

THE AGENCY'S GAZETTE

1870-2020

150 YEARS FIGHTING FOR MORE HUMANITY IN WAR

30 March 1943, the first time in...

...Iraq

A “nice” place | Roughly 1,200 Italian prisoners of war were transferred from Egypt to Iraq in February 1943, and an ICRC delegation from Cairo visited them a month later. The prisoners were split into two work camps, named – somewhat unimaginatively – Camp A and Camp D. It did not seem to have been a particularly pleasant place: ICRC delegates Hans Bon and Pierre Descoedres were blunt in their report, calling it “a desert, absolutely flat ... and utterly without interest”. Though the climate was mild in winter, it was hot in summer, very hot – up to 55 degrees Celsius in the shade! Except there was no shade because there were no trees, the delegates noted wryly.



P. Descoedres during a visit to Italian civilians interned in Egypt in May 1943



H. Bon during a visit to Iran in March 1943

Somewhat spartan accommodation | Camp A and Camp D

were made up of army tents surrounded by barbed wire. At first, the prisoners slept on the ground, but they managed to build makeshift beds out of “pieces of wood, scraps of fabric, etc.”. As for clothes, the British military authorities in Egypt had taken back what they’d given the prisoners before they were sent to Iraq. As a result, they arrived “somewhat short of clothes”. Though the situation was improving, some prisoners still only had one pair of trousers and one shirt. But as the delegates observed, “the climate is hot, and it almost never rains.” Dress code was, therefore, not considered a priority issue.

As the prisoners had only just arrived, there had not yet been time to organize intellectual or recreational activities in the camps, such as setting up libraries. For these rather petty ICRC delegates, that was no real problem; they considered the work the prisoners were compelled to do to be “the best distraction for them”. We can only imagine what pleasure the Italian soldiers took in making bricks eight hours a day, six days a week. And since “prices in Iraq [had] risen steeply in the past few months”, the prisoners’ meagre pay was essentially worthless; it took 12 hours of work to buy a pack of cigarettes from the camps’ canteen! | IME, DPM & DGON

ACICR

HD/175/OM

Iraq

PRISONNIERS ITALIENS EN IRAQ

Siège le 30 mars 1943 par le Colonel H. Bon et le Dr. P. Descoedres

Récemment des prisonniers de guerre italiens furent transférés en Iraq, où ils se trouvent dans deux Camps de travail: les Camps "A" et "D", situés dans une région absolument plate et désertique. Le climat y est doux en hiver, mais des plus chaud et humide en été.

Les prisonniers italiens des deux Camps "A" et "D" sont au nombre de 1200. Ils sont arrivés dans le pays le 6 février 1943. Ces Camps ont une capacité plus considérable et il est probable que d'autres prisonniers y seront envoyés. Les prisonniers italiens actuellement en Iraq se trouvent auparavant en Egypte et furent transportés par voie de mer, en 10 jours.

P.O.W. Camp "A" P.A.I. Forces (Prisoners of War Camp "A" Forces and Iraq Forces). Visité le 30 mars 1943.

Médecin - Capitaine Peronetti Luigi - No. 263158
Soto-Ten, medico Saccerani Lelio - No. 263150

Hommes de confiance des deux Sections ("Cages") -
Mensurabile milionario Attilio - No. 20691
Serg. Magg. Migliore Giovanni - No. 204752.

Situation -

Le Camp "A" est situé dans une zone désertique, absolument plate et sans aucun intérêt. Le climat y est très chaud et humide en été. Il est constitué de deux Sections ("Cages") et d'une infirmerie, entourées de fils de fer barbelés. Une troisième Section est prête à recevoir d'autres prisonniers et actuellement à l'isolement de deux prisonniers atteints d'écouillons.

Efficacité -

Le nombre des prisonniers dans les deux Sections du Camp est d'environ 2000 ce sont tous des soldats, à part quelques sous-officiers et médecins se trouvant avec eux ainsi que 12 médecins personnels sanitaires.

Quartiers -

Le Camp n'est constitué que de tentes militaires et les hommes y habitent à raison de 10 par tente. Les couvertures chaudes, actuellement, si possible à tous

First report on the visit to Iraq