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**CONCENTRATION CAMPS COMMISSION.**

# **R E P O R T**

ON THE

## **CONCENTRATION CAMPS IN SOUTH AFRICA,**

BY THE

**COMMITTEE OF LADIES**

**APPOINTED BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WAR;**

CONTAINING

**REPORTS ON THE CAMPS IN NATAL, THE ORANGE RIVER  
COLONY, AND THE TRANSVAAL.**

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## REPORT ON BETHULIE, 7TH SEPTEMBER 1901.

The Bethulie camp was first formed on 22nd April 1901. It then numbered 1,500, and was situated on the slope of the kopjes above the present site. The camp was moved on 6th June owing to the difficulty of procuring water at the first site. A disadvantage of the present site is that it lies in heavy mist at night and early morning, at least this was the case at the date of our visit (7th September 1901), the village at the same time being quite free and clear. The camp now numbers 4,882 persons. The Superintendent is Mr. Russell Deare.

1. *Water Supply.*—The present camp is near an excellent spring, carefully fenced round with barbed wired to prevent fouling either by animals or human beings. The spring yields 1,800 gallons an hour of first-class water. It has never been known to fail even in the driest seasons. The spring is about 150 yards from the nearest part of the camp, and about 500 yards from the furthest point. The water is brought into camp in pails by hand. The hospital is supplied by a water cart holding 80 gallons. The washing of clothes is done in a spruit with a hard rocky bottom forming convenient pools for the purpose. Every Sunday four men walk down this spruit with brooms sweeping out all holes.

2. *Sanitation.*—On the trench system, and very rough. No proper seats (except in the school latrine) for either men, women, or children, but simply logs thrown across trenches. The wood and iron required for the screening of the hospital latrines have not arrived, consequently there is at present no hospital latrine. Every few days fresh holes are dug for emptying slops and stools from the hospital; no disinfectant is used in the holes, but every night about six inches of dry earth are thrown in. The pails used are disinfected with Jeyes' fluid and washed before being returned to hospital. At present in the whole camp there are seven latrines, viz., three for men, three for women, and one for the school. The ground round the boys' and women's latrines is very badly fouled, the ground having been more used than the latrines; and the ground outside the camp is indescribably filthy, in some places over large areas it is barely possible to walk. Up to 10 p.m. three policemen patrol the river bank to prevent people using it as a latrine; but one alcove on the river bank was habitually used as a latrine, as was also the dust heap about 400 yards from camp, and a dry spruit about 900 yards distant on the south side. The extent of the fouling of the ground in and around the camp involves a serious danger to the health of the inmates, especially when hotter weather comes on.

It is only fair to add that, with the exception of the school latrine, the latrine accommodation was so extremely bad that there is much excuse for the fouling of the ground.

*Disposal of Refuse.*—There are bags provided, one for every four tents, to hold dry rubbish. These are emptied every morning by Scotch carts. There are 22 old men called corporals (unpaid), whose business it is to see that rubbish is deposited in these bags.

The head of every family is responsible for the ground round his own tent, and the corporals' duty is to see that this is not neglected. The bags are often destroyed by the people putting hot ashes into them. The Commission were informed that 20 bags were destroyed in this way every day. It would be more economical to use old coffee tins.

3. *Housing.*—Nearly all in bell tents. The offices and hospital are in marquees. All tent flaps are ordered to be lifted for two hours daily, weather permitting. If the order to lift flaps is disregarded, the pole of the tent is taken away. The average number in a tent was, Mr. Deare informed us, six or seven. We found a number of tents with eight or nine, and, in one instance, ten inmates. More tents had been ordered, and arrived at the station while we were at Bethulie. The tents are pitched too close together. The rule of 15 yards from pole to pole ought to be observed.

4. *Rations.*—The serving of rations was the best system the Commission had seen in any camp. There are two centres from which rations are served. The camp is divided into "blocks"; each block contains 16 tents, and the "blocks" are called up one by one by a call boy appointed for the purpose. As soon as about six people in block A have been served the call boy summons block B, and so on; each family much fetch its own rations, except in cases of sickness, when the ration is sent to the tent by a policeman. There is no confusion, and very little waiting; the people in each block would not have to wait more than 10 minutes. The whole service of 2,400 meat rations was over in about two hours' time. The grocery rations are issued on the same principle, but take rather longer. No ration tickets are used. The chief distributor, Mr. de Villiers, has three issuers and 15 helpers. We saw these men just as they had finished the distribution of the meat ration. They looked fresh and bright, and were evidently proud of the smart way in which they had done their work. They presented a great contrast to the jaded and overworked issuers at Aliwal North. Mr. Deare and Mr. de Villiers would highly approve of the addition of rice,  $\frac{1}{2}$  lb. a week, to the present rations.

5. *Kitchens.*—All separate, except that four or five families will sometimes combine to build an oven which they then use by turns. The Superintendent had supplied old bricks for the building of some of these ovens. Some were made of sun-dried bricks made in camp. These ovens were in several cases really little kitchens or pantries neatly and cleverly made.

6. *Fuel.*—Mainly green wood from the river; but this is supplemented by coal which is served out when the weather is wet and the wood damp. The wood is fetched in five wagons, two belonging to the camp and three hired. Fifteen men are commandeered to go down to the river to cut the wood daily. The wagons arrive in camp about 4 p.m. At 6 a.m. the wood is cut up; labour for this purpose being also commandeered. Each corporal selects a man from his own block for this wood-cutting purpose. The serving of the wood ration is done on the "block" system. Twenty-two tons of coal had lately come into camp and were lying on the ground. De Villiers said he did not think there was much risk of its being stolen, for it would be easy to detect people who were burning coal when none had been issued.

7. *No Slaughter-houses.*—All meat is supplied by contractor.

8. *Bedding.*—Mr. Deare, in reply to inquiry, said he thought at least four-fifths of the people in Bethulie Camp slept on the ground.

We strongly and repeatedly urged on him the desirability of furnishing the camp with a larger supply of bedsteads, of however simple a description. He represented the difficulty of getting suitable material. We pointed out what had been done in other camps to utilise local material and get rough bedsteads made in camp. One good point in the Bethulie camp was the presence of a large number of high wooden frames outside the tents, on which mattresses and other bedding were hung up to air. We pointed out that if these could be made in camp of local material, so could bedsteads. Mr. Deare promised to supplement the supply of bedsteads or to promote their being made in camp. In the month of August there were 206 deaths in this camp, mainly from measles and pneumonia, and 75 in the first nine days of September. There were 13 corpses lying in the mortuary tents on the 9th September. The supply of coffins at one time had been short, and the dead had been buried in blankets, the same as soldiers who die in military hospitals. The people feel this very much, and the supply of coffins was obtained again as soon as possible.

9. *Clothing.*—Distributed by local committee of three ladies, Mrs. Becker, Dutch Reformed clergyman's wife, Bethulie, Mrs. Van Zyl, and Mrs. Joubert, aided by nine women selected from the camp. Their main reliance was, of course, Government clothing, but they had also received gifts from Mr. Schulz's committee in Cape Town. A good deal of shoemaking was done in camp. Eighty skins had just arrived, as well as uppers and soles for boots, indented for by Mr. Deare. Mr. Deare had a large consignment of Government clothing waiting for distribution in the store marquee on the date of the Commission's visit.

10. *Shops.*—There are two shops in camp. The storekeeper, a German Jew, complained that the Director of Civil Supplies at Bloemfontein kept him very short of the various articles he wanted. He showed us one large indent for Dutch medicines which had been returned with the endorsement "not granted." We told him that we thought this was a good thing. But the shop was very bare compared to others. The chief things noted were tinned salmon, men's shirts, women's skirts, concertinas, and cigarettes.

The whole of the Bethulie village and district is very short of supplies. All civilians are rationed, and have lately been placed on half rations. This half ration (for which, of course, civilians pay) is less than what is provided gratis for the Concentration Camp. In the village *no* one is allowed condensed milk except people with young children. Cows' milk is not to be had. Bethulie camp, with 4,800 people, gets 12 truck loads of provisions per month. Bethulie village, with 727 white inhabitants, is supposed to get four truck loads a month. (See Appendix.)

11. *Hospital Accommodation.*—Five marquees, three for women and children, and two for men. Forty-two beds in all, full on 9th September. In good order and well ventilated. The patients looked cheerful and comfortable; a large proportion were doing well. The staff consists of Dr. Wohlers (resident in Bethulie), Dr. Mackenzie, N.Z., five weeks in camp, and Dr. Madden, three days in camp. There are two nurses (both refugees, neither fully trained), Miss de la Rouviere and Miss Rous, and seven local assistants, three for night and four for day, and one dispenser with an assistant.

Both the head nurses did day work only; the night work was entrusted wholly to the local assistants. This is the first camp in which we have seen serious cases of enteric and pneumonia left at night to be nursed only by local assistants. In one of the men's marquees there was a very smart *bed* for the night nurse. In consequence of the energetic protests of a member of the Commission the bed was taken down before we left. The Commission recommended the appointment of a certificated nurse for night duty, and also the appointment of a hospital orderly and male attendants for the men's wards. More hospital accommodation is required, at least two marquees should be added. The hospital was full at the date of the visit, and there was still much sickness in camp. There had been 76 cases of enteric since May.

The hospital kitchen was made of bricks and had a range, but was not sufficiently supplied with boilers. The same boiler had to be used for supplying hot water for drinking purposes and for washing dishes, &c. All the drinking water for hospital is boiled and filtered. The hospital store tent was in a terrible muddle. Clothes, said to be clean, but unfolded, had been thrown into lidless boxes. Dirty clothes from enteric and other patients were thrown into the same tent, close to the clothes supposed to be clean. Dirty clothes, brought in by patients, were also lying about, and other soiled and broken articles. The disinfection of enteric and other infected clothing had been ordered by the doctor in a solution of 1 in 1,000 of perchloride of mercury; but his orders were not carried out. What is really done is to throw the dirty clothing first into the store tent with the clean clothing, then it is carried to the river by the washerwoman and placed in two half casks, where she concocts, according to rule of thumb, a disinfectant made of crude perchloride of mercury. The clothes are then left all night in the casks by the side of the river. It would be far safer to boil the infected linen at the hospital. The bottle of perchloride of mercury was seen by a member of the Commission standing on the kitchen mantel-piece. In commenting on the disorder of the hospital store, &c., it must not be forgotten that Boer nurses have not so high a standard of order and cleanliness as that to which English nurses are accustomed. A fully qualified English nurse at the head of the nursing department would produce a very great improvement in this respect. The views of the Commission on the disinfecting of the linen and the condition of the store tent were at once attended to by the Boer nurses.

The Commission wish to pay a tribute to the energy and skill of Dr. Wohler. The doctors have much to contend with in the ignorance of the Boer women. Mrs. Becker (member of the local committee already

mentioned) told us she had found children with measles full out on them, sitting up and eating meat. We were also told of children being dosed by their parents with a wine-glass of dog's blood, or a strong solution of Rickett's blue.

The mortuaries are too near the camp and hospital, and look dirty and neglected. The 13 corpses in the mortuaries on the 9th September were all shrouded; but there was a general look of disorder, dirty blankets lying on the floor in and near the tents. We were informed that the care of the mortuary is left to the people themselves, but there ought to be more order and cleanliness.

Hospital comforts are given out, both for the lines and the hospital on the doctor's orders. At present there is a lack of some drugs, such as bark, but an additional supply was expected hourly. As no cow's milk is available in the Bethulie District (on account of rinderpest) we strongly recommended the supply of "Ideal" milk be kept up, and that it should not be given out in tins, but mixed with boiled water.

12. Mr. Deare was at first not inclined to see much use in a camp matron, but at a meeting between the Commission, the local committee, and the Superintendent, on 9th September, the Superintendent came round very much to our view that a sensible woman of the district nurse type would be most valuable to go from tent to tent where children were sick, and instruct the mothers in elementary principles of nursing, the value of cleanliness, pure air, and suitable food. It was also urged by us that there should be a central soup kitchen to supply invalids with beef tea, barley broth, &c. Mr. Deare promised at once to order three soyer stoves for this purpose. Mr. Becker suggested the name of a lady suitable for the post of camp matron. The Commission has recommended a grant of 20*l.* from the Victoria League Fund towards the expenses of the soup kitchen.

13. *Minister*.—Reverend Mr. Tuckoff lives in camp, he is assisted by the Reverend Mr. Becker from Bethulie. We attended the open-air service conducted by Mr. Becker in the camp on Sunday afternoon, 8th September.

14. *Discipline and Morals*.—"Not much difficulty," according to Mr. Deare. Some men and one woman had been sent to gaol, and sentenced to hard labour; for small offences the rations would be docked of milk and sugar, but the disadvantage of this is that it punishes the children for the offences of their parents. The village was out of bounds for the camp, and there was said to be no going backwards and forwards without passes. We noticed a considerable quantity of biltong being made in this camp. Eight policemen, all refugees, at 2*s.* a day, were employed in guarding the boundaries.

15. *Education*.—There was two small bucksail shelters used for schools, the attendance was very small. The plan had been adopted of taking only one class at a time for an hour and a half. The schoolmaster's name is De Villiers, and he has eight assistants. The school was seen at a disadvantage owing to the epidemic.

16. *Occupations*.—Shoemaking, carpentering, brickmaking. Men could earn 2*s.* 6*d.* a day at brickmaking. Men are commandeered to cut wood on the river bank, and also to chop it into suitable portions for rations. The Superintendent hopes to start a garden for the benefit of the camp.

17. No difficulty about orphans. Their relations take them.

18. *Local Committee*.—Mrs. Becker, Mrs. Van Zyl, and Mrs. Joubert (from the village), with nine women in the camp to help them. Their chief duty is the distribution of clothing to necessitous cases.

19. Return of the ages of those who have died:—

Under one year	-	-	-	-	-	46
One to five years	-	-	-	-	-	132
Five to 15 years	-	-	-	-	-	79
15 to 25 years	-	-	-	-	-	28
25 and over	-	-	-	-	-	43

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The deaths in May had been eight, in June nine, in July 30, in August 206, for the first nine days of September 75. (For further returns see Appendix.)

20. *Number of Persons* leaving camp to join friends, about 18.

21. *Servants*.—There are very few servants in camp, and no rations are issued for them.

#### GENERAL REMARKS.

There was a very general outcry in the camp about the poor quality of the meat supply up to the 7th September. We were assured that it was impossible to obtain anything better in the neighbourhood. The butchers' shops in Bethulie had been shut because there was no meat to be had.

Mrs. Roos, mother of one of the nurses, was one of the most clamorous against the bad quality of the meat ration. She brought out some dried-up scraps which had evidently been exposed to a parching wind for several days. It was represented to her that if, instead of keeping it until it was little better than leather, she had made it at once into broth or stew she would have shown more practical capacity for making the best of things. The members of Mrs. Roos' family were receiving wages for work done in camp amounting to 17*l.* a month, so that she could easily have supplemented her rations if she had been so disposed.

There is a good lawn tennis court in camp, and another is being made. The lawn tennis club, of which Mr. Deare is president, has 42 members. People were playing all day long. We saw young girls playing at a little after eight in the morning.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS.

- (1.) That a camp matron should be appointed.
- (2.) That a central soup kitchen should be established to supply invalids' food on doctor's orders to patients (especially children) in their tents. This soup kitchen to be kept up as long as the epidemic lasts.
- (3.) That a ration of rice,  $\frac{1}{2}$  lb. per head per week, should be added to the existing ration.
- (4.) That there should be a greater distance between the tents, and the rule of 15 yards from pole to pole adhered to.
- (5.) That there should be a bath-house for women.
- (6.) That stringent measures should be taken to improve the latrines, and prevent the fouling of the surrounding ground.
- (7.) That a great effort be made to provide bedsteads. These could be made in camp if material were available.
- (8.) That more hospital accommodation (at least two marquees) should be provided with a proportionate increase of the medical and nursing staff, and that an out-patient department be organised.  
Male assistants for men's wards should be appointed. Another boiler should be provided for the hospital kitchen; and another ordinary boiler for the boiling of enteric clothes.
- (9.) That all patients (not infants at the breast) and especially that all enteric patients be compelled to go to hospital.
- (10.) That there should be more attention to order and cleanliness in the mortuaries, that the doors should be turned the other way, and that the tents should be further removed from the camp.

(11.) That the overcrowding in the tents should be reduced.

(12.) That the milk should be served diluted with boiled water.

(Signed) M. G. FAWCETT.

BETHULIE TOWN CIVILIAN DAILY RATION SCALE.

	Ordinary Scale.	Present scale, half rations.
Meal or flour	1 lb.	8 ozs.
Sugar	2 oz.	2 "
Coffee	$\frac{3}{4}$ "	$\frac{1}{4}$ "
Tea	$\frac{1}{4}$ "	$\frac{1}{8}$ "
Rice	$\frac{1}{4}$ "	2 "
Meat	1 lb.	

The ordinary scale has been in use since last January, and the people were quite satisfied with the amount issued, but the whole civilian population is now on the half ration scale in consequence of the short supply of foodstuffs. With regard to meat, some families resident in town kill their own sheep, and can eat as much as they like, but the butchers' shops have been closed four days, there being no sheep to kill. I have obtained 150 sheep from Cape Colony, and this scale of rations will for the present be reduced.

*Note.*—No milk is allowed to be sold, the small supply in town being reserved for issue to the sick and very young children.

(Signed) C. GRANT,

Resident Magistrate, Bethulie, O.R.C.

9th September 1901.

DEATH RATE, BETHULIE CAMP.

	Under 1 year.	1 to 5.	5 to 15.	15 to 25.	25 and over.	Total.
May	4	2	2	—	—	8
June	2	1	3	1	2	9
July	5	8	7	3	7	30
August	29	70	45	20	42	206
September	11	34	14	6	10	75
	51	115	71	30	61	328

REPORT ON BURGHER CAMP, NEWTON CAMP, KIMBERLEY,  
26TH AND 27TH AUGUST 1901.

Superintendent—Major S. B. Shutte.

Numbers in camp at the time of our visit: 553 men, 1,135 women, 2,006 children; total 3,694.

The camp is about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Kimberley Railway Station. It was formed in March 1901, and then only consisted of 600 people.

So far as sanitation is concerned, the camp is well provided for.

1. *Water Supply.*—The water supply is the same as that of Kimberley, and no expense seems to have been spared by the Kimberley authorities in carrying out a good system of sanitation. We were told it cost 500l. a month.