

LIFE IN A GERMAN MUNITION PLANT

TOLD BY A BRITISH PRISONER NOW RELEASED.

How Germany Schemes With the Captives of War to Gain Her Own Disgraceful Ends!

The following story of life in a munition factory at Cassel, Germany, is furnished by a released prisoner (says a correspondent in the London Times). I give it in his own words:—"Henschel Steel Factory since the outbreak of the war turned its whole resources to the production of munitions. Approximately 20,000 people were employed in the latter part of 1915. Amongst these were 2,000 prisoners of war who were sent there not knowing until they arrived the nature of the work they were to perform. The majority of the prisoners of war immediately when they realize that they are at a munition factory refuse to work, but either by force, persuasion or guile they subsequently remain. Compelling prisoners of war to work is peculiar. On arrival at the works the prisoners are given a good meal, a few bottles of beer and things to smoke. They are interviewed by the firm's interpreter whose duty it is to impress the prisoners that it is not a munition factory. They only make bicycles, pocket knives, razors, etc. The field sledge guns, machine guns and thousands of shells you see stacked in every spare foot of the yard are there to be painted. You flatly refuse to start work and a German officer of high rank appears, who the interpreter informs you is in charge of the works and of prisoners of war and is invested with supreme power and can sentence you to death. You again refuse to work. Immediately you are surrounded by twenty sentries who tickle your ear with the butts of their rifles or bayonet you. When you regain consciousness you find yourself in an underground cell close to exhaust pipes of the various machines. You stick this usually three, four or five days. Then suddenly the interpreter appears and asks "Will you work now?" Should you answer in the negative you are left for another three or five days. Should you tell him you are thirsty and hungry, having had nothing to eat for three to five days, he will inform you that if you consent to work you can have anything in reason you desire. He takes you to a dining hall and you do justice to what is given you. Then you are given a few bottles of lager beer and a cigar. Your guardian angel unfolds to you a wonderful tale. Give the conversation as it actually took place between the interpreter and myself.

Ferribe State of Affairs.
He said: "You must work for us at your trade (crucible steel smelting) we will pay you 25 marks a day, out of which you pay 10 marks for food and lodging. You shall live in a house in town with civilians and allowed to wear civilian clothes. When your work is finished you may go anywhere you wish, provided you are accompanied by the German with whom you are lodging. You can have any girl you wish, provided she is willing, and there is no reason why you should not be comfortable."

Looking around the shops the only peculiarity I noticed was the truth of the interpreter's remarks concerning the women. In every branch of the works where a prisoner was employed he had women and girls as neighbors. I questioned different Frenchmen about what I'd been told about the women, only to learn that it was true. As many as 500 prisoners of war were living with women and were allowed as much freedom of movement after working hours as the Germans themselves. A large number of girls between 18 and 20 were pregnant, the prisoners of war being responsible. I want it clearly understood that this practice was encouraged by the authorities, as it assisted the birth rate and ensured the output of more work.

What One Man Suffered.
I know a case of a man of a famous Scots regiment who, whilst employed loading a munition train at the siding of certain works in Germany, took thirty round axle boxes of each wagon and removed all grease, substituting gravel, so as to make the axle bearing run hot and cause serious delay, or better still, an explosion. Unluckily he was noticed by a brakeman just as he'd finished the last wagon. For this display of British patriotism he was sentenced by the officer in command to stand up stripped naked in the centre of a small shop. Smith's carpenters then built securely around him three circles of bayonets pointing inwards and upwards at an angle of 45 deg., the bottom circle of bayonets encircling his legs just below the knees, the middle encircling his stomach, the top circle encircling his neck the points were one inch from the man's vein. He was sentenced to be left alone in that position for 72 hours. What was most remarkable of all was that when the door was opened at the termination of 72 hours the man was found upright, but bleeding, and, needless to say, mad.

I was not an eyewitness to this wonderful feat of physical and mental endurance, but I am sure if an advertisement were put out the man who told me the foregoing true story would vouch for it. He is in England at present. The other poor fellow is in an asylum in Germany.



Private Ross

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