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I. (b). 14275.

## LEAKAGE OF INFORMATION THROUGH PRISONERS OF WAR.

ISSUED WITH G.R.O. No. 4791S.

(Not to be taken below Battalion Headquarters.)

1. There is increasing evidence to prove the importance which the enemy attaches to information gleaned from prisoners, and of the ingenious methods employed by him to obtain it. In estimating the importance of such information, it is only necessary to apply the test of our own experience. This shows that practically no item of information is of so little value that we can afford to neglect it.

It does not appear, however, to be generally realized that a chance remark by a prisoner or a piece of information contained in a private letter may be of military value to the enemy. It should be impressed upon all ranks that a reference to a rumour of an intended attack, a statement as to the location of any unit, formation, headquarters, gun position, dump, route or defensive work, a casual remark as to the composition and strength of drafts, a reference to the prevalence of an epidemic, to the quality or sufficiency of rations in the field, or to food conditions in England, or an account of the effects of hostile gas, artillery or aerial bombardment; may assist the enemy.

Almost any item of information may fit in with something which the enemy already knows, and so contribute to his knowledge of our intentions, our strength, our dispositions, and our defensive organization. In other words, it must never be forgotten that anything and everything which the enemy learns from prisoners or from captured documents may assist him in his endeavours to defeat us.

2. Information is principally obtained by the enemy from prisoners in the following ways:—

- (a) By the examination of documents and letters found on prisoners.
- (b) By the verbal examination of prisoners carried out either officially, or under cover of casual conversation.
- (c) By means of a telephonic apparatus concealed in the wall of the room in which prisoners are confined.
- (d) By the employment of agents, disguised as British or Allied officers or soldiers, who mix with the prisoners in camps or hospitals. Such agents are often disguised as wounded officers or men.

*Documents, Letters, etc.*—It is important to remember that not only official documents, orders and maps are of value if-captured, but also private diaries and letters, whether written by the owner, and not posted, or received from other soldiers in the field, or from persons at home. This may be illustrated by an example:—Shortly before one of the greatest offensives of the war, the Germans took a letter from a captured soldier belonging to the army of one of our Allies. The letter was from the man's wife. She complained that she had received no letter from him for a long time, whereas wives of men in other parts of the line had heard regularly from their husbands up to the date on which she was writing. From this item of information the enemy deduced that letters from a certain sector were being purposely delayed in the post, and correctly drew the inference that an attack was intended on the part of the front where the man was captured. The writer of the letter could have had no idea that the information given would ever reach the enemy, or that it would be of any use to him if he received it. Nevertheless, she was the means of conveying an indication of the highest possible value.

It is essential, therefore, to impress upon all ranks the danger of taking with them into the forward area any papers, whether official or private, and to prevail upon them to burn their private letters and papers as soon as possible.

*Examination of Prisoners.*—A prisoner of war is not obliged to give any information beyond his name and rank. The enemy cannot, and will not, compel him to say more, though he may threaten to do so. On the contrary, he will respect a man whose courage and patriotism do not fail, even though wounded or a prisoner. Captured German orders show that Allied prisoners, who have been recently taken by the enemy, have completely baffled the enemy's attempts to obtain information from them by stating that they had just arrived as drafts, or returned from leave, and, therefore, knew nothing. Their determined reticence has thus rendered inestimable service to their country.

Apart from direct interrogation by German officers, the enemy employs many tricks and subterfuges in order to obtain information. Wounded men are frequently given cigarettes and other comforts, and efforts are made to make them feel that they are no longer regarded as enemies, in order that they may be induced to speak freely. Nurses, orderlies, and Germans disguised as other wounded prisoners listen to their conversations. Germans, masquerading as captured British officers or men, and speaking perfect English, are placed among prisoners. In other cases, prisoners are questioned about missing relatives serving with the British forces, by officers who pretend that they will be able to obtain news of them, but who in reality are only endeavouring to ascertain where the battalions are to which the relatives belonged. The death of a relative is sometimes announced to a prisoner by a person professing to be a neutral visitor to the camp,



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prison, or hospital, who then asks for the number of the battalion to which the dead relative belonged. At one camp, a German officer, after winning the confidence of captured officers by kind treatment, is known to repeat to them information which he alleges has been given by other prisoners, in the hope of eliciting thereby a denial or confirmation. In another camp, a German soldier who has lived for long in France asserts that he has escaped conscription, and makes friends with prisoners. He asks for information with regard to the conditions prevailing in France, in order to help him in writing a book on the war.

It is certain that, in every prison camp, the Germans have installed carefully hidden telephones, specially contrived to enable persons outside or in neighbouring camps to overhear conversation between prisoners who believe themselves to be alone.

A prisoner should be especially on his guard when he finds himself alone with another prisoner with whom he is not acquainted. He should always assume in such a case that he is in the presence of a disguised German.

Every officer or man who may be captured must be constantly on the look-out for traps, and must give his confidence to no one until it is proved beyond all manner of doubt that he is a genuine British prisoner of war.

3. The above should be made known to all troops employed in any capacity in the forward area.

GENERAL STAFF (INTELLIGENCE),  
GENERAL HEADQUARTERS.

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