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XXIX. Hearings in Regard to Prisoners

(Sub-Committee of the Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives, Military Establishment Appropriation Bill, 1944, Thursday, June 10, 1943)

Statement of Hon. Robert P. Patterson, Under Secretary of War, Accompanied by Maj. Gen. A. H. Carter, Budget Officer, War Department, Brig. Gen. George J. Richards, Brig. Gen. F. W. Hopkins, Col. C. F. Hofstetter, Col. J. D. McIntyre, Col. R. S. Moore, John J. Dubbelde, Jr., Col. J. H. Watson, Col. E. V. Elder, Col. Arthur M. Heritage, and E. W. Lancaster, Chief, Civilian Training Office of Secretary of War

MR. SNYDER. Mr. Secretary, we have invited you to come down in two capacities; first, as the civilian head of the Department, acting for Mr. Stimson, and, secondly, in connection with your responsibility, under the law, for procurement for the Army. We should like to hear from you first in the latter capacity.

CARE OF PRISONERS OF WAR

MR. SNYDER. Mr. Secretary, there are \$271,000,000 in this bill for the care of prisoners of war. That money is for pay, clothing, subsistence, housing, and recreation; also, for pin money for enlisted prisoners of war. The whole program conforms with the Geneva Convention, and there is no distinction as regards housing and subsistence between prisoners and our own soldiers. Is that right?

MR. PATTERSON. Yes sir.

Mr. SNYDER. On the pay side, do you feel that we actually should make compensation payments monthly, whether the prisoners work or not, instead of waiting until we know definitely whether or not our soldiers who are prisoners of our enemies are being paid in accordance with the terms of the Geneva Convention? In other words, should not their money be held until they are released from our custody, and payment then made according to whatever standard or formula the enemy pursued?

Mr. PATTERSON. We abide by the Geneva Convention and we have to assume, and are willing to assume until we know otherwise, that our enemies are abiding by the Geneva Convention.

Under the terms of the Geneva Convention we pay \$21 per month to prisoners of war who work. Of this \$21, not more than \$10 is available to the prisoner of war for purchases at the post exchanges. The balance will stand to his credit until the war is over.

The bulk of it will be held and accumulated for the prisoners. As I say, not more than \$10 a month is available for ordinary purchases.

(Discussion off the record.)

Mr. SNYDER. We abide by the Geneva Convention?

Mr. PATTERSON. Yes; we have and we intend to adhere to the Geneva Convention.

(Discussion off the record.)

Mr. POWERS. Let me understand about the Geneva Convention. As I understand it, we are supposed to pay the prisoners, those who work, \$21 per month. Is that correct?

Mr. PATTERSON. Yes, sir.

General WHITE. We pay them \$3 a month as an allowance for toilet articles, and things of that kind, whether the prisoner works or not.

The men who work outside of the prison camp itself are paid at the rate of 80 cents per day.

There is no pay for working in the prison camp.

The prisoner only receives in post exchange coupons \$10 a month. That is, he gets \$10 each month out of the sum he earns at the rate of 80 cents a day.

Thirteen dollars a month is the maximum that the prisoner receives in cash.

Mr. POWERS. What can the prisoners do with that in the prison?

Mr. PATTERSON. I do not know. They can, if they wish, buy additional articles of food, bed linen, clothing, and such items as may be specifically authorized by the camp commander, but that is the maximum that they are allowed to have.

Mr. POWERS. Is Japan said to be doing the same thing for our prisoners?

Mr. PATTERSON. They are supposed to be paying our prisoners.

Mr. POWERS. Are they paying them as much?

General WHITE. No; not this amount. The pay is based on the work performed and in harmony with the rates prevailing in the country detaining the prisoner.

Mr. POWERS. What pay do the Japanese provide?

General WHITE. I do not know, sir.

I have some figures here on what other nations are paying American prisoners of war.

Mr. POWERS. Do they pay the American prisoner what they would pay a comparable rank in their own Army?

General WHITE. The Germans and the Italians pay our prisoners 35 cents and 50 cents a day for skilled and unskilled labor. We pay 80 cents a day.

Mr. POWERS. Why do we pay 80 cents a day if the Germans and the Italians are only paying 35 cents and 50 cents a day?

General WHITE. This is in comparison with the conditions in the countries.

The Japanese probably pay our men a few cents a day.

Mr. POWERS. We pay their men, who work, \$21 a month.

General WHITE. We pay them 80 cents a day for the time that they work.

Mr. POWERS. What do we do with the officers?

General WHITE. The officers get a flat rate, but you cannot work the officers.

The lieutenants and the warrant officers get \$20 a month, the captains \$30 a month, and all others \$40 a month.

The Japanese officers get \$5 a month less all along the line. Their lieutenants get \$15 a month.

Mr. POWERS. What do they pay our officers?

General WHITE. I do not know.

Mr. POWERS. Does anyone know?

General WHITE. No, sir; I doubt it.

Mr. POWERS. It is peculiar that we have a scale for officers who are prisoners of war, and we have a pretty nice scale, and we do not know what they are paying our officers.

General WHITE. It is not based on what they pay our officers. We are required to pay their officers a given amount. They are required to pay our prisoners a given amount.

Mr. ENGEL. What is it based upon?

General WHITE. It is based on a supplemental tentative agreement between the several nations.

Mr. POWERS. Is not that a public document?

General WHITE. Under the Convention we pay the Japanese prisoners the same as our soldiers.

Mr. POWERS. What about our men?

General WHITE. Just the reverse. Our men, prisoners in Japan, would receive the rate of pay of the Japanese soldiers.

Mr. SNYDER. How much is that?

General WHITE. Two or three cents a day.

The information that we have on the Japanese is that they are paying two and a half up to eight and a quarter cents per day. It is difficult to get information.

Mr. POWERS. You have no idea that they are living up to the Geneva Convention?

General WHITE. To that extent I think they are. From the best information that we can get they are reasonably following the Convention.

The Germans and the Italians are, we know that. The Swiss have given us that information.

Mr. MAHON. Does it come down to this? It is a question of the living standards of the countries.

General WHITE. That is right.

Mr. POWERS. Is there anything in the Geneva Convention about the treatment of prisoners of war?

General WHITE. Yes, sir.

Mr. POWERS. Do you think that Japan lived up to that when they executed our fliers?

General WHITE. No, sir.

Mr. POWERS. Do you think that we are so bound to the Geneva Convention that we should squander as much money for prisoners of war as we actually spent for maintenance of the United States Army in 1932?

General WHITE. I think this: We must live up to the Convention. The fact that Japan does not live up to the Convention does not relieve us from the obligation of living up to it.

Mr. POWERS. It is a matter of opinion. I do not agree with you gentlemen, but I am not running the show.

Mr. POWERS. If the execution of our fliers is an indication of how Japan will abide by the Geneva Convention I think it is time that we had better start thinking ourselves.

Mr. PATTERSON. That was a breach.

We still have more than 13,000 prisoners in the hands of the Japanese.

Mr. POWERS. Morality—there is no morality in war at all. Do you get anything definite on our soldiers who are prisoners?

General WHITE. Yes, sir. For a long time we got nothing, but in recent months reports come through quite regularly. They come through the Red Cross.

Mr. KERR. Does the report include the Filipino troops?

General WHITE. The figure does not include the Filipino troops. They are all continental troops. They also captured a lot of the British.

Mr. POWERS. Do you get any reports on these men?

General WHITE. Yes, through the Swiss Government.

Mr. POWERS. What do the reports indicate?

General WHITE. They are reasonably satisfactory. The food is not food that our men are accustomed to. It is a difficult ration for white men to live on. It is equivalent to the Japanese Army ration.

Mr. POWERS. What reports do you get on the treatment our men get from the Germans?

General WHITE. The reports are very good.

Mr. POWERS. How about the Italians?

General WHITE. They are living right up to the terms of the Convention.

Our men who are prisoners of the Germans get the same ration as the German Army. That is a better ration than the civilians get.

Mr. POWERS. Are the Germans still chaining the prisoners?

General WHITE. We have had no reports that they have shackled any of our prisoners.

Mr. ENGEL. When you are attempting to make a comparison in terms of money—as to what they pay and what we pay—you should take into consideration the difference in prices—what a certain amount of money will buy over there as compared to what it will buy here. We talk about 2 cents, 5 cents, or 10 cents, as a small item, but it will buy a lot over there.

I think you have no alternative but to follow the Geneva Convention. I hope you will.

Mr. POWERS. On the subject of rations for prisoners: How much does the ration cost us?

General WHITE. Seventy-two cents.

Mr. POWERS. The feeding of these fellows costs 72 cents?

Mr. ENGEL. Do the Japanese prisoners want the American ration, or do they want to go back to rice?

General WHITE. They ask for a substitution in the ration and the commanders of the local camps are authorized to make substitutions.

Mr. ENGEL. You mean substitute Japanese food?

General WHITE. Substitute something in place of the type of food that our soldier gets.