

FEEDING THE ALLIES PRISONERS IN GERMANY

*A Detailed Account by a Canadian Woman
Helping at the Headquarters in Switzerland*

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At the beginning of the campaign groups of devoted men and women in England, France and Russia, as well as in the neutral countries, faced the problem, always growing greater, of providing the prisoners of war, civilians and soldiers, with the necessities that they lacked. Despite their untiring labour, as the number of prisoners taken by Germany and Austria grow, and as the needs became more vital, it was found that to be effective their efforts must be co-ordinated.

From these scattered groups developed the "Bureau de Secours aux Prisonniers de Guerre"—the aid to prisoners of war—under the patronage of the French Ambassador to Switzerland—with its seat at Berne, a city admirably situated politically and geographically to be the distributing point. The aim of the Bureau is to learn what are the needs of the prisoners, and then to do all possible to reduce to the minimum the misery of their condition.

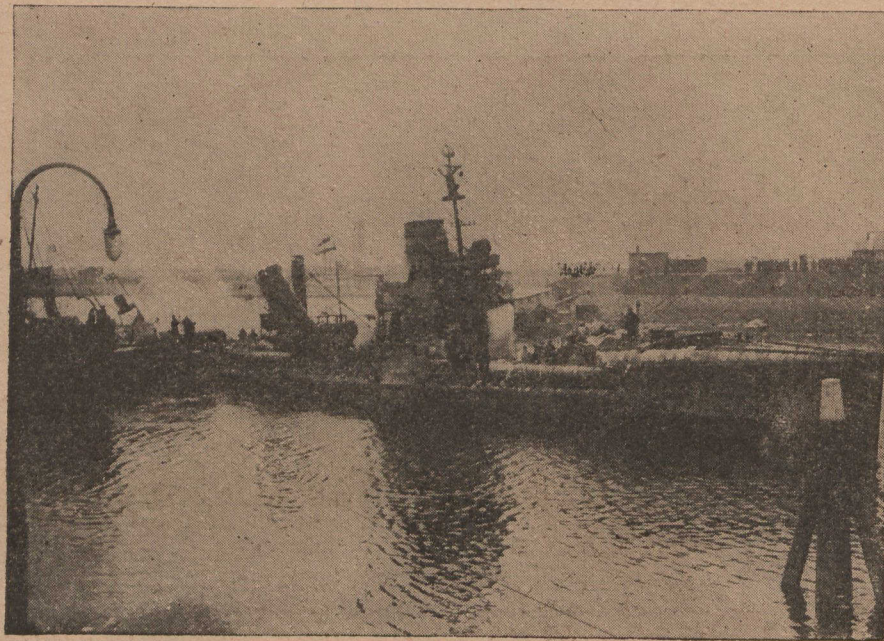
The Swiss Government, as its contribution to the humane work, has assumed the transportation expenses of all consignments sent to prison camps. The permission given by the French and German Governments to neutral delegates to visit the camps from time to time and make reports, has been of enormous value to the Bureau, and great benefit to the prisoners.

The special needs of the prisoners of the various nationalities being slightly different, a committee each of English, French, Italians and Russians, looks after their own compatriots; while an entirely neutral committee affiliated with the Swiss Red Cross, completes the makeup of what has grown to be a huge enterprise.

THE appointment in all the prison camps of *hommes de confiance* has very materially helped the work of neutral delegates, by making known the needs, and stamping out the abuses that were bound to arise when relief work was done on so large a scale. *Homme de confiance* must not be translated "confidence man," but rather signifies the man who, for his trustworthiness, is chosen by the Commandant to act as intermediary between the authorities and the other prisoners. Among their many duties is that of being present at the distribution of parcels or the dividing of a large consignment to see that the really needy get their share. It was on the suggestion of these *hommes de confiance* that the Bureau made the rule that no appeal for aid from a prisoner should be considered unless it was countersigned by a responsible party, and the following post-card is now sent to, and must be filled out by each man who asks for aid. (I translate it from the French):

Name.
Christian name.
Date of birth.
Habitual residence.
Military incorporation.
Signature of *homme de confiance*, chief of barracks, or non-commissioned officer.
Remarks.
Date.
Your signature.

As soon as this card reaches the Bureau a package containing the articles desired is sent, and another post-card that is to be returned to the Bureau, and which will, if the prisoner wishes, then be forwarded to his family. "The Bureau de Secours aux Prison-



THIS is what happened our friend the enemy, (the German Torpedo boat destroyer, V. 69) when she tried to "steal a base" from the British fleet. She and others of her kind were lying in the harbour at Zeebrugge when winter swept over the North Sea. They had hoped to face it out, but severe weather hurried the ice-formation so that the T.B.D.'s, to avoid being frozen in, had to try for "home." What happened is now history. Sneaking up in the dark they were caught by a British patrol—and hammered into something like the above shape. The V.69 was lucky. She reached neutral safety with her wounded. Some of her companions went to the bottom.

niers de Guerre is happy to send you a package. It will be grateful if you will acknowledge its receipt. Upon this card you also can give news of yourself, which the Bureau will send to the person whose name and address you indicate. Kindly also mention the articles of which you are most in need. Have you received the package No.

What is the address of your family
Space reserved for correspondence
Date Signature"

and on the reverse side the prisoner's name, with military incorporation and camp address. The practice of sending individual packages of bread has been adopted with regret by the French committee, for even with the precautions above taken, certain men receive packages from several sources, while others more in need, get none. The bread sent in large consignments and divided by the camp committees and *hommes de confiance* made a juster division possible, and permitted those in need and who had not asked for help to have their share. Unfortunately the German authorities, after having permitted the large consignments, now refuse to accept for the French prisoners anything but individual packages.*

This measure falls hardest upon the very neediest of the prisoners—those whose families can send them nothing—and it is to be hoped that the authorities will again allow the collective consignments.

The reports of the *hommes de confiance* are most

*The question of collective consignments of bread is still in suspense, because the Germans wish to obtain in exchange for the authorization, certain advantages for their own prisoners. In France the same rule for the alimentation of prisoners has been applied that is in force in Germany, that is:—reduced ration of bread and meat, but with the difference made up in vegetables. At Berlin they wish France to give the German prisoners the full ration of bread and meat in exchange for the authorization to send bread from the Bureau to the French prisoners. The affair is being negotiated, though many difficulties must be overcome.

illuminating. In almost every camp there is a great and sustained effort made to keep the prisoners from degenerating intellectually, and to give additional advantages to those men who have lacked in this way. Besides elementary and secondary classes, there are classes in stenography, modern languages, book-keeping, agriculture, architecture, etc., In many cases the Commandant of the camp has shown eagerness to aid in lightening the dreary monotony of the prisoners' lives; giving books, etc., putting a room at their disposal for entertainments and classes, or in other ways encouraging and stimulating the prisoners' own efforts to throw off the lethargy of enforced idleness. (Of course very many prisoners are not idle at all, for thousands are employed to replace the Germans mobilized, in agricultural pursuits, mining, road-building and other public works.)

IN the camp at Göttingen a little newspaper is published by the prisoners. There, there is an orchestra of thirty pieces under a well-known conductor, which, with a choral society, gives many concerts. And a theatrical company does its share of entertaining with plays and light operas. It is also in this camp that the valid prisoners have formed a society to aid the amputated or wounded. This aid takes three principal forms: relieving the ill of their share of the fatigue duties of cleaning, giving them medical care, and giving them massage or the special exercises their condition demands.

From the camp of Nurnberg comes the idea of a co-operative

kitchen, where food sent to the prisoners may be cooked, and where hot food and drinks may be bought. The profits from the kitchen go to buy extra food for the ill and weak. This kitchen prospers greatly and the plan has been adopted by other camps.

In the great camp of Senne, which contains, besides soldier prisoners of several nationalities, many civilians, plays and concerts are given regularly. The makeshift theatre here is the bath building, where the audience places itself between the long rows of washstands.

The painters and sculptors among the captives are very industrious, and the Bureau is preparing an exhibition and sale of their work, as well as of the other articles made in the camps. In one or two camps monuments have been designed and erected by the prisoners to the memory of comrades who have died in captivity.

THESE few glimpses give an idea of the mental life in the camps; but the reports show, too, that the material needs are great. One *homme de confiance* writes: "The hundred and thirty-five French prisoners in this camp were all wounded, and are almost all in need of new uniforms, their having been in many cases cut on the battlefield to facilitate the first dressing of their wounds." From another: "Our camp contains more than five thousand prisoners, three-quarters of whom have been in captivity since the beginning of the war. Their uniforms are in bad condition. The German authorities have given some suits and underclothing, but four hundred still lack a woollen shirt. We nearly all need shoes. Wooden-soled boots are given by the authorities, but they are very hard on the feet for the long marches that many of us must make daily."

Other communications ask specially for clothing
(Concluded on page 21.)