

## #6

Many Ottoman soldiers taken as prisoners of war by the British were held in POW camps in Egypt. There diseases spread: in particular, a contagious eye disease (which returning POWs later spread throughout rural Turkey) and a disease caused by a vitamin deficiency as a result of improper diet in the camp.

“Even as these cultural activities continued, various diseases killed or maimed the prisoners, particularly in the Egyptian camps. Trachoma, a contagious eye disease acquired during the war at the Palestine and Yemen fronts, spread relatively quickly in the camps, partially or fully blinding as many as 15,000 prisoners. A nutrition deficiency disease, pellagra, killed at least 3,056 Ottoman prisoners in the Egyptian camps. Pellagra was a recognized disease, but its causation was not known at the time. Although the British doctors were adamant at first that the prisoners who came into the camps already had the disease, evidence shows that even if small numbers of them came in already pellagrous, many others developed the disease in the camps due to a "faulty" diet. While the intention clearly was not to make the Ottoman prisoners sick, certain Orientalist and racist beliefs of the British led them to concoct a "European diet" for the German and Austro-Hungarian prisoners in the Egyptian camps, and a "non-European diet" for the Ottoman prisoners. The "non-European Diet" was high in calories, most of which came from the daily thirty-two ounces of bread, but it lacked the crucial vitamin B3 (niacin). Extended deficiency of niacin resulted in pellagra among more than 9,300 Ottoman prisoners of war, while the vast majority of the Germans who were given their "European diet" remained pellagra-free. And those small numbers of Germans, who eventually succumbed to pellagra, developed it well after the Ottomans did, another indication of both their more nutritious diet and that the disease developed in the camps.”

Yanıkdağ, Yücel. “Prisoners of War (Ottoman Empire/Middle East).” *1914-1918 Online: International Encyclopedia of the First World War*. 8 Oct. 2014. Web. 10 Aug. 2018.