a means of breaking with the past which entailed a re-imagining of the wartime experience with the purpose of occluding certain aspects. Yet this memory disruption occurred within the confines of traditional forms of popular expression – memoirs and veterans' associations – which in many respects modelled themselves on trade unions. The disruption of memory was couched within traditional memory forms and carried out by very mainstream memory agents.

It was also carried out through new taboos. What prisoners could tell was defined by the cultural codes that surrounded interwar masculinity in each country. In interviews held during the war, the culture of conflict, with its emphasis upon shaming the enemy, appears to have allowed prisoners to describe being beaten.<sup>1621</sup> During the interwar period it appears to have been much more difficult for men to articulate such experiences, which showed them in a powerless or humiliated light. Taboos on what could be publicly “remembered” help explain why ex-prisoners always sought to depict themselves mastering their captivity. They also may explain why allusions to the sexual abuse of prisoners are so rare.<sup>1622</sup> Violence in the interwar period was re-enshrined with peacetime taboos. It became a subject few were prepared to confront honestly.

To return, in conclusion, to *La Grande Illusion*, which raised several issues that marked the interwar period. First, once violence as a component of captivity was dropped from popular discourse, a shift to a more social memory was possible. This reinvented the prisoner of war experience as no longer a ‘combatant,’ military experience, but as a ‘social’ one. Second, in Britain in particular, and to a lesser extent in France and Germany, the memory of prisoner of war officers came to predominate. Unlike other rank prisoners, they were highly educated, literate and had the financial resources to write and the social connections to publish their accounts. Their captivity was always more comfortable than other ranks and in many cases was surprisingly luxurious. The predominance of their accounts distorted the historical and the popular image of what the average prisoner experienced.

Third, the politics of reconciliation played a part. Populations were unwilling to address topics which risked arousing either the anger of their former enemy or old hurts and bitteresses among their own populations. In order to move on from wartime hatreds it was necessary to forget issues that might rouse animosity. Fourth, prisoners themselves

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<sup>1621</sup> See the interview collections in: TNA, WO 161/98; WO 161/99; WO 161/100; SHAT, 7 N 1187, Attachés militaires Pays-Bas. Déclarations de prisonniers de guerre français évadés à la légation de France à la Haye, 1915-1916.

<sup>1622</sup> During the course of this Ph.D. only one reference to sexual abuse was found – an article in the *Münchener Augsburger Zeitung*, “sadisme français,” 25.12.1920, which relates an account of a French guard raping a German prisoner. The account is allegorical in tone and appears to have been fabricated.



were often complicit in redirecting memory of their experience away from the themes of the earlier wartime discourses. Finally, the political climate of the period, with its increasing ideological cleavages, created a unique situation that affected the way memory of the conflict was written.

During the First World War captivity evolved more over the course of the four and a half years than it was possible for many to grasp. Conditions in 1914 were not those of 1916. 1918 again represented a very different experience. 1920 brought a further shift for German prisoners. Captivity was in a state of perpetual flux. The myriad range of experiences made it hard for even one former prisoner to narrate a cohesive historical account of a captivity that was uniformly 'bad' or 'good,' let alone for millions of prisoners' experiences to be distilled into one simple historical outline. This contradictory nature of ex-prisoner testimony caused confusion. With only limited access to archives, and dependent upon former prisoners' accounts, interwar observers found prisoner treatment impossible to objectively assess. This is not surprising. What is surprising is that so many failed even to try.

## CONCLUSION

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During the First World War the distinction between prisoner of war and combatant enemy soldier began to break down, although it never fully disappeared. A large number of British, French and German prisoners of war did return home alive, testament to the fact that prisoners retained a certain protected status. However, that status had been greatly reduced from that enshrined in international law as a result of the significant levels of violence against prisoners which the conflict unleashed. Most importantly, the war resulted in the emergence of a dual prisoner of war system in Britain, France and Germany with one set of camps, at or near the front, distinguished from prisoner camps on the home front. This development facilitated increased amounts of prisoner mistreatment. In the historiography of the war the dual nature of the prison camp systems of 1914-1920 has not been adequately recognised.

Prisoner of war labour companies created a new prisoner space which international law had not anticipated. They existed solely under the jurisdiction of military law, allowing the prisoners no redress for any mistreatment. They represented an innovation in military forced labour. And they appear to have been an inherent product of military thinking rather than restricted to any one army culture. Faced with trench warfare, within the space of a year three different national armies decided the permanent forced labour of prisoners was necessary. How they treated that labour differed. The necessity for it was not questioned.

It was legal under international law to make other rank prisoners work for their captor state. However, this work was not to be directly connected to the war effort. The British, French and German armies' use of prisoner labour companies was, therefore, illegal, regardless of how well or badly the prisoners were treated. As prisoners were only paid a tiny wage it was also highly exploitative. Stanislaw Swianiewicz defines slavery as a permanent condition of total ownership of a socially segregated individual by another



person or institution.<sup>1623</sup> Prisoners in labour companies met all these conditions bar that of permanency. Effectively owned by armies for the duration of the conflict, these prisoner labour companies were a landmark development in a century that would see the emergence of multiple forms of large scale forced labour.

At the level of each of the three mediating structures examined in this thesis - representations, military practices and memory - a different drive towards extremes of violence emerged. Between 1914 and 1916 depictions of prisoners of war became more violent and captives became associated with atrocity either as victims or perpetrators. This, in turn, provided the cultural background to the development of prisoner of war labour companies in the British, French and German armies in 1915 and 1916, resulting in the subordination of prisoner welfare to the demands of the captor army's labour requirements, regardless of the consequences for prisoners' well-being. The initial memory of prisoner mistreatment in 1919 endorsed new extremes of hatred and animosity which provided the cultural impetus that facilitated the French and British governments retaining their German captives at the former battlefields.

This tendency towards extremes of violence appears to have been inherent within many sectors of wartime society. In particular, the unstructured violence towards prisoners by civilians which emerged in France and Germany in 1914 illustrates that excessive violence was not solely carried out by the military. As this thesis has shown, public opinion, influenced by prevailing ideological values played an influential role in legitimising or restraining excesses. The analysis of the representations of violence against prisoners in 1914 and 1915 reveals the extent to which ordinary civilians engaged in an ongoing wartime debate about violent practice. The public were not ignorant of the transgression of perceived norms of violence – in calls for reprisals they often encouraged it.

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<sup>1623</sup> Stanislaw Swianiewicz, *Forced Labour and Economic Development. An Enquiry into the Experience of Soviet Industrialization* (Oxford, 1965), p. 21.

However, this study also reveals that in almost all cases the move towards violent extremes was impeded soon after it emerged. In Britain in 1915, the Admiralty was blocked by the government from instigating further prisoner reprisals. In the French and British armies in 1917 the shift towards extreme prisoner mistreatment in labour companies was checked by the implementation of the thirty kilometre rule. The dynamic towards extremes of memory was halted in the early 1920s for a variety of reasons in the three different countries. Only in the German army did the tendency towards extremes of violence against prisoners continue unabated but here the labour-intensive nature of trench warfare, ironically the very factor that had led to the creation of the German prisoner of war labour company, also acted as a brake to limit prisoner mistreatment. The German army did not have access to an inexhaustible labour supply. This forced it to curtail the demands it made of its prisoner workers.

In most cases this process of curbing extremes happened from within state structures, on occasion due to the influence of public opinion. Thus, to what extent violence against prisoners occurred depended upon how particular state institutions such as armies were organised and how susceptible they were to violent opinions and attitudes. Isabel V. Hull contends that

The Imperial German case shows that militaries, because violence is their business, do not need external ideologies or motivations to encourage excess; their task and the doctrines, habits, and basic assumptions (the military culture) they develop to handle it may be sufficient in themselves.<sup>1624</sup>

Hull locates the cause of excessive violence in how an army is organised to fight war, and the institutional and administrative traditions it has developed.

Such institutional organisational cultures were very important in determining military practice towards prisoners in 1914-1920. The structure of the German military, its cultural legitimisation of the harshest types of violent reprisals as a means to an end, and its absolute lack of any external political or civilian control clearly encouraged violent

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<sup>1624</sup> Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction. Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca and London, 2005), p. 324.



practice against prisoners of war. Hull's argument provides a valuable explanation for the evolution of more violent practices in prisoner of war labour companies in the German army compared to the slower evolution of similar practices in the French and British armies in 1918. She contends that because of the primordality of doctrines of military necessity and strong organisation, all military cultures contained the potential for transgressive violence in the early twentieth century, but in some countries this military organisational culture was offset by particularly powerful governmental or civilian controls.<sup>1625</sup>

This idea of controls helps to explain the comparative conclusions regarding violence against prisoners that can be drawn from this thesis. Germany's treatment of military captives resulted in the worst excesses of the war, both in scale and extremes. Britain's treatment stands as the least violent, although it too saw a deterioration process at work between 1914 and 1918. The French case was in perpetual flux between phases of short term deterioration and phases of return to humanitarian principles. This thesis has shown that the escalation or de-escalation of violence against prisoners was a two-way process: organisational cultures within state institutions such as the civil service, foreign ministries and the judiciary were highly significant, acting to brake or accelerate military violence. It was the internal culture of these institutions that determined whether they reacted to check or encourage prisoner abuse. In Britain and France government institutions felt confident enough to check military behaviour. Thus, the British and French prisoner systems contained internal controls that curtailed the tendency, inherent within military culture, to violent excess: a certain amount of civilian involvement in prisoner administration, accountability to a democratically elected government and parliament, the ability to adapt, investigate and reform when things went wrong. All of these were absent in the German case. Where the military was allowed the greatest freedom to practice its own organisational culture the greatest violence towards prisoners occurred.

Prevailing ideologies contributed to this process of preventing or promoting violence against prisoners. They were crucial determinants of how and why violence against

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<sup>1625</sup> Ibid., p. 325.

prisoners happened. A major factor was that pre-war humanitarian ideology, as enshrined in international law proved weak when tested. Large sections of wartime societies abandoned it in favour of reprisals, exploitation of prisoner labour and subordination of prisoner welfare to the larger aim of winning the war. This massively undermined the pre-war cultural codification of the prisoner's protected status. International law on prisoners of war had been greatly weakened by the end of the conflict.

Class was another ideology which determined the exposure of prisoners to violence. Throughout the war, in Britain, France and Germany, shared values and understandings of class identity protected officer prisoners from mistreatment. This class ideology was largely shared by military and civilian society. It shows that it was possible to reduce violence against prisoners where cultural beliefs dictated that this should happen. Based on the extent of the protection which class offered prisoners, it is fair to argue that it was a far more deeply engrained ideology in European societies than pre-war international law or nineteenth-century humanitarianism.

Prevailing popular prejudices towards certain prisoner groups also led to the development of hierarchies of prisoner treatment which privileged or discriminated against particular prisoners on the basis of race or ethnic identity. The prisoner of war was viewed by the majority of military *and* civilians as the enemy disarmed, not as an individual who had been returned to his pre-military status of civilian, and this 'enemy' image was ethnically determined. Hence the privileging of certain prisoner identities over others, such as Alsace-Lorrainers and Poles in France, or the German view of Russian prisoners as inferior to other captives.<sup>1626</sup> For the duration of the war both the prisoner and his captor nation remained ideologically motivated by a set of wartime beliefs which attributed bad and good values to certain ethnicities. These beliefs played an important role in where and when prisoners were subjected to violence.

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<sup>1626</sup> The French assessed whether an individual was a true 'French' Alsace-Lorrainer by a series of questions about ethnic origin: AN, AJ.30.277.



These beliefs were profoundly influenced by the principal ideological belief system of the conflict: nationalism, which served to legitimise and to encourage violence against the ‘enemy’ other, both on and off the battlefield. This ideology varied in strength in different sections of societies but it was the continual and fundamental link which made violence against prisoners of war possible. The engrained idea of a shared national ‘self’ led civilians, soldiers, governments and high commands to identify with their compatriots who were in the hands of the enemy, over the prisoners held in their own country. In this ideological nationalist world view, all men were not equal – compatriots were privileged over all other national identities. Violent practice against prisoners of war became legitimate and even desirable within this ideological outlook, where it was believed necessary to protect compatriots imprisoned by the enemy.

Although referring to a very different camp world, Primo Levi provides a useful deconstruction of the genesis of the wartime prison camp as the most extreme consequence of cultural nationalism:

Many people – many nations – can find themselves holding more or less wittingly, that ‘every stranger is an enemy.’ For the most part this conviction lies deep down like some latent infection; it betrays itself only in random, disconnected acts and does not lie at the base of a system of reason. But when it does come about, when the unspoken dogma becomes the major premise in a syllogism, then, at the end of the chain, there is the lager.<sup>1627</sup>

The First World War prisoner of war camps and the violence which occurred towards prisoners within and outside of them were dependent on wartime society reaching a particular point on this spectrum of ideological nationalism, a point which legitimised violence against individuals on the basis of national identity.

Prisoners should not be seen purely as the target of this nationalist violence. They were also agents of it. As combatants they perpetrated violence against the enemy; as released captives their testimony supported national belief systems that promoted wartime violence as sacrifice for a just cause. They also perpetrated violence as prisoners. 210

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<sup>1627</sup> Primo Levi, *If this is a Man* (London, 2004 [1958]), p. 15.

German military and civilian prisoners in British captivity were court martialled for illtreatment of a fellow prisoner, assault or other violence.<sup>1628</sup> Those prisoners who changed sides, such as Alsace-Lorrainers in France, or Irish prisoners who joined Roger Casement's Irish Brigade, were beaten and ostracised by their fellow captives.<sup>1629</sup> A German prisoner recalled an incident in Brocton camp where a German sergeant reacted violently towards an Alsace-Lorrainer who had agreed to assist the British: "He ripped the uniform off him, saying he was not worthy to wear the German uniform. That very day because of the attack the prisoner was moved to another camp."<sup>1630</sup> An Irish prisoner, Private Daniel O'Brien, interviewed about Casement's Brigade, described how "we gave Corporal Keogh of the Connaught Rangers a terrible hiding when he was going to join."<sup>1631</sup>

On occasion prisoners perpetrated violence against enemy civilians. A key example of this was the high number of cases of attempted rapes of German women by French prisoners working in Wurttemberg.<sup>1632</sup> In this region prisoners were needed to provide labour on farms, many of which were run by women, left alone while their menfolk were away at war. Young German girls on these farms were particularly vulnerable to unwanted advances. Of 68 individual court martial cases in the XIII German Army Corps area for sexual misdemeanours between 1888 and 1920, 35 involved prisoners of war between 1914 and 1918.<sup>1633</sup> 26 of these cases involved French prisoners and 9, Russians.<sup>1634</sup> The majority of the French cases (20) were for rape or attempted rape, six of which involved attacks on German minors. This violence was not merely sexually

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<sup>1628</sup> TNA, WO 161/82, p. 670. Analysis of proceedings of military courts for the trials of prisoners of war and civilians, 4 August 1914 to 31 March 1920.

<sup>1629</sup> TNA, 141/9; Also TNA, WO 161/97, no. 284, Interview between Daniel O'Brien and F. Varley, 13.2.1916.

<sup>1630</sup> HStA, STUTT, M 77/1.930, Stellv. Generalkommando XIII. [Königl. Württ.] Armeekorps, Abt IIe 4. Akten betr.: Vom Ausland zurückgekehrte deutsche Kriegs- und Zivilgefangene, 28.4.1918 – 23.8.1918, Nr.138.w, Bericht des Ers-Batls des Inf. Regt. Nr 246, 18.7.1918, Erschienen ist der Austauschgefangene Clemens Prinz, Gen.Komp. ER 246. See also: ACICR, 432/II/10/c.37 for a description of the tensions between German prisoners and Alsace-Lorraine prisoners who were usually chosen to act as interpreters in French camps.

<sup>1631</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1632</sup> HStA, STUTT, M 631 Repertorien, Bestand M 631, Zusammenstellung der Militärstrafverfahren des XIII. Armeekorps – Einzelfälle – 1888-1920, Bearbeitet von Gerd Mantel und Franz Moegle-Hofacker.

<sup>1633</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1634</sup> *Ibid.*



motivated. It was framed in terms of the national war effort and portrayed as prisoner sabotage in Germany and France.<sup>1635</sup>

Gender was another major determinant of the nature and form of violence against captives. As with combatant violence, violent practice against prisoners was largely masculine. Although women were involved in crowd actions in 1914, the practice of most violence against captives was by men with only several exceptional cases of violence by nurses against wounded prisoners.<sup>1636</sup> Prisoners found violence by women deeply unsettling, as the 1914 chapter illustrated. In one well-documented case in France, in 1915 and 1916, a nun, Sister Saint-Pierre, repeatedly mistreated wounded German prisoners she was nursing, hitting them in the face or on the buttocks. Being hit by a woman was deeply humiliating. One prisoner recalled: "She hit Nutzhorn many times in the face if he screamed in pain when she was changing his dressing. Nutzhorn wept and said to the doctor who entered the room soon afterwards that the sister had hit him 'and should not hit me, I am a married man.'"<sup>1637</sup> Violence rarely transgressed the accepted norms of gendered behaviour: when it did, prisoners found it shocking.

Ideological belief systems, coupled with the organisational cultures which existed within state institutions, and in particular within militaries, determined the kinds of violence against prisoners which emerged. This complex causation lies behind the evolution of this violence in Britain, France and Germany during the First World War. This evolution can be traced in wartime societies at the level of representations, practices and memory. All three levels interacted throughout the war. However, there was a continual process of evolving hegemony at work. Representations of older forms of violent practice against prisoners in 1914 and 1915, such as crowd hostility and battlefield shootings, provided the impulse for new violent practices such as labour reprisals. New violent practices in turn gave way to a polarised European memory of First World War captivity in the post-

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<sup>1635</sup> Wilhelm Doegen, *Kriegsgefangene Völker. Der Kriegsgefangenen Haltung und Schicksal in Deutschland*, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1921), pp. 116-117, pp. 132-133; Christoph Beck, *Die Frau und die Kriegsgefangenen*, vol. 1, *Die deutsche Frau und die fremden Kriegsgefangenen* (Nuremberg, 1919).

<sup>1636</sup> BA-MA, PH2 / 33, f. 138, Heinrich Nutzhorn.

<sup>1637</sup> ACICR, FAW 140/3, [140/1], 1.5.18, Red Cross, Berlin to CICR, Otto Westerkamp aus Recklinghausen [1/3 Garde Regt z.f.].

war years. Violence against prisoners of war was not a marginal issue during the conflict. It was an integral part of why countries were fighting and what they believed the enemy stood for. In this sense it was not entirely separate from the violence that was occurring on the battlefield.

Ultimately, the historiographical debate as to whether overall prisoners of war in the First World War were generally well treated or badly treated cannot be resolved here. This study has by definition focused on the violent aspects of captivity and has only considered three prisoner nationalities. However, what emerges here is a new paradigm for discussion: the nature of violence against captives. This thesis has contended that during the war captivity was largely perceived and represented as violent in Britain, France and Germany. Non-violent captivity received little attention. Moreover, representations of violence against prisoners were often based on reality. In addition, the types of violence that occurred against prisoners evolved during the conflict. In certain phases of the war and in certain regions, captivity breached new violent thresholds: for example, violence in prisoner of war labour companies was on a far greater scale than has previously been acknowledged. As a result, international law relating to prisoners of war was greatly undermined. Finally, violence against captives resulted in bitterness and grief which ultimately overwhelmed the history of prisoners of war during the interwar period, making it impossible to remember their experience.

At the heart of this process was the difficult transition from war to peace. To end, this thesis returns to where it began – two German schoolgirls making their way to a prisoner of war graveyard on a wintry day in November 1918. When Piete Kuhr climbed over the wall to lay her wreath, she was looking for a particular prisoner grave with an inscription in French that she found especially moving.<sup>1638</sup> Kuhr wished to commemorate the prisoner deaths in 1918 because she believed that they symbolised the futility of war and the universal suffering it brought. Others had a different reason for remembering. The grave inscription read:

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<sup>1638</sup> Jo Mihaly, [Piete Kuhr] “*da gibt's ein Wiedersehen!*” *Kriegstagebuch eines Mädchens 1914-1918* (Freiburg, 1982), p. 379. The inscription translated reads: “to you my thoughts and my tears, all my days.”



*“À toi mes pensées  
et mes larmes,  
tous les jours.”*

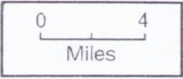


APPENDIX 1. MAP OF LATVIA SHOWING THE LOCATION OF 1916-1917 PRISONER REPRISALS

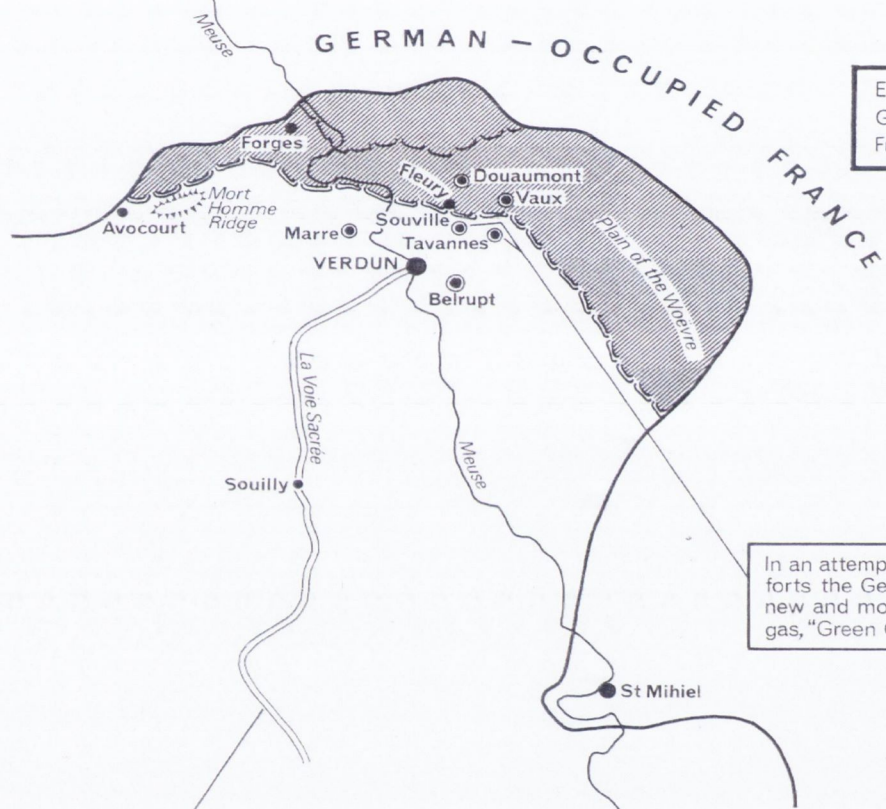


**VERDUN 1916**

General Pétain wrote of the 21-year-old troops returning from the battle:  
*"In their unsteady look one sensed visions of horror, while their step and bearing revealed utter despondency. They were crushed by horrifying memories"*



Estimated dead:  
German 300,000  
French 350,000



In an attempt to seize these forts the Germans used a new and more harmful gas, "Green Cross Gas"

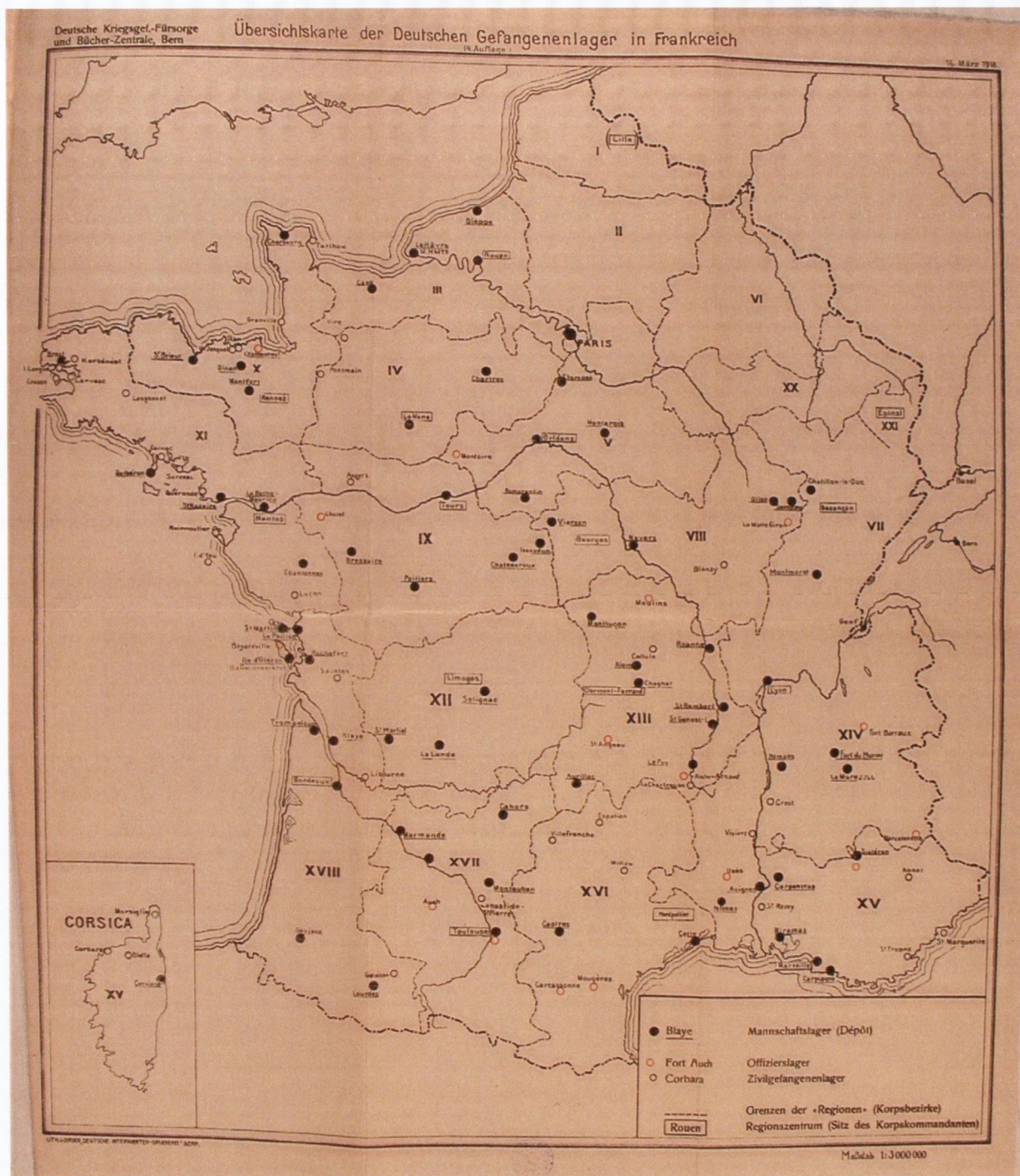
Lorries passing every fourteen seconds day and night along this road ensured that Verdun received sufficient men and materials to withstand the massive German attack. In 5 months over 23 million shells were fired by the two sides

- The front line before the German attack on 21 February 1916
- German advance by 24 February 1916
- Furthest German advance by July 1916
- French fortresses
- ▨ Area within which 650,000 men were killed in little more than four months

**APPENDIX 2. THE VERDUN BATTLEFIELD**

MARTIN GILBERT, *FIRST WORLD WAR ATLAS* (LONDON, 1970), P. 53.





**APPENDIX 3. OVERVIEW OF THE MAIN FRENCH PRISONER OF WAR CAMPS ON 16 MARCH 1918**

**DEUTSCHE KRIEGSGEFANGENEN-FÜRSORGE BERN, ATLAS DER GEFANGENENLAGER IN FRANKREICH IN NEUN KARTEN (BERN, 1918), N.P.**



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 Bonn North Cemetery- Bonn, Nordrhein-Westfalen.  
 Cologne Memorial – Köln, Nordrhein-Westfalen  
 Cologne Southern Cemetery – Köln, Nordrhein Westfalen  
 Deutz Jewish Cemetery – Cologne Nordrhein-Westfalen  
 Euskirchen New Town Cemetery – Nordrhein-Westfalen  
 Giessen Jewish cemetery- Giessen Hessen  
 Göttingen Jewish cemetery – Göttingen Niedersachsen  
 Hamburg Cemetery – Hamburg  
 Hasenheide garrison cemetery – Berlin, Berlin  
 Koblenz Jewish cemetery – Koblenz Rheinland-Pfalz  
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## **GERMANY**

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#### Auswärtiges Amt

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R 901/84189 Konferenz über Gefangenfragen, Hague 1918, AA III b

R 901/84451 Gefangenenlager in Deutschland, AA IIb Akten betreffend das Gefangenenlager in Stettin

R 901/84490 Auswärtiges Amt, IIIb Akten betreffend die Gefangenenlager im besetzten Gebiete

R 901/84255 Gefangenenlager in Deutschland, Kassel

R 901/84525 Auswärtiges Amt IIIb Akten betreffend Besichte der Gefangenenlager in Frankreich und Deutschland durch das Rote Kreuz vom Juni 1915 bis Februar 1916, Militärwesen, nr.184, Frankreich Lager

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Kriegsgefangenenwesen.

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PH 2 / 25 Schwarzen Liste derjenigen Engländer die sich während des Krieges gegenüber deutschen Heeresangehörigen völkerrechtswidrigen Verhaltens schuldig gemacht haben [mit Vernehmungsprotokollen der Zeugenaussagen] 1915-1919

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PH 2 / 36 Interner Wochen Bericht nr. 68 des deutschen Roten Kreuzes-Ausschuss für deutsche Kriegsgefangene, 2.4.1916

PH 2 / 588 Schwarze Liste derjenigen Engländer, die sich während des Krieges gegenüber deutschen Heeresangehörigen völkerrechtswidrigen Verhaltens schuldig gemacht haben

Bestand PH.2 Kriegsministerium, Teil 2 [from former DDR archives]

PH 2 / 592 Aufstellung über strafbare Handlungen durch Heeresangehörige im besetzten Gebiet, 1914-1918

PH 2 / 595 Aktenverzeichnis der Leipziger Verteidigungsstelle über Verfahren gegen Kriegsbeschuldigte, die aufgrund des Gesetzes zur Verfolgung von Kriegsverbrechen und Kriegsvergehen vom 18. Dez. 1919 vom Reichsgericht in Leipzig untersucht bzw. verurteilt wurden, 1919

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PH 5 II / 447 Monatsberichte über Gefangenenlager. Enthalt u.a. Meldungen über Stärke, Zustand, Verpflegung und Unterkunft. Karte mit Einzeichnungen der Gefangenenlager. Jan. 1918 - Nov. 1918. 4.1.16.1/19

PH 5 II / 448 Meldungen über eingebrachte Kriegsgefangene. Apr.1918-juli 1918

PH 5 II / 449 Schriftwechsel über die Ruckführung von französischen und englischen Kriegsgefangenen hinter die 30 km Feuerlinie. Enthalt auch: Armee Befehl über Verschiebung der südlichen Armeegrenze, vom 3.6.1918. März 1918 - Sept. 1918

PH 5 II / 452 Verfügungen über Kriegsgefangenenangelegenheiten. [Bd. 1 und 2] Jan. 1918 – Nov. 1918. 4.1.16.1/24 a+b

PH 5 II / 453 Verfügungen über Kriegsgefangenenangelegenheiten. [Bd. 1 und 2] Jan. 1918- Nov 1918. 4.1.16.1/24 a+b



PH 5 II / 454 Verfügungen über Kriegsgefangenenangelegenheiten. Febr 1915-Okt. 1918. 4.1.16.1/25

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PH 5 II / 459 Einsatz von Kriegsgefangenen und Zivilarbeitern zum Stellungsbau im bereich des AOK 4 [Hermann-Stellung] Juni 1917- Sept. 1918. 4.1.16.1/29

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