



German Atrocities from German Evidence: Rules for Field service of the German Army

Joseph BÉDIER

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German Atrocities
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Pudor inde et miseratio.

Tacitus.

I intend to prove that the German armies cannot wholly escape from the reproach of sometimes violating the law of nations, and I mean to prove my case according to French custom from absolutely trust worthy sources.

I shall make use only of documents most rigorously examined, and I have taken care to criticize their text as minutely as if in times of peace I were questioning the authority of some old chronicle or the genuineness of some old chart. And I shall do so perhaps from professional habit, perhaps impelled by an inward longing to get at the truth, in any case for the good of the case I am pleading: for these pages are intended for every one; for the casual reader, for the indifferent, and indeed for the enemy of my country. I wish that the casual reader who may by chance open this pamphlet in an idle moment should be struck by the genuineness of the documents, if he has eyes to see, just as their sordid character will touch his heart, if he has a heart that feels. My aim has been that these documents whose authenticity is obvious should carry an equally obvious authority. It is easy to make accusations difficult to prove them! No belligerent has ever been at a loss to bring against his enemy a heap of evidence, true or false. But though the evidence may be collected in accordance the most solemn forms of justice by the highest magistrates, it will unfortunately long remain useless, so long as the adversary has not had an opportunity of disputing it, everyone is entitled to consider statements as lies, or at least as open to refutation. That is why, I shall abstain here, from quoting French or Belgian testimony true though I know it to be. I have preferred that the evidence which I shall call shall be of such a nature that no living man, not even in Germany shall attempt to refute it. German atrocities shall be

proved by German documents.

I shall take the evidence chiefly from those war diaries, which Article 75 of the Rules for Field service of the German Army advises soldiers to keep on the march, which we have confiscated from prisoners, as being military papers. It goes without saying that their number increases daily. I should like some day the complete collection to be deposited in the collection of German manuscripts in the Bibliothèque Nationale for everyone's instruction. In the meantime, the Marquis of Dampierre, a former student of the École des Chartes, archivist and paleographer, is preparing and will shortly bring out a book in which the greater part of these roadside journals will be minutely described, copied, and brought into the full light of day. For my part I have examined but forty. They will suffice for my task. I shall make some extracts from them, taking care that each quotation bears sufficient proof of its genuineness.

In what order shall I arrange them? For many reasons, but chiefly because some of these documents only ten lines long contain proof of crimes of many kinds, I shall not attempt to adopt any rigid order of classification. I shall dip haphazard into the heap; certain associations of ideas or pictures, and a certain similarity in the texts will alone enable me to group them.

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