

Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales

Otto Wortmann internment camp papers, 13 September 1918- 17 February 1919
MLMSS 261 / Box 6 / Item 52

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Friday, 13 September 1918, 7.30pm

One shouldn't really start anything on a 13th, especially if it is a Friday – or, conversely, on a Friday, etc, etc! There are people who will tell you a whole lot of tales to the effect that an opus begun on such an ominous day, on such a “dies ater”, on such a “dies fatalis”, has never been completed. Well, let these people nurse their superstitions and let's calmly begin, because who knows if there ever will be a beginning if we don't start today.

Thus: still a prisoner of war, and we already heard about the tribulations and few joys, about the daily grind of this deplorable creature in four previously penned so-called diaries. What has changed is the environment, the scenery, but the subject, the writer, is still the same old person with his many edges, nicks and defects. As a pessimist, a fatalist and a hardened prisoner I can offer this profound insight: life behind barbed wire remains the same, regardless of the environment and the scenery beyond the esteemed barbed wire.

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Spring is waiting to happen in this continent of Australia! The first warm winds are blowing across this plateau in New South Wales. The ever green, or rather brown, bush starts to look a tad friendlier. Among the huge hoary jungle giants the first wattle trees are bursting into bloom, slim and slender as birch trees, their luminous green and golden yellow a balm for the eye. The poor, grey, downtrodden, pitiable heather, extends with an almost adorable timidity the first new shoots towards the sun, and here and there you can spot white, yellow and red little flowers, standing alone or in clusters. During the day, the sun shines bright and warm in a steely blue sky and at night, the Southern Cross and the myriad stars of a southern sky illuminate the canopy.

This is how the surroundings of the new camp, of the camp and its so-called cow park, which is the recreation area, look like in better, halfway peaceful moments. But how the scenery changes when we look at it with our everyday eyes, when we look only at what is accessible to us within the barbed wire. When we look at it only from our limited perspective.

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It's a grey, monotonous, deadly flat territory fenced in by a triple row of barbed wire. A watchtower in each corner and on the western length a pompous gate studded with several locks, through which occasionally somebody enters, but few of us ever leave for any length of time. To the left of the main path, which runs north to south, are six barracks in a straight line, all painted grey, and on the other side are seven barracks.

[There follows a map of the compound, its facilities and its surroundings, all neatly numbered and labelled, including canteen, theatre, bowling alley, tennis courts, school, officers' garden, urinals and washroom, boxing and chess club and, outside the compound, the main camp, the hospital, the recreational ground and the vegetable garden.]

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And how about the barracks! Open at the front, the back wall so badly insulated that you can hear the winds whistling through, no door, no windows; a cage boarded up to $\frac{3}{4}$ of its height in which four men can just about manage to move without touching each other — and four men are indeed cooped up in here — furnished with four iron-mesh bunk beds, two atop two, attached to iron poles. The barracks are covered with tar paper, not all of it waterproof, and may resemble the lean-tos of a human abode, but definitely not the human abode itself. The canteen is too small. The “Duck Coop”, the only closed-in facility here, is one of the most inhospitable, draughtiest localities you can imagine. The washroom is inadequate for the number of prisoners. The kitchen is so-so. The lavatory is too small and reeks. The dining halls are open sheds, and one of them houses the cinematograph, which is the only entertainment we have here. As yet there is no theatre, school, etc, as we have to build them ourselves. Everything, from the surroundings to life to the era, is absolutely wretched and miserable. (9 o'clock)

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Monday, 23 September 1918

As so often before, this Monday was to usher in a week full of work and activities. Maybe it will happen, maybe not. We have to wait, I cannot and do not wish to promise anything anymore. I did make a desperate attempt at laboriousness this morning by writing two letters, and I am now sitting here trying to write in my diary, but most of the time I'm just biting my pen and smoking an inordinate number of cigarettes. I know I am listless and lacking energy! I'm telling myself for the umpteenth time that this needs to change, but I also know that I'm useless, worthless, and that every minute wasted is a minute lost, yet I am too tired, too impotent to change! I do read a lot and enjoy doing it, I can get enormously inspired by the beauty of a chapter, by the beauty of just one sentence, which in turn inspires me to dream up a whole chapter. I can dream and phantasise about the beauty of a tree, a bush, the clouds, about the hills that shimmer in the dying light of the evening, and yet I am not capable to clad these beautiful images in words.

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I'm dreaming of a glorious future, of married bliss, children, robust health and yet I know, although I don't want to acknowledge it, that I will achieve none of these fairytales. — Time passes slowly and monotonously in captivity; I have no work that will yield profit and success in a foreseeable future, and so I squander away the days of my youth! I'm sitting here writing, but if you asked me why I write, I wouldn't know the answer. Why do I bother keeping a diary? Which isn't even a proper diary. I'd be lying to myself, which I do often enough, if I were to say

that I enjoy it. Every so often I actually do feel like writing, but mostly I have to force myself to do it to avoid stumbling through life without a purpose. But what purpose is there to my writing? Do I wish to revisit these journals one day in anger or for enjoyment? Or do I want to torture or entertain other people with it? I have a vague memory of my parents suggesting once that I start keeping a diary, start chronicling my adventures. Is it possible that this suggestion lodged itself into my cranial nooks and that I now

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feel an irrevocable obligation, a moral duty to attempt writing every so often? At the moment I fool myself into believing that I would happily chronicle my adventures and experiences if I had any worth committing to paper. (But this could well be the same illusion that often grips you in other situations, when things that are suddenly accessible often lose their charm and lustre. The most beautiful objects become grey and empty. Swimming in the ocean or in the cool limpid river promises magic the night before, but when, the next morning, you stand there in your swimming suit, the morning sun is anything but warming, the morning zephyr is anything but caressing and the joy of swimming has vanished – until you're back home in your warm corner!) There are no adventures in war captivity. The first taste of captivity behind barbed wire may be an adventure, but it is no adventure to spend three years there and to slowly lose your wits. Being broke for the first time may be an interesting and even amusing experience, but to spend three years in dire straits and to accumulate a mountain of debt simply wears you down

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and corrupts your character. Nobody cares when I sleep badly, when I feel miserable, when my kidneys hurt, except maybe for those who revel in the plight of others, but I'm egotistical enough not to give these gentlemen the satisfaction of my pains and keep them to myself. My mother or my sister would surely care about my toothache and the first grey strands in my shock of hair, but why should I trouble my loved ones with such trivialities.

The mental and real – or is it the real and therefore mental – horizon of a prisoner of war is small and narrow, and of limited scope are the things he can do or experience, and so he gets mired in small and trivial matters and becomes small and petty himself. Barbed-wire philosophy or sheer insanity? I sometimes have to remind myself of how I got to be here, if it's really me who experienced all

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that I seem to have experienced. I'm mystified by how I stumbled along this far and by what's to become of me. Old hags preach that a man needs a scheme of life; maybe they're right and, woe is me, I have none! However, the old hags in Turkey and the Turks themselves preach something else: All's fate, coincidence, kismet, and man best resign himself to it and enjoy life! Still, man is not what the cocoon is to the fly, he is not on earth to simply vegetate until upon his death he can soar on angel wings across the ether and enjoy a life that is a thousand times more beautiful. No, life on earth is beautiful, is worth living, to be enjoyed, and maybe after death we go on living it, albeit dematerialised. Of course, the beauty of life does not refer to an

existence behind barbed wire, within prison walls. And the Turks only talk about "kismet", nothing else, and the whole long string of words that I added after that has nothing to

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do with Turkey, it's just that I wrote before thinking and promptly galloped into a tidy mess. But since we've mentioned the Turks, it shall herewith be noted that I will learn Turkish starting tomorrow, because I need to keep busy. And that's it for today, I have earned myself a cup of coffee, so I'm off to the "Ducks Coop". (3.15pm)

Monday, 30 September 1918

I have survived another month! Spring has not quite established itself in the paradisiac realm of Australia, harsh winds still howl across the camp, and colds and the flu are on the agenda. In Europe, gruelling battles rage. In the west, the Allies are reaping victories from the sea to the Vosges. Bulgaria is asking for armistice; defeat in Palestine and everywhere. I don't know what to make of it; maybe peace is in the making.

I had mail from Mother! All's well at home! Ada and Richard are working on a farm.

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Only Rosa is unhappy, she is angry that I don't want to get married. Picture me as a husband! It would be a farce, so grotesque and ridiculous as to perish the thought!

Rabaul showed its noble side and sent 5 pound; I was able to pay off my debts but not much is left after that.

The Turkish lessons have begun. I find it hard to study, but it's still enjoyable and at least the time flies. Have just finished two letters to Father and Mother. After "rejoicing" in the newspaper, I'm tired. More tomorrow.

I'm getting old. It's time to get out of here, it can only get worse. The grey hair is starkly proliferating! (9pm)

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Wednesday, 2 September [sic; should be October] 1918

The camp is in turmoil! People are running back and forth, scampering this way and that, just like in a beehive after a catastrophe. The reason: newspaper reports that are blacker and bleaker than ever.

Bulgaria has asked for armistice, has surrendered to the Allies unconditionally. Hostilities have ceased. The troops outside Bulgaria are surrendering to the enemy. The troops inside Bulgaria are being disarmed. The Allies are gaining entry to and free passage through our erstwhile ally. They are demanding control over the railways and steamships. The newspapers also report that Turkey has asked for armistice, and that Romania is mobilising once more against Germany. – It

is difficult to assess these events, to gauge the consequences. It is possible that we will try, with the help of the Austrian troops, to overrun Bulgaria as quickly as possible to avoid severing the connection with Turkey; should we succeed, the next challenge would be to hold the admittedly huge front from the Adriatic Sea to

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the Black Sea until peace is achieved. Of course, the assumption is that the reports here are more or less true. – Even more difficult it is to understand how this enormous betrayal could happen. How it was possible for the [Bulgarian] prime minister to keep his plans secret from his king and from Germany! It's probably safest to assume that American money bribed Premier Malinoff and Agriculture Minister and Democrat Stambulivski. At least Bulgaria's defection begs the question whether peace is not also within Germany's reach. Although, and always assuming that the British cables aren't lying, it seems doubtful that it would be a peace acceptable to Germany, one that grants her all the goals she strived for.

In the "big" camp, they are all forecasting peace. Here, the strategists are still divided; for now they prefer to bitch and rail. And, since they are factoring in the successes on the western front, the loss of Cambrai and St Quentin, it all degenerates into much equivocating and lamenting! The incorrigible optimists interpret everything as a German subterfuge, stratagem and,

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better still, a peace manoeuvre and begin to pack up. – The current events have pushed the notion of an exchange of prisoners to the back. There are still no official reports either. For my part, I can't even begin to imagine an end to this misery here, and how I'm to deal with sudden freedom, with being able to move at whim.

The money from Burns, Philp for this month has just arrived, but there's nothing for me; I'd like to know what the hell this means. Has the double-crosser of a paymaster kept back the pennies because it's been only 14 days since I received £5 from Ehrmann, which I definitely consider to be extra pay? It certainly throws a nasty spanner in my financial works.

Other than that there's not much to report. The Turkish lessons prove to be painful; it takes forever just to write the few letters I've learned so far. One night I spend

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in my cell reading, the next night I'm at the cinema, where one finally gets to see properly dressed people, women, tramways, proper buildings, automobiles and other amenities whose existence one has long forgotten.

Quite some time ago I have taken the noble decision to chronicle our "Pentecostal ride", our transfer from Trial Bay to here, but I find it hard to begin.

It's cold here, ridiculously cold, and it's also raining, or else the wind is blowing so hard that everything shakes and rattles and you can't find a place in the whole camp where dust and dirt isn't assaulting your ears, nose or eyes.

Hurrah, the big mope was in vain, my money is here after all, the chap on postal duty forgot to add my name to the list.

I was just rudely interrupted by Haugk's political interpretations and now it's time for coffee; after today's marvellous lunch, hamburgers and white beans, I feel famished. (3 o'clock)

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Friday, 11 October 1918

To judge from the local rags, the current political and warfaring events are bad enough to spoil your mood. In our community here, forsaken not only by God but also by mankind, a profound pessimism reigns. One hardly dares ponder the future, and if so, only in a very general way; one simply sympathises with Germany, and with the Germans in general. As for myself, I'm adopting the ostrich's tactic – keep your head in the sand and ignore the dire things that are going on.

Nothing seems to have changed with regard to Bulgaria. The newcomers have abandoned the war effort, but Germany and Austria still seem to hold the front towards Serbia. – In Turkey, Enver and Taalaat Pasha have resigned; Tewfiek, the former envoy to London and a friend of the entente, is the new premier. Turkey's unconditional surrender, the begging for peace, is expected

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any hour now. If these reports are true, it would only be logical for Austria to do the same very shortly. If the English cables are indeed based on fact, it would mean, as the English call it, “the beginning of the end”. The union of the four is broken. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link, and it seems that the weakest, Bulgaria, has been busted.

This explains the enemy reports. Also, one has to view the peace offer from Germany's new Reich Chancellor under the assumption that Germany will seek peace before a total military and political collapse. Prince Max of Baden, the first German chancellor elected by the Reichstag, by the German people themselves, and thus supported by the people, has proposed an armistice to President Wilson, plus a peace conference based on the Fourteen Points previously stipulated by Wilson. They include the restitution of France and of Belgium, plus compensation for Belgium.

Wilson's reply has generally been interpreted as a blunt refusal. Among other things he asked the highly

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superfluous and impertinent questions whether the new chancellor was speaking on behalf of

the German people or just a certain clique, and whether Germany was willing to negotiate the Fourteen Points. I don't think it likely that we will bother to answer that. – The Allied press, inebriated by their mooted successes on the western front, such as the fall of Cambrai — which are really no more than a German retreat in the course of which whole cities go up in flames, explode and disappear from the face of the earth and the enemy sustains enormous losses — clamours for more war, for Germany to be completely defeated by pushing German troops all the way back to their own territory, and that when no German soldier is left on foreign soil, then the time has come to dictate the terms of peace to Germany! I still cannot fathom the possibility that Germany should suffer such a misfortune, that our soldiers and diplomats should be failing so badly. But the situation is grave. The peace we dreamed of, one that we were to impose on the world,

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does not look so probable anymore, but in view of our present strength one could reasonably expect at least an honourable peace.

To assess Germany's internal state of affairs from here is even more difficult than to gauge the military situation. Max of Baden seems to be the people's choice of chancellor. [Wilhelm] Solf, [Philipp] Scheidemann and [indecipherable] are also men of the people, and so we seem to have established a parliamentary government. Which means it is time to write an epilogue for the last autocratic German kaiser, Wilhelm II. Personally, I can accept this step, but not if it were to lead to a schism between soldiers and politicians, if it were to push us into a rash peace agreement.

As mentioned before, the camp is singing the blues and unfortunately, pessimism is a highly contagious illness and robs one of the last motivation for any activity. Never before has there been so much bitching and ranting here, because to make matters worse, we had news that Germany refuses to ratify the prisoner-exchange

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agreement. So there is now ample reason to believe that Germany does not care about us. We have been sitting here in total isolation for the past 4 years without any effort whatsoever from the German government to intervene on our behalf. Everywhere in this world they have released at least the aged civilians and soldiers, and, it needs to be acknowledged, especially in England, which takes good care of its prisoners. Here, however, not one man has seen even half a day of freedom, and the soldiers of Tsingtan and the "Emden" are also still in captivity!

Seeing how one disappointment follows the other, life has become unbearable! The only distraction I have are the movies and the Turkish lessons. The bowling alley is now operating, but I don't bowl, I just have my afternoon cup of coffee there. Of Ehrmann's money not much is left after repaying my debts.

There hasn't been any mail whatsoever. But

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Grundig, the mailman, has sworn that from now on there will be German mail every day, although not necessarily for everyone. At least there is something to pin our hopes on. To hope is everything here. But if it's true what they say, that "hoping and waiting turn a man into a fool", I've long reached the apex of foolishness and idiocy. (3pm)

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Monday, 21 October 1918

Will there be peace or not? What about peace? Peace or not peace, that is the question. It is the question that makes the world turn right now. The local rags tell us that Germany has accepted Wilson's Fourteen Points. On Tuesday, i.e. tomorrow, the Reichstag will hold its decisive session. We are steadily retreating in France. We have evacuated the Belgian coast, Ostend and Zeebrügge. I consider these moves the harbingers of an armistice. The newspapers all too readily tell their readers about Germany's defeat, political unrest, revolution, abdication of the Kaiser, etc. It would be unfair of us, after 3 years of isolation from the world and its affairs, to criticise the German people and the enormous events at home. Yet the camp talks nothing but politics, it could make you sick. Sometimes you hear such horrifying bullshit, such abominable

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toilet wisdom that your skin crawls. In general, however, our camp is but a mirror of the world when it comes to the overwhelming wish for peace! One would want to pray for peace, beg for it on one's knees, anything to get of this hellhole!

One day it is roving hot here, a dry heat that sears and cracks your skin; then the wind gets up, a wind that blows veritable clouds of dust from one corner to the next only to turn and attack from the other direction, so that the same dust hits you twice, clogging your eyes, ears, mouth and every other pore. That's a good day. The next day it is freezing cold, and while the wind carries less dust, it penetrates your every bone. Thus we are free to swear on any given day, either because it's too hot or because it's too cold! To boot, nothing much happens. Three times a week the cinematograph brings some relief. Once a week there is a concert that everybody shuns. I'm drinking my various cups of coffee

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in the club house of the bowling club, which is rather comfortable. It's "full speed ahead" for the Turkish lessons; learning the language takes a bit of work, but I don't mind that at all. Mail from Germany is scarce; I've had a letter from Alma Spagl but none from Mother.

Beyerlein wrote from New Guinea. In Ralum, Mirow has converted the old Kanack depot into a hotel with a tract for the rooms, a bowling alley and an ice and soda water factory. The time is ripe to pay a visit there. Maybe, when peace arrives, we'll be released first and allowed to sail to Rabaul. On the one hand, I'm very much looking forward to going back there, although I

don't know if I'll reach an agreement with the company and for how long. On the other hand, I'm afraid to go back there because I'm not feeling strong and healthy enough; I'm worried that my kidneys and my genital organs are sick and weak and that I could fall seriously ill there or even die. Maybe these worries are already the first sign of

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dementia or barbed-wire-itis, or however else you want to call it. – Generally, the chance of peace is being met with more stoicism than I expected! If only the day were here already; everything else would fall into place. (4.30pm)

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Wednesday, 6 November 1918

Hurrah! We are going home! The odds are 10:1 that we have weathered the worst of the captivity storm. There are even some optimists here who firmly believe that the armistice is a done deal. The newspapers have reported official Allied armistice with Bulgaria, Turkey and Austria-Hungary. And they say that an armistice with Germany is but hours away. Because here in camp all the flags, including the hospital flag, have been struck already, the optimists take this as meaning armistice.

The political discussions here could drive you mad. They start at 6am and don't stop until 11pm, there's no escaping them, not in the cow park, not in the bowling alley, not in the Duck Coop or in the lavatories. I'm off to the cinema as often as possible, because at least there you can forget about war and politics for a few hours. This period of feverish expectation and tension, with all its excitements and telegrams, is just as hard to bear as days without any content. The

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Austrians are hoping to be released within days. But where to is another question. One wants to stay in Australia, the other wants to go to New Guinea, or Colombo, Bangkok, Singapore, Germany. Each claims that his intention has the best chance of coming true and insists, so the tohuwabohu is complete. The Australians, not without calculation, keep absolutely silent and none of us knows anything.

The camp has established a subcommittee in charge of liquidation. Once we are all off to god knows where, a representative of the German government, probably de Haas from the consulate, who is also a reputable Sydney merchant, would sell everything left behind. The proceeds would be handed to the German ambassador and everybody would later have to stake his claim with him. The available cash could be distributed right here, except that there is none, because there's no limit to charity and donations to the Red Cross are advisable, etc. Personally, if I were to see

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any cash at all, which I doubt, I would keep it, because the Red Cross and other organisations of

its type have done absolutely nothing for us, have not moved a finger in 4 years for any prisoner in Australia. Tit for tat!

If all that is reported in the newspapers is true, then Germany and its allies are indeed in big trouble and one could turn grey over it; which is not to say that all my grey hair is a result of such contemplations.

The terms of the armistice with Turkey reportedly include [Allied] occupation of the Dardanelles, access to the Black Sea, overall control of post and telegraph services, occupation of the Black Sea ports, etc. The terms for Austria are pretty much the same and even an occupation of Trieste is suggested. I must say I'm curious to see how much of it will be true in the end.

To judge from local reports, Germany's internal affairs are dire. The Kaiser

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is expected to abdicate and the Wittelsbach clan is pretending to the imperial throne. Hindenburg and Ludendorff have already resigned. There are riots and revolts in several cities, revilements of the Kaiser, Liebknecht was pardoned and the comrades are baying for a republic.

It's even worse for Austria. Hungary becomes a republic, as does Bohemia. Czechia, Slovakia, Ruthenia, Ukraine, Dalmatia, Croatia, Istria and [indecipherable] are all becoming independent, partly as republics, partly as monarchies. Count Tisza assassinated, the emperor has fled, street fighting in Vienna and thousands of other bad news. The Lord may bestow peace on earth and goodwill towards men. (11 o'clock)

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Monday, 25 November 1918

The local rags report that on 11 November 1918, [Matthias] Erzberger as head of the German delegation, which included Kuthmann, Liebnowsky, Generals Winterfeld and Gründel, signed the armistice at French headquarters. The first step towards peace on earth! A bitter step for Germany if the reported terms are indeed true: The German army evacuates France and Belgium, and the Allies occupy the left bank of the Rhine as well as [bridgeheads with a radius of] 30 kilometres on the right bank. The enemy oversees the administration of the occupied territories even though German officials stay in office and Germany pays for the occupying forces. A huge amount of cannon, machine guns and other weaponry will be handed over. They say that all U-boats and $\frac{3}{4}$ of the warships have already surrendered to England and are quarantined in a Scottish harbour. The blockade remains and, worse, the best part of our railway carriages will be in enemy hands for the duration of the armistice. Germany, forced by famine to accept such an armistice,

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now really faces a famine. New notes were sent to Wilson and apparently America is making

efforts to supply food to Germany.

What I personally find hardest to take is the clause that all English prisoners on German soil are to be released immediately, whereas we have to tough it out here until the actual peace conference. – Sydney, like all big cities of the Allies, was ecstatically celebrating the declaration of armistice. They already had received word of an armistice on 9 November and wasted no time getting plastered and making a hell of a racket in the streets; in the course of the day the news was revoked, but Sydney kept on celebrating. So on 11 November, all drinking holes were preventatively ordered closed, but everybody drank and celebrated anyway. One of the soldiers here said: It was revolting, and the ladies in particular behaved like whores!

Here in camp we more or less kept calm; after all, we had been forewarned and had no reason to celebrate. But the whole situation

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has been debated and analysed so often that it could make you sick the moment anybody opens his mouth. I have to force myself just to write about it. Really bad, however, must be the internal affairs back home; the Kaiser and all the state sovereigns and princes, 278 in all, have reportedly been toppled, chased out or forced to abdicate. Until a decision by the national assembly, Prince Max of Baden leads a provisional government, but the rest of this government are all socialists: Ebert as chancellor, Scheidemann as minister, etc. Eisner as regent in Bavaria? First we heard of a bloody revolution, of street battles, etc, but now we are told that the whole movement has been peaceful, that the revolution has been exemplary and that calm reigns in Germany.

From here it's nigh impossible to know what really happened — as an aside, the Kaiser is said to have fled to Holland and be interned there — but for me the most important thing is that Germany is united, that they do away with all the small

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fiefdoms and principalities, that Germany becomes a republic or, if there is to be an emperor like they said in [18]48, that it is one who does as the people want. —

I feel sick, edgy, listless, my kidneys and my back hurt, it could drive me crazy, and I have only one wish, to get out of here really quick. I still don't know if they will us let go back to New Guinea or deport us all to Germany. At the moment, we are threatened by the flu, or the pneumonic plague as they now say, which broke out in New Zealand and reportedly already reached Sydney; should this plague reach our camp, it would certainly mean death for 2,500–5,000 men, given the sanitary conditions here and a mere 30 hospital beds. And since we are all so dulled, so terribly tired, so dispirited, we don't even care if it's feasible or not. We just vegetate like mangy dogs, the world outside doesn't seem to exist. We are but tired, indifferent, physically and mentally sick. (10am)

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Tuesday, 17 December 1918

Otto Wortmann internment camp papers, 13 September 1918- 17 February 1919

*MLMSS 261 / Box 6 / Item 52
Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW*

Even though we sit here with nothing to do, it is rather strange how time can escape us. Every day I wake up or fall asleep with the best intentions, but once I have studied Turkish for one or two hours, I am exhausted for the rest of the day, with no desire or energy for any other activity, and all I can do is read or walk in circles in the "cow park". This amazing ability to busy oneself with nothing for hours on end is another result of this captivity, along with my kidney pains and a weak and ailing heart. Sitting behind barbed wire for 3¹/₂ years like a beast, badly fed and constantly poked, destroys a man, makes him sick and incapable. The war is over! English and French prisoners have long since returned home, only we are still here in captivity. Nobody gives a damn about us.

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Eight days from today it will be Christmas. I could howl with rage and frustration! Christmas, the feast of love! What love? Whose love? It will be the fourth Christmas I spend in captivity. Christmas! Here it's not even possible to be alone, to spend Christmas back home at least in thought, undisturbed. I'm beginning to hate all these people around me, even if they too are here against their will. Oh to be alone and able to meditate in peace and quiet for just one day! It's impossible here. Even in the privy somebody sits to your right and to your left! – I shall never be able here to write a proper diary or, as I had planned, to chronicle our Pentecostal ride from Trial Bay to here. That was Whitsunday, now it's Christmas. I have achieved nothing in all this time except for learning a bit of Turkish and becoming old and miserable.

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Recently we had a heavy dispute with our clergymen. These high priests of humbleness and charity had finally managed to be treated like officers and promptly demanded to be housed like officers and for us to surrender our messes to them. The provost marshal sent his sergeant and we were ordered to evacuate the premises; we refused; great big stink in the camp; the committee stumped as always; I took this opportunity to tell Widmann off; then the order to imprison us; negotiations with Widmann. The threat of being arrested was effective enough, however, to turn my proposal of a vote into a farce, since 8 of 14 men promptly voted for evacuation without resistance — the 8 men, in fact, who had protested the loudest. This more than anything else in this whole captivity riled me. I was sick with frustration. Widmann then went to see the commander and we were given time until the next morning. Now, however,

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the noble clergymen, aware of the hostile mood, revoked their claim and so we are still living in our old quarters, which we had only just debugged a few days earlier. –

Another matter:

Germany has sent 36,000 Mark, to be distributed as a Christmas present among all the men. Those charged with the task — de Haas, Dr Pupke, First Lieutenant Gerdes — installed themselves in an open dining hall and then denied anyone the right to claim his share who already receives money from elsewhere or has been earning money by working in the camp. First the absolute tactlessness of rebuffing these people in front of the whole camp, then the

fact that the wrong people ended up getting the money, those who were always too lazy to earn a proper living and wouldn't be given a cent anywhere else in the world, those like Mr von Schmidhals, the Buddhists, Bauer, the reservists and other vermin. I doubt that this was the intention of the donors.

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I, and others, have to borrow the money that we need here and have to repay it with usurious interest or work it off later in back-breaking labour, whereas the vagabond is being subsidised.

I could have made good use of the money. Still, I rather starve than humiliate myself. It means I have to spend Christmas without money, why would a prisoner need much food or tobacco anyway ... and don't we all love each other at Christmas. (2.30pm)

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Monday, 10 February 1919

Christmas and New Year have gone. Grey and monotonous. The new year has brought no change and I'm still here, sad, desperate and bitter. Stuck here ill and miserable as if nothing had happened out there in the world. As if the end of this gigantic fight, the armistice, the enormous changes back home were nothing but chimera. There's simply nothing happening here. We are sickened by everything, everybody, not least by our own selves, fraught with weakness and faults, lack of energy and sloth. No mail from home! No news from any other part of the world. New Guinea keeps mum and the money is running out.

Daily there are rumours that we are about to be shipped home, to be released. Two weeks ago they asked who wanted to go to Germany, who to New Guinea; I opted for Rabaul. (I just heard that Jerssen, against his promise, opted for Germany.) We sit here and sit here.

Australia is ravaged by the "flu"; 50 dead in Sydney, 3,000 dead in Melbourne. This camp

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has been quarantined. If the plague ever reached it, at least half the men would die. There are no doctors, no hospital. I am at a point where I don't care if I die here or in New Guinea or at home, should I ever make it there. I am defeated, my kidneys, my kidneys, my spinal cord are rotting! Just one wish: get me out of here! Maybe all will be well one day.

Monday, 17 February 1919

Temperatures: the day before yesterday: max. 45°; yesterday: 42°, today: 43°; now, at 9pm: 39°!

I am moved. And should still work hard on my Turkish. Yesterday mail from Mother and [indecipherable]. All are well, thank God. Oh Lord, please get me out of this inferno.

Daily activities: Turkish, reading, swimming, domino. Walking.

Next door, Harst and Wimmertz are playing the guitar and the zither, a waltz: "[indecipherable] Nights".

Music is not always welcome!

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The last days of Tr. Bay: music, cinema. The theatre just finished. Enormous commotion. Tomorrow I'm leaving here. Naturally, I'm broke. Schweizer helps out. Farewell lunch at the Ducks Coop. Packing! Terrible agitation. Chaos. Burning down the huts. Decampment. March to an unknown destiny. On foot (9am) to Southwest Rocks. Environment: [indecipherable]. Soldiers' songs. Boat trip up the Maclay [sic] River to Kempsey, 3.45pm. Environment: barren, but freedom! Much jostling, nothing to eat. Saw men and beasts in liberty. Kempsey: March to the station, right through town. Life in an Australian "city"; clean, made-up faces! Railway trip: Life in a compartment. Hering, Schrieber, Huber, Broadbelt, Hayer, Jerssen. Environment. At last back in a railway! Liverpool is nearing. Confiscation of papers, inspection. Internment camp! All empty and bleak. Mess, noise, no quiet, cold, cold, diarrhoea. The prospect of a new camp. The Liverpool dust! A dispute with the Swiss Consul. A small revolution at the barbed-wire fence. Provost marshal. Relocation at last. Jochen is leaving us. Wittrock is in hospital. Detlevssen demented. New camp! Housing: Täufert throws in the towel.

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Dispute over Berblingen.

[End of the written diary, the remaining two pages contain various stamps and a piece of bark.]

[Transcriber's notes:

Pg. 13. Prime Minister Alexander Malinov and Agrarian leader Aleksandar Stamboliyski, who was not yet a member of the government.

Pg. 16. Enver -Ismail Enver Pasha, Taalaat Pasha -Mehmed Talaat Pasha, Tewfiek -Ahmed Tefvik Pasha]

[Transcribed and translated from German by Rosemarie Graffagnini for the State Library of New South Wales]