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Canadian Prisoners of the First World War: The Struggle for Resilience

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in History

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Abstract

In the First World War, 3,500 Canadian soldiers were taken prisoner. Throughout their captivity, they endured intense humiliation, dehumanization, and abuse. Despite this, the men were able to remain resilient and even found ways to fight back. By using memoirs and letters written by the prisoners, this paper will analyze how these Canadians were determined to keep fighting. This paper will be using an analogy of a bank account to explain how close the prisoners came to breakdown, and how they continuously struggled to endure. Society and war had taught these men that prisoners were weak and cowardly, but they were determined to change this narrative and prove their own bravery through decisive actions of physical and mental resistance, evasion, and escape. By all accounts, the prisoners should have run out of their morale reserves, they should have gone past the breaking point of war weariness to complete breakdown, and they should have had nothing left in them to endure. But the foundation of camaraderie they had built on the front lines set the Canadian soldiers up to endure trauma, remain resilient, and continue their own fight while in the prison camps of Germany. The purpose of this paper is to give a voice to Canadian prisoners of the First World War, and to use the concept of resilience to understand their determination to continue their fight in German territory.

Summary for Lay Audience

Canadian soldiers of the First World War underwent intense trauma and struggled to keep their morale up despite bombardments, trench raids, loss of comrades, boredom, mud, lice, and the constant fear of the unknown enemy. The men were able to endure these uncomfortable and adverse experiences by writing letters home, by sharing experiences with comrades, and by believing that they were fighting an immoral enemy. Society had ingrained in these men the idea that soldiers were the epitome of bravery, and once in the trenches their superiors, friends, and family told them that prisoners were cowardly and weak. Yet, 3,500 Canadians became prisoners of war. This experience shook their identity as soldiers, and almost completely destroyed their morale. But the Canadians were determined to find strength in adversity and remain resilient. They realized that bravery in the prison camps was different than in the trenches. They found ways to increase morale by building close-knit groups of comrades, resisting in any way they could, and, ultimately, by planning and attempting various escape techniques. The prisoners found that by building a strong foundation, they could endure abuse, humiliation, terrible working conditions, and a lack of food. Out of the 3,500 Canadian prisoners, 100 successfully escaped Germany. By using memoirs and letters written by the prisoners, this paper will show how these Canadian soldiers remained resilient despite the constant abuse and humiliation they underwent.

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Introduction

“Fighting in war creates an environment where fear is prevalent, and unless courage prevails, all is lost.”¹

In the fighting on the Western Front, over 3,500 Canadian soldiers and 262 officers found themselves in German captivity between 1914 and 1918.² Of these, one officer and ninety-nine other ranks successfully escaped their prisoner camps and enemy territory.³ The prisoners experienced extremely diverse and varied treatments, depending on what camp they were in, if they were being punished, and a variety of other factors discussed in this paper. By using autobiographical accounts, this discussion will look at how the Canadian soldiers and prisoners of the First World War found strength in adversity, how they modified their definitions of bravery, and ultimately, how their camaraderie was vital to their resilience within the prison camps. While the stories used here may exaggerate or omit details, their subjective experiences provide insight into the nuances and contradictions involved in the exposure to constant and significant adversity. Memory is subjective, can be affected by the pressures of society, and is often only available to others when written down. But the personal and emotional perspectives of these sources lend influence to their words; their stories are all that is left from the prisoners of the First World War. Using three terms – resilience, endurance, and courage – this paper will analyze how the Canadian soldiers and prisoners of the First World War continued to stay motivated and keep fighting. By all accounts, the men should have run out of their morale

¹ Lord Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage: The Classic WWI Account of the Psychological Effects of War* (New York; NY: Carroll & Graf, 2007), xi.

² This paper will use the term “soldier” to refer to all non-commissioned ranks and the term “officer” when referring to those holding commissioned rank; this is according to Major General William D. Otter, *The Guide: A Manual for the Canadian Militia*, 10th ed. (Toronto: The Corp Clark Company Limited; repr., 1916), 19. For the historically recorded amount of prisoners taken see, Government of Canada, *Report of the Overseas Military Forces of Canada* (London: Ministry Overseas Military Forces of Canada, 1918), 468; Desmond Morton, *Silent Battle: Canadian Prisoners of War in Germany 1914-1919* (Toronto, Ontario: Lester Publishing Limited, 1992), ix, 168. See Edward H. Wigney, *Guests of the Kaiser: Prisoners-of-War of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1915-1918*, (Canada: CEF Books, 2008) for a breakdown of the numbers captured, and the discrepancies of the lists of those captured and those actually captured.

³ Canada, *Report of the Overseas Military Forces of Canada*, 467.

reserves, they should have gone past the breaking point of war weariness to complete breakdown, they should have had nothing left in them to help them endure, but the foundation of camaraderie they had built on the front lines set the Canadian soldiers up to endure trauma, remain resilient, and continue their own fight while in the prison camps of Germany.

Canadian prisoners of the First World War are usually only statistics in the larger histories of the war.⁴ The few histories that have been written offer a starting point for future historians. Canadian military historian Desmond Morton, in his book *Silent Battle: Canadian Prisoners of War in Germany 1914-1919* (1992), showcased the prisoners' life in the camps and argued that the prisoners felt they were forgotten by those at home.⁵ Morton used memoirs, letters, and diaries to show what the prisoners thought of their experiences, analyzing each aspect of their lives, beginning at their moment of capture, and ending with their return home. His book was the first to look at what the prisoners experienced, how they were treated, what type of work they did, the punishments they endured, the food they received, and where they were interned. His book laid the groundwork for future research on Canadian prisoners of the First World War.

In 1994, Canadian military historian Jonathan Vance wrote *Objects of Concern: Canadian Prisoners of War Through the Twentieth Century*.⁶ His chapter on the First World War argued, in opposition to Morton, that the prisoners were not forgotten because charitable organizations such as the Canadian Red Cross Society made sure to take care of each Canadian prisoner. Despite the contradictory theses, both historians were right – the soldiers were not forgotten, at least by charitable organizations like the Red Cross, but they may have felt alone in a foreign country with no friends or family.

Both historians viewed the Canadian prisoners from different perspectives. Morton looked at the prisoner's thoughts and feelings while Vance used mainly Red Cross and government sources. Vance also focused more on what went on behind the scenes at home than

⁴ For example, see, G. W. L Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919: Official History of the Canadian Army in the First World War* (Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015).

⁵ Morton, *Silent Battle*.

⁶ Jonathan Vance, *Objects of Concern: Canadian Prisoners of War through the Twentieth Century*, (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 1994).

what the prisoners experienced. Together, these books showed how the soldiers felt about their experiences and how charitable organizations and the Canadian government took care of them. What these two histories are missing is how the heroic ideal that had been ingrained in these men affected their lives in the camps, how they endured the torment, and what kept them moving forward.

British historian Martin Bowman's book *Voices in Flight: Escaping Soldiers and Airmen of World War I* (2017) focused on the airmen of Britain, Canada, Australia, and Germany who attempted to escape from the prison camps.⁷ While this book is not solely focused on Canadian soldiers, it shows that escape was at the forefront of many prisoners' minds, and that they had to find creative and new ways to escape. These historians have each laid the groundwork for further discovery.⁸ Morton's generalized history of Canadian prisoners of the First World War offers future historians a starting point, while Vance dug into a specific aspect of the prisoner's lives and Bowman looked at escape by using the stories from various nationalities.

Various historians have analyzed the impact of trauma on certain groups' ability to remain resilient. Michael Roper discussed how trauma could push British soldiers back into a child-like state and make them desire the comfort of their mother.⁹ A number of historians edited *The First World War and Health: Rethinking Resilience*; specifically, the Introduction offered a starting point for understanding resilience and war, and mainly focused on an individual's own resilience. The chapter by Julie Anderson, "Military Resilience", expanded this explanation by thoroughly exploring how soldiers shared the burden of resilience while at the front lines. The book has a few other relevant topics including how certain groups of people (such as medical personnel, pilots, and civilians) coped, examining specific coping mechanisms like drugs,

⁷ Martin Bowman, *Voices in Flight: Escaping Soldiers and Airmen of World War I*, (Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Aviation, 2017).

⁸ Similarly, Canadian military historian Tim Cook's article focused on the deadly experience of capture, but showcases the Germans surrendering, rather than shedding light on Canadians experiences as prisoners. Tim Cook, "The Politics of Surrender: Canadian Soldiers and the Killing of Prisoners in the Great War," *The Journal of Military History* 70, no. 3 (2006), <https://doi.org/10.1353/jmh.2006.0158>

⁹ Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War*, (Manchester, England: Manchester United Press, 2009).

alcohol, and sex, a historiography of personal resilience, and much more.¹⁰ This book offered a foundation for understanding how different groups developed resilience, popular coping mechanisms, and how personal writings are vital to understanding resilience. *Endurance and the First World War*, a book edited by David Monger, Sarah Murray, and Katie Pickles, analyzed very similar themes with a focus on New Zealand and Australia.¹¹ Specifically, the book focused on institutional, home-front, battlefield, and race endurance, including a section on memorials; Chapter Four, by Steven Loveridge, looked at what tools the men on the front lines needed to remain resilient, or the “sentimental equipment” required for them to endure. Carol Acton and Jane Potter’s article, “‘These frightful sights would work havoc with one’s brain’: Subjective Experience, Trauma, and Resilience in First World War Writings by Medical Personnel,” discussed how medical personnel of the First World War coped with trauma.¹² Lord Moran’s book, *The Anatomy of Courage*, delved into the intricacies of courage on the front lines, and provided the analogy that will be described in the next chapter.¹³ Jordan Chase’s dissertation “‘For Weariness Cannot but Fill our Men after so long a Period of Hardship and Endurance:’ War Weariness in the Canadian Corps in the First World War” discussed a different aspect of resilience, which the author called “war weariness.”¹⁴ War weariness, as Chase explained, described the soldier nearing a breakdown; he discussed how the soldiers attempted to fight this war weariness with different coping techniques, and what happened when they could no longer fight it.¹⁵ Despite the abundance of research on resilience, including various groups, different nationalities, and different genders being analyzed, there has been no effort to move this concept behind barbed wire and research the Canadian prisoner of war’s resilience. This paper is aiming

¹⁰ Eric Vermetten, Leo van Bergen, *The First World War and Health: Rethinking Resilience* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2020).

¹¹ David Monger, Sarah Murray, Katie Pickles, eds., *Endurance and the First World War: Experiences and Legacies in New Zealand and Australia*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014).

¹² Carol Acton, Jane Potter, “‘These frightful sights would work havoc with one’s brain’: Subjective Experience, Trauma, and Resilience in First World War Writings by Medical Personnel,” *Literature and Medicine* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2012), <https://doi.org/10.1353/lm.2012.0010>, 66-85.

¹³ Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*.

¹⁴ Jordan Chase, “‘For Weariness Cannot but Fill our Men after so long a Period of Hardship and Endurance:’ War Weariness in the Canadian Corps in the First World War,” (PhD History, *The University of Western Ontario*, 2019).

¹⁵ Chase, “‘For Weariness Cannot but Fill our Men after so long a Period of Hardship and Endurance.’”

to fill this void and investigate how Canadian prisoners of the First World War managed to cope with the trauma of captivity, restore their resilience, and even fight back. This paper will examine how the prisoners represented their traumatic experiences in their own words, which legitimized their stories and gave their untold history a voice.

Prior to the First World War, various international conventions established laws to protect prisoners of war. Henri Dunant's description of the massacre of over 40,000 soldiers on the battlefield of Solferino in June 1859 led to the 1864 Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded in Armies of the Field, then the 1899 Hague Convention (II) with Respect to the Laws and Customs of War on Land, and the 1907 Hague Convention (IV) respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land.¹⁶ At the start of the First World War, the 1907 Convention was the most recent agreement that should have protected prisoners of war, but it was not signed by all parties and was therefore never fully in effect. The 1899 convention was the legal document under which the prisoners were protected, although occasionally some modifications from the 1907 convention were accepted without holding legal standing.¹⁷ The Lieber Code, written by Dr. Francis Lieber in 1863, had fifty-seven articles on prisoners of war, granting them basic rights including: "protection of private property; adequate medical treatment; 'plain and wholesome' food; and humane treatment without being forced to endure 'intentional suffering or indignity.'"¹⁸ After the Franco-Prussian War, the Brussels Declaration of 1874 also reiterated many of the basic rights of prisoners of war laid out in the Lieber Code. And although these two documents were widely accepted in militaries across the world, they held very little legal power. Still, throughout the war Britain and Germany made ad hoc agreements on the treatment of prisoners of war that contained echoes of these other codes.¹⁹

Most of the prisoners described in this paper tried to escape their prison camps many times, and some were never completely successful. These prisoners are a unique demographic –

¹⁶ Morton, *Silent Battle*, 7.

¹⁷ See [Appendix C](#) for the laws that pertained to prisoners from the 1899 Hague Convention.

¹⁸ Vance, *Objects of Concern*, 12.

¹⁹ Vance, 12.

since only one hundred Canadian prisoners successfully liberated themselves from Germany out of over 3,500 Canadians who were taken captive.²⁰ One in ten prisoners reported trying to escape, with half of these also reporting a second or third attempt.²¹ This means that around 350 prisoners tried to escape, around 170 prisoners attempted to escape more than once, and 250 of these prisoners never successfully escaped Germany. The death rate for Canadian prisoners was around ten percent: 382 died in captivity – two were killed trying to escape, and one died in a mining accident.²² Most of the prisoners in this paper were captured during the Second Battle of Ypres (22 April - 25 May 1915) or the Battle of Mount Sorrel (2-14 June 1916).²³ The prisoners chosen for this paper wrote diaries, memoirs, or newspaper articles detailing their stories.²⁴ They were not chosen for any reason other than that they wrote their stories down. They were between the ages of eighteen and forty-two, most were from Ontario with a few from other provinces, most came from the working class with a few from the upper classes, and they were all white men.

Their narratives were written against a background of powerfully ingrained beliefs of bravery, and many who were captured felt that their family, peers, and military leaders believed, like Private Frederick McMullen, that “we hadn’t done our duty.”²⁵ This may have caused them

²⁰ Wigney, *Guests of the Kaiser*, 12.

²¹ Morton, *Silent Battle*, 98.

²² Wigney, *Guests of the Kaiser*, 11.

²³ Captured at the Battle of Mount Sorrel (1915): Private Mervin Cecil Simmons, Private Merton Egbert Ellsworth Kittredge, Private Daniel Bilson Merry, Lieutenant John Charles Thorn, Major Peter Anderson, Lance-Corporal Edward Edwards. Captured at the Second Battle of Ypres (1916): Private Frederick James McMullen, Private John Evans, Lance-Corporal John O’Brien, Private Franklin Cecil MacDonald, Private Alexander Miller Allan, Lieutenant John Harvey Douglas. Private Benjamin Campbell Davison was captured 6 April 1916, and Private Alfred Theodore Post was captured 15 August 1917.

²⁴ See [Appendix A](#) for a complete list of the prisoners with a breakdown of when they enlisted, were captured, were released or escaped, and more. This report was government commissioned to record all prisoners who made damages claims due to maltreatment. These cases focused primarily on the negative aspects of life as a prisoner and not on bravery. A larger study would include these sources to further understand the treatment the prisoners received, but it is not applicable to this analysis due to the reparation nature of the report. Commissioner Errol M. McDougall, *Reparations, Report, Maltreatment of Prisoners of War*, (Ottawa: F.A. Acland 1932).

²⁵ Fred McMullen; Jack Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland* (Toronto, ON: William Briggs, 1918), 4. For examples of soldiers who felt similarly, see: Nellie L. McClung, *Three Times and Out: A Canadian Boy’s Experience in Germany*, Dictated by Private Simmons, (Toronto, Ontario: Thomas Allen, 1918), 11; George Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat; Being the Full Account of the Capture and Fifteen Months’ Imprisonment of Corporal Edwards, of the Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry, and His Final Escape from Germany into Holland* (NY: New York: George H. Doran Company, 1917), 58, 72.

to embellish aspects of their stories to re-establish the bravery and heroism they had felt as soldiers. The amount (or lack of) unabridged truth of their stories is not relevant to this analysis; what matters is how hard they fought to restore their title of bravery and how they maintained their morale. The prisoners discussed here wrote memoirs, letters, or diaries describing their experiences as prisoners of war. All of these prisoners described their desire to escape and resist their captors. This may have been a way for them prove their active role in the war, or it may have been the honest truth. Regardless, their stories reveal how resilient they were in the face of adversity, and what techniques they used to cope.

The discussion that follows is based on each soldier's exact words: how he wrote of other prisoners' actions, how he wrote of himself, and how he wrote of his aspirations and goals. The soldiers frequently wrote of others whom they perceived as very brave or very cowardly and how they felt about themselves as a prisoner. While the prisoners may not have specifically used terms like "resilience" and "endurance," they clearly expressed coping techniques, and many euphemisms (such as their levels of exhaustion or need for camaraderie) suggested how much resilience they felt they had left. The soldier's heroic identity was shattered at capture, and he was constantly dehumanized and degraded by his German captors. This humiliation was carefully calculated to destroy the prisoner's self-worth.

Soldiers of the First World War found that once they arrived at the front-lines, their earlier definitions of courage were no longer relevant. Bravery was still highly valued, but the men adapted their definitions to better fit their circumstances. But nothing could prepare them for capture; the soldiers had been taught that prisoners of war were cowards. Being captured destroyed all their established notions of soldierly conduct and they were forced to find ways to reclaim their heroic identity and replenish their endurance – if they could. Resistance became their new objective, and most of the prisoners realized that escape would be their ultimate redemption. This paper will focus on how the prisoners struggled to find a new objective they could work towards, and how their resilience was constantly fluctuating while in the prison camps of Germany.

Chapter 1: Resilience and Endurance

“Having come so far, more or less safely, we made up our minds that life was worth hanging on to for a while yet.”²⁶

Canadian soldiers of the First World War underwent an experience that can best be described as traumatic. Like Private Mervin Simmons, many of the men enlisted due to a “love of adventure, and a desire to see the world.”²⁷ Little did they know that the technological advances of the age had created a style of warfare that no society had ever faced. With little military knowledge, a severe lack of medical resources, and strict military regulations, countless men could not withstand the pressures of war. In the First World War, there were 80,000 cases of war neurosis (called shell shock at the time), 8,513 British soldiers were diagnosed with nervous diseases, and many more struggled with fear and their own mortality while on the front lines.²⁸ Soldiers were unprepared for the intense and constant physical and mental stress they would endure while on the front lines, and they had to develop their own ways of coping. When in the prison camps, they were again sorely unprepared for the humiliation and abuse they would experience, and many relied on very similar strategies to provide energy to endure and remain resilient.

Although not discussed in most historical works on resilience, it is important to note that in the health science field, there is an ongoing debate over the definition of resilience.²⁹ Many researchers acknowledge that resilience is commonly understood to be a trait, a process, and/or

²⁶ Frank C. MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest* (Garden City, NY: Country Life Press, 1918; repr., Bibliographical Center for Research, 2009), 86.

²⁷ McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 1, 2. For similar examples, see: Jack O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death* (New York, NY: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1919; repr., Forgotten Books 2012), 74; Major J.C. Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany* (1919), Introduction; Anderson, *I, That’s Me* (repr., CEF Books 2009), 32; J.L. Granatstein, *Hell’s Corner: An Illustrated History of Canada’s Great War, 1914-1918*, (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2004), 4.

²⁸ Chase, ““For Weariness Cannot but Fill our Men after so long a Period of Hardship and Endurance,”” 121; Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*.

²⁹ Ricky T. Munoz, Shane Brady, Vanessa Brown, “The Psychology of Resilience: A Model of the Relationship of Lucus of Control to Hope Among Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence,” *Traumatology* 23, no. 1 (2017): 102. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/trm0000102>

an outcome.³⁰ The American Psychological Association (APA) defines resilience as “the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands.”³¹ The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines it as “the ability to be happy, successful, etcetera, after something difficult or bad has happened.”³² Within the health sciences field, there are various definitions of resilience, but most follow slight variations of the definition set out by Sunilya Luther, Dante Cicchetti, and Bronwyn Becker, that resilience is “a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity.”³³ There are two essential conditions to this definition: (1) there is a significant exposure to a threat or severe adversity, and (2) that the individual is able to make a positive change on their well-being despite constant exposure to major adversity.³⁴ Resilience is based on one’s ability to recover from a negative experience and to be able to adapt, despite constant hardship.³⁵

Endurance, in the context of war, is commonly understood to be someone’s ability to bear pain or suffering for an extended period of time, similar to resilience. The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines it as “the ability to keep doing something difficult, unpleasant, or painful for a long

³⁰ Katie J. Shillington, Kimberley T. Jackson, Cara A. Davidson, Julia Yates, Jennifer D. Irwin, Brenna Kaschor, Tara Mantler, “Riding on resilience: impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women experiencing intimate partner violence,” *Springer Nature Switzerland* 2, no. 92 (2022): 4. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43545-022-00343-6>.

³¹ *The American Psychological Association*, “Resilience,” <https://dictionary.apa.org/resilience>. This definition shows that there may be different kinds of resilience, including mental, emotional, and behavioural flexibility. Due to the nature of this research, these have all been grouped into one category. If there had been more primary sources, the variations could have been discussed in more length.

³² Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary & Thesaurus, “resilience,” (*Cambridge University Press*). <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/resilience>. For alternate definitions see: Oxford English Dictionary, “resilience, n.” (*Oxford University Press*). <https://www-oed-com.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/view/Entry/163619?redirectedFrom=resilience#eid>; Psychology Today, “Resilience,” *Psychology Today*, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/basics/resilience>.

³³ Suniya S. Luther, Dante Cicchetti, Bronwyn Becker, “The Construct of Resilience: A Critical Evaluation and Guidelines for Future Work,” *Child Development* 71, no. 3 (May/June 2000): 543. <https://doi-org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/10.1111/1467-8624.00164>

³⁴ Luther, Cicchetti, Becker, “The Construct of Resilience,” 543. See also: Shillington et al., “Riding on resilience,” 4; Munoz, Brady, Brown, “The Psychology of Resilience,” 102.

³⁵ Luther, Cicchetti, Becker, “The Construct of Resilience,” 543; Julie Anderson, “Military Resilience,” in *The First World War and Health: Rethinking Resilience*, ed. Eric Vermetten Leo van Bergen (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2020); Oxford Dictionary, “resilience, n;” Thesaurus, “resilience;” Psychology Today, “Resilience.”

time.”³⁶ David Monger, Sarah Murray, and Katie Pickles define endurance as “a form of suffering” as a type of resilience and morale.³⁷ Endurance is not always externally visible; for a soldier of the First World War, endurance was often a mental battle to withstand hardship.

The final term that needs to be discussed is courage. The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines it as “the ability to control your fear in a dangerous or difficult situation,” and “the ability to control fear and to be willing to deal with something that is dangerous, difficult, or unpleasant.”³⁸ Lord Moran defines courage as “an individual’s exercise of mind over fear through self-discipline.”³⁹ This paper will follow the understanding that courage is not a lack of fear, but one’s ability to act *in spite* of their fear, to plan their next actions regardless of the trauma they may endure.

These definitions provide the framework that this paper will use to understand the prisoners’ actions and motivations. The following chapters will explain what affected their ability to remain resilient and how this struggle was amplified in the camps. Life on the front lines was not easy and the men were often forced to, and indeed beyond, their limits, many fighting against war weariness.⁴⁰

³⁶ Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary & Thesaurus, “endurance,” (*Cambridge University Press*). <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/endurance>. For an alternate dictionary definition, see: Oxford English Dictionary, “endurance, n.” (*Oxford University Press*).

<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/62033?redirectedFrom=endurance>.

³⁷ Monger, Murray, Pickles, eds., *Endurance and the First World War*, xii.

³⁸ Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary & Thesaurus, “courage,” (*Cambridge University Press*). <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/courage>. For an alternate dictionary definition, see: Oxford English Dictionary, “courage, n.” (*Oxford University Press*).

<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/43146?rkey=lgXu9F&result=1&isAdvanced=false>.

³⁹ Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, xvi.

⁴⁰ War weariness is a term often associated with war neurosis or shell shock. It is commonly understood as the limits of one’s ability to endure up until the breaking point – which is a complete breakdown. A soldier could experience war weariness if he experiences explosions, snipers, gas, other types of attacks, lack of sleep or food, fear of the unknown enemy, witnessing the death of a comrade, and so on. War weariness can also be expressed in a myriad of ways: being sick and tired of war, being burnt out, one’s nerves at the breaking point, a desire to end the war while still wanting to beat the Germans, a lack of motivation to step up as a soldier, and many more. Many soldiers likely experienced war weariness, and despite the constant trauma, they continued to endure. Chase, “War Weariness in the Canadian Corps in the First World War,” 2-3, 121; Edward Madigan, “‘Sticking to a Hateful Task’: Resilience, Humour, and British Understandings of Combatant Courage, 1914–1918,” *War in History* 20, no 1 (2013), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0968344512455900>.

The prisoners themselves used the term resilience very sparingly, if at all. They were more likely to use terms and phrases like war weariness, endurance, sticking it, or expressions of courage and bravery to articulate their purpose and to explain how they coped.⁴¹ Adding resilience into this paper's repertoire helps to better articulate the argument, giving it a deeper meaning.

In Canada before the war, society spent a good deal of time encouraging men and boys to conform to certain standards. Men were encouraged to be outdoorsy, to show off physical prowess, to protect the innocent, and there was a close connection to militaristic ideals.⁴² Men were encouraged to be courageous, ambitious, decisive, determined, to show loyalty, be willing to sacrifice, have a sense of duty, and to be tough.⁴³ Men and boys were taught to value these characteristics through the process of socialization wherein one becomes an active member of a group.⁴⁴ Canadian historian Mark Moss defined socialization as

the development processes whereby each person acquires the knowledge, skills, beliefs, values, attitudes, and dispositions which allow him or her to function as a more or less effective, though not inevitably compliant, member of society. Through these developmental processes, the individual learns how to live with others, even though values, beliefs, and patterns of behaviour may vary from one generation to the next.⁴⁵ Socialization occurred consciously and unconsciously through leisure activities such as sports and youth groups such as cadets or the Boy Scouts, educational practices and subjects, media, popular literature – particularly boys' adventure novels – and many more.⁴⁶ The family, church, school, various levels of government, and even toy manufacturers all played a part in

⁴¹ Madigan, "Sticking to a Hateful Task," 83-76.

⁴² Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 28; Mike O'Brien, "Manhood and the Militia Myth: Masculinity, Class and Militarism in Ontario, 1902-1914," *Labour/Le Travail; Canadian Committee on Labour History*, no. 42 (Fall 1998), 119.

⁴³ Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 23, 28; Wayne J. Martino Christopher J. Grieg, *Canadian Men and Masculinities: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc, 2012), 44; O'Brien, "Manhood and the Militia Myth," 119; Sonja Levsen, "Masculinities," *1914-1918-Online International Encyclopedia of the First World War* (2015), <https://doi.org/10.15463/ie1418.10531>. <https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/masculinities>.

⁴⁴ Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 6.

⁴⁵ Moss, 6.

⁴⁶ Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 3, 8-9, 32, 33; Roper, "Between Manliness and Masculinity," 347, 348.

teaching young boys who they should try to become.⁴⁷ A boy who grew up in the years before the First World War would likely have fervently believed that heroism and bravery, especially in war, were vital to a man's identity.⁴⁸ And as military fervor increased in the early twentieth century, many boys believed that war would be the ultimate test of manhood.⁴⁹ In the early twentieth century, male gender constructs were closely tied to war.⁵⁰ As a result, this study shares some themes with a paper on gender beliefs, particularly in areas where resilience and manliness intersect. However, due to space constraints and a lack of evidence in the primary sources (words like "manliness" and "masculinity" are absent from their writings), a complete exploration of the gender element is not feasible.

The cultural construct that a true soldier was heroic, brave, and faced death without fear was embraced by the military and government to encourage a uniform identity in soldiers.⁵¹ From the moment the war began, the government created a mass of propaganda that fostered the belief that brave men signed up for war, and strong men protected the weak. [Figure 1](#) in Appendix B shows a recruitment poster which displayed a soldier in khaki with the British flag behind him, and above his head, the words, "Here's to the soldier who bled, To the sailor that

⁴⁷ Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 32.

⁴⁸ Moss, 32.

⁴⁹ Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 17, 21-22; Roper, "Between Manliness and Masculinity," 348; Levens, "Masculinities."

⁵⁰ For a deeper analysis of gender constructs and war see: Anthony Fletcher, "Patriotism, the Great War and the Decline of Victorian Manliness," *History* 99, no. 334 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-229x.12044>; Mark Howard Moss, *Manliness and Militarism: Educating Young Boys in Ontario for War* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2001, 2014); Michael Roper, "Between Manliness and Masculinity: The "War Generation" and the Psychology of Fear in Britain, 1914–1950," *Journal of British Studies* 44, no. 2 (2005), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/427130>; Leo Braudy, *From Chivalry to Terrorism: War and the Changing Nature of Masculinity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003); Mike O'Brien, "Manhood and the Militia Myth;" Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford, 1975); Ted Bogacz, "War Neurosis and Cultural Change in England, 1914–1922: The Work of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into 'Shell-Shock'," *Journal of Contemporary History* 24, no. 2 (1989); Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London, 1996); Joanna Bourke, "Effeminacy, Ethnicity and the End of Trauma: The Sufferings of 'Shell-Shocked' Men in Great Britain and Ireland, 1914–1939," *Journal of Contemporary History* 35, no. 1 (2000); Allen Frantzen, *Bloody Good: Chivalry, Sacrifice, and the Great War* (Chicago, 2004). For a historiography on how manliness changed over the years, see; George Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York, 1996). For women's role, and how female gender constructs changed prior to the war, see; Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830–1980* (London, 1987).

⁵¹ Braudy, *From Chivalry to Terrorism*, 375-377; Madigan, "'Sticking to a Hateful Task,'" 70-73; Robert Allen Rutherford, *Hometown Horizons: Local Responses to Canada's Great War*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004) 62-63.

bravely did fa'. Their flame is alive, though their spirits have fled On the wings of the Year that's awa'."⁵² Not only was the poster encouraging the young man to enlist, it was apotheosizing a soldier's death as the ultimate sacrifice, reinforcing the heroic identity of a true soldier. This is one example of the notion of true heroism; many of the men would never achieve it, and none of them would achieve it alive.

The history of courage and war has a well-developed literature – that was sometimes tied to gender research – but with few specifics on the Canadian context and even fewer on prisoners of war. Ted Bogacz analyzed the discrepancy of opinions in the changing cultural and social environment of the First World War; people either believed that shell shock was a coward's way out of war, or that it was a “product of fear, which every man harboured.”⁵³ Joanna Bourke questioned how medical and military conceptions of shell shock varied from traditional beliefs about one's character.⁵⁴ Canadian historian Mark Humphries' analysis of shell shock showed that there was a good deal of disagreement about the authenticity of shell shock during and after the First World War.⁵⁵ Shell shock was a highly contested mental illness, but it was commonly believed to be a mental rejection of war: men who could not withstand the horrors of war would break down under its pressure.⁵⁶ Due to the complexity and lack of evidence in the memoirs, shell shock will only be used as a passing example of war weariness and breakdown in this study.

Canadian society was strongly influenced by American and British culture.⁵⁷ This paper will use some British terms and phrases that the prisoners used to show how their identities and morale changed, but the soldiers discussed here were Canadian. Ontario boys had also been

⁵² Government of Canada, “Heroes of St. Julien and Festubert,” *Wartime Recruiting Poster*, (Canada) 1914-1918, <https://www.warmuseum.ca/firstworldwar/objects-and-photos/propaganda/recruitment-posters/heroes-of-st-julien-and-festubert/?back=1580&anchor=2105>, *Canadian War Museum*. [Appendix B](#)

⁵³ Bogacz, “War Neurosis and Cultural Change in England, 1914–1922,” 227, 249.

⁵⁴ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*; Bourke, “Effeminacy, Ethnicity and the End of Trauma.”

⁵⁵ Mark Osborne Humphries, *A Weary Road: Shell Shock in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1918* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 6.

⁵⁶ Shell shock is one example of what war weariness looks like. While the prisoners of this paper may have suffered from shell shock, there is no evidence in their records. It will not be factor of this study due to the lack of evidence, but it often is closely linked with notions of bravery and cowardice.

⁵⁷ Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 19.

socialized since childhood to believe that there was no better way to prove one's bravery than to fight for one's country.⁵⁸ Displaying a love of adventure and outdoors, being able to handle a weapon, protecting the weak and innocent, and showing a strong sense of patriotism all guided boys to want to be brave soldiers.⁵⁹ Boys were often given toy soldiers or adventure novels as gifts and were taught how to hunt and shown the basics of handling a weapon.⁶⁰ Many were enrolled in Boy Scouts, which taught them the value of being outdoors and working hard – Boy Scouts founder Lord Baden-Powell modelled the organization on his experience in the military in the Boer War.⁶¹ Each of these aspects were a form of social control that slowly and subconsciously imprinted upon them a cohesive definition of what a true soldier should look like.⁶² While there were surely those who held beliefs outside of these parameters, the soldiers in this paper, judging by their writings, seem to have held these very strong beliefs when they enlisted for the war.

The definitions of resilience, endurance, and courage will be analyzed through an allusion to a bank account. Lord Moran outlined this way of understanding a soldier's motivations when at war in his book *The Anatomy of Courage: The Classic WWI Account of the Psychological Effects of War*. If we consider that courage is like a bank account, positive events add credit to the account and negative ones take away credit.⁶³ Positive events could be things like good food, leave from the front, letters and parcels from home, spending time with comrades, and so on.⁶⁴ Negative events are often traumatic, and could be bombardments or shelling, fear of snipers, a comrade dying, lack of nutritious food, trench raids from the Germans, or doing a trench raid themselves, and so on. A person only has as much courage as is in his account, and his capacity to endure, or be resilient and stave off war weariness, is only as great as his account is full. The longer the men were at the front, the harder their accounts were hit, which meant that the soldiers

⁵⁸ Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 2, 3, 16, 17, 20.

⁵⁹ Moss, Chapters 16 & 17.

⁶⁰ Moss, 7, 15, 39, 115.

⁶¹ Moss, Chapter 6 & 7.

⁶² Moss, 9.

⁶³ Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, 21, 25, 67, 69.

⁶⁴ Anderson, "Military Resilience," 12.

needed to replenish their accounts constantly. Moran also argues that, “The real difference between the war of 1914 and the wars of history lay in the absence of a close period, when men safe for the moment could rest and build up a reserve.”⁶⁵ Soldiers of the First World War were forced to be constantly on their guard, without significant respite while they were near the front lines; they received little time away from the front, and only received leave infrequently. Even if their time in the trenches was quiet, they were still forced to be on be attentive and prepared should a raid or bombardment start. Their account may only have been slowly draining, but it was constant, and therefore required frequent top-ups.

Lord Moran’s bank account is related to a soldier’s experiences, so their methods of replenishing their accounts involved things like leave from the front, good food, freely spending time with comrades, and so on. Prisoners did not have access to many of these replenishment techniques – the food they had was camp food or what they received in their parcels, only certain camps allowed them to play games or freely socialize, and any positive activity was extremely regulated by their captors. The more that the prisoners endured, the faster their accounts were drained. Every day captivity was a source of psychological stress, so the prisoners needed to find ways to – at the minimum – maintain their balance. Due to the constant drain, the prisoners were unlikely to completely make up what was lost.

But resilience was not only an individual’s burden; it was, as military historian Julie Anderson wrote, “a shared burden, if an individual’s resolve faded, one’s comrades breached the gap, which reinforced the collective resilience of the group.”⁶⁶ Soldiers of the First World War lived in the muddy trenches and built intense relationships of camaraderie. These relationships acted as a replacement for the social structures of home that they had lost when they went to war.⁶⁷ The depth of these relationships will become key to this paper’s analysis; how they dealt

⁶⁵ Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, 76.

⁶⁶ Anderson, “Military Resilience,” 11.

⁶⁷ Sarah Cole, *Modernism, Male Friendship, and the First World War* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 141; Steven Loveridge, “Seeing Trauma as Sacrifice: The Link Between “Sentimental Equipment” and Endurance in New Zealand’s War Effort,” in *Endurance and the First World War: Experiences and Legacies in New Zealand and Australia*, David Monger, Sarah Murray, and Katie Pickles, ed. (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 52.

The men had been taught as children that true men kept close bonds with those around them, and remained loyal to their comrades. Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 17, 32.

with trauma and how they endured and remained resilient were primarily due to the relationships they had with their comrades. While on active duty, the soldiers were forced to create a new set of values, and consequently created a new shared identity; many felt that they had built a comradeship that extended beyond any pre-existing social barriers, a bond had been produced from their shared common destiny and experiences.⁶⁸

Resilience and endurance are useful notions that help to explain how the men in this thesis found the strength to keep fighting against war weariness. Many of those men used terms such as bravery or courage as a measurement of their success in that regard. Canadian prisoners of the First World War experienced a trauma that their generation had never faced before. They needed to find new coping mechanisms, create a new value system, and find meaning in a world they had never imagined they would experience.

⁶⁸ Eric J Leed, *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 24.

Chapter 2: Resilience in War

*“I was so wild with anger over our helplessness I didn’t know what to do.”*⁶⁹

When word spread that war had begun there were a variety of reactions from those who eventually enlisted: stoic determination to be part of it, excitement at the prospect of adventure, confusion about modern warfare techniques, a sense of duty to country, fear that the war would end before they arrived, and anger and indignation at what Germany was doing to Belgium.⁷⁰ While many of these feelings were natural given the circumstances of war, the men had been culturally preconditioned to react in a certain way to war.⁷¹ All of the men discussed here enlisted within the first year of war, many within the first five months, and were “anxious to leave with the first contingent.”⁷² The new recruits knew almost nothing of modern war, but hoped it would be their greatest adventure.⁷³ The men had been told that some would die, but they never believed that it would be them or their comrades.⁷⁴ They never expected to have their identity as soldiers shattered. As they neared the battlefield, many of the soldiers were forced to realize that war was much different than they had expected, and that its consequences for their identity would be profound.

The youngest to enlist from the prisoners examined in this thesis was Private Benjamin Davison, age nineteen, and the oldest to enlist was Major Peter Anderson, age forty-six – the only officer to successfully escape the prison camps.⁷⁵ Most of the prisoners analyzed in this paper were in their twenties, and enlisted because they had (as Private Simmons described it) a

⁶⁹ Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 29.

⁷⁰ For soldiers expressing these sentiments, see McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 1; O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 74; Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, Introduction; Anderson, *I, That’s Me* (repr., CEF Books 2009), 32; Granatstein, *Hell’s Corner*, 4.

⁷¹ Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 3, 8-9, 32, 33; Roper, “Between Manliness and Masculinity,” 347, 348.

⁷² Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, Introduction. For a similar sentiment, see: McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 2. See [Appendix A](#) for a detailed description of the soldiers.

⁷³ McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 1; O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 74; Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, Introduction; Anderson, *I, That’s Me*, 32.

⁷⁴ O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 2-6; MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 6; Anderson, *I, That’s Me*, 32-35.

⁷⁵ For a complete list and further details of the prisoners examined, please see [Appendix A](#).

“love of adventure, and a desire to see the world.”⁷⁶ They wanted to protect the innocent (namely the Belgians), and felt a strong sense of duty.⁷⁷ The older soldiers also felt an excitement and a sense of duty to protect the innocent.⁷⁸ Most of the soldiers in this paper believed that enlisting for the war was their duty and did not think twice.⁷⁹

On their way to the front, they had their beliefs of heroism and duty reinforced by being cheered through the streets of Canada, then Britain, finally France.⁸⁰ In Toronto, thousands gathered, cheering, and giving the recruits cigarettes, gum, and candy while the troops responded heartfully with their own cheers and songs.⁸¹ In Guelph, countless families and friends crowded the railway station and tracks, trying to stay as close as possible to the men, many worrying this would be their “final parting.”⁸² In Winnipeg, a similar crowd waved the men off, with shouts of farewell and good luck loud enough to drown out the band, and when the train finally pulled out everyone joined in singing “Auld Lang Syne.”⁸³ With strangers showering them with small gifts and young women giving kisses and promising to write to them, children running alongside, and massive crowds of people praising them as they marched past, how could they not fall under the exhilarating spell of war? Everyone was telling them that they were heroes, that they were brave men, and that they were protecting the weak and innocent.⁸⁴

Once on the ships or trains, and away from the cheering crowds, being around other soldiers gave them time to settle into their new role. They built bonds with these strangers that could only be broken by death. “They were all strangers to me,” recalled Lance-Corporal Jack

⁷⁶ McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 2.

⁷⁷ Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 7; O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 2-6; MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 6; McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 2.

⁷⁸ Anderson, *I, That’s Me*, 32-35; Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, Introduction.

⁷⁹ Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 7; O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 4; MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 6; Anderson, *I, That’s Me*, 32-35; Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, Introduction.

⁸⁰ Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 3, Chapter 7; Terry Copp, *Montreal at War 1914-1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021), 37; Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, Introduction; Anderson, *I, That’s Me*, 33-39; O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 3-5.

⁸¹ Ian Miller, *Our Glory and Our Greif: Torontonians and the Great War*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 92.

⁸² Rutherford, *Hometown Horizons*, 56-57.

⁸³ Jim Blanchard, *Winnipeg’s Great War: A City Comes of Age*, (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2010) 37, 82.

⁸⁴ Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 3, Chapter 7; Rutherford, *Hometown Horizons*, 62-63.

O'Brien, "and we were destined to go through experiences that drew us closer together than brothers."⁸⁵ Male friendship was one aspect of their identity as soldiers that would continue to be a driving force in their resilience, as they endured many terrible experiences, even the prison camps of Germany.

These close connections were vital to the mental health of these men; they acted as substitutes for the social order of school, church, and the family that were missing at the front.⁸⁶ But nothing could prepare them for the trauma they would undergo. Unbeknownst to them, building these friendships was the first step to building an unbreakable resilience. These camaraderies gave them an outlet for the stress and trauma of war. It gave them someone to talk to when it was nearly impossible to write the full truth to those at home – no one would truly understand the horrors of what they were writing.⁸⁷ But the intensity with which these friendships developed would not have been accepted at home due to the strong emotional connection required.⁸⁸ Men at home had been taught to be unemotional and brave, but these friendships offered them an outlet for their emotions and a place to be free from some of the standards of society. Those at home expected men to develop comradeships to help cope with the trials of war, but the relationships surpassed what society expected and became much more personal and emotional than a "normal" friendship.⁸⁹ Without the women from home to take care of them, comrades began to step into the role of caretaker and emotional supporter for each other. Although this was a feminine role on the home front, the men were forced to adapt to their environment and find comfort in who was available. They were creating a home away from

⁸⁵ O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 5. These relationships were highly encouraged, and in Canada before the war, men were urged to build close heterosexual relationships with the men around them because remaining loyal to one's comrades was evidence of manliness. Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 15, 17, 32, 145; O'Brien, "Manhood and the Militia Myth," 133; Anderson, "Military Resilience," 11.

⁸⁶ Cole, *Modernism, Male Friendship, and the First World War*, 141.

⁸⁷ Chase, "War Weariness in the Canadian Corps in the First World War," 26.

⁸⁸ Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 17. Due to the lack of evidence in the memoirs, this paper will not analyze how and if these relationships developed into homosexual relations. For a discussion on homosexual relationships on the front lines see, Cole, *Modernism, Male Friendship, and the First World War*; Steven Maynard, "Through a Hole in the Lavatory Wall: Homosexual Subcultures, Police Surveillance, and the Dialectics of Discovery, Toronto, 1890-1930," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5, no. 2 (1994): 207-42; Steven Maynard, "'Horrible Temptations': Sex, Men, and Working-Class Male Youth in Urban Ontario, 1890-1935," *Canadian Historical Review* 78, no. 2 (1997): 191-235.

⁸⁹ Cole, *Modernism, Male Friendship, and the First World War*, 139; Granatstein, *Hell's Corner*, 46.

home in the trenches, and these relationships gave them strength during difficult times, a reason to keep fighting when all hope seemed lost, and someone to guide them when they felt utterly despondent.⁹⁰ As the men settled into their new role as soldiers, a new hierarchy of bravery began developing. These close bonds helped the soldiers establish themselves within this new order by giving them role models and ideals that they could compare to themselves.

For many soldiers, it did not set in that they were joining a *war* until they could hear the shells and see the lights from the battlefield;

No sounds in the world bring the same sense of hopeless, heart-breaking loneliness as these which drift from the front at night. Every full rifle crack seems to carry a message of anguish to the lonely listener. The bold defiance of the machine guns seems to die away again in dismay, afraid of its own echo. And the lights, those flashing, silent, yellow lights, lend a ghostly aspect to the scene which helps to deepen the lonesome feeling.⁹¹

Many were jubilant right up until they were within a few kilometers of the front, when an icy realization settled in as they saw the wounded and dead passing by.⁹² Their first experiences in the trenches sobered them, and many wrote of near-misses or of a comrade who died from standing up too tall.⁹³ In their early days on the front, many tried not to think of their own mortality.⁹⁴ They were afraid that if they showed their fear, they would be labelled a coward and

⁹⁰ Gilly Carr and Harold Mytum, “Camp Domesticity: Shifting Gender Boundaries in WWI Internment Camps,” In *Cultural Heritage and Prisoners of War: Creativity Behind Barbed Wire*, (New York: NY: Routledge, 2021), 292; O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 5.

⁹¹ MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 13.

⁹² O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 51; Madigan, ““Sticking to a Hateful Task,”” 93.

⁹³ Anderson, *I, That’s Me*, 54; O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 53. Lance-Corporal O’Brien was warned his first day in the trenches not to put his head over the trench wall in a bet, since a dead man cannot pay his bills. On Major Anderson’s first day in the trenches, a rum jar a few inches above his head was shot by a sniper 600 yards away. Any time he tried to look over the trenches, he could hear the sniper’s shots fly by. The soldiers on the front line quickly learned not to raise their heads out of the trenches – the German snipers were always watching.

⁹⁴ O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 51.

be shamed.⁹⁵ War changed the soldiers; the death and destruction of the front-lines forced them frequently to come face to face with mortality.⁹⁶ A soldier's ability to endure hardship was only as strong as his morale, and as mentioned earlier, their ability to endure was limited by the amount of morale left in their account: every time a soldier experienced trauma (such as going over the top, lack of sleep and nutrients, facing German trench raiders, a battle, a comrade dying, and so on), his endurance balance decreased.⁹⁷ The soldier must refill his morale account with positive experiences – such as leave from the front, good food and drink, camaraderie, and so on.⁹⁸ The camaraderie the soldiers had built on the way to the front not only acted as replenishment for their constantly ebbing resilience accounts, but their accounts were also fortified through the soldiers' negative experiences, and the men leaned into the comfort these relationships offered.

The soldiers quickly realized that life in the trenches was sapping their endurance. Willpower could not replace or restore courage, and once a man's courage was gone, it was often gone for good.⁹⁹ Facing death every day forced them to slowly shift their understanding of courage into something that was realistic for the front-lines: for some it became the ability to follow orders, volunteering to go over the top as often as they could, killing Germans in the rare face-to-face combat, volunteering for unique jobs such as working in a tunnelling company or as a bomber, protecting one's comrades, rebuilding trenches, or building close-knit bonds.¹⁰⁰ Many came to shape their ideals on what their superiors did or did not do – how they reacted in heavy

⁹⁵ O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 51; Granatstein, *Hell's Corner*, 42, 46, 61; Madigan, ““Sticking to a Hateful Task.””

This belief tied to the gender constructs these men had been raised to believe. They had been taught that men were to be brave with no outward signs of panic or cowardice, to conceal their emotions, to be courteous and protective of women and children, to be loyal to comrades, and, vital to the soldiers of the First World War, to be able to meet death without flinching. Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 15, 17, 31-32; Roper, “Between Manliness and Masculinity,” 347.

⁹⁶ Granatstein, *Hell's Corner*, 42, 61; Madigan, ““Sticking to a Hateful Task.””

⁹⁷ Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, 21, 25, 67, 69.

⁹⁸ Anderson, “Military Resilience,” 14.

This is another gender construct that the men had been raised to believe – building close bonds with those around them was a powerful aspect of the manliness they had been raised to believe in. Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 21, 198.

⁹⁹ Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 358; Madigan, ““Sticking to a Hateful Task.””

¹⁰⁰ Anderson, *I, That's Me*, 82; MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 54.

bombardments, how they treated those below them, whether they were willing to do tasks that they asked their men to do, and so on. Courage was not as straightforward as they had been taught; in war, courage was highly dependent on one's environment.

The first days in the trenches were often the most shocking and Private Donald Laird was typical in writing of the innocence he felt he had lost: "I was possessed by a strange, indefinite feeling, as if I had suddenly lost something of great value without knowing exactly what that means."¹⁰¹ Not knowing the hardships of war was a privilege, and within moments their prewar innocence was ripped away from them. They could not afford to be "soft-hearted or soft-headed."¹⁰² Front-line fighting proved that life was not certain, and some soldiers came to accept that their own mortality was out of their control. They believed that when death came, there was nothing they could do to stop it, so they tried to enjoy every moment they could.¹⁰³ Sometimes that meant extending their leave, if possible, to spend a few extra days with people they cared about. They knew that anything could happen before they got another leave.

Many soldiers on the front-lines considered it rational to have *some* fear, and to not be "careless of life."¹⁰⁴ But they had been taught that bravery "meant having control over one's emotions; it was even permissible to display fear – provided it was a one-time occurrence. Experiencing fear was part of the testing, the coming of age; mastering it meant that one was brave."¹⁰⁵ And, as Moran explains, there are varying levels of fear: there are men who feel no fear, men who feel fear but do not show it, men who feel fear, show it, but still do their job, and men who feel fear, show it, and allow it to control them.¹⁰⁶ The soldiers quickly came to the conviction that feeling fear on the front-lines was healthy, for it kept them alive. A soldier in Private Franklin MacDonald's unit would try to continue playing cards when there were shells dropping all around them (especially if he was losing), and when the others finally abandoned

¹⁰¹ Donald H. Laird, *Prisoner 5-1-1: The Memoir of Harry Laird, 4th Canadian Mounted Rifles 1914-1918*, ed. Norm Christie (1919; repr., CEF Books, Ottawa, 2006), 22.

¹⁰² O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 51.

¹⁰³ O'Brien, 37.

¹⁰⁴ Granatstein, *Hell's Corner*, 39-42.

¹⁰⁵ Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 68.

¹⁰⁶ Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, 5.

the game, he did not seek shelter with them in the culvert.¹⁰⁷ Instead, he sat beside a bomb store – the most dangerous place to be when they were being shelled. This soldier, Private MacDonald wrote, “often exposed himself to danger unnecessarily and seemed to be absolutely devoid of fear.”¹⁰⁸ But having a lack of fear was not the same as being courageous or heroic. This soldier purposely put himself in harm’s way, and likely was suffering from war weariness. He was later killed at the Battle of Sanctuary Wood in 1916.¹⁰⁹ Private MacDonald believed that fear was part of life on the battlefield, but there was a way to have courage without being reckless. The definition of courage was highly subjective, but the camaraderies the soldiers developed allowed them to understand and accept their fear without a public demonstration of it.

The soldiers spent a large portion of their time on the front-lines sitting or lying in the trenches; they played cards, smoked, wrote letters, made warm meals, or just sat around talking.¹¹⁰ The average soldier rarely looked over the trench parapet, fearing the fatal headshot if a sniper happened to be watching and knowing that there was not much to see in no-man’s-land.¹¹¹ Most trench raids occurred at night when it was hard to see the enemy coming. Usually only a few men were chosen to go on a trench raid; some soldiers vied for the opportunity, whereas others would rather stay safely in the trenches.¹¹² On the front-lines, the men adapted their perceptions of courage and duty to suit their environment and what they would have been able to endure in that moment. Duty and courage were not always outward displays, sometimes it was supporting one’s comrade through a difficult time, or helping rebuild the trenches, or suggesting a new technique to outwit the Germans. Their own perceptions of courage were fluid and changed many times. For example, some saw going over the top as the bravest action and believed that going into no-man’s-land or engaging in a bomb fight was “exciting work.”¹¹³ The soldiers had to mould their beliefs to fit their circumstances, otherwise they would never have

¹⁰⁷ MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 43.

¹⁰⁸ MacDonald, 44

¹⁰⁹ MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 43; Chase, “War Weariness in the Canadian Corps in the First World War,” 118-19, 27, 29, 46.

¹¹⁰ MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 43.

¹¹¹ See, for example, Anderson, *I, That’s Me*, 84, 86; and MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 55.

¹¹² O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 74.

¹¹³ MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 57.

known how to act. Each moment of courage helped replenish their endurance accounts, ensuring they were never fully depleted.

In a major battle it was common for the soldiers to lose connection with their commanding officers; for example, Private MacDonald's sergeant gave an order to retreat, but within seconds, he was severed in half by a piece of iron from a dugout roof.¹¹⁴ Soldiers were forced to make life and death decisions based on the limited tactical information they could deduce. Retreat was impossible with the shells raining down around them, and the trenches were in constant upheaval – adding a risk of being covered in dirt.¹¹⁵ This was the battle of Mount Sorrel which the men endured for over six hours, with little help from their own artillery. They tried to make their way back to their reserve trenches, crawling over dead and wounded, wishing they could end the tormented suffering with “a hearty fire from our guns.”¹¹⁶ Private MacDonald knew that a mercy-killing of his comrades would have mentally destroyed him, but it would have stopped their pain, and ensured that the Germans could not torture them or kill them with flamethrowers – which would certainly have been a worse death.¹¹⁷ But Private MacDonald did not kill them. Perhaps he had hope that they would survive or that their own artillery would step in soon and end the bombardment and their stretcher-bearers could save them. Perhaps he was afraid of the consequences. Perhaps he did not think he had the time, or maybe he just could not bring himself to do it. Instead, he continued crawling with his comrade, but death and agony were all around them – the trenches resembled “a butcher's shop and in addition to the nerve-racking sight of wounded and mutilated men, the odor of blood and flesh was sickening and horrible.”¹¹⁸ While in the heat of battle, they were in survival mode, which was quickly using up their resilience. It was usually down to the most basic instincts: fight or flight, knowing that the wrong choice could cost them their lives. When someone died nearby, they quickly grieved the loss, having to continue moving, or risk dying themselves. They only tried to save the fallen

¹¹⁴ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 69.

¹¹⁵ MacDonald, 71.

¹¹⁶ MacDonald, 70.

¹¹⁷ MacDonald, 70.

¹¹⁸ MacDonald, 71.

soldier if there was a chance he was still alive, or if they were bonded. Once, Private Nicholson was buried in dirt from a shell, and Private MacDonald took the time to dig him out.¹¹⁹ These two had been together since they joined the war, building an unbreakable bond. It was because of this camaraderie that they stuck together and helped keep each other alive. It was not until later, after the battle, that they had the time to digest this trauma.

Each time they found a new spot to hide they were seen by the German spotters and the shelling was refocused on them. They had to keep moving, but this time Private MacDonald thought it would be smarter to head into no-man's-land. Due to the proximity to the Germans, he hoped it would offer protection. They were soon joined by four others and before long the group was bombarded with more shells and were forced to keep moving.¹²⁰ Usually they could see where the shells would fall, but because of the mass number that day, it was impossible to avoid all of them. As their group continued, two were killed, and one was wounded. The trauma of the bombardment caused some men to become disoriented and forget where they were; one man in Private MacDonald's group "lost his mind" and stood up, walking back to their trenches and would not take cover.¹²¹ He was soon taken out by a machine gun. He had been in shock: he had watched many of his comrades die mere feet from him, he had almost died many times, and he was likely controlled by his fear. Ultimately, many of the soldiers who "lost it" like this one were killed because they stopped being careful, got disoriented, and were in range of the German gunners.¹²² These men could not endure the war anymore, their morale reserves were depleted, they were pushed past just being war weary, and suffered a complete breakdown.¹²³ Unfortunately, many believed that, "It was more honourable, for example, to be torn apart by shell fragments than be made militarily ineffective by little-understood psychiatric problems."¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 73.

¹²⁰ MacDonald, 72.

¹²¹ MacDonald, 72.

¹²² For a discussion on British shell shock/PTSD see Roper, "Between Manliness and Masculinity." For a Canadian perspective, see Humphries, *A Weary Road*.

¹²³ Chase, "War Weariness in the Canadian Corps in the First World War," 8, 120-27; Humphries, *A Weary Road*.

¹²⁴ Chase, "War Weariness in the Canadian Corps in the First World War," 121.

This description of men who lost all rationality is not uncommon in First World War literature, and exemplifies what happens when a man's ability to endure has been used up.

Even with this shift in mentality towards accepting rational fear, building up the endurance bank account, and embracing camaraderie, many soldiers strongly believed that prisoners of war were weak and cowardly – another presumption that was culturally conditioned that prisoners had given up, rather than continuing to fight.¹²⁵ Using this paper's method of analysis, it was not perceived as a slow drawing-down of the resilience bank account through circumstance, but rather an intentional closing of the account. Major Anderson wrote that one of the commanding officers of his battalion became a prisoner "through no fault of his own," implying that some others may have been captured through some fault of their own.¹²⁶ It was common for prisoners to make sure that others knew that they had been captured unwillingly, or because they were wounded, unconscious, or out of ammunition. Even the Red Cross incorrectly recorded that every soldier captured at Ypres in 1915 was either wounded or gassed, again implying that no Canadian soldier would *choose* to be captured.¹²⁷ Being captured was believed to be the worst-case scenario – the men must have had no choice in the matter, because if they had had a choice, they would have fought to the death. This stigma was reinforced by military doctrine stating that every man who was captured had to face a board of inquiry and could be charged with desertion if believed to have gone willingly.¹²⁸ While this may not have been a universal belief, it was common and was often instilled in the men by their superior officers, peers, and even family members. Private Simmons wrote of how one comrade, Private Fred

¹²⁵ Anderson, *I, That's Me*, 37. This cultural conditioning is closely tied to the male construct they were raised to strive for – the brave soldier who showed no signs of fear or panic, who was loyal and protective, and who met death without flinching and did not become a prisoner of war. Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 15, 17, 31-32; Roper, "Between Manliness and Masculinity," 347; J.L. Granatstein, *Hell's Corner*, 61.

¹²⁶ Anderson, *I, That's Me*, 37. For similar mentalities, see: Vance, *Objects of Concern*, 26; Morton, *Silent Battle*, 24; Granatstein, *Hell's Corner*, 55-56; Loveridge, "Seeing Trauma as Sacrifice," 51; McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 11; Private Alex Allan, *What Happened to Me on June 2nd 1916: My Personal Experiences in Front Lines During Third Battle of Ypres and My Experiences in Germany While a Prisoner of War June 13th Til Dec. 6th 1916*, (Canadian War Museum (CWM), Ottawa, Canada: Control Number: 20140001-001, 1916).

¹²⁷ Vance, *Objects of Concern*, 26.

¹²⁸ At least one Canadian was charged with desertion to the enemy, and others were suspected to have crossed over to the enemy. Vance, *Objects of Concern*, 26; Morton, *Silent Battle*, 24; Granatstein, *Hell's Corner*, 55-56; Loveridge, "Seeing Trauma as Sacrifice," 51.

McKelvey, was told by his father never to let himself be captured; the father would rather his son die than live with the shame of having surrendered.¹²⁹ It was likely the worst thing the soldiers could imagine happening.

Regardless of the stigma, the soldiers believed that they would never have voluntarily chosen to become a prisoner, but in the heat of battle, there was rarely time to weigh the options. Soldiers were instructed to “Take no prisoners!” and “Die fighting!” by their commanders.¹³⁰ While this may not have been official Canadian military policy, it was commonly enforced. They were also taught to believe that prisoners were weak and that dying would be more heroic and noble than being captured; this was ingrained in them on the front lines.¹³¹ Watching their comrades die beside them also added to their motivation because the fury and devastation drove them to keep on fighting. In the heat of battle, with death and destruction surrounding them, surrendering was the last thing on their minds. Most of those analyzed here wrote how they killed many Germans before surrendering, fighting until they had no ammunition, no energy, and they were often wounded: “I knew I had made them pay the price anyway – we were out of ammunition and, besides, we were too much ‘all in’ to put up any kind of scrap.”¹³² It remains true: few soldiers would have willingly chosen to become a prisoner of war (i.e. through desertion). But in the heat of battle, the choice was not prisoner or soldier, it was life or death; these prisoners realized in those final moments that their life was more valuable than a heroic title, and they were too exhausted to even try to fight.

¹²⁹ McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 11. This is another example of how strongly those at home felt about prisoners of war – they had been taught to believe that prisoners were cowards, weak, and the opposite of manly. Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 3, 8-9, 32, 33; Roper, “Between Manliness and Masculinity,” 347, 348.

¹³⁰ Many soldiers recalled such such instructions. See, for example, Allan, *What Happened to Me on June 2nd 1916*; Morton, *Silent Battle*, x, 2.

¹³¹ McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 11; Allan, *What Happened to Me on June 2nd 1916*; Morton, *Silent Battle*, x, 2.

¹³² O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 115. Although the war had transformed their beliefs around courage and bravery, they still felt compelled to conform to the traditional, civilian notions of bravery in their memoirs. This may have led to an exaggeration to appear more heroic and prove that they had no choice in their capture and had killed many Germans before they were captured. They may have felt compelled to follow this heroic narrative because that was what their readers believed, and following the narrative was simpler than teaching the reality of war.

Being a tunneller for the 250th Tunnelling Company offered Lance-Corporal O'Brien a unique experience of working on the front, and ultimately of capture.¹³³ Every day he went more than a hundred feet underground to either lie in a listening post for hours (trying to hear German diggers) or to dig towards the Germans. One day, Lance-Corporal O'Brien and his corporal began digging a hole in which a torpedo could be properly aimed at the German diggers and German trenches, but they realized there was a massive bombardment happening above.¹³⁴ The two made their way back to the entrance and found it had caved in, so they worked with another tunneller to dig out.¹³⁵ A group of Germans came down the tunnel and there was a deadly fight, resulting in the Germans being killed with the help of a shell collapsing the tunnel.¹³⁶ By the time the Canadians got to fresh air, they had been buried for four hours. The group, along with some Canadian machine gunners, began making their way to the reserve trenches, but the Germans had advanced past their tunnel entrance.¹³⁷ As the group jumped from shell hole to shell hole, killing any German soldier they found, most of their group was killed, but not once did they consider surrendering.¹³⁸ Shells rained down around them, leaving only two from the eight that began the arduous journey. As they moved towards the next hole, they heard a shell dropping and threw themselves in.¹³⁹ At the bottom, a group of Germans had their rifles aimed and ready; the two Canadians thought they were certainly dead, and Lance-Corporal O'Brien recalled that "really I didn't much care if they finished me right then."¹⁴⁰ Many who were captured wrote of this reaction: a miserable despair settling into the pit of their stomachs, which was the collapse of their resilience accounts.¹⁴¹ Most soldiers had been through hell the moments before capture: they had killed Germans, watched comrades die, and many of them were wounded and completely exhausted – any endurance they had had in the fight was rapidly running out or completely depleted. When at last they knew there was no chance of escape, and expected to die

¹³³ O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 89-91.

¹³⁴ O'Brien, 105.

¹³⁵ O'Brien, 106-108.

¹³⁶ O'Brien, 108-109.

¹³⁷ O'Brien, 110.

¹³⁸ O'Brien, 111-113.

¹³⁹ O'Brien, 114.

¹⁴⁰ O'Brien, 117.

¹⁴¹ See, for example, Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 56; McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 11.

a heroic death, their resilience gave out. But instead of death, they were captured; Private Simmons' shame was evident in his writing, "There were about twenty of us altogether, and we climbed out of the trench without speaking. There was nothing to be said. It was all up with us."¹⁴² The shock of capture was evident; it was unexpected and identity shaking.

Private Simmons had endured a day-long, heavy bombardment before being commanded to retreat.¹⁴³ He and his comrades moved through the trenches as quickly as they could, but there were dead and wounded every few feet. A few of those retreating tried to run for a distant trench by cutting through a field, but it was in clear sight of the enemy. Private Simmons followed the others but was shot through the shoulder and fell into a shell hole before making it to his goal. It was in this moment that he realized capture was a "grave likelihood."¹⁴⁴ A powerful determination pushed him to try to make it to the trench, even if he got killed in the process; he used up what was left of his endurance account and jumped from shell hole to shell hole, the raw fear of being captured driving him forward, but he fainted as he got within reach of the trench.¹⁴⁵ He woke to the words, "The Germans are coming," then the Germans swarmed his trench.¹⁴⁶ Surprisingly, the German officer gave the Canadians an opportunity to surrender, and it was suddenly over. The Canadians climbed out of the trenches in shock, their morale account in shreds. The German soldiers herded them like animals, commencing the relentless dehumanization which would torture them throughout their time in Germany.¹⁴⁷ Private Simmons had believed that becoming a prisoner was a fate worse than death; it was humiliating and terrible, and now it had happened to him.¹⁴⁸

The instant of capture was intense and life-threatening but was over before the men could realize what had happened. Lieutenant John Thorn and his men barely had a chance to think.¹⁴⁹ Germans swarmed their trench, and each man fought for his life, but they were overwhelmed and

¹⁴² McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 10.

¹⁴³ McClung, 8.

¹⁴⁴ McClung, 9.

¹⁴⁵ McClung, 9.

¹⁴⁶ McClung, 10.

¹⁴⁷ McClung, 10.

¹⁴⁸ McClung, 10.

¹⁴⁹ Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, 1.

surrounded, with no alternative but surrender. Lieutenant Thorn made it explicitly clear in his memoir that they had no choice over their capture: “at one o’clock on April 24th, having no ammunition, and nearly all the men being killed or severely wounded, we were surrounded, and I was taken prisoner.”¹⁵⁰ Lieutenant Thorn and his men were in shock, exhausted, and ready to die; the worst had happened.¹⁵¹ The fact that they were permitted to surrender after a brutal hand-to-hand fight shows that the Germans did have some compassion – at least when an officer was present.

Surrendering was an extremely dangerous, and potentially deadly, event. In the heat of battle, the enemy could have killed the Canadians without a second thought and it often took a senior German officer to step in and officially start the capture process.¹⁵² Many of the Canadians described how the German soldiers had argued when they were supposed to take them captive, and while the Canadians could not understand them, the tone was clear: many of the Germans wanted to kill them and be done with it.¹⁵³ The Germans who could speak English told the Canadians that they had been specifically instructed to take no *Canadian* prisoners because they believed that Canadians killed German prisoners.¹⁵⁴ One Canadian wrote of his fear to surrender because they saw the German soldiers “*were pumping liquid fire on the wounded men in the shell holes, burning them up*”¹⁵⁵ (italics in the original). The line between murder and war was very vague, especially in the heat of battle. Many believed that their surrender would result in death.

The moment of capture was burned into the captives’ memories as a demeaning and humiliating experience. They had fought for their lives, losing many comrades in the struggle to survive.¹⁵⁶ After realizing the futility of the fight and with their endurance reserves drained, they

¹⁵⁰ Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, Introduction; Vance, *Objects of Concern*, 26.

¹⁵¹ Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, 1.

¹⁵² Tim Cook’s paper describes how precarious being capture experience was. While his paper focuses more on Canadians capturing Germans, it clearly shows that capture was not always as easy as raising one’s hands and saying “comrade.” Cook, “The Politics of Surrender: Canadian Soldiers and the Killing of Prisoners in the Great War.”

¹⁵³ See, for example, MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 79; Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 60.

¹⁵⁴ Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 64.

¹⁵⁵ MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 76.

¹⁵⁶ Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, Introduction.

gave in, defeated, exhausted, and ready to die.¹⁵⁷ But surrendering did not always mean they were safe; Lance-Corporal Edward Edwards watched helplessly as his comrade Private O.B. Taylor was mercilessly shot in the back after surrendering.¹⁵⁸ The Germans claimed that because he was a Canadian, he deserved what he got; they saw Canadian soldiers as *geldsoldaten* (mercenaries).¹⁵⁹ Private Taylor had surrendered, was following the orders given to him, and had showed no signs of resistance. Another two Canadian soldiers were lying in the trench, severely wounded, and a German came along and stabbed and killed one, then dripped the blood on the other. When the man cried out for mercy, the German gave him some water and said he would show how well Germans could treat a prisoner.¹⁶⁰ Under the laws of the Hague Convention, both murdered soldiers should have been spared; they had surrendered and therefore were prisoners of war, not enemy soldiers.

Lance-Corporal Edwards also wrote of how a German kept trying to kill him with a broad axe, watching for an opportunity when the officer who captured them would not be able to stop him. Although Lance-Corporal Edwards felt ready to break from the humiliation of capture, when the German soldier raised his axe for the killing blow, Lance-Corporal Edwards felt an intense terror sweep through him; he did not want to die.¹⁶¹ The line between murder and war was often unclear and easily crossed; these men had surrendered and were following their captor's orders, yet some Germans still tried to kill them. This made the act of surrendering less of a safe haven from battle, knowing that their lives were still held in the balance. And although the men felt completely drained, with no resilience left in them, when it came down to a life-and-death situation, the men found they did not truly want to die.

Although the Canadians had submitted and surrendered – realizing that their life was more valuable than a heroic death in battle – they still believed that being captured was demeaning and degrading. Those who were conscious and aware of their surroundings wrote of

¹⁵⁷ Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 58.

¹⁵⁸ Pearson, 46, 47.

¹⁵⁹ Morton, *Silent Battle*, 37; Vance, *Objects of Concern*, 27; Cook, "The Politics of Surrender: Canadian Soldiers and the Killing of Prisoners in the Great War," 650.

¹⁶⁰ Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 52.

¹⁶¹ Pearson, 48-9.

“the awful despair and misery which looked out of the eyes of the poor wounded fellows.”¹⁶² There were few who spoke, stewing in their own misery.¹⁶³ They had assumed that they would never surrender, but they had never been put in such extreme circumstances as these. They would certainly have died had they continued to fight. In that moment, they had realized the value of their life, and using any strength that was left in their endurance account, they hoped against death.

The soldiers had received very little information on what becoming a prisoner looked like. When Major Anderson was taken captive, he told as many Canadians as he could not to say a word; he would do all of the talking.¹⁶⁴ Those who did not have an officer captured with them were forced to follow their instincts.

Private MacDonald and his comrade Private Nicholson had witnessed Germans burn the wounded alive, so they hid in a culvert, afraid they would be killed.¹⁶⁵ They had no means to protect themselves and would rather hide than face the murderous Germans. In this moment, endurance did not always mean actively fighting back; it meant finding ways to stay alive. Their own units began to fight back, and the Germans had begun to dig in, right in front their hiding place. Once the leading mopping up party had passed, they crawled to a nearby hole, knowing that there was no way back to their own trenches; they were eventually found by some Germans who began arguing, clearly discussing whether to kill them or not.¹⁶⁶ The two Canadians were exhausted and done fighting; Private MacDonald attributes their survival to the indifference they showed.¹⁶⁷ As they walked towards the rear, many Germans spat at them, cursed them, and a few tried to kill them. Throughout their whole journey away from the front they kept expecting to die. They knew that becoming a prisoner did not mean instant immunity – as the Hague Convention stated. They were only *safe* once they were officially documented as prisoners and

¹⁶² MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 82. For similar descriptions see: Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 58; McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 11; Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 49.

¹⁶³ McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 11.

¹⁶⁴ Anderson, *I, That's Me*, 91; Vance, *Objects of Concern*, 27.

¹⁶⁵ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 77.

¹⁶⁶ MacDonald, 79.

¹⁶⁷ MacDonald, 80.

sent away from the front-lines.¹⁶⁸ Some were actively aware of every moment after they were captured, and Private Evans described that he was “so wild with anger over our helplessness I didn’t know *what* to do”¹⁶⁹ (italics in original). They dwelled in their despair, feeling every sickening second tick by, Private Simmons felt their fate to be “bitterer far than to be shot.”¹⁷⁰ Others were in a haze until they arrived at the gates of the camp when they realized they were prisoners of war.¹⁷¹ No matter when they had the dawning realization that they were prisoners, it was a humiliating moment, wondering what those at home would think of them.¹⁷² Lance-Corporal Edwards even hoped, for a moment, that a German soldier would kill him; with the gun pressed to his temple, he was exhausted and did not think he could handle another horrible moment of the day.¹⁷³ Many of the new prisoners wrote of their disinterest in life in those moments; they did not care if they lived or died.¹⁷⁴ They believed they had failed as soldiers and did not know if – or how – they could redeem themselves. Major Anderson describes this sentiment: “I was now a Prisoner of War. What an awful feeling; what a humiliating position to be in. What will people at home think about me. A Prisoner of War. But I am going to get away somehow, come what may.”¹⁷⁵ Although he was utterly devastated from his capture, he already had a plan: he was going to escape from the prison camps and redeem himself.

On the front lines, resilience had meant enduring long periods on the front lines, sitting in mud and water for days on end and fighting an unknown enemy. Sometimes it was active fighting, while other times it was sitting and waiting for the next bombardment. Resilience meant

¹⁶⁸ MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 221.

Some prisoners were illegally forced to work behind the front-line trenches for the Germans and were not documented. Since they were never officially reported as prisoners, those prisoners were never accounted for, never received Red Cross parcels, and many died. These deaths were not included in the accounting of prisoner deaths; rather, they were listed among the casualties of front-line fighting. Those who survived were weak, malnourished, and were covered in scars from the horrible abuse they had endured. Morton, *Silent Battle*, 39.

¹⁶⁹ Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 29. For similar comments, see MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 82; McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 11; Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 49.

¹⁷⁰ McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 11.

¹⁷¹ Anderson, I, *That’s Me*, 89; Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 35.

¹⁷² Anderson, I, *That’s Me*, 89-91.

¹⁷³ Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 58.

¹⁷⁴ For such observations, see MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 79-80; Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 49, 58; Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 54; Anderson, I, *That’s Me*, 91-92; McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 10-11; Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, Introduction, 1.

¹⁷⁵ Anderson, I, *That’s Me*, 91.

staying alive, staying together, and knowing the war would end one day so they could go home. As they began their journey away from their old lines, they were forced to come to terms with a new reality in which German soldiers sneered at them, poked them with their bayonets, stole items from their uniforms, laughed at them, and threatened to kill them.¹⁷⁶ In those moments, they no longer felt like Canadian heroes, they were now prisoners of war – supposedly, men who had given up the fight.¹⁷⁷ But soon they began to rebuild their endurance accounts in a way that would fit into their new environment, and, slowly, they felt “ready to buck the Germans in any way we could, for when we realized fully that we were prisoners we determined that the fight should be carried on behind his lines as well as in front of them.”¹⁷⁸ Even if they did not quite recognize it in the moment, their resilience had been forced to take on a new character. For some, like Major Anderson and Private MacDonald, this change was almost instantaneous; they knew that resilience meant enduring the humiliation and torture until they could find a way to escape the prison camps of Germany. It took some of the other prisoners in this paper longer to realize this, but eventually, they all knew that if they focused on escape, they could endure the camps.

The disorientation that the new prisoners felt was exhausting. They had fought for their lives, some had been under heavy bombardment for days, and they were covered in mud and blood. They had gone from fighting for their lives to being prisoners in enemy hands. They felt they had lost their sense of identity as a soldier and felt like failures to their families and countries. With no idea of what lay ahead of them, many were dejected shells of their previous

¹⁷⁶ Many POWs described these situations, including Anderson, *I, That's Me*, 92; McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 11-12; Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, 1-2; Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 47-48, 57; MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 80-81.

¹⁷⁷ This is a very common reflection in the memoirs. See Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 29, 54; Anderson, *I, That's Me*, 91-92; McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 10-11; Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, Introduction, 1; Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 48, 49, 58; MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 72, 77, 79; O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 117.

The idea that they failed as men may be tied to the male gender constructs which had been ingrained in them since childhood. Predominantly around the outbreak of war, men were told that *manly* men went to war and fought for their country – becoming a prisoner was the opposite of what they had been taught to believe. Leo Braudy, *From Chivalry to Terrorism: War and the Changing Nature of Masculinity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 375-377.

¹⁷⁸ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 80.

selves, silent, brooding, and depressed.¹⁷⁹ Their passage through the medical tents, their journey away from the front, and the people they met became blurs, mere blotches on their recollections.¹⁸⁰

Dying on the battlefield was believed to be the ultimate sacrifice a man could make, and a wound could bring them back to England with a heroic status. But being captured was regarded as cowardly. These men had never considered that capture was a possibility, and Private Evans reflected, “Not a single one of the fellows I was with then or talked with later had ever dreamed of being captured, so we didn’t worry over what was ahead of us.”¹⁸¹ They had assumed they would either survive and go home, be wounded and be sent home, or die fighting and become an eternal hero.¹⁸² As they settled into this new role as prisoners, they were forced to try and rebuild their shattered resilience accounts. They were no longer the heroic ideal that society had raised them to be – a soldier – but had become the opposite: they were prisoners, and therefore failures. While on the front-lines, they had learned that endurance was not as straightforward as they had thought; they had watched comrades die, witnessed horrible deaths and gruesome events, had nearly died various times, and they had sat and lived in mud and water. War was not always brave or heroic; it was dirty, exhausting, and often involved long periods of waiting. With their comrades, the soldiers transformed their views of bravery to fit their circumstances. When their endurance account ran low, they refilled it with positive experiences like spending time with comrades, getting good food, trying to rest, and so on. The soldiers worked together to remain resilient and endure the exhaustion of the trenches. They would soon realize that being a prisoner also would force a remoulding of their resilience.

¹⁷⁹ For such comments, see MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 82; Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 29, 58; McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 11.

¹⁸⁰ Many prisoners described the journey this way: Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 35, 54; Allan, *What Happened to Me on June 2nd 1916*; Vance, *Objects of Concern*, 28; Morton, *Silent Battle*, 43.

¹⁸¹ Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 35.

¹⁸² Davison, “P.O.W.: Chapter 1,” 4.

Chapter 3: Replenishing Endurance

*“Broken, ragged, bloody, and hopeless we staggered along, helping one another when we could. The awful despair and misery which looked out of the eyes of the poor wounded fellows as we were urged along by the guards were too agonizing to be expressed.”*¹⁸³

Life on the front-lines quickly taught these soldiers that their endurance only lasted so long and needed to be replenished frequently so they did not break down. Soldiers in the trenches still honoured bravery and sacrifice as key qualities, but they also knew how important it was to find comfort in camaraderie and to find other ways to reload their endurance account.¹⁸⁴ Friendships were important back in Canada, but on the front-lines these bonds were amplified and offered a place to share fears and traumas.¹⁸⁵ On the battlefield, death was believed by Canadian society and the military to be the ultimate sacrifice, whereas becoming a prisoner was believed to be the ultimate disgrace.¹⁸⁶ Fighting to the death sounded heroic, in theory, but a soldier’s capture was often too quick to allow him to make an active decision, and since the soldiers were already following their survival instinct in the heat of battle, it was over before they had a chance to think. Their endurance had been drained while trying to stay alive and get back to their reserve trenches, and by the time they came face to face with the German soldiers, they did not have it in them to fight any longer. After this moment was over, most of the soldiers sunk into deep depression – they did not care if they lived or died, and some even hoped that they would die. The men felt an intense despair; their instincts had deduced that their lives were more important than the theoretical heroic death in war, but they believed that being captured

¹⁸³ MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 82.

¹⁸⁴ Camaraderie was highly encouraged, and was closely linked with the manly gender construct they had been raised with. Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 21, 198.

¹⁸⁵ Anderson, “Military Resilience,” 11. This bonding is also a form of socialization which occurs when “one becomes a fundamental member of a group.” Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 6. For a similar description see: Granatstein, *Hell’s Corner*, 46.

¹⁸⁶ Anderson, *I, That’s Me*, 37.

was the true embodiment of cowardice.¹⁸⁷ On their journey to the camps, they began to try and reconstruct their resilience accounts into a new shape which would allow them to endure the prison camps.

Once officially prisoners of war, their treatment varied widely. Most of the men discussed in this paper were taken during the Second Battle of Ypres (22 April – 25 May 1915) or the Battle of Mount Sorrel (2 – 14 June 1916).¹⁸⁸ Private McMullen was severely wounded during the fight and lay in the mud for hours, but as darkness came, he knew he had to move or he would be dead by morning.¹⁸⁹ He gathered what strength he had and slowly pulled himself towards the German trench.¹⁹⁰ When the German soldiers finally pulled him over the parapet, they let him fall to the bottom where he lay for another half hour until two other soldiers came and carried him like a sandbag to the dressing station where he received some bandages.¹⁹¹ In these moments, he did not care much if he lived; he had given up many times in his struggle to get to the German trench, and ultimately found strength to move another inch, then repeated the process.¹⁹² A battle waged inside his head between a determination to keep fighting and a desire to die. Ultimately, he knew that if there was a chance at survival, he had to try.¹⁹³ Once behind German lines, he and a wounded Canadian corporal slept on and off, ignoring the German soldiers who taunted and spat at them as they passed. He was then carried to another dressing station where they cleaned out his wounds and inoculated him.¹⁹⁴ While the treatment he

¹⁸⁷ This is a common theme in the memoirs. See MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 82; Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 58, 29; McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 11; Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 49. Being a prisoner went against everything these men had been taught to believe – prisoners had not fought to the death, but instead had surrendered. Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 15, 17, 31-32; J.L. Granatstein, *Hell's Corner*, 61.

¹⁸⁸ Captured at the Battle of Mount Sorrel (1915): Private Mervin Cecil Simmons, Private Merton Egbert Ellsworth Kittredge, Private Daniel Bilson Merry, Lieutenant John Charles Thorn, Major Peter Anderson, Lance-Corporal Edward Edwards. Captured at the Second Battle of Ypres (1916): Private Frederick James McMullen, Private John Evans, Lance-Corporal John O'Brien, Private Franklin Cecil MacDonald, Private Alexander Miller Allan, Lieutenant John Harvey Douglas. Private Benjamin Campbell Davison was captured 6 April 1916, and Private Alfred Theodore Post was captured 15 August 1917.

¹⁸⁹ Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 50.

¹⁹⁰ Evans, 50-54.

¹⁹¹ Evans, 50-54.

¹⁹² Evans, 50-54.

¹⁹³ Evans, 51.

¹⁹⁴ Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 55; Morton, *Silent Battle*, 43.

received was rough, it was much better than expected, and his captors even gave him some rum to ease his pain.¹⁹⁵ Through the name-calling, being spat on, and unending assault by German soldiers, the new prisoners did not care much, as “they couldn’t have done anything to us which would have caused any greater agony than we were suffering then.”¹⁹⁶ His own disappointment in himself was worse than anything any German could say or do to him. But this new hostile environment was unnerving and confusing.

After Lance-Corporal Edwards was captured, the group of prisoners marched to the rear of the German lines and were told to lie in a small gully. Exhausted and burnt out, the men began to lean on each other for mental and physical support. One of Lance-Corporal Edwards’ comrade’s hands was severely mangled and needed to be amputated.¹⁹⁷ Between being shot at by vengeful Germans, and Allied shells dropping nearby, the group of captives sawed off Private Frederick Cox’s hand and bound the wound up as well as they could. Private Cox did not complain, but he draped himself across Lance-Corporal Edwards and gripped him in a tight embrace as an attempt to relieve his pain while joking how he would write to his mother while in Germany so she would not know of his amputation – Private Cox died a few weeks later from his wounds on 23 May 1915.¹⁹⁸ Lance-Corporal Edwards believed Private Cox was the “most valiant and faithful soldier.”¹⁹⁹ The ability to withstand pain with minimal complaint was heroic,

¹⁹⁵ Private McMullen classified his medical treatment as rough, but decent. Others received varying qualities of treatment, from harsh and rushed, to moderate, kind, or no treatment at all. Nearly all the prisoners received an inoculation since they were more susceptible to certain diseases while in the camps. Few of those discussed were given something for their pain, Private McMullen was one of the few. Some with moderate wounds, like Lance-Corporal O’Brien, were forced to walk for miles before they could rest and were given no medical attention. Those who were severely wounded and could not walk were carried on stretchers and often put on trains to a nearby location where they could be treated. Some, like Private McMullen and Private Allan, later received surgery for more severe wounds. While Private McMullen felt the surgery was rough and the doctor was not particularly kind, he felt that the doctor knew what he was doing and trusted that he was given a proper surgery. Others who received surgery believed that the doctors intentionally disabled the prisoners. Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 57; Allan, *What Happened to Me on June 2nd 1916*; O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 116-120. In the trenches, rum was also used for a variety of purposes: encouragement for a difficult task, a reward for completing a task, a daily dose was given for warmth, and as liquid courage. Tim Cook, “Wet Canteens and Worrying Mothers: Alcohol, Soldiers and Temperance Groups in the Great War,” *Social History*; Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 56; Chase, “War Weariness in the Canadian Corps in the First World War,” 145.

¹⁹⁶ Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 54-55.

¹⁹⁷ Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 55.

¹⁹⁸ Wigney, *Guests of the Kaiser*, 39; Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 69.

¹⁹⁹ Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 57.

but was not diminished when he asked for the physical and mental support of his comrades. They had learned on the front-lines that life as a soldier was hard, and the connections they built held them together and had helped replenish their resilience account – they were starting to realize that the prison camps may offer a similar outlook on camaraderie, and that they could use this camaraderie to begin rebuilding and replenishing their endurance accounts.

Spirits were at their lowest point among the new prisoners. Private MacDonald's group was either in a "stupor" or "half crazy" from the intense bombardment and the destruction of their heroic identity.²⁰⁰ As they marched towards their next destination, they all felt miserable and helpless.²⁰¹ Major Anderson wrote how he was "so dejected being taken prisoner that I did not care what happened."²⁰² The men felt defeated, but as they began their journey to the camps they began to adapt to this new role as a prisoner.

The treatment they received by their captors only reinforced what they were feeling. At various points in their journeys to the rear of the trenches they were forced to stand on exhibition as the German soldiers took their buttons, pipes, and any other items they wanted.²⁰³ This humiliated the prisoners and they felt powerless to fight back, which acted as a continuous drain on their endurance account, which they had begun replenishing.²⁰⁴ When they were forced to give up their possessions, the prisoners destroyed anything the Germans might find useful. Private John Evans had a book on machine gunning, and as they stood in line to hand over their belongings, he and his comrades tore the book up and shoved it down the drain or ate it when no one was looking.²⁰⁵ Lieutenant Thorn had a diary with trench sketches and messages from earlier that morning; he also tore them up when he was not being watched.²⁰⁶ When they were

²⁰⁰ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 81, 82.

²⁰¹ For such reflections, see MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 81, 82; Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 29, 58; McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 11; Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 49.

²⁰² Anderson, *I, That's Me*, 92; Humphries, *A Weary Road*, 5, 8.

²⁰³ Many POWs wrote of this: Anderson, *I, That's Me*, 92; Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, 1; McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 12, 14.

²⁰⁴ See, for example, Anderson, *I, That's Me*, 92; MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 84-84; Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 53-54; Chase, "War Weariness in the Canadian Corps in the First World War;" Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, 21, 25, 67, 69, 76; Anderson, "Military Resilience," 13.

²⁰⁵ Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 35.

²⁰⁶ Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, 2.

questioned, they made sure to exaggerate the numbers of guns, reserves, airplanes, and underground mines they had, often going over the top in their exaggerations.²⁰⁷ The Germans denounced them as fools and threw them from the room. These small acts gave them a slight sense of power which showed the prisoners that their actions were not completely controlled by their new captors; this was another way the prisoners began to replenish their accounts. Just because they were prisoners did not mean they had to stop fighting, and maybe “life was worth hanging on to for a while yet.”²⁰⁸ As the prisoners left the German lines and began their journey towards the prison camps, some were forced to stop at railway stations and stand in front of the local civilians. They had to listen as their guards denounced them as murderers of the wounded, while they were unable to defend themselves.²⁰⁹ The goal of this humiliation was to demoralize them and consistently break them down, to drain whatever was in their resilience account, and remind them that they were no longer heroes: they were weak and cowardly prisoners. But the small sparks of power had given them hope; this was the start of their battle behind enemy lines. The constant humiliation was likely meant to demolish any hope of rebuilding their endurance accounts and break their spirits. Instead, it reminded the prisoners of the motto “Be British,” which gave them strength and purpose again, and this helped reconstruct their endurance account, giving them a new common goal they could work towards *together*.²¹⁰

Some prisoners were forced to march for hours under heavy guard, and they were “herded together like a flock of sheep,” as Thorn wrote.²¹¹ This dehumanizing treatment was a constant reminder of how far they had fallen. Their guards tried to condition them to believe they were no longer men who deserved humane treatment. Now they were worse than animals, being driven, prodded, and abused with no autonomy, rights, or privileges. A few of the prisoners were marched by Uhlans, Prussian Lancers on horses, who would occasionally ride through the

²⁰⁷ Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 37; MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 84-85; Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 66-68.

²⁰⁸ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 88.

²⁰⁹ See Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 78; and John Harvey Douglas, *Captured: Sixteen Months as a Prisoner of War* (Toronto: McClelland, Goodchild & Stewart, 1918), 60.

²¹⁰ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 111.

²¹¹ Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, 1. See also O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 117; MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 83; McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 21, 39, 40.

marching group of prisoners and knock over as many as they could, jabbing at them with their steel-tipped lances. The guards also attacked any Belgian civilians who tried to help the prisoners.²¹² The captives warned the civilians away as best as they could but three women were stabbed trying to pass on some food, and a boy was beaten almost to death for giving a prisoner an apple.²¹³ As the prisoners marched on, a few hoped for death, thinking it had to be better than the exhaustion of constant marching. Nevertheless,

in spite of all the pain and weariness and the horrible feeling of being driven like cattle in an enemy country, there seemed to be among the boys a determination – which afterward became very manifest in the prison camps and which has kept many a man alive – to show these German brutes that we were British and that British soldiers had the nerve and stamina to endure anything without being broken.²¹⁴

This endurance emerged at different moments in each of the men's memoirs. For Private MacDonald, the exhaustion slowly turned into a quiet resolve to beat the Germans; he knew that they could not break him. He began to replenish his resilience account by realizing that capture did not drain it; instead, being a prisoner added a new dimension where he could continue the fight behind German lines. Being a soldier was not just fighting in the war, it was being brave in the face of danger, continuing to fight even when all hope seemed lost, and finding new possibilities in dire circumstances. Private MacDonald had realized what each prisoner in this paper would: his role in the war was not over, it was just being fought on a new front.

By the time the new prisoners got to their rest stop, they were exhausted, thirsty, and starving.²¹⁵ Throughout their journey they had received little or no food. Some of the prisoners were given black bread or "sandstorm," a thin porridge made from cornmeal, with rotten figs for flavouring, and sand or sawdust as filler.²¹⁶ When offered food, one soldiers wrote how they

²¹² O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 118; MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 82.

²¹³ For descriptions of such violence, see MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 82; O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 118-119; Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, 2.

²¹⁴ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 83. Although MacDonald called himself British, he was a Canadian soldier. It was very common for the Canadians to classify themselves as British.

²¹⁵ McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 13-16; Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 30-33.

²¹⁶ O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 124; Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 40; MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 83; Buck Private, "Theodore Post Tells of the Joys of Life in the German Prison Camps," *21st Battalion Communique* (Peterborough, Ontario), July 1937, 7.

were “too sick and weary to think of eating even though we had had nothing all day, [we] dropped to the floor of the barn like dead men.”²¹⁷ Private MacDonald struggled to fall asleep, as his mind was too active. When he did finally sleep, he dreamt fitfully of the battlefield, reliving the moment of capture over and over again. Despite the restless night, he woke up feeling refreshed with a renewed spirit, and “when we fully realized that we were prisoners we determined that the fight should be carried on behind [the German’s] lines as well as in front of them.”²¹⁸ His duty was not over; this was just a new obstacle that he had to learn how to overcome.

The non-commissioned ranks who were put on trains were often crammed in, with no room to sit or lie down.²¹⁹ As their trains passed through Belgium, a few of them met kind souls who made a lasting impact on them. Private Simmons was wounded, exhausted, hungry, and thirsty, but when a Belgian woman showed his train car the Union Jack, it brought a vigorous cheer from the prisoners.²²⁰ Her sad eyes were a sharp reminder of what they were fighting for, and where the real hardships of war were. At the school where Private Simmons and his group rested, they were cared for by some Belgian women who were in mourning; their sons-in-law had been carried off by Germans and shot in front of their daughters.²²¹ Even though the women were in mourning, there was a gleam of determination in their eyes: they had not been broken, and this reminded the men what they were fighting for.²²² In Köln, a young boy repeatedly filled up the men’s water over and over until they had all had enough to drink; the boy’s nationality did not stop him from helping the prisoners. He saw a need and filled it.²²³ These civilians showed the prisoners that the war was not over just because they were away from the front-lines; there were other ways to fight back.

²¹⁷ MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 83.

²¹⁸ MacDonald, 84.

²¹⁹ Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 41.

²²⁰ McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 22.

²²¹ McClung, 23.

²²² McClung, 23.

²²³ McClung, 25.

Once their trains moved further into Germany, most civilians became hostile, spitting at the prisoners, throwing items, and needing to be held back by the guards.²²⁴ There was nothing the prisoners could do to protect themselves and they were forced to endure the torment and humiliation until it was over. While the Belgian civilians had shown the prisoners that they could still fight, many German civilians degraded them, trying to destroy any endurance they had begun to replenish.²²⁵ As they got closer to their prison camp, they were forced to come to terms with their new reality. Their journey had taught them to be wary of their captors, who treated them like animals, but it also showed them that there were other ways to continue the fight. The mourning Belgian women who had stayed strong despite heartache and the young German boy who had delivered as much water as he could before the train departed were proof that they did not have to give in; they could keep fighting.

On their journey away from the front-lines, the prisoners had discovered that the war was not over for them, it was just a new battlefield that they had to learn and conquer. At capture, their endurance accounts had been broken, and they had been exhausted and ready to die, but then they began to find small ways to rebuild and replenish their accounts. They found comfort with the men who were with them, mentally and physically, they found they could still fight the Germans, even in small ways, and they realized that they still had a part to play in the war. But their resilience was constantly being depleted by their captors' abuse, the civilians' torments, and their overall feelings of despair. Their endurance accounts were constantly being drained and topped up, over and over again, never being completely empty or full. The constant reductions on their accounts would follow them through their journeys of the prison camps of Germany, but the men would always find ways to fill their accounts, no matter how dire the situation was.

²²⁴ Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 80-81; Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, 6.

²²⁵ Vance, *Objects of Concern*, 27.

Chapter 4: Strength Among Comrades

*“It had never occurred to me, any more than it does to the average Canadian boy, to be thankful for his heritage of liberty, of free speech, of decency.”*²²⁶

Arriving in the prison camp was a shocking reminder to the prisoners that they had failed as soldiers. They had been humiliated on station platforms, were not able to defend themselves against accusations, and were poked and attacked at random intervals by their guards and civilians, all of which had lowered their morale immensely. This treatment had simultaneously ignited a small spark inside some of them. They knew that if they could continue the fight in enemy territory, they would find a way to redeem themselves. But struggling to replenish their resilience accounts was only the beginning of their troubles. Their time in captivity would bring some of the toughest experiences of their lives, having to fight through starvation, maltreatment, abuse, and hard labour. What lay ahead of them would not be easy, but these Canadians were determined to continue the fight and, in the process, remain resilient.

They were still in the process of rebuilding their endurance accounts as they arrived in the camps. They had a new group, a new set of goals, and began to establish what was brave and what was not. While their interpretations of bravery varied, the prisoners discussed in this paper agreed that it involved redeeming themselves as soldiers, especially since, according to Private MacDonald, “The Germans did everything in their power to keep the prisoners miserable, hopeless and in despair.”²²⁷ The Canadians were determined to stay strong, and to not let their enemy break them down, like the Germans did to the French and Belgian prisoners.²²⁸ Although their main goal was survival, as the Canadian soldiers settled into their new environment they slowly began to replenish their resilience accounts, and found ways to fight back.²²⁹ Most often, men who were captured together tried to stay together, and formed close bonds in what they called *schools* or *mucking it*. These relationships were similar to those formed on the battlefield,

²²⁶ McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 95.

²²⁷ MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 125, 209.

²²⁸ MacDonald, 125, 209.

²²⁹ MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 84, 110-112; O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 142.

but much deeper. These schools became their primary source for sustaining their endurance. In these schools, the men shared ideas, supported each other, shaped their morals together, and gave each other a place to feel as at home as they could in enemy lands.²³⁰ These relationships were created when their ideals were shaken and their endurance accounts were nearing empty, and led them to build an irreplaceable friendship that could not be broken.²³¹ This chapter will focus on how these men began to restructure and replenish their resilience accounts while adapting to a new environment.

Upon arrival at their first camps, some of the men were put into a section of the camp that was quarantined.²³² The goal of this quarantine could have been to stop the spread of diseases, but since most of the prisoners were inoculated once captured, it is possible that the Germans wanted to stop current news from the front from reaching the other prisoners or to break their will and make them docile animals who would follow the rules without complaint. Those in quarantine were extremely demoralized and starving, they felt “more like famished wolves than human beings.”²³³ The constant dehumanization acted as a consistent drain on their resilience. But it also acted as a foundation for their camaraderie – the anger and irritation they felt drove them to fight back. The men with whom they were quarantined became their strongest allies, supporting them through some of the toughest moments of their prison camp experiences. Each

²³⁰ O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 157.

²³¹ There is no evidence in the memoirs that the prisoners developed homosexual relationships. There is a possibility it occurred, but without evidence, it cannot be proven. For an analysis of front-line soldiers and homosexuality, see Cole, *Modernism, Male Friendship, and the First World War*; Carr, “Camp Domesticity,” 292.

²³² Lance-Corporal O’Brien’s group was isolated for two months, whereas Private Evans and Private Davison were only quarantined for the first several weeks. Some prisoners, such as Private McMullen, Private Alex Allan, and Private Simmons were sent to a hospital (*lazaret*) first, and therefore were not technically quarantined when they arrived in the prison camp. And some, like Lieutenant Thorn, Lance-Corporal Edwards, Private Merton Kittredge, and Major Anderson, were never placed in quarantine – these prisoners were all captured in April of 1915, and due to how early it was in the war, a quarantine might not have been established yet. Lance-Corporal MacDonald wrote that he was put in a separate enclosure at night but could freely mix with the other prisoners during the day. Private O’Brien, Private Evans, Private MacDonald, and Private Davison were captured within days of each other and were sent to the same prison camp. The quarantine disparity could reveal an inconsistency in their memories, which is normal, but should be remembered when reading these types of memoirs. MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 88. Morton, *Silent Battle*, 43. O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 125; Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 42, 65; Ben Davison, “P.O.W.: Chapter 1,” *The Forty-Niner* (Edmonton, Alberta) 1934, 32; MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 88; McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 26; Allan, *What Happened to Me on June 2nd 1916*, 50.

²³³ O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 126.

of the men had varying strategies for proving their bravery and finding their new role in the war, but it all began with the bonds they built. Over the next few months, they would each explore various ways to replenish their endurance accounts in situations where they were constantly being drained.

For the first few months of their confinement, they were forced to survive on only camp rations. When Lance-Corporal O'Brien's group arrived at the prison camp, a few of the earlier captured prisoners gathered up some food from their parcels and smuggled it to the new prisoners.²³⁴ This was a sign of solidarity and reminded the new prisoners that they were not alone and that their life as a prisoner did not have to be built on guilt at having been captured. This act of kindness added a level to their endurance accounts; the compassion and generosity of the older prisoners helped them feel strong again, and when it was their job to help the next group, the act of kindness would help them replenish their accounts as well.²³⁵ This gave them a purpose and proved to them that the war was not over. They found ways to support each other within the camps, but it was different than they had previously known.

The Canadian Red Cross started sending supplies the moment they were aware of a prisoner's capture, but it often took two months for the parcels to arrive.²³⁶ By 1916, most Canadian prisoners were officially sent a parcel every two weeks, but due to the nature of the postal system, they often received multiple parcels together, then would go for weeks without receiving one.²³⁷ By mucking it, the prisoners were able to stretch out their rations and ensure they rarely went a week without food from home.²³⁸ Not only did this help them survive until their parcels arrived, but it also helped foster camaraderie.²³⁹ Sharing became an important aspect of camp life, and it was an expectation within the schools, for "we all shared our

²³⁴ O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 125; Davison, "P.O.W.: Chapter 1," 32.

²³⁵ O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 125; Davison, "P.O.W.: Chapter 1," 32.

²³⁶ Vance, *Objects of Concern*, 37.

²³⁷ Vance, 45.

²³⁸ O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 157; MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 163; Davison, "P.O.W.: Chapter 1," 34; Ben Davison, "P.O.W.: Chapter 2," *The Forty-Niner* (Edmonton, Alberta) 1934, 18.

²³⁹ Douglas, *Captured*, 90, 100; O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 157; MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 163; Davison, "P.O.W.: Chapter 1," 34; Ben Davison, "P.O.W.: Chapter 2," *The Forty-Niner* (Edmonton, Alberta) 1934, 18.

parcels.”²⁴⁰ Those without schools had to beg for food when their parcels were interrupted, and because of this, there were very few who did not become part of a school.

The first few months without help from the Red Cross were difficult. Lance-Corporal Edwards wrote that his first three months were a slow starvation of “a hell on earth.”²⁴¹ And according to Lance-Corporal O’Brien, when the Germans delivered the food, the men swarmed the soup pots like “hungry wolves,” and at least once, they nearly drowned someone in the rush to get their food.²⁴² Private MacDonald and his comrade Private Nicholson waited in a starved stupor for their first parcels to arrive.²⁴³ They took turns shaking each other awake when the mail arrived, but with each disappointment of no mail, they sunk deeper into depression, suffering more and more from war weariness.²⁴⁴ When they were moved to a block that received parcels, there were some prisoners who

could put their pride in their pockets, and systematically begged from the few who had got food, [and these prisoners] got along fairly well, but Wallie and I found it hard to beg, even in starvation. When nothing else offered we hung around the garbage pails and boxes, and picked the best bits from the refuse.²⁴⁵

This reveals an important aspect of their identities: how their pride developed. The men could not ask those outside their schools for food if they could not return the favour, but they could dig in garbage for discarded scraps of food. Begging other prisoners was not the same as asking for help from their schools, because the schools were a reciprocal relationship where the give-and-take was eventually reciprocal. In contrast, begging from people outside their schools was perceived as cowardly and weak because the new prisoner could offer nothing in return for the

²⁴⁰ Douglas, *Captured*, 90, 100.

²⁴¹ Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 92. See also Bilson Merry, “The Gold Stripe Vol 1”.

²⁴² O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 128.

²⁴³ MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 98.

²⁴⁴ Chase, “War Weariness in the Canadian Corps in the First World War,” 118.

²⁴⁵ MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 99-100. See also, Davison, “P.O.W.: Chapter 1,” 32, 34. They had learned that by soaking mouldy bread in water then baking it in the oven, this would remove most of the mould, allowing no food to be wasted.

food.²⁴⁶ The “unendurable experience” was made endurable by the “receiving and sharing of food parcels from home.”²⁴⁷ Getting parcels from family helped the prisoners replenish their endurance accounts by giving the prisoners proper nutrients and reinforced the camaraderie bond by encouraging schools to form.

Most prisoners were allowed to send two letters a month and one postcard a week, and as Lieutenant Douglas wrote, “The most exciting thing that can happen to [a prisoner] is the receipt of a letter or a parcel.”²⁴⁸ The prisoners believed that communication with loved ones was a key to their survival. Life in the camps challenged them in ways they had never been challenged before, and writing home gave them an outlet – regardless of what was written.²⁴⁹ “Hope is the best preservative in war,” and the love and support from their friends and family gave them hope for better times, proof that their families still loved and supported them, and motivation to keep pushing through the torment of the prison camps.²⁵⁰ With the infrequency of mail, it could not be relied upon as a steady source to fill their endurance account. But generally, the more mail they received, the stronger and more determined they felt.

In their letters home, some tried to write coded notes asking for forbidden items or to disclose the poor treatment they received. If caught, the letter would be burned, and the author would be severely punished.²⁵¹ They had to be explicit in their writing and write in large letters so the censors could read it.²⁵² Sometimes the prisoners would use the censor to send a message to the German officials. In one instance, twenty-one prisoners came together and wrote letters to

²⁴⁶ This analysis is not true for all nationalities. For example, Russian prisoners did not receive parcels and constantly begged, but would not take the food for nothing in return. Instead, some Canadians took on a Russian prisoner as a *batman* – in exchange for their camp meals, the Russians would do favours for Canadians such as watch and tidy their bunk, wash their clothing, do their dishes, or other simple chores. All sides felt that the exchange of work for food was a fair trade. Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 150; Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 111-112; McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 174-175; Ben Davison, “P.O.W.: Chapter 3,” *The Forty-Niner* (Edmonton, Alberta) 1935, 13; MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 99-100, 209.

²⁴⁷ Chase, “War Weariness in the Canadian Corps in the First World War,” 65.

²⁴⁸ Douglas, *Captured*, 100. For similar examples, see: McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 32; MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 100; Anderson, *I, That’s Me*, 96; Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 89-90; Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, 99.

²⁴⁹ Morton, *Silent Battle*, 50; Chase, “War Weariness in the Canadian Corps in the First World War,” 26, 140; Anderson, “Military Resilience,” 14.

²⁵⁰ Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, 76.

²⁵¹ MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 100; Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 204.

²⁵² Douglas, *Captured*, 80.

officials in England about how bad the lice were.²⁵³ Even though the censor would not let a single letter pass, a German official came to the camp and had the facility fumigated. In their letters home, the prisoners could ask for parcels, but could not imply that food was needed.²⁵⁴ Private MacDonald wrote of a comrade who penned a letter asking how his friend “W.E.R. Starving” was doing.²⁵⁵ He himself wrote home about how lovely the experience was, then referenced a trip to a penitentiary they had gone to with his friend Chuck who had died; Private MacDonald was trying to hint to his family that they were in a prison, rather than a camp, and were starving to death.²⁵⁶ Private Simmons wrote multiple coded letters to friends and family; in one, he steamed open the envelope so he could write “send a compass,” and on another he wrote in code asking for a compass hidden in cheese.²⁵⁷ He later received the compass inside of a block of cream cheese. The Germans carefully inspected all incoming parcels and mail for forbidden items, but a few banned items got past their inspection.²⁵⁸

By February 1917 private parcels sent from families and friends were not permitted; only official Red Cross parcels were allowed.²⁵⁹ After this, the Germans no longer searched parcels looking for forbidden items. To some prisoners, this was preferred because, as Private Davison explained, a prisoner “who had a well-off family or friends was well taken care of, but others did not fare so well.”²⁶⁰ There was also an inconsistency in how many parcels arrived. Lance-Corporal Edwards wrote that he was lucky if he got six out of every ten parcels sent, and if they arrived with more than half the contents.²⁶¹ Lance-Corporal O’Brien, however, wrote that

²⁵³ McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 172; Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 152.

²⁵⁴ MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 101; Douglas, *Captured*, 80, 100.

²⁵⁵ MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 101.

²⁵⁶ Chuck was a common canned food eaten in Canada. See [Appendix D](#) for the coded letter. MacDonald, 101.

²⁵⁷ McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 104, 105. For Lance-Corporal Edwards’ perspective of Private Simmons writing his letter, see Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 115. See [Appendix D](#) for the coded letter.

²⁵⁸ MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 202.

²⁵⁹ Officers were exempt from this rule, which caused uproar in Canada from the families of other prisoners. See Morton, *Silent Battle*, 51-53; Vance, *Objects of Concern*, 47; MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 202; Davison, “P.O.W.: Chapter 1,” 32.

²⁶⁰ Davison, “P.O.W.: Chapter 1,” 32. Instead of families sending their loved ones home-made parcels, which were more likely to be destroyed in transit, they could donate to the Canadian Red Cross and their name would be put on the package as the donor. This also ensured the packages were well packed and had useful items. MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 124; Douglas, *Captured*, 119.

²⁶¹ Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 90.

because of the careful handling of the parcels, there was not much of a risk of them going missing, and the only time the Germans touched them was when they were looking for compasses and other forbidden items.²⁶² These prisoners agreed that “These parcels mean *life* and a small degree of comfort to these boys, so you can imagine how they are looked forward to.”²⁶³ Some camps used the prospect of writing and receiving letters as a reward for good behaviour, which meant that some prisoners lost a vital right to write home to loved ones when they were punished, and this removed one method of replenishing their endurance accounts.²⁶⁴ Letters from home were a powerful motivation for the men; while they could not write the full truth of their experiences, they could have a piece of their home with them. The fact that their family still wrote to them was a sign to the prisoners that they had not failed as men and soldiers. Even if the impact on their resilience account was small, the frequency with which they reread the letters acted as a constant top-up in the account.

Not only did the letters offer mental strength to the men, but the parcels provided much needed sustenance and nutrients. The prisoners received a shocking lack of food from the camps, which their captors blamed on the Allied blockade.²⁶⁵ Their daily allowance was often limited to acorn coffee in the morning, a thin soup at lunch sometimes accompanied by black bread, and then soup and black bread again for supper.²⁶⁶ Black bread, otherwise known as war bread, was often made from a mixture of vegetable or potato shavings, some wheat or barley, and (as some prisoners claimed) either sawdust or sand. In their first few months, some prisoners bartered their valuables for a chance at more food, while others waited painfully until their Red Cross parcels arrived.²⁶⁷ Like on the front lines, food was critical to one’s performance, but also central to their

²⁶² O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 129; Douglas, *Captured*, 86, 87.

²⁶³ O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 130. For similar statements, see: Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 91; MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 90; Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 108.

²⁶⁴ Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 89-90.

²⁶⁵ Vance, *Objects of Concern*, 44.

²⁶⁶ For a detailed list of what each the camps supplied for food (based on the prisoner memoirs), see [Appendix E](#). James W. Gerard, *My Four Years in Germany* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1917), 174.

²⁶⁷ This is a common theme in the memoirs. See Morton, *Silent Battle*, 43, 44. MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 90; Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 110-111; Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 88, 152; O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 128; McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 173.

resilience.²⁶⁸ Without proper nourishing food, the prisoners' energy and endurance accounts were constantly nearing empty which directly correlated to their ability to endure torment. The men were forced to find other ways to replenish their resilience accounts, and by the time their Red Cross parcels began arriving, they had a strong camaraderie with those in their schools which not only helped their endurance, but also developed a new identity as prisoner-soldiers.²⁶⁹ One thing was strikingly clear to them: those who benefited from others' misfortune were cowards.²⁷⁰ The prisoners believed that being brave meant taking care of their comrades and offering support to those less fortunate; they had supported each other in times of crisis in the trenches and would continue to do so in the prison camps of Germany. Men who fended only for themselves – and did not join a school that would offer extra food, and mental and physical support – were believed to be cowardly and craven.²⁷¹

Along the same lines, some prisoners reported any offence they saw, regardless of how minor, and as a reward received special treatment from the guards.²⁷² These prisoners helped the guards by choosing how to punish the misbehavers, such as an officer who chose “Number One Field Punishment” for a prisoner who committed a minor offence.²⁷³ Lance-Corporal Edwards was enraged that the officer had given the guards the idea, and even if the offender had committed a serious offence, the officer should have “lied like a man” to protect his fellow prisoners.²⁷⁴ Those who helped the Germans punish their comrades, reported on their fellow prisoners, or helped the guards in any way were described as cowards, traitors, and

²⁶⁸ Anderson, “Military Resilience,” 12.

²⁶⁹ Leed, *No Man's Land*, 24. Cole, *Modernism, Male Friendship, and the First World War*, 141; Loveridge, “Seeing Trauma as Sacrifice,” 52.

²⁷⁰ Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, 23; Anderson, *I, That's Me*, 101-103.

²⁷¹ Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, 23. Anderson, *I, That's Me*, 101-103.

This notion that those who are independent and only fend for themselves were cowards ties back to the manly construct they had been raised to become – a true man was loyal and kept close bonds with those around him. Men who remained autonomous strayed away from that belief and were not true men.

²⁷² These prisoners received private rooms, better food, no punishments, and a variety of other favours from the guards. Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 119, 120; MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 159, 161-162.

²⁷³ The prisoner was suspended spread-eagled on a wheel of a gun limber, tied to the spokes by his ankles and wrists; the Number One Field Punishment became a common punishment in this camp for petty offences, whereas the Canadian military had only used this as punishment in serious cases. Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 122.

²⁷⁴ Pearson, 122.

sycophants.²⁷⁵ They went against everything these Canadians believed, focusing only on personal gain, hurting their fellow prisoners, and aligning with the enemy. Those who benefited from the misfortune of the others were also despicable.²⁷⁶ When the Canadian prisoners initially arrived in the camps, they were starving, and many traded their valuables with French prisoners to get extra food – their boots, overcoats, and anything useful they had.²⁷⁷ Once their parcels began arriving, they saw some French prisoners continue to trade away their inadequate camp food for much better resources; they took advantage of with anyone who was starving and had no other options, forcing some prisoners to decide between starving and freezing.²⁷⁸ Once the Canadians' parcels began arriving, they made a point of giving the Russians their camp food in exchange for simple favours.²⁷⁹

Food was not the only thing that affected their life in the camps. Each camp had its own rules about what sorts of activities the prisoners could engage in, and punishments for when the prisoners disobeyed.²⁸⁰ Minor offences were met with one to three nights in *dark* or *black cells*: solitary confinement in a small room, only a few square feet, all light was sealed off, no communication with the outside world was permitted, and the rations were diminished.²⁸¹ The second most common punishment was *stillgestanden*, where they were forced to stand at attention for as long as they could – until they fainted or gave in to their guards' demands.²⁸² *Stillgestanden* was a common punishment when prisoners refused to work and there were too

²⁷⁵ Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 119.

²⁷⁶ Pearson, 119-122, 150.

²⁷⁷ Pearson, 150.

²⁷⁸ Pearson, 150.

²⁷⁹ As mentioned in footnote 246, the Russian prisoners did not receive parcels and were starving, but they would not take the food for nothing in return. So, the Russian completed simple chores in exchange for the camp rations. For examples, see Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 150; Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 111-112; McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 174-175; Ben Davison, "P.O.W.: Chapter 3," 13. MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 99-100, 209.

²⁸⁰ As in the Boy Scouts, cadets, boarding schools, and the early stages of the military, the prisoners were taught to obey orders. Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 110, 115, 118, 144.

²⁸¹ As described in Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 91, 102, 104-107, 133; Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, 67, 77; Wigney, *Guests of the Kaiser*, 159.

²⁸² Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 89, 99, 123; MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 96, 105, 115, 117, 120, 156; Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 82, 90, 104-107; Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, 136; Wigney, *Guests of the Kaiser*, 159; Merry, "The Gold Stripe Vol 1.," Davison, "P.O.W.: Chapter 1," 34; Morton, *Silent Battle*, 72.

many troublemakers to go into dark cells.²⁸³ To make the punishment less endurable, they were forced to stand outside in the rain or snow, in front of the sweltering coke ovens, or anywhere else the guards thought might be painful. Sometimes, the punishment only ended when a prisoner fell unconscious, for example, as Private MacDonald described the fate of a fellow prisoner: “I knew W.H. was about at the end of his endurance, and so was not surprised when he pitched on his face, ‘dead to the world’.”²⁸⁴ *Strafe barracks* meant they were forced to sit on a stool for two hours, eyes straight and body rigid, then given an hour rest, and repeated this until the guards decided their punishment was over. While they were in the *strafe barracks* they were not allowed to talk, receive parcels, write letters, lay down, or exercise, and their already scanty rations were cut.²⁸⁵ Other common punishments were beatings by their guards, having their rations taken away, and not being permitted to send or receive mail. Sometimes guards would punish their prisoners for rumours they heard of punishments given to German prisoners.²⁸⁶ The punishments were intended to demoralize the prisoners by attacking their endurance and taking away basic needs such as fresh air, sunlight, movement, and communication. While being punished, their resilience accounts would be extremely diminished, often becoming so close to empty that some prisoners contemplated giving in to their captors and submitting. The only thing that kept the prisoners going was the knowledge that the punishment would end, and their comrades would be waiting to help them replenish their lost morale.

Most officer camps had concerts, and prisoners could sing and play music in their quarters, play sports like tennis, baseball, or football, and play cards. They also had barbers, tailors, and dentists, had artists come in to sketch them, could buy beer and other liquors from a canteen, could have a camera if purchased in Germany, and many more liberties that other ranks were not permitted.²⁸⁷ Officers were treated more humanely, and given much more freedom,

²⁸³ Morton, *Silent Battle*, 72; MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 96, 105, 113, 117; Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, 135; Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 90.

²⁸⁴ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 189.

²⁸⁵ Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 89; Morton, *Silent Battle*, 72.

²⁸⁶ Gerard, *My Four Years in Germany*, 162-167, 176, 185, 196.

²⁸⁷ Anderson, *I, That's Me*, Chapter 9. Had there been more space and more officers who wrote memoirs, there could have been a deeper analysis and comparison between officers and soldiers. See [Appendix F](#) for a breakdown of the types of camps, and [Appendix A](#) for an extensive list of the prisoners examined here.

owing to their higher rank. While not all officer camps had these liberties, most were well equipped to keep the prisoners busy.²⁸⁸

The lower ranks were not quite as lucky in their experiences. In the non-punishment camps (such as Dulmen and Giessen), they often had fewer liberties, depending on their behaviour. Private MacDonald, Private Kittredge, and their comrades often played cards, despite games being forbidden.²⁸⁹ Some activities and resources available when the prisoners were behaving at Giessen included a dentist, football games, a theatre, lessons in trades, and a studio for painting.²⁹⁰ At Dulmen, there was a newspaper made by the prisoners called “Church Times,” and a barber shop available to the prisoners – although, there was no soap to help the shave stay smooth, so it felt more like they were getting skinned.²⁹¹ At the hospital camp Munster, the prisoners had much more freedom. They developed a prison language called *Gefangenese*, printed a camp newspaper, played football on Sundays, had a concert every two weeks, had a band (until the musicians were branded troublemakers), gambled (even though it was forbidden), and had a tailor.²⁹² While not all non-punishment camps had these activities, the prisoners had a little freedom when they behaved. When a prisoner escaped or a group of prisoners refused to work, the whole camp went into a semi-lockdown where no activities were permitted and any minor offence was severely punished.²⁹³ By punishing the whole camp for the actions of a few, the guards reinforced the lack of power that the prisoners had while also disturbing any morale the prisoners had built up.

In punishment camps (such as Auguste Victoria or Parniewinkel), prisoners were not permitted to have any sort of recreational activities, such as singing, dancing, playing cards, or smoking in barracks. They would be severely punished if caught engaging in such activities. Although some camps had provisions for activities, they were only at the camp for appearances –

²⁸⁸ Gerard, *My Four Years in Germany*, 187.

²⁸⁹ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 194. Wigney, *Guests of the Kaiser*, 159.

²⁹⁰ McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 41; Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 116; Gerard, *My Four Years in Germany*, 183-184.

²⁹¹ O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 131-133. MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 101-102, 220; Douglas, *Captured*, 76.

²⁹² MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 202-204.

²⁹³ Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 89-90.

to impress the neutral officials who inspected the camps for their treatment of the prisoners.²⁹⁴ Some guards in these camps wanted the prisoners to break a rule, because then it would allow them to punish the whole camp. Around Christmas, the rules were more relaxed, and the prisoners could have a Christmas concert and games.²⁹⁵ The strict rules, and even the relaxing of rules during certain times, were displays of the power the guards held over the prisoners, and a constant reminder of the lack of autonomy the prisoners had – the dehumanization was also a consistent drain on their endurance accounts. The lack of control the prisoners felt was like an endless leak; when they felt powerful and in control – such as when they got away with an act of resistance – they felt brave and heroic, but instances where their power was taken away from them – like a restriction of activities – was a reminder of their position as prisoners, and the cowardice they felt the military attributed to them.

In most camps, the prisoners had access to a newspaper called the “Continental Times,” which was written by the Germans – the prisoners called it the “Confidential Liar.”²⁹⁶ There was a lot of misinformation written about German victories, and although it claimed that it was written by American journalists, it was evidently designed by the Germans to demoralize the prisoners. The prisoners did not believe much of the news it included, especially the news of German victories, and only believed the Allied victories they read about, however small. While a lot of what the Germans wrote may have been false, it was supplemented with truth, which only added to the confusion. For example, when Lord Kitchener died, the prisoners did not believe what the Germans wrote of his death until a prisoner received a postcard from a family member in England telling them the news – Lord Kitchener had been a symbol of empire to the soldiers, and his death sent shockwaves of depression through the soldiers.²⁹⁷ By confusing truth with fiction, finding out bad news reminded the prisoners that the Germans again held power over

²⁹⁴ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 120, 131.

²⁹⁵ MacDonald, 168.

²⁹⁶ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 112; McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 31, 39; Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 157.

²⁹⁷ Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 157-158. We now know of the brutality of Lord Kitchener's methods, but this does not diminish the symbolic effect he had on the soldiers – he was an emblem of hope and power, and his death would have been a blow to the prisoners.

them. The prisoners tried to get recent news from the new arrivals, but due to the quarantine, they were very limited in what they could find out.

Life in the camps was also greatly affected by their daily living conditions. Cleanliness was not seen as vital to survival, but the guards made sure that the Canadian and British were the ones to bail out the latrines daily.²⁹⁸ Due to the lack of sanitation, a prisoner spent many days “reading his shirt,” – watching the lice jump around.²⁹⁹ Living with lice was not new to the prisoners, for they had had the travellers with them while in the trenches as well.³⁰⁰ The insect powder sent from home did very little to help get rid of them, and although the prisoners washed their shirts often, the cold water did not kill the eggs, and hanging a shirt to dry only brought the bugs out in full force.³⁰¹ Private Simmons and his group complained very loudly to the commander, and were finally taken to a fumigator to get rid of the lice; their clothing was baked, and they were shaved and given a shower bath.³⁰² This kept them clean for a few days, but the lice soon returned. Compulsory weekly baths followed, which helped greatly to diminish the lice, but never got rid of them completely.³⁰³ Even though the lice came back, getting the commander’s attention showed that by working together, the prisoners could solve *some* problems in the camps. Feeling dirty only added to their feelings of helplessness; they felt like animals with the bugs jumping around them, unable to get or stay clean.

The physical structure of the camp also acted as a demoralizing force. Lance-Corporal O’Brien described Dulmen as something resembling a chicken ranch with fourteen-foot-high, electrified wire fences with barbed wire, and another low fence so they could not get under, and little frame huts in the middle.³⁰⁴ Being herded, caged, and treated like animals was a constant

²⁹⁸ Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 152.

²⁹⁹ McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 37; O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 139.

³⁰⁰ Chase, “War Weariness in the Canadian Corps in the First World War,” 141.

³⁰¹ Soap was not a readily available commodity in Germany, and what they received in their parcels was often reserved as a bargaining tool when they needed something from the guards. For related comments, see McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 37-39; O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 140; Wigney, *Guests of the Kaiser*, 159; MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 130.

³⁰² McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 38.

³⁰³ McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 39; Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 118; Chase, “War Weariness in the Canadian Corps in the First World War,” 141.

³⁰⁴ O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 124, 125.

reminder of their lack of autonomy and power, consistently wearing down their endurance accounts.³⁰⁵ It was a struggle to maintain their reserves, and often their endurance was solely maintained by their camaraderie. Once their parcels began arriving their determination, willpower, and energy rose.

Although there were electric fences, guards with guns on high platforms, a constant sentry presence around the camp, angry watchdogs, and guards who would shoot to kill if they saw someone escaping, a quiet determination to resist grew within these prisoners.³⁰⁶ They were warned that anyone seen near the fences or tampering with anything suspicious would be shot on sight.³⁰⁷ The guards wanted to discourage thoughts of insubordination because a docile group was easier to control. The guards were also quick to remind the prisoners who held the power, but for some prisoners, this just reminded them that they wanted to continue to fight, irritating more than humiliating them. For the most part, the constant degradation did not act to subdue them as the guards hoped.³⁰⁸ Rather it angered them and gave them an objective: they would remain resilient and would resist in any way possible.

Life in the prison camps was a constant reminder of their status as a prisoner and the constant dehumanization could have worn them down and shattered any resilience they had left, but the Canadians discussed here created a support system that would not allow them to give up. They were determined not to let the lack of food, poor living conditions, abuse, or any other factor break them down. These prisoners were determined to stay strong and to continue the fight in German territory. Although this fight may have begun by maintaining their strength and merely surviving, it soon became much more than that.

³⁰⁵ Many prisoners reflected on this. See Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 124-125; O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 124-125; Wigney, *Guests of the Kaiser*, 158; Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, 94.

³⁰⁶ Morton, *Silent Battle*, 45, 62; Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, 94.

³⁰⁷ McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 29; Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, 7.

³⁰⁸ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 83.

Chapter 5: Forms of Resistance and Resilience

“A greater glory is theirs than that of a soldier. They wrought amongst a world of foes, knowing their certain punishment, but daring it rather than assist that foe’s efforts against their country.”³⁰⁹

Camp life taught these men that life as a prisoner was challenging; they would struggle to eat enough food, would feel more like dirty animals than men, and their endurance accounts were constantly being drained. They quickly realized that the best way to survive the prison camp was by sticking together. The schools they formed helped them find a place they belonged and people who would take care of them when times got tough.³¹⁰ These schools also helped them endure whatever torments they were given. This chapter will show how their schools and relationships were the driving force for their morale, and how these relationships were mobilized when one comrade was in dire need of support. This chapter will also describe some of the jobs that the prisoners were forced to do, how and why they began to resist, the obstacles that many prisoners faced, the punishments they had to endure, and how they replenished their resilience accounts in the process.

As the prisoners began to find a routine within the camps, they found that they were still missing a vital aspect of their identity as soldiers: the part that had fought the Germans. So, some prisoners resolved to find ways to resist them, and continue the fight in enemy territory – but this often came at a great cost. Resistance at work came in various forms, including refusing to work, destroying crops and equipment, or sleeping on the job. The motives behind each instance varied, but the common motivation was to hurt the German war effort. Every job they were assigned made them feel like they were helping their enemies to win the war; regardless of the work, they were freeing up working German men who could go to the front-lines. But

³⁰⁹ Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 97.

³¹⁰ As defined in the previous chapter, schools (or mucking it) were intense friendships the men formed to help them navigate the prison camps. The schools generally ranged from two to eight men, depending on the camp, work conditions, and nationalities of the men. They were initially formed as a way for friends to stick together, but developed into much more, including a group who shared their parcels to help ensure they never ran out of food.

sometimes, the men resisted because of the exhaustion; they were in dire need of a break. Other times, it was a way for them to prove their bravery.³¹¹

According to the laws of the Hague Convention, the prisoners could be made to work, so long as it was not war-related work.³¹² But there was no set definition of what war-related work was. Working in an ammunition factory would almost certainly classify as war work, yet some prisoners were forced to work there.³¹³ Working on a farm or in any factory *might* be classified as war work if a prisoner working these jobs freed men up to go fight at the front – but in this case, any work could be war work. Working in the mines that provided the materials for the ammunition factory also could have counted as war work, yet prisoners were forced to do labour in the mines.³¹⁴

The American Ambassador James Gerard, who resided in Germany during the war, made it his goal to ensure the prisoners were being humanely treated.³¹⁵ He worked with German civilian officials to create an agreement that allowed him to visit the prison camps with twenty-four hours' notice. Initially, he was allowed to speak to prisoners within sight of the guards – but out of hearing – to remedy any complaints with the camp officials before bringing them to higher authorities, and to have other representatives visit in his place.³¹⁶ He did what he could to ensure the prisoners received the best treatment possible, but he spent his war years struggling with a poorly designed political system that made it difficult to remedy abuse and neglect.³¹⁷ According to Ambassador Gerard, Germany was divided into army corps districts that were governed by corps commanders; these commanders held absolute power over their districts, and could refuse any orders given by the civilian officials.³¹⁸ The commanders, who were often also the prison camp commanders, were very determined to make their own rules and sometimes would not allow Ambassador Gerard to visit the camp or speak with the prisoners alone. By 1916, the

³¹¹ Morton, *Silent Battle*, 71.

³¹² See [Appendix C](#) for a full list of the laws. Officers could not be forced to work.

³¹³ O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 161; Wigney, *Guests of the Kaiser*, 159; Morton, *Silent Battle*, 72.

³¹⁴ Wigney, *Guests of the Kaiser*, 160.

³¹⁵ Gerard, *My Four Years in Germany*, 161.

³¹⁶ Gerard, 161.

³¹⁷ Gerard, Chapter 10.

³¹⁸ Gerard, 162.

commanders broke the agreement and Ambassador Gerard and his team were not allowed to speak with prisoners out of hearing of the camp officials.³¹⁹ Although the Ambassador did everything within his power to ensure fair treatment, he had very little success, and many commanders would not follow his directives.³²⁰

When a camp was notified of Ambassador Gerard's incoming visit, it "was cleaned up previous to his visit and the soup showed a marked improvement for that day."³²¹ In one camp, a few prisoners told Ambassador Gerard that they were starving, and the Ambassador said there was not much he could do, but their parcels should arrive soon – a guard then intervened to say that they were receiving regulation food rations. Regardless of the distance they were supposed to give, the guards listened closely and punished any prisoner who complained.³²² Ambassador Gerard changed very little, and his visit may have only been a matter of form – his ability to help was limited by the Commandant's willingness to change.³²³

When Lieutenant Thorn tried to write to Ambassador Gerard, his letters were returned and he was roughly told to stop because the Ambassador could not act as an intermediary for them – his authority would not be recognized.³²⁴ His comrade also wrote a letter to a friend in England, saying that something was very wrong with the camps. Suddenly the prisoners were forced to clean the camp, curtains were added to windows, and they were given more food. The next morning Ambassador Gerard arrived, but it was extremely difficult to get him alone – the Commandant and his staff followed him closely and got between any prisoner and the Ambassador. When Lieutenant Thorn finally got the Ambassador alone and told him how it had all been cleaned up and how they were normally treated, Ambassador Gerard said there was not much that could be done to fix the living conditions, but he got a few prisoners moved out of the camp.³²⁵ Although he did not have much power to help their daily life, he could move them to a new, and hopefully better, location. It was also very difficult to contact any officials about any

³¹⁹ Gerard, *My Four Years in Germany*, 195-197.

³²⁰ Gerard, 162.

³²¹ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 97-98.

³²² McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 44; MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 98.

³²³ Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 84.

³²⁴ Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, 29.

³²⁵ Thorn, 30.

'laws' that might be broken because the censors read all of their outgoing mail and would not allow any complaints out of Germany. Very little could be done officially about their poor living conditions, war-related jobs, or anything else that went against international law. Despite this, not all of the prisoners believed that Ambassador Gerard was powerless; Lance-Corporal O'Brien wrote that although the Germans punished the prisoners easily, "the only thing that kept them from killing the prisoners outright was the fact that all of German prison camps were visited every few weeks by American Ambassador Gerard or some of his staff."³²⁶ He knew that Ambassador Gerard could do nothing to improve their daily living conditions, but he still saved many lives just by constantly touring the camps. Knowing that Ambassador Gerard would visit, the Germans were kept somewhat accountable for their actions.

The work the prisoners were given depended on the camp they were in, where in Germany they were located, their rank, and if they were wounded. The severely wounded and those of the officer rank were usually not given any work unless they requested it, or were put on light duty around the camp to maintain cleanliness and order.³²⁷ Then there were those who did not make it past the German trenches; small groups of men were forced to work behind the German lines digging gun pits and carrying ammunition.³²⁸ These were extremely harsh conditions and because they were not officially reported as prisoners, they never received Red Cross parcels, were given very little food, were under constant shell fire, were frequently abused, and endured extremely hard labour. When they were finally moved away from the front, they were broken, thin, and barely able to stand.³²⁹ These prisoners had received the worst treatment, and many barely survived a week after arriving at the camps. Their arrival in the prison camp reminded the other prisoners what they were fighting for and reignited their desire to fight back.

³²⁶ O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 162.

³²⁷ The Hague Convention ([Appendix C](#)) stated that an officer could not be forced to work, but these were not always followed.

³²⁸ Errol M. McDougall, *Reparations: 1930-1931 Report: Maltreatment of Prisoners of War 206* (Ottawa: F.A. Acland, 1932). Morton, *Silent Battle*, 39; Vance, *Objects of Concern*, 31; Davison, "P.O.W.: Chapter 1," 6; MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 160.

³²⁹ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 220.

Resistance at work came in three forms: destruction, evasion, and mental resilience. How the prisoners resisted depended on what camp they were in, what camps they had been in, if they were seen as troublemakers, and with whom they were imprisoned. To some, resistance became the main reason for survival – the less work that the prisoners performed for the German war effort, the stronger and braver they felt, and the more they could endure.³³⁰

Prisoners acted as cheap labour to farmers in Germany, and most prisoners wanted to work on farms “because of the larger freedom it gave them and because of the better treatment which was usually given by the farmers.”³³¹ But not all prisoners on farms were treated better. Private McMullen worked on a few farms; at the first one he was barely fed, but when he was sent back during harvest season, he received ample food.³³² The treatment at this farm was poor both times he was there: he was pushed beyond his limits, abused, and when he finally refused to work, he was sent to a different farm. At the second farm, he received the same amount of food that the family did, was treated fairly, given manageable working hours, and was left alone in the field without supervision. A prisoner’s treatment often affected how willing he was to work and how much work he did: a lack of food meant a lack of energy and being treated kindly made the prisoner feel like less of a prisoner and more like a labourer.³³³ The prisoner’s treatment also greatly affected if and how he resisted. A better fed and fairly treated prisoner would be less likely to destroy a farm’s crops than one who was beaten and abused.

In his early days as a prisoner, Lance-Corporal O’Brien was put on light duty (three days a week) at a farm.³³⁴ He was set to planting tomatoes with other prisoners, but they did not enjoy the thought that they were helping feed the Germans. Consequently, the prisoners planted some of the crops in rows but when they got to the middle of the field, which could not be seen by the guards, they dumped many plants in one hole.³³⁵ The idea caught on quickly and soon whole fields were planted this way. This would not have been noticed until the crops bloomed, meaning

³³⁰ MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 112, 157.

³³¹ MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 106. For more explanation on why prisoners preferred farm work see: Vance, *Objects of Concern*, 31; Morton, *Silent Battle*, 76; Gerard, *My Four Years in Germany*, 184.

³³² Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 124-125, 132.

³³³ Morton, *Silent Battle*, 81.

³³⁴ O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 133.

³³⁵ O’Brien, 134.

the prisoners got away with this without punishment. Assuming they had done their jobs correctly, they were given their next task to plant cabbage, and they snipped the root of each cabbage before planting it; in three days, all of the plants were wilted or dead.³³⁶ The guards realized quickly what had happened, and this was the last time Lance-Corporal O'Brien and his comrades were sent to work on a farm. Despite knowing they would be punished and sent away from the farm, the prisoners knew they wanted to fight back somehow, and this was the only way they knew how. Destructive resistance made them feel powerful again and was an efficient way of replenishing their resilience account. The more damage they accomplished, the stronger and braver they felt.

Similarly, when Lance-Corporal Edwards and his comrades were told to plant potatoes at a farm, they refused.³³⁷ The guards tried to force them through abuse and threats with their guns, but the prisoners threatened to cut their heads off with their shovels; there were 200 prisoners and forty guards. The guards took them back to the camp and locked them up until they could reinforce the guard with thirty more.³³⁸ Destructive resistance gave the prisoners a powerful sense of pride and a goal that they could reach towards. If they had to work, they would ruin as much as they could in the process.³³⁹ If they could fight back, they would. This gave the prisoners a sense of autonomy back and proved that could still have a role in the war. Likewise, resisting the Germans by refusing work – evasion – made them feel powerful again, and it showed that there were various ways they could continue the fight behind German lines – whether the Germans knew it or not.

British and Canadian prisoners quickly gained a reputation for destroying or eating crops, causing trouble, or refusing work, and were rarely sent back to farms following these events.³⁴⁰ Instead, they were put to work in harder jobs, often back-breaking labour that was intended to destroy their bodies, wills, and spirits. Lance-Corporal Edwards worked in a brickyard where the

³³⁶ Private MacDonald also used this trick on cabbage while working on a farm. O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 135; MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 92.

³³⁷ Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 123.

³³⁸ Pearson, 123.

³³⁹ Vance, *Objects of Concern*, 33.

³⁴⁰ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 106.

prisoners had to fill a mixer with clay, or a car with stone, then two of them pushed the car on a narrow-gauge railroad track, and two trammers would hop on the brake and send it down the incline.³⁴¹ If the prisoners *forgot* to hit the brake, the car would fly off the end of the track over the dump. The guards would swear and rage but could not prove anything so long as it did not happen too often. Once, Lance-Corporal Edwards distracted a guard while another prisoner hid a piece of steel in the car and sent it down the track without the brake. When the grinding crash came, the guards ran around threatening the prisoners while they all acted surprised. The steel had ripped through the roof of the building below the tracks, causing a large mess. The group was sent back to the camp and put in dark cells for five days.³⁴² This punishment was a victory to the prisoners because they were not working anymore. Destroying their work gave them a sense of purpose that they had lost, and consequently made a large deposit into their resilience accounts. Resilience was more than just surviving to these prisoners; they fought to find unique ways to fight the Germans.

As the prisoners adapted to their new environment, they were forced to follow the rules and regulations of the camp. The prisoners struggled to treat the German officers and authorities with the respect that was demanded. They were to salute any rank higher than their own, but many refused.³⁴³ German officers prided themselves on their rank, and demanded respect, so the prisoners were forced to practice saluting until they got it right.³⁴⁴ While they may have saluted while practicing, they mocked the officers once out of sight.³⁴⁵ Disrespecting German officials made the prisoners feel brave, and although they risked severe punishment, it was worth the reward of feeling even the slightest amount of control again. The prisoners believed that this blatant disrespect for authority was proof of bravery, whereas on the front-lines this would have been akin to desertion.³⁴⁶

³⁴¹ Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 93.

³⁴² Pearson, 94.

³⁴³ Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 103, 151; Davison, "P.O.W.: Chapter 1," 33; Davison, "P.O.W.: Chapter 3," 16; MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 96; Morton, *Silent Battle*, 112.

³⁴⁴ Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 103, 151; Davison, "P.O.W.: Chapter 1," 33; Davison, "P.O.W.: Chapter 3," 16; MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 96-97; Morton, *Silent Battle*, 112.

³⁴⁵ Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 103, 151; Davison, "P.O.W.: Chapter 1," 33; Davison, "P.O.W.: Chapter 3," 16; MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 97; Morton, *Silent Battle*, 112.

³⁴⁶ Granatstein, *Hell's Corner*, 55, 60.

There were also times when the prisoners knew that they would be punished anyways and found more creative or aggressive ways to irritate their captors. Private MacDonald and his comrades were told they were heading back to punishment camp K47, also known as “The Black Hole,” after working in a boiler room for a couple of months.³⁴⁷ Hearing this, they knew that whatever they did could not make their punishment worse, so were determined to wreak havoc. There were no guards in the building where they were working, and instead of cleaning the boiler of an engine house, they spent most of their day cutting a maple leaf out of a block of steel, then, just before quitting time, they destroyed everything they could, throwing all the tools and equipment down the hole to the canal.³⁴⁸ When the destruction was noticed the next morning, all of the workers were locked up in black cells and had to make a statement about their actions every day for a week. They had to survive on only bread and water during their confinement, but there was no evidence to prove they had destroyed the equipment, so they were released and sent on to K47.³⁴⁹ Being able to destroy equipment and get away with it gave the prisoners a renewed confidence; they had expected to be punished or locked in dark cells for a longer period, but this experience showed that they could wreak havoc without penalty.

While some prisoners enjoyed blatantly resisting their captors, others found that there were more effective ways to replenish their resilience accounts. Private Kittridge was set to work with five other Canadians in a factory breaking pig iron with a twenty-pound sledgehammer – which he could barely swing – while the others shovelled gravel into cars.³⁵⁰ When he found out that it was a munitions factory they were working in, he refused to work.³⁵¹ The guards, thinking he was confused about his task, first tried to show him how to do it, then they beat him and tried to force him to work. The Canadians had been separated the first day, and only some of them refused to work once they found out they were in a munitions factory – the others might have

³⁴⁷ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 213-214.

³⁴⁸ MacDonald, 213-214.

³⁴⁹ MacDonald, 215.

³⁵⁰ Wigney, *Guests of the Kaiser*, 160.

³⁵¹ When prisoners found out their work was somehow related to munitions work, they would immediately refuse to work. This happened with Private Evans as well. Morton, *Silent Battle*, 72; Wigney, *Guests of the Kaiser*, 160; Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 90.

resisted at first, but could not hold out through the abuse.³⁵² Private Kittridge was moved to the cement factory beside the munitions factory and tried to resist again, stating he still did not want to help make the ammunition that would kill his friends.³⁵³ The guards threatened to kill him, and instead of continuing to refuse to work, he decided he would try and escape. So, he cooperated and did the bare minimum. In situations where their lives were at risk, the prisoners had to make the same instinctual decision as they had on the battlefield: die fighting or stay alive and wait for a better opportunity to come along. This decision was not quite as quick, or as profound because Private Kittridge already had another plan in mind. He did not feel like he was giving up; he was just finding a better way to resist the Germans.

Some other jobs that prisoners might have been given were working in the prison farms, cutting peat in the nearby moors, odd jobs around the camp, or more strenuous jobs like working in factories, salt mines, coal mines, ironworks, or coke ovens. If the group of prisoners found out the place they were working was directly related to the war, such as an ammunition factory or a mine where shell materials were gathered, they would initially refuse to work – they knew that international law should have prevented them from doing war-related work.³⁵⁴ The Germans would then bully, abuse, and harass the prisoners in an attempt to force them back to work. When this did not work, some were sent back to a larger camp like Giessen to receive their punishment – such as eighteen months at the punishment camp Butzbach – or they were subjected to *stillgestanden* until they gave in.³⁵⁵

Working in the mines and the coke ovens were the worst jobs. They were backbreaking, exhausting, and often had the cruellest guards.³⁵⁶ Those prisoners who were sent to work here were often being punished for poor behaviour, or just because they were British.³⁵⁷ When departing for their new camp, they were often told that they were being sent to a farm because if they knew that they were being sent for industrial work, the British prisoners would refuse to

³⁵² Morton, *Silent Battle*, 72. Wigney, *Guests of the Kaiser*, 160; Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 90.

³⁵³ Wigney, *Guests of the Kaiser*, 160.

³⁵⁴ McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 41.

³⁵⁵ McClung, 41

³⁵⁶ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 120; Morton, *Silent Battle*, 83-85.

³⁵⁷ Canadians were often grouped in with British prisoners; they bunked together at camps, were blamed together, and were punished together. Morton, *Silent Battle*, 83.

leave due to the notoriously bad treatment at those camps.³⁵⁸ When they refused, the guards would abuse the prisoners physically, then force them to endure *stillgestanden* until they gave in, often being physically abused again after standing for more than twelve hours; this would have been difficult for a healthy person, but it was gruelling for someone who had been starved and abused for months.³⁵⁹ The goal of this process was to break them down and make them feel powerless, but the Canadians knew that their spirit would not be broken, even if their bodies were.³⁶⁰ Eventually the group would realize that even if they gave in and worked, they would find alternative ways to resist.

The prisoners were determined to stand strong, but some conditions could force even the strongest men to adapt their methods. The prisoners who were seen as the least tractable, and most delinquent, were sent to punishment camp K47. Before the war there had been a civilian force of 3000 operating the mines and ovens; during the war, there were only 750 prisoners completing the same work.³⁶¹ According to Private MacDonald, the men who worked in the “The Black Hole of Germany” had “drawn faces,” and “their flesh was flabby and colourless and such a world of homesick misery looked out of their eyes that we were forced to wonder at their evident good spirits.”³⁶² Even though the Germans did everything possible to break their spirits and make them miserable, the motto “Be British” held strong because it reminded them that they were fierce and could – at least mentally – withstand anything the Germans threw at them.³⁶³ Upon arrival, the prisoners were determined to strike if they were forced to work in the mines or the coke ovens, but the older prisoners advised against it; it was too dangerous and exhausting to refuse work, the punishments were too painful, and there was no way the prisoners would outlast

³⁵⁸ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 104; Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 85; O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 138.

³⁵⁹ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 104-105; Morton, *Silent Battle*, 72, 74.

³⁶⁰ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 83, 112.

³⁶¹ Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 86.

³⁶² MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 110. The Black Hole of Germany was the coke ovens and mines at Auguste-Victoria or K47. The Black Hole of Germany likely got its name from the Black Hole of Calcutta where British prisoners of war were held in the eighteenth century. Most of the prisoners sent to the Black Hole of Calcutta died in captivity. Jonathan Vance, *Encyclopedia of Prisoners of War and Internment*, 2nd ed. (Millerton, NY: Grey House Publisher, 2006), 43, 44; Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 85.

³⁶³ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 111.

their guards.³⁶⁴ They should just do the bare minimum like the older prisoners. So, the Canadians went to work, but then an Irish-Canadian prisoner was killed in the mines.³⁶⁵ The Germans claimed that it was because the mine collapsed on him, but civilians and prisoners got into many fights, and, as Private MacDonald wrote, the civilians “hadn’t enough manliness to think of fighting with their fists, but used a knife, a pit lamp, a club or a chunk of wire cable.”³⁶⁶ The prisoners believed that the civilians had killed their comrade, and when they were not allowed to see his body, they went on strike.³⁶⁷ The guards gathered the prisoners into a line and forced them to stand all day. Private MacDonald fainted after twelve hours and was taken to the *revier* (camp hospital); the rest stood through the next day.³⁶⁸ The prisoners were then marched to the coke ovens and forced to stand in front of the blazing heat. When they fainted, they fell against the ovens and burned themselves; they were then woken up by being doused with buckets of cold water and a few kicks.³⁶⁹ The abuse was repeated until they gave in; Private Evans stood for thirty-six hours without food or water.³⁷⁰ In the end, what could they do but give in? They had no real power. This treatment could have broken a strong, healthy man, and these men were not that; they were malnourished and exhausted. They had to find an alternative way to fight back that would not kill them.

In the punishment camps, like K47, it was extremely dangerous to fight back and show any sign of resistance. Most prisoners started out in the mines, then were sent to work at the coke

³⁶⁴ MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 113, 117; O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 144; Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 86-87.

³⁶⁵ MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 113-117.

³⁶⁶ MacDonald, 115.

³⁶⁷ Private MacDonald later notes in his memoir that the man’s name was Flannigan. Lance-Corporal O’Brien also went on strike when his comrade, Bill Flannigan, died in the mines from a falling stone. Both Lance-Corporal O’Brien and Private MacDonald knew their fellow prisoners’ head had been smashed in but did not know how or why – and both men wrote how they stood for two days without food. It is unclear if these were the same incidents or not. Private Evans also wrote of a comrade who died, and the prisoners refused to work and were forced to stand at attention until they reached their limit and were kicked by a sentry. Due to the similarities in their stories, it is likely that this was the same incident that Private MacDonald and Lance-Corporal O’Brien mentioned.

While there were two Canadians with the name “Flanagan” who died during their time as a prisoner; the first died before the three were captured, and the second died while they were all prisoners. MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 118, 223; O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 144; Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 90; Wigney, *Guests of the Kaiser*, 51.

³⁶⁸ MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 119.

³⁶⁹ MacDonald, 119.

³⁷⁰ Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 91.

ovens when they misbehaved. Lance-Corporal O'Brien began 2,000 feet underground in the mines, separating coal from stone into a car, then pushing it to the main tunnel where the engine took it to the next machine.³⁷¹ He and his comrades came up with a few unique ways to fight back while in the mines. The prisoners worked with civilians, and while the prisoners only got a set amount of money per day (regardless of how long they worked), the civilians were paid based on how much coal they loaded.³⁷² If the cart was inspected and no civilian's tag was visible, no one got the credit. The prisoners would sometimes hide the tag halfway down the pile, and, when the civilian was not paid for the load, "it did our hearts good to hear the row they made."³⁷³ This disobedience would not have been possible had there been guards nearby watching them, but in the mines, they were under the supervision of the mine's management – who were just as cruel, and gave terrible punishments for even the smallest offences, but could not watch them as closely.³⁷⁴ Any small act of insubordination felt like a major victory to the prisoners; in a place where they felt small and powerless, any successful act of resistance replenished their resilience accounts enough to give them the energy to continue to resist.

Another way that the prisoners in the mines fought back was by loading the bottom half of the cart with stone and the top half with coal, so it looked like the cart was full of coal and would pass the inspection. Then, at the dumping machine the contents would get stuck in the sieves.³⁷⁵ The destruction made the Germans furious – but there was no way to prove who did it. Instead, they just threatened to punish the prisoners if it continued. The prisoners were immensely satisfied at the results of their mayhem – they could still resist the Germans, even if in a minor way. The rage from the guards and civilians only gave the prisoners more determination to fight back – it made them feel powerful again, which energized them enough to keep fighting.

Although these methods were effective in frustrating the Germans, the men were forced to keep working, and they continued to feel that they were helping the German war effort more

³⁷¹ O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 141.

³⁷² O'Brien, 142.

³⁷³ O'Brien, 143.

³⁷⁴ O'Brien, 143.

³⁷⁵ O'Brien, 146-147.

than hurting it. The best way to stop helping the Germans was through evasion – to stop working. One day, Private Evans went to work and was not feeling well, so he went and laid down behind the old workings.³⁷⁶ While sleeping, he was found by some *steigers* (foremen) who gave him a brutal beating, and he reacted by hitting one with a miner lamp. He was given three days in black cells and when he was released, he refused to go back to work. He was then charged by the *steiger* who beat him; he was tried in a civilian court and ultimately the *steiger* was charged.³⁷⁷ Not only did this give the prisoners a renewed sense of power – they now knew they could win in court – but it also showed the civilians what could happen if they mistreated a prisoner. While it slightly improved conditions in the mines for a short while, it exponentially improved the men’s perception of themselves. Early in their time as a prisoner many had been treated like animals, but this fair trial reinforced that they were honest and real men, who deserved fair treatment.

At the start of a shift, the prisoners were supposed to meet with the bosses and check in, but if a prisoner did not show up, the boss assumed he was pulled to work in an alternate tunnel.³⁷⁸ So, a group of six prisoners decided that it was time they got a break and came up with another evasion tactic. When they went into the mine, they dodged into an abandoned tunnel when no one was watching and slept there for the day – they had helped clear many tunnels and knew which ones were no longer in use. These tunnels were no longer structurally sound, and “of course we were in constant danger of being buried alive, but we greatly took the risk for the sake of getting a rest.”³⁷⁹ At the end of their shift, they would blacken their faces and rejoin the other miners. This worked for eight weeks, until two of the prisoners did not show up and the group

³⁷⁶ Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 91.

³⁷⁷ At his preliminary trial, he was surprised to find that he had an interpreter and a lawyer. He borrowed a clean uniform from another prisoner and was as straightforward and honest as he could be – being the best soldier he knew how to be. The judge promised he would be fairly treated, and he was. Private Evans was released without penalty and the *steiger* was charged. Later, another *steiger* appealed the case and it was sent to a higher court where the same procedure followed: Private Evans was released and the *steiger* was charged. Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 92-95.

³⁷⁸ O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 149.

³⁷⁹ O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 150. For similar feelings see, MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 133-135, 154-156.

tried to hide without them.³⁸⁰ The group of four was discovered by an inspector who pretended not to notice them but returned quickly with twenty civilians armed to fight.³⁸¹ After a brutal brawl, the prisoners were reported to the military authorities and given five hours' *stillgestanden* as punishment. The real punishment came the next day when they were taken to work at the coke ovens instead of the mine, and they were told that if they did not work, they would be killed.³⁸² The eight weeks they had been on break gave them strength and energy to work in the coke ovens; Lance-Corporal O'Brien felt that "this rest was all that saved my life."³⁸³ Work in the coke ovens was often used as punishment for misbehaving prisoners, and they quickly understood why. It was a long shift with no rest and intense physical labour. Resting for eight weeks had prepared them to endure intense physical torture. Had they not been so rested, they may not have been as resilient, and may have broken down.

The cruelty they experienced after being caught resisting only spurred the prisoners to find alternative ways to fight back. Their shifts were eight to twelve hours at the mines and coke ovens, and they were not allowed to have any type of diversion: no singing, playing cards, or smoking in barracks.³⁸⁴ These jobs pushed them to their limits, leaving them barely with enough energy to survive. At the coke ovens, the shifts were twelve hours, and they were forced to shovel a total of thirty-two tonnes, and on Sundays the length and amount of work was doubled.³⁸⁵ If they did not finish their minimum amount, they had to stay until they did. The best form of resistance here was mental: keeping their spirits up, and never giving the enemy "the satisfaction of letting them know it [the punishment and treatment] hurt," as Lance-Corporal

³⁸⁰ The prisoners slept in a different spot every day. But when two did not show up, the others knew that if they waited around, they would be put to work. So, they went and found a spot, and the other two had to find their own spot. Usually in the group of six, one or two would stay awake and make sure no one snored too loudly, but the two men fell asleep and were also discovered due to their snoring, so they had to run to find a new spot. O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 151-154.

³⁸¹ The group knew they had to face the civilians, so the prisoners came out of hiding, pretending to believe the inspector when he said they would not be punished, and the moment they were in the tunnel, they ran. Three got knocked down and they all were brutally beaten, but they got through and chased down two civilians, who had run instead of joining the fight, and got some revenge. O'Brien, 155.

³⁸² O'Brien, 156.

³⁸³ O'Brien, 158.

³⁸⁴ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 120.

³⁸⁵ O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 156.

O'Brien put it.³⁸⁶ In these conditions, the men may have wanted to give in, but their schools kept them strong. The coke oven was the one place where they could not show any outward displays of resistance: they had to do the minimum allotted work, they could not hide out and sleep, and they could not fight back in any physical way. The bosses of the coke ovens knew how draining the job was, so they would rotate the prisoners off the ovens occasionally to allow them to gather a bit of strength, then move them back to the ovens, and this process repeated over and over.³⁸⁷ If a prisoner tried to strike, the bosses would hang him by his hands and beat him in front of the other prisoners, then force him to stand at attention in front of the coke ovens or outside in the snow, while threatening to kill him; Private MacDonald felt that "It was punishment that no human being could bear."³⁸⁸ The work was torture and they were being forced to help the German war effort, but there was nothing they could do to stop.

The constant exhaustion made it a mental fight. They could not let the Germans win by becoming shells of the men they had been. By keeping their mind strong, "being British," and sticking with their schools, they resisted.³⁸⁹ They could not be punished for this, and if they had their comrades beside them, they could keep fighting. Lance-Corporal O'Brien wrote that, "Sharing with each other brought us a little closer together than we otherwise would have been." These relationships gave the prisoners the capability to endure gruelling physical labour and vicious abuse, and to keep their wits together when all hope seemed lost.³⁹⁰ The schools they formed helped them find the determination to keep fighting. And even though frequent late-night "Raus!" (roll calls) were only a minor punishment, Lance Corporal Edwards explained,

We never knew what our tormentors wanted but supposed it to be a systematic attempt to break our spirit and nerve by the simple expedient of habitually interfering with our sleep so that we would become like the Russians. They were mostly utterly broken in spirit and had the air of beaten dogs, so that they cringed and fawned to their masters.³⁹¹

³⁸⁶ O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 147.

³⁸⁷ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 155.

³⁸⁸ MacDonald, 156, 157.

³⁸⁹ MacDonald, 111.

³⁹⁰ O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 157.

³⁹¹ Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 86.

They were determined to keep their “British spirit” strong and withstand any punishment their guards could think of.³⁹² Mucking it helped them survive, by giving them a community and people to rely on when it was difficult to cope. Despite their exhaustion, they knew that keeping their camaraderie strong would help them stay sane and survive; they fought to be brave in the face of terrible cruelty, to maintain their pride, and find any essence of power.

The prisoners who let themselves dwell on these feelings of anger and desolation and on their own misfortunes could rarely get out of the stupor. They gradually lost their strength and their logic, succumbing to a war weary breakdown, and were often removed to an asylum outside of the camp where they spent the rest of the war years.³⁹³ It was extremely dangerous to stew in their despondency, so most Canadians did not risk it, and used their schools to bolster their mental strength. They were determined to never give in, although they believed that eventually, according to Private MacDonald, “even the strongest men soon broke down under the work.”³⁹⁴ There was no room for a pessimist in the punishment camps and dwelling on the negative aspects of their lives would only accelerate a breakdown and lead to further torment.³⁹⁵ The prisoners soon realized that if they were to survive, they needed a new goal, something that would keep them motivated and resilient.

Mental resistance was not visible to the outside world, and they likely felt that they had to prove that they were still fighting, even if their efforts were not as visible as destroying property or crops. They could not afford the risk of outward resistance in the punishment camps because they could be severely punished or even killed. Mental resistance was the safest way to keep fighting because the Germans could not easily punish them for it.

Another form of mental resistance was taking care of each other. In the punishment camps, it was easy to fall into the rhythm and forget the world around them. By mucking it, they were able to keep one another strong despite the terrible conditions. They tried to take care of

³⁹² McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 158, 175, 191; Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 88, 160.

³⁹³ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 219.

³⁹⁴ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 156-157, 172. For a similar conviction see: O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 147.

³⁹⁵ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 110, 191, 195; Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 158; Loveridge, “Seeing Trauma as Sacrifice,” 51.

each other by making dinner for the group that just finished its shift before they headed out to begin their own shift, but this was soon forbidden.³⁹⁶ Any outward form of support was strictly forbidden by their German tormenters; they wanted the prisoners to suffer alone, but the prisoners kept finding alternative ways to support their comrades. In these camps, resistance was silent: giving comrades encouraging glances, sharing parcels, doing the bare minimum of work required, or just staying alive. In the coke ovens, they quickly realized that physical resistance was rarely possible; there was no way to fake the work or destroy equipment without risking severe punishment or death. They could only complete their assigned work and keep their hearts strong. As they continued to work in these terrible conditions, they would come up with smaller expressions of resistance, methods that would never have been thought of as an option had they been in better working conditions or camps. It quickly shifted from external resistance at work, to internal resistance and in ways that were not always abundantly clear.

With external resistance came punishment, and each prisoner knew the risks for their actions. The prisoners learned quickly how easily the guards could be provoked, and that in punishment camps their guards often sought out prisoners for punishment, even if there was no offence.³⁹⁷ Every camp had its own methods of punishment, but with many similarities. Punishments lasted from a few days to a few weeks – depending on the type of punishment, the kind of camp, the severity of the offence, and what guard chose the punishment.³⁹⁸ A prisoner's punishments usually got more severe and longer the more often he offended.

Each of the prisoners discussed received some sort of punishment, whether it was for an escape attempt, refusing work, or any other misdemeanor. Dark cells were the most common punishment for any misbehaviour.³⁹⁹ In some camps, the prisoners found ways to blackmail the

³⁹⁶ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 124.

³⁹⁷ Morton, *Silent Battle*, 71; Vance, *Objects of Concern*, 33.

³⁹⁸ As mentioned earlier, common punishments were dark cells, *stillgestanden*, or *strafe barracks*.

³⁹⁹ The cells size ranged from three square feet to ten square feet. **Shorter punishments** (24 hours – 7 days): MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 113, 188-189, 192, 207, 215; Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, Evans: 91, 200; McMullen: 102, 133; Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, 67, 77; Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 88, 141. **Longer Punishments** (10 days – 7 weeks/indefinite): McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 86, 93, 155, 156; Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 141, 144; MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 96, 153, 165; Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, Evans: 171; McMullen: 109, 135. O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 182; Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, 14, 86, 106, 135.

guards, which allowed them to send food and resources to the dark cell prisoners, making their stays a little more manageable – and also robbing the cells of their true goal, demoralization through starvation and loneliness.⁴⁰⁰ While in the cells, the men fought to get access light, often the men in their schools found ways to sneak matches in, or poke holes in the walls or ceilings, or the prisoner in the cell lifted up ceiling boards for a crack of light, or a variety of other methods. Taking care of each other was a powerful technique to remain resilient, whether they were mucking it and sharing their parcels, or they were finding ways to help those in the prison cells. Sometimes all they could do was keep each other company and talk through the walls until it was over.⁴⁰¹ They supported each other in any way possible, because that was what comrades did: they did not let others suffer alone if they could help.

The prisoners learned to expect harsher punishments as their imprisonment continued; yet they resisted anyways. Their determination to resist despite certain punishment shows how strong their convictions were – they were willing to risk painful and exhausting punishments in order to hurt the German war effort in any way they could. Their resistance, however small, gave them a feeling of control in an otherwise powerless situation. And even though the punishments reduced their endurance accounts, the satisfaction of their resistance added to them.

Resistance and resilience did not have just one mode of expression. It varied by prisoner and camp. Resistance came in three main forms, and depended on where the prisoners were located, what job they were working, and who they were with. Destructive resistance was visible through physical acts of damage such as breaking equipment and destroying crops. Evasive resistance was by way of avoiding work such as hiding, sleeping in tunnels, or going on strike. Mental resistance was the least visible and most often used in punishment camps; it was achieved through taking care of their schools, keeping their spirits up, and sometimes just staying alive. Prisoners built intense relationships that helped keep their minds strong and found new ways to resist the Germans, moulding their endurance to their new environment. The prisoners

⁴⁰⁰ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 113, 165; Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 142; McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 147.

⁴⁰¹ O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 182; Loveridge, "Seeing Trauma as Sacrifice," 51.

used the others in their schools to build up endurance, to feel supported, and to come up with alternative ways to continue to fight back.

Chapter 6: The Fight for Freedom

*“All I wanted was an opportunity to prove my mettle and retrieve my lost reputation.”*⁴⁰²

The danger that resistance posed did not deter the prisoners from trying, but it did force them to find unique and creative methods. Resistance came in many forms, depending on the individual, the camp they were in, if they had comrades, and their working conditions. These factors dictated whether the prisoners could resist at all and what types of resistance were possible. The more they misbehaved, the worse their punishments became. Ultimately, the prisoners in this paper realized that escape was the ultimate form of resistance, for it could earn them their freedom, but as Private Davison explained, “A serious attempt to escape from the country required considerable courage and endurance, and to be successful, a lot of luck.”⁴⁰³ The escapees knew that if caught in the attempt, there was a high probability that they would be killed, but achieving freedom was worth the risk. There were likely many prisoners who believed that it was best just to stoically survive and do what they were told, because the reward of freedom was not worth the hardships and suffering that would be endured if caught escaping.⁴⁰⁴ Or perhaps the prisoners believed that they had a better chance of surviving the war if they did not escape or outwardly resist; for them, getting home to their family alive was braver than endangering their lives. It was up to each prisoner to choose what was worth the risk, and what was worth enduring.

In the prisoners’ writing, it is evident that most of them believed that escape was the ultimate form of resistance, and despite the cruelty, Private MacDonald explained that “the boys, with the British spirit that never has been and never will be broken, made it a point of honor to keep on smiling.”⁴⁰⁵ No matter how the Germans treated them, the Canadians were determined to remain strong, but that did not stop them from wanting to get out of Germany. If they could successfully escape, the benefits would far outweigh the risks, and the men who died trying were

⁴⁰² Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 113.

⁴⁰³ Davison, “P.O.W.: Chapter 1,” 34.

⁴⁰⁴ Morton, *Silent Battle*, 110, 111.

⁴⁰⁵ MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 112.

portrayed by their comrades as heroes; a similar apotheosis was granted to those who died on the battlefield.⁴⁰⁶ The ultimate sacrifice was still death, but only if achieved through heroic actions. This chapter will focus on alternative methods of resistance, how the Canadian prisoners escaped the camps, and how the prisoners ferociously struggled to maintain the balance of their endurance accounts. These men had survived the humiliation of capture, constant degradation, and many other challenges that came along with life as a prisoner of war; they were determined to survive their escape attempts as well. In the punishment camps, the forms of resistance centered on evasion and escape. As it became more difficult to resist, the prisoners were forced to turn to more subtle avenues to stay alive while still maintaining some aspect of control. They would never stop fighting; they just had to keep adapting their methods. Being limited in resistance might have made it look and feel like they were being compliant, so they affirmed their bravery by writing vivid explanations of their defiance in their memoirs.⁴⁰⁷

In the trenches, many of the soldiers believed that self-harm was a coward's way out of war.⁴⁰⁸ But in certain situations in the prison camps of Germany, self-harm offered prisoners a way to evade the terrible working conditions, gave them access to more food in the hospitals, and sometimes offered an opportunity for escape. The prisoners harmed themselves in a myriad of ways, each way having its own benefits and pitfalls.

In punishment camps, the men would do anything to avoid work – partly to rest, and partly to resist their guards. In camps like K47, the prisoners were watched very closely, and they could not fight back by destroying equipment or commodities, so they turned to themselves. If they would be forced to work, the only way out of it was to make it so they could not

⁴⁰⁶ Morton, *Silent Battle*, 109.

⁴⁰⁷ Not all prisoners wrote about their experiences in the camps. According to Wigney only twelve Canadian prisoners wrote memoirs during or after the war. In the 1930s, a report was written of the prisoners' experiences, but this was used to claim damages due to maltreatment. These cases were primarily negative aspects of life as a prisoner and did not focus resilience. A larger study could have used these sources to further understand the treatment the prisoners received, but it is not applicable to the current study. Wigney, *Guests of the Kaiser*, 12; McDougall, *Short Reparations: 1930-1931 Report: Maltreatment of Prisoners of War*.

⁴⁰⁸ Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 352, 355; Granatstein, *Hell's Corner*, 55, 56; Chase, "War Weariness in the Canadian Corps in the First World War," 128.

physically do the work. This began by injuring themselves at work, which was easier to get away with because the jobs were extremely dangerous, and injury was common.

Lance-Corporal O'Brien and Private MacDonald decided that it was time to escape, but they had to get out of work first.⁴⁰⁹ The two flipped a coin, and Lance-Corporal O'Brien won (or lost) and put his hand between two of the rail cars, crushing his fingers. That night, Private MacDonald wet a handkerchief and used a stick to make a tourniquet around his arm, and the next morning it was swollen, discoloured, and very painful.⁴¹⁰ The doctor did not know why and put him on light duty with Lance-Corporal O'Brien. This gave them access to an escape route that would not have been available in the mines.

The prisoners creatively used the resources they had on hand to create physical symptoms that could not be explained: Private Simmons repeatedly pounded a lump of earth in one spot for twenty minutes which caused swollen limbs, some prisoners ingested soap to raise their temperature or fake a heart disease, some ate tobacco to derange their heart rhythm, and Private MacDonald simulated fever for a month by placing hot stones under his armpits.⁴¹¹ While all of these caused the prisoners physical discomfort and pain, it gave them a break from work, and sometimes opened up new possibilities for escape. Despite the harm they were causing themselves, these actions replenished their endurance by giving them a break from the inhumane working conditions, better food, fresh air, and a chance to socialize with their comrades. If these acts were committed with another prisoner, it reinforced their bond by giving them a shared experience.

In a more severe case, Private MacDonald was making tea for himself before shift and decided to pour the boiling water on his hand.⁴¹² He repeated this twice more before he went to the hospital. The guards sent him to get the wounds bandaged and he went back to his barracks, but the next morning he was sent to the black cells for a night – they had discovered he had inflicted the wounds on himself. The whole camp went on strike until he was released and sent to

⁴⁰⁹ Wigney, *Guests of the Kaiser*, 68; MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 225-226.

⁴¹⁰ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 225-226.

⁴¹¹ McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 176. MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 132, 168-170.

⁴¹² MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 192.

the doctor.⁴¹³ When the doctor peeled back the bandage, Private MacDonald had such a severe burn that he could almost see the bones through the charred skin. The camaraderie in this camp went farther than just the schools; when a prisoner was being confined without medical treatment and there was a risk of death from the injury, the prisoners banded together to protect their comrades.

These men were determined to get out of work, and sometimes that meant injuring themselves. They were more than willing to pay the price if it got them out of work and possibly to a better prison camp. But they did not take the cost lightly, Private MacDonald explained that “Many a man lost a hand or an arm over there which he has sacrificed for the cause just as truly if it had been shot off in Flanders.”⁴¹⁴ While it would wound them, possibly permanently, it also got them out of the terrible working conditions which helped them to stop working for the Germans, and it renewed their sense of purpose. Private MacDonald and the others associated self-harm in the camps with a wound on the battlefield. These men believed their self-inflicted wounds showed as much bravery as a soldier wounded in combat. To them, their injuries *were* inflicted in a battle, just not in the trenches they had been captured in. This resistance gave the men’s resilience a new goal to work towards: if they were forced to work, they would try to make the hospital and jail cells always full.

Another form of self-harm that the prisoners practiced was in the form of false illness. Creating an illness from scratch took a lot of creativity and willpower. One prisoner created a “communicable” disease outbreak by rubbing mustard on the skin which caused a painful reaction.⁴¹⁵ Some men mixed mustard with salt and/or soap, which made the wounds much worse. At one camp, thirty prisoners applied the salve of mustard to their hands and feet, and the following morning the doctor proclaimed that there was an outbreak of the plague at the camp. Although this ruse was, according to Private MacDonald, “Painful – of course; but, so was

⁴¹³ MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 193.

⁴¹⁴ MacDonald, 157. There were various other ways that the prisoners injured themselves including (but not limited to): encouraging blood poisoning by rubbing dirt in wounds, breaking their own bones, boiling liquid and pouring it over a limb, eating excess amounts of tobacco, or crippling themselves in any way imaginable. Hospitals tended to have better food and less work.

⁴¹⁵ MacDonald, 168.

work.”⁴¹⁶ The doctor could not find any known disease that aligned with their symptoms, which made this appear very serious, and it kept ‘spreading’ as more men applied the salve. A few of the ‘infected’ were sent away to Munster camp, which was the goal; they would get better camp conditions, more rations, and safer working environments. Two specialists were brought in and tried many experiments, but eventually the ruse was given up by some Russians who were roughly interrogated.⁴¹⁷ All the ‘infected’ were sent back to work, regardless of their wounds. After this, the hospital and jail were very empty for a while – Private MacDonald wrote how discouraging this was, since the goal was to have both full so that fewer people were helping the German war effort.⁴¹⁸ When the men at Private Simmons’ camp tried to stage a sick parade of ninety men, armed guards were brought in and the prisoners were marched to work.⁴¹⁹ The number of men who appeared at sick parade shows that it was accepted as a resistance technique, but after this, they had to get more creative with their ways out of work, and created the motto, *Nix Arbide* – no work.⁴²⁰

The laws of the Hague Convention allowed the governing country to choose how to punish the escaping prisoners:

Prisoners of war shall be subject to the laws, regulations, and orders in force in the army of the State into whose hands they have fallen. Any act of insubordination warrants the adoption, as regards them, of such measures of severity as may be necessary. Escaped prisoners, recaptured before they have succeeded in rejoining their army, or before quitting the territory occupied by the army that captured them, are liable to disciplinary punishment.⁴²¹

Ambassador Gerard claimed that all recaptured escapees were not severely punished, but they were justly confined in jail, then sent to a punitive camp.⁴²² In 1917 Britain and Germany agreed that any attempted escapee was to receive two weeks’ solitary confinement, but prior to this the

⁴¹⁶ MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 169.

⁴¹⁷ MacDonald, 168-170.

⁴¹⁸ MacDonald, 170.

⁴¹⁹ McClung, 117.

⁴²⁰ McClung, 119.

⁴²¹ International Peace Conference, “Convention (Iv) Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land and Its Annex: Regulations Concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land. The Hague, 18 October 1907,” (*The Hague*, 1907), Chapter 2, Article 8. See [Appendix C](#) for the full list of laws.

⁴²² Gerard, *My Four Years in Germany*, 187.

punishment varied; it could have been a couple days or a few weeks in black cells, then possibly another punishment.⁴²³ There was a high probability of death during an escape: if the prisoners were seen escaping the camps, if they fought back while being recaptured, or if the person recapturing them saw fit to kill them, the prisoner had no power. The prisoners were warned upon arrival in the camps that anyone seen fleeing would be shot on sight.⁴²⁴ Private John Hughes and his comrade planned to escape while they were on their way to work one morning, but as the two ran, Private Hughes was shot through the back and killed.⁴²⁵ They also knew of others who were killed just for standing too close to the enclosing fence.⁴²⁶ The prisoners who sought to escape understood the risks involved and most were willing to face the consequences, should they fail.

Although many of the prisoners were unsuccessful in their attempts to escapes multiple times, they remained determined, and as Private MacDonald wrote, “All the time I was in the camp the thought of getting away again was never out of my mind.”⁴²⁷ Endurance was more than being brave and finding ways to fight back; it was never losing hope and never giving up, despite constant failure. There were surely times when the prisoners felt like quitting, but the men they were mucking it with supported them when they felt weak and tired, and gave them the strength to keep fighting.⁴²⁸ But being caught escaping was more of a motivator than a deterrent – it made them want to fight harder to escape and find new and more creative ways.⁴²⁹ Despite how frustrating being caught near or within the confines of the camp was, it quickly showed them which methods were not successful, and it gave them the motivation to find another route. For Private MacDonald, “escape became an obsession that burned in my brain day and night. If I had

⁴²³ Morton, *Silent Battle*, 104, 106.

⁴²⁴ McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 29; Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, 7, 94; Morton, *Silent Battle*, 45, 62.

⁴²⁵ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 213; Wigney, *Guests of the Kaiser*, 68.

⁴²⁶ Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 96.

⁴²⁷ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 204; Davison, “P.O.W.: Chapter 1,” 34.

⁴²⁸ For such comments, see MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 110, 191, 195; Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 88, 158, 160; McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 158, 175, 191.

⁴²⁹ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 135, 173, 204, 216, 224, 226; Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 129-132, 169-170, 172, 173, 174, 175, 174, 204; Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 112, 114, 124-127; Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, 10, 19, 40, 46, 66, 99, 102; McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 58, 108, 122, 174, O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 136, 166, 179, 186.

not at last succeeded, I believe I should have gone mad. My heart was breaking; every failure only made me more determined and more stubborn.”⁴³⁰ The prisoners who wanted to escape were driven by sheer force of will, and every time they failed, that determination grew stronger. While being caught before they had even begun their attempt was dangerous, being recaptured while on the run was even more of a risk, and those facing recapture knew they had to be careful.

As their time in the camps continued, small forms of resistance did not seem good enough. They felt they needed to make a bigger stand to redeem themselves. Many of the prisoners named in this paper eventually concluded that escaping Germany was, and should be, “the ultimate goal [of] every prisoner of war.”⁴³¹ While other forms of resistance helped reinforce that it was possible to fight back, they believed that escaping Germany would earn them their honour back in the eyes of the military, their families, and themselves. But escaping the camps was an extremely deadly endeavor; most attempting to escape understood and accepted all the risks.

Some did not realize until the exact moment they were supposed to escape that they could not handle the fear. Lance-Corporal Edwards was on a railway working party, and when the group took a break for lunch and the guards were elsewhere, he and his companion simply walked into the woods.⁴³² But within minutes, his companion was anxious. The comrade said that it was a bad time and place to escape, and that they should turn back before it was too late. The two stood there arguing for a few minutes, but it was no use; Lance-Corporal Edwards’ companion, “fell prey to his own fears” and dreaded the certain punishment if they were recaptured.⁴³³ So, the two turned back. Lance-Corporal Edwards was hesitant of going alone because it was better to have a guard while sleeping during the day, but he came to regret not forging on alone.⁴³⁴ Being recaptured and punished would have been better than the humiliation

⁴³⁰ MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 226. For similar examples of the prisoner’s determination to escape, see MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 173, 204, 216, 224; Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 169, 172-174, 204; Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 112, 128; Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, 10; McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 124; O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 135.

⁴³¹ Douglas, *Captured*, 101.

⁴³² Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 108.

⁴³³ Pearson, 109.

⁴³⁴ Pearson, 110-111.

of cowardice, and, “All I wanted was an opportunity to prove my mettle and retrieve my lost reputation.”⁴³⁵ They became the joke of the camp, and were aggressively mocked by their campmates – but Lance-Corporal Edwards could not defend himself by blaming the other man because that would have made him look even worse.⁴³⁶ Lance-Corporal Edwards was determined to try again, struggling not to let the jeers demoralize him, but they did, and he became miserable as he desperately searched for an escape plan.⁴³⁷ When they were ready to try again, Private Simmons and Lance-Corporal Thomas Bromley asked both Lance-Corporal Edwards and his previous companion to join.⁴³⁸ When they cut through the fence, three of them crawled towards a pile of peat, but the first companion refused again; Private Simmons believed it was because “Crawling is a slow and terrible way to travel when every instinct cries out to run.”⁴³⁹ Although the group of three was recaptured after many days on the run, they were proud of their accomplishment and could use what they had learned on later escape attempts. Lance-Corporal Edwards and Private Simmons did not name the man in their memoirs because they were likely trying not to destroy his reputation, regardless of how cowardly they felt he was.

Similarly, Private MacDonald’s comrade, WH, got the two purposely recaptured within half a mile of the border: his comrades had been shot during his previous attempt and he was very anxious that it would happen again.⁴⁴⁰ As they journeyed back to their camp, Private MacDonald reminded and helped prepare WH for the punishment that was to come, and “it was with some satisfaction that I saw a haunted look come into his eyes.”⁴⁴¹ And even though Private MacDonald was infuriated with WH, he never disclosed his full name. To these prisoners, a successful escape meant freedom, good food, and the chance to go home. It was the motivating

⁴³⁵ Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 113.

He had been taught to believe that a true man was a soldier who fought for his country, becoming a prisoner had likely made him feel like a coward (a failure of a man), and he believed that escape would prove his devotion to the war and his country again.

⁴³⁶ Pearson, 112.

⁴³⁷ Pearson, 113.

⁴³⁸ Wigney, *Guests of the Kaiser*, 28.

⁴³⁹ McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 125; Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 126-127.

⁴⁴⁰ MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 182, 187.

⁴⁴¹ MacDonald, 187.

force behind the prisoners' actions, and when a fellow comrade purposely took away that chance, it ruined any relationship they had built.

When these men revealed their true nature, the others in the camps did as well. Even those who never considered escaping taunted and tormented the escapees who got recaptured on purpose. The prisoners had built a tightly knit camaraderie, and while the men in their schools supported them, those outside their group would not have known the full truth of the escape attempt. Private MacDonald and Lance-Corporal Edwards' abortive escapes were due to the companion becoming afraid and needing to return to camp. Despite the two men's desire to continue, they were tormented for the cowardice of the companion. It was better to try and be recaptured and punished, than to purposely fail. It was accepted that not all men wanted to escape, but they all agreed that purposeful capture was cowardly. These men were at the mercy of their fears, and Private MacDonald felt that "All his [WH's] courage was foam and had settled back into dregs."⁴⁴² They had no endurance left in their accounts to give them the energy needed for the escape.

Being recaptured was not failure; it was an opportunity for others to learn from. Those who were caught after an escape attempt were lauded as heroes and told their tales of life on the run to many eager listeners – both those who wanted tips on escaping and those who wanted to live vicariously through the escapees.⁴⁴³ Prisoners, like Private Hughes, who died in the attempt, were apotheosized, which is evident in Private MacDonald's writing, "So another gallant band gave his life in trying to gain his freedom."⁴⁴⁴ Purposely failing, or turning back before trying, was cowardly because they were letting their fear control them instead of taking the risk.

Each failed attempt only spurred the prisoners on, and every time they were unsuccessful, they shared what they had learned with the rest of their school.⁴⁴⁵ Even though few plans were successful a second time – especially if caught in the act – others could learn useful tricks, like where to cross rail tracks, the best way to safely get through a town, or how to cross a canal.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴² MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 110.

⁴⁴³ MacDonald, 148.

⁴⁴⁴ MacDonald, 185.

⁴⁴⁵ MacDonald, 205.

⁴⁴⁶ MacDonald, 216.

Despite the punishments, they continued to try and escape.⁴⁴⁷ Getting out of Germany was their primary goal, and they likely believed that it would reclaim their honour in the eyes of their friends, families, and commanders.

The prisoners cited in this paper planned various unique escapes, but it often took many tries before they successfully escaped Germany. Countless men were successful in getting out of the camp, but were caught on their journey to freedom.⁴⁴⁸ It is important to remember that only one hundred Canadian prisoners successfully escaped Germany, and of those, there was only one officer – Major Anderson.⁴⁴⁹ But one in ten prisoners reported attempting to escape, with half of these reporting a second or third attempt as well.⁴⁵⁰ Since there were around 3,500 Canadian prisoners, around 350 prisoners tried to escape, around 170 prisoners tried to escape more than once, but 250 of these prisoners never successfully escaped Germany. And after the first escape attempt, they were watched very closely by the guards and received special marks on their clothing to signal that they were troublemakers and required constant attention.⁴⁵¹ Which only made escape that much harder.

The prisoners knew that death was a possibility every time they attempted escape, but few ever saw how close they came. Private MacDonald and his comrade tunnelled through a wall in their barrack bathroom into a broom closet that was between the two fences of the camp, they planned to escape at one o'clock that morning.⁴⁵² As they prepared to climb through, they happened to see the smallest sliver of light filter through the hole: someone had opened then closed the closet door.⁴⁵³ Through the bathroom window they saw that a guard had his gun aimed at the closet door, ready to shoot whoever emerged. They hid their map and compass and went back to bed. Within a half hour the guards stormed the room, waking everyone up for a surprise

⁴⁴⁷ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 135, 173, 204, 216, 224, 226; Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 129-132, 169-170, 172, 173, 174, 175, 174, 204; Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 112, 114, 124-127; Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, 10, 19, 40, 46, 66, 99, 102; McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 58, 108, 122, 174, O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 136, 166, 179, 186.

⁴⁴⁸ Morton, *Silent Battle*, 98.

⁴⁴⁹ Wigney, *Guests of the Kaiser*, 14; Morton, *Silent Battle*, 98.

⁴⁵⁰ Morton, *Silent Battle*, 98.

⁴⁵¹ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 189.

⁴⁵² MacDonald, 224-225.

⁴⁵³ MacDonald, 225.

search, but could not figure out who had tried to escape.⁴⁵⁴ Rather than demoralizing the prisoners, close calls increased their endurance; it made them more determined to escape because freedom had felt within reach. The prisoners would regroup, and try and plan another escape route, or another resistance technique.

There were a variety of methods the prisoners used to escape. The most common was through a tunnel or crawling under the fence wires. In most camps where tunnels were attempted, there was at least a two-foot clearance between the ground and the floorboards of the huts where they could hide the excess dirt.⁴⁵⁵ Depending on the length of tunnel required, it took the prisoners anywhere from five days/nights to three months to finish digging. They would always stop when they got near the surface, so that they could prepare for their escape the following night. Unfortunately, if the tunnel was too close to the surface, a guard might fall through as he marched the path.⁴⁵⁶ The largest known tunnel was built at Fort Zorndorf by sixty British and Canadian officers, it was 375 feet, took over four months to dig, and the prisoners encountered many issues including running out of space for dirt, and running out of air and light.⁴⁵⁷ Unfortunately, a month before they were set to finish “the work of art,” (as Lieutenant Thorn called it) the British were moved and some French officers took over their room and alerted the Commandant that there was a tunnel.⁴⁵⁸ Not only was this a huge disappointment, but since two-thirds of the fortress was involved, they could not all be punished. Instead, the cost to fill the tunnel was taken from their officers’ pay and the prisoners were forced to endure a month of hard labour to fill it.⁴⁵⁹ While this was devastating, it only made the prisoners more determined to succeed.

⁴⁵⁴ MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 225.

⁴⁵⁵ O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 136; Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, 19; Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 169-170.

⁴⁵⁶ O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 137; Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 172.

⁴⁵⁷ Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, 24, 25.

⁴⁵⁸ Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, 24, 25. Lieutenant Thorn had a few creative escape attempts. See his Chapter 15 for how they created a poison which they had hoped to give to a guard – until it nearly killed their test subject.

⁴⁵⁹ Prisoners were paid according to their job, the camp they were in, and their rank. This was not a factor in their endurance so was not included in the larger discussion but could have been had there been more space. Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, 24, 25.

Some Canadians were very wary of trying to dig a tunnel because, in Private Davison's words,

tunnels were under the handicap of not having the exact measurement of the distance between the hut and the fence, with the unfortunate result that when they turned upwards to the surface they found themselves still on the wrong side. They didn't break right through the surface, but of course, one of the guards stepped on the weak spot and went through, so the tunnel was discovered.⁴⁶⁰

In another example of the hazards of tunnels, Private MacDonald witnessed a French man get shot when he came up between two of the fences, rather than outside the outer one.⁴⁶¹ Tunnels were an extremely common form of escape because they were the easiest to hide, and if done on shifts, usually could be completed before the authorities got suspicious.⁴⁶² But they also held their hazards: if a tunnel collapsed, whoever was inside would likely be killed.⁴⁶³ If the tunnellers came up too soon, they would be seen by the guards and could be shot on sight. Yet the prisoners continued to risk their lives to escape. They felt they had nothing to lose; starvation and their working conditions held just as much of a risk to their lives as escape did.

The second most common method was by crawling under the camp fences, as described earlier by Private Simmons and Lance-Corporal Edwards. They watched the movements of the guards, cut the bottom wire on the fence, scrambled under both fences, then had to continue crawling until they were far enough away that they could stand up and run.⁴⁶⁴ This was straightforward, and done in sight of the guards. This was a much more daring escape attempt as the guards could walk by or notice at any moment during the escape. And once the guards noticed the cut wire, it was a chase.

Dressing in a disguise of sorts was also a common escape technique. Private Evans received some civilian clothes in a parcel and hid them from the camp officials so that they did

⁴⁶⁰ Davison, "P.O.W.: Chapter 2," 18.

⁴⁶¹ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 216.

⁴⁶² For more tunnel escapes see MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 103; Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, 17, 26, 35, 46.

⁴⁶³ For some hazards with tunnels see, Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, 24, 25.

⁴⁶⁴ Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 124; McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 58, 122; MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 135.

not get his troublemaker's stripes.⁴⁶⁵ He and his comrade Private Nicholson walked out the front gates of the mine with the other civilians.⁴⁶⁶ The two successfully got away, and "We tried to take it all in coolly but inwardly I know I was quaking all the time. Never had such a sensation before or since."⁴⁶⁷ Escaping in broad daylight had felt more dangerous, but they blended in with the miners around them. Using civilian or miner's clothing to get out had to be done at the end of the shift, which meant they could only bring minimal provisions with them. Another disguise was made by Lieutenant Thorn who bought some black crepe and stole a woman's coat to create widow's weeds: a woman's dress, veil, and hat.⁴⁶⁸ He hid in a wheelbarrow and a Belgian orderly filled it with manure and other garbage, then a German guard took it to be emptied. Once emptied into the manure pit, the guard walked away and Lieutenant Thorn crawled out, cleaned himself up, and got dressed up in his widow weeds.

Another common escape route was by hiding in wicker baskets that were to be taken from camp. The prisoner would hide in a wicker basket, wait for others to load him onto a cart, then be driven away by the driver. Unfortunately, a guard walked by and noticed that the basket was moving, and the prisoner was discovered.⁴⁶⁹ This escape attempt was tried a few times and was often discovered before they left the camp.

The least common way out of the camp was over the fence, which was extremely difficult due to the barbed wire and the constant sentry marches. Climbing over the fence took time and could be seen from more angles than going under. The only prisoner discussed here who escaped over the fence was Major Anderson. He began his escape by hiding in a well, and once the other officers cleared the yard, he emerged, dug his pack out of the sand, climbed up a ladder and into a stable on the property, climbed down the other side of the barn, then over both fences.⁴⁷⁰ It

⁴⁶⁵ Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 175. Others also disguised themselves as civilians to escape: MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 173; Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, 64-68. Some even disguised themselves as guards: MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 217.

⁴⁶⁶ Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 175-178.

⁴⁶⁷ Evans, 178.

⁴⁶⁸ Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, 33-37.

⁴⁶⁹ Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, 10, 102; MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 217.

⁴⁷⁰ Anderson, *I, That's Me*, 112-116.

took him seven hours to cross sixty yards, but he felt it was time well spent because he successfully got out of the camp and then out of Germany.

Being recaptured without being killed while on the run proved to be possible, even though the prisoners were warned that they would be shot if caught escaping. The Germans told the prisoners that escaping Germany alive was impossible, but the Canadians were determined. Those who successfully got out of their camps felt a surge of excitement at first, but quickly sobered as they heard the camp alarms go off, and knew they had followers.⁴⁷¹ In a prisoner's early attempts, they usually did not get very far; they were most often recaptured trying to cross a river by a bridge or rail tracks, they quickly figured out that taking such risks were not advisable.⁴⁷² The more they escaped – and were subsequently caught – the more they learned.

Those who had escaped many times – or spoke with other failed escapees – knew that intentionally throwing followers off their trail greatly helped their chances of success.⁴⁷³ On Lance-Corporal O'Brien and Private MacDonald's later attempts, they dropped pepper on their trail to throw off the bloodhounds that chased them.⁴⁷⁴ At the punishment camps, escape was much harder, and the prisoners had to be much bolder in their attempts. As Lance-Corporal O'Brien and Private MacDonald walked back from lunch, they quietly followed the sentry to his post, on a normal day they would have followed for a bit then turned off to their assigned task.⁴⁷⁵ Just as the sentry was about to turn around and march his path, the two dropped down to the platform below and ran 200 yards to the empty boxcars. No shots were fired; they had not been seen, but they soon heard a commotion as the prisoners were counted and their absence was discovered. They dropped pepper on their path to throw off the bloodhounds and changed into civilian clothing so their red-striped prison uniform could not give them away.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷¹ Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 127-28, 64; MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 228; O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 190-91; McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 126.

⁴⁷² Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 171.

⁴⁷³ Morton, *Silent Battle*, 102; MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 205.

⁴⁷⁴ O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 186; MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 137, 139, 229.

⁴⁷⁵ O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 190; MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 227-228.

⁴⁷⁶ O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 191; MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 229.

Every failed escape attempt helped them learn more about Germany and eventually aided someone in an escape attempt.⁴⁷⁷ Those who successfully escaped would write back to the prison camps with coded letters on how best to escape.⁴⁷⁸ Those who were caught were heralded as brave men by all the other prisoners and were interrogated for information on the border and their travels.⁴⁷⁹ Being recaptured did not hinder their endurance, rather, it encouraged them to try harder the next time. But the more failed attempts, the harder the men tried; Private MacDonald felt that “If I had not at last succeeded, I believe I should have gone mad. My heart was breaking; every failure only made me more determined and more stubborn.”⁴⁸⁰ Although the prisoners grew more daring with every failed attempt, it also made them stronger, and encouraged them to stick together.

Major Anderson only escaped the camps once, but throughout his journey, he constantly worked to throw the Germans off his trail. Before he escaped, he made it appear as though he had friends and family in Switzerland, and he left a piece of his map with the Swiss border under his pillow.⁴⁸¹ He was actually headed for Denmark – ten times further than Switzerland. Major Anderson took a lot of time to prepare for his escape; he gathered as much money as he could, and bought or stole a raincoat, rain hat, food, and other necessary supplies.⁴⁸² By taking his time in planning his escape, he was able to gather enough provisions, fake his direction, and successfully escape Germany.

While on the run, the prisoners encountered many issues, some life-threatening, some confidence-boosting. They had a lot of endurance, and they believed that if they could survive the torture of the punishment camps, they could survive the journey to freedom – and in the name of liberty, they would do almost anything to ensure that freedom. Determined to be successful, the men realized that theft, assault, and sometimes even murder were necessary to reach their goal. While on the run, they did not have free access to food and nutrients, and if they

⁴⁷⁷ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 205.

⁴⁷⁸ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 245; Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 167.

⁴⁷⁹ Morton, *Silent Battle*, 102.

⁴⁸⁰ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 226.

⁴⁸¹ Anderson, *I, That's Me*, 103.

⁴⁸² Anderson, 105-107.

wanted to successfully escape Germany, they would have to make use of the resources they found on their journeys. A strong hatred for the German civilians allowed them to steal without much guilt. But stealing from farmers was not always easy; Private Evans and his comrade were digging up some potatoes in a farm field when they were shot at before they could steal more than a few.⁴⁸³ During an escape, feelings towards the civilians ranged from fear and disdain to a powerful hate.⁴⁸⁴ These feelings helped them rationalize theft, but how far could they go? Every prisoner had to draw a line that they would not cross, whether it was murder, assault, or theft.

Finding milking cows or milk jugs left out overnight to be picked up the following morning was like finding water in a desert. Milk was the best possible commodity to find on the run; it gave them nutrients and sustenance, which gave them confidence to keep moving forward.⁴⁸⁵ Most prisoners had no problem stealing milk, potatoes, turnips, carrots, and oats from farmers' fields and eating them raw. Digging up half a field was gratifying to the prisoners, it "tickled us [Lance-Corporal O'Brien and Private MacDonald] to think how angry the old farmer would be when he discovered the damage done to his crop."⁴⁸⁶ Having food meant the difference between life and death, or between recapture and freedom, because, as Private Simmons explained, "Hunger sharpens a man's mind and gives him a view of things that will never come when the stomach is full."⁴⁸⁷ Being hungry made them more willing to take unnecessary risks and it made them tired and irritable, but having a full stomach gave them the confidence to know what direction to go and allowed them to have a clear mind when making life-threatening decisions.

Many escapees claimed they would do *anything* to succeed. They wrote how their nerves were always on high alert, prepared to dispose of any animal or person who came too close.⁴⁸⁸ The prisoners knew they were being followed, so when German soldiers stormed their forest, the

⁴⁸³ Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 210.

⁴⁸⁴ McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 219.

⁴⁸⁵ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 232; O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 197; Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 214; McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 206, 207, 210, 212, 213, 218.

⁴⁸⁶ O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 194-195. For similar sentiments, see: Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 169, 171, 172; McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 200.

⁴⁸⁷ McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 132.

⁴⁸⁸ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 140; O'Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 191-192.

men hunkered into their hiding spots, determined not to be scared out into a chase “like rabbits.”⁴⁸⁹ This association with animals reveals how the prisoners constantly felt like animals when in the Germans’ presence. The determination to stay hidden in their bush – against the instinct to flee like an animal – shows how strongly they wanted to feel like men again. Some believed that divine intervention was the only thing that kept them from being discovered because many civilians “passed within fifteen feet and we [Private Evans] thought they were going to walk right in on us, but something seemed to steer them away.”⁴⁹⁰ While the prisoners wrote that they were prepared to fight, with their hands tightened on clubs they had found on their journeys, and muscles tensed, few were faced with a direct challenge.

As Lance-Corporal O’Brien and Private MacDonald neared the Dutch border on their final attempt (fourth and fifth, respectfully), they were painfully aware of the danger they were in.⁴⁹¹ Patrols increased in frequency the closer they got to the border, and they were spotted by one patrol who ordered them to stop.⁴⁹² When the two raised their arms in mock surrender, the patrols lowered their weapons and came closer. The sentries had expected two exhausted and starved prisoners; instead, they found two desperate men who attacked them, then ran while the guards were down.⁴⁹³ When Lance-Corporal O’Brien and Private MacDonald came to the border the following night, they were again ordered to stop, but this time the two ran: “There was no attempt at concealment now, we were running for our lives, or what was clearer still – our liberty.”⁴⁹⁴ When tested, the two had fought for their lives, but then ran the following night. Their actions were dictated by how hungry they were, if it was early in the night, and how mentally and physically prepared they were for the sentries. The closer the escapees got to the border, the higher their spirits and morale rose. Freedom felt a mere breath away, and no amount of exhaustion, dehydration, or starvation could dampen their moods.

⁴⁸⁹ McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 69. For similar examples, see: O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 192, 198; MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 175, 178.

⁴⁹⁰ Evans, *Out of the Jaws of the Hunland*, 186. See also: MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 142, 229, 232.

⁴⁹¹ O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 201; MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 235.

⁴⁹² O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 202.

⁴⁹³ O’Brien, 203.

⁴⁹⁴ O’Brien, 209.

One day, as Lance-Corporal Edwards and Private Simmons rested in a crumbling shed, a woman suddenly appeared in what was left of the doorway, she quickly turned and walked away.⁴⁹⁵ They had not noticed that a farmhouse was nearby, and the inhabitants had seen their movements in the shed. Lance-Corporal Edwards wrote how they had instantly regretted not seizing her, as she appeared to be signalling to the nearby workers.⁴⁹⁶ Although he never mentioned what he wished they had done to the woman, it is clear they would have harmed her to achieve freedom.⁴⁹⁷ The two quickly continued their journey, and as they were evaluating their next steps on the top of a hill, a farmer came across them.⁴⁹⁸ The man had a shotgun and a vicious dog, but they had clearly surprised him just as much as he surprised them:

I do not know whose was the offensive. But I do know that the three of us came together with one accord in a wild and terrible medley of oaths in two languages and of murderous blows that beat like flails at the threshing ... In those mad moments there sped through our brains the reel of that whole horrid film of fifteen months' torture of mind and body; the pale, blood-covered faces of our murdered comrades of the regiment and ... our own slow and deadly starvation and planned mistreatment.⁴⁹⁹

They had no ropes to tie the man or his dog up, and they were desperate.⁵⁰⁰ It is clear from Lance-Corporal Edwards' writing how deadly a struggle it was, their desperation strengthening their blows. While stealing food and other necessary survival items was easily – and commonly – rationalized, murder was much harder to justify. While the prisoners were fighting for their freedom, their journey was not a battlefield where the civilians had willingly signed up knowing they could die. This was an innocent farmer who had happened upon them. Even though this was difficult to justify, Lance-Corporal Edwards did not regret his actions, only wished they had not run across the man.⁵⁰¹ While moments like this may have dampened their mood, it did not stop them from forging on, using every bit of their endurance to reach their goal.

⁴⁹⁵ Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 180. McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 219.

⁴⁹⁶ Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 180. McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 219.

⁴⁹⁷ The ideology of bravery had taught these soldiers that they were to protect women and children, and this is *likely* why they did not harm her initially. But they came to regret this decision as she went to warn some nearby workers of their presence. Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 28, 32.

⁴⁹⁸ Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 184.

⁴⁹⁹ Pearson, 184.

⁵⁰⁰ Pearson, 185. Private Simmons never mentioned the man in his account of their escape. He could have been ashamed of their actions and was trying to shape how his readers saw him into a hero, not a murderer.

⁵⁰¹ Pearson, 185.

Although the prisoners wrote that they were prepared to do *anything* to keep their freedom and reach safety, when it came to the real test, many surrendered instead of fighting. But the later their attempts, the more determined they became. In the early attempts, the men wrote of the extreme joy they felt at escaping the prison camp, such as Private Simmons who wrote: “we were happier than either of us had been since being taken to Germany, for a weight had been rolled off our souls.”⁵⁰² Often it was these thoughts of freedom that gave them the endurance to keep moving forward – regardless of their hunger and fatigue.⁵⁰³ But their starving conditions affected their ability to evade recapture because hunger often made them take more careless risks – like stealing milk from cows near a farmhouse, travelling on busier roads, or going through a town instead of around it. These unnecessary risks put them in danger of coming across someone who could recapture or report them to the authorities. Hunger and exhaustion were real challenges the men had to overcome on their journey to liberty. Surviving on raw potatoes and similar vegetables was barely enough to keep them alive, let alone to give them the strength they needed to walk twenty kilometers a night, swim multiple canals and rivers, and evade recapture. They did their best to avoid busy roads and towns, but this was much harder in the thickly settled areas. Sometimes their exhaustion caused their fear to spike and made them more reckless.⁵⁰⁴ Private MacDonald’s comrade WH had become increasingly reckless as they neared the border; he wanted to go through towns instead of around and even wanted to buy some bread from a shop.⁵⁰⁵ As mentioned earlier, WH got the two recaptured on purpose by noisily arguing on a road near the border. His fear from a previous recapture experience had overridden his desire to reach freedom, and this was amplified by his hunger and exhaustion.

After Lance-Corporal Edwards and Private Simmons encountered the farmer, they had continued, hiding and sleeping during the day, and walking at night. The days with decent weather gave them energy and made them feel confident, but the rainy and cold days made them

⁵⁰² McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 62. See also: MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 229; O’Brien, *Into the Jaws of Death*, 170, 171.

⁵⁰³ Thorn, *Three Years a Prisoner in Germany*, 68.

⁵⁰⁴ McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 210.

⁵⁰⁵ MacDonald, *The Kaiser’s Guest*, 176.

desperate.⁵⁰⁶ This constant fluctuating of their endurance accounts was reminiscent of their camp experiences, but instead of the guards' abuse draining them and their comrades helping to refill them, their daily conditions and rations were the main factors in their morale. They soon ran low on the tobacco they had received in their Red Cross parcels and began scheming how they could get some more. Wanting tobacco was not uncommon, but being starved, wet, and weary made the situation dire, and it soon felt like a necessity to them. They talked about robbing a man with a pipe, but they would have to kill him, and Lance-Corporal Edwards felt "that seemed a bit thick for a pipe of tobacco."⁵⁰⁷ Instead, they rationed their tobacco, trying to stretch it out as long as they could, but it still did not last long enough, and added to the drain on their endurance accounts.

Life on the run was dangerous and created many risks. The men who tried to escape knew that it could be days or possibly weeks with little food and no comfort. They would have to sleep in bushes, haystacks, forests, or abandoned shacks if they were lucky. They knew that they could be found at any moment and that if the person who found them was armed, they could be shot on sight. Those who found milk felt like they had won a lottery because it gave them the energy and confidence to keep on going. Those who encountered people had to make split-second decisions, and hope their partner made the same choice. Escaping the camps was not easy, and neither was their journey to freedom. Many prisoners were recaptured multiple times before they successfully escaped Germany, and countless prisoners were repeatedly recaptured and never escaped Germany.

Life in the German prison camps was tough; the men were pushed to their limits, abused, and forced to find ways of replenishing their endurance. As they became more confident, they began showing the Germans what it meant to be Canadian – they would never give up and they would never stop fighting. This became increasingly difficult as they were labelled troublemakers; they were sent to punishment camps where any signs of resistance were met with abuse. So, the men turned on themselves: if they were forced to work, they would make it so

⁵⁰⁶ Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat*, 186.

⁵⁰⁷ Pearson, 187.

they could not physically do the work. They injured themselves, faked illnesses, and did everything they could think of to evade the work. Ultimately many prisoners concluded that escape would be their ultimate redemption: it would free them from the torture of their work, and, they hoped, get them safely back to their loved ones. The constant fluctuation of their endurance accounts in the prison camps were mimicked while on the run. Instead of the torment and humiliation of camp life draining them, their physical surroundings had the greatest impact. Lack of food, poor weather conditions, getting lost, and running into German civilians or soldiers could drastically impact their endurance. And finding milk or other farm food, having good weather, and knowing where they were going made their travels easier and raised their morale. The greatest factor was their proximity to the border, to freedom. The closer they got, the more energy they felt they had, the more likely they were to fight for their lives, and (usually) the more effective the escapees were as a team.

War and imprisonment changed the prisoners. The men in this paper fought tooth and nail for their freedom and to maintain their resilience, and eventually many of them concluded that escape was the solution. The men held many of the same values they had at home, believing that bravery, camaraderie, and a strong spirit would see them through their torment in Germany and help them remain resilient. The prisoners quickly realized that while this was true, there was a better answer than enduring torment and finding ways to prove their bravery through acts of deliberate heroism – escaping Germany would grant them freedom, return them home, and end the up-and-down cycle of their resilience accounts.

Conclusion

Arriving on the front-lines, the Canadian soldiers quickly realized that war was not what they had been led to believe. It was not a heroic battle, but a muddy and exhausting experience that isolated them from normal civilian society. They had to adapt their mindset to better endure an environment filled with death and destruction, and with only other soldiers for company. The men at the front highly valued camaraderie because these relationships offered them the emotional and physical support required to endure the horrors of war.⁵⁰⁸ Once captured, these relationships became vital to the prisoner's resilience.

Canadian soldiers were trained to believe that prisoners were cowards and that only weak men were captured; but when facing capture or certain death, these men valued their life more. From the moment of capture, the prisoners were demoralized, abused, and treated like animals. The men's endurance accounts (to use the analogy created by Lord Moran in his study of morale in the First World War) were constantly being drained, forcing them to find new ways to replenish them. Evidently, this was partially accomplished through acts of bravery and resistance, but the keys to their endurance were the schools they had formed and the parcels and letters sent from home. Throughout their time in the camps, the prisoners faced many challenges, including starvation, abuse, confinement, and constant dehumanization. It seemed as though the whole camp system was designed to break them down: the high wire fences resembling chicken coops, the lack of nourishing food, the constant abuse and torment, and especially being forced to do work they felt was directly related to the war effort.⁵⁰⁹

The sources used here were written by working-class, white, Canadian prisoners of war between the ages of eighteen and forty-two. Most of their accounts were written once they returned home from war, after surviving the extreme cruelty of camp life. While their goals and motivations changed when they were in the prison camp, the narratives were written knowing the

⁵⁰⁸ There is no evidence from the memoirs that there were homosexual relationships within the camp, but there is evidence of soldiers on the front lines conducting homosexual relationships; wartime experiences alter perceptions of homosexual relations. It is possible that the schools developed beyond friendship, but without evidence, it cannot be proven.

⁵⁰⁹ See [Appendix E](#) for a breakdown of the food in the prison camps.

societal standards they would be judged against. Society expected the soldiers of the First World War to come back changed, and that held true for prisoners as well, but there was a limit to the degree of change that would be accepted. The men may have omitted aspects of camp life that would not have fit in with the war narrative their families had grown to know, and they may have enhanced certain moments they felt would be accepted or encouraged – such as acts of resistance or moments of bravery. These memoirs cannot reveal the objective historical reality of camp life, nor can they reveal everything that the prisoners were thinking and feeling. Instead, they were used to begin the process of understanding how the prisoners endured the torment and abuse of camp life, and how they framed that experience in their own narratives.

Despite the constant cruelty, the Canadians found ways to replenish their resilience accounts. These accounts provided them with energy to fight back and the ability to endure whatever the Germans may have thrown at them. Constant abuse, adversity, and malnourishment meant the prisoners had to find a way to constantly replenish their accounts to maintain their balance, but they were unlikely to completely fill their accounts again.

It was vital that the prisoners felt they were being brave and to prove it to those at home. Bravery was vital to a prisoner, but it was not necessarily the same kind of bravery that was demonstrated on the battlefield. It varied depending on the individual, the camp he was in, the work he was doing, and the amount of food he had.⁵¹⁰ To some, bravery was avoiding doing any assigned work, destroying the projects or equipment, just doing the bare minimum at work, or even just surviving the torture and humiliation. At any normal workplace in Canada, or on the front-lines, a disrespect and disregard for one's workplace would have shown the workers to be lazy and craven but helping the German war effort went against everything they believed, so fighting back – in any way – was evidence of bravery and made them feel powerful. The soldiers clearly exuded this power and pride in their writing.

Sometimes, bravery and resistance involved feigning illness or injuring themselves. This could get them out of working and would hopefully move them to a better – ideally hospital –

⁵¹⁰ See [Appendix E](#) for a breakdown of the food in the prison camps.

camp.⁵¹¹ At home, feigning illness was hardly a marker of bravery, and in the trenches, self-harm was a punishable offence; it was portrayed as the coward's way out of war, and some soldiers were even executed for intentional self-injury.⁵¹² In the prison camps, self-harm was an effective technique for getting out of work – many of the jobs were very dangerous, and injuries were frequent and expected. By using either of these techniques, the prisoners were able to stop working, which in turn helped achieve the most basic goal of many of the prisoners: to undermine the German war effort. The men were continuing the fight from within Germany, so their feigned illness and self-harm were techniques of war, and subsequently helped replenish their endurance accounts by giving them time to rest and clear evidence of resistance.

Bravery also meant blatantly disrespecting the camp commanders and officers; this was very dangerous and often resulted in severe punishment (*stillgestanden*, *dark cells*, or *strafe barracks*). In the Canadian military, disrespecting one's commander was a crime, and was not something most soldiers purposefully aimed to do. But in the prison camps, prisoners who did not salute commanders, who mocked German officers, or who disregarded orders were believed to be brave because the prisoners felt an overwhelming hate towards their captors and were powerless to show it in any other way.

Most of the prisoners in this paper came to believe that escape was their fundamental goal, one that would earn them freedom from torment and from the constant fluctuations of their endurance accounts. They considered escape a decisive action that clearly proved their courage. They trusted that the risk of escape – punishment or death – was worth the reward of succeeding. If they were caught in the attempt and not killed, they were taken back to their prison camp for the punishment. Once returned, the other prisoners at the camp heralded these recaptured escapees as heroes and gathered around to learn of their experiences; by sharing knowledge, the prisoners helped each other to avoid making the same mistakes, and perhaps succeed next time they tried. Regardless of their success, as long as the prisoners did not willingly get captured, they were portrayed as brave soldiers again.

⁵¹¹ See [Appendix F](#) for a breakdown of the prison camps.

⁵¹² Granatstein, *Hell's Corner*, 55-60; Chase, "War Weariness in the Canadian Corps in the First World War," 128.

Bravery was different to every prisoner, and it often changed when a prisoner moved to a different camp, was given different work, or was being punished. The prisoners consistently wrote of the ways that they kept the fight alive in Germany. They were determined to prove that being a prisoner could be brave too, even if it was different from what they had been taught. And these acts of bravery helped replenish their resilience accounts by giving them a sense of power and proving that the war was not over for them. While punishments reduced their accounts, acts of bravery and resistance helped replenish them.

In the prison camps, taking care of one's comrades, building intense relationships, and asking for help were encouraged within the schools. The men forged bonds with those around them to help them survive the terrible conditions. These schools shared their food parcels, were the closest of confidants, and were their partners in resistance. Without these bonds, the men might have crumbled under their emotional distress and broken down when their accounts were emptied. Instead, they worked together to find ways to fight back, feel powerful again, and survive. The schools gave them a community that would support them and gave them the motivation to fight back; their resistance likely would not have been possible had the prisoners tried to survive in isolation.

In Canada, asking for emotional or physical support may have been perceived as weak, but in the prison camps, the men had a system designed for that purpose, and it showed them who they could lean on. By having their schools as support in any way needed, the men were better equipped to endure the torture and suffering in the camps. The intensity of these bonds might not have been encouraged in Canada, but in Germany, the men had no other options.

Resilience was extremely subjective, and seen through the lens of a bank account, this paper has shown how the men fought to maintain the balance. There were many negative aspects of camp life that may have reduced their accounts, including abuse, lack of food, humiliation, terrible working conditions, exhaustion, and much more. But the prisoners held onto what gave them energy and motivation, knowing that letting their morale slip could mean mental debilitation or even death. Letters from home gave them hope to see their families and friends again, and a motivation to keep fighting. Parcels sent from home gave them nutrients that were much needed, which gave their bodies the energy to continue to work and to complete the minimum tasks they were required to do. The parcels also offered the prisoners a way to share

with their closest comrades. The schools shared all parcels received, so that no prisoner they were mucking with went more than a week without food from home. The schools they formed helped them feel validated as prisoners, gave them the mental and physical support required to endure the torment, and gave them a group of men who could understand what they were going through, and figure out solutions to camp problems. These schools developed resistance techniques to evade work, to sleep on the job, or to fight back against their captors through actions of destruction. Resistance may have brought punishment, but it also offered the prisoners a sense of power that was sorely lacking in the prison camps. Their imprisonment was solely designed to demean, dehumanize, and destroy the prisoners' morale – a docile prisoner was easier to control than a determined one. Acts of resistance helped the prisoners regain some control over their resilience accounts, giving them more energy to endure the torment their captors placed on them, and in the end, gave them the energy to come up with ways to escape the prison camps. To many prisoners, escape became their ultimate goal. They knew that if they could escape Germany, they could return home to their families or fight in the war again. Successfully escaping would also end the constant fluctuation of their resilience accounts by providing them a safe environment, or at least one without the same extremes of torment. But escape came with many challenges, from figuring out how to escape the prison camp, learning to survive while on the run, what to do when encountering civilians or armed guards, how to deal with hunger and thirst, and how to safely cross the border to freedom. Their endurance accounts continued to fluctuate while on the run, affecting their ability to make decisions and which decision they made. No matter how many times they were caught, escape was their fundamental goal, offering them a chance at freedom and redemption.

The Canadians of the First World War fought bravely and with a stubborn determination to endure. Once captured, this did not change; it just adapted to suit their new environment. Fighting became less about shooting at a hidden enemy and more about finding ways to remain resilient within the confines of a prison camp. Resistance offered these prisoners the most effective outlet, gave them a sense of power over their captors, and helped them keep their mental strength up. And while resistance was helpful to keep fighting, the camaraderie that they built in the trenches became their ultimate saviour while in the prison camps. The bonds they built gave them the strength to fight back, the sustenance to keep working, and an outlet for all of

their feelings. While their fighting techniques changed, their determination did not. The Canadian prisoners remained resilient against abuse, terrible working conditions, and a severe lack of proper nutrients. Despite all of this, they were able to endure, remaining resilient in an environment that had been built to demoralize them.

Appendices

Appendix A: Prisoners

Most of the information is taken from their personnel records available on the [Library and Archives Canada website](#). Their ranks and service numbers were collected from Edward Wigney's record of prisoners of war, and their information has been taken from their government files.⁵¹³ This also does not include how many times a prisoner returned to a camp due to the complexity of their experiences and the inconsistency of their personnel files. The prisoner may have been in more camps than those listed here due to the irregularities of the personnel files.

M* = Married

References for the following chart:

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Laird, Donald Harry, 112079, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 5315 – 23, Item Number: 506385.

Macdonald, Franklin Cecil, 106416, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 6721 - 2, Item Number: 146005.

McMullen, Frederick James, 109158, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 7125 - 21, Item Number: 168826.

⁵¹³ Wigney, *Guests of the Kaiser*.

Merry, Daniel Bilson, 23416, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 6134 - 15, Item Number: 195429.

O'Brien, John, 73194, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 7403 - 26, Item Number: 545653.

Post, Alfred Theodore, 195654, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 7918 - 23.

Simmons, Mervin Cecil, 23445, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 8914 - 30, Item Number: 229697.

Thorn, John Charles, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 9670 - 24, Item Number: 276474.

Name	Married	Military History	Birth Year	Age	Place of Birth	Next of Kin	Enlistment Location	Career	Enlisted	Captured	Out of Germany	Known Camps	Type of Resource
Private Alexander Miller Allan			1887	28	Wishaw, Scotland	Wishaw, Scotland	Collingwood, ON	Organist and Choir Master	20-09-1915	02-06-1916	Repatriated 09-1916	Stuttgart	Hand-written journal/ memoir
Major Peter Anderson	x	Belonged to Active Militia	1868	46	Newburg, Denmark	Edmonton, AB	Valcartier, QC	Brickmaker	23-09-1914	28-04-1915	24-11-1915	Bischofswerda	Memoir
Private Benjamin Campbell Davison		19 th A.D. Edmonton for one month	1895	19	Charlottetown, PEI	Trail, BC	Edmonton, AB	Telephone Man	08-01-1915	06-04-1916	Repatriated 05-12-1918	Giessen, Huston, Kommando 59	Article in <i>The Forty-Niner</i>
Lieutenant John Harvey Douglas		Belonged to Active Militia	1888	26	Toronto, ON	Toronto, ON	Niagara, ON	Worked for Whole Sale Dry Goods	29-06-1915	02-06-1916	Repatriated 10-09-1917	Hospital Camp VI	Memoir
Lance-Corporal Edward Edwards	x	Gordon Highlanders for eight years	1876	38	Aberdeen, Scotland	Toronto, ON	Ottawa, ON	Gas Fitter	08-1914	08-05-1915	16-09-1916	Giessen, Parniewinkel	Memoir
Private John Evans		19 th Alberta Mounted Rifles for two years	1892	23	Plumstead, England	Oshawa, ON	Toronto, ON	Automobile Mechanic	01-05-1915	02-06-1916	18-10-1917	Dulmen, Munster	Memoir written with Private McMullen
Private Merton Egbert Ellsworth Kirtredge		Belonged to Active Militia	1890	24	Stubley, England	Rochelle, QC	Valcartier, QC	Draughtsman	29-08-1914	24-04-1915	13-12-1916	Giessen, Soltau	Debriefing in Edward Wigney's report.
Private Donald Harry Laird		39 Infantry	1893	21	Blenheim, ON	Blenheim, ON	London, ON	Farmer	14-06-1915	02-06-1916	Repatriated 05-01-1917	Wahn, Aachen, Stuttgart, Stendal, Merin	Memoir
Private Franklin Cecil MacDonald		Belonged to Active Militia. Lord Strathcona's horse for seventy-nine days	1890	24	Bonaventure, QC	Rainy River, ON	Brandon, MB	Locomotive Fireman	01-12-1914	02-05 - 06-1916	28-06-1917	Dulmen, Munster	Memoir

Name	Married	Military History	Birth Year	Age	Place of Birth	Next of Kin	Enlistment Location	Career	Enlisted	Captured	Out of Germany	Known Camps	Type of Resource
Private Frederick James McMullen			1889	25	Toronto, ON	Toronto, ON	Toronto, ON	Carpenter	27-11-1914	02-06-1916	18-10-1917	Hospital, Friedrichsfeld Camp, Cassel, Farm near Warbern	Memoir written with Private Evans
Private Daniel Bilson Merry		Belonged to Active Militia	1894	20	Toronto, ON	Trail, BC	Valcartier, QC	Bookkeeper	08-1914	24-04-1915	13-05-1918	Giessen, Soltau, Göttingen, Hameln/Hamm	Article in "The Gold Stripe"
Lance-Corporal John O'Brien		Belonged to Active Militia; Alberta Hussars for two years	1892	22	England	N/A	Moose Jaw, SK	Labourer	24-10-1914	06-06-1916	29-06-1917	Dulmen, Munster	Memoir
Private Alfred Theodore Post			1893	22	Peterboro, ON	Hastings, ON	Apsley, ON	Lumberman	27-01-1916	15-08-1917	Released 08-1918	Linburg, Dulmen, Merseburg, Munster, Westphalia	Article by Buck Private in <i>21st Battalion Communique</i>
Private Mervin Cecil Simmons		Belonged to Active Militia	1886	27	Verschoyle, ON	Buchanan, Sk	Valcartier, QC	Carpenter	22-09-1914	24-04-1915	16-09-1916	Giessen, Hanover	Memoir written by Nellie McClung
Lieutenant John Charles Thorn	x	Belonged to Active Militia; served ten years in various units	1881	33	Sudbury, England	Vancouver, BC	Valcartier, QC	Financial Agent	23-09-1914	25-04-1915	Interned in Holland - August 31, 1918	Bischofswerda, Ingolstadt Bayern, Holzminden, Strohen Kreis Sulingen, Claussthal, Custrin (Fort Zorndorf)	Memoir

Appendix B: Propaganda



Figure 1: Canada, Government of. "Heroes of St. Julien and Festubert." *Wartime Recruiting Poster*, (Canada), 1914-1918. <https://www.warmuseum.ca/firstworldwar/objects-and-photos/propaganda/recruitment-posters/heroes-of-st-julien-and-festubert/?back=1580&anchor=2105>. Canadian War Museum.

Appendix C: Taken Directly from the 1899 Hague Convention⁵¹⁴

CHAPTER II: On prisoners of war

Art. 4. Prisoners of war are in the power of the hostile Government, but not in that of the individuals or corps who captured them.

They must be humanely treated.

All their personal belongings, except arms, horses, and military papers remain their property.

Art. 5. Prisoners of war may be interned in a town, fortress, camp, or any other locality, and bound not to go beyond certain fixed limits; but they can only be confined as an indispensable measure of safety.

Art. 6. The State may utilize the labour of prisoners of war according to their rank and aptitude. Their tasks shall not be excessive, and shall have nothing to do with the military operations.

Prisoners may be authorized to work for the public service, for private persons, or on their own account.

Work done for the State shall be paid for according to the tariffs in force for soldiers of the national army employed on similar tasks.

When the work is for other branches of the public service or for private persons, the conditions shall be settled in agreement with the military authorities.

The wages of the prisoners shall go towards improving their position, and the balance shall be paid them at the time of their release, after deducting the cost of their maintenance.

Art. 7. The Government into whose hands prisoners of war have fallen is bound to maintain them.

Failing a special agreement between the belligerents, prisoners of war shall be treated as regards food, quarters, and clothing, on the same footing as the troops of the government which has captured them.

Art. 8. Prisoners of war shall be subject to the laws, regulations, and orders in force in the army of the State into whose hands they have fallen. Any act of insubordination warrants the adoption, as regards them, of such measures of severity as may be necessary.

Escaped prisoners, recaptured before they have succeeded in rejoining their army, or before quitting the territory occupied by the army that captured them, are liable to disciplinary punishment.

Prisoners who, after succeeding in escaping are again taken prisoners, are not liable to any punishment for the previous flight.

⁵¹⁴ Conference, "Convention (Iv) Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land and Its Annex: Regulations Concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land. The Hague, 18 October 1907."

Art. 9. Every prisoner of war, if questioned, is bound to declare his true name and rank, and if he disregards this rule, he is liable to a curtailment of the advantages accorded to the prisoners of war of his class.

Art. 10. Prisoners of war may be set at liberty on parole if the laws of their country authorize it, and, in such a case, they are bound, on their personal honour, scrupulously to fulfil, both as regards their own Government and the Government by whom they were made prisoners, the engagements they have contracted. In such cases, their own Government shall not require of nor accept from them any service incompatible with the parole given.

Art. 11. A prisoner of war cannot be forced to accept his liberty on parole; similarly the hostile Government is not obliged to assent to the prisoner's request to be set at liberty on parole.

Art. 12. Any prisoner of war, who is liberated on parole and recaptured, bearing arms against the Government to whom he had pledged his honour, or against the allies of that Government, forfeits his right to be treated as a prisoner of war, and can be brought before the courts.

Art. 13. Individuals who follow an army without directly belonging to it, such as newspaper correspondents and reporters, sutlers, contractors, who fall into the enemy's hands, and whom the latter think fit to detain, have a right to be treated as prisoners of war, provided they can produce a certificate from the military authorities of the army they were accompanying.

Art. 14. A bureau for information relative to prisoners of war is instituted, on the commencement of hostilities, in each of the belligerent States, and, when necessary, in the neutral countries on whose territory belligerents have been received. This bureau is intended to answer all inquiries about prisoners of war, and is furnished by the various services concerned with all the necessary information to enable it to keep an individual return for each prisoner of war. It is kept informed of internments and changes, as well as of admissions into hospital and deaths. It is also the duty of the information bureau to receive and collect all objects of personal use, valuables, letters, etc., found on the battlefields or left by prisoners who have died in hospital or ambulance, and to transmit them to those interested.

Art. 15. Relief societies for prisoners of war, which are regularly constituted in accordance with the law of the country with the object of serving as the intermediary for charity, shall receive from the belligerents for themselves and their duly accredited agents every facility, within the bounds of military requirements and administrative regulations, for the effective accomplishment of their humane task. Delegates of these societies may be admitted to the places of internment for the distribution of relief, as also to the halting places of repatriated prisoners, if furnished with a personal permit by the military authorities, and on giving an engagement in writing to comply with all their regulations for order and police.

Art. 16. The information bureau shall have the privilege of free postage. Letters, money orders, and valuables, as well as postal parcels destined for the prisoners of war or dispatched by

them, shall be free of all postal duties both in the countries of origin and destination, as well as in those they pass through. Gifts and relief in kind for prisoners of war shall be admitted free of all duties of entry and others, as well as of payments for carriage by the Government railways.

Art. 17. Officers taken prisoners may receive, if necessary, the full pay allowed them in this position by their country's regulations, the amount to be repaid by their Government.

Art. 18. Prisoners of war shall enjoy every latitude in the exercise of their religion, including attendance at their own church services, provided only they comply with the regulations for order and police issued by the military authorities.

Art. 19. The wills of prisoners of war are received or drawn up on the same conditions as for soldiers of the national army.

The same rules shall be observed regarding death certificates, as well as for the burial of prisoners of war, due regard being paid to their grade and rank.

Art. 20. After the conclusion of peace, the repatriation of prisoners of war shall take place as speedily as possible.

Appendix D: Coded Letters

Key phrases have been underlined to show the true meaning of the letter, the underline was not in the original text.

Private MacDonald

This is a most beautiful country. The German people are kind and thoughtful and I am having a splendid time. In fact, I have never been treated quite the same since the summer I spent in Stony Mountain. But I do miss poor old Chuck. I am afraid he has been killed. I haven't seen him since the day I was taken prisoner.⁵¹⁵

Stony Mountain: Manitoba penitentiary.

Chuck: an item in his mother's pantry – writing that he was hungry.

Private Simmons

Dear Jim,

I send you this card along with another to come later, which please pass on to Fred. In next parcel, and send cheese, please.

Yours ever, M.C. Simmons

In the address he wrote "Seaforth wds." Hoping that the censor would see "Seaforth Woods" but that his friend would see "see fourth words."⁵¹⁶

⁵¹⁵ MacDonald, *The Kaisers Guest*, 101.

⁵¹⁶ McClung, *Three Times and Out*, 104.

Appendix E: Food in the Prison Camps

Using their terminology and times given.

<p>Major Anderson</p> <p>Anderson, <i>I, That's Me</i>, (repr., CEF Books 2009), 98.</p>	<p>Bischofswerda</p> <p><u>Breakfast</u>: Small white roll, split with butter on one side, coffee that tasted like dirty water.</p> <p><u>Other Meals</u>: Meat, fish, potatoes, black bread, sausages, and sometimes butter.</p> <p>Could buy beer and food from the canteen.</p>
<p>Private McMullen</p> <p>Corporal Fred McMullen & Private Jack Evans, <i>Out of the Jaws of the Hunland</i> (Toronto,</p>	<p>Friedrichsfeld Camp</p> <p><u>Breakfast 6am</u>: Acorn coffee, “It was simply vile-tasting warm water, with no nourishment whatsoever.” Drank water instead.</p> <p><u>Dinner 12pm</u>: Turnips or mangels boiled in soup, occasionally thick and satisfying, usually thin and aggravating.</p> <p><u>Bread Fatigue 2pm</u>: A loaf of war bread divided among 11 men, usually around 200 grams a person.</p> <p><u>Supper 6pm</u>: ‘Sandstorm soup’ and bread. Some bread was supposed to be saved for breakfast, but you ate it when you could (it was often inedible – usually gave it to the Russians who never got parcels but always had money to buy their bread).</p> <p>Cassel Camp</p> <p><u>Morning</u>: Coffee</p>

<p>ON: William Briggs, 1918), 72, 102, 104.</p>	<p><u>Dinner</u>: Stewed grass – no one ate it but the Russians.</p> <p>Horse-chestnut soup (chestnuts boiled and kept for use for another day).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Farm near Waubern</p> <p><u>Runkle Soup</u>: Concoction of turnips or mangels in warm water. (Later when the roots became scarce, the soup was made just from the tops.)</p>
<p>Lance-Corporal O’Brien</p> <p>Private Jack O’Brien, <i>Into the Jaws of Death</i> (New York, NY: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1919; repr., Forgotten Books, 2012), 126-127</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Dulmen:</p> <p><u>Breakfast</u>: A small bowl of acorn coffee, black.</p> <p><u>Dinner</u>: A bowl of soup – boiled cabbage, and turnips with dog bones (a French chef showed him the bones).</p> <p><u>Supper</u>: A bowl of slop – “sand-storm” and a three-pound loaf of Deutschland Black bread divided between 10 men. Bread was made from ground vegetables mixed with rye flour.</p>
<p>Private MacDonald</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Dulmen:</p> <p><u>Breakfast</u>: Bowl of coffee or cocoa or “a soup made from bones ground into a fine dust.” No solids were allowed at breakfast, they were supposed to have saved their bread from the night before.</p> <p><u>Noon / “repast”</u>: Bowl of soup from ground and dried veggies.</p> <p><u>4pm</u>: Daily bread ration. Made from veggies and less than a third of a pound, supposed to last them 24 hours.</p>

<p>Private MacDonald, <i>The Kaiser's Guest</i> (Garden City, NY: repr., Bibliographical Center for Research, 2009), 88-89.</p>	<p><u>Supper</u>: Soup made from something resembling cornmeal, thin and lacked nourishment. Tommies called this “sandstorm.” Given half a salt herring once or twice a week; putrid, but never thrown away. Occasionally found meat chunks, and supposedly collected the bones and made it into a German dachshund.</p>
<p>Private Evans</p> <p>Corporal Fred McMullen & Private Jack Evans, <i>Out of the Jaws of the Hunland</i> (Toronto, ON: William Briggs, 1918), 80-81.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Dulmen:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Stechrübe</u>: Turnip Soup. (Staple food).</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>9:30am</u>: Coffee.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>12pm</u>: Thin turnip soup.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>5:30</u>: Sandstorm and some black, doughy, sour bread. (resembled ancient cheese) Were supposed to save bread for breakfast, but could not.</p> <p>Raided the cookhouse on a few occasions and found potato peelings and turnip tops – got no dinner as punishment.</p>
<p>Lance-Corporal Edwards</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Giessen (Estimated May 1915-September 1916):</p> <p>Acorn coffee (four pounds of burned barley boiled in 100 gallons of water), 250 grams/half pound of black bread (half potatoes, half rye) to split between 5 men.</p> <p><u>Shadow soup</u>: 200 gallons of water, one bag of potatoes, on packet of herbs. = for 800 men.</p>

Ham soup: 200 gallons of water boiled with 10 pounds of ham rinds, 10 pounds of cabbage, 20 pounds of potatoes.

Oatmeal Soup: 200 gallons of water, two pounds of currants, 50 pounds of oatmeal.

Chestnut Soup: 200 gallons of water, 100 pounds of whole chestnuts, 10 pounds of potatoes. “To be served hot and thrown out.”

Meat Soup: 200 gallons of water, 10 pounds of meat, one small bag of potatoes, 10 pounds of vegetables. Most nutritious.

Rice Soup: 200 gallons of water, 50 pounds of rice, 20 pounds of potatoes, 1 pound of currants.

Bean Soup: 200 gallons of water, 50 pounds of beans, 20 pounds of potatoes.

Pork Soup: 200 gallons of water, 15 pounds of oatmeal, 2 pounds of barley, “to be served hot as a drink.”

Received sausage once every 2 months.

Once a week for breakfast: acorn coffee, black, with half a square of Limburger cheese (“Before serving, open all windows and doors. Then send for the Russians.”).

Parnewinkel in Hanover (Feb 22nd arrived)

Soup: Pickled Fish roe and some potatoes

One night a week: Raw herring fresh from the brine barrel, to eat raw – impossible.

One in seven days: Weak cabbage soup.

George Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat; Being the Full Account of the Capture and Fifteen Months' Imprisonment of Corporal Edwards, of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, and His Final Escape from Germany into Holland*, (NY: New York:

<p>George H. Doran Company, 1917), 83-85</p>	<p><u>Daily Ration</u>: Potatoes and rye bread.</p>
<p>Private Simmons Nellie L. McClung, <i>Three Times and Out: A Canadian Boy's Experience in Germany</i>, Dictated by Private Simmons, (Toronto, Ontario: Thomas Allen, 1918).</p>	<p><u>Breakfast</u>: A bowl of coffee. <u>Dinner</u>: Soup. <u>Supper</u>: Black bread made from potato flour.</p>
<p>Private Kittredge Edward H. Wigney, <i>Guests of the Kaiser: Prisoners-of-War of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1915-1918</i> (Canada: CEF Books, 2008), 158; Major J.C. Thorn, <i>Three Years a Prisoner in Germany</i> (1919), 94.</p>	<p><u>6am</u>: Coffee <u>Dinner</u>: Vegetable soup, sometimes very thin, sometimes had boiled chestnuts. <u>Supper 4pm</u>: Very thin soup or green tea and bread. A loaf of bread was 9 inches in diameter and 2 inches thick, divided between 5 men. Rarely got meat, lucky if a piece in their soup.</p>
<p>Lieutenant Thorn Major J.C. Thorn, <i>Three Years a Prisoner in Germany</i> (1919), 7.</p>	<p>Holzminden (while in dark cells) <u>Breakfast 8am</u>: 2 slices of black bread, acorn coffee <u>Lunch 12:30pm</u>: Soup. Some mangols, sauerkraut, sometimes potato. <u>Dinner 6:30pm</u>: Different coloured soup, still tasteless, a small amount of cabbage, more stewed mangols, twice a week they recieved German sausage.</p>
<p>Private Ben Davison Ben Davison, "P.O.W.: Chapter 1," <i>The Forty-Niner</i> (Edmonton, Alberta) 1934.</p>	<p>Giessen Potatoes, black bread and vegetable soup Huston, Kommando 59 Turnip soup and (sour) peas</p>

	<p>1 loaf of soggy bread per man per week</p> <p>Potatoes once in a blue moon</p>
<p>Ambassador Gerard</p> <p>James W. Gerard, <i>My Four Years in Germany</i> (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1917), 174.</p>	<p>Acorn coffee for breakfast</p> <p>Received the same weight of bread given to civilian population.</p> <p><u>Mid day</u>: A bowl of thick soup was given – the quantity of meat and potatoes gradually diminished as the war continued.</p> <p>Potatoes were later substituted for turnips and carrots.</p> <p><u>Evening</u> (in “good camps”): thick soup, or an apple, or a small piece of cheese or sausage.</p>
<p>Professor Alonzo E. Taylor</p> <p>Mentioned in James W. Gerard, <i>My Four Years in Germany</i> (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1917), 184.</p>	<p>The letters and resources Professor Taylor collected are available for study here:</p> <p>https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/tf1g5001mv/entire_text/</p>

Appendix F: Prison Camps

Type	Average*	Punishment	Hospital	Average* Officer	Punishment Officer
Definition	<p>This was the most common type of camp and most prisoners were sent to here initially. They allowed prisoners to have more freedom and activities. But if the prisoners disobeyed, they could lose privileges. Some examples what was allowed include: sending mail, a dentist, football games, a theatre, electrical lessons, painting studio, a camp made newspaper, barber shop, free time, and so on.</p> <p>These camps were usually not as deep in Germany and acted as waypoints for prisoners to be sent to smaller camps or farms where they would work.</p>	<p>Punishment camps were designed to discipline misbehaving prisoners. They limited any and all activities, only slightly relaxing some rules around the holidays. They were not allowed any free time – worked 12 hour shifts every day – and were not allowed any games. These camps were often much further into Germany, and therefore much further from the border.</p>	<p>All prisoners and officers who required treatment could be sent to hospital camps. They were not intended to stay long in these camps. They had very similar privileges to average camps, but rarely took the privileges away as punishment since the prisoners did not stay long. Most prisoners (especially those in punishment camps) wanted to get to a hospital camp – conditions and food were better.</p>	<p>This was the most common Officer camp, and most were sent here initially. They were allowed much more freedom than other ranks and since they were not forced to work, they had much more free time. They were less guarded in these camps, had the same activities and more available to them than the average camps, could buy items from town, and had classes to teach other officers new skills.</p>	<p>There were very few of these camps, and while they were seen as a punishment camp, there was no hard labour or much limitations on their activities. These camps were fortresses and nearly impossible to escape from. This camp was for officers who had tried to escape and other misbehaving officers.</p>
Example(s)	<p>Giessen, Dulmen</p> <p>Dulmen was also one of the camps used in the personnel records when the prisoners were at a punishment camp.</p>	<p>K47/The Black Hole of Germany/ Auguste-Victoria, Parniewinkel</p> <p>In the prisoners' personnel files, these camps are not listed, instead it has an average camp listed then a hospital camp when they injured themselves.</p>	<p>Munster</p> <p>Munster was also one of the camps used in the personnel records when the prisoners were at a punishment camp.</p>	<p>Bischofswerda, Holzminden, Crefeld, Augustabad, Stralsund</p>	<p>Fort Zorndorf, Infoldstadt</p>

Prisoners	All discussed prisoners	Private Evans, Private MacDonald, Lance-Corporal O'Brien	Private Evans, Lance-Corporal O'Brien, Private MacDonald, Private Post	All discussed officers	Lieutenant Thorn
How camps were guarded	All camps were surrounded by a chicken wire fence, with another fence or wall inside this to separate prisoners. Armed sentries marched outside and between the fences, changing paths frequently. There were also usually platforms where armed guards stood watch over the camp.				
Nationality of inhabitants	Nearly all camps had an assortment of nationalities: French, British (Canadians were grouped into this), Belgian, and Russian. The prisoners usually resided with their nationality.				
Reference(s) (Many more references within their writing, these are just a few key spots)	McClung, <i>Three Times and Out</i> , 41; Pearson, <i>The Escape of a Princess Pat</i> , 116; Gerard, <i>My Four Years in Germany</i> , 183-184; O'Brien, <i>Into the Jaws of Death</i> , 131-133. MacDonald, <i>The Kaiser's Guest</i> , 101-102, 220; Douglas, <i>Captured</i> , 76.	MacDonald, <i>The Kaiser's Guest</i> , 120, 131, 168; Evans, <i>Out of the Jaws of the Hunland</i> , 85-97; O'Brien, <i>Into the Jaws of Death</i> , 138, 161.	MacDonald, <i>The Kaiser's Guest</i> , 194; Private, "Theodore Post Tells of the Joys of Life in the German Prison Camps," 8.	Thorn, <i>Three Years a Prisoner in Germany</i> , 7, 131; Anderson, <i>I, That's Me</i> , 96, 101.	Thorn, <i>Three Years a Prisoner in Germany</i> , 131.

*Due to the subjectivity of the camps, average camps could become a punishment camp if the local commander or German government decided that they needed more punishment camps.

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