The Repatriation of the Sick and Wounded

The Tragic Case of

Private 7822 Arthur Williams
‘C’ Company, 2nd Battalion Royal Munster Fusiliers

It was inevitable that hospitals and medical staff at home would also have to care for the sick and injured enemy soldiers in their custody. The Prisoner of War Societies and the Red Cross worked tirelessly to bring about repatriation or exchange wherever they could, although this tended to be in cases where the men were very ill and would continue to need hospital care on their return. They were not soldiers who would be patched up and set back into action. Illness was often realised to be terminal and it was felt that where possible they should be returned to be near their family. However, there were often great delays in completing the bureaucracy before the exchange could be confirmed. If men were well enough, they were interviewed by the authorities on their return to obtain any information they could divulge about what was happening behind the lines.

One such prisoner fortunate to be exchanged was Private 7822 Arthur Williams, of ‘C’ Company, 2nd Battalion Royal Munster Fusiliers. Arthur was born in Wolverhampton in 1887, the son of Arthur Henry Williams and Anne Elisa Williams of Major Street (right), his father working in the adjacent chemical factory. By 1901 the family had moved to nearby 28 Johnson Street, while Arthur junior found his first employment as a brass dresser, aged fifteen. A short time after that young Arthur had found work as a cycle fitter, aged fifteen. A short time after that young Arthur had found work as a brass dresser, but looking for a life of excitement and probably better pay, Arthur enlisted for the Army at Bilston on 7 Oct 1904. He signed up for three years (plus 9 years in Reserve) and was assigned to the Royal Munster Fusiliers.

Two months later on 13 December he was in Tralee, County Kerry, the HQ of the Royal Munster Fusiliers (left), where he would begin his education and training. On 23 March 1905 he received his first posting – to Gibraltar, where he served
for 2 years and 348 days, before his return to the UK on 6 March 1907. After a few months training back in Ireland, his term was over, and he was transferred to the Army Reserve on 6 October 1907. Arthur returned home, but by 1911 the family were living in their first house in Ellesmere Port, in 43 Heathfield Road, both men now working as galvanised sheet packers in the new iron works. Like many other Ellesmere Port families, they had come from the Black Country to follow the move made by the Wolverhampton Iron Works after its pre-war relocation to the Port. Sometime later, before the war, Arthur had moved out to Dudley Terrace, in a neighbouring street, while his parents and family moved to the adjacent street to 64 Princes Road.

43 Heathfield Road (left) and in 1910 (above)

2 Dudley Road (left) and in the road in 1910 (above)

The family home – 64 Princes Street.
Three years later, when war was declared on 4 August 1914, Arthur, as a Reservist, was called up immediately and was mobilised on 6 August at Tralee. Within days the Royal Munsters were in France with the BEF, and swiftly into the thick of the action in the first major engagement, which resulted in what became known as the Great Retreat during the Battle of Mons. A strategic rearguard action was called for in order to allow the BEF to escape and the 2nd Royal Munster Fusiliers, in their very first action in France, were tasked with holding their ground under all circumstances, thereby achieving a military feat seldom paralleled in modern warfare.

A brigade may occasionally have the task of trying to delay a whole enemy division. A division may perhaps be deployed in an attempt to turn aside or halt an advancing army corps - but for a single battalion to stem the advance of an entire army by their sole action was unprecedented. In fact, less than a battalion in strength, just three companies of the 2nd Battalion of The Munsters, supported by a couple of field guns, engaged the German attackers. The Munsters fell back to an orchard near Étreux, and as night fell on the evening of 27 August, found themselves surrounded. Having exhausted their ammunition, they surrendered.

(Right) Royal Fusiliers (9th Brigade, 3rd Division) on 22 August, 1914, resting in the square at Mons, Belgium, the day before the Battle of Mons.

In their action at Étreux, the 2nd Munsters were decimated, with only five officers and 196 other ranks surviving. Nevertheless, the Battalion's action halted the advance of the German Army for fourteen hours in the area of Oisny and Étreux, effectively preventing German pursuit, thus enabling the rest of the British Army to withdraw to a safe distance of twelve miles. The Munsters were outnumbered at odds of over 6 to 1, and when finally defeated, the survivors were congratulated on their supreme bravery by the German soldiers they had fought.

In 1922, a cross was erected in an orchard in Étreux, just behind the railway station, to the memory of 120 men of the Munsters's 2nd Battalion who fell there in their last stand on 27 August 1914. The officers and men of the Regiment who died in that battle are buried there alongside the carved monumental cross dedicated to their memory.

Part of the inscription reads " In proud and lasting memory of ..... the officers, warrant officers, non-commissioned officers and men of the 2nd. Battalion, Royal Munster Fusiliers ..... who laid down their lives during The Great War in the cause of Freedom and Justice, 1914-1918"
A more detailed battle account comes from the Étreux memorial (Commonwealth War Graves) webpage.

**The Rearguard Action at Étreux**

The first major battle fought by the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) on the Western Front took place at Mons on 23 August 1914. In the wake of the Battle of Mons, the British Forces, along with their French allies, began retreating south west toward Paris. The men of the 2nd Munsters had remained in reserve at Mons and had not been involved in any fighting by the time they halted about four miles north of Étreux on the evening of 26 August. Along with the two cavalry units of the 15th Hussars and a section of the Royal Field Artillery, the Munsters were tasked with acting as a rearguard for III Corps of the BEF as it continued to retreat south toward the village of Guise.
The weather was warm and sultry as the men of the rearguard rose at dawn on the 27th and prepared to meet a possible German attack. Several early assaults by small by small groups of German troops were repulsed by well-aimed rifle and machine-gun fire, but by midday German infantry were attacking in strength and the Munsters were forced to retreat to village of Fesmy-le-Sart. Fesmy was the scene of heavy fighting throughout the afternoon as German units charged at the British lines and were repeatedly beaten back.

By 5 p.m., the battalion was in danger of being overrun and began to retire south toward Étreux in order to rejoin the main force of British troops which had been retreating for most of the day. Yet as they approached Étreux, the Munsters discovered that much of the town had already been occupied by German troops who now began to lay down heavy machine-gun and artillery fire. Cut off from its own army and greatly outnumbered by the enemy, the rearguard now began to suffer serious casualties as it tried to fight its way through the German lines. British troops charged again and again at the houses in the northern outskirts of the village, which were full of German soldiers, but were beaten back by intense enemy fire. By 7 p.m. the rearguard was under attack from all sides, the commanding officer had been killed, and the surviving officers and men had retired to an apple orchard from where they continued to resist the advancing German forces. Shortly after 9.15 p.m. those who were still standing, about 250 men, finally surrendered. By 7 p.m. the battalion was in danger of being overrun and began to retire south toward Étreux in order to rejoin the main force of British troops which had been retreating for most of the day. Yet as they approached Étreux, the Munsters discovered that much of the town had already been occupied by German troops who now began to lay down heavy machine-gun and artillery fire. Cut off from its own army and greatly outnumbered by the enemy, the rearguard now began to suffer serious casualties as it tried to fight its way through the German lines. British troops charged again and again at the houses in the northern outskirts of the village, which were full of German soldiers, but were beaten back by intense enemy fire. By 7 p.m. the rearguard was under attack from all sides, the commanding officer had been killed, and the surviving officers and men had retired to an apple orchard from where they continued to resist the advancing German forces. Shortly after 9.15 p.m. those who were still standing, about 250 men, finally surrendered. On the day after the battle many of the dead Irishmen were buried in the same apple orchard in which they had fired their last shots. Over 600 British soldiers were killed during the rearguard action at Étreux, but by engaging so many German troops for so long the Munsters had allowed III Corps of the BEF to continue its retreat with only minor losses.

Private Arthur Williams was one of the survivors, but he had been taken prisoner. On his return to Britain he wrote a long letter to the Prisoner of War Society in the Ellesmere Port, which remains the most detailed account of war experience written by any of the Ellesmere Port men in the forces. He wrote the following letter on 3 January 1916 in the hospital he was taken to in London, the contents of which no doubt touched many of those later asked to contribute to the Prisoner of War Fund (by this time his condition was said to be improving);

A true account of my internment,
by
Private A Williams, Royal Munster Fusiliers

I was taken prisoner on 27 August 1914, at a place called Étreux in France on the historic retreat from Mons after a very severe engagement in which my regiment ‘The Dirty Shirts’ (so called because it was reported that they turned out in their shirt sleeves to fight an engagement in India) lost very heavily; and the few that were lucky enough not to be killed were taken prisoners. It would be about 10 o’clock on the Thursday night and after being knocked and cuffed about we were taken and put in a cloth factory in the village where the fight had taken place, and remained there twelve days. Never will I forget these first twelve days. We were allowed to tear up bales of cloth and linen to rest our weary bones on at night time. The sanitary arrangements here were something awful. I often wonder how it was we were not struck down with some disease.

The next day after my capture we were sent out to bury some of our dead comrades. This was very sorrowful as only a few hours before they had been light-hearted and happy, and some of them were mangled beyond recognition. As regards the food, it was nothing but sheer starvation. We got small drops of
coffee, about half a pint in a morning, half a pint of soup at noon, and the same amount of coffee again in the evening. During this time we only got five or six issues of bread, amounting to about 15 or 16 ounces altogether, but I mention that the German officer in charge told us that that was the best they could do for us, because they were living on loot themselves. We were kept in this place nine days before we were allowed out in the fresh air for exercise, and I remember well that they had to break several windows in this factory to let in fresh air, or else we should all have been stricken down with illness.

Whenever the Germans required a fatigue party there used to be a general stampede to try and get out as there was a chance to pick up a stray carrot or some other kind of vegetable. Often have I seen myself and also my comrades pick up the peel of vegetables and eat it just to satisfy the terrible craving for food. On the 12th day we got the news that we were going to be removed to Germany. On that day we got nothing to eat at all. All we got was a small drop of coffee in the morning. We moved off that day about noon to a village about eighteen miles away. I do not know the name. Along the route we were allowed to pick up a marigold out of a field and we ate it with the greatest relish. Arriving at this village we were placed in a church for the night, resting the best way we could in pews; and the few wounded we had with us managed to have a bit of straw to lie on.

The following morning we again marched off about another twelve or thirteen miles to a town called Formies in France [most likely Fourmies]. Again we got nothing to eat, but the good people placed pails of milk on the road for us to drink, and this managed to keep us from fainting. Here we were to entrain for Germany, so we were put in cattle trucks, huddled together like bees in a hive. On the side of the line here was a convoy of bread, which had been sent down the line for the German troops. It had lain for days in the rain and had gone all mouldy, so they decided to give us the bread to eat on the way. When you broke this bread, clouds of dust would fly out of it, but nevertheless we ate what we could out of it, washing it down with water, as this was the only drink they would give us. They told us water was good enough for the swine of an Englishman. We met with some very hostile treatment going up the line, the civilians shouting and jeering at us and throwing stones; and I saw one incident where a German officer struck one of my comrades with a blow on the back with his sword. This was only a beginning of German Kultur. What I have seen since makes me put down the majority of Germans as cowards and bullies, with the greatest of all tyrants their king.

Coming to my story again, we were in the train about forty hours, arriving in Sennelager, Westphalia on the Friday morning about 6 o’clock, 11th September 1914. After being paraded and marched about, we were taken to the canteen and given the first good meal since our capture, and it
consisted of barley, potatoes and meat. I think this was the best meal I ever enjoyed in Germany as I was so hungry, the same time I could have eaten leather. After this we were told we were going to have a bath, so we were marched down to the bath houses, but never a bath did we see? They gave us towels and left us there till evening time. Afterwards we were marched away to the camp ground. Here we were told we were lucky to get a tent, as most of the prisoners had been sleeping in the open air. After being given our issue of bread and coffee, for which we had to wait hours in the rain, we were given one blanket and a bit of straw. We were told, ‘off to your tent’. This first night was terribly wild. It blew and rained all night, and was intensely cold, and out of the poor unfortunates, who were sleeping out in the open, there were seven or eight died from cold and exposure. The following morning I had my first glimpse of the interned civilians and how sorry I felt for them, for they had no shelter at all. Their sufferings must have been very bad: but what did the Huns care! They were only ‘English swines’ to them! And so commenced my life in Sennelager No.3.

The food here was not up to the mark. We had black coffee, no milk or sugar for breakfast, watery soup for dinner and coffee again for tea, and one large loaf of black indigestible bread between six men. On this diet we had all kinds of fatigue to do, with an occasional small bun and a bit of sausage or cheese in the way of recompense. But for all that we managed to keep a light heart.

As the days rolled on the weather began to get extremely cold, and we were very poorly clad. Our socks and boots were nearly worn out and we had only one shirt which by this time was much ‘verminised’. I think it was about November 20th when we got our first bath, and got our clothes fumigated: and the Germans gave us a thin shirt so that we could have a change. Up till December 1st we were sleeping in old tents on a small bit of dirty straw, but by this time they had given us another blanket. About December 1st we were moved into wooden huts which had been built for the benefit of the prisoners: but here two men had to sleep on one old straw mattress, and the conditions were not much better. However, with a plentiful supply of Keating’s powder, and clean clothes which we got from home, we managed to get gradually cleaner.

The form of punishment here was very severe to my mind. For the least offence you were tied to a tree with rope for three days, two hours each day, which the German’s considered equal to three days’ solitary confinement. I also witnessed occasional bullying on the part of some of the sentries; such acts as kicking and punching and striking men with the butt of their rifles was very common at this time. One day, while on fatigue round the German troops’ barracks, I was called by a decent German to have a basin of soup. Hearing him call there were several Frenchmen ran for this soup, as well as me, but being the tallest I reached over to get it, when the sentry in charge gave me a punch in the back worthy of Jack Johnson. I need not tell you that I did not get the soup.

Coming to Christmas Day, our bill of fare was dry black bread for breakfast with coffee. We were told we were going to have a grand dinner, but when we got it
what a shock! It consisted of carrot water soup with a little meat, which was like boiled string. But they were decent enough to give us five cigars. This was the only thing that reminded us that it was Christmas Day, and we had a little tune or two on the mouth organ for supper.

About this time we started to get parcels and that helped to cheer us up a bit. Well in fact, only for the people of England being so good and kind in sending parcels out to the poor prisoners of war, I don’t know how they would live. As regards the fatigues, some of them were very hard. There was one fatigue especially which was very hard. We called it the “farm fatigue” and all we got extra for it was a bit of sausage, cheese or a herring. The day we would be on this fatigue we got dinner which consisted always of some kind of soup at 7 a.m., and then proceeded to the farm where we used to stay until 3.15 with nothing to eat, unless we happened to save some bread from the night before. There were several kinds of work on this farm, such as dragging a harrow or towing machines about as they had no horses; also digging drains making roads, etc. Often have we got ringing wet, and having no change of clothes we used to sit on our old mattresses until we were dry again. I don’t know if they were getting short of bread, but they cut our rations down. Instead of six men to a loaf, they made it ten, and the occasional bun we used to get was taken away altogether. Often did we ask for great coats, but they would not give us one. They said we would sell them. It’s true there were a few men where clothing had been sold, but it was sold to try and get bread with the money. I ask you, what can a starving man do?

I stayed in Sennelager until March 15th 1915, when I was told I was off for a working party. Before going we got two new shirts, two pairs of underpants and clogs, and then proceeded to a place called Dorsten, which was Detachment No.2 Camp of Dulmen. Here the work was very hard. At first we used to go out at 7 am, return for soup at 12 o’clock; go out again at 1.30, and return at 6pm. The work consisted chiefly of turning land over ready for growing produce. After a while the hours were changed. We went out at 6am and returned at 3pm having half an hours rest while we were out. After this we had another change, going out at 4am and returning at 1pm. Then we had another change, going out at 6am and returning at 6 pm with two hours rest on fatigue, during which we got a small drop of soup. I might say that after a few weeks here they commenced to pay us a small amount for the work we did. The pay was 1d for bad work, 2d for medium and 3d for good. The food here at the confinement was fairly good, but it gradually dropped back to the same old thing. I remember once they gave us some raw salty herrings to eat. As this food was totally unfit to eat, we naturally threw them in the swill tub. The officer in charge somehow managed to see them, and for punishment deprived us of coffee.
for one month, which I think was a very unfair punishment. The same officer would also visit some nights at about midnight and have a fire alarm sounded. I might say on these occasions he was nearly always drunk.

I will now tell you about a wanton act of cruelty on the part of a German sentry. We were out on fatigue, levelling land over after it had been ploughed by a steam plough. There was a squad of around fifteen men, including myself. One of the men, a gunner of the R.F.A., did not seem to be doing the work to the sentry’s liking, so he took the spade off him and showed him how he wanted it done, handing the spade back. The man tried to do the work the way the sentry showed him. Again he did not seem to give satisfaction, so the sentry deliberately stabbed him in the thick part of the leg. This was one of the most cowardly actions I have ever seen, as the man never gave any provocation whatsoever, not by word or action.

I remained in this place until September 19th, when I was taken to a civil hospital in the town suffering from a bad attack of diabetes [according to the official interview when he returned to London, this hospital was Dorsten]. My treatment in this hospital was good. After remaining in this hospital for about ten days, I was removed to a prisoner of war hospital at Wesel-on-Rhine. Here my treatment was very good, but I can’t say the same for the other patients as I was on a special diet. While here my eye-sight went very bad, and on the application of Mr L. Wilkinson of Ellesmere Port, the British Red Cross Society sent me the money to pay for the glasses which the German oculist recommended me to wear. I must also pay a tribute to the good work the Prisoners of War Society, Ellesmere Port, is doing, for without parcels from home I do not know what the prisoners would do. In this hospital there were boards over the bed cots to let you know what diet you were on. There were Form 1 and Form 2. Form 1 was for any prisoners who were enjoying good bodily health, but were wounded. This consisted of coffee and bread and butter at 7am, soup at noon, coffee again at 2pm and soup again at 6pm and nearly always very watery. Form 2 was for the patients not in good health. I was called Form 2 with extras, and the extras consisted of different things, according to the patient’s health. Attached to this hospital was a courtyard, where we were allowed out for walking exercise between the hours of 11 am and 12, and again from 2pm until 5pm. During this time we were allowed to smoke.

I cannot express my joy, when on 30th October I was told I was for England on account of my health. That day I passed two inspectors, and was told I was to hold myself in readiness for the next exchange on 21st November. I was ordered to get ready to proceed to the exchange depot. So, proceeding to the station in the charge of an escort, I was taken to Düsseldorf and placed in hospital there, where I was told we had to stay until the authorities got the papers through from England.
Here we remained ten days, the conditions being much the same as at Wesel. On 1st December we left for the exchange at Aachen. The hospital we were taken to was a lovely place. Everything there was clean and comfortable, with as much food as we could eat, with a nice smoking and sitting room, where we often had a bit of an accordion played by a Belgian private. On the 4th we passed the board of inspection and out of 99 there were 28 rejected and out of the poor unfortunates were men missing an arm. The worst part of exchanging was that you do not know until the last minute if you are rejected or not. This is I think is very cruel as it keeps men in suspense. On leaving this place we were given whatever articles of clothes we were short of. What a contrast this was after what we had all gone through. I think they gave us these just to try and make the dear people of our country think we had been well treated during our internment.

On the evening of the 5th the names of the men who were rejected were read out. Some were sent back to camp, and some to hospital and those that had passed the board were taken to the station in a motor ambulances and placed in a hospital train and put to bed. These hospital trains were very comfortable each ward having about ten beds with an orderly in attendance. About midnight the train started for Flushing, travelling to Brussels. Here the Belgian exchange prisoners that were travelling with us were taken off.

Reaching the first station in Holland, we had a very good reception, stopping there two hours. The good people brought us sandwiches, cakes and tea, cigars and cigarettes and English papers. It did the heart good to read a bit of truth once more, for the only paper we read in Germany was a paper called the “Continental Times” supposed to be edited by a man named White and printed for the benefit of Americans in Europe, and full of all kinds of lies. In fact, they put what news in they thought would dishearten us, but we only used to laugh and say “Who’s next for a read of the “Continental Liar”?”. About 5pm we reached Flushing, and we were taken aboard the hospital ship, where everything was ready for our comfort. The following morning at daybreak, we set sail and reached Tilbury docks the same evening, where again we had another fine reception.
Now I hope my trials and troubles are over for a while, so let us pray, pray to God that the Allies win this gigantic struggle. All I can say is ‘God helping us if we lose’.

Yours truly

Private A. Williams

The next hint of Private Williams’ movements is contained in an article published about the ‘Comforts Fund’;

Good progress has to be recorded, although contributions have been below normal for the past few weeks, owing to stress of circumstances. The set-back has been met to some extent by means of a special appeal during the past fortnight, by which it is hoped to raise £10. Through the kindness of Mr J Winn of the Knot Hotel, who has offered the use of the green for the purpose, arrangements are well in hand for conducting a bowling tournament. The officials of the local league have offered every assistance. The secretary continues to receive numerous letters and postcards in acknowledgement of parcels sent out, while during the past few days the personal thanks have been expressed of Private A Williams, an ex-prisoner of war, Private T.C. Rutherford and Private Wellock, all recently discharged, and now at home. Lance-Corporal H Elmore, now lying wounded at Norwich, sends his regards and thanks. Private J Hyde says he is pleased his ‘fellow mates’ still think of him as also are a number of other Port men with whom he is serving. Messages of thanks and appreciation also have been received from Private H. Talbot, T.W. Arnold, Private J. W. Thomas, Sid Riley, Corporal E. Corns, Corporal J.T. Stone, Private Albert Wellock (who unfortunately has had a leg amputated), G. Taylor, W. Reid, J. Holding, C. Shelley, A. Wright and others.

*Chester Observer, February 1916*

So Arthur Williams was now safely at home in Ellesmere Port, although there is no doubt he was still very ill. Although it has been found that the occurrences of diabetes was actually reduced during the First World War, due mainly to less excess and an improvement in balanced diets, this could not include those who were on a deprived diet such as a Arthur Williams, and it is likely this was the cause of his condition. In the early 20th century, physicians could do little to combat diabetes and patients remained little more than human guinea pigs. Some doctor’s prescribed low calorie diets with as little as 450 calories per day. This diet prolonged the life of people with diabetes but kept them weak and suffering from near starvation. Pity poor Arthur if this was his treatment considering what he had already endured. In his book, *The Discovery of Insulin*, Michael Bliss describes the painful wasting death of the diabetic before insulin:

‘Food and drink no longer mattered and often could not be taken. A restless drowsiness shaded into semi-consciousness. As the lungs heaved desperately to expel carbonic acid (as carbon dioxide), the dying diabetic took huge gasps of air to try to increase his
capacity. ‘Air hunger’ the doctors called it, and the whole process was sometimes described as ‘internal suffocation.’ The gasping and sighing and sweet smell lingered on as the unconsciousness became a deep diabetic coma. At that point the family could make its arrangements with the undertaker, for within a few hours death would end the suffering.’

Tragically for Arthur Williams, it would not be until 1921 before the miracle extract, insulin, would be discovered and ensure diabetes was no longer a terminal disease. Arthur had undoubtedly come home to die, but at least he was home in the care of his family. He passed away aged thirty on 4 September 1917, the cause of death officially recorded as diabetes.

**FORMER PRISONER OF WAR PASSES AWAY**

The many friends of Mr A. Williams, 64 Princes Road, Ellesmere Port, will be sorry to learn of his untimely death at the age of thirty years as a direct result of the exposure and treatment which he met with while a prisoner of war in Germany. It was the Ellesmere Port Prisoners of War Society who were instrumental in bringing his case before the British Red Cross Society, who secured his exchange. For a time he was in hospital in London and he took part in the Royal Munster’s Prisoner of War matinee, which took place at the Shaftesbury Theatre. He was then sent to a hospital at Hoole, and it was from here that he visited Ellesmere Port and spoke at a matinee at the Queen’s Theatre in aid of the Prisoners of War Funds. In fact Mr Williams was ever ready to help the Prisoners’ Society. He was taken prisoner at Etreux on August 17th 1914. It was here he spent twelve terrible days of fearful privation, and later he assisted in burying some of his own comrades. He was glad at that time to feed even upon the skins of vegetables and was given mouldy bread for rations.

*Birkenhead News 15 September 1917*

Arthur Williams was laid to rest in Christchurch, Ellesmere Port, the parish church of his home, in a Commonwealth War Grave. [Plot B, Row 7, Grave 21.]
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<th>Place of Birth</th>
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</tr>
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Census: 1891 (top) / 1901 (bottom).
# Census 1911

## Medal Card

### Campaign: 1914

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<td>Rhumetius Pete</td>
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**Action taken**

- Dis charged.

**Qualifying Date**

13.8.14

(6 34 46) W231—HP5690 500,000 4/19 HWVF(P240) K608

8153/Adt
Former Prisoner of War Passes Away.

The many friends of Mr. A. Williams, 64, Princess-road, Ellesmere Port, will be sorry to learn of his untimely death at the age of 30 years as a direct result of the exposure and treatment which he met with while a prisoner of war in Germany. It was the Ellesmere Port Prisoners of War Society who were instrumental in bringing his case before the British Red Cross Society, who secured his exchange. For a time he was in hospital in London, and he took part in the Royal Munster's Prisoners of War matinee, which took place at the Shaftesbury Theatre. He was then sent to a hospital at Hoole, and it was from here that he visited Ellesmere Port and spoke at a matinee at the Queen's Theatre in aid of the Prisoners of War funds. in fact, Mr. Williams was ever ready to help the Prisoners' Society. He was taken prisoner at Étreaux on August 27th, 1914. It was here he spent twelve terrible days of fearful privation, and later he assisted in burying some of his own comrades. He was glad at that time to feed even upon the skins of vegetables, and was given mouldy bread for rations.

Tranmere Man Killed.

Birkenhead News 15 September 1917
P.O.W. Interviews

When Prisoners of War returned home they were usually interviewed by military authorities to gather intelligence about the enemy. Men who were to be hospitalised were subjected to a series of questions for similar reasons, but also to learn how men had been treated medically by the enemy. Records are still intact and are held in The National Archives. This is the actual interview experienced by Private Arthur Williams.

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**HOSPITAL ENQUIRY SHEET.**

1. Name, Rank, No., and Regiment.
2. Home Address.
3. Place and date of capture.
4. Nature of wound, if any.
5. Any attention at field dressing station? Kindly treated?
6. Name of Hospital to which ultimately sent.
7. Length of journey to hospital.
   Nature of conveyance.
8. Treatment on journey by—
   (a) Guard.
   (b) Others.
9. Any food on journey? If so, what and how often?
10. Behaviour of German Red Cross.
11. Length of time in this Hospital.
    Give dates if possible.
12. Treatment in Hospital.
    (a) Medical.
    (b) Nursing.
    (c) Lodging.
    (d) Food.
    (e) Sanitary conditions; if bad, state way in which defective.
    Any difference of treatment made between different nationalities.
13. Names of doctors who attended informant; humane or reverse?
    Any operation? If so, under anaesthetic? If not, why not?
    Any supplied by Germans?
    What? Underlinen? Bed linen?
    How often changed?
15. Postal arrangements. Received letters and parcels sent? Regularly or not?
    Opened in informant's presence? Any articles removed?
16. Date of discharge from hospital.
    To what camp? Length of journey.
    Treatment on journey.
17. General remarks on points not included above.
18. Opinion of Examiner as to intelligence and reliability of informant.
**wo/161/98/157**

**Heilbronn.**

(1) Williams, Arthur, Private, No. 7822.
Royal Munster Fusiliers.
(2) 2 Dudley Terrace, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire.
(3) Kranz, France. 27th August 1914.
(4) No wound.
(5) Nil.
(6) Dorsten Hospital for 10 days from 18th September. Then sent to Wesel Hospital.
(7) Nil.
(8) Bad. Bad food. Mouldy bread and water on the journey. (a) The guard treated us fairly. (b) The civilians in Germany throw stones at us, and threatened us.
(9) Mouldy bread and water. Plenty of it.
(10) Nil.
(11) At Wesel Hospital, from 28th September 1915 to 21st November 1915.
(12—(a) The doctor was very good to me.
(13) No nurses.
(14) Good.
(15) Very good.
8th December 1915.

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**Stewart Johnson.**

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**wo/161/98/412**

**259.**—(1) Williams, Arthur, Private, No. 7822. 2nd Royal Munster Fusiliers.
(2) 2 Dudley Terrace, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire.
(3) Sennheiser, No. 3.
(4) From 11th September 1914 to 31st March 1915.
(5)—(a) About 5,000. (b) About 1,200.
(6) Not known.
Character of Commandant pretty fair.
(7)—(a) In huts. One straw palliassse between two men, no pillow. Two blankets per man and one sheet.
(b) The huts were cold. Three fires in a hut for about 200 men.
(c) Pretty good. There were baths.
(d) Bad as could be. Fatigue parties had to clean out the latrines and urinals, which smelt badly.
(e) My comrades told me that the hospital was bad. I never went in.
(8)—(a) Not sufficient. 8 oz. black bread. Soup (very watery) with small bit of meat if lucky. Black coffee for breakfast, made from maize with no sugar and no milk.
256. Williams, Arthur, 7822, 2nd Royal Munster Fusiliers.
(2) L. Dudley Terence, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire.
(3) Dorset Detachment, No. 9 Camp, Dulmen.
(4) From 31st March 1915 to 18th September 1915.
(7) (8) English.
(9) I did not know the names of The Commandant. Very severe. A bully to the prisoners and his own men also.
(10) (11) In a wooden hall. Good.
(12) Only those in warm weather.
(13) Plenty of facilities.
(14) Proper flush closets and urinals; good.
(15) Fair.
(16) Good canteen, run by the owner of the public house.
(17) Fair.
(18) Fair condition. Arrived all right.
(19) Fair.
(20) No much room. Only a small yard. We were wired in in the yard.
(21) Games allowed, but yard too small for football.
(22) Any indoor games.
(23) At any time in the yard.
(24) The R.C.'s were taken to a church, but no religious services for the others.

Evidently knew he had done wrong. The R.A.M.C. men made up a stretcher, and carried the man back to barracks. He could not walk. Kidd died with pain when he was stabbed. He gave no provocation to the sentry before he was stabbed. He was afterwards removed to a hospital, and I never saw him again.
I saw him before he went to the hospital, and he complained of his leg being very painful.

The sentry was never in charge of a squad after that. He was sent away, and a German sergeant afterwards said he had been killed at the front.

The names of the other men in the squad that I knew were:

- Private Blackburn, R.A.M.C.
  - Steel, R.A.M.C.
  - Potter, of the Lincoln.
  - Lancaster, R.A.M.C.

The following men were in the same bungalow as Kidd, and, no doubt, saw him when he had been stabbed:

- Private McKenna, Royal Munster Fusiliers.
- Roach, Royal Munster Fusiliers.
- Parsons, Royal Munster Fusiliers.
- Wheeler, Royal Munster Fusiliers.

There are still in Germany except the R.A.M.C. men.

Williams, Arthur, 7822, 2nd R.M.F.
In Dec. 1914 when I was at Sommelager, the majority of the Irish prisoners were separated off from the rest of us, and put in separate huts. We tried to get to know why this was done, but could not find out. A company was formed, which was called the Irish Company, from these men that were sent apart. The Irish went away just before Christmas. We understood they went to Limberg. After that one letter (for Munster Fusiliers) used to be delivered with the post-mark Limberg on them. I daresay about 150 men of my regiment were in this Irish Company.

I can give the names of some of them—

Sergeant Murphy,
Sergeant Foley,

Company Sergeant-Major Brown,
Corporal Daniello,
Private Butler,
Private Hibbert,
Private Bullion,
Private Braddish.

We were able to mix with them when they were in the separate huts. They did not know why they were kept separate. They knew two or three days beforehand that they were going away, but they did not know where they were going to or for what object. They were thoroughly loyal men.

I never heard the name of Cuemeral when I was in Germany. I could not say if he ever visited the camp.

Williams, Arthur, Private, 7822, 2nd Royal Munster Fusiliers.

Stewart Johnson,
8th Dec. 1915.

Stewart Johnson,
11th Dec. 1915.
In Memory of
Private
Arthur Aaron Williams

7822, "C" Coy. 2nd Bn., Royal Munster Fusiliers who died on 04 September 1917 Age 30

Son of Arthur and Anne Eliza Williams, of 64, Princess Rd., Ellesmere Port. Born at Wolverhampton.

Remembered with Honour
Ellesmere Port (Christ Church) Churchyard

Commemorated in perpetuity by
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission
Private 7822 Arthur Williams
‘C’ Company, 2nd Battalion Royal Munster Fusiliers
Commonwealth War Grave
[Plot B, Row 7, Grave 21.]
Christchurch, Ellesmere Port

CWGC records reveal the original inscription requested by the family was

‘A Mons Hero’
Researched and written
by
Mike Royden

Photographs in France also by the author

www.roydenhistory.co.uk