

Prisoner camp Ahmednagar during WW I

Hi all,

This message is a follow-up to my previous question about Internment in India during WWI. I hope readers will find it interesting and not too long.

Visit to the British Library 08.09.1999

Few records were found to exist that related to internment in India. L/MIL/3/2531 is one possible reference, as is WS2728, which relates to the control of aliens, and WS271, 3566 which is specific to India, but these records relate to WWII.

The only records found during a day at the library were found in L/P&J/6 and were files relating to the Teichmann name (My maternal family). These files were 3337, 3431, 3433 and 4740. These were found at references L/P&J/6/1396,/1379,/1415 and/1596.

Subsequently, a large block of correspondence was discovered that relates to the situation of internment during WWI. There was a Memorandum on Foreigners in India dated 30th Sept 1914 found in L/J&P/2645 (1915). This was not very informative. File 3337(1915) is a letter from the Baptist Missionary Society dated 25th August 1915 to the Rt. Hon Austen Chamberlain, HM Sec of State

for India. The letter says that a cable has been received from the Teichmann family saying that they are to be repatriated within a month to Germany.

A letter from the Baptist Missionary Society to the Government. The letter informs the Government that there are actually two missionaries rather than one, the father is in Chittagong and the son is in Chandraghona. It also indicates that Katherine (Mother) and Dorothy (Daughter-in-law) were both British by birth, and that Gottfried (son) and Grace (daughter) was British Indian by birth. The BMS offered to defray the cost of internment to the Government of India. The letter was signed by Edward Wilson, Foreign Secretary of the BMS.

Subsequent correspondence in the files showed that it was expected to exchange German and British Missionaries (J&P 3349 (1915)). It seemed that the British wanted to use the German and Austrian Missionaries as a bargaining tool.

J&P4706 (1915) dated 17th November 1915. This document showed that 42 missionaries had been allowed to remain in India at their own request. 4 had been repatriated, and one went to the USA. Of

the remaining 255, one lot were to be repatriated on a liner being sent to India for that purpose, and the second party would go the following February.

In a Minute within J&P on 19th October 1915 it was concluded that the return of the missionaries would increase the fighting strength of Germany. (!!!!) The advantage would be very much on the German side as a letter (3349/15 of J&P 4121 (1915) showed. There were only 6 British Missionaries in German East Africa, but numerous German ones in India.

Minute of 7th October 1915. The Indian Government wanted to repatriate the German Missionaries as soon as possible (J&P 3872 (1915)) The repatriation would consist of these groups. Others would be interned. Ordained clergy, b) Civilians over 55 (or over 60 for Austrians) c) Civilian invalids under 55 and d) Women and children.

In a letter of 30th Sept. 1915 from the Under Secretary of State at Foreign Office it was stated that the Exchange of Missionaries was to be general, as agreed by Chamberlain. It would not be linked to the release of women and children being held at Bagdad. The letter was signed by T.W.Holderness. Clearly a number of people in the Government had to agree to this repatriation.- in J&P

3774 (1915) we find Under Secretary of State at the Foreign Office Bonnar Law giving his consent to the general repatriation.

The War Office gave their consent I J&P 3726 (1915) with the proviso that those repatriated should give an undertaking that they would not serve in the Army or Navy.

J&P 3468 (1915) dated 30th Sept 1915 is concerned with the Detention of Missionaries in British Possessions, but does not enlarge on the detail given so far.

J&P 3349/15 is a large document, a Departmental Memo concerning foreigners of all types in India during the War, but Appendix 4 says that there were 589 German and Austrian missionaries and their families in India at that time.

In the next letter (J&P 3349) dated 4th September 1915 from Lionel Abrahams raises once more the very unequal numbers of German/Austrian missionaries and their British counterparts, and hopes once more to link in the women and children in Bagdad. This proposal was rejected because the British Government did not believe that all missionaries should be repatriated - only those in the categories listed above. These proposals went to and fro between the Brit-

ish and German Governments via the American Ambassador in Berlin.

The next stage was to try to drive German missionaries out of India by cutting off their funds. Memorandum No 2 on Foreigners in India (Para. 10) says – All alien enemy missionaries were to have their money cut off so it was expected that they would leave India. "The Times" of 6th August 1915 states "It is understood that the Government of India have decided to intern or deport all German Missionaries."

A newspaper extract (Appendix 4 of Memorandum 2) quoted showed that according to a communique issued by the Government of India on 13th August 1915 there were 1153 Germans and Austrians of military age, prisoners of war at Ahmednagar, and 1232 Germans and Austrians in civil charge, of whom 589 were missionaries and their families.

In an extract of The Sunday Times dated 15th August 1915, there was an article dated 13th August 1915 Simla. "Since war broke out aliens had only been allowed to travel on a permit and were under Police surveillance. They were later interned at Ahmednagar in Bombay – 1143, and the rest were supervised. Later there was some civil unrest attributed to the agitation from German

nationals and stricter controls were "needed" so many of those allowed to live under supervision were interned. These included 1232 Germans and Austrians, of whom 406 were men, 513 women, 186 children and 127

'suspected'. Of these 589 were missionaries and families. Of the remaining aliens some were concentrated at various centres and some left at their normal residences. In the article it also showed that it had been decided to repatriate all women and children and men of non-military age, whether missionaries or not.

The situation of the internees was discussed in a letter from the Viceroy on 9th April 1915. The treatment was to be in three categories. 115 men under military control at Ahmednagar (but not resident there – see below). Those who compulsorily reside under civil control in a specified place (16 men and 54 women). Remain at liberty on parole, subject to civil supervision. 244 men and 198 women. Of those in Class 1, 53 were in Bombay and 57 in Madras . Category 2 were in Madras only (???)

Letter from Viceroy 15th July 1915. Up to date figures - Prisoners of War at Ahmednagar (including some missionaries) 1108. Under Civil Control 1000 plus chil-

dren, of these Missionaries Male 240, 193 Missionaries Female; others Male 212 and other female 355. Austrians were about 1/8th of the total. The Vice-roy was uncompromising. He wanted conditions to get more severe in the camps and there was an expectation that the internment would go on after peace had been declared to prevent the missionaries (and others) from returning to their 'jobs'. In fact the internment camps did not start to empty until late in 1919, long after many PoW's in Britain and elsewhere had been released. The Government in Britain made it clear that it had no interest in who the internees were. That was left to the local Indian Government. There was tremendous anger and hurt at 'local' people in India who had germanic names and whether there would have been violence against these people had they not been interned is difficult to see.

From my reading about nineteenth and early twentieth century India it is clearly documented that there was a tension between the British Administration (The Raj) and the ever increasing numbers of Missionaries. They swarmed into the country supposedly to 'Save Souls' The East India Company had tried to exclude them because they disturbed commerce and educated the Indians. Educated In-

dians may have wanted independence!! I suspect that the Government in India saw missionaries as a thorn in their flesh and saw a way of using what was an irritant, to win a small diplomatic battle with the Germans.

One cannot comprehend the misery caused to so many people by WWI and a period of internment may have been a small price to pay for these people. Nevertheless - One ordained Baptist Minister who would eventually devote 39 years of his life in trying to encourage people in India to believe in the God he believed in so passionately, lost four and a half years imprisoned without trial because he had a German name and was Stateless. In his youth he had been turned down for German National Service because of a twisted spine. He was not a strong bargaining chip when looked at as an individual, but as a number on a list, he became just a little bit more useful to the British Government of the day. While the rest of the British population celebrated throughout the large parts of the World that Britain still ruled at the cessation of war, these families would have to serve another year of imprisonment. I hope he and his kind were useful, because after those four and a half years of privations lasting until he was nearly 60 years of age, he had heart

problems and did not live for many more years. Alfred Teichmann never held a grudge against the British. He applied for naturalisation as a British Subject shortly after the end of the War. It was accepted without question!

R. Capon

.....Nigel: Interesting and relevant observations on the British Indian Army. You make my point for me as regards the under-representation of India in Imperial armed ranks. And, yes, I had noticed during my visits to India and intermittent TV news viewing the persistence of the

"martial races" fallacy. Yet, the Indian Army Corps (some 23,000 strong) that reinforced the BEF in Flanders probably made the difference between victory and defeat there in 1914. And, I neglected to point out that over six million Indians served His Majesty's Forces in the Great War, most of them as laborers. India supplied badly needed financing to the British Exchequer, as well as most of the jute for all those millions of sandbags and gunny sacks. Six million Indians also died of influenza... Len Shurtleff

R. Capon