

BELGIUM UNDER THE GERMAN OCCUPATION. (1916)

A PERSONAL NARRATIVE 2

Brand WHITLOCK

Chapter XXXIII. The press-gangs : Tournaisis.

The whole region of the Tournaisis was in rage, terror and despair. The men were being constantly seized and all the while trains were passing filled with those who, during the stops at the station, told the Tournaisiens standing by that they had come from the two Flanders and that they were being taken, not to Germany, but to France. Under the constant and excessive exactions of General Hopffer the city authorities of Tournai were in a most difficult position ; they would not yield to the menaces, and they knew not which way to turn to obtain the funds for the fines that were the penalty of their resistance. They could only refuse again to surrender the lists and formally notify their insatiable tyrant that they had no more money with which to pay the tribute he so mercilessly exacted. But even their firm position could not protect their citizens ; the lists seemed to be more a matter of pride than of necessity to the Germans, for the seizures went on uninterruptedly, the press-gangs were busily at work. Mr. Pate told me that by the **November 4** twenty-five thousand men had been taken. They were ordered first to work at

Ramegnies-Chin, near Tournai, where an aviation field was being constructed, and when they refused they were sent toward the Front in France and there they were left without food. Hunger, indeed, was a weapon constantly employed. The Germans took a hundred and fifty French workmen to work on that aviation field at Ramegnies-Chin — a terrible place, by all accounts — and starved them into accepting the conditions they imposed. And even then the Germans gave them only a half ration, and the Belgians in the village took pity on the French and shared their own scanty provisions with them. There were five hundred French prisoners in the village of Blandin who also refused to work, and they were subjected to similar tortures.

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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), especially pages 285-286. (**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.

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>