

# Germany's Dishonoured Army

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Title: Germany's Dishonoured Army  
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Release Date: July 15, 2014 [EBook #46293]

Language: English

Character set encoding: UTF-8

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GERMANY'S  
DISHONOURED ARMY.

ADDITIONAL RECORDS OF GERMAN  
ATROCITIES IN FRANCE.

BY  
PROFESSOR J. H. MORGAN.

(Late Home Office Commissioner with the British  
Expeditionary Force.)

1915.

THE PARLIAMENTARY RECRUITING COMMITTEE,

12, DOWNING STREET, S.W.

(M 3942) Wt. w. 8147-565 500M 8/15 H & S

A DISHONOURED ARMY.

\_In November, 1914, Professor Morgan was commissioned by the Secretary of State for Home Affairs to undertake the investigation in France into the alleged breaches of the laws of war by the German troops. His investigations extended over a period of four or five months. The first six weeks were spent in visiting the base hospitals and convalescent camps at Boulogne and Rouen, and the hospitals at Paris; during the remaining three months he was attached to the General Headquarters Staff of the British Expeditionary Force. Professor Morgan orally interrogated some two or three thousand officers and soldiers, representing almost every regiment in the British armies and all of whom had recently been engaged on active service in the field. The whole of these inquiries were conducted by Professor Morgan personally, but his inquiries at headquarters were of a much more systematic character. There, owing to the courtesy of Lieutenant-General Sir Archibald Murray, the late Chief of the General Staff, he had the assistance of the various services--in particular the Adjutant-General, the Provost-Marshal, the Director of Military Intelligence, the Director of Medical Services and their respective staffs--and also of the civil authorities, within the area at present occupied by the British armies, such as the sous-prefets, the procureurs de la République, the commissaires de police, and the maires of the communes. In this way he was enabled not only to obtain corroboration of the statements taken down at the base in the earlier stages, but also to make a close local study of the behaviour of the German troops towards the civil population during their occupation of the districts recently evacuated by them. The following is extracted (by permission of the Editor) from statements by Professor Morgan which appeared in the "Nineteenth Century" for June, 1915\_:--

[BY PROFESSOR J. H. MORGAN.]

A German military writer (von der Goltz) of great authority predicted some years ago that the next war would be one of inconceivable violence. The prophecy appears only too true as regards the conduct of German troops in the field; it has rarely been distinguished by that chivalry which is supposed to characterise the freemasonry of arms. One of our most distinguished Staff officers remarked to me that the Germans have no sense of honour in the field, and the almost uniform testimony of our officers and men induces me to believe that the remark is only too true.

Abuse of the white flag has been very frequent, especially in the earlier stages of the campaign on the Aisne, when our officers, not having been disillusioned by bitter experience, acted on the assumption that they had to deal with an honourable opponent. Again and again the white flag was put up, and when a company of ours advanced unsuspectingly and without supports to take prisoners,

the Germans who had exhibited the token of surrender parted their ranks to make room for a murderous fire from machine-guns concealed behind them. Or, again, the flag was exhibited in order to give time for supports to come up. It not infrequently happened that our company officers, advancing unarmed to confer with the German company commander in such cases, were shot down as they approached. The Camerons, the West Yorks, the Coldstreams, the East Lancs, the Wiltshires, the South Wales Borderers, in particular, suffered heavily in these ways. In all these cases they were the victims of organised German units, i.e., companies or battalions, acting under the orders of responsible officers.

There can, moreover, be no doubt that the respect of the German troops for the Geneva Convention is but intermittent. Cases of deliberate firing on stretcher-bearers are, according to the universal testimony of our officers and men, of frequent occurrence. It is almost certain death to attempt to convey wounded men from the trenches over open ground except under cover of night.

=Killing the Defenceless Wounded.=--A much more serious offence, however, is the deliberate killing of the wounded as they lie helpless and defenceless on the field of battle. This is so grave a charge that were it not substantiated by the considered statements of officers, non-commissioned officers, and men, one would hesitate to believe it. But even after rejecting, as one is bound to do, cases which may be explained by accident, mistake, or the excitement of action, there remains a large residuum of cases which can only be explained by deliberate malice. No other explanation is possible when, as has not infrequently happened, men who have been wounded by rifle fire in an advance, and have had to be left during a retirement for reinforcements, are discovered, in our subsequent advance, with nine or ten bayonet wounds or with their heads beaten in by the butt-ends of rifles. Such cases could not have occurred, the enemy being present in force, without the knowledge of superior officers. Indeed, I have before me evidence which goes to show that German officers have themselves acted in similar fashion.

Some of the cases reveal a leisurely barbarity which proves great deliberation; cases such as the discovery of bodies of despatch-riders burnt with petrol or "pegged out" with lances or of soldiers with their faces stamped upon by the heel of a boot, or of a guardsman found with numerous bayonet wounds evidently inflicted as he was in the act of applying a field dressing to a bullet wound. There also seems no reason to doubt the independent statements of men of the Loyal North Lancs, whom I interrogated on different occasions, that the men of one of their companies were killed on the 20th of December after they had surrendered and laid down their arms. To what extent prisoners have been treated in this manner it is impossible to say--dead men tell no tales--but an exceptionally able Intelligence Officer at the headquarters of the Cavalry Corps informed me that it is believed that when British prisoners are taken in small parties they are put to death in cold blood. Certain it is that our men when captured are kicked, robbed of all they possess, threatened with death if they will not give information, and in some cases forced to dig trenches....

#### THE PROOFS OF POLICY.

The question as to how far these outrages are attributable to policy and superior orders becomes imperative. It was at first difficult to

answer. For a long time I did not find, nor did I expect to find, any documentary orders to that effect. Such orders, if given at all, were much more likely to be verbal, for it is extremely improbable that the German authorities would be so unwise as to commit them to writing. But the outrages upon combatants were so numerous and so collective in character that I began to suspect policy at a very early stage in my investigations....

=Frenzy against British Troops.=--On the 3rd of May I visited the Ministry of War in Paris at the invitation of the French military authorities, and was received by M. le Capitaine René Petit, Chef de Service du Contentieux, who conducted me to the department where the diaries of German prisoners were kept. I made a brief preliminary examination of them, and discovered the following passage (which I had photographed) in the diary of a German N.C.O., Göttsche, of the 85th Infantry Regiment (the IXth Corps), fourth company detached for service, under date "Okt. 6, 1914, bei Antwerpen":--

The Captain called us to him and said: "In the fortress [i.e. Antwerp] which we have to take there are in all probability Englishmen. But I do not want to see any Englishmen prisoners in the hands of this company." A general "Bravo" of assent was the answer.

This malignant frenzy against British troops, so carefully instilled, is borne out by a passage in another diary, now in the possession of the French Ministry of War, which was found on the 22nd of April on the body of Richard Gerhold, of the 71st Regiment of Infantry of the Reserve, Fourth Army Corps, who was killed in September at Nouvron:--

Here also things occur which should not be. Great atrocities are of course committed upon Englishmen and Belgians; every one of them is now knocked on the head without mercy. But woe to the poor German who falls into their hands.

As regards the last sentence in this diary, which is one long chapter of horrors and betrays a ferocious credulity, it is worthy of remark that I have seen at the French Ministry of War the diary of a German N.C.O. named Schulze, who, judging by internal evidence, was a man of exceptional intelligence, in which the writer refers to tales of French and Belgian atrocities circulated among the men by his superior officers. He shrewdly adds that he believes the officers invented these stories in order to prevent him and his comrades from surrendering.

A less conclusive passage, but a none the less suspicious one, is to be found in a diary now in my possession. It is the diary of an Unteroffizier, named Ragge, of the 158th Regiment, and contains (under date October 21) the following:--

We pursued the enemy as far as we saw him. We "knocked out" many English. The English lay on the ground as if sown there. Those of the Englishmen who were still alive in the trenches were stuck or shot. Our company made 61 prisoners.

=Damning Brigade Order.=--So far I have only dealt with the acts of small German units--i.e., companies of infantry. I now come to the most damning proofs of a policy of cold-blooded murder of wounded and prisoners, initiated and carried out by a whole brigade under the orders of a Brigadier-General. This particular investigation took me a long time, but the results are, I think, conclusive. It may be remembered that some months ago the French military authorities published in the French newspapers what purported to be the text of an

order issued by a German Brigadier-General, named Stenger, commanding the 58th Brigade, in which he ordered his troops to take no prisoners and to put to death without mercy every one who fell into their hands, whether wounded and defenceless or not. The German Government immediately denounced the alleged order as a forgery. I determined to see whether I could establish its authenticity, and in February last I obtained a copy of the original from M. Mollard, of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who is a member of the Commission appointed by the French Government to inquire into the alleged German atrocities. The text of that order was as follows:--

Army Order of 26 Aug., 1914, about 4 p.m., such as was given to his troops as a Brigade or Army Order by the leader of the 7th Company of the 112th Regiment of Infantry at Thionville, at the entrance of the wood of Saint Barbe.

To date from this day no prisoners will be made any longer. All the prisoners will be executed. The wounded, whether armed or defenceless, will be executed. Prisoners, even in large and compact formations, will be executed. Not a man will be left alive behind us.

Taking this alleged order as my starting-point, I began to make inquiries at British Headquarters as to the existence of any information about the doings of the 112th Regiment. I soon found that there was good reason to suspect it. Our Intelligence Department placed in my hands the records of the examination of two men of this regiment who had been captured by us. One of them volunteered a statement to one of our Intelligence Officers on the 23rd of November to the effect that his regiment had orders to treat Indians well, but were allowed to treat British prisoners as they pleased. This man's testimony appeared to be reliable, as statements he made on other points, i.e., as to the German formations, were subsequently found to be true, and his information as to discrimination in the treatment of Indians entirely bore out the conclusions I had already arrived at on that particular point. The German witness in question further stated that 65 out of 150 British prisoners were killed in cold blood by their escort on or about the 23rd of October on the road to Lille, and that the escort were praised for their conduct. Other German prisoners have, I may add, also made statements that they had orders to kill all the English who fell into their hands....

At the end of April--too late, unfortunately, for use by Lord Bryce's Committee--one of our Intelligence Officers placed before me the following entry in the field note-book of a German prisoner, Reinhart Brenneisen[1], reservist, belonging to the 4th Company, 112th Regiment, and dated in August (the same month as appears on the face of the order in question):

Then came a brigade order that all French, whether wounded or not, who fell into our hands were to be shot. No prisoners were to be made.

This, I think, may be said to put the reality of the brigade order in question beyond doubt.

The cumulative effect of this evidence, coupled with the statements of so many of our men who claim to have been eye-witnesses of wholesale bayoneting of the wounded, certainly confirms suspicions of the gravest kind as to such acts having been done by authority. Neither the temperament of the German soldier nor the character of German discipline (furchtbar streng--"frightfully strict"--as a German prisoner put it to me) makes it probable that the German soldiers acted

on their own initiative. It would, in any case, be incredible that so many cases of outrage could be sufficiently explained by any law of averages, or by the idiosyncrasies of the "bad characters" present in every large congregation of men....

#### TREATMENT OF CIVIL POPULATION.

It is clear that the treatment of civilians is regulated by no more rational or humane policy than that of intimidation or, even worse, of sullen vindictiveness. As the German troops passed through the communes and towns of the arrondissements of Ypres, Hazebrouck, Bethune, and Lille, they shot indiscriminately at the innocent spectators of their march; the peasant tilling his fields, the refugee tramping the roads, and the workman returning to his home. To be seen was often dangerous, to attempt to escape being seen was invariably fatal. Old men and boys and even women and young girls were shot like rabbits. The slightest failure to comply with the peremptory demands of the invader has been punished with instant death.

The curé of Pradelle, having failed to find the key of the church tower, was put against the wall and shot; a shepherd at a lonely farmhouse near Rebais who failed to produce bread for the German troops had his head blown off by a rifle; a baker at Moorslede who attempted to escape was suffocated by German soldiers with his own scarf; a young mother at Bailleul who was unable to produce sufficient coffee to satisfy the demands of twenty-three German soldiers had her baby seized by one of the latter and its head dipped in scalding water; an old man of seventy-seven years of age at La Ferté Gaucher who attempted to protect two women in his house from outrage was killed with a rifle shot.

= No Value on Human Life. =--I select these instances from my notes at random--they could be multiplied many times--as indications of the temper of the German troops. They might, perhaps, be dismissed as the unauthorised acts of small patrols were it not that there is only too much evidence to show that the soldiers are taught by their superiors to set no value upon human life, and things have been done which could not have been done without superior orders.

For example, at Bailleul, La Gorgue, and Doulieu, where no resistance of any kind was offered to the German troops, and where the latter were present in force under the command of commissioned officers, civilians were taken in groups, and after being forced to dig their own graves were shot by firing parties in the presence of an officer. At Doulieu, which is a small village, eleven civilians were shot in this way; they were strangers to the place, and it was only by subsequent examination of the papers found on their bodies that some of them were identified as inhabitants of neighbouring villages. If these men had been guilty of any act of hostility it is not clear why they were not shot at once in their own villages, and inquiries at some of the villages from which they were taken have revealed no knowledge of any act of the kind. It is, however, a common practice for the German troops to seize the male inhabitants (especially those of military age) of the places they occupy and take them away on their retreat. Twenty-five were so taken from Bailleul and nothing has been heard of them since. There is only too much reason to suppose that the same fate has overtaken them as that which befell the unhappy men executed at Doulieu.

= A Possible Explanation. =--I believe the explanation of these sinister proceedings to be that the men were compelled to dig trenches

for the enemy, to give information as to the movement of their own troops, and to act as guides (all clearly practices which are a breach of the laws of war and of the Hague Regulations), and then, their presence being inconvenient and their knowledge of the enemy's positions and movements compromising, they were put to death. This is not a mere surmise. The male inhabitants of Warneton were forced to dig trenches for the enemy, and an inhabitant of Merris was compelled to go with the German troops and act as a guide; it is notorious that the official manual of the German General Staff Kriegsbrauch im Landskriege condones, and indeed indoctrinates, such breaches of the laws of war. British soldiers who were taken prisoners by the Germans and subsequently escaped were compelled by their captors to dig trenches, and in a field note-book found on a soldier of the 100th Saxon Body Grenadiers (XIIth Corps) occurs the following significant passage:--

My two prisoners worked hard at digging trenches. At midday I got the order to rejoin at village with my prisoners. I was very glad, as I had been ordered to shoot them both as soon as the French attacked. Thank God it was not necessary....

#### OUTRAGES UPON WOMEN.

When life is held so cheap, it is not surprising that honour and property are not held more dear. Outrages upon the honour of women by German soldiers have been so frequent that it is impossible to escape the conviction that they have been condoned and indeed encouraged by German officers. As regards this matter I have made a most minute study of the German occupation of Bailleul. This place was occupied by a regiment of German Hussars in October for a period of eight days. During the whole of that period the town was delivered over to the excesses of a licentious soldiery and was left in a state of indescribable filth.

There were at least thirty cases of outrages on girls and young married women, authenticated by sworn statements of witnesses and generally by medical certificates of injury. It is extremely probable that, owing to the natural reluctance of women to give evidence in cases of this kind, the actual number of outrages largely exceeds this. Indeed, the leading physician of the town, Dr. Bels, puts the number as high as sixty. At least five officers were guilty of such offences, and where the officers set the example the men followed. The circumstances were often of a peculiarly revolting character; daughters were outraged in the presence of their mothers, and mothers in the presence or the hearing of their little children. In one case, the facts of which are proved by evidence which would satisfy any court of law, a young girl of nineteen was violated by one officer while the other held her mother by the throat and pointed a revolver, after which the two officers exchanged their respective rôles. After the outrage they dragged the girl outside and asked if she knew of any other young girls ("jeunes filles") in the neighbourhood, adding that they wanted to do to them what they had done to her.

=\_No use appealing to German Officers.\_--The officers and soldiers usually hunted in couples, either entering the houses under pretence of seeking billets, or forcing the doors by open violence. Frequently the victims were beaten and kicked, and invariably threatened with a loaded revolver, if they resisted. The husband or father of the women and girls was usually absent on military service; if one was present he was first ordered away under some pretext; and disobedience of civilians to

German orders, however improper, is always punished with instant death. In several cases little children heard the cries and struggles of their mother in the adjoining room to which she had been carried by a brutal exercise of force. No attempt was made to keep discipline, and the officers, when appealed to for protection, simply shrugged their shoulders. Horses were stabled in salons; shops and private houses were looted (there are nine hundred authenticated cases of pillage)....

The German troops were often drunk and always insolent. But significantly enough, the bonds of discipline thus relaxed were tightened at will and hardly a single straggler was left behind.

Inquiries in other places, in the villages of Meteren, Oultersteen, and Nieppe, for example, establish the occurrence of similar outrages upon defenceless women, accompanied by every circumstance of disgusting barbarity. No civilian dare attempt to protect his wife or daughter from outrage. To be in possession of weapons of defence is to be condemned to instant execution, and even a village constable found in possession of a revolver (which he was required to carry in virtue of his office) was instantly shot at Westoutre. Roving patrols burnt farmhouses and turned the women and children out into the wintry and sodden fields with capricious cruelty and in pursuance of no intelligible military purpose.

#### PRIVATE PROPERTY.

As regards private property, respect for it among the German troops simply does not exist. By the universal testimony of every British officer and soldier whom I have interrogated the progress of German troops is like a plague of locusts over the land. What they cannot carry off they destroy. Furniture is thrown into the street, pictures are riddled with bullets or pierced by sword cuts, municipal registers burnt, the contents of shops scattered over the floor, drawers rifled, live stock slaughtered and the carcasses left to rot in the fields. This was the spectacle which frequently confronted our troops on the advance to the Aisne and on their clearance of the German troops out of Northern France. Cases of petty larceny by German soldiers appear to be innumerable; they take whatever seizes their fancy, and leave the towns they evacuate laden like pedlars. Empty ammunition waggons were drawn up in front of private houses and filled with their contents for despatch to Germany.

=\_Robbery--pure and simple.\_--I have had the reports of the local commissaires of police placed before me, and they show that in smaller villages like those of Caestre and Merris, with a population of about 1,500 souls or less, pillaging to the extent of 4,000\_l.\_ and 6,000\_l.\_ was committed by the German troops. I speak here of robbery which does not affect to be anything else. But it is no uncommon thing to find extortion officially practised by the commanding officers under various more or less flimsy pretexts. One of these consists of holding a town or village up to ransom under pretence that shots have been fired at the German troops. Thus at the village of Merris a sum of 2,000\_l.\_ was exacted as a fine from the Mayor at the point of a revolver under this pretence, this village of 1,159 inhabitants having already been pillaged to the extent of some 6,000\_l.\_ worth of goods. At La Gorgue, another small village, 2,000\_l.\_ was extorted under a threat that if it were not forthcoming the village would be burnt. At Warneton, a small village, a fine of 400\_l.\_ was levied. These fines were, it must be remembered, quite independent of the requisitions of supplies. As regards the latter, one of our Intelligence officers, whose duty it has



been to examine the forms of receipt given by German officers and men for such requisitions, informs me that, while the receipts for small sums of 100 francs or less bore a genuine signature, those for large sums were invariably signed "Herr Hauptmann von Koeppenick," the simple peasants upon whom this fraud was practised being quite unaware that the signature has a classical fictitiousness in Germany....

=\_German Officers' Bestial Ways.\_--Before I leave the subject of the treatment of private property by the German troops, I should like to draw the attention of the reader to some unpleasant facts which throw a baneful light on the temper of German officers and men. If one thing is more clearly established than another by my inquiries among the officers of our Staff and divisional commands, it is that châteaux or private houses used as the headquarters of German officers were frequently found to have been left in a state of bestial pollution, which can only be explained by gross drunkenness or filthy malice. Whichever be the explanation, the fact remains that, while to use the beds and the upholstery of private houses as a latrine is not an atrocity, it indicates a state of mind sufficiently depraved to commit one. Many of these incidents, related to me by our own officers from their own observations, are so disgusting that they are unfit for publication. They point to deliberate defilement.

=\_Methods of Savages.\_--The public has been shocked by the evidence, accepted by Lord Bryce's Committee as genuine, which tells of such mutilations of women and children as only the Kurds of Asia Minor had been thought capable of perpetrating. But the Committee were fully justified in accepting it--they could not do otherwise--and they have by no means published the whole. Pathologists can best supply the explanation of these crimes. I have been told by such that it is not at all uncommon in cases of rape or sexual excess to find that the criminal, when satiated by lust, attempts to murder or mutilate his victim. This is presumably the explanation--if one can talk of explanation--of outrages which would otherwise be incredible. The Committee hint darkly at perverted sexual instinct. Cases of sodomy and of the rape of little children did undoubtedly occur on a very large scale. Some of the worst things have never been published. This is not the time for mincing one's words but for plain speech. Disgusting though it is, I therefore do not hesitate to place on record an incident at Rebaix related to me by the Mayor of Coulommiers in the presence of several of his fellow-townsmen with corroborative detail. A respectable woman in that town was seized by some Uhlans who intended to ravish her, but her condition made rape impossible. What followed is better described in French.

Mme. H---, cafetière à Rebaix, mise nue par une patrouille allemande, obligée de parcourir ainsi toute sa maison, chassée dans la rue et obligée de regarder les cadavres de soldats anglais. Les allemands lui barbouillent la figure avec le sang de ses règles.

It is almost needless to say that the woman went mad. There is very strong reason to suspect that young girls were carried off to the trenches by licentious German soldiery, and there abused by hordes of savage and licentious men. People in hiding in the cellars of houses have heard the voices of women in the hands of German soldiers crying all night long until death or stupor ended their agonies.

One of our officers, a subaltern in the sappers, heard a woman's shrieks in the night coming from behind the German trenches near Richebourg l'Avoué; when we advanced in the morning and drove the Germans out a girl was found lying naked on the ground "pegged out" in

the form of a crucifix. I need not go on with this chapter of horrors. To the end of time it will be remembered, and from one generation to another, in the plains of Flanders, in the valleys of the Vosges, and on the rolling fields of the Marne, the oral tradition of men will perpetuate this story of infamy and wrong....

=\_Insolence which Knows no Pity.\_--Although I have some claims to write as a jurist I have here made no attempt to pray in aid the Hague Regulations in order to frame the counts of an indictment. The Germans have broken all laws, human and divine, and not even the ancient freemasonry of arms, whose honourable traditions are almost as old as war itself, has restrained them in their brutal and licentious fury. It is useless to attempt to discriminate between the people and their rulers; an abundance of diaries of soldiers in the ranks shows that all are infected with a common spirit. That spirit is pride, not the pride of high and pure endeavour, but that pride for which the Greeks found a name in the word ὑβρις the insolence which knows no pity and which feels no love. Long ago Renan warned Strauss of this canker which was eating into the German character. Pedants indoctrinated it, Generals instilled it, the Emperor preached it. The whole people were taught that war was a normal state of civilisation, that the lust of conquest and the arrogance of race were the most precious of the virtues. On this Dead Sea fruit the German people have been fed for a generation until they are rotten to the core.

#### FOOTNOTE

[1] Brenneisen is now a prisoner in England. The diary was a most carefully kept one.

#### TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE

-Obvious print and punctuation errors fixed.

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