

REPORTS ON
BRITISH PRISON-CAMPS
IN
INDIA AND BURMA

VISITED BY
THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS
COMMITTEE
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1917

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2. CAMP AT AHMEDNAGAR (BOMBAY PRESIDENCY)

Visited 7 March, 1917. Contained 1,621 persons, of whom 452 were military (apparently including captured crews of German ships), the rest civilians. The camp was divided into three separate sections, A and B (to which prisoners were assigned according to social class), and C for those who had given their parole.

. . . *Housing.* The internment camp at Ahmednagar comprises a large number of buildings, some of which had already been used as quarters for troops, while the rest were erected specially for the internees. In Camp C, the parole camp, the internees are housed in three large dressed stone buildings, with wide verandahs. Four officers have to themselves a pretty bungalow, surrounded by greenery and flowers. In Camp B, the usual form of hutment is a building measuring 150 by 60 feet, sub-divided into a central hall and several smaller chambers. Right round it the roof projects about 26 feet, forming a verandah, supported by columns. The roof is usually of corrugated iron covered with tiles, which are an excellent and cheap protection against heat. In a few of the huts corrugated iron has been used for the inside division walls, but the experiment has apparently not been very successful. All rooms have large bays, and the open space left between the two slopes of the roof ensures constant ventila-

tion. Moreover, the climate makes it possible to keep all doors wide open. The 150 by 60 feet huts accommodate 43 men each. In the other quarters also the space is amply sufficient. The internees as a rule have a lot of baggage, and the piles of boxes, trunks and valises make many of the rooms seem crowded.

All inhabited quarters have the earth covered with a paving of squared stones. The only exceptions are two small rooms in a building formerly used as a store, in which the hard earth floor has not yet been replaced by one of stone. All walls are whitewashed. The buildings are excellently cared for, and spaced well apart. A number of fine trees afford shade here and there, while the recently made plantations and the many cultivated gardens near the huts show a wish to enliven the appearance of the camp. Some buildings were covered with climbing plants in full bloom.

Under the heading of furniture, the administration provides each internee with a bed, a table and a wooden arm chair. The interned are given all facilities for adding cupboards, shelves, easy chairs and anything else they may want, by ordering them from fellow countrymen in the camp who do joinery and upholstery.

The camp is lit by oil lamps at the cost of the administration. Inmates who wish to have additional lamps may obtain them by payment. "Lights out" is at 10.30 p.m.

To complete this description of the housing accommodation we will add that the interned have full liberty to decorate their rooms with pictures,

photographs, portraits of their sovereign and the German Generals, and with flags and patriotic emblems. . . .

The following is the official list of daily rations per man, for both interned people and the British troops on duty at the camp.

| | INTERNED. | BRITISH TROOPS. |
|----------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| Bread ... | 453.6 gr. (1 lb.) | 453.6 gr. (1 lb.) |
| Meat ... | 340.2 ,, | 453.6 ,, (1 lb.) |
| Potatoes ... | 226.8 ,, ($\frac{1}{2}$ lb.) | 340.2 ,, |
| Vegetables ... | 225.1 ,, | 113.4 ,, |
| New milk ... | 113.4 ,, | — |
| Tea ... | 14.17 ,, | 5.67 ,, |
| Sugar ... | 56.70 ,, | 39.69 ,, |
| Salt ... | 14.17 ,, | — |
| Pepper ... | .4 ,, | — |
| Rice ... | 56.70 ,, | — |
| Butter ... | 28.35 ,, | — |

For variety, 28.35 gr. of coffee are supplied instead of 14.17 gr. of tea, and 28.35 gr. of lentils in place of rice.

Most of the kitchens are staffed by 54 men, and are in separate buildings provided with all the necessary equipment. The head cook has had all openings in the kitchens covered with movable metal gauze to prevent contamination by flies, but often encounters the deliberate negligence of the internees, who will not recognise the importance to health of this precaution. Many of the kitchens have adjoining bakeries, which provide all kinds of cakes and dainties for payment. These bakeries are private

ventures controlled by the administration with a strict eye to health. Work in the kitchens is performed by volunteers from among the interned, who are in this way enabled to earn good pay. Some of them are professional cooks. In each camp a committee elected by the prisoners themselves is given charge of the kitchens and of arranging bills of fare.

Rations are distributed at the following hours:—

8 a.m. *Breakfast*. Coffee or tea; rice; bread and butter.

12 noon. *Lunch*. Soup; meat; vegetables.

5 p.m. *Supper*. Soup; meat; vegetables.

We were present at the mid-day distribution and satisfied ourselves that the rations were ample and of good quality. Each man has his own spoon, fork, etc. Meat is provided every day. . . .

The pastrycooks in each section sell sweets and cakes. All other provisions can be bought at the section canteens, which are well stocked with all kinds of goods sold at prices fixed by the authorities and displayed on the premises. We were given a price-list of all articles sold. All the milk brought to camp comes from a Government depôt in the charge of the head doctor and controlled by the cantonment magistrate. It is of exactly the same quality as that provided to British troops and Europeans living in the neighbourhood. It is sterilised in the presence and under the direction of a skilled British overseer, and then placed in sealed vessels and delivered by a British employee to the head cook at each kitchen. This procedure prevents any possibility of it being contaminated or adulterated. . . .

Hygiene. An abundant supply of running water

is delivered under pressure from a well $15\frac{1}{2}$ miles from the camp. Every house is provided with taps. For safety's sake the water was boiled before being used, until a few months ago: now it is chlorinised and then dechlorinised chemically. The water is cold and non-laxative. The camp contains 130 douches, one for every ten prisoners. Washing water is discharged into a river some distance from the camp. Prisoners receive 3 lbs. of wood daily for heating water. . . .

Medical attendance. The camp medical service is under Lieut-Col. Molesworth, who is assisted by two British captains and a doctor qualified to practise in India. Besides these, there are six British military doctors in the Ahmednagar cantonment who are called in to the prisoners if needed. Nineteen German orderlies are distributed among the three camp infirmaries and the hospital.

The camp contains three young German doctors who do nothing in the way of attending to their fellow-countrymen. We were astonished at this and questioned the doctors. We discovered that they demand the same freedom as is enjoyed by the British doctors, in return for their services. Since this request could not be granted, Lieut.-Col. Molesworth dispensed with their services and forbade them to enter the hospital. . . .

The hospital is fitted up in accordance with modern requirements. Four wards are kept for the prisoners and a fifth will be equipped for the more comfortable accommodation of sick officers. The operating theatre contains the latest patterns of sterilising stoves and instruments. The analytical

laboratory, used chiefly for examining the blood of malaria, the stools of dysenteric and the sputa of tuberculous patients, is equally well equipped. Dressings and medicines are imported from England and ordered from the central depôt at Bombay. Hospital patients have good beds with spring mattresses and mosquito curtains. Cases are classified according to complaint, and special orderlies and material are allotted to each category.

Death rate. The climate at Ahmednagar is one of the healthiest in India. The camp lies high. Coming from Bombay, the train passes through tunnels and over viaducts to reach the top of the Ghâts which command the western coast of India. We took particulars of the highest and lowest temperatures for the year 1916. . . .

In July, as the plague in its epidemic form had been identified in the town of Ahmednagar, the head doctor issued a notice, inviting all prisoners to be inoculated at the dispensary against this disease. No prisoner would be treated, so a circular was distributed giving details of the precautions to be taken against the bodies of dead rats. Soon afterwards the case of plague referred to above [in a passage not given here] occurred in Camp B. That camp was immediately cleared and its occupants were transferred for a fortnight to tents in Ahmednagar fort. As soon as the camp had been disinfected, the floors fired, the walls scraped and re-whitewashed, the furniture treated with cresol and all rat-holes stopped, the prisoners returned to their quarters.

Some meetings held to impress upon the prisoners the need of preventive inoculation resulted in 854

prisoners allowing themselves to be vaccinated; the rest refused. The epidemic plague was fortunately limited to a single case. . . .

Work. The prisoners at Ahmednagar are not forced by the authorities to do any work at all. All the men who follow an occupation do so of their own freewill and receive payment. A kind of arrangement has been come to between the poor prisoners and their well-to-do comrades by which the latter give them work.

The camp authorities on their part take pains to afford craftsmen an opportunity of pursuing their trades by getting them orders from the people of the neighbourhood. Payment for orders executed is made through the camp accountant, who opens a special account for each workman and pays him the money in regulation instalments. We looked this register through and observed that quite respectable sums had been earned in this way by the prisoners. Among the craftsmen noted by us were garage mechanics, watchmakers, joiners, plumbers, framemakers, tailors, a gunsmith, a piano-tuner, painters, photographers, etc. Every section has its hair-dressers.

Discipline. The relations between the commandant and officers and the prisoners seemed to be very good. Everything possible is done to render captivity less irksome, either by giving all the freedom compatible with the demands of discipline, or by avoiding anything that might cause offence. So far as the necessary obligations of a life in common permit, each prisoner occupies himself as he sees fit and to suit his own tastes. Some of the men devote

themselves to gymnastics and sports; others cultivate a small garden; others, again, read, write or draw. Some spend their time in learning foreign languages. In Camp A there are skilled workmen who make all kinds of articles, some of them very artistic. Last year there was an exhibition of all these manufactures, most of which were purchased by the prisoners themselves. . . .

Disciplinary punishments. The disciplinary regulations are the same as those mentioned in connection with Sumerpur Camp, and, in fact, are identical in all Indian camps. The only modification in this case is to allow a prisoner punished by having his correspondence stopped, to inform his family of the fact, and of the duration of the punishment. The offences which have had to be punished are as follows: Drunkenness—formerly very common, but now reduced to one case a month on the average—quarrelling, talking with prisoners on parole, using invisible ink, theft, breaking into the canteen, etc. Most of the misdemeanours occur in Camp A, which contains many sailors and lower-class prisoners. . . .

Religious services. At Ahmednagar camp are several Benedictine monks who were missionaries in Northern India, as well as some Catholic priests and Protestant pastors. They hold services alternately in the premises of the Y.M.C.A.

Intellectual recreation. The prisoners have the use of a large building, which acts as theatre, two smaller theatre rooms, reading rooms with English papers, a well equipped English library, and a billiard room, which is open from 9 a.m. till 8.15 p.m. Singing and music is permitted. There are two

orchestras, and many of the prisoners devote themselves to music.

There are many dogs in the camp.

All kinds of games are allowed. There are tennis and badminton courts. Card games, notably "bridge," are in great favour among the prisoners.

Letters and postcards. Prisoners may write four letters a month, two in German and two in English, on a single sheet of paper measuring four by seven inches. They must be in Roman characters. Any number of postcards may be sent, but, as the cards have very little printed matter on them, they are not very popular. There are no restrictions as to the number and length of postcards or of letters which the prisoners may receive. . . .

Until August, 1916, the British Government allowed the liquidators of German and Austrian businesses in India, in course of being wound up, to pay their employees and members 80-120 rupees a month. Since then this permission has been withdrawn, to the great annoyance of the persons interested, and as a result the number of people without means has increased rapidly. It is expected that it will be about 200 in March, and 300 later on. . . .

In regard to the censoring of letters, which is done in the camp, we think that possibly some changes might advantageously be made. A single censor and two helpers cannot comfortably handle the correspondence of over 1,600 prisoners with despatch and all the care required. Up to a certain point we can sympathise with the strong complaints brought by the director of an important German bank against the way in which the censorship is con-

ducted by a very young officer, who perhaps lacks the time and experience needed for a proper discrimination in dealing with correspondence. Some Germans who have been interned for nearly three years demand to be repatriated at once, or at least transferred to Dagshai, in the mountains north of Simla, whither the convalescent prisoners are sent in the hot season. Consul Ringger made a note of these demands, also of requests for permission being given to receive monthly sums from the liquidators of businesses in course of liquidation. The matter will be taken up with the Indian Government.