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Organized Savagery: Legitimization of British Occupation in the Post-Ottoman State

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Introduction

After years of writing to correspondents, compiling letters and telegrams, pouring over data from the Red Cross and British Military, Lord Justice Robert Younger and the Prisoners in Turkey Commission presented their findings to Parliament. On November 7th of 1918, Younger and his commission stepped onto the floor of Westminster to discuss the condition of British and Indian soldiers in the Ottoman camps and the logistics of their repatriation.¹ The Great War had ended in the Middle Eastern theatre with the signing of the Armistice of Mudros on October 30th, 1918, leaving British politicians to sort through the rubble of the Ottoman Empire, investigating the condition of the land, its people, and government as they decided how to handle their defeated enemy.

In considering the question of indemnities and reparations for the upcoming 1919 Paris Peace Conference, British Parliament had to account for all war claims and losses, from infrastructure damage to the cost incurred from human suffering. Even before the conference date was set, British “avidity for oil” in relation to the “Turkish question” of post-war occupation was an open secret.² These underlying interests were present throughout the course of the Great War, resulting in the invasion and occupation of Basra in 1914 and the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1915 that made the Middle East look like pieces of meat on a butcher’s chart.³ From these discussions and considerations, the Treaty of Sevres was fashioned and signed on August 20th of 1920, carving up the Post-Ottoman state and placing new polities under the mandate of the various Entente nations.⁴

But how did accounts of human suffering play into these negotiations? How much did the British Parliament value their soldiers and why? This paper assesses how the British Parliament and press used stories about the suffering of British and Indian prisoners of war in Ottoman prison camps as a means to delegitimize Ottoman rule and legitimize British occupation. This paper also suggests that Britain used this interpretation of prisoners’ pain as a means to secure dominion over the economy and resources of the Post-Ottoman state.

1. “FO 383/462,” in *Foreign Office: Prisoners of War and Aliens Department* (National Archives, 1918). <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/browse/t/h/C2617705>.

2. “Coercion of The Turk,” in *The Times* (The Times Digital Archive, March 12, 1918). https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS268635756/TTDA?u=purdue_main&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=86cd85c4.

3. Eugene Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans: The Great War in the Middle East* (Basic Books, 2015), 80 & 285-287.

4. Rogan, 392-393.

Assessing the Conditions of Ottoman Camps

Very little modern research exists about Ottoman prison camps during the Great War. Most historical analyses on the topic amount to an uncritical repetition of biased primary accounts in online forums or are only briefly covered in more generalized histories. The truth is almost always grey. This section seeks to establish a baseline understanding of what these prisons were truly like to better facilitate critical analysis of British presentation and representation of these prisons in comparison to the actual conditions.

On the most basic of levels, the Ottoman Empire took prisoners. This at the very least signifies that the Ottomans recognized the right these soldiers had to life, or else they would have simply killed all enemy combatants. Conversely, the capturing of prisoners in a country whose able-bodied men have been recruited into war could be viewed as a more pragmatic solution to labor shortages the Ottoman Empire faced at the time.

In any case, there was little international prerequisite on which the Ottoman Empire could base their policy for treating prisoners of war. The Geneva Convention of 1864 focused primarily on the rights and treatment of wounded combatants while the brevity and vagueness of the 1907 Hague Convention left room for interpretation. Stricter international agreement and clarification on the rights and treatment of prisoners of war waited until the 1929 Geneva Convention.⁵

Despite complaints of obstructive red tape, the Ottoman Empire did allow the International Red Cross to inspect internment camps in Anatolia from October of 1916 to January of 1917.⁶ Its sister organization, the Red Crescent, regularly inspected camps across the Empire and the Ottoman government itself performed inspections. At Afion-Kara-Hissar and Kastamuni, government investigations led to official reprimand and replacement of Ottoman officers for the poor treatment and abuse of prisoners.⁷ The presence of the Red Crescent's charity was palpable

5. "Prisoners of War and Detainees Protected under International Humanitarian Law," in *ICRC*, (International Committee of the Red Cross, October 29, 2010).
<https://www.icrc.org/en/document/protected-persons/prisoners-war>.

6. Alfred Boissier & Adolphe Vischer, *Documents Publics A L'Occasion de la Guerre European* (International Committee of the Red Cross, March 1917).
<https://grandeguerre.icrc.org/en/Camps/Kirchehir/108/fr/>.

7. Prisoners in Turkey Commission, *Report on the Treatment of British Prisoners of War in Turkey* (H.S. Stationery Office, November 1918), 11-12 & 16. <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/report-on-treatment-of-british-prisoners-of-war-in-turkey>.

for almost all prisoners, as they provided postcards and letters for the prisoners to write home weekly.⁸

The Ottoman Empire in general lacked resources and supplies at this point. After years of war, officers, civilians, and prisoners alike suffered from a dwindling supply of food, incomplete rail infrastructure, damaged transport lines, blocked harbors, and a short supply of laborers and qualified professionals. Damaged trade systems and infrastructure left hospitals without the medicine to treat patients, including POWs, and formally trained British and Indian medics worked hospital floors to make up for the lack of qualified staff.⁹ British and Indian prisoners fended for themselves regarding food and provisions. Prisoners navigated the local civilian market as the Ottoman economy began to free-fall, struggling to scratch up necessary supplies with the monthly allowance the Spanish, American, and Dutch Consuls dealt out in the face of inflation.¹⁰

The internment camps themselves varied in condition and treatment. While guards beat POWs in Angora, the British officers held captive at Yozgad could ski and borrow local dogs for hunting expeditions.¹¹ Abandoned buildings served as housing in most prison camps. The buildings, by the nature of their abandonment, were not in the best of shape. Complaints of exposure were frequent. One prisoner at Belemelik explained that he had a simple “sheet of brown paper over part of the window to keep out a little spray of rain which blows in” which had blown down, resulting in the water stains on the letter he sent home.¹² Other complaints arose from the poor ventilation, lack of heating, and vermin in the facilities.¹³ The Taurus and Amanus Mountains housed a plethora of labor camps, wherein European-headed enterprises used prison labor for the

8. 28815, *Maurice George Delpratt Correspondence* (John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland, 1915-1920).

http://bishop.slq.qld.gov.au/webclient/DeliveryManager?pid=601915&custom_att_2=simple_view er.

9. Prisoners in Turkey Commission, *Report on the Treatment of British Prisoners of War in Turkey* (H.S. Stationery Office, November 1918). <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/report-on-treatment-of-british-prisoners-of-war-in-turkey>.

10. Prisoners in Turkey Commission, 3 & 15.

11. Prisoners in Turkey Commission, 12 & 15.

12. Maurice George Delpratt, “Letter, 24 May 1917,” in 28815, *Maurice George Delpratt Correspondence* (John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland, 1917).

http://bishop.slq.qld.gov.au/webclient/DeliveryManager?pid=601915&custom_att_2=simple_view er.

13. “Turkish Prison Horrors,” in *The Times* (The Times Digital Archive, July 31, 1919). https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS184749311/TTDA?u=purdue_main&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=4d9a18.

construction of railroads and infrastructure.¹⁴ The Belemedik camp paid its prisoners twenty piastres a day to continue construction on the Baghdad railway.¹⁵

The prisoners taken from Kut al-Amar likely suffered the most under Ottoman care. After their starvation diet from the four-month long siege in 1916, all but the most infirm walked across the Syrian desert to Ras al-Ayn and the Taurus Mountains for internment at labor camps. With little food or medicine, wasting bodies, deteriorating clothes, and abusive or neglectful guards, many of the British and Indian captives were left to die by the roadside.¹⁶ They suffered from a high rate of mortality, with 2,611 of the original 15,672 captives dead by October 25th, 1918, while another 2,222 of those captured were listed as “Untraced.”¹⁷

The Younger Report

Following the Armistice of Mudros, the Ottoman government began repatriating British and Indian soldiers. Throughout the war, family members of the prisoners sent letters into newspapers and government offices to raise awareness and promote aid for their sons and brothers, aware of the camp conditions from the letters their boys sent back home.¹⁸ Now as an occupying and victorious force, the British government had full access to the camps and could more properly assess these claims and enforce humane conditions.

By conducting interviews with escaped or repatriated prisoners, speaking to the Spanish, Dutch, and American Consuls, and by contacting the Red Cross representatives that inspected the prisons in person, Lord Justice Robert Younger and his Treatment of Prisoners in Turkey Commission pieced together a summary of the various accounts and experiences of different POWs across the prison camps of the Ottoman Empire. The 1918 “Report on the Treatment of British Prisoners of War in Turkey” crowned their three-year long investigation. The Younger Report, as it was more colloquially known, details the experience of the Kut soldiers from the moment of their capture to their desert marches and

14. Prisoners in Turkey Commission, *Report on the Treatment of British Prisoners of War in Turkey* (H.S. Stationery Office, November 1918), 12-13. <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/report-on-treatment-of-british-prisoners-of-war-in-turkey>.

15. Prisoners in Turkey Commission, 18.

16. Eugene Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans: The Great War in the Middle East* (Basic Books, 2015), 272-273.

17. Prisoners in Turkey Commission, 5.

18. ANXIOUS, “Prisoners of the Turks,” in *The Times* (The Times Digital Archives, April 16, 1918). https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS86575760/TTDA?u=purdue_main&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=c951c0ae.

evaluates the conditions of hospitals and prison camps throughout the Ottoman Empire.

The commission presented the Younger Report to Parliament on November 7th of 1918, during a period when the British government was formally appraising the cost of the war as a matter of determining war indemnities and reparations.¹⁹ On November 19th, the House of Commons discussed peace terms and German reparations. Parliamentary members demanded that the “net cost of the war incurred by the Allies” be issued as an indemnity against the German Empire as a prerequisite for any peace talks. The House made it clear that they wanted Germany to pay and extended that demand to her allies. In the same meeting, Parliamentary members asked “who was to be master at Constantinople.” Assistant Secretary, Lord Robert Cecil, assured the House that the Turks “were now absolutely in our power.” He condemned the mismanagement of the Ottoman Empire during the war, fraught with “delay and resistance” that impeded British negotiations, and worried that there were signs “that even now the Turks had not learnt their lesson.” Cecil finished by saying that “the Turks would make a profound mistake if they did not realize that their power” to deny the British “was finally finished.”²⁰ The want of vengeance, via indemnity and teaching the Turk a lesson, was at the front of Parliament’s mind when presented with the “Report on the Treatment of British Prisoners of War in Turkey.”

Thus, it is imperative to discuss the anti-Turkic rhetoric that frames this report. Younger asserts that two things led to the poor treatment of British POWs in Anatolia: the supposedly medieval disposition of the Turks as a people and a deliberate, systematic abuse on the part of the Ottoman government.

The report pays special attention to the “helpless confusion of the Turkish post”, the “oriental hospitals” of a “civilization centuries out of date”, and the “predatory greed and indiscipline” of the Ottoman “rabble.”²¹ The backwards attitudes of the Ottoman peoples resulted in incompetence and hostile conditions from which the POWs suffered. The report states that “the chaotic condition of the Turkish postal service makes it impossible to ensure” POWs would receive

19. “FO 383/462,” in *Foreign Office: Prisoners of War and Aliens Department* (National Archives, 1918). <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/browse/r/h/C2617705>.

20. “House of Commons,” in *The Times* (The Times Digital Archives, November 19, 1918). https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS168102771/TTDA?u=purdue_main&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=db0fea8c.

21. Prisoners in Turkey Commission, *Report on the Treatment of British Prisoners of War in Turkey* (H.S. Stationery Office, November 1918), 17, 4, & 5. <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/report-on-treatment-of-british-prisoners-of-war-in-turkey>.

their mail and parcels east of Aleppo.²² In the hospitals, “the typical Turkish orderly [is] lazy and dirty and dishonest” and the concept of sanitation was “beyond the local talent.”²³ Hospital conditions only improved when British and Indian medical officers took “matters entirely in their own hands, down to the simplest dressing of wounds and the most elementary demands of hygiene.”²⁴ Meanwhile, the ordinary soldiery of the Ottoman Empire “busily thieved” boots, water, and medicine from the unarmed men taken at Kut while civilians pelted them with stones.²⁵

The report denies that “where western standards are so unknown it is futile to condemn,” accusing the Ottoman state of deliberately concealing prison conditions, a sign that “there has been no willful carelessness...[that] the Turks have not been so ignorant of western ideas.”²⁶ The report especially focuses on the deflection and squabbling of Ottoman politicians and officers when handling international requests to investigate the camps. Ultimately, Younger determined that “the Turks had neither the power nor the will to protect the lives of the prisoners they had taken.”²⁷ Younger considered the Turks to be brutes even at the highest of levels, inherently incapable of taking responsibility or treating others with dignity.

Thus, the report simultaneously paints the Ottoman Empire as governed by people incompetent regarding modern organization and standards, but somehow still cunning enough to orchestrate an elaborate veil of concealment to thwart calls of inhumane practice from the Western nations. Younger portrayed the Ottoman Empire as an entity that was not only unable to govern itself, but a morally repugnant body that should not be allowed to govern itself. Younger explicitly doubts that conditions would change without the jealous eye of Britain watching over the Turks, because they were simply incapable of feeling responsible for their prisoners’ wellbeing.²⁸ In this way, Younger calls on Parliament to assume control of the Post-Ottoman state in order to prevent a return to inhumane conditions, an inevitability should Ottoman rule persist.

Then the Post-Ottoman state could be creditably eliminated as an answer to the question “who was to become master at Constantinople.” The door

22. Prisoners in Turkey Commission, 3.

23. Prisoners in Turkey Commission, 4

24. Prisoners in Turkey Commission, 5 & 8.

25. Prisoners in Turkey Commission, 6 & 17.

26. Prisoners in Turkey Commission, *Report on the Treatment of British Prisoners of War in Turkey* (H.S. Stationery Office, November 1918), 1-2. <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/report-on-treatment-of-british-prisoners-of-war-in-turkey>.

27. Prisoners in Turkey Commission, 6.

28. Prisoners in Turkey Commission, 18.

remained open for some influential foreign nation to take over Anatolia, and Britain remained interested. Throughout the war, Britain had vied for access to the oil rich lands of Ottoman provinces and territories. Now as victors of the Great War, Britain had the chance to legitimately crack open the Ottoman oil honeycomb.

Popular Legitimization of British Occupation

Following the Sykes-Picot Agreement and Balfour Declaration, which prematurely and contradictorily divvied up the territorial spoils of war, the British government needed to come up with a politically legitimate way to split the Ottoman Empire. Several institutions vied for influence over such a momentous decision, submitting memorandums and recommendations to official offices. The Federation of British Industries (FBI) rose to the challenge. As a lobbying organization composed of more than 124 British firms, the FBI influenced decisions regarding labor relations and tariff reform since 1916 and maintained a deep interest in the resources the Ottoman territories could provide.²⁹ Their “Scheme for Exacting Payment” published in February of 1919, advised that the Entente could absorb the “potential revenue-producing assets of Turkey” under the cause of reparation. The memorandum provides indemnity estimates and suggests a policy that would not only put the Post-Ottoman state under crushing debt and economic subservience to the Entente but would result in the Entente being placed “in the position of the administrator of a bankrupt firm.” Under this plan, the Entente would reserve “all present railways and all...methods of penetration with Turkey or Bulgaria” for their own use as well as “all mineral or land concessions.”³⁰ This would grant the Entente and Britain access to Ottoman oil and transportation routes from the Middle East into Europe. This proposal set Britain on top of an Ottoman oil monopoly, while the economically incapacitated Post-Ottoman state could do nothing but sit back and watch.

But the conditions of these reparations rested in Britain’s ability to establish cost and suffering over the course of the war. Thus began a flood of popular media reciting the inhumane treatment of British and Indian prisoners by

29. *Federation of British Industries Collection*, (Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, 1916-1965). <https://mrc.epexio.com/records/FBI>.

30. “Enemy Indemnities,” in *The Times* (The Times Digital Archives, February 5, 1919). https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS51711045/TTDA?u=purdue_main&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=5014c3e5.

the Ottomans as the 1919 Peace Conference got underway in January and discussions regarding the Ottoman Empire bled into August of 1920.³¹

British officers used newspapers and interviews to broadcast the narrative that the Ottoman Empire proved itself incapable of self-governance through their treatment of prisoners. *The Times* interviewed Vice-Admiral Somerset Calthorpe, the High Commissioner of the Post-Ottoman state, on July 31st, 1919. Calthorpe declared that the Turks were incapable of treating prisoners humanely and it was “hopeless to expect any real alteration” in prison conditions “while the Turks remained their own masters.” It was only with Entente occupation that, “radical and humane changes [had] been forced upon them” thereby improving those conditions and the wellbeing of the remaining British and Indian prisoners. The author takes care to note that Ottoman officials resented these changes and that “nothing but a constant watch by the Entente authorities” would prevent a resumption of the “old horrible conditions.”³²

The influence of Britain’s anti-Ottoman rhetoric on media representations of the Ottoman prisons expanded beyond news articles. Lowell Thomas’ newsreel about the Middle Eastern theatre released to mass acclaim in August of 1919, detailing and glamorizing the Orientalist exploits of T.E. Lawrence.³³ During this Peace Conference period from 1919 to late 1920, former British and Indian prisoners of the Ottoman Empire saw not only the deluge of articles on Ottoman prison conditions but also the immense popularity and money-making potential of Lawrence’s accounts. Several autobiographies were released in this time frame, detailing the lives of British prisoners in the Ottoman Empire.

In his 1920 autobiography, *A Prisoner in Turkey*, Second Lieutenant John Still recounts his experience as an Ottoman prisoner. Ottoman forces captured Still during the Dardanelles Campaign of 1915.³⁴ Still, a member of the 6th Battalion of the East Yorkshire Regiment, experienced life in the prison camps at Angora and Afion-Kara-Hissar before his repatriation.³⁵ Still prefaces his account of the Ottoman prisons with select excerpts from Younger’s “Report on the Treatment of British Prisoners of War in Turkey”, explicitly referring to sections

31. Eugene Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans: The Great War in the Middle East* (Basic Books, 2015), 390-394.

32. “Turkish Prison Horrors,” *The Times* (The Times Digital Archives, July 31, 1919). https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS184749311/TTDA?u=purdue_main&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=4d9a18.

33. “The Players: Lowell Thomas,” in *Lawrence of Arabia* (Public Broadcasting Service, 2003). <https://www.pbs.org/lawrenceofarabia/players/thomas.html>.

34. John Still, *A Prisoner in Turkey* (John Lane Company, 1920), 1. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc2.ark:/13960/t9f47jn9t>.

35. Still, viii.

that emphasize the Ottoman Empire's incompetency.³⁶ The explicit political influence on this text is undeniable, as the words are lifted straight from the Younger Report and color the rest of the book, making it impossible to disentangle Still's experience from the officially presented narrative.

The media also adopted the narrative of Turkish incompetence, as expressed through the treatment of British and Indian POWs, to legitimize calls for British oversight and occupation of Anatolia. The notion that the Turks did not deserve to rule themselves was most succinctly expressed by *The Times*' "Ultimatum to Turkey" on July 19th, 1920. The author scolds the Turkish nationals who objected to the treaty conditions most recently put forth by the Entente at the Peace Conference. He asserts that the Entente had resolved "to put an end once and for all to the empire of the Turks" due to the Ottoman government's inability to protect its charges, citing incidents of "organized savagery" including "massacre", "deportation", and "maltreatment of prisoners of war" over the course of the Great War. This explicitly ties British reparation demands of occupation and economic oversight in the Post-Ottoman state to the suffering incurred by British and Indian prisoners during the war. However, the author is quick to assure his British audience that "the clauses providing for certain measures of financial control" to which the Post-Ottoman delegates objected, were introduced to "protect Turkey against...corruption and speculation" not to secure "the subjection of Turkey." Maintaining the appearance of impartiality and paternalism was key to consolidating Britain's peace-time occupation of Anatolia; the war-weary public tired of aggression. Only with the protection and oversight of the British Empire could "the Turkish people [be] freed at last from the Imperialist lure" and "become a prosperous and well-governed people."³⁷

The narrative presented by the British government and adopted by the British press served to delegitimize the Post-Ottoman state and simultaneously legitimize British occupation of the Anatolian peninsula. In Western tradition, the foundation of any government is its ability to care for its people and mediate international relations. By presenting the administrators of the Ottoman government as unmodernized barbarians, inherently incapable of humane treatment, the British government called the very foundation of the Ottoman Empire into question.

36. Still, ix-xxii.

37. "Ultimatum To Turkey," in *The Times* (The Times Digital Archive, July 19, 1920). https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS184749811/TTDA?u=purdue_main&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=26de99ed.

Meanwhile, accounts of the deliberate conspiracy on the part of the Ottoman government to cover up their inhumanity placed accountability for transgression squarely on the Ottoman government; the Ottoman Empire could not excuse their behavior by claiming ignorance of Western expectations. Thus, Britain represented the Ottoman government as a state inherently incapable and undeserving of self-rule. This then legitimized British calls for Post-Ottoman indemnities by seizing resources and enforcing state oversight.

Complicating the Narrative

The narrative used to delegitimize the Post-Ottoman state is simply that: a narrative. In reality, the British were guilty of the same mismanagement and misrepresentation they accused the Ottoman Empire of. Britain mismanaged their internment camps to the point that Turkish prisoners died en masse. Meanwhile, British POWs were neglected by their government. On the battlefield, the supposedly disorganized Ottoman post outmatched the imperial British post in notifying POWs families of their capture. And once they came home, the British POWs that the government and media cared so much for were neglected and forgotten.

El-Qantara, anglicized at the time as Kantara, straddles the northern section of Egypt's Suez Canal and was an ideal defensive location during the Sinai Campaign. The British utilized the city as a distribution center throughout the war and established an internment camp for Ottoman and German prisoners there. In 1917, 9,300 Turkish prisoners at the Kantara camp contracted pellagra and more than 3,000 Ottoman soldiers died from the disease.³⁸ Pellagra is now known to be a disease caused by a nutritional deficiency of niacin, a B vitamin commonly found in meat and other protein rich foods, progressively resulting in skin lesions, diarrhea, dementia, and death.³⁹ In the tradition of early twentieth century European advancement, all aspects of life in the British camps were subject to the scrutiny of medicine and science in the name of impartial benefit. However, colonial European powers like Britain put considerable stock in upholding and legitimizing race relations, resulting in a rather distorted sense of impartiality. Thus, at Kantara and many of the other British camps, "the dietary of the Turkish soldiers differ[ed] somewhat from that of the German and Austrian prisoners" giving each either an "Oriental" carb-heavy diet, or a "European" diet,

38. Yucel Yanidag, "Prisoners of War (Ottoman Empire/Middle East)," in *International Encyclopedia of the First World War* (October 8, 2014). https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/prisoners_of_war_ottoman_empiremiddle_east.

39. Savvoula Savvidou, "Pellagra: A Non-Eradicated Old Disease" in *Clinics and Practice*, 4(1), (March 27, 2014), 637. <https://doi.org/10.4081/cp.2014.637>.

more heavy in protein, “to suit the palates of each.”⁴⁰ This dietary distinction seems to be the most probable factor in causing the pellagra outbreak at Kantara.

At the start of the outbreak, the theory of pellagra’s mechanism was much more in-keeping with the germ theory tradition, describing the condition as an “infection” and investigating the hygiene of the Kantara camp to determine the source of the outbreak. It was impossible to conceive that the blame for the Turkish prisoners’ poor health could be placed on British enlightenment. Rather, the 1919 Committee assembled to investigate the prevalence of pellagra among the Turks at Kantara posited that the Turks “were really incipient pellagrins who” had contracted the disease before their capture.⁴¹

This scapegoating the Turk was only questioned by British officials when “a severe outbreak of pellagra” developed among the German prisoners of Kantara “after the Committee had handed in its report.”⁴² No longer could it be disregarded as a disease brought in by the Turk, but a malady that could affect Europeans. The reality of the German outbreak likely lies in the tightening of resources and rationing as the war continued but speaks volumes to the racist overtones that coded “impartial” life in British camps. While Britain railed against Ottoman prisons and government coverups, the British government itself could not take responsibility for the suffering it put the prisoners under British care through.

Throughout the “Report on the Treatment of British Prisoners of War in Turkey”, Younger emphasized the confusion and censorship of the Ottoman post, asserting that mail rarely made its way past Aleppo.⁴³ However, this may not necessarily represent the truth for all British and Indian POWs. On July 12th of 1915, the family of Sargent Maurice George Delpratt, a 28-year-old Queenslander serving the British Imperial war effort in the Gallipoli campaign, received a cablegram from Constantinople. In block type, Delpratt reassured his family of his health and informed them that he had been taken prisoner by the Ottomans on

40. The Delegates of the International Committee of the Red Cross, *Turkish Prisoners in Egypt* (Red Cross Society, 1917), 15. <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000446788>.

41. “Report of a Committee of Enquiry regarding the Prevalence of Pellegra Among Turkish Prisoners of War,” in *Tropical Diseases Bulletin*, 15(1), (January 15, 1920), 52-53. <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000639018>.

42. “Report of a Committee of Enquiry regarding the Prevalence of Pellegra Among Turkish Prisoners of War”, 52.

43. Prisoners in Turkey Commission, *Report on the Treatment of British Prisoners of War in Turkey* (H.S. Stationery Office, November 1918). <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/report-on-treatment-of-british-prisoners-of-war-in-turkey>.

June 28th, 1915. It was the first time they heard that anything amiss had happened to Maurice.⁴⁴

This cablegram was the beginning of a correspondence that lasted until Delpratt's repatriation in 1920, a correspondence that followed him as he moved across the various prisons of Anatolia, from Afion-Kara-Hissar to Hadji-Kiri to Belemelik. The Delpratt family saved more than 190 letters and postcards and later gifted the collection to the State Library of Queensland for posterity. The very existence of this extensive correspondence complicates the British government's claim of an ineffective and backward Ottoman post office, as they were clearly effective enough to keep track of Delpratt as he was moved about, provided their prisoners with the materials to stay in contact with their families, and could efficiently gather and distribute correspondences among the thousands of prisoners. The most telling aspect of this correspondence is that the initial letter, telling the Delpratt's of their son's capture, an exclusively Ottoman administered letter, arrived before any British official had the thought to inform the family.⁴⁵

In spite of Parliament's disgust over the mismanagement of the Ottoman government, the British government suffered from the same evasive maneuvering and misdirection when it came time to deal with their own soldiers. In August of 1919, in the midst of the Peace Convention and reparation talks, "a time when the public attention [was] being drawn to the horrors endured by the garrison of Kut," a survivor of that garrison gave "voice to the dissatisfaction prevailing" among the newly repatriated prisoners. Having served for their empire with all that was "humanely possible" having "kept the flag flying for 150 days" the survivor was appalled to find that "in spite of repeated representations to the India Office, [he had] not received a penny of [his] field pay" for the period that he had been a prisoner of war in Anatolia, nor "even received an answer to [his] letters on this subject." After returning home from their harrowing experiences, the surviving prisoners were "received with official coldness and indifference" invited to celebratory processions and housed without beds or food for the occasion.⁴⁶ The

44. Maurice George Delpratt, "Letter, 12 July 1915," in *28815, Maurice George Delpratt Correspondence* (John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland, 1917). http://bishop.slq.qld.gov.au/webclient/DeliveryManager?pid=601915&custom_att_2=simple_viewer.

45. *28815, Maurice George Delpratt Correspondence* (John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland, 1915-1920). http://bishop.slq.qld.gov.au/webclient/DeliveryManager?pid=601915&custom_att_2=simple_viewer.

46. A SURVIVOR OF KUT, "The Survivors of Kut," in *The Times* (The Times Digital Archives, August 16, 1919). <https://link-gale->

British and Indian soldiers held prisoner by the Ottoman Empire throughout the Great War were used by their own government as pawns in international negotiations. The former prisoners were exploited by the British government, their suffering turned into a price tag that they received no penny of.

Conclusion

By controlling the narrative of prisoner maltreatment, Britain constructed Ottoman incompetence and immorality. This allowed Britain to take the high ground in international peace negotiations, calling on indemnity and oversight in the name of enforcing human decency. To quite plainly answer the question posited at the beginning of this investigation, the British government and media used the experiences of British and Indian soldiers to condemn the Ottoman Empire as a state that should not be allowed self-rule and to legitimize British occupation and resource domination as a condition of reparation for, among other things, the human suffering incurred by those prisoners.

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