

# THE Prisoner of War

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Free to Next of Kin

MAY, 1944

## The Editor Writes —

MANY prisoners of war are being deprived of their letters week after week because well-meaning people on this side are writing too much and too often. A very urgent appeal has reached us from a British Camp Leader in a large Stalag begging us to do what we can to stop the excessive flow of letters to his camp. "Please impress upon relatives and friends of P.O.W.s," he writes, "that one letter a week per man is quite sufficient and would certainly ensure every man getting his mail regularly."

### One Letter a Week

I believe that many men have written to their next-of-kin urging them to keep letters down to one a week, but perhaps it is difficult to make people realise the congestion and delay caused in the Censor's office on the other side if there are two or three letters for Bill Smith instead of one; for there may be thousands of Bill Smiths in the camp, and therefore thousands of extra letters to be censored and distributed without any extra staff to do the work. Naturally the men whose letters are delayed get "fed up" to see their companions getting several letters when they get none. The remedy is for each next-of-kin to organise the mail to the best of his ability. "One a week from home" is the ration, and relatives should collaborate to see that it is not exceeded.

### They All Get Chocolate

I have been looking at a most interesting chart of the contents of the food parcels that are sent to the camps. Each parcel contains about 17 items out of a list of 40 different commodities. Seven different standard parcels are packed at the Packing Centres, and since last month the contents of the parcels have been replanned under expert guidance. No. 7 parcel is a special one for Indians. Of the other six all contain chocolate, tea, sugar, condensed milk, cheese, hot meat, biscuits and butter or margarine, salmon or pilchards, jam or syrup, beef loaf or chopped ham, and most of them dried eggs and rolled oats or oatmeal. One parcel contains pancake batter, another oatmeal block, and I notice that the one parcel with sausages has



Prisoners of war setting off from Stalag Luft 3.

no bacon. The average weekly output from all the Packing Centres in Britain is now 97,000.

### Cheerful Letters—and Others

Somebody has noticed that the letters we publish on our letter pages are almost always cheerful and bright and suggests that it is time we printed some of the other kind. The answer is, of course, that we do. It is only rarely that a gloomy letter is sent to me for publication, because I think that it is realised that hundreds and even thousands of people might be caused needless anxiety by a piece of information about conditions which perhaps affected only the writer and his immediate surroundings. You have only to read the "Official Reports from the Camps" to recognise that we do not make any attempt to conceal real conditions. Many letters reach the Prisoners of War Department containing complaints about one thing or another. These are always investigated, and in suitable cases referred to the Protecting Power or the International Red Cross Committee for action.

### Holiday Camp

Life certainly sounds congenial at Stalag IID, judging by an unofficial account I have seen of the camp. Stalag IID is run as a sort of holiday resort for men who have been working in mines or on other arduous tasks for the past three years.

"They come here for a six weeks' rest with good food and organised games, concerts and sports," writes my informant, "and it's really amazing

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## the Camps

solidly constructed. The rooms are high, with small windows and floors of cement. Kitchens, and infirmary, hospital, and recreation rooms have been separately built.

There is a large sports ground. Two blankets have been issued to each prisoner, who sleep in three-tier bunks.

The rooms are overcrowded and there is not adequate seating accommodation. Lighting is bad and heating insufficient.

The water supply is adequate, but the sanitary installations are not, although all the prisoners have one hot shower each week.

Food is prepared by French prisoners of war in a central kitchen. The medical situation is good. Two British medical officers and seven orderlies are in charge of the infirmary and hospital, and dental treatment is given by a French dentist. Medical supplies are sufficient and hygienic conditions are described as being "not too bad."

Laundry is done by the prisoners of war themselves. Recreational facilities have not yet been organised. Most of these prisoners came from Leros and their morale is very high. They will be sent out to work camps as quickly as possible.

### STALAG XVIIIA, KAISERSTEINBRUCH

1,883 of the 2,335 British prisoners are in the main camp. The others are in work camps. These men are from Italy. The British in the main camp occupy four huts, the remainder are occupied by prisoners of other nationalities.

The huts are built of wood and are divided into two rooms each, which are said to be overcrowded. Three-tiered bunks are in use. Lighting is bad, and washing and bathing facilities are inadequate for the large number of prisoners. There is not enough space for exercise and no sports ground.

Clothing conditions are satisfactory. Correspondence forms had not been issued to the prisoners, but a stock had arrived on the day of the visit and the receipt of mail has been greatly delayed. No religious facilities had so far been organised.

One of the huts has been reserved for use as an infirmary with two British medical officers in charge, assisted by five British medical orderlies.

Up to the time of the visit this hut had not been sufficiently fitted out as an infirmary, but the doctors had an adequate supply of drugs.

### STALAG XVIIIA

Work Camp A941.—There are 68 prisoners of war here, accommodated in wooden huts, which are situated on a hill. They have two-tier bunks, one sheet, a pillow and two blankets. There

are huts in use as dining-rooms, kitchens and for sanitary installations.

Heating and lighting are adequate and there is plenty of room for tables and chairs. Clothing conditions are not good. Medical and dental attention is given by civilians and appears to be satisfactory. Recreational facilities have not yet been organised. The men are employed on drainage work. Hours of work are 8½ per day and week-ends are free.

### HOSPITAL AT OBERMASSFELD

Obermassfeld is described as very full and many airmen are brought here if wounded when captured, as well as surgical cases from Kloster Haina.

271 British patients and 104 Americans are in the care of nine British medical officers and a British dentist. There are also nose and throat specialists. The supply of instruments and drugs is, generally speaking, sufficient, and the operating and dental theatres, massage room and artificial limb "shop" are quite well equipped. The dental station deals with prisoners from many camps in IX Area.

Apart from being somewhat overcrowded this hospital can be considered to be satisfactory.

### HOSPITAL AT BAD SODEN, SALMUNSTER

After the repatriation of sick and wounded prisoners of war last October, Kloster Haina was closed and the "eye-station" and blind prisoners of war transferred to this new hospital at Bad Soden.

A former sanatorium has been taken over. It is on a hillside facing south and is surrounded by a park.

There are patients of other nationalities besides British (who number 36, including 10 officers), and all are under the care of two British medical officers and British orderlies and two Braille teachers.

The impression



A group of prisoners at Marlag und Milag Nord.



Outside the internment camp of Dongelberg, Belgium.



A trio of airmen at Stalag Luft I.