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THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS COMMITTEE IN MID-1923, COMMISSIONED THE REPORTS PREPARED BY THE BOARD OF INSPECTION TRIPS AND ANATOLIA

Abstract:

The Turkish nation, State, and National cooperation with them in Fighting the invading Armenia and the Greeks against the East, South, and West had to battle fronts. All these fronts was taken prisoner as soldiers of the warring parties.

Greek prisoners other than prisoners of war, in agreement with the national struggle to be released were provided. Greek warfare during the Lausanne Conference, while prisoners of Greece and Turkey as a mutual release of prisoners signed the contract for the garrison and the prisoner were created, ranging from the battalion are in.

Both the number and the Greek prisoners of war have to Greece in the hands of the Turkish prisoners of war captured in the presence of senior generals and officers, plus a large number of civilian population is to take place, the parties to the issue of prisoners has led to pay attention. It's not just the Governments of the warring States, Greek and Turkish Red Crescent Red Cross to prisoners of war, he has worked closely with the State concerned. This community are put forward claims and reports prepared by international Red Cross Committee have complained about each other with. Therefore, the International Committee of the Red Cross from time to time in both countries, in order to make an inspection of the camp experts remained in post. Indeed, in 1922 and in 1923, various inspection delegations, including the Greek prisoners of war camps were sent to Turkey to review.

We are the prisoners of the Greek warfare in Turkey this study regarding the status "prisoners were treated badly and is in difficult conditions of the prisoners" to what extent the Greek Red Cross claims is correct, commissioned by the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva to investigate Burnier-Burckhardt and his delegation, for their inspection visits and in Anatolia, it will consider the report and prepared

Keywords:

The national struggle, the Greek prisoners of war, the International Committee of the Red Cross, Inspection Visits, the report

INTRODUCTION

Before the War of Independence (National Struggle) Tripoli, Balkan and the Turkish Nations who participated in the World War I had left many of their sons captured one after another. Especially, in several fronts of the First World War, thousands of Turkish soldiers were taken as prisoners¹. The process of bringing these prisoners back to the country after their release, continued for years, some of them were released by the undertakings during the War of Independence and so they were able to return to the country².

During the war of Independence the Turkish Nation was forced to fight in the eastern, southern and western fronts against the alliance states, who occupied the country and against the Armenians and Greeks who were in collaboration with them³. In all this fronts, the soldiers of the warring parties were taken as prisoners mutually. Undoubtedly, prisoners were taken in the fight against the Armenians in the Eastern front and against the French and Armenian who were cooperating with the French in the Southern front. However, in these fronts, the soldiers who were captured, were released mutually due to the treaties made during the War of Independence⁴.

In the western front took the Turkish side the most prisoners during the war of Independence. This front opened against the Greeks was the main center of the fights during the National Struggle. Indeed, until the First Inönü War which was known as the first war with regular army, we had some prisoners from the Greek forces within the "Operation of the Nationalist Forces" which was ongoing on that front. However, their number was only a few. Together with the First İnönü War, the Turkish Army was seen to capture many more Greek soldiers as war prisoner. During the ongoing Second İnönü War and Sakarya Battle many prisoners were taken again. With the Field Battle of the Commander –In-Chief which began on 26 August 1922, the Greek Army was definitely defeated and they began to retreat or even escape in an irregular manner. Many of the officers and soldiers of the Greek Army were captured during the following operation which began in the immediate aftermath of the Great Offensive. The number of prisoners passed even ten thousand. Among the captured prisoners beside the Greek soldiers there were also local Greeks who committed all kinds of atrocities and massacres against our army and our people in the occupied territories by assisting the Greeks.

¹ Cemalettin Taşkıran, **Ana Ben Ölmedim(I. Dünya Savaşı'nda Türk Esirleri)**, Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul 2001, s. 47-48.

² Ahmet Özdemir, "Savaş Esirlerinin Millî Mücadeledeki Yeri", **Atatürk Yolu**, Ankara Üniversitesi Türk İnkılâp Tarihi Enstitüsü Dergisi, C. 2, Yıl: 3, Sayı: 6(Kasım 1990), s.322.; Taşkıran, **a.g.e.**, s. 227- 234.

³ **Esaret Hatıraları**(Eyüb Sabri(Akgöl Beyin "Bir Esirin Hatıraları"), Tercüman 1001 Temel Eser Serisi, Kervan Yay., İstanbul 1978, s. 13-89.

⁴ Mesut Çapa, "Yusuf Akçura'nın Rusya Seyahati ve Türk Esirleri", **Türk Kültürü**, Yıl: XXXI, Sayı: 366, s.608-622.; Bige Yavuz, **Kurtuluş Savaşı Döneminde Türk Fransız İlişkileri(Fransız Arşiv Belgeleri Açısından 1919-1922)**, Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, Ankara 1994, s.145.

With the increase in the number of prisoners some difficulties had arisen too. More serious precautions were thought to be needed for the prisoners who were kept in various camps behind the lines until that day, because the situation of these prisoners experienced great difficulties and problems on issues such as subsistence, protection, transport, exchange. At the beginning of the taken precautions “the garrisons and the headquarters were needed to be established⁵. The Greek military and civilian prisoners were sent to these garrisons and battalions established⁶ in different cities and towns according to the requirements. The created battalions were forced to work primarily in the rebuilding of the places, in the repair of the railway-engine lines which were destroyed during the occupation and in the road constructions⁷.

As it was mentioned above, the prisoners other than the prisoners of the Greek warfare were provided to be released due to the treaties during the War of Independence. While the prisoners of the Greek warfare were kept in the established garrisons and battalions until the implementation of the agreement signed between Greece and Turkey about the mutual release of the prisoners during the Lausanne Conference.

In order to determine whether the claims of the Greek Red Cross related to the conditions of the prisoners of the Greek War such as the mistreatment of the prisoners or the bad conditions under they were kept was true or not, in our study the report of the Burnier-Burkhard Delegation will be discussed and evaluated. The Burnier-Burkhard Delegation was appointed by the Geneva International Red Cross Committee to make inspection visit in Anatolia.

THE INSPECTION TRIPS AND THE REPORTS OF THE “BURNIER-BURKHARD DELEGATION APPOINTED BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

The release of the civilian and military prisoners of both sides began in accordance with the contract which was signed in Lausanne by the Turkish and Greek chief delegates about the exchange of the civilian and military prisoners. Even at the first stage this number was determined as 10000 thousand⁹. While this work was continuing, the Greek Red Cross was constituted by a commission made up of various nationalities. This commission had prepared a report based on allegations and untrue information about the civilian and military prisoners of the war who were released from Anatolia by the exchange¹⁰. This report was

⁵ Ahmet Özdemir, “Millî Mücadelede Yunan Harp Esirleri”, **Askeri Tarih Bülteni**, Genelkurmay Askerî Tarih ve Stratejik Etüt Başkanlığı Yayınları, Yıl: 18, Sayı: 34,(Şubat 1993), s.153-154; Ahmet Özdemir, “Millî Mücadelede Üserâ Taburları”, **Atatürk Yolu**, Ankara Üniversitesi Türk İnkılâp Tarihi Enstitüsü Dergisi, C. 2, Yıl: 3, Sayı: 5,(Mayıs 1990),s.130.

⁶ Özdemir, “Millî Mücadelede Üserâ Taburları”, s.136.

⁷ Özdemir, “Millî Mücadelede Üserâ Taburları”, s. 137.

⁹ **THAM**, No: 19, 15 Mart 1339(1923), s. 182.

¹⁰ **THAM**, No: 26, 15 Teşrin-i evvel 1339(1923), s. 278.

interpreted in the Lausanne negotiations especially through the International Red Cross Committee¹¹.

The Turkish Government and the Turkish Red Crescent explained that the claims which were put forward by the commission were not true and the reports of the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) Delegation who had visited the Greek prisoners in Anatolia before should not be taken as a basis. The publication of this committee's report and its adaption as official documents was defended by us¹².

However the Greek Government and the Greek Red Cross insisted on this report which was published in contravention to the facts by the commission formed by persons of different countries and they made a new attempt on this issue. Thereupon, the International Committee of the Red Cross met Ismet Pasha who was the head of the Turkish delegation in Lausanne and he accepted on the agreed compromise that the International Committee of the Red Cross could send a delegation to inspect the garrisons of the Greek prisoners in Anatolia¹³.

The International Committee of the Red Cross appointed Georges Burnier¹⁴ who served as a delegate in Istanbul and another delegate Charles Burckhard¹⁵ for this inspection. Saffet Sav Bey joined the delegation who was the Branch Manager of the Hilal-i Ahmer Usera . The delegation moved from Istanbul on 24 June 1923. This inspection visit of the delegation was continued until the beginning of August. After completing the inspection the delegation returned to Istanbul again via Izmir¹⁶.

After the inspection visit in Anatolia, Monsieur Burckhard a member of the delegation made a farewell visit to the Headquarters of the Hilal-i-Ahmar in Istanbul and later went back to Swiss¹⁷. The delegation published the observations and determinations about their travels to Anatolia and about the visits in the garrisons of the Greek prisoners later as well.

The itinerary was specified in the beginning of the report which was prepared by the Burnier-Burckhard delegation that left Istanbul in order to inspect the garrisons of the Greek war's prisoners in Anatolia. According to this, the delegation had moved through Anatolia from north to south, from the center (Central Anatolia) to westward. Within this framework, the centers of the visited prison garrisons were the followings: Ankara, Yahşihan, Talas (Kayseri), Opium Karahisar, Kömürler (Akhisar), Adana, Konya, Uşak, Güney (Ödemiş), Alaşehir-İzmir.

¹¹ Şimşir, **Lozan Telgrafları, C. II**, s. 221 belge No: 83.

¹² **THAM**, No: 19, 15 Mart 1339(1923), s. 182.

¹³ Şimşir, **Lozan Telgrafları, C. II**, s. 225-226, Belge No: 89.;Şimşir, **Lozan Telgrafları, C. II**, s.326-327, Belge No: 259.

¹⁴ Tefik Bıyıkoğlu, **Trakya'da Millî Mücadele**, C. I, Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, Ankara 1987, s. 423, 63 nolu dipnot

¹⁵ Şimşir, **Lozan Telgrafları, C. II**, s. 400, Belge No: 376.

¹⁶ Mesut Çapa, **Kızılay(Hilâl-i Ahmer) Cemiyeti(1914-1925)**, Ankara Üniversitesi Türk İnkılâp Tarihi Enstitüsü Basılmamış Doktora Tezi, Ankara 1989, 194.

¹⁷ ¹⁷ **THAM**, No: 24, 15 Ağustos 1339(1923), s. 331.

As it could be seen in this inspection visit, the delegation visited 10 prisoner garrisons¹⁸. When we look at the geography state of these garrisons it can be said that it contained the western, central and southern regions of Anatolia. This situation showed that in some other regions the prisoner garrisons whose existences we knew were abolished. Indeed, after signing the contract in Lausanne between the Turkish and Greek sides about the release of the civilian and military prisoners the implementation was started immediately in accordance with this agreement. It was understood that the first 10.000 thousand civilian and military prisoners sent to Greece were sent from regions such as Sivas, Erzincan, Gümüşhane, Kastamonu, Çorum and Samsun. The garrisons and battalions whose prisoners were submitted so which were completely vacated during the return of these prisoners were abolished¹⁹.

In the report of the Burnier-Buckhard delegation brief but striking information were given on issues such as geographical features, agricultural conditions, economic and trade structure and population during their travels. Indeed, a determination was confirmed in the form of *“Everywhere the ruins of burnt stations, the wreckages of destroyed bridges and looted neighbourhood are observed”*, especially the city, town and even the villages which were located within the area of Greek occupation were burnt, destroyed and ruined by the Greeks.

Another notable observation was that expect the few number of young and vigorous men population seen in the city, women and children were working in the villages especially in the fields outside consistently. The reason of this was explained to the members of the delegation as the young population was murdered during the war and the survivors of the massacre were taken to serve in the army or in the labour battalion.

There was another thing stated by the delegation, that after the war, recovery works started in Anatolia, the agriculture begun to be re-done regularly, the rail and communication lines were quickly repaired and policy and peace was provided everywhere.

In the report it was stated that the garrisons where the Greek prisoners were held except of a few exceptions, were established usually close to the railway line. This expressed that the prisoners of the capture garrisons were subjected to the same management style and treatment as the “labour battalions” serving behind the fronts and they were forced to do works such as road constructions and repairing the bridges, tunnels and railway lines. The report included another important finding of the delegation on this issue. Salary was not paid to the Turkish soldiers who were running the back services, therefore it was determined that there was not any payment for the prisoners too. It was stated that the prisoners of the battalion had the same subsistence than the Turkish soldiers who were working with them together. The members of the delegation mentioned in their reports that although the captured

¹⁸ **THAM**, No: 26, 15 Teşrin-i evvel 1339(1923), s. 379

¹⁹ Özdemir, **Millî Mücadelede Üserâ Taburları**, s.142.

Greek soldiers did not receive any salary, their dresses and shoes were perfect and the prisoners were dressed to a nice "rose" coloured uniform.

Burnier-Burckhard delegation reported that the captives in the stations did complain nothing about the location, accommodation, food and the cloth. In the report of Burnier-Burckhard, it was also stated that some of the garrisons were even without barbed wire at their edges and captives could walk around in the city (Ankara, Konya) freely in their free times.

Another remarkable issue in the report was the relationship between the Greek captives and the staff (the officers and the personnel of the garrison) in the garrisons. It was seen that the members of the delegation reported that this relation was at a favourable level and the captives appreciated the officers and the staff as well. At first, the members of the delegation did not believe in this pleasing relationship and they wanted to observe the attitudes committed against the Greek captives. During the observation, they were shocked ones more by the attitudes of the residences of the garrisons against the Greek captives. They (members of the delegation) observed that Turkish people did not hate and hatred them but hosted them gently despite all the atrocities and massacres the Greek soldiers committed against the Turkish people. Moreover it is stated in the report that Afyon Karahisar was under Greek occupation for more than a year but just after its freedom, the residences of Afyon Karahisar contributed clothes for 500 captives and 350 quilts and daily wages of 20-40 Turkish cents in Konya.

It was written in the report that Greek captives of the war were employed at road constructions and captives worked 8 hours per day.

According to delegate's states, everything was in order but they reported that captives had difficulties in sending and receiving posts especially parcels and transfers. It was because the exchange of locations in short periods.

The member of the delegate also stated in the report that Greek captives were healthy and fine in all captive garrisons. The health organisations were excellent and tidy. In each squad there was a infirmary or hospital governed by Greek medical officers and there was no difference between Greek and Turkish soldiers. It was also observed that a Greek soldier might be in bed while a Turkish soldier was on the floor. According to the delegate, Turkish people behaved well due to their culture that they accept it as a humanitarian task.

In the reports, the delegate was glad for all help and contributions afforded by the commander of west front and the Turkish Red Crescent Associations

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