

Russian Prisoner, Long in German Hands Tells of Treatment Received by the Huns

(By An Escaped Prisoner.)
For three and one half years I was a prisoner in a German prison camp. At the end of that time I was fortunate enough to escape. Although I am a Russian, the peace of Brest-Litovsk did not give me my freedom. Like the enemy subjects who were in the same camp I had to wait my chance to make a perilous dash for liberty.
Although much has already been written in the press of all countries about the treatment of war prisoners in Germany, nevertheless I believe that I have had experiences which are, to a certain extent, unique and worth relating. The camp in which I was confined is Camp Holminden, on the Weser. At this place a great number of civilians who have in no way participated in the war are held captives. It is not a camp for military prisoners; it is a camp for enemy civilians.
The regime at Holminden was fairly mild until the beginning of 1917. But when General Hachnisch, a barbarous old despot, was named general of the 16th army corps, in which district Holminden belongs, the camp conditions were utterly changed at once. In the place of the former commanding officer, General Pflieger, who had treated the prisoners with decency and a certain amount of consideration, Colonel Gallus was appointed, a half crazy individual, with years of experience as a prison director. With the help of a group of his underlings, more ruthless than himself, the colonel very soon succeeded in establishing a German prison regime at Holminden.

Heaviest Work Required.
This regime involved forcing the prisoners to do the heaviest sort of labor. Every day they were required to break up and haul stone, build roads, and work in the fields. The road building was at a distance of from five to six kilometers from the camp. Work in the factories of Holminden was also looked upon as a camp duty. Because of the fact that the prisoners were for the most part students, engineers, merchants and so on, who were unused to physical labor of this sort, the tasks were particularly onerous. Furthermore, the guards were instructed to keep nagging at the prisoners constantly, to make them work faster.

The manner of these guards is quite indescribable. They received from the colonel himself orders of the most outrageous sort. To speed the work of the prisoners they were told to strike them with their fists and with clubs. At the most trivial offense they were instructed to shoot. If a guard was so rash as to be friendly with one of the captives, he was severely punished. To make the guards more zealous in their work, Colonel Gallus informed them that all of the

Coming Events Cast Their Shadows Before



civilians incarcerated at Holminden were pirates and criminals, deserving of the most violent treatment. The result is inevitable. There were almost daily cases of physical mistreatment while I was at Holminden. Some of the poor fellows were so badly handled that they had to be taken to the hospital.
A Dreary Day.
The day's program was a dreary one. At 4:30 we were awakened; that is, at 4:20 by German summer time, which is in reality 2:50. At

5, we went to work. Often we could not return to the barracks at noon because we were working in a place several kilometers from the camp, and we were obliged to remain out of doors in the wet and rain until 7:30 in the evening. At 9 p. m. when it was still light, we were locked up in the barracks. We had not sufficient time for sleep, rest, or even for meals.

In spite of the constant activity demanded of the prisoners, the food was poor and contained little nourishment. We did have a sort of commissary committee, composed of three prisoners. But if for a single time ventured to complain of the soup as "unsatisfactory," the most disagreeable things always happened. Mail was frequently held up, by way of retaliation for alleged misdeeds. Mail was not allowed to be kept beyond eight days and if a post-card older than that was found upon the person of a prisoner he was always rigorously punished. There was not clothing enough to make one comfortable. As we had to work out of doors regardless of weather or season, our clothing was often wet through, and the next morning we had to put it on while it was still damp. Colds were naturally unavoidable. The medical attention given us was absurd. The crazy colonel himself made a point of being present at almost all medical examinations, and completely dominated the physicians, who cringed before him. He was fond of saying that only the lazy ones pretended to be ill, that the camp itself was the best sanatorium, and hard work the best cure-all.

The Colonel Was Sentimental.
In spite of his brutality, the colonel had his sentimental streaks. The following anecdote is illustrative. A Frenchman, 78 years of age, was caught in having the street of the camp. The colonel passed by, and, as the old fellow did not seem to him to be working diligently enough, he stopped up and gave him a tremendous box on the ear. The poor old man said nothing, but took out a memento box on the ear. The poor fellow which it appeared that he was ill and only capable of a small amount of work. The colonel was much moved, almost to the point of tears. He gave the old man eight days of exemption from all labor. But that was rather cold comfort.

Camp Holminden was frequently visited by General Hachnisch and other officials. However, they never looked at the prisoners' quarters, except in the most perfunctory way. They merely strutted through the barracks, watched the laborers at work, and then directed all their attention to the camp pigs. These pigs, the especial interest of Colonel Gallus, were usually treated in their pens, and certainly led a much happier life than the prisoners, until they were slaughtered for the officers' mess.

Even the women are not spared. Lately conditions have become still worse, I am told. The women are forced to do all sorts of senseless things. For instance, they are put at breaking and unbreaking fish nets and the only purpose of the task-masters seems to be to make their fingers sore. Every Sunday, a weird walk is undertaken, to a wood about six kilometers away, from which they break back wood on their backs. Hundreds of men and women are put in this work every Sunday, although it could easily be done by a wagon and two horses. In fact, the largest part of the labor demanded of the prisoners is almost wholly unproductive, and serves no purpose save to torture. If any of them dare to complain, they

are subjected to certain peculiar punishments of which the most frequent is confinement in an extraordinary cell called the "bug room," a place filled with all sorts of mattresses and sacks, which simply swarm with vermin and lice.

For some unknown reason, there had been no shootings in Camp Holminden when I last heard. In a nearby camp at Blerch, I well remember the shooting of an eighteen year old French lad, in the summer of 1917. Because he for an instant stopped work, his guard, a stupid, half insane fellow, pointed his weapon at him and fired. The whole garrison was highly incensed by the killing. But when the general was told of it he slapped the guard on the shoulder and said: "You did your duty." Shortly afterward, the guard received a promotion.

Among the prisoners, none were more badly treated than the group of young Russian students of which I was one. Their moral and physical sufferings were hardly to be depicted. For four years they have been shut out of the world. Their priceless, splendid years of youth have flown. Joy, health, strength, and education have been denied to them. The war relief organizations would undertake a great and wonderful work of brotherhood if they could obtain the release of these wholly innocent war captives, by putting the matter before the proper authorities.



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