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# Report of Treatment of Conscientious Objectors at the Camp Funston [Kansas] Guard House [events of Sept. 5 to Oct. 21, 1918]

by David Eichel, et al.

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entitled *What Happens in Military Prisons: The Public is Entitled to the Facts*, dated Dec. 13, 1918.

## **Thursday, September 5, 1918.**

Seven Conscientious Objectors arrived at the Military Police Guard House from the Guard House at Riley.

## **Saturday, Sept. 7th.**

We were ordered to fold our arms and stand at “attention” by the “Officer of the Day,” Capt. Buckley. Failing to comply with this order he proceeded to abuse and insult us, referring to those of Jewish birth as “damn kikes,” etc. He then had our beds and blankets taken from us, and ordered that we be given raw rations — pork and beans — which we were to cook in the latrine, if we wanted to eat. He suggested to the prisoners that they beat us up. We had no supper and slept on the bare floor in our clothes.

## **Sunday, Sept. 8th.**

Very little sleep was had because of the extreme chilliness of the night. No other provisions having been made for the preparation of food, we ate nothing on this day. We again slept on the bare floor without blankets.

## **Monday, Sept. 9th.**

Food conditions remained the same until supper, when we were informed that a kitchen for preparing our food would be furnished us, if we would do our own cooking. We were able to prepare supper. Upon returning from this meal we were informed that,

henceforth, we would be given bread and water only. Upon this fare we continued until Sept. 15th.

## **Saturday, Sept. 14th.**

Colonel Barnes, the Provost Marshal, called at the Guard House. He ordered us to stand at “attention” and when we refused to comply, he proceeded to kick the legs of the men. Kaplan had his legs and ankles bruised as a result. Upon leaving he hinted to the prisoners that he would be tempted to pardon them if they beat us up.

## **Monday, Sept. 16th.**

We were again placed upon bread and water diet. This continued until the following Sunday, Sept. 22nd, on which day we had regularly prepared meals — so that between Sept. 7th and 22nd we had only 2 days of regular rations.

## **Monday, Sept. 23rd.**

We were ordered to stand at “attention” by the incoming “Officer of the Day” and upon refusal we were told that we would be taken out during the night. This procedure was inaugurated that very night when we were awakened at these periodic intervals, taken out and kept out a while and sent back to bed.

## **Thursday, Sept. 26th.**

While walking about in the courtyard, the men were kicked and shoved about for not obeying an or-

der to walk in prescribed military fashion — Kaplan and Breger being the particular targets.

In the afternoon Larsen was brutally assaulted, being choked, his head banged against the wall, and dragged around the room by the Sergeant of the guards for refusing to clean quarters other than their own.

### **Friday, Sept. 27th.**

Again, while exercising, the men were grossly maltreated. The bayonet was applied to all of us — Larsen receiving a scar. Kaplan and Breger were beaten with the butt end of the rifle. All were kicked and shoved about.

Eight Conscientious Objectors came here from Fort Riley Guard House.

After supper we were ordered outside where we formed in double rank. The Sergeant of the Guards issued some military commands to us. When we did not obey promptly, he shoved us about violently. We then began marching around the building. Orders were given to “double time.” Bayonets were pressed against the bodies of Larsen, Silver, and others to obtain compliance, but no one ran. The guards now insisted that we walk in strict military posture and cuffs, kicks, and blows were rained upon those who refused to do so. Eichel refused to submit to this abuse and informed the guard that since in his opinion exercise was optional with Conscientious Objectors, he would march no more under such brutal impositions. A guard seized him by the neck and forced him around the building, heaping blows and kicks upon him at the same time. When he was finally released, the back of his head was covered with bumps and he was sore all over.

At about 9:00 that evening, we were again ordered out and again put through the same ordeal. This time Steiner ceased walking. He was seized by the ears and dragged around the building. Another guard after a while seized him by the throat and choked him so forcibly that he sank breathless to the ground. Steiner reported his treatment to the “Officer of the Day,” a 2nd Lieutenant, who refused to give his name and who insisted that he was carrying out orders.

We were informed that we would be called out every two hours. At 11:00 pm we were awakened and ordered out. We refused. It was debated whether or not to forcibly drag us out. They finally decided to leave us alone. However, none could sleep, for the

thought that we might be roused any moment kept preying on our minds.

### **Saturday, Sept. 28th.**

At 8:30 pm the Sergeant of the Guards ordered us out. Expecting a repetition of yesterday’s affair, especially since the Sergeant was a veritable brute, we refused. Kaplan, half undressed, was the first to rouse his venom. He was lifted bodily off his bed and thrown headlong through the door. He was dragged back, again lifted off his feet, and thrown against the bedstead so forcibly that his skull might have been smashed. He was then ordered to put on his shoes. He refused. The sergeant seized him and put him out barefooted. The other men were similarly handled. When we were finally lined up outside, the Sergeant followed us out — and never did man gloat so over his accomplishment. He remarked that he was carrying out the major’s orders — meaning Major Taussig, the Military Police Officer. After marching around a while we were permitted to return to quarters. Threats of subsequent and periodic repetition of this treatment again had the effect of keeping us awake all night.

The instructions that Conscientious Objectors are to be permitted to exercise is being utilized as a means to impose hardships upon us. We are kept outdoors in all sorts of weather, from 6 to 8 hours each day, and the guards are instructed to see to it that we keep moving continually. This is a source of constant irritation and friction between us and the guards, for some of us find it physically impossible to keep walking all day.

### **Thursday, Oct. 3rd.**

Our corresponding privilege has been restricted to one letter a week. The letter must be written upon one side of one small sheet. Its contents are subject to careful censorship. A general and thorough raid was made upon our quarters for books, magazines, and other reading matter. All prisoners were forced to take a cold shower.

### **Friday, Oct. 4th.**

Orders were issued that Conscientious Objectors are to be given but one helping of food and “d— little at that.” Not even an extra piece of bread is allowed us. We are kept hungry from meal to meal.

**Saturday, Oct. 5th.**

We were ordered to take a cold shower. DaRosa, feeling that cold showers are detrimental to him, and having taken a bath but one-half hour previous to the issuing of the above order, refused to undress. The Corporal of the Guards thrust him under the spray with his clothes on. DaRosa returned to the guard room, wearing his dripping clothes. The Corporal ordered him to undress and take a thorough shower. When DaRosa again refused, the Corporal tore his clothes from his body and at the same time delivered upon him some telling and effective blows. He was then placed under the cold shower.

We were compelled to take a cold shower once in the morning and once in the afternoon. A guard stood watch and checked each man.

**Sunday, Oct. 6th.**

In the afternoon, Sandin collapsed while taking his second cold shower of the day. We explained to the doctor who called the nature of the treatment we had been receiving lately. We also informed him that we were being underfed.

The Captain, who was "Officer of the Day," ordered that we be deprived of supper because we did not stand at "attention" at roll call.

At midnight we were suddenly and unexpectedly roused by the sergeant of the guards and ordered to take a cold shower. It was obvious that this was an unreasonable and vicious imposition and most of us refused to get up. We were then violently dragged into the shower room and held underneath the spray, night-clothes and all, until thoroughly exhausted. Kaplan, Breger, Block, Powell, Franklin, Eichel, Downey, Steiner, and DaRosa were so treated. The "Officer of the Day" was present and directed the proceedings.

**Monday, Oct. 7th.**

Greenberg, Block, Bernstein, and other have gone on sick report this morning, suffering from colds. Block and Bernstein were given aspirin tablets to make them perspire. Though the day was rainy and damp, all hands were ordered out for exercise. We were kept outside in the drizzle, until ordered to come in for a cold shower. Even those who had taken aspirin tablets were not excused from the prescribed bath.

Breger, Monsky, Ott, Silver, DaRosa, Block, and

Eichel have already declared an absolute hunger strike as a vehement protest against this treatment.

Another cold shower was administered to us in the afternoon. At 8:00 pm the "Officer of the Day," a Captain, and the Sergeant of the Guards ordered all to undress in the squadron and prepare for a cold shower, the third that day. We were marched to the latrine in a body. The Captain himself brought forth scrub-brushes, used ordinarily for cleaning toilet seats and brooms used for sweeping, and ordered that we scrub each other with them. Franklin refused to use the filthy brush. He was seized and roughly thrown to the cement floor, dragged back and forth, and viciously belabored until thoroughly exhausted. He was then placed under a cold spray and left there until he collapsed. Eichel and Shotkin helped him back to his bed. When he recovered he became hysterical.

The Captain wished to know what had happened. Eichel explained that Franklin was suffering from myocarditis and the constant and frequent impositions of cold showers had in all probability aggravated this ailment. Eichel then requested the captain to permit him to see the Post Commander. This the Captain refused to do, although he told Eichel that he was carrying out the instructions of the Post Commander in treating us so.

**Tuesday, Oct. 8th.**

Franklin, Sandin, and Hennessey have joined the hunger strike as protest against our inhuman treatment.

At about 8:00 pm the order was issued to prepare for a cold shower. Monsky informed the Captain who directed proceedings that he would not undress. The Captain ordered a guard to undress him and keep him under the shower twice as long. The Sergeant of the Guards timed everyone. Monsky was kept under the spray an unusually long time. He finally heard the Captain say, "if he suffers, keep him there; but if he isn't suffering, let him go."

Franklin because of his collapse the previous evening was given an extra dose and again collapsed. Eichel again requested to be permitted to see the Post Commander and again was refused.

Quite a few of the men, thoroughly chilled by the cold shower, had gone to bed to warm up. "Attention" was suddenly called and those in bed were

dumped by the guards and dragged to their feet. Half naked, the guards proceeded to place them in military posture. Towels, socks, and ropes were utilized to tie their hands in proper position. Then the Captain addressed us. "How many of you will now become sensible objectors and go out and do some work this afternoon?" Receiving no favorable response he said tersely: "All right, another cold shower at 10:30 am."

We were then ordered to dress and go out for exercise. Quite a few refusing to do this, were rudely dressed and dragged outside.

Promptly at 10:30 we were ordered in for our cold shower. Monsky, Block, Breger, Franklin, and Eichel, feeling that this was unquestionably punishment for their refusal to work, refused to undress. They were taken to the shower room in their clothes. There, Eichel was again ordered to undress. When he refused a Corporal slapped his face vehemently and dragged him back to the squad room. There the order was repeated and when Eichel maintained his attitude, the Corporal belabored him viciously with slaps across the face and blows upon the head. He was taken back to the shower room and he as well as the others who had refused to undress, were placed and kept underneath the spray in their clothes.

Hennessey had undressed for the shower and had stepped underneath. No one was paying any particular attention to him. Suddenly he emitted a wild shriek, began tottering and swinging aimlessly. If someone had not grabbed him instantly he might have dashed his head against the cement. He was carried to his bed, all the time maintaining his wild cries. Presently his struggles subsided and he remained in a state of coma for almost an hour. No doctor was sent for. Ott now asked permission to see the Post Commander and was given the expected response.

Those who had taken the shower in their clothes undressed and went to bed. At about 2:00 pm the order came to get out for exercise. The wet clothes were put on the men and they were thrust outside. We were walking around when the Corporal informed us that the Major (Taussig) had ordered that we walk more rapidly. Franklin attracted the guards' attention first. He was rushed violently against the wire fence, thrown to the ground, and his head banged against the rocks. Monsky next received the brunt of attention. The Corporal and guard pummeled, shoved, and abused

him. A group gathered to watch the spectacle. Amongst the latter were some friends of the active guard. To please them he seized Monsky from behind and ran him around the enclosure. Then, acting upon the suggestion of one of the spectators, he deliberately strove to step upon Monsky's bare feet. The latter succeeded for a while in thwarting him, but the inevitable happened and Monsky sank to the ground in agony. His ankle had been sprained.

This cowardly act completely unnerved Breger. "Hurray! Hurray for our brave American!" he yelled, and clapped his hands vehemently in applause. He was stopped but he no longer was master of himself. He stopped, took off his shoes, and exclaimed: "Here, do the same to me and show your bravery!" He walked on a while and suddenly let forth an uncanny yell and fell to the ground. He struggled painfully, all the time maintaining his gruesome cries. His struggles ceased finally and amid jeers of "He's all right," he was raised to his feet. Monsky in the meanwhile had been dragged all over the ground, his clothes tore from his body and was practically unconscious.

The "Officer of the Day" now came upon the scene. He ordered that those who would not walk be placed in solitary confinement on bread and water. Breger and Monsky were the first to be so punished. Eichel discontinued walking. He was dragged around a while and then placed in solitary confinement on bread and water. Steiner now refused to walk and he too was placed in solitary. Silver next attracted the guard's attention. The doctor had come and Silver informed him that since he had not eaten for 2 days, his physical condition would not permit his exercising and hence he would walk no more. He was ordered back into the ring by the "Officer of the Day" and when he refused a guard seized him and threw him to the ground. He then lifted him by the legs, to the intense delight of the spectators, and banged his head against the ground. This act was repeated a number of times. Then Silver, thoroughly shaken up, was placed on the restricted bread and water diet.

Breger, in the squad room, again gave vent to the wild paroxysms. His cries and intense internal struggle continued intermittently for over an hour.

#### **Wednesday, Oct. 9th.**

Steiner joined the hunger strikers because he had

been placed on bread and water.

Eichel was undressed and given a cold shower.

Colonel Barnes, the Provost Marshal, called while some of the Objectors were taking their enforced exercise. He ordered them to stand at "attention." When they refused he beat them vigorously with his heavy riding crop. Shotkin was badly hurt, the Colonel breaking his crop over the former's ankles. He deprecated the ruining of his stick, and implied that the only reason he did not brain Shotkin was that he wasn't worth the trouble. He then addressed the men before him. "You have declared a famine strike on me. Well, the Third Assistant Secretary of War [Frederick P. Keppel], your friend, knows it and has instructed that I permit you to starve to death."

Shotkin, limping, returned to quarters. A guard straightaway ordered him outside. Shotkin insisted that he could not walk and demanded medical attention. Though the doctor was in the room at the time, no treatment was given him. On the contrary, though suffering intense pain, he was dragged outside and two guards pushed him around the enclosure.

Steiner was dragged from his solitary cell and ordered to walk around. Failing to obey, a guard seized him by his fingers and dragged him around. Steiner suffered intense pain, for the slightest resistance on his part meant the pulling of his finger out of joint.

After supper two slices of bread were given to those who were presumably on bread and water, despite the fact that every one of them was on hunger strike. The Sergeant informed them "not a drop of water do you get until this bread is consumed."

#### **Thursday, Oct. 10th.**

Ott and DaRosa, both materially weakened by their hunger strike, were forcibly dressed and put on exercise in the afternoon.

Ott was shoved around a while and then left unmolested.

DaRosa was pushed about, then thrown to the wet ground, punched, kicked, and spat at by the guards. He was then raised to his feet and dragged around some more. Presently he was dropped and one guard seized him by the hair and rubbed his face in and banged his head on the ground. His cheek and forehead were bruised, leaving two ugly skin wounds.

Then four guards carried him to the shower

room, stripped him of what little clothes remained on his person, placed him on the cold cement floor, in an exhausted condition, and turned the cold spray on him. The soldiers then scrubbed him viciously with filthy brushes and brooms. One guard tickled his feet. He was finally brought back to the squad room in a semi-conscious state.

Downey, Brandin, Bernstein, and Kaplan, feeling they could not conscientiously continue eating while their fellow Conscientious Objectors were being so brutalized, joined in with the hunger strike.

#### **Friday, Oct. 11th.**

Brandin, because of extreme weakness, was unable to walk. A guard pricked him with a bayonet and then the Sergeant of the Guards, himself, pushed him around.

#### **Saturday, Oct. 12th.**

In the afternoon all the men, regardless of their physical condition, were ordered to dress and go out for fresh air. Those who refused were forcibly dressed and thrust outside. The men, because of their weakened state, sprawled all over the ground, while groups of spectators watched the miserable and sorry sight. At various times during the afternoon, Block, Breger, and Silver collapsed from total exhaustion.

After supper, the men were taken out of the solitary cells and returned to the regular squad room.

#### **Monday, Oct. 14th.**

Major Taussig, accompanied by another Major, who introduced himself as our investigator, came into the room in the morning. The latter gazed sneeringly and insolently about the room and without much ado dismissed most of the men from his mind as "Russian foreigners." His questioning was confined for the most part to ascertaining the birth and nativity of the men and establishing them as "Pro-Germans and members of Von Ludendorf's third division." He finally asked, with studied irony, whether any man was in danger of losing his reason or even his life. His final remark was: "There isn't a single American in the crowd."

Our writing tablets and what little money was in our possession was taken from us. A special guard was placed over us.

**Tuesday, Oct. 15th.**

Silver was examined by the doctor and it was apparent that his condition was very poor. He was hardly able to get out of bed. In the afternoon he was taken out of our squad room and placed in a solitary cell.

**Thursday, Oct. 17th.**

The men felt that the hunger strike had accomplished its purpose, in that brutalities had been discontinued for the past few days, and decided to eat supper. Bread and milk was given us to break our fast.

**Friday, Oct. 18th.**

Black coffee and bread was sent for breakfast. Such food, at this time, most of us felt was actual poison for our systems. Hence, with one or two exceptions, we declined to eat this repast. No other food was furnished us.

**Saturday, Oct. 19th.**

Immediately after breakfast Eichel was viciously and suddenly struck two stinging blows in the mouth, for failing through no fault of his, to properly “cover off” for count.

Later Ott and Eichel were ordered to clean the latrine by the Sergeant of the Guards, and when they refused, the former slapped, punched, and shoved them violently against the wall and other projections.

**Monday, Oct. 21st.**

The Major who made the perfunctory investigation Monday, Oct. 14th, returned and began calling each man to explain the mistreatments he had experienced and witnessed.

We wish it known that during this tense period we were held absolutely incommunicado. Packages containing food and delicacies, sent us from home at great expense of time and money and sentiment, were viciously and wantonly destroyed, and their contents dumped in the garbage cans, though we had at no time been told that we could not receive such packages.

The above is only a brief summary of the atroci-

ties perpetrated upon us. The situation can never be described with sufficient vividness and intensity to impart to the authorities a real impression of the mental and physical anguish suffered by us. Most of the mistreatment took place outside, with large groups watching the sorry and revolting spectacle of defenseless men being most brutally punched, shoved, and abused.

While we do not wish to impugn the motives of the investigator, we have reason to believe, because of his own statements and his obviously antagonistic attitude, that the report of his investigation would be prejudiced and not strictly in accordance with the fullest testimony of the men. We therefore feel justified in submitting this report, which we are all willing to affirm under oath, merely as a confirmation to his report.

The men reached the Guard House at Funston on the following dates — and went through the above experiences from the day of their arrival:

**September 5th [1918]:**

Bernstein, Breger, Greenberg, Kaplan, Hennessey, Larsen, Powell.

**September 27th [1918]:**

Downey, Eichel, Franklin, Ott, Sandin, Shotkin, Silver, Steiner.

**September 30th [1918]:**

Block, DaRosa, Monsky.

**October 8th [1918]:**

Bradin.

A copy of this report has been given to the investigator.

We, the undersigned, consider the above a fair and accurate account of our treatment at the Military Policy Guard House of Camp Funston, Kansas.†

*David Eichel*  
*Julius Greenberg*  
*Charles P. Larsen*  
*Francis Steiner*

*Emanuel Silver*  
*Benjamin Breger*  
*Rexford Powell*  
*Morris Franklin*

† Probably because their resistance began after induction, none of the 14 signatories of this document were included in Stephen M. Kohn's *American Political Prisoners: Prosecutions under the Espionage and Sedition Acts*. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994).

<i>Francis X. Hennessey</i>	<i>Thomas Shotkin</i>
<i>John Downey</i>	<i>Herman Kaplan</i>
<i>Mayer Bernstein</i>	<i>Lester G. Ott</i>
<i>Henry Monsky</i>	<i>Joseph Brandon</i>
<i>Max Sandin</i>	<i>Ulysses DaRosa</i>

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*[Addenda in the National Civil Liberties Bureau edition:]*

### **From an Affidavit.**

As soon as Mr. Bregar appeared [Aug. 26, 1918], I noticed a mark under his right eye, and was told by him, with the officer overhearing, that during the time he had been said to be exercising on the previous day, he had in reality been bound in his cell while a cold water hose was played upon him and that when he was released, his collapse was so complete as to require immediate medical attention. Two other COs, H.H. Kaplan and Francis Hennessey, were subjected to treatment equally brutal. Mr. Kaplan was forced to remain seated while cold water was trickled on his head and this process was continued until he fainted, while Mr. Kaplan was bound with his hands above his head in a manner so painful that he felt his arms were being broken and the pain caused him to scream repeatedly. While in this position the hose was played first upon one side and then upon the other.

All this was done under the supervision of the Officer of the Day, by a Private, who when not watched by the officer, told Mr. Breger that he hated to do what he was doing, but was compelled to obey orders.

*Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.*

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