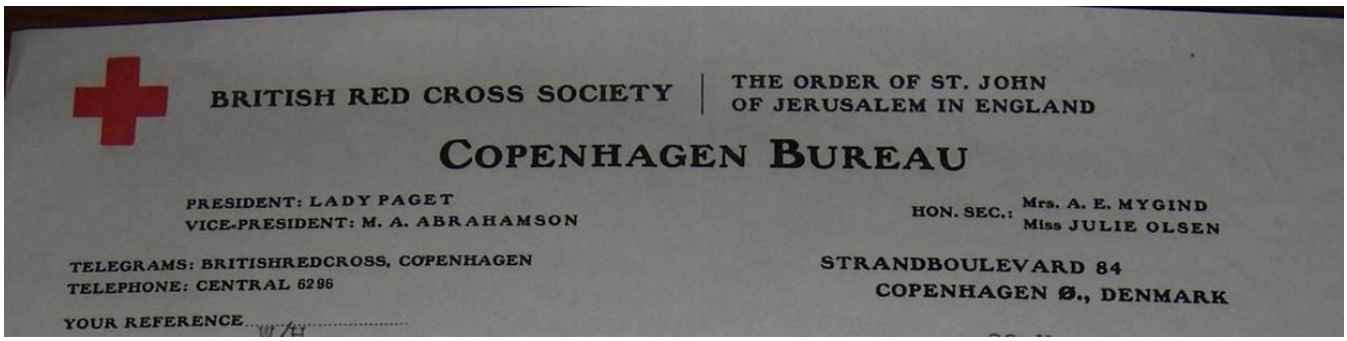
The Copenhagen Bureau

revised 10.02.2016


BRITISH RED CROSS SOCIETY | THE ORDER OF ST. JOHN OF JERUSALEM IN ENGLAND

COPENHAGEN BUREAU

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YOUR REFERENCE

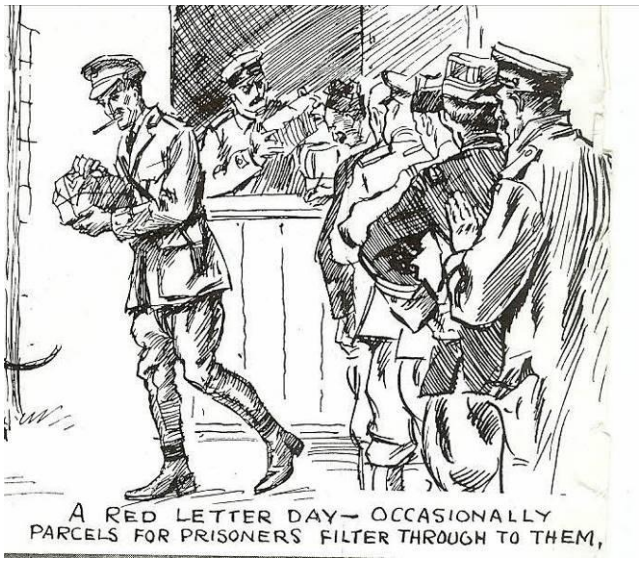
In the autumn of 1916 the "British Red Cross Society and Order of St. John of Jerusalem in England" (BRC) opened a bureau in Copenhagen. Its task was very specific, to send white bread to British prisoners of war in Germany and it was referred to as the Copenhagen Bureau.

The Germans had to provide food for the prisoners of war (pows) in their custody; International agreements stated that the amount of food should conform to their own soldiers' rations. In reality, the menu for a pow consisted of black bread (kriegsbrot) and substitute coffee for breakfast, thin soup for lunch and black bread again for dinner with a little herring, cheese or sausage occasionally. The Allied blockade very quickly had an effect on the amount of food available in Germany; it became very difficult for the Germans first and foremost to provide food and calories enough for their own soldiers. Civilians had to cope as well they could and the pows were the lowest priority. Many of the pows lived in miserable conditions; put into forced labour in mines or near the frontline, with inadequate accommodation, insufficient and poor quality food and usually without medical attention. At the end of the war Germany had taken 2.5 million prisoners, approximately 185,000 of whom were British. That so many survived as well as they did was largely due to the food they were sent from home and not least the bread they got from Copenhagen.

The first knowledge of a man's capture brought great joy to their family. They were not dead, and were out of the fray of the battlefield for the duration. The joy was soon tempered by another concern, what was the situation like for a prisoner of war? Was it something you came home alive from? The next thought would be what could the family do to improve the lives of their loved ones as long as the captivity lasted? Food parcels could be sent under the auspices of the Red Cross organisations, and by the autumn of 1914 many families were doing so.

As the weeks went by, and it was accepted that the war would not end any time soon, groups were formed by those interested in the welfare of prisoners of war. It was often the wives and mothers of prisoners who, together with officers' wives of their men's regiment who formed Care Committees. Other organisations such as the postal workers union looked after men who as civilians had worked for the post office. Some

organisations, for example "the National Cyclists Union", "adopted" pows who were not associated with their organisation. These groups could get approval to pack their own parcels or parcels could be purchased at authorized stores. It was expected that all parcels met the specified requirements regarding weight etc. and were not used to smuggle compass or such escape aids. The parcels were then shipped free via the British Red Cross to Germany, where German Red Cross freighted them to the prisoners of war.



The parcels were sent individually to named prisoners of war and were paid for privately by either family, regimental Care Committee, or by others who had adopted that person. It was a financial burden for a poor family to pay for a weekly food parcel and many were unable to do so. Everything was self-financed and groups spent considerable time and effort to collect money to fund their activities. There were different rules for the parcels, depending on if the prisoner was a rating, officer or civilian pow. It was recognized that the system which had developed ad hoc had many shortcomings. Firstly you had to be known to be a prisoner of war and be registered with the Red Cross as such. Then you had to have family or a link with an organization that could afford to send you parcels, or be adopted by someone willing to do so. However, if you were a wealthy officer you could receive many parcels from family and friends with all sorts of delicacies and wine. Several times during the war the system was changed, and improvements were made in the light of problems which had arisen. Eventually if the pow's name was registered and the parcels did not get lost on the way, it was on the food in the parcels from England that the men survived.

Petty Officer A. Picton Warlow was captured in the first months of war and interned at Döberitz camp. His wife Camilla sent him a parcel of miscellaneous goods. He told her that what he was most pleased with was the bread. What he wanted now was that she should send bread to him on a weekly basis, enough to share with his fellow prisoners. The enterprising Mrs. Picton Warlow subsequently took the initiative to the Bedford Bread Fund, which raised money and sent bread to sailors interned in Germany. This was recognized as a good idea and after some time she approached the British Red Cross and suggested they establish a way that all British

prisoners of war in Germany could be supplied with white bread, and not only those who had someone to provide it. The bread would complement their food, either the miserable German pow diet or the food, mostly canned, that the luckiest pows received in parcels from home. As well as the prisoners of war's diet being greatly improved in vitamins and calories, it would also benefit them psychologically, being a taste of home and an indication that the people at home had their interests at heart.

In April 1915, Lady Grant Duff, wife of the minister at the British Legation in Switzerland, had established something similar in Berne, a Bread Bureau, which sent white bread to British prisoners of war in Germany and Austria. Within eighteen months they had gone from sending bread to 3 men to sending bread, food and clothing to 30,000 men on a weekly basis. The system was the same as with the parcels, families or organizations commissioned and paid for each prisoner. But there could be problems in obtaining flour in Switzerland and the war in southern Germany sometimes disturbed supplies to the camps.

There were also problems with the bread sent from England, which rarely reached the prisoners in a satisfactory condition. The desire to establish another Bread agency in a neutral country grew, and there were indications that Denmark could be a good choice. During the spring of 1916, Mrs. Picton Warlow went, together with Mr. Gee, to Copenhagen to investigate whether it was a good place to establish another Bread Bureau. They had an introduction to Miss Abrahamson, who introduced them to her brother Martin Arnold Abrahamson. The Abrahamsons were a Danish / Dutch Jewish family who had lived in London for many years, where Martin and his siblings were born and raised. Abrahamson helped them to explore the possibility and cost of producing bread in Copenhagen. They also contacted the Danish Red Cross, who had experience in the delivery of aid parcels to prisoners of war and who would be responsible for the shipment of bread from Copenhagen. Mrs. Picton Warlow and her companion returned to London, and nothing was heard from them over the next few months.

Mrs. Camilla Picton Warlow with her children John, Harold and Barbara, 7th May 1915.

It was white bread the pows were to have, and one can imagine that many Danes found it strange, maybe even incomprehensible that so much trouble and expense was being expended to send what they considered a luxury item to all prisoners. Especially during a war! Danes grow up with rye bread as a basic food which they believe to be healthy, filling and cheap, and which they actually think tastes good. White bread is for Sundays and birthdays. What was wrong with the bread the pows were given in their rations? Why couldn't they eat rye bread? They got kriegsbrot just like everyone else in Germany. The original kriegsbrot recipe contained 20% potato flour along with rye flour, egg and cocoa. By January 1915 bread was rationed in Berlin, six months later over all of Germany and after the potato harvest failed in 1916, all kinds of ingredients found their way into the bread dough. But the prisoners' aversion was not just to the kriegsbrot, Britons do not eat rye bread no matter how "delicious" it is. Now they had to, and many were dependent on what little they got to survive. The British hated the black bread, as they called it, which also gave them stomach ache. If they were lucky enough to have received a parcel from home, they happily gave their German bread rations to others, especially to the Russians who were hungry and liked the bread.

How much bread meant to prisoners of war can be seen from a postcard sent by a prisoner of war in Sennelager II camp, D. Macdougall, Gordon Highlanders, to his godmother in England, Mrs. Peal from Ealing, dated 2nd February 1916.

"Dear friend,

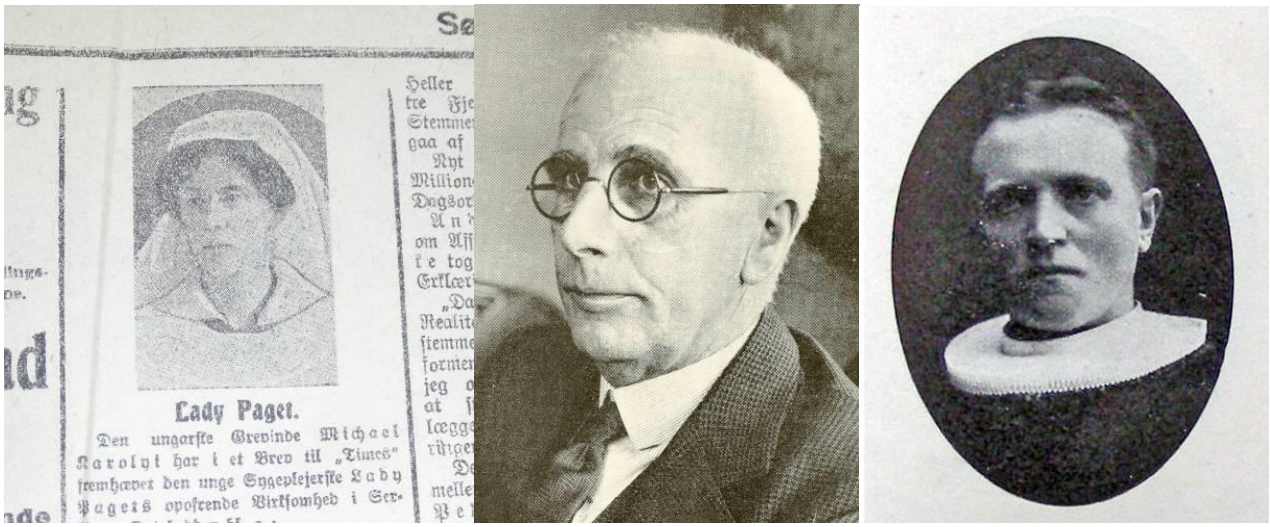
Still receiving parcel O.K. The cake is very nice, but if you do not think me ungrateful; I would deem it a favour if you could let me have the bread you used to send, instead of the cake. I am still getting Mrs. Wallis' bread from Switzerland, but most of us receiving it from there, would much sooner having a loaf from home. But we do not like to complain in case they think us ungrateful. Am in good health and doing well.

Yours in anticipation."

He would rather have bread than cake, and preferably from home.

A few amusing examples of the opposite position exist. Dane Thomas Dinesen (Karen Blixen's brother) fought in the "Royal Highlanders of Canada" in "Quebec regiment" for the Allies. He relates in his book that his battalion had moved 8-10 km forward and had taken many prisoners and guns. Now they sought in the German trenches for souvenirs. "But the only thing of interest I got hold of was a big, black loaf of rye-bread, - rather clammy and sour, but delicious all the same after 15 months of nothing but wheat bread. I toasted it over a little fire, slice after slice - the others looking in disgust." After the war the Danish Nurse Cecilie Lütken travelled on a mission to Hungary. She took several loaves of rye bread with her for her own use and "when I soaked the bread in a little water first it tasted very good and was chewable." German prisoners of war in England had enough food and did not need parcels from home to survive. Part of their rations was the white wheat-bread their British counterparts in Germany longed for. They for their part longed for black bread: white bread gave them problems with dyspepsia and constipation.

Many good forces worked diligently on behalf of prisoners of war in England. But it was a mess; some got nothing while others, a few, got more than enough. Early in 1915 a pow Relief Committee was established in London to coordinate the work, but all the voluntary work was independent and the committee had no power over them. It failed and was dissolved in September 1916. It was replaced by "Central Prisoners of War Committee of the British Red Cross and Order of St. John" (BRC HQ). From that time all pow help relating to food came under their umbrella. For the privates and civilian prisoners of war it meant that their names were put on a single list, and if they didn't have family, friends or regiment a sponsor was found. There was a different system for officers who were not expected to have trouble in that area.


Lady Paget.
Den ungarske Grevinde Michael Karolyi har i et Brev til „Times" fremhævet den unge Sygeplejerske Lady Pagets opofrende Virksomhed i Ser-

Lady Paget, Carl Frederik Jarl and Andreas Vangberg Storm

During the late summer of 1916 it was decided in London to open a Bread Bureau in Copenhagen which was to share the task with Berne and step in if and when there were problems with deliveries from there. Lady Paget, known for her relief work in Serbia and wife of the minister at the British Legation in Copenhagen, was the first president of "the British Red Cross and Order of St. John" section in Copenhagen. Martin Abrahamson became Vice President. Marcus Slade came from England to take up the post of director and a board was formed of committed people living in Copenhagen, some with connections with England. Mortimer Egerton Kennedy pastor of St. Albans, the English Church in Copenhagen, was British. Andreas Vangberg Storm, pastor at the Kastel church had been pastor at the Danish sailors' mission in Newcastle and his wife was English. Robert Erskine was British consul while Carl Frederik Jarl and Jens Olsen were Danish business men. And last but not least Mrs. Picton Warlow was on the Board. They would benefit from her experience and she would help get the agency up and running. There was sympathy for the British in Copenhagen after the submarine E 13 was torpedoed in August 1915 at Saltholm. Fifteen submariners had died and the surviving crew members were detained in Denmark for the rest of the war. The incident touched people deeply in Denmark and a number of Danes "adopted" prisoners of war and sent them letters and parcels, and now volunteered for the Bread Bureau.

Late summer was spent getting everything organized and the bureau opened in the small business premises of Bloch & Behrens' at Toldbodgade 19 and 21. Bloch & Behrens was a wool merchant company which had recently taken on two new staff, Jens Olsen and Niels Peter Pedersen, both extremely competent and enterprising men. The war paralysed international trading, not least in wool. At the suggestion of personnel at the British Legation in Copenhagen, Pedersen travelled to London in 1914, as an expert to advise in the talks regarding trade in raw textile materials in Scandinavia. A few weeks later the talks were dropped and Pedersen travelled on to Bloch & Behrens in the U.S.A. In Denmark Jens Olsen managed to achieve a special arrangement with the British government and Bloch & Behrens were able to handle all the raw wool they wanted. That is until German unrestricted submarine warfare put an end to it. Work in the wool trade closed down and presumably as an extension of Jens Olsen's collaboration with the British Legation he offered Bloch & Behrens premises for the Bread Bureau. He was a member of the board and became responsible for the daily shipment of parcels. Several of Bloch & Behrens employees who had become unemployed were given work for the bureau. Toldbodgade is very close to the British Legation which was in Bredegade and the British consul (and spy) Robert Erskine, who was also on the board also had his office in Toldbodgade at number 28.

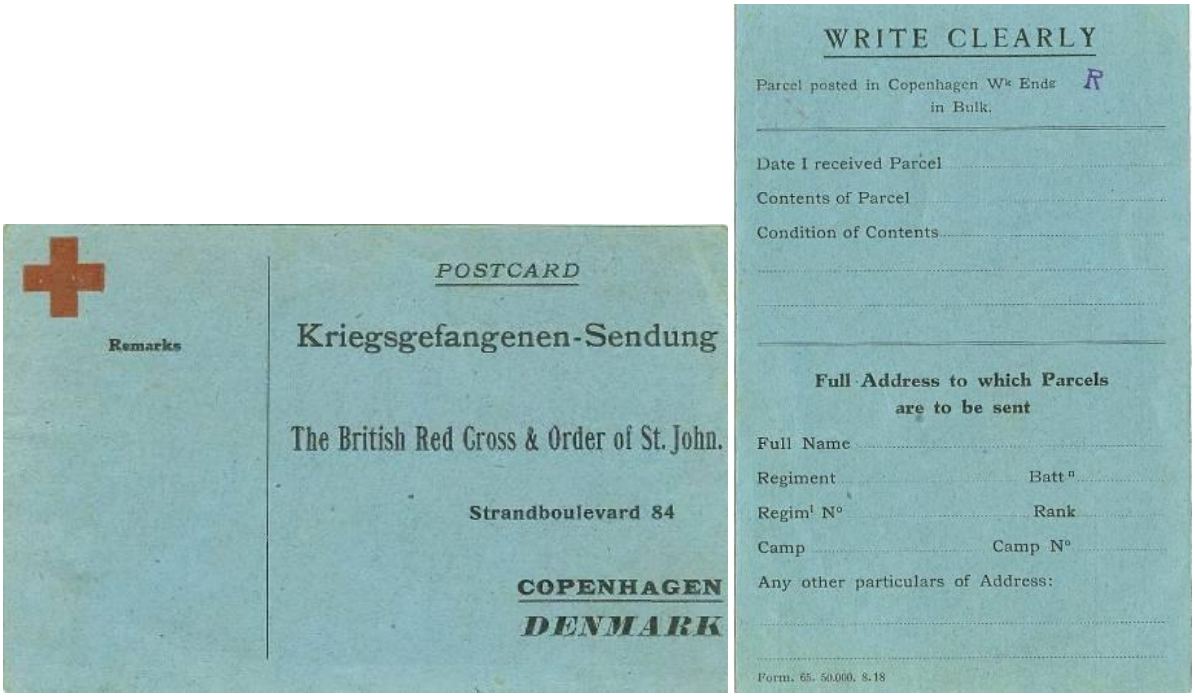
It is not known which of the Copenhagen bakers baked the white bread for the prisoners. Bakers were provided with the flour and fat they needed and an agreed amount was paid to them for every 100 kg of flour they baked into bread. Wheat flour, fat, oil, coal for cooking and string and wire for the packaging was imported from England. Fresh from the ovens the bread was transported in large trucks to Toldbodgade where it was allowed to cool for 24 hours. Each loaf was then wrapped in paper along with a postcard for the recipient to complete and send back. The postcard gave feedback on the date of receipt and the condition of the bread. Two loaves of bread were packed in a cardboard box and addressed to a specific prisoner. It was noted in the bureau card system who the bread was sent to and when. Large wagons freighted the parcels on to the Danish Red Cross (DRC) parcel office and from there they were transported to Germany. In February 1917 the Danish Red Cross established a packing office for single parcels in Hyskenstræde and for collective shipments at Raadhus pladsen 2, on premises owned by United Breweries. The DRC's packing departments were led by Benny Dessau, manager of Tuborg and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of United Breweries, and N.P. Pedersen. Pedersen, Jens Olsen's partner from Bloch and Behrens had returned to Denmark and was now Secretary of the DRC. It was the United Breweries which financed the running of the Danish Red Cross packing station while the British Red Cross paid the cost of freight from Denmark to Germany.

Benny Dessau

Marcus Warre Slade was sent from London to be the first director of the Copenhagen bread bureau. He was a lawyer who had lived in Hong Kong for seventeen years where he worked as a Kings Counsel (KC) in the Supreme Court. He was a highly respected citizen. One of his brothers joined him in Hong Kong, where they both bought houses and lived with their English wives, here also their children were born. Marcus Slade moved

with his family back to England in the spring of 1914. Both Marcus and his wife Isabella were of minor noble families, both their grandfathers were baronets. Marcus' second brother was an Admiral and his sister who had trained as a doctor, was married to a Dutch man. One senses a family who were confident and accustomed to being heard. The 41-year-old Isabella travelled with her 51 year old husband Marcus to Copenhagen, where she also was to work in the bureau. They had 3 children 14, 12 and 10 who were probably at boarding school in England.

With Mr. Slade as the daily general manager the bureau was initially divided into two main branches "Bread and General Supply Department" and "Despatching and Transit Department". Mrs. Picton Warlow was in charge of the first, being responsible for the files containing prisoner of war details which were constantly in need of update. Those prisoners who had received bread from her Bedford Bread Fund were transferred to the Copenhagen list. One card system contained the men's names in alphabetical order, arranged in order of their regiment. The other card system also contained the men's names in alphabetical order but arranged in order of the camp to which they were currently allocated. To keep this information as up to date as possible staff in this department were in daily contact with many different bodies. Information from both England and Germany was registered in the files and the information forwarded to other interested parties. Daily lists were made up of who the bread was to be sent to the following day so that labels and postcards would be ready for the despatch of bread parcels the next day. Information from the returned postcards from pows allowed prisoner details to be updated where necessary. They also provided information on how long the bread had taken to reach its destination and its condition on arrival. Other comments were noted and acted on if possible. Mrs. Picton Warlow made a monthly report which was sent to BRC HQ in London.



POSTCARD

Remarks

Kriegsgefangenen-Sendung

The British Red Cross & Order of St. John.

Strandboulevard 84

COPENHAGEN

DENMARK

WRITE CLEARLY

Parcel posted in Copenhagen Wk Ends in Bulk. R

Date I received Parcel .....

Contents of Parcel .....

Condition of Contents .....

Full Address to which Parcels are to be sent

Full Name .....

Regiment ..... Batt.n .....

Regim.l N° ..... Rank .....

Camp ..... Camp N° .....

Any other particulars of Address:

Form. 65. 50.000. 8.18

Jens Olsen and Mrs. Slade supervised the "Despatching and Transit Department." Mrs. Slade organized and had charge of the mostly volunteer workforce. In the first number of magazine “Vore Damer” in 1917 an indirect appeal for volunteers was made. It was suggested that women who wanted to do something on behalf of British prisoners of war would be most welcome. They should contact Director Slade by phone or meet up at the premises in the morning. Jens Olsen led the "packing" department. Properly packed parcels of bread were put on carts, taking them to the Danish Red Cross parcel department. The first shipment was sent on 15 October 1916, a delivery of bread to the 3,500 names in the prisoner of war register. The list was constantly growing. Each prisoner was to be sent 4 ½ pounds of bread each week. There was some debate in England that 3 parcels every 14 days were more appropriate, but this was not sent from Copenhagen.

Ruhleben, the camp housed in the horse racing track just outside Berlin, contained civilian prisoners of war. It held up to 5,000 men who had been interned at the beginning of the war. They were British citizens who lived in Germany or who happen to be in the country for some reason, on vacation, musicians on tour, students, fishermen or sailors in the German port, etc. They felt hungry and missed white bread just like the military prisoners of war. Early in March 1915 they received a visit from the American ambassador in Berlin, James Watson Gerard. At that time America was the protecting power for British interests, including pow issues. While he was shown around his car stood just inside the fence. The back of the car was very dirty and a desperate man wrote "We want bread, Ruhleben". The black bread, which they were given, they ate only of necessity, and rations were hardly sufficient. No regiment sent them parcels, and those who had relatives in England wrote asking for bread and had it sent to them. Unfortunately on arrival it was often mouldy. They had learnt that bread with currants kept best, but best of all was Veda bread, a "sweet malt bread." Four days after Gerard’s visit improvements were made to the food in Ruhleben. But it was only when the civilian prisoners of war were given bread from Berne and Copenhagen that their bread situation improved. They found, however that the bread from Berne was hard and full of holes. Early in November 1916 Ruhleben got their first delivery of bread from Copenhagen and it was said to be very good.

Nico Jungmann, Dutch-born but of British nationality, was interned in Ruhleben. A painting of his entitled "The queue for bread from Denmark" and dated 5th December 1916 is now in the Imperial War Museum, London.

Many pows tried to escape. If they were captured alive, they were typically punished by imprisonment in solitary confinement on "bread and water". Many suffered terribly during their punishment for their attempt to escape. That rye bread was the only food made the penalty even worse. Following an agreement made in 1917 between the warring nations they were given, in addition to bread, a bowl of soup on the 4th and 8th days, and then on every third day. Canadian Private Mervin Simmons had to endure an almost unbearable punishment for his second escape attempt. The only bright spot was one time when a new guard smuggled a very large portion of soup, thick with meat and vegetables and half a loaf of white bread to him. The bread was from Berne and the other half was given another prisoner. He hid the bread that he did not manage to eat for later and in order to protect the guard. This compassionate deed was never forgotten by Simmons. Another pow was captured as a result of white bread. Leading up to an escape attempt the pows saved food from their parcels as supplies for the journey. In James Gerard's book he tells of an escaped prisoner from Ruhleben who had made some sandwiches with white bread. These he sat and ate while he waited at the railway station. The German travellers around him were curious and asked where he had obtained the white bread, which they could not buy. And thus he was exposed and recaptured.

It appears that the Copenhagen Bureau got off to a good start, but it very quickly ran into problems of various kinds. To start with they didn't have correct lists with addresses for the prisoners. Post from BRC HQ in London was only sent to Copenhagen once a week and it could take a fortnight to arrive. Throughout the winter there were problems in obtaining raw materials from England and it was almost impossible after February 1917 with the start of the German unrestricted submarine warfare. The bureau had to borrow flour in Denmark to keep the bread production running. Mr. Slade had problems managing the Bread Bureau, maybe being an experienced top lawyer wasn't the right qualification for the job. Mrs. Picton Warlow had found it difficult to work with him and in frustration she returned to England in December. And it was not just her; eventually everyone refused to work under him. Members of the Board found him difficult too, and at last Lady Paget had to write to London and explain the situation. Such a case was very difficult to handle, and they did what they could to get Mr. and Mrs. Slade recalled to London without it resulting in hostility and gossip. Something must have gone badly wrong for him since he is referred to as having an "objectionable personality". He left reluctantly after making disparaging comments about Lady Paget and the bureau to the bourgeoisie in Copenhagen. In London, Mr. Slade, obviously still annoyed at being recalled, intrigued at headquarters trying to make trouble for them back in Copenhagen.

The premises at Bloch & Behrens became too cramped and the bureau moved its operation to Strandboulevarden 84 at the New Year 1917. It remained at this address for the rest of the war. Jens Olsen and half the staff from Bloch & Behrens moved with the bureau while the rest joined the Danish Red Cross parcels office with N.P. Pedersen. The new premises were a cryolite factory, Sound Chemical Factory, where C.F. Jarl, a member of the board of the BRC in Copenhagen, was the director. Currently these were unused buildings, and Mr. Jarl provided premises, heating and lighting free of cost for the Bread Bureau.

Martin Abrahamson with Arnold and Ettie

On 26 April 1917 Martin Abrahamson became CEO. He was 46 years old and part owner of an electrical installation company, Tvermoes and Abrahamson. Abrahamson was married to Emma Hirschsprung and they had two children, Arnold 12 and Ettie 8 years old. Family man though he was, they cannot have seen much of him over the next few years. Abrahamson put his own company aside to spend half his time on the Bread Bureau. With him from his company, was his "right hand", his secretary Miss Agnes Gulstad.

There had been problems for some months getting parcels delivered in Germany. It was thought that only 1 out of 4 parcels arrived. Apparently they disappeared in the German postal service, not in the camps. In March 1917 a complaint was sent through diplomatic channels. The German authorities suggested that a possible way to alleviate the problem of thefts could be further packaging the parcels in sacks. C.F. Jarl from Sound Chemical Factory which housed the Bread Bureau offered to deliver 1000 bags which would be used in a trial run. Again this wasn't without difficulties. Denmark lacked sacks and without a guarantee from the Germans that they would be returned, the Danish Government would not be willing to accept the experiment. The sacks were to be filled at the bureau then sealed by the Danish Red Cross in their parcel office ready for shipment to Germany. The parcels were first sent to the German Red Cross in Frankfurt before they were sent to camps.

There were other reasons for problems in the delivery of parcels, both food and bread, and these were at the camps themselves. One persistent rumour was that the French Government had smuggled in the parcels sent to their prisoners of war, guidelines for how those prisoners could poison German crops and set fire to farm buildings. It was said that they had also poisoned biscuits and chocolate, which the French prisoners of war received in their parcels. The Germans issued a warning not to let the prisoners of war touch or sow seeds and the farmers were not allowed to eat chocolate and biscuits offered by the prisoners. Although the problems originated with the French it had serious consequences for British prisoners of war. Their parcels were held back or as can be seen in the following excerpts, for some their bread was cut into pieces in a search for poison.

Pte. Edwin Young ” I got my parcels well until the end of February when they all stopped, and I had nothing until I escaped except 4 parcels of Copenhagen bread which arrived uneatable; it had been all cut up.”

Pte. Percy Neale ”With regard to the bread, I think that the Swiss bread is best to send to prisoners; it keeps much longer than the Danish bread. The Copenhagen is certainly nicer to eat, but if it gets knocked at the corners at all it will go bad; the Berne bread is not nearly so quickly affected. Really I think that instead of sending bread out to the British it would be better, especially in the summer to adopt the French method and send out biscuits.”

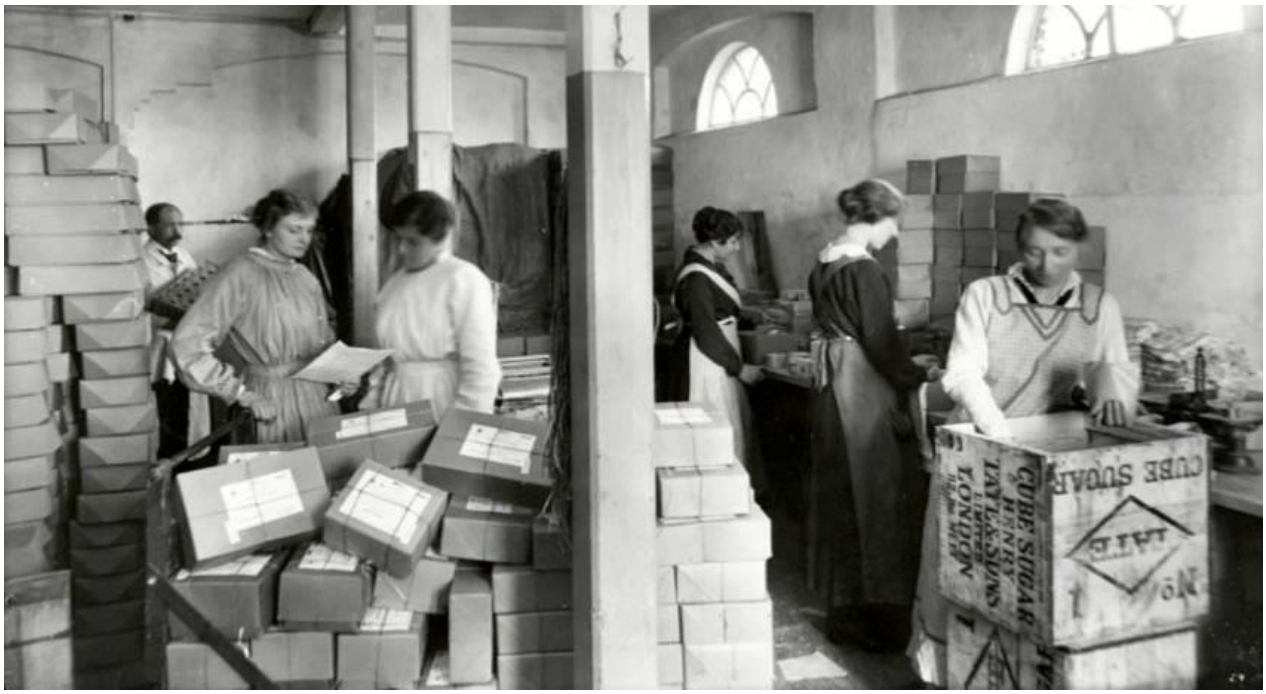
Pte. William Wiltshire ”Under the new system I have only received 2 parcels (bread from Copenhagen) between February and the day I escaped. The Copenhagen bread might have been good if the Germans had not cut each loaf into 6 pieces.”

Pte. George Young ”The Copenhagen bread is very good bread but hardly ever arrives fit to eat. The Berne bread is much more suitable for prisoners as it arrives in a much better condition. All the men who were getting Copenhagen bread have asked to have it changed for Berne bread. The Copenhagen bread is liable to arrive mouldy.”

L/Cpl. Arthur Fidler ”I got bread from Copenhagen which arrived in a good condition until the beginning of May, after which it arrived bad. It only took 3 days to come but still arrived mouldy.”

These five men were all in working commandos in north-western Germany, each managed to escape in late May 1917. In the reports they wrote back in England all thought that their parcels had arrived at their stammlager and a conscious retention had taken place. Hitting the pows in this manner was also a way to "stress" their supporters at home, and thus yet another front in the war. After some months, and complaints through the Dutch minister, Holland had now become the protecting power for British interests, the distribution of the parcels slipped back to normal.

Some Germans found it a provocation that the British pows received so much bread and so many food parcels from home. In Southern Jutland they became directly unpopular for that reason. People "knew" that they received parcels with bread and that they discarded everything that was just a little mouldy. It angered the locals, who would gladly have eaten it.



The Danish Red Cross department for pow help grew in size as new initiatives were taken on. In March 1917 Captain Axel Ramm travelled to Berlin, where he opened a Danish Red Cross office in Victoria Strasse. Axel Ramm had in 1916 been sent to Russia to inspect prison camps with German / Austrian prisoners. Now his job consisted mainly of supervising the Russian pows in Germany. With him, the British had a good advocate as he spoke up for prisoners of war of all nationalities. In Denmark, the Bread Bureau had particularly good relations with the Danish Red Cross, which was transporting its parcels from Copenhagen to Germany. The bureau also had good relations with the German Red Cross, who also had a branch in the city who helped the German war prisoners in Russia. Martin Abrahamson got on very well with the leader of the German Red Cross in Copenhagen, Dr. Schairer. He was competent and extremely cooperative, which greatly benefitted the daily practical work for both parties.

Axel Ramm and his wife Geo in Berlin

In England they had started to evaluate the various prisoner of war efforts, and it was decided to close the Bread Bureau in Copenhagen. They had had many difficulties to contend with, and the last reports were that after the weather had become warmer the bread was mouldy and inedible when it arrived. Emergency supplies of biscuits were sent from headquarters in England to Copenhagen to remedy this. The bread was too expensive compared to bread sent from England and Switzerland. Arguments against the bureau were

manifold; from they spent too much money on telegraphing to they couldn't find enough local volunteers. So the decision to close the bureau is perhaps understandable. The suggested solution was to build a new bread factory either in southern England or Holland. In June the message reached Copenhagen that they would close on 15 July. The news was not well received. The Board met and decided to fight to keep the Copenhagen Bread Bureau open. Mr. Abrahamson had been in charge for less than two months, and there was still much that could be done to rectify the problems. From the start in October 1916 with 3500 prisoners, in June 1917 they were sending bread to over 21,000. When the last shipment was sent on 15 July, they had 21,626 pows on their list; but the bureau had to close.

The conclusions made in the report over the inquiry into the organization and methods of the Central Prisoners of War Committee in July 1917 were very clear and quite damning. The Copenhagen Bread Bureau had in no way lived up to what had been hoped for. It was worst of course for the prisoners who hadn't received the bread supplies they were desperate for. The failure of the director of the bureau to inform HQ in London of all the difficulties they were battling against had delayed any alternative relief being dispatched. HQ on the other hand should have kept a better eye on the work being done in Copenhagen so they could have provided more temporary assistance. It would in fact have been better to have carried on sending bread from England until the Copenhagen Bread Bureau had proved itself to be fully functional and able to cope with difficulties as they arose. All in all they did not doubt the wisdom in the decision to close the Bureau.

By now British prisoners of war were used to getting parcels of bread, and although its arrival could be irregular, and the bread could be bad, they could not do without it. Petty Officer Hugh Hardy interned in Döbertitz camp complained to his mother. She had already arranged that her son was receiving extra food parcels from Denmark, in addition to those she sent from England. Now he wasn't receiving bread because of the problems in Copenhagen, and believed that the biscuit ration was not sufficient. His mother begged her Danish contact to send her son white bread with the other good Danish food he got. Hugh Hardy was one of the lucky ones. Whether this was possible or not I don't know because from 1st April 1917 Denmark introduced bread rationing. Bread cards were distributed with coupons for 8 kg. rye bread and 4 kg. white bread per person per month. However, if you could get flour you could bake it yourself.

Abrahamson went to London well prepared to fight for the cause. Those who had worked for the Copenhagen Bread Bureau harboured a certain amount of resentment and hurt feelings that the decision to close the bureau had been taken over their heads. They were not questioned about the problems and whether they could sort them out. At headquarters, however, they held firm in their resolution; the Bureau in Copenhagen was closed. Abrahamson had a long memorandum with him, which explained why it was a good idea that there were two Bread Bureaux which could complement each other and explaining all the many benefits there were with having an agency in Copenhagen. The problem with the shelf life of the bread was thought to be due to the poor quality of flour which had been received from England. Abrahamson agreed that the telegraph had been used in a wasteful manner, but suggested that with the use of codes they could reduce the costs by a third. The problem of recruiting volunteers would be easier now that Mr. Slade was no longer in charge. Abrahamson's list of advantages were many: they could import good quality flour and other goods from the USA, they had very good contact with the prisoners of war through both the Danish and German Red Cross, which Berne had not, and it was quicker and easier to get to Northern Germany from Denmark if it was allocated as their special area.

The Central Committee listened to his arguments in a friendly manner but was unyielding; the bureau was closed and was not to be restarted. Abrahamson turned up one last time at headquarters to say goodbye, and those receiving him felt some relief that he had given up. However, he had one last trick up his sleeve. He announced that he had an appointment the next day with a member of parliament (MP). He would brief the MP about the closure of the Copenhagen Bureau with all the advantages that were being lost. These points would then be raised in the House of Commons where the interests of British prisoners of war were frequently aired. It worked. After a few hours of further discussions the BRC decided the Copenhagen Bread Bureau could reopen, subject to the approval of the War Office. The War Office had no objections.

Abrahamson spent just over two months in London. He made arrangements for the best Canadian flour to be shipped in Danish ships to Copenhagen. The improved recipe was to contain two percent fat and it was therefore also necessary to import supplies of fat from USA. Flour and fat were transported on the "Hellig Olav" a DFDS vessel which sailed monthly between Copenhagen and New York. The Copenhagen Bureau reopened and sent its first consignment of bread on 15 October 1917. During the first month 48,902 parcels each with 2 bread loaves weighing 2 1/4 pound were sent. With 20,000 prisoners of war it took some weeks to get up to speed. With Martin Abrahamson as director and good ingredients the bread bureau settled down to a couple of quiet months. Soon they were asked to perform additional tasks.

Hvor Krigsbrødet bages i Tyskland. Man er i Tyskland overbevist om, at man nok skal faa Kornet til at slaa til, naar man sparer paa det. Saa spiser man Brødet, der er mærket K. K. Godt smager det ganske vist ikke, men spises kan det dog. — Fot. Int. Ill. B.

According to a Danish newspaper – the German bread doesn't taste nice but is edible.

When a prisoner of war was captured it would often take several weeks for the information to be received by the BRC and disseminated to that part of the organisation which would send him regular food and clothing parcels. A scheme was devised whereby each new prisoner would be supplied with “first parcels” for the first four weeks to tide them over until their own specifically addressed parcels would arrive. The first of these four weekly parcels could usually be supplied from each camp’s own stock. The three subsequent “first parcels” were to be supplied by the Copenhagen bureau. This additional task obviously created a lot of extra work for those volunteers working for the BRC in Copenhagen. The contents of these parcels, which included food, tobacco and personal hygiene items, were sent from England. It was Miss Julie Olsen, who was responsible for "First capture parcels." This 53-year-old, unmarried Copenhagener was the sister of Jens Olsen. Her English must have been proficient as she had run an "English Play Room" in the lodging house where she lived. Here a small number of young girls and boys could learn English by singing and playing. Miss Olsen must have closed her playroom for she had been active at the bureau since it opened in 1916. She was known for her willingness to work. The Copenhagen bureau was commended for the work they did with the "First capture parcels." Two thousand of the British prisoners taken during the battle of Cambrai arrived in the Münster camps at Christmas 1917. They received their first parcels from the reserves in the camp and a message was immediately sent off to London. Copenhagen was told and within a week had despatched to these prisoners bread and their next “first parcels”. They must have been extra busy at the bureau that Christmas. This is also an example of the system, for once, working without problems.

In the period before Christmas 1917 the staff in the Copenhagen bread bureau placed a Christmas greeting in the bread parcels. A number of different photos of the agency were used on the front of the postcards and each had a handwritten message on the reverse; "With our Best Wishes for Christmas and the New Year", Copenhagen Bread Bureau, British Red Cross. I suggest that this action typifies the care and fellow feeling the volunteers in Copenhagen had for the British prisoners of war they were helping in such practical ways. It was indeed a personal message of good wishes for the recipients in the coming year.

It had been acknowledged for a long while that the systems that had developed to send food and bread personally addressed to 100,000 men scattered all over Germany, and moving camp from time to time, were completely absurd. For many prisoners it worked fairly well, but for many others who fell through the net it meant that they received no parcels. Some parcels were sent from Berne to northern Germany and some from Copenhagen to southern Germany which was very cumbersome, very expensive administratively, leading to increased delivery times and increased opportunities for misunderstanding and misinformation to occur. Actually it's a wonder it worked as well as it did, and we can only thank the many different associations for the huge effort they made.

We must say a word about the Germans as without their involvement the parcels would not have been received by the prisoners of war. It was in Germany's interest to deliver the food parcels to their prisoners as it relieved them of the burden of providing adequate rations themselves. All things considered, with a starving population, there were surprisingly few in transit parcels that "disappeared". A radical reform of the entire pow relief work was required, but given its complexity it was almost impossible to change. Several conferences between the various national Red Cross organisations were held and arrangements were made to improve conditions for prisoners of war. Axel Ramm from the Danish Red Cross' Berlin office participated. He supported a plan whereby the Red Cross organisations of interested neutral countries should become responsible for the food and clothing for all prisoners held in the belligerent countries. From central warehouse supplies parcels could be packed and distributed to pow camps in agreed amounts. These food and clothing supplies would be managed and paid for by the prisoners' home country. Simplification of administration and of the transportation routes and reduction of waste and theft would have yielded significant savings and ensured that the pows got more consistent help. But the time was not right for such a massive reform.

It was vital that the time taken to transport the bread from baker to prisoner be kept as short as possible, both to ensure its freshness on arrival and to reduce the opportunity for theft during its journey. It was also crucial for the success of the project that correct information was held on the names and whereabouts of the prisoners. The card indexes held in Copenhagen were updated daily with new captives' information, and any transfer between camps was also recorded. Miss M. Hodgson, who had come to Copenhagen from headquarters in London, was in charge of Records and Registration Division. She was praised for being both industrious and especially careful, ensuring that the department ran very efficiently. All information received was noted on a card - even the dead were recorded. There was an index with 90,000 names arranged according to regiment and 90,000 names ordered by camp. The daily lists were compiled from these indexes. Mr. Langballe and Miss Nygaard ran the Department of Statistics and were later praised for their work. Not everyone acknowledged the receipt of their parcels with the supplied postcards. Out of the 103,600 acknowledgement cards received after 15th October 1917 there were only 1,200 complaints. These complaints came exclusively from prisoners in camps with long delivery times. There is no obvious explanation as to why some prisoners responded and others did not, or the difference from camp to camp.

Knowledge that a man had been captured was received through various channels. After a battle the Germans made lists of those taken prisoner which were sent to England. Sometimes prisoners were supplied with special cards printed with the information that one was now a prisoner of war, which they completed and sent to their home. Everything depended on the captor's benevolence. Lists of names were then sent from BRC headquarters in London to Copenhagen. YMCA, German Red Cross and help committees in the camps also sent information on new captives to England. The transmission of such information was not foolproof and in the circumstances of war there could be that many factors that could hinder information on captives reaching home quickly. Typically it took between two to eight weeks. Because it was known that the transfer of information was not perfect there was always the hope that men reported missing, were in fact prisoners of war who had not been registered. Sometimes on arrival in camp a prisoner wrote directly to the bureau giving his details and requesting bread parcels. In these cases the office in Copenhagen was the first to gain knowledge that the missing man was still alive. This was registered and the information was reported to the authorities in England. Families of men "reported missing" were very anxious for news and made enquiries of any organisation they thought could help. It soon became general knowledge that the Copenhagen bureau was a good place to make enquiries. The Bureau in Copenhagen had become a collection point for pow information. It became the first place people turned to. It had contacts with the German Red Cross office in Copenhagen and the German Red Cross in Berlin and Frankfurt, and also had close contacts with the Danish Red Cross, which had a branch in Berlin.

A method of dealing with these enquiries was devised. When a request for information was received from England a brown card was written out with all the information about the missing man. The card was placed in the main file with the white cards. New information arrived daily from Germany with names of new prisoners of war or information about deaths, which was also recorded on cards. In November 1917, during the battle of Cambrai many British were taken prisoner. Headquarters in London was virtually besieged by families seeking information about their missing. The German Red Cross in Frankfurt, which was marshalling the first capture cards telegraphed daily to Copenhagen lists of the names of newly captured officers. Copenhagen then telegraphed this information to BRC headquarters in London, who contacted the next of kin. In this way, the families received messages long before they would have received notification through the military channels. In London, where relatives turned up in person, there were touching scenes when a message from Copenhagen was received that a loved one was alive. There were numerous occasions in Copenhagen when it was discovered that a brown card matched a one white and a “missing” was "found". Copenhagen of course, forwarded this information to London. They had in March 1918, 3,494 brown cards and had managed to provide information on 2,032 of them. It usually took about two months from the time they received a query for them to be able to respond. The bureau in Copenhagen was able to use its connections to contact hospitals in Germany. This allowed British prisoners in some of these hospitals to send important messages to their relatives and vice versa.

Mrs. Annie Mygind

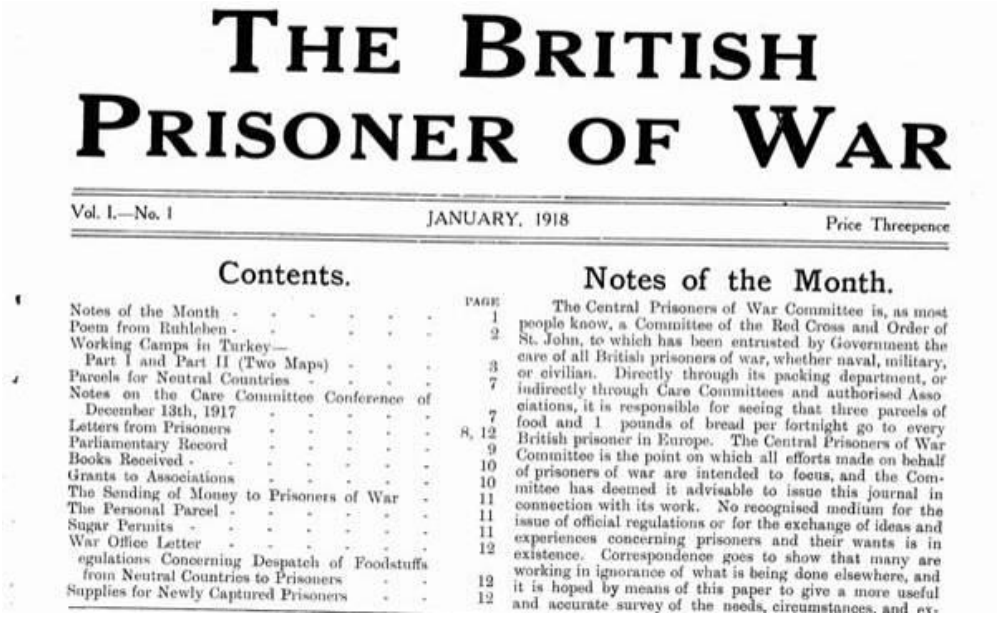
The correspondence department thus became the heart of Bread Bureau. Mrs. Mygind took over as its head in February 1917. Mrs Annie Mygind was a 54-year-old English woman who was married to surgeon Dr. Holger Mygind and had lived in Denmark for many years. Their eldest son Kai Mygind had been the representative for the Danish Industrial Council in London since 1915. He had married there and the couple was expecting their first child. The Correspondence Department had many contacts, in March 1918 as well as the fore mentioned Red Cross organisations, 51 camp committees, and up to 7,054 individual prisoners of war had entries in the correspondence card index. There were various reasons for personal contact with an individual prisoner. Sometimes it was through the bureau that relatives in Britain received the first information about a prisoner of war because as well as well as passing the information of a newly captured man to BRC HQ in London the bureau immediately contacted their family in England. In this way, Copenhagen acquired a special status among the prisoners and their relatives. When it happened, it's easy to understand that the staff of the bureau and the prisoners maintained contact, and not just about the bread.

This unorthodox and very personal method of working attracted criticism from BRC HQ immediately after Christmas 1917. Official Red Cross international agreements meant that all prisoner mail should be channelled through the official pow mail system and the help given by the staff of the correspondence department of the Copenhagen bureau was over and above that. Instructions were sent from BRC in London to stop the extra help given by the Copenhagen volunteers. This news came as quite an unwelcome surprise to the staff in Copenhagen. They couldn't understand why the valuable work they were doing had to stop. They had taken such pains to create their personal contacts with the prisoners of war and their relatives. Abrahamson argued against the new instruction, convinced that the Copenhagen methods were of great benefit psychologically to the prisoners of war. This explanation did not alter the decision that had been made in London. Abrahamson thought that there must be some misunderstanding in London, and was absolutely steadfast in the belief that they were doing the best for the prisoners, so he allowed the practices to continue. The response from BRC HQ was a repetition of the first instruction, now with a further explanation. The War Office wrote "..... unless all letters and post cards from British Prisoners of War in Germany pass through one channel it is not possible to

keep a check on the numbers arriving with a view to detecting whether any undue proportion are being held back. "

The controversy continued over several months. Abrahamson could still not understand what all the fuss was about, and tried again to explain himself, ”Naturally this leads to a sort of friendly correspondence with individual men, and I consider this a very important feature of our work, as it undoubtedly tends to keep up the spirits of the men when they find that we, besides supplying them with bread, have a sort of personal interest in them and their doings.” He had impressed on the volunteers the importance of forwarded mail going through censorship and all errors in procedure should be avoided. Abrahamson's opposition to the instruction from London perplexed them as they were not used to being questioned in this way. With so much else to do in the Prisoner of War department of the War Office and the Red Cross pow headquarters, this insubordination caused real irritation. It was said of him "... Mr. Abrahamson with all his good points, is the most obstinate and argumentative of men". Four months after the matter first attracted criticism, and after much correspondence Abrahamson had to give in and accept the changes being demanded. This he did in late May in a letter in which he wrote of his acceptance of the instruction.

A long story about a stubborn man. Abrahamson knew his bureau was doing good work, which was valued by the prisoners and their relatives and he was not inclined to accept what he saw as an inferior service. He had his convictions and would not obey an order he questioned. He was obviously not a military man. In Copenhagen, they took the prisoners of war welfare personally. Fortunately he did not leave his post as director of the Bread Bureau at Copenhagen in a huff. The stubbornness he showed over this issue was an attribute the bureau needed and which would later prove invaluable in his work with the repatriation of prisoners of war via Denmark.



THE BRITISH PRISONER OF WAR

Vol. I.—No. 1 JANUARY, 1918 Price Threepence

Contents.

Notes of the Month.

The Central Prisoners of War Committee is, as most people know, a Committee of the Red Cross and Order of St. John, to which has been entrusted by Government the care of all British prisoners of war, whether naval, military, or civilian. Directly through its packing department, or indirectly through Care Committees and authorised Associations, it is responsible for seeing that three parcels of food and 1 pounds of bread per fortnight go to every British prisoner in Europe. The Central Prisoners of War Committee is the point on which all efforts made on behalf of prisoners of war are intended to focus, and the Committee has deemed it advisable to issue this journal in connection with its work. No recognised medium for the issue of official regulations or for the exchange of ideas and experiences concerning prisoners and their wants is in existence. Correspondence goes to show that many are working in ignorance of what is being done elsewhere, and it is hoped by means of this paper to give a more useful and accurate survey of the needs, circumstances, and ex-

At BRC HQ in England, they decided to publish a 12 page monthly journal, "The British Prisoner of War." It first appeared in January 1918 and cost three pence. It was a really good way to keep those interested informed of how things stood for the pows, containing articles, reports from relevant meetings in the parliament, advertisements, letters, etc. The Copenhagen Bureau was mentioned a number of times. In the January edition one officer recently escaped from Ströben said about the bread ".. quite excellent, and after being placed in an oven for a short time" was "absolutely like new bread "and was the best thing he has had during his captivity.

The extra work at Christmas caused by the many first-capture parcels for Münster, was followed by an additional lot to do in the new year.

In December 1917 supplies of high quality flour began to arrive from the United States in large quantities, so a parcel of bread was after the first of January 1918 increased from 4 ½ to 6 ½ pounds. Abrahamson held meetings in February with the Board of bakers' guild, who baked the bread for the bureau, regarding tests

done and considerations about the recipe. For the recently produced bread they had used a recipe with 2% fat, and had used good Canadian flour. This bread kept for a long time before it went mouldy. Bread would go mouldy from the outside, so the actual baking, with a good crust was very important for the breads' shelf life. The extra fat meant that when the bread was dry it didn't crumble quite as much. As the fat had to be imported from the USA it was discussed if the amount of fat used could be halved if they replaced the water with milk. That would mean using 33 kg of milk per 100 kg flour, and an increase in the cost of 5000 kroner per week. So the idea was dropped. With the previous recipe they had been producing "square bread" which was cheaper, and apparently crustless, which didn't keep as long as the crusted bread. They decided that when they had the required ingredients they would produce bread made with the 2% fat recipe but baked as squares. However crusty bread was to be sent to the camps Dülmen, Münster, Friedrichsfeld, Soltau, Hannover and Giessen and biscuits to Heilsberg. They immediately ordered new supplies of fat, which could be transported on the "Hellig Olav" which left New York in the middle of the month. Also bean oil had to be ordered as the bakers could no longer use from their own stock.

A note in the March issue of "The British Prisoner of War" reported that in Copenhagen a parcel of bread had been returned to them as it couldn't be delivered to its addressee. It was 7 weeks since it had been despatched, and when opened the bread was found to be in perfect condition, sweet and very edible. Included in this edition were several good reviews of the bread from Copenhagen. Cpl. T. Blatchford, Döeberitz: "Bread from Copenhagen is arriving in fine condition." CQMS Jackson Williss, Schneidemühl: "Copenhagen bread is arriving in excellent condition". Private William Russell, Neiderzwehren bei Cassel: "Copenhagen bread is the very best". L / Cpl. Frederick William Gibbs, Sennelager: the "Copenhagen bread is excellent and is arriving regularly every week". The British Help Committee in Sprottau wrote that they "would like to remark on the splendid condition of the Copenhagen bread." It must have been satisfying to see such praise in print.

Had there been a German counterpart of the magazine, it could have run an article about research being done in a pow camp near Hawick. In March 1918 the camp at Stobs ran, over the period of a week, a series of test bakes of rye-bread, made by the German bakers interned there: the first with half rye flour, the second with two thirds. The German prisoners much preferred both loaves over white bread, the favourite being the second. The officer in charge made a snappy decision and dropped a third round of tests to go all in for bread baked with a sourdough and 100% rye. This was obviously much more like the loaf the Germans wanted, the only difference now being that the English rye flour was milled too finely. The officer concluded that the rye-bread was very filling and would make economic sense, and it had the added advantage of keeping well. Rye could be grown on poor land, such as the unused land typically surrounding pow camps. Not much English rye-bread can have been produced at Stobs so late in the war, but at least the interest and intention was there!

In March 1918 there were almost 120 employees in the Copenhagen Bread Bureau. There was the managing director Abrahamson, an accountant, eight secretaries, 77 assistants and 31 packers. How many were paid employees and how many were unpaid volunteers is unknown. One of the secretaries was Florence Shimwell who was sent from BRC HQ in England. She received a salary of £3 a week with an additional allowance of 10 kroner a day. Again the bureau was threatened with closure. This was to be on 1st June 1918, two reasons being put forward. In the summer months of the previous year, the bread from Copenhagen was mouldy when it arrived in the camps, and the bread produced in Copenhagen was more expensive than that produced in Berne. The first reason could be countered with the argument that the bread they were now producing was of a much superior quality which would keep fresh even in the summer months. The point relating to relative cost was more valid. In March 1918 the all-inclusive cost of producing the bread sent to each prisoner each week was three shillings and nine pence in Copenhagen, whilst the comparative cost was only cost two shillings and three pence in Berne. The reason the Copenhagen bread was more expensive was due in part to the good but more expensive flour they had sourced in America. The families, adopters, societies and committees which sponsored the prisoner only paid 1 shilling and 10 ½ pence, the remainder was paid by the British Red Cross. In March 1918, the Copenhagen bureau sent bread to 30,000 prisoners. Over a year this would amount to an additional cost of £117,000 for the BRC to bear. This was a very large amount of money, enough for the decision to be taken a second time to close the bureau. Once again Mr. Abrahamson had to argue why they should be allowed to continue. The answer he got was that if the number of prisoners of war did not increase in a few weeks, the bureau would close. What a dilemma, to wish that there were even more prisoners of war! Unfortunately that was just what happened.

The Germans gathered all their forces for the big spring attack, the "Ludendorff Offensive". On the first day 21,000 British were taken prisoner. From 21 March to 5 April the total number of new British prisoners reached 75,000, many French prisoners were also taken during this period. This was not a good time to be taken prisoner, as no preparations had been made in Germany for a massive increase in pow numbers, either in accommodation or in rations. The system which allowed the prisoners to send postcards home from Germany to inform relatives of their capture failed, adding to the number of queries the Copenhagen bureau received about missing men. This occurred during the controversy regarding correspondence related above. On one day alone information was sent from Copenhagen regarding 23 officers whom at that time the War Office did not know had been captured. One can well understand why Abrahamson fought for their method of doing things for if you were not registered as a pow in England no one knew they had to send a first capture parcel or bread. For those poor souls that were taken during the “Ludendorff Offensive” there were many hard months ahead. For one, Jack Rogers, it happened on his 24th birthday, the 21st March 1918. His parents received a message from the War Office that he was missing presumably captured and nothing else over the next month. He was as it turned out at the camp at Münster which was visited by Danish Red Cross representatives who took details of the names and regiments of all the prisoners. One of Jack Rogers’ friends back home in England approached the Danish Red Cross and was told that he was a prisoner and in which camp. Thus, Jack Rogers became registered and finally he was able to receive parcels of bread and food. As the "Ludendorff Offensive" continued many more prisoners were registered and the numbers who were sent bread from the Copenhagen bureau soared. Now there was no more talk about closing the bureau.

In March, around the time of the attack, but not because of it, a discussion began about whether the ration of 6 ½ pounds of bread a week was too much anyway. Bread was a foodstuff which was also rationed to the people of England, and it seemed wrong that the POWs were receiving so much. The civilian war prisoners from Ruhleben sent a message, via Copenhagen, to BRC HQ in London, that 4 ½ pounds of bread each week

was appropriate for them. The War Office however took a scientific approach, and after consideration, they believed that 6 ½ pounds of bread was necessary to ensure that those pows forced to do hard manual labour were receiving enough calories. So they disagreed. But with so many new prisoners of war, it was now impossible to get enough flour to Copenhagen and Berne to supply the higher ration so in the middle of April the ration was cut back to 4 ½ pounds per week, which is the amount which had been supplied prior to January 1918. At the same time the Copenhagen Bureau closed its first capture parcels department; these were now to be sent from Rotterdam. First bread parcels however, continued to be sent from Copenhagen. Miss Julie Olsen's took up the position of head of the Department of Statistics.

Bread parcels were always sent to a camp. When the parcels arrived at the camps, they were distributed to named prisoners in the parcel hut. Members of the help committee were present. The parcels were opened under the supervision of a guard, and with food parcels a common procedure was to the open the cans. The parcels were otherwise locked in the parcel hut for storage. On the 9th January a catastrophe befell the prisoners of Friedrichsfeld camp, when the huts containing their parcels of food and bread burnt down. They could only stand and watch. It must have been terrible. Work commandos, either on farms or in mines, were associated with a main camp and parcels for these prisoners were sent to the main camp. Generally the procedure then was for the parcels to be sent on from the stammlager to the local post office where they were picked up by a trusted prisoner and a guard. This onward transmission of the parcels to the men of the work commandos, delayed their receipt and increased the possibility of loss or theft.

There are excerpts in the June edition of "The British Prisoner of War" from a letter sent by S.M. Want who had recently been transferred to interment in the Netherlands. He had been on the help committee in Giessen camp. He told how he had been instrumental in the introduction of a new system which had been put in place just three weeks before his departure. Previously the German guards had insisted that parcels were given out to prisoners in the order they had arrived in camp, regardless of whether some of them contained perishable items such as bread. Want argued that the Germans should release the bread parcels as soon as they arrived but the Germans wouldn't budge. Eventually Want approached the Dutch ambassador and the system was introduced immediately. Want clearly says that the bread was "extremely important to our men" and believed that this "excellent system" should be introduced at all camps. That something so simple to change, and with such obvious advantages, was so hard to implement, is a good example of rigid routines and regulations that inhibited sensible reform. This change didn't happen at Giessen until March 1918; hopefully other camps had used a similar procedure before then.

A three-page article about "the Copenhagen Bureau" was published in the May edition of "The British Prisoner of War". It told the story of how it started and some of the problems they had had to resolve. It went on to say it was now well managed and that with the large numbers of new prisoners there was even more need for bread production from Copenhagen to continue.

In May, Mr. Abrahamson was trying to cut costs. Everything was expensive, so they tried to find savings where they could. Transport of the parcels from the bureau to the Danish Red Cross parcel office was done by horse and cart at a cost of 21.50 kr. for 1000 parcels. There were trucks in Copenhagen, but because of gasoline shortages they stood unused. Abrahamson planned to borrow or rent some of the idle trucks, getting petrol from England. Abrahamson applied for the petrol, firstly 3,000 gallons and then a further 750 gallons each month. By these means Abrahamson had calculated they would be able to save 4.50 kr. per 1000 parcels. In his application he stated that acceptance of the proposal should be backed by a guarantee of monthly gasoline delivery, for if he terminated the contract with the horse and carts it would not be possible to resume it, as there was a shortage of horses. The proposal was accepted by London but the gasoline was to be supplied from the USA, being shipped on the “Hellig Olav”. Also in May, a new type of cardboard box for the packaging was brought into use which was also reckoned to give a significant saving.

With so many new prisoners of war, the system just had to be rationalised. Throughout the month of April detailed plans were made to divide Germany and Austria geographically, which previously both Copenhagen and Berne had covered. Copenhagen was to supply bread to prisoners in northern Germany and Berne the south and Austria. Roughly this left Copenhagen to supply 40,000 prisoners and Berne 80,000. The big changeover occurred on 15 June 1918. The division wasn’t just a line on a map, it took into consideration the railway systems and journey times. Such a reform seemed long overdue but prior to this date there had been no significant backing for the change. This was because of the way the systems had started and had developed over the years. The individual regimental or care committee could chose to use either Copenhagen or Berne to supply all of “their” prisoners, who could be in camps scattered throughout Germany. After the massive

increase in the numbers of prisoners after the Ludendorff Offensive the change became a necessity. It required a huge effort in addition to their daily work, to get the lists ready and have stencils made for the new pow names for those men whose supplier was changing from Copenhagen to Berne and vice versa.

Mr. Arthur Mayne who had been director at the Berne bureau from October 1917 to June 1918, moved to Copenhagen. He was a retired Indian civil servant. He was by many accounts a strange character, with an irascible temper, not easy to work with but an exceptionally good administrator. Had he lived today he would probably be diagnosed with Aspergers Syndrome. It is probably thanks to him that the changes in Berne in June 1918 succeeded so well. Berne had been visited by two experts in the autumn of 1917. They suggested improvements that were implemented and work processes were reduced to a minimum. For example, they moved the packaging department to a building that stood alongside the railway. The parcels of bread were thrown down a chute directly into a waiting railway carriage.

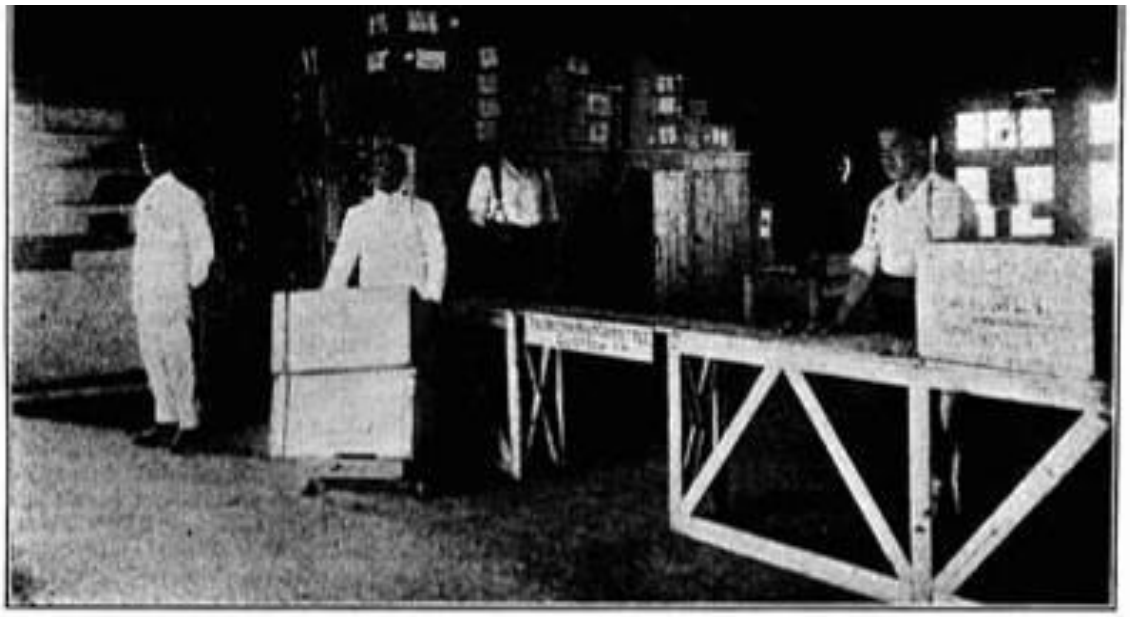
THE BREAD CHUTE.

Another new employee joined the Copenhagen bureau in July 1918. Petty officer Charles Bowden was one of the submarine E-13's crew who had been interned in Denmark since it's stranding in August 1915. He worked in the records and registration department. Despite being very busy, he enjoyed his last months in Denmark, and left for home after the Armistice with many good memories of his stay in Denmark.

Bakers in Berne had been able to supply biscuits instead of bread for all their prisoners of war. They had proven that biscuits were a better option than bread in the hot summer months, especially for prisoners of war in work commandos where the time taken to deliver the parcels was extended. Biscuits were also sent from Copenhagen. "The British Prisoner of War" magazine printed a letter relating to the biscuits. This time from an officer in Furstenberg, who sent thanks for the new biscuits from Copenhagen "They are quite excellent and when dipped in water and put in an oven are a very near approach to bread. If the Committee can manage to keep this class of biscuit going there can be no grumbling." However the bakers in Copenhagen could not deliver enough biscuits, only half of their prisoners of war could be supplied. The bureau therefore had to import large quantities of biscuits from Messrs. Huntley and Palmer from England.

There was a bakers' strike in Copenhagen in August 1918, but whether it affected work at the bureau is not recorded. As no-one expected the armistice to come when it did plans were being made for the future. Mr. Abrahamson was visited by Mr. Heath Jones of the BRC HQ finance department in August. In September they signed a contract with a company that was to build and equip a factory with modern machines for making biscuits. They wanted to be sure that the Copenhagen bread bureau could supply biscuits to all their prisoners of war from the spring of 1919. They really made a great effort in Copenhagen to try and ensure that all prisoners of war in their area should get parcels of either bread or biscuits.

In October the Copenhagen bureau received a telegram from Güstrow with a request to reduce the number of weekly parcels to the camp to 6000. From lists they had they knew that there were 8764 British pows in Güstrow. With only 6,000 parcels 2,764 men would be without bread. In the office they supposed that a large number of prisoners had been transferred to another camp. However, letters arrived from Güstrow which explained the reason. The Germans in the camp had said that they simply were not able to cope with more than 6,000 parcels per week. The bureau sent a letter to N.P. Pedersen, secretary of the Danish Red Cross packing branch in Copenhagen, who was in Germany at that time. He was visiting a number of prison camps in Germany with British prisoners of war to report on conditions. The bureau asked Pedersen, to contact the commander in Güstrow directly, or to contact the German War Ministry, to find a solution so that they could resume sending the correct number of parcels. Food was very scare in Germany at this time, and was gradually worsening, a percentage of the population were starving. Prisoners of war who received parcels of bread and food were much better off than their German guards and the German civilians. Outside the camps, children begged bread from the prisoners of war. It's hard to understand that why the German would reduce the amount of bread being sent.



Office of the British Help Committee at Güstrow.

As the summer progressed it became increasingly clear that the system to send parcels addressed to an individual could not go on. Another major change was made in mid-October. From then on, the amount of bread sent to each camp depended on the number of British pows registered at that camp, plus an extra 10% for stock. Bread parcels were no longer sent to individuals. The extra 10% was to be used for newly captured prisoners, and if there was delay in delivery. Also in October a change was made in the supply of bread to officer prisoners. It was decided that all of their bread was to be supplied from Copenhagen with the exception of two camps in Austria, which were to be supplied from Berne. Finally, less than a month before the war ended, they had a more reliable and efficient system.

The armistice came into effect on 11 November 1918. At that time the Copenhagen Bureau was sending bread and biscuits to 40,000 other rank and civilian prisoners, and all the officer prisoners of war. There were approximately 200 employees at the bureau and an unquantifiable number of people worked in the bakeries, the cardboard box factory and with the transport. Work on the new factory had started and £7,500 had to be paid to cancel construction work. The bread bureau didn't close down immediately; exactly when the last bread was baked is not known. The end of the war was celebrated and a dance was held for the employees. There was no prepared plan for the repatriation of British prisoners of war. That staff from the Copenhagen bureau were ready to help with that too, cannot surprise anyone. They had for several years worked tirelessly on behalf of prisoners of war. This was a continuation of the work they had set out to do, helping the prisoners of war return to their homes. But that's another story.

Arthur Mayne, Agnes Gulstad and Martin Abrahamson

When the first ships, Dronning Maud and Kong Haakon, left Copenhagen on 21 November to pick up the first prisoners of war for home they had, of course, bread from the Copenhagen Bureau with them. The trains with the prisoners of war were late and while the staff waited they buttered 6000 slices of the big loaves ready. The bread was delivered too, to the camps in Denmark where the former pows stayed a few days.

For 10,000s of British pows the bread from Copenhagen was essential for they survived their captivity in fairly good condition. It meant something to the prisoners and their families. In pure PR. terms, it was finally a success story, many had previously not been aware of Copenhagen now they knew that this was where good bread and kind thoughts came from.

Billedfortegnelse

1. Brev på bureauets officielle brevpapir
2. Tegning fra januar 30. 1915 The Illustrated London News
3. Kriegsbrot/black bread hjemtaget af Corporal A.B. Wilson, 10/11th Highland Light Infantry krigsfange fra april 1918 i Cottbus lejren. http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/30085605
4. Mrs. Picton Warlow med børn, 7. maj 1915, foto i familiens eje.
5. Tegning fra 30. januar 1915 The Illustrated London News
6. Medlemmer af bestyrelsen. Lady Paget i Næstved Tidende, 29. december 1918. Carl Frederik Jarl, direktør I Øresunds Chemiske Fabriker. Andreas Vangberg Storm, præst.
7. Bloch & Behrens mosaik i porten Toldbodgade 19, København.
8. The Copenhagen Bureau efterår 1917, KB DH0 13933.tif
9. Benny Dessau.
10. Postkort i privat eje.
11. 06. juli 1916 Næstved Tidende.
12. Nico Jungmann dato 5. december 1916 kaldes "The queue for bread from Denmark" og findes i dag på Imperial War Museum, London. http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/14504
13. Sir Martin Abrahamson, foto i familiens eje.
14. Postkort i privat eje.
15. The Copenhagen Bureau efterår 1917, KB DH0 13931.tif
16. Axel Ramm sammen med sin hustru Geo som var på besøg. De står foran Dansk røde kors kontor på Victoriastrasse, Berlin. Foto i familiens eje.
17. Kiks/brød hjemtaget af Lieutenant Frank Cameron, 7th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, krigsfange fra marts 1918 i Schweidnitz lejren http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/30087164
18. Illustreret Familiejournal 27. maj 1915.

19. X-mas postkort. Roger Partridge.
20. The Records and Registration department, The Copenhagen Bureau efterår 1917, KB DH 13935.tif
21. The Copenhagen Bureau efterår 1917, KB DH0 13937.tif
22. Mrs. Annie Mygind, foto i familiens eje.
23. "The British Prisoner of War" første udgave.
24. Skrapbog, i privat eje. Vore Damer december 1918.
25. Postkort, i privat eje.
26. Postkort. http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/28678
27. The Copenhagen Bureau efterår 1917, KB DH0 13939.tif
28. Foto fra juni udgaven af The British Prisoner of War, The Bread Chute, Bern bureauet.
29. Biscuit factory in Lancashire http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205196972
30. Foto fra oktober udgaven af The British Prisoner of War, Office of the British Help Committee at Güstrow.
31. Martin Abrahamson, Arthur Mayne og Agnes Gulstad, i Berlin november 1918. Foto i Abrahamson arkiv i familiens eje.

Kildefortegnelse

Ikke publiceret arkiv

The National Archives, Kew

Abrahamson Martin, familiearkiv

Ramm Axel, familiearkiv

Mygind Annie, familiearkiv

British Red Cross archive, London

Optegnelser af Christian Kampen

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