

It is right that I should add that the description does not apply everywhere, as there Mr. Gerard saw many camps where prisoners were treated humanely. That fact, however, shows that ill treatment did not arise out of the necessity of the case.

22. BOARD OF VISITORS.

One recommendation the consideration of which I wish to press most strongly on Government is the formation of a small Board of visitors, with power to inquire into future but not past grievances, and to make arrangements and recommendations with a view to securing smooth running in the future. This Board should not have power in any way to interfere with the authority of the Commandant. It should, however, have full authority to confer with him, and independently to confer with the squad-leaders' committee and to interview prisoners, officers, guards. Personal contact of this sort is of far more value than correspondence, regulations, or orders. The Board should comprise at least one member who is thoroughly versed in the subject of feeding, clothing, and housing large bodies of men, and has a general knowledge of sanitation. At first its visits might have to be rather frequent, but after a time running-conditions could be secured, which should render an occasional visit by one member of the Board sufficient. It would be best, I think, if one member were an experienced Magistrate or one who had held that office.

In my opinion, it is the want of such a Board that has been the main defect throughout the history of this camp. The Commandant has been too isolated and has had too much responsibility. He certainly had the right to resort to his superiors, but I do not think that that has sufficed in the case of dealing with a large body of civilian prisoners, many of whom are, or in the earlier stages were, prone to insubordination. I have seen the advantage in another class of institution of a specially qualified adviser to whom the responsible head might resort in a difficulty, and I am sure that the Commandant would appreciate this. The prisoners of war, too, would feel it very satisfactory to know that their squad leaders could resort to such an adviser. The Commandant has frequently complained that the squad leaders failed to report grievances of their men, and left the men grumbling. During the course of this inquiry a definite arrangement has been come to that a committee of three of these squad leaders might add to their number a fellow-prisoner of superior education who was not himself a squad leader; but I am afraid that there is already evidence that this agreement will not last. It is with a committee so formed that a Board of visitors might confer, with advantage to the prisoners and without detriment either to the authority of the Commandant or the discipline of the camp.

This question is, I presume, purely one for the consideration of the Defence Minister. Personally, I am satisfied that its adoption would prove of advantage, provided it was made clear that the Board had no authority to interfere with the disciplinary authority of the Commandant, and could in case of difficulty request the intervention of the Minister.

23. CONCLUSION.

I am conscious of the many imperfections of this report, but in the circumstances I submit that they are in many cases necessary imperfections. After hearing 113 witnesses I have endeavoured to set out certain conclusions which may prove to have a value, while omitting many which seemed to me immaterial. In the cases of alleged ill treatment I have had to investigate a very old story, and in some cases have found myself forced to disregard direct evidence because I found myself unable to believe that the treatment has been truly represented. Another person with that same evidence before him in a written form might think I was wrong. Appellate Courts under our system of jurisprudence attach the highest importance to the opinion of the Judge who sees the witness and observes his demeanour. In rehearing a very old story manifest signs of exaggeration have a very destructive effect on the evidence; that is an observation that is as familiar to juries as to Judges.