

SPORT IN RUHLEBEN: 'N TOONBEELD VAN OORLEWING IN KRYGSGEVANGESKAP

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ABSTRACT

Imprisonment occurred on an unprecedented scale during the First World War. The Ruhleben camp, with its more than 4000 British prisoners, is an excellent example of how sport served as a lifebuoy for their barbed-wire syndrome. From September 1915 the prisoners of war started establishing a self-governing community that later functioned like a little piece of England. Playing organised games or sport took root instinctively. Initially only soccer was played and was by far the most popular sport, as rugby was prohibited yet did make an appearance later. The main driving force behind it was the South African, Lt. J. Moresby-White. When it became too hot to play soccer, the prisoners of war played cricket and later also tennis. With 10 professional golfers in the camp, this sport was also popular. Other popular sports and games included athletics, hockey, boxing, physical drill, board games and gambling. One of the redeeming features of life in the Ruhleben camp was the well-organised nature of the prisoners' sport. The camp became a world in itself – for many the world. The fact that most of the people described captivity as a stimulating experience and that relatively few were affected negatively by it, can be attributed to the social climate in the camp.

Key words: First World War; Sport; Military; Prisoners of war; Ruhleben; Germany.