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French in Africa

American Friends Service Committee
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CAMPS IN NORTH AFRICA

General Situation:

This summary of the condition of internment camps in North Africa is based on the very excellent series of separate reports on each camp visited by Dr. Wyss-Dunant, Delegate for North Africa, from the International Red Cross at Geneva. He is to be congratulated on these excellent reports. These reports cover nearly all camps where there are foreign internees, although there was one camp (Missour) in Morocco not visited due to its inaccessibility through lack of transportation. Additional information which I have later obtained is also included. There are a number of other internment camps in North Africa exclusively for French prisoners, many of whom are believed to be there for political reasons. Very little is known about these camps and this study makes no attempt to cover them.

In Morocco there are at present fourteen camps and at least five in Algeria. In Morocco, these camps are in some cases several hundred miles apart. There are apparently about four thousand interned in Morocco, and at least two thousand five hundred in Algeria. These figures are, if anything, low, being based on data collected last summer. (See attached tabulation.) To this has been added the known increase due to the arrival of English internees. It should also be clearly understood that these figures are liable to sudden increases as the result of military operations, so any real appraisal of the situation should count on a rather large probable increase. Numerically the Spanish are the most important in the camps, there being at least 3,000 in Morocco and Algeria. Exit visas from Morocco and Algeria are now being refused so that there is no opportunity for any appreciable number of these people to improve their condition by leaving for the New World. Under present conditions all that can be done for them is to make them as comfortable as possible where they are.

So far as is known at present there are only a few women and children in these camps in Morocco, and they are all in one camp, Sidi El Ayachi, about fifty miles down the coast from Casablanca. Without counting the recent British arrivals there are about fifty children under sixteen years of age, most of them Spanish. It is hoped that arrangements can be made to remove the British children. There are approximately 75 women exclusive of the British. It is also hoped possible to have the British women removed from the camp before too long. All the British are under the care of the U.S. Consulate.

Relief Agencies in the Field:

There are a number of agencies doing all they can to aid the internees. As just mentioned, the British are under the care of the U.S. Consulate, as representing British interests. Count Czapski heads a Polish agency which has some limited funds available to aid Polish internees, the chief difficulty being to find clothing which can be purchased with these funds. Count Czapski has been quite successful in persuading the authorities to permit his people to leave the camp for jobs which he has found for them provided the people are not Jewish. There is a Norwegian representative here with fund to distribute to his people but in numerous cases his difficulty also is to find supplies which can be purchased. The Czechs have a representative here also with funds, subject to the same limitations. The Jewish Committees represented by Mr. Cottinger and Mme Benatar have done splendid work for all nationalities of Jewish origin, particularly in immigration. The Spanish have a representative here but he has no funds to aid his people in the camps. Mademoiselle Marin-Chancerelle, of the International Migration Service, is doing splendid work, operating with the Region Civile. She spends several days a week in a camp, becoming thoroughly acquainted with conditions in this way. She makes these visits alone and with the poorest transportation facilities imaginable. Working in this way under these conditions requires not only marked physical endurance but a great amount of courage and devotion. Dr. Wyss-Dunant's reports speak for themselves.

Camp Conditions:

The conditions in different camps vary enormously and naturally depend to a very large extent on the attitude of the local commandant. The general greater scarcity of food, clothing and other supplies is bound to be reflected in the condition of the camps.

In considering these camp reports it must be clearly borne in mind at all times the atmosphere of the country in which they exist. First, this is a country which has lost a war--with all that implies under modern conditions. There is a continuous intense pressure for further economic, political, moral and probably military concessions. On the one hand, France has been systematically drained of foodstuffs of all kinds, materials and now manpower; and on the other hand the allied blockade has practically completed the paralysis of what little part of normal economic activity might have survived the other exactions. These same conditions apply to a large extent to North Africa, especially Algeria.

Furthermore it must be realized that living standards in North Africa are, even in normal times, much lower than those in America.

However, even after making all due allowances there are surely conditions in certain camps which are simply atrocious and should be tolerated nowhere. Through Dr. Wyss-Dunant's efforts one camp was abolished, and the North Europeans in a particularly hot camp were transferred to another where the climatic conditions were more like those to which they were accustomed. Dr. Wyss-Dunant also requested the abolition of a most atrocious camp, Berguent, whose population is exclusively Jewish. His recommendations were not only disregarded, but there are reports that plans are underway for moving this camp to an even more intolerable location. Dr. Wyss-Dunant is to make further representations in Rabat in an effort to have this camp abolished before winter sets in. It is recommended that the separate report on Berguent be carefully studied.

Missour, the camp which was not visited is, according to the information reaching me, populated principally by Spaniards and is bad - perhaps as bad as Berguent.

Of all the nationalities interned, the Spanish are perhaps the worst off, as there is no government to look out for them and no committee supplied with adequate funds to give aid even to the most needy.

In general, conditions in these camps have probably deteriorated since Dr. Wyss-Dunant's survey was made in the summer. Greater scarcities are bound to show in the camps as well as in the general community. This is very definitely the case at Sidi El Ayachi, where the food conditions are certainly poorer. Acetylene formerly used there for lighting no longer exists. The supply of calcium carbide, for producing acetylene, is depleted; and this probably applies to many other camps. There is no oil for lamps and there are few, if any, candles. Few camps have electricity. With the sudden arrival of the British, entirely destitute, at Sidi El Ayachi, blankets were taken from some of the long established residents of the camp, and very properly given to the British; but they were not replaced. The local Jewish Committee has succeeded in purchasing a few native blankets at a very high price to help relieve the situation.

One quite interesting project is the school at Sidi El Ayachi, presided over by Ruth Lueck with Lili Heinemann and other volunteers. I enclose photographs showing the children and Ruth Lueck (dressed in black) at the time that General Nogues visited the camp some months ago. This was probably when the camp was at its best.

Medical Attention:

As will be seen by Dr. Wyss-Dunant's reports, medical attention varies greatly with different camps. One point that he makes, and one which I have heard repeated elsewhere many times, is that men are frequently not given proper attention and consideration until they are very seriously ill, when it is perhaps too late. I am continually amazed to find not that there are many cases of illness, but that the camps are not entirely decimated by outbreaks of malaria, dysentery and other epidemic diseases. The Casablanca Pasteur Institute is prepared to supply a certain amount of typhus vaccine; but there are no adequate supplies to cope with any widespread outbreaks of amoebic dysentery, malaria or plague. In many camps there are practically no medical supplies. The lack of sulpha drugs is also most serious. Again, all such supplies must come from

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America. Madam du Quart has endeavored to supply a hospital service to some of the camps, but due to a lack of gasoline and medical supplies I do not know how effective it can be.

Anti-Jewish Sentiment:

Anti-Jewish sentiment in Morocco is regrettably on the increase, and of course is also evident in the camps. Berguent is an example where approximately 90% of the men are ex-volunteers from the French Army. They are ill clad and subjected to the most severe rigors of heat and cold with wholly inadequate shelter and are without comforts of any kind. Recently when one of them was offered a job as a baker at Rabat the authorities refused to let him take it as he was a Jew. A very influential and well-known Frenchman intervened on behalf of this man on the basis that this man had volunteered and fought for France; but the plea was refused and the boy had to return to the camp.

Up until recently Sidi El Ayachi had been apparently free from any anti-Jewish bias; but a short time ago when the local Jewish Committee entered a mild protest with the camp management against the lower quality of the food, they were threatened with the statement that all the Jews would be sent to Berguent unless protests ceased. The English upon their arrival were told to keep away from the rest of the residents, who were described as "Jews and Bolsheviks." A separate school for the English children is planned as well as a separate canteen.

Work for Friends Service:

Assistance has already been given in a number of special cases at Sidi El Ayachi and elsewhere, where cash will purchase needed additional food or clothing or other supplies. This type of assistance can and will be extended as we become better acquainted with the needs of the different camps and the local resources.

The great need for clothing can be met only by large shipments from America as promptly as possible. We should have been at this work at least a year ago.

This same situation also applies in the case of medical supplies.

While requests have already been made for clothing and a certain amount of medical supplies, a further more specific request for additional items will be forwarded to Philadelphia following the next conference which I have with Dr. Wyss-Dunant in approximately two weeks. The needs will be much clearer after he has a conference with the authorities both at Algiers and at Rabat. We shall know then definitely what they can and/or will do; and we can then see how much of the load must be carried by other agencies if the needs of these unfortunate people are to have anything like adequate attention.

--- Leslie O. Heath
AFSC Delegate to North Africa

CAMPS IN MOROCCO

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Spaniards</u>	<u>Jews</u>	<u>Polos</u>
El Ayachi	288	86	?	?
Oued Zem	215	?	?	?
Missour	?	?	?	?
Berguent	155	-	155	-
Im Fout	264	?	?	?
Foum de Flah	37	?	?	?
Bou Arfa	818	694	?	?
Colomb-Bechar (22)	112	97	?	?
Colomb-Bechar (21)	747	696	?	?
Monabba	120	115	?	?
Mongoub	38	?	?	?
Oued Akreuch	100	?	?	?
Djerrada	192	145	?	?
Moulay-Bouazza	56	(removed to other camps)		
Settat	<u>255</u>	<u>?</u>	<u>?</u>	<u>?</u>
	<u>3,357</u>	<u>1,833</u>		

Since the figures were compiled a British Polish group arrived, survivors of a torpedoed ship. Their total is approximately 600.

CAMPS IN ALGERIA

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Spaniards</u>	<u>Jews</u>	<u>Polos</u>
Kenedza	600	280	300	?
Djelfa	899	444	152	93
Berrouaghia	80	33	17	1
Colomb-Bechar	205	-	-	205
Boghar	<u>401</u>	<u>340</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>40</u>
	<u>2,185</u>	<u>1,097</u>	<u>489</u>	<u>699</u>

Since these figures have been compiled there has been an addition of several hundred British to the Algerian Camps.

In all camps, other nationalities make up the difference between the sum of the Spaniards, Jews and Polos, and the totals.