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MAIL

Under the Geneva convention, prisoner of war mail is transmitted free and is delayed as little as possible by censorship. The number of out-going letters is fixed by each of the belligerent nations, but incoming mail is limited only by the exigencies of transportation and censorship. Postal censorship officials encourage letter writers to be brief and not to write more than one letter a week. In Germany, non-commissioned officers and men are allowed to send out two letters and four postcards a month. Protected personnel -- doctors, dentists, medical orderlies, chaplains, stretcher bearers -- may send out four letters and eight post cards each month, and officers may send mail in amounts varying according to their rank.

During the year 1943 the total letter mail coming from and going to Canadian prisoners of war amounted to 412,155. This included a small number of letters sent to and received from Japan. The volume of mail is increasing every week. For the month of February, 1944, incoming and outgoing Canadian prisoners of war mail amounted to 49,069.

Canadian postal censorship regulations prohibit mention of anything likely to give information to the enemy. There should be no offensive remarks concerning the enemy, and even notepaper bearing a "V for Victory" slogan may be destroyed by the German censors. There may be no enclosures except snapshots, unmounted photographs of a personal nature and bank statements. Letters to Japan are limited to 24 words and must be typewritten or printed in capital letters. When letters cannot be sent because they contravene regulations, they are always returned to the sender with an explanation and a new copy of the regulations.

The Canadian Red Cross, at the request of the Canadian government, established a cable service by which 20-word messages, in English or French may be sent to prisoners and internees in enemy hands by the next-of-kin. Inquiries about prisoners are restricted to those who are known to be wounded or ill. Special forms are obtainable at local branches of the Red Cross in Canada, are prepaid and sent at the owner's risk. The Red Cross collects payment and forwards the cables. These cables are not guaranteed as to delivery, nor can any message be sent "reply paid", and messages are delivered by consent of the camp commandant. Since this service began in June, 1942, 2,015 cables have been sent.

MEDICAL CARE

Certain minimum standards of hygiene are provided for in the Geneva convention. It is also stipulated that medical inspections of prisoners of war be arranged at least once a month, and that each camp have an infirmary. This rule seems to have been complied with in Germany. Even the smallest camp has an infirmary, and some of the large ones have two or three or even more hospitals. Three hospitals have been given over to special cases; one for the treatment of blinded men or those suffering from eye wounds, one for tuberculosis patients and one for orthopaedic cases. Prisoners needing special care, such as those suffering from mental diseases, are cared for in civilian institutions.

Doctors, dentists, orderlies and technicians who are prisoners are permitted to treat fellow prisoners. In general, co-operation between allied and German doctors is good, and requests for needed equipment are met with good response, although shortage of materials and transportation difficulties often cause long delays.

The British Red Cross sends medical comforts and invalid food parcels to the ill or wounded. Next-of-kin may also send supplementary medical comforts through the Canadian Red Cross - such individually needed items as spectacles, kidney belts or trusses, special prescriptions, etc.