

BELGIUM UNDER THE GERMAN OCCUPATION. (1916)

A PERSONAL NARRATIVE 2

Brand WHITLOCK

Chapter XXXIII. The press-gangs : **Roulers**.

There seemed to be in those early days of the **slavery** some regard for the appearances, and a resort to tricks and subterfuges that resembled the stupid cunning of maniacs. For instance, at **Roulers**, which was in the *Etappen*, when the Belgians, presenting themselves in the customary way for control at the *Meldeamt*, showed their cards of identity, the Germans seized and stamped the cards, or the cards of such of the men as appeared able to perform manual labour, with the words *Freiwillige Arbeiter*, and having thus, after a German fashion, transformed them into willing workers, they sent them off to dig a fourth-line trench from Staden to Ostend. A man from Flanders told me that near the scene where they laboured there was a large sign labeled "*Freiwillige Arbeiter*".

The workmen living along the Roulers-Dixmude railway line, which extends as far as Zarren, were allowed to return to their homes every evening. They went to and came from their place of work penned in flat cars. They were exposed to all weathers, shivered from the cold, were wet to the skin, and they made the journey thus twice

each day. "A cattle breeder, in taking care of his livestock", said the man, "would not permit them to travel under such conditions".

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Footnotes.

Belgium under the German Occupation : A Personal Narrative ; London ; William HEINEMANN ; 1919, 2 volumes. See chapter (« The Press-gangs», sometimes with title « *Documents in evidence* » in other editions), volume **2**, pages 268-344 (**76** pages). About Roulers : page 276. (**Very partial**) French translation : «*Les enlèvements*» in WHITLOCK, Brand ; chapitre XXVI (1916) in ***La Belgique sous l'occupation allemande : mémoires du ministre d'Amérique à Bruxelles*** ; (Paris ; Berger-Levrault ; 1922) pages 383-391, especially page 388.

It would be interesting compare with what **Paul MAX** (cousin of the *bourgmestre Adolphe MAX*) told about the same day in his ***Journal de guerre*** (*Notes d'un Bruxellois pendant l'Occupation 1914-1918*) :

http://www.museedelavilledebruxelles.be/fileadmin/user_upload/publications/Fichier_PDF/Fonte/Journal_de%20guerre_de_Paul_Max_bdef.pdf

It would also be interesting compare with what [Louis GILLE](#), [Alphonse OOMS](#) et [Paul DELANDSHEERE](#) told about the same days in ***50 mois d'occupation allemande*** (Volume 2 : 1916) :

<http://www.idesetautres.be/?p=ides&mod=iea&smod=ieaFictions&part=belgique100>

It would also be interesting compare with what Charles TYTGAT told about the same days in ***Journal d'un journaliste. Bruxelles sous la botte allemande*** :

<http://www.idesetautres.be/?p=ides&mod=iea&smod=ieaFictions&part=belgique100>