

ARMY SERVICE FORCES  
OFFICE OF THE COMMANDING GENERAL  
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

SPMGG

March, 1945.

To the Next of Kin  
of American Prisoners of War  
in the Hands of the Enemy.

Dear Next of Kin:

The recent glorious successes of Allied Armies which resulted in the release of thousands of Americans interned in the Philippines and a lesser though equally important number in Europe have swamped the Provost Marshal General's Office with inquiries and the pleasurable task of informing next of kin that their loved ones have been returned to Allied control. Every attempt is being made to inform you at the earliest possible date and at the same time to assure the best possible treatment for those less fortunate individuals still in enemy hands.

All persons in the Provost Marshal General's Office and in the War Department, including those in Washington and those in the field, who have anything to do with the prisoner of war program have constantly in mind one dominating thought, and that thought is to do everything humanly possible to insure that our own people in the hands of the enemy have all of the benefits of the Geneva Convention which it is possible for us to get for them, and to insure in every way possible their early return to their homes in this country in the best possible condition. To accomplish this we are ever on the alert to avoid anything which will give the enemy an excuse for failing to give to our men everything to which they are entitled or cause the enemy to do anything which would interfere in any way with their return to their homes in the best possible condition.

There have been many comments on the radio, in the press, and by persons in the street to the effect that American treatment of German prisoners of war has been "soft." That is untrue. American treatment has been firm and fair.

A careful reading of the provisions of the Geneva Convention and a comparison of the treatment given prisoners of war in the United States with the provisions of that Convention will show that the War Department has followed a policy of giving to German prisoners of war exactly what they are entitled to under the Convention but no more.

The War Department believes it essential to pursue a program that will protect the Americans in enemy hands and eventually bring them safely back to the homes they have so gallantly defended. The necessity for such a policy was recognized by the House Military Affairs Committee, which, following an investigation which failed to substantiate any of the numerous coddling rumors, reported as follows:

"The provisions of the Geneva Convention of 1929 are obviously being carried out to the letter and it is well indeed that such is the case, since the slightest deviation therefrom on our part would instantly result in more than retaliatory measures on the part of our enemies against American prisoners of war in their hands. Such a contingency must not be overlooked for a single instant."

The War Department intends to continue adhering to the Geneva Convention regardless of criticism not only because under Article 6 of the Constitution of the United States, treaties such as the Geneva Convention constitute part of the supreme law of the land and the War Department has no choice but to carry out the supreme law of the land, but also because we are convinced that it is paying dividends in the saving of lives and the preservation of health among our own men in the hands of the enemy.

In the Washington Star of February 13, 1945 appeared an article by Victor O. Jones, North American Newspaper Alliance, date lined "Somewhere in Holland" and headed "Pampering of Nazi Prisoners may be Saving American Lives." In referring to German prisoners of war, he said:

"We asked all the prisoners whether they had been afraid of mistreatment after capture. They all said their officers had told them they'd be shot or tortured, but that they hadn't believed it because they had had letters from captured comrades who told them British and American treatment of prisoners was excellent.

"It may burn you up to hear that German prisoners are getting cigarettes when you can't, but it's not a big price to pay when you can get guys like these to come out of strong bunkers without firing a shot. After the 9th Army troops took Bruchelen without resistance they were surprised by the strength of some of its fortifications. The main body of Germans had retired, but a die-hard rear guard had been left behind with instructions to fight to the last bullet. If they'd done so our casualties might have been much heavier than they were. From that point of view, our policy of living up to the Geneva Convention is smart tactics, even without considering other angles." (Underlining supplied).

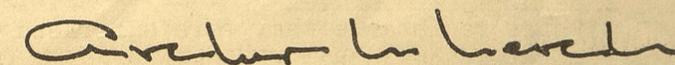
It is hardly necessary to explain to next of kin of American prisoners of war held by the Germans what an outstanding job the Red Cross is doing in getting food and medicine to our people. In the Sunday Star, Washington, D.C., February 18, 1945, under the heading, "Red Cross Sends Food to U.S. Prisoners in Germany via Sweden", Mr. Maurice Pate of The American Red Cross said:

"The greatest single factor which gives us strength in getting relief and maintaining regular communication with our prisoner kin is the scrupulous attitude of the American Army in fulfilling the Treaty of Geneva toward enemy prisoners. Some have lightly called this policy of our Army "mollycoddling." The truth is that the Army has maintained the highest discipline in handling enemy prisoners. It treats these men strictly but fairly and has obtained from them millions of valuable man-work hours."

In the article to which I have just referred, Mr. Pate also stated that the American prisoners receiving regular Red Cross food packages eat better and have more tobacco than the Germans who are guarding them. He also stated that thus far the American prisoner with his Red Cross and private parcels eats as well as, or better than the average German civilian. Our information indicates that American prisoners receive between 1800 and 2000 calories of food per day from the Germans. Apparently that is not true of French and Russian prisoners. A recent statement in the New York Times was to the effect that French and Russian prisoners in Germany are not treated in accordance with the provisions of the Geneva Convention, and have been reduced to eating rats. The value of strict adherence to the Geneva Convention is apparent.

The Provost Marshal General handles for the War Department matters concerning American prisoners of war in the hands of the enemy and also concerning enemy prisoners of war in our hands. The purpose of this letter is to point out to you as next of kin the close relationship existing between our strict adherence to the terms of the Geneva Convention and the health and lives of our people in the hands of the enemy. We feel that when these facts are better known to the American public there will be less criticism of the War Department's adherence to the provisions of the Geneva Convention.

Sincerely yours,



Archer L. Lerch,  
Major General, U.S.A.,  
The Provost Marshal General.