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REPORT

ON KRASNAYA RECHKA PRISON

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HEADQUARTERS TWENTY-SEVENTH INFANTRY,  
Vladivostok, Siberia, February 25, 1918.

From: Commanding Officer.  
To: The Adjutant General of the Army. (Thru military channels.)  
Subject: Krasnaya Rechka Prison Camp.

1. On October 31, 1918, the following telegram was received at Habarovsk, Siberia:

"Vladivostok, Siberia, October 29, 1918.

Colonel Morrow: 27th Infantry, Habarovsk.

Number seventy. Paragraph one. Under an agreement here the American troops have taken over the guarding and care of German and Austrian prisoners of war including prisoners captured during the present operations of the Allies which are now being held at Habarovsk. No prisoners will be accepted by you who are not in actual confinement there this date. You will detail Colonel Morrow and the necessary number of men to take charge of this work. Immediate report should be made here as to the number of prisoners there of all classes and what clothing and other supplies are needed to care for the prisoners including supplies during the winter. Clothing will be shipped you from here upon receipt of the necessary information. General Oi has been notified from Japanese Headquarters.

Paragraph two. Rations authorized for prisoners, sixteen ounces beef fresh or twelve ounces cooked meat or twelve ounces bacon or twelve ounces dry fish or sixteen ounces pickled fish. Eighteen ounces flour or eighteen ounces corn meal. Two point four ounces beans or one point six ounces rice. Sixteen ounces fresh potatoes onions, cabbage, turnips or other fresh vegetables procurable locally. Point sixty four ounces prunes, apples or peaches, evaporated. Coffee point eight ounces, sugar one point six ounces, vinegar point naught eight gill, salt point sixty four ounces, pepper point naught four ounces, syrup point naught eight gills. Pickled pork may be substituted for bacon. Fresh meat if the cost does not exceed the cost of beef may be substituted for fresh beef. No lard included as sufficient fat should be saved from meats for cooking and baking. An accurate itemized record will be kept of cost of all articles issued and used for benefit of prisoners copy being furnished these headquarters first of each month.

Colonel Morrow

2. Pursuant to the above telegram, Colonel Morrow at once began negotiations with the Russian authorities looking towards the transfer of the Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war, then in confinement at Krasnaya Rechka. The State Department of the province was directly in charge of these prisoners but as Ataman Kalmykoff was the real power, both were consulted and issued orders that the prisoners be transferred to the American Command.

3. Krasnaya Rechka lay about sixteen versts southeast of Habarovsk. There was a poor wagon road for summer use and in the winter the road lay along and across the Amur and the Ussuri Rivers. It was also connected with the main line of the Ussuri railroad which connected Habarovsk and Vladivostok. The distance from Habarovsk to Krasnaya Rechka by railroad was 22 versts. The camp itself lay about one and a half versts from the railroad station. Trains ran on this railroad but twice a week and as the road before the river froze was almost impassable the railroad furnished practically the only means of transportation.

4. On November third the first preliminary survey of the prison camp was made by Colonel Morrow and Captain Burdette. Krasnaya Rechka was a brick garrison consisting of well constructed one and two story buildings with ample frame warehouses and stables. The garrison had formerly been occupied by a regiment of railroad troops belonging to the Russian Army. Near the railroad was a large enclosure containing thirty three large warehouses which contained an enormous amount of tools, supplies, property etc., belonging to this force. The buildings were in every way suitable for a prison camp, commodious, well constructed and capable of quartering all the prisoners of war then in confinement there as well as providing ample quarters for the guard and building for administrative purposes. But true to Russian form and organization they were in a bad state of repair, a horrible unsanitary condition and apparently every method had been used to make the administration of the camp as difficult as possible. The grounds were in a frightful condition refuse, garbage and building materials of all kinds cluttered the place. The camp was divided into two compounds, each enclosed by a barbed wire fence and a board fence twelve feet high. The two compounds were separate and distinct although the prisoners continually passed from one to the other, the space between the two compounds was without fence of any kind. The headquarters building, supply warehouses, bath house and hospital were all outside of the compounds. Great open ditches ran through the camp. There was no water or sewerage system. The water supply was procured from a well about four hundred yards outside the compound. Cooking was done in four kitchens and all meals were carried and eaten in the barracks by the prisoners. No attempt had ever been made to install mess halls. There was a wonderful building practically equipped for a bath house, save for basins, which had never been utilized on account of the poor facilities for procuring water. A splendid two story brick building constructed for hospital purposes had never been utilized or had any attempt ever been made by the Russian authorities to establish even the semblance of a hospital. No shops had been established and such work as was performed by the prisoners was done in the barracks. There was no laundry or place for the prisoners to wash their clothing. No amusement hall had ever



been thought of or considered. One or two candles sputtered in a barrack and the gloom and horror of the place defied description. At this time Krasnaya Rechka contained approximately 2,000 prisoners of war. About 1,250 of whom were officers. Out of these 2000 men 450 were ill with fevers of various kinds and without hospital facilities. The sick were scattered throughout the barracks to spread contagion among their comrades. The entire prison personnel was half starved. This condition had been reached slowly, it was slow starvation for lack of sufficient food and food of nourishing quality. The Russian Government allowed to the officers an allowance of 50 to 75 roubles a month, according to rank, to cover all expenses of food, clothing etc. The prison officials charged these prisoners 60 roubles a month for their food alone. The additional 10 roubles a month was paid the Russian officials by the Danish and Swedish Red Cross. Although the rigors of winter could be plainly felt, the prisoners in their weakened and starved condition were pitifully clothed and not one in twenty had a suit of winter underwear. Very few had overcoats, but few had winter socks and many had no socks at all. The foot gear was of all kinds and so patched and worn as to be practically unserviceable in the fast approaching Siberian winter. The outer clothing of the prisoners was the same that they had been captured in ~~in~~ which was in most cases four years previous. This clothing was so faded, patched and worn as to present to the eye, when these men were paraded, the exact resemblance to a gathering of scarecrows.

5. The Russians had no individual records of these prisoners nor did they know how many prisoners they held in confinement. Four Colonels were stationed at Krasnaya Rechka each claiming to be in command and to justly and legally represent the only department having authority over the prisoners.

6. The enlisted prisoners of war were fed by a contractor and the entire garrison, that is officers and guards, lived from the food furnished from this mess. The contractor had not even installed a bakery.

7. The garrison boasted in the way of transportation two horses and two carts. One of these carts belonged to the contractor and the other one belonged to the prisoners of war themselves.

8. But little provision had been made in the way of supplying the post against the coming winter. As for provisions, rations etc., they simply did not exist. A little wood had been accumulated and this practically completed the meager assets of the garrison. The disorder and confusion of the garrison was so great, its disorganization so complete that it was impossible to take over anything in the prison from them save the property. Such rolls as they had of prisoners were so incomplete and so inaccurate as to be worthless. Through the senior war prisoner it was arranged to have a Captain designated for each barrack floor who would prepare a roll showing names and rank of every man sleeping on his floor. This was extended to include every building in both compounds. At a given signal on November seventh all men were verified from these rolls and held under guard in every building until the compound and all orderlies and men living outside the compound were verified and listed.

9. The ten senior war prisoners were called together and an outline of reorganization and regeneration of the camp laid before them as follows:

(1st) That all officers of the rank of captain and above would receive \$38.00 per month and all officers below the grade of captain \$25.00 per month. Cost of clothing and food would be deducted.

(2nd) The establishing of good messes and the construction of mess halls with good and sufficient food.

(3rd) The installation of a water system to provide ample water inside the compound for drinking, cooking and bathing purposes.

(4th) The installation of an electric light plant for the garrison.

(5th) The organization and operation of a modern efficient and completely equipped hospital.

(6th) The equipment and operation of a bath house and laundry.

(7th) The establishment of tailor shops, shoe shops, carpenter, blacksmith, tin and paint shops.

(8th) The construction of a theatre and club.

(9th) The organization of the camp into 13 companies - with one captain, one 1st and one 2nd lieutenant to each company.

(10th) The organization of a Staff Corps and Record Department from the officer prisoners. This Staff Corps to function under the American Command.

(11th) The immediate rendering of morning reports, sick reports and the keeping of a duty rosters.

(12th) The proper clothing and equipping of the prisoners as speedily as possible.

(13th) The renovation of the barracks including the installing of wash rooms and sanitation of latrines.

(14th) The building of a spur of railroad one mile long to connect the railroad with the camp.

The prisoners deeply affected promised their full assistance and all the work that lay in their power. However, asking that they be judged lightly in the matter of their work until they could recover from their famished condition. Their joy at being taken over by the Americans was pitiful.

10. On November 4th, Company E, 27th Infantry, was ordered to take station at Kramaya Rechka as guard company. Captain E. Larking, commanding, with the following officers; 1st Lieut. Owen E. Colledge, 1st Lieut. E. D. Doryland, 2nd Lieut. Edward Nicely, and 2nd Lieut. Donald Stanbro. 2nd Lieut. John James was detailed as Adjutant. Capt. Benj. Burdette, M. C. with two enlisted men comprised the medical personnel. 2nd Lieut. Harry W. Killpack was detailed as Supply Officer.

11. Lieut. James at once proceeded to organize the administrative departments of the prison. The senior war prisoner, Major Ferdinand V. Reder, with his adjutant was given an office next to the Adjutant's and permitted to detail the necessary clerks. An individual record of each prisoner of war was at once started. Instructions on the preparation of morning reports, sick reports, and duty rosters were taken up and within a few days a consolidated morning report was being rendered. A technical company was organized to perform all skilled labor of the prison. A medical detachment consisting of former Medical Officers and Hospital Corps men was organized from the prisoners. In addition to these men the Hospital was made a complete unit by detailing to its personnel car-

penters, masons, tinsmiths, tailors, and shoemakers. At the end of one month Captain Burdette had in full operation a complete hospital the equal of which could not be found in all Siberia. The laying of the water pipes and construction of a water tower was at once undertaken in ground frozen as hard as steel. Ditches were dug fourteen feet deep.

12. Permission was secured from the Russian authorities to draw tools, supplies, etc., from the warehouses of the Engineers near the railroad station. From these warehouses were secured a large and varied assortment of tools and many kinds of material and supplies including two engines and dynamos. The tools completed the shops and the installation of the engine and dynamo was at once undertaken.

13. The quarters of Company B, while commodious and possessed of every possibility for wonderful barracks were in a terrible condition. This splendid building was heated by steam, but the boiler had been broken, the pipes and radiators were broken and scattered over the floor. For months this barrack had been used for Red prisoners of war who had built open fires on the concrete floors for cooking as well as for heating purposes. The walls were black from smoke while the floor was covered with ingrained filth. All of this was soon corrected and this barrack was all that could be desired as a model barrack.

14. One week after the Americans took over the camp, the bath house was in full operation and included a barber shop and temporary laundry.

15. Prisoners of war were detailed as assistants to the Supply Officer, as mess officer and details made from the enlisted prisoners as cooks and bakers. The construction and equipping of two large mess halls was begun and rapidly carried to completion. These mess halls and kitchens when completed contained almost every modern facility, tanks were found in the prison and hot and cold water piped through the kitchen and mess halls. The walls were painted and decorated, mess tables and benches made and the necessary mess equipment secured. Prior to this all food had been sent to the barracks and eaten there by the prisoners, in their little cubicles. The cubicles were constructed in every barrack and contained from four to eight men. Here the prisoners had their messes, as well as their personal belongings. These cubicles gave the impression of rabbit warrens. They shut out the light and there they had accumulated a mass of useless junk and belongings. They were unsightly and unsanitary to a degree. It took two hours to issue a meal under this system and when the food reached the barracks it was unfit for consumption.

16. The compound was at once extended to include all buildings and all were placed in one compound. The board fence was torn down and utilized for building purposes. This permitted a clear view throughout the compound, and made the administration and guard of the prison much easier.

17. Within a few weeks the water system and electric lighting system was in full and complete operation. The shops including tinsmiths, tailors,

carpenters, blacksmiths, plumbers, shoemakers and electricians were now in full operation and the theatre and club were started. This theatre and club when completed contained four club and reading rooms, a theatre with boxes and balcony and an orchestra pit, dressing rooms and scenery. This building also contained rooms for rehearsal, and orchestra and piano rooms, as well as a complete kitchen and buffet. The decoration and furnishing of this building was an artistic success of the highest order. If placed in a large city it would have attracted unusual attention and the most favorable press comments. The entire building was completely electric lighted. The skill and artistic taste of the prisoners accomplishing this work can hardly be realized. The materials used were scraps and junk of every character and the ability to utilize all and everything for the sake of accomplishment was truly marvellous.

18. Schools were opened and a building set aside for this purpose. Some of the professors in this school had been leading professors in some of the greatest universities of Europe.

19. A large one story brick building previously used as a warehouse was made into a laundry and was soon doing the laundry for the entire prison including the laundry for the guard company. Work rooms were established for every kind of an artist or craftsman and a display room for his completed work organized.

20. The prisoners of war were permitted to open a prison exchange and for this purpose a purchasing officer from among their number was chosen and the exchange operated most successfully along army lines. The enlisted men not receiving any pay from the United States were paid various amounts ranging from \$5.00 to \$10.00 per month. This was paid by deducting from the pay of each officer a proportionate part. This was done by the committee of the prisoners and at their request and duly submitted each month for the approval of the Commandant.

21. The barracks were cleaned of their rabbit warrens and laid out along the lines of American Army barracks. The rears were cleaned and excellent wash rooms installed. All barracks were whitewashed and painted. Stoves and windows repaired and after all was completed the barracks presented a splendid appearance. Roads and walks were laid out and great improvements made in this respect. Grounds were cleaned of their filth and rubbish and athletic fields and gardens laid out.

22. Immediate requisition was made for all necessary supplies and after one month the entire prison personnel was warmly clothed in every way.

23. The railroad spur was a heavy undertaking as two large fills and one long cut had to be made in order to get a practical grade to the top of the hill on which the post was located. The work was accomplished with the temperature far below zero. The assembling of the necessary materials required an enormous amount of labor and patience.

24. Late in January 1919 the camp had to accommodate 442 Cossacks from the mutinous forces of Ataman Kalmykoff together with 306 horses. This force remained in the camp until the end of March, but were always kept separate from the Austro-Hungarian prisoners. For a full report on this incident see Kalmykoff report from these headquarters dated December 13, 1919.

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December 13, 1919



25. Early in November a complete telephone system was installed throughout the prison and with Habarovsk. A telegraph line connecting with Habarovsk and Vladivostok was also installed.

26. All musicians and actors both Austrians and Hungarians were placed on the special duty list. Two splendid Symphony Orchestras were organized one Austrian of 37 pieces, one Hungarian of 46. Two male choirs were similarly organized of 40 and 50 voices, respectively. Instruments in most cases were manufactured in the prison. Costumes and scenery painters as well as stage carpenters were detailed to the theatre. The concerts, operas, operettas and comedies staged at this theatre equalled the best renditions heard in the United States. Every night saw the theatre in full operation. One night a week was reserved for the guard company which was marched to and from the theatre.

27. The supply of the post presented many complications. The enormous amount of wood required to keep 500 Russian stoves burning through a Siberian winter must be seen to be appreciated or understood. All fresh vegetables were procured locally. The material and the thousands of various kinds of articles required to bring this huge prison into what the Commandant considered an efficient establishment can hardly be understood. The further facts that it was already winter when we came to the place, the poor communications and the difficulty of buying materials and the simplest articles in a city so destitute as Habarovsk can not be understood save by one who has faced such a problem in the interior of Siberia. Added to this was the language difficulty and the hostility of Kalmykoff and the utter stupidity of the Russian officials whose only training and only efficiency lay in hampering and preventing accomplishment anywhere by anyone. That everything was secured, that at no time was there a shortage of food, material or wood and that all the various articles required in construction of so many varied enterprises were secured, speaks for the wonderful efficiency of the Supply Officer.

28. In February plans were prepared for beautifying the entire camp. Spacious flower gardens were laid out, tennis grounds, a foot ball field and a general athletic field. Plants were grown in hot houses and as soon as the weather permitted ground was broken and the work of clearing begun. Many old, unsightly and useless shacks were torn down and destroyed and in their places bloomed gardens. The camp and surrounding country was mapped as was the road leading from the prison to the prison cemetery. A wonderful plaster relief map made to scale showing every building, road, walk and garden and marvellously colored was prepared by one of the Austrian war prisoners; this map is now in the National Museum at Tokyo as it was purchased by the Japanese Government.

29. Every original plan made by the American Command at Krasnaya Rechka was fully carried out to such an extent that the planners and the accomplishers stood amazed before their own work. We found Krasnaya Rechka an inferno of horrors, and a place of starvation and death, a Siberian prison camp the horrors of which are beyond imagination. We made of it a flower garden filled with music in place of starvation and death, athletics and perfect sanitation were found instead of dirt and squalor, instead of mismanagement were found cleanliness, order and efficiency; found starving and without hope these prisoners awaited the fast approaching death to find instead hope born again, new life and a promise of a safe return to their own land. The sincere gratitude of these prisoners of war to



the American nation and the American Army cannot be appreciated save by those who saw its hundreds of manifestations. This feeling of gratitude to Americans and America extended throughout every prison camp in Siberia and always the Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war manifested and exhibited towards the American Army their deep feeling of gratitude. This feeling manifested itself when the 17th Infantry was stationed at Verkhne-Udinsk, two thousand miles from Khabarovsk where a thousand Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war under the charge of the forces of Ataman Semenov volunteered to fight for and with the regiment against any and all forces, and without asking for pay or clothing only that they be armed to fight for the country which had done so much for them and their fellow prisoners.

30. From the beginning until the prison was turned over to the Japanese the Austro-Hungarian prisoners assisted to the full extent of their ability the American management and operation of the prison. By far the larger part of the prisoners were officers and yet they performed their full part of the labor and gave out their pay to the prisoners who did not receive pay. Most of the prisoners confined at Krasnaya Rechka had been in prison for four years and through the dire necessity of preserving their lives had learned to be skilled workmen and possessed of the prisoners' sharpened ability to make and create marvels out of materials a more fortunate workman would scorn.

31. That this huge place containing at times 2,500 men was constructed and administered, its officer war prisoners paid, fed and clothed and provided with every necessity, the records of prisoners prepared and an itemized account of all expenditures, by two American officers without detailed assistants from the army, must of itself speak for the splendid ability of these two officers. Without a single American assistant 1st Lieut. John James as Adjutant organized and maintained a system of administration which was a model of efficiency, cared for a thousand complex details of this prison and its records, reports and returns. Only an officer possessed of his wonderful powers of organization, rare administrative abilities and one of untiring and unceasing application and devotion to duty could have accomplished such a herculean task. For this marvellous accomplishment and for many other accomplishments in Siberia the Commandant extends to him his sincerest thanks for an assistance unequalled and for a loyalty unsurpassed. His services fully entitle him to the Distinguished Service Medal for which he has been recommended.

32. To 1st Lieut. Harry W. Killpack, 27th Infantry, Supply Officer, the Commandant desires to express his deepest thanks. A young and inexperienced officer he faced a problem at Krasnaya Rechka that might well have daunted a veteran Quartermaster. Without assistants from the army, and by his own initiative energy and decision he organized and perfected among the prisoners of war a supply and construction department the equal of which could only be found in one of the old well established army posts manned by scores of veteran officers and noncommissioned officers of the supply and accounting branch of the army. He paid, fed and clothed the prisoners, purchased the food and fuel and at the same time superintended all construction, repairs, shop work and transportation of the prison. For this splendid accomplishment it is recommended that he be awarded the Distinguished Service Medal.

33. To Capt. Benj. L. Burdette, Medical Detachment, 27th Infantry, Prison Surgeon, the Commandant owes a sanitary and life saving accomplishment never surpassed by the American Army. He found 2,000 half starved prisoners of war at Krasnaya Rechka, weakened by years of horrible prison confinement 460 of whom

were ill with fever, and not a vestige of a hospital or hospital organization. Due to his marvellous devotion to duty, his wonderful constructive and executive ability he organized and equipped without a single assistant from the Army, a hospital that for efficiency, completeness and beauty stood unequalled in all Siberia. From November until April there were but two deaths in this prison and both were old cases beyond human aid. He justly earned the eternal devotion of these prisoners. The Commandant takes this opportunity of recommending that he be awarded the Distinguished Service Medal for an accomplishment so distinguished that it excited the wonder and admiration of all.

34. The guarding of the prison was ably performed by Captain Edward Larkins and his most efficient company. Captain Larkins and his officers and men richly deserved the confidence and esteem in which they were always held by the Commandant. Under the leadership and following the example of their company commander they guarded the entire prison as well as from 60 to 70 American prisoners who were confined at Krasnaya Rechka for disciplinary purposes. Their work was performed during the winter when the thermometer frequently registered forty degrees below zero and yet there was no complaining and the health of the command for months led the entire expedition. The accomplishment of the men of this company in reconstructing their barracks was a notable one.

C. H. MORROW,  
Colonel, 27th Infantry,  
Commanding.

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