

DEFENSIVE HUMANIATARIANISM:
SWISS INTERNMENT CAMPS DURING WWI

by

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Submitted to the Department of History of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for departmental honors

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Abstract

During World War I, the Swiss state interned nearly 30,000 foreign soldiers who had previously been held in POW camps in Germany, France, Britain, Belgium, Austria, and Russia. The internment camp system that Switzerland implemented arose from a Swiss diplomatic platform that this thesis describes as defensive humanitarianism. By offering good offices to the belligerent states of WWI, the Swiss state utilized humanitarian law both to secure Swiss neutrality and to alleviate, to a degree, the immense human suffering of the war. This thesis fills a gap in the historiographical literature as one of the few papers in English on the topic, as well as one of the only to holistically consider the internment camp system as a panacea for the crises that the Swiss state faced during WWI. By mixing domestic concerns with international diplomacy and humanitarianism, a domestic policy platform taken to the international diplomatic level succeeded in building enough trust between the signatory states to create an internment system that reconceptualized the treatment of foreign soldiers from the holding of prisoners to the healing of men.

Introduction

On July 27, 1916, William McGilvray, a sergeant in the London Scottish Regiment, found himself riding in a passenger train travelling south through Germany, surveying the landscape of the Rhine River valley. It was quiet, the sounds of the sloshing mud and whizzing bullets of trench warfare far off to the west. He had started that day in Friedrichsfeld, one of the many prisoner of war camps in Germany that detained Allied soldiers. He would arrive that evening in Darmstadt to connect with another train brimming with other British prisoners of war. His journey would bring him to Konstanz, Germany, for examination before internment in Switzerland; Konstanz was for many internees the last stop before entry into Switzerland.¹ McGilvray, along with 305 of his compatriots, comprised the first British POWs imprisoned in Germany to be evaluated for internment in Switzerland, which offered better conditions than those in Friedrichsfeld. Crowds of Swiss citizens at the train stations of Zurich, Lausanne, Montreux, and finally Chateaux D'Oex would soon greet him. Speeches by Swiss and British military, government, and Red Cross officials would welcome him and the other soldiers throughout their journey, as well as music, gifts, and warm meals. His experiences and perceptions have been echoed by many soldiers who were interned during World War I in Switzerland, including those from France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Belgium.²

Three distinct legal factors that shaped and allowed for the creation of the internment camp system emerged over the course of the previous centuries. First, a body of international law developed in Europe beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, particularly in the form of the

¹ The city's English name is Constance and it is located on the Bodensee, or Lake Constance, in southern Germany along its border with Switzerland.

² "Letter from Sergeant William McGilvray," *The London Scottish Regimental Gazette* 20, no. 3 (1916), 136.

Geneva Convention of 1864 and The Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907. Both specifically evaluated and offered guidance on the rules of war and the treatment of soldiers, POWs, internees, and civilians during war. These conferences offered states guidance on the internationally accepted standards for the treatment of soldiers and civilians, captive or not, in times of war. A second factor that emerged was Switzerland's neutrality policy, which solidified in 1848 through the founding of the modern Swiss federal state. Third, humanitarianism began to truly explode onto the European scene with the founding of the International Committee of the Red Cross by Henry Dunant in Geneva, Switzerland in 1863. International law, Swiss neutrality, and humanitarianism emerged and expanded around the same time and in the same intellectual spaces in Europe. In response to the political, social, and economic crises of World War I, Swiss diplomats and statesmen utilized the tools at hand to merge international law, Swiss neutrality politics, and the ideology of humanitarianism into a cohesive diplomatic platform to protect Swiss sovereignty, while at the same time asserting Switzerland's commitment to the ideology of humanitarianism. This strategy necessitated the Swiss state to cooperate with international NGOs and other humanitarian and charitable bodies, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Swiss Red Cross, and the Vatican. Of these relationships, this thesis focuses the most on the relationship between the ICRC and Swiss state.

The close relationship between the ICRC and Swiss state existed long before WWI, but during this period many personnel overlaps existed between the two. Most important of these was that of Gustave Ador. Ador, born into the elite circles of Geneva in 1845, acted as president of the ICRC from 1910 to 1928. As ICRC president during the conflict, he pushed in 1914 for the creation of the International Prisoners of War Agency. He also frequently communicated with and called on Arthur Hoffman, Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Swiss government, to

intervene on the behalf of sick and injured POWs in captor states.³ After Hoffmann's resignation, Ador replaced him on the Federal Council.⁴ Many historians the appointment of Ador, both a francophone speaker and a Francophile himself, within the Federal Council to Minister of Foreign Affairs as a symbolic act on the part of a largely German-speaking government to prove Switzerland's commitment to neutrality and international humanitarianism.⁵ The connections between the ICRC and the Swiss state will only be explored in this thesis in regards to their impact on defensive humanitarianism and the internment camp system, both theoretically and practically. Both the ICRC and the Swiss state have historically needed the cooperation and collaboration of each other to further their humanitarian ventures. This this relationship deepened through the actions of actors like Gustave Ador during WWI.

The internment camp system in Switzerland during World War I represented the institutional intersection among international law, Swiss neutrality politics, and humanitarianism. This intersection formed a new policy referred to in this thesis as defensive humanitarianism.⁶ Due to its successes in WWI, this policy platform continued to define Swiss international relations and the Swiss image internationally in the decades that followed. WWI triggered the synthesis of international law, neutrality politics, and humanitarianism, which culminated in the formation of defensive humanitarianism, the modern Swiss diplomatic and domestic policy platform.

³ Irène Herrmann, "Ador, Gustave," International Encyclopedia of the First War, accessed April 12, 2018, https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/ador_gustave.

⁴ The Federal Council has seven members and acts as the executive body of the Swiss government.

⁵ Herrmann, "Ador, Gustav."

⁶ This is a term created for this thesis in order to succinctly explain Swiss diplomacy since WWI. I have found no records of this term elsewhere.

The topic of internment camps in Switzerland during World War I and their impact on humanitarianism, Swiss politics, and European history is understudied. These areas rarely overlap with each other in the literature, as historians generally treat them separately. In the twentieth century, these individual themes dominated the larger historical narrative of Switzerland during WWI. Looking at the situation from the perspective of international diplomacy, the role of Swiss good offices, or the offering by a third party state to facilitate peaceful mediation between two opposing states, in the formation of international treaties was especially salient as historians began to look back on the legacies of WWI.⁷ Swiss good offices greatly informed the idea of defensive humanitarianism in this paper, as the Swiss state operated with more authority than the ICRC or Vatican in international diplomacy during WWI; this idea will be discussed in Chapter 2.

Historians do not dispute that the international laws, treaties, and agreements surrounding POWs, internees, and civilians in WWI expanded in scope during the conflict. However, many scholars have greatly understated the role of the Swiss state and the Swiss internment camp system in their conclusions.⁸ These historians minimize the importance of small-player states in their explanatory framework, which views this evolution as an effort on the part of major-player states, specifically Great Britain, the United States, Germany, and France to lessen the suffering of soldiers and civilians in a war of attrition.⁹ These authors undervalue the actions of smaller state players, such as Switzerland, as their role in WWI transpired in diplomatic realm through

⁷ Raymond R. Probst, *“Good Offices” in the Light of Swiss International Practice and Experience* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1989).

⁸ John Yarnall, *Barbed Wire Disease: British & German Prisoners of War, 1914-19* (Stroud, UK: History Press, 2011).

⁹ Small-player states, as used in this thesis, refers to neutral or less-discussed states in WWI that are generally not considered to be among the large and powerful Western actors, namely: the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Russia.

their role in offering good offices, and in the understudied internment camp system. The actions of the belligerent and larger states capture more attention, as their actions functioned centrally to the progression of the military conflict. Other authors briefly mention the Swiss internment camp system in their discussion of WWI diplomacy, but only as a small-scale humanitarian project that did not significantly impact the war, arguing instead that it merely created enough proof of good intentions to allow for the larger belligerent states to collaborate on later bilateral agreements.¹⁰ In an atmosphere that focused on the actions and diplomatic platforms of belligerent, major-player states, the historiography of this period fails to consider the actions of other smaller, but still influential, actors. This paper seeks to amend the shortcomings of the historiography by acknowledging the central role of international diplomacy in WWI as facilitated through the good offices of smaller actors, specifically highlighting the Swiss case and its unique contributions to the legacy of international law. This acknowledgment requires a fundamental reframing of WWI from a focus on the traditional major-players to a more nuanced look at the facilitators of productive international diplomatic discourse.

Those historians, Swiss or otherwise, who focus on Swiss internment camps specifically have traditionally approached it from the position of a history of neutrality and international relations. In the historiography of Switzerland during WWI, some historians maintain that the Swiss government acted as a main actor on both the international diplomatic and humanitarian scenes, with the ICRC assisting only as a secondary collaborator.¹¹ This ignores the collaboration of the ICRC with the Swiss government and military on the internment camp

¹⁰ Richard B. Speed III, *Prisoners, Diplomats, and the Great War: A Study in the Diplomacy of Captivity* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 33-38.

¹¹ Georges André Chevallaz, *The Challenge of Neutrality: Diplomacy and the Defense of Switzerland* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001).

system, as well as the ICRC's larger international role as the progenitor of national Red Cross societies. The relationship between the ICRC and Swiss state will be explored in Chapter 2 in this thesis, in order to clarify its collaborative and mutually beneficial qualities during WWI. Others have approached the history of the internment camp system as exclusively within the domain of the history of humanitarianism and the ICRC, ignoring the role played by the Swiss state in their diplomatic endeavors. This strain of the historiography looks at the Swiss state only as a facilitator of the internment camp system, possessing the bureaucratic framework and institutional resources to physically construct and manage the camps, not on its role as sovereign power and negotiator with a dedication to humanitarianism.¹² This thesis argues that domestic Swiss neutrality politics and the international humanitarian ideology of the ICRC intersected in the diplomatic platform of the Swiss state, leading to the formation of the internment camp system, in which both the Swiss state and the ICRC played different but complementary roles.

There are exceptions to the historiographical exclusion of Swiss internment camps and their unique characteristics. Some recent scholarship gives a general overview of life in the Swiss internment camps, its economic benefits in the area of Swiss tourism, and the role of women in Switzerland during WWI.¹³ The focus on the benefits of the internment camp system for the Swiss economy and the roles of women in the internment system represents a new area of exploration. However, these historians fail to recognize the unique blend of the domestic imperative of neutrality and the international movement of goods and people for the Swiss

¹² David P Forsythe and Barbara Ann J Rieffer-Flanagan, *The International Committee of the Red Cross: A Neutral Humanitarian Actor* (Abingdon: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group 2016).

¹³ Susan Barton, "'Dropped from 'ell into 'eaven': Interned POWS in Switzerland 1916-1918." Accessed February 16, 2018. http://www.ruralhistory2015.org/doc/papers/Panel_12_Barton.pdf.

economy with the ideas and institutions of international humanitarianism. This thesis builds on this economic approach to the internment camp system by contextualizing its place in the debate in tandem with the international diplomacy and humanitarianism pieces.

Since the turn of the twenty-first century historians of Switzerland studied Swiss history through a combination of political, diplomatic, economic, or social lenses, however, these methods have failed to offer a rounded look at the complementary factors that influenced the Swiss state during WWI. According to recent works of history on Switzerland, neutrality was the dominant Swiss interest in Swiss international relations during WWI.¹⁴ However, scholars have also increasingly portrayed the influence of neutrality politics on areas such as the Swiss economy and Swiss identity inside and outside of Switzerland.¹⁵ Some of the newest scholarship focuses on the situation of specific internee groups within Switzerland; though their work exists outside the purview of this thesis.¹⁶

Most notable among emerging scholars of the Swiss WWI internment camps is Cédric Cotter, whose work focuses on the connection between neutrality and humanitarianism in Switzerland, and its meaning for Swiss diplomacy and identity.¹⁷ Cotter offers many important insights into the political situation of the Swiss state during WWI, arguing that the issue of neutrality functioned as the central concern for the Swiss Bundesrat in its decision to pursue the

¹⁴ Cotter, (s') *Aider Pour Survivre: Action Humanitaire et Neutralité Suisse pendant la Première Guerre Mondiale* (Geneva: University of Geneva, 2016).

¹⁵ Max Mittler, *Der Weg Zum Ersten Weltkrieg - Wie Neutral War Die Schweiz?: Kleinstaat und Europäischer Imperialismus* (Zürich: Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 2003).

¹⁶ For information on Russian internees in Switzerland during WWI, see Thomas Bürgisser, *"Unerwünschte Gäste": russische Soldaten in der Schweiz 1915-1920* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 2010).

¹⁷ Cotter, (s') *Aider Pour Survivre: Action Humanitaire et Neutralité Suisse pendant la Première Guerre Mondiale*.

internment camp system.¹⁸ Many of Cotter's works examine the relationship between the Swiss state and humanitarianism; however, this thesis broadens the scope of this debate by observing the evolution of international humanitarianism through bi- or multilateral treaties. The major difference between Cotter's work and the conclusions of this thesis arise from the use of defensive humanitarianism as a unifying concept that elucidates how the Swiss state responded to the crises of WWI by drafting a coherent. By examining the internment camp system as a microcosm of the political, humanitarian, and economic crises of WWI, this thesis offers new insights into the domestic and international impacts of the internment camps on Switzerland and Europe during and after WWI.

This thesis draws from the large body of primary source literature from the ICRC, Swiss government, and Swiss military that demonstrate the interconnected nature of international law, neutrality politics, and international humanitarianism. The Swiss government and military meticulously preserved their correspondence with outside governments, as well as their internal briefs, notices, and telegrams. The Swiss Federal Archive in Bern houses these documents. These French and German language sources form the primary basis of this thesis. In addition, Major Édouard Favre, Surgeon General and head of the internment system within the Swiss army, published three reports between 1917 and 1919 on the history, formation, structure, and issues encountered while administering the camps, and his reflections on these topics.¹⁹ These reports synthesize many of the documents found in the Federal Archive, and this thesis employs the reports more frequently than the original papers. They offer the factual information of the

¹⁸ The Swiss Bundesrat is the Swiss Parliament. Switzerland is the only direct democracy in the world.

¹⁹ Edouard Favre, Harvey W. Hewett-Thayer, and Karl Hauser, *Swiss Internment of Prisoners of War: An Experiment in International Humane Legislation and Administration: A Report from the Swiss Commission in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1917).

originals, but include Favre's commentary as the main administrative actor. His insights begin with the formation of the internment camps in 1915 and continue through to the post-war repatriation of the internees beginning in 1918. These notes are useful as their intended audience were members of the Swiss military. Therefore, they lack the propagandistic tendencies of other government sources.

In addition, British Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Philip Picot published his memoirs of his time as a British diplomatic administrator involved with the camps, including the reception of British internees in 1916.²⁰ His memoir, *The British interned in Switzerland*, relays many anecdotes on the reception of interned soldiers in Switzerland, however, it presents the limitation of having the explicitly propagandistic motive of improving the moral of the British populace. While Favre, as a ranking official of the military, had a bias towards the importance of Swiss sovereignty, Picot favored the topics of international law and diplomacy as a British diplomat. The reports by Favre and Picot allow this thesis to conclude how actors within different areas of influence conceived of the importance of international, domestic, and humanitarian issues. They reveal the relationships among these areas, as well as their overlapping roles within the context of the internment camp system. The methodology utilized here differs from the methodologies of other historians of Swiss diplomacy and Swiss history by examining these documents in the larger context of defensive humanitarianism.

The format of this thesis is both thematic and chronological and operates with a telescoped structure. Each chapter assesses defensive humanitarianism and the internment camp system from both temporally and thematically focused perspectives. The narrowing in sequential chapters from the broad, international developments to the individuals impacted by the

²⁰ Henry Philip Picot, *The British interned in Switzerland* (London: Edward Arnold, 1919).

internment camp system allows this thesis to connect the areas of international law, neutrality politics, and humanitarianism in increasingly focused levels in order to explain how the three areas joined to form the policy platform of defensive humanitarianism.

Chapter 1 focuses on international laws and treaties and the history of internment camps before WWI in order to contextualize these areas at the European level. In addition, this chapter analyzes the creation and implementation of the first iteration of internment camps in Switzerland during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871 for three purposes: to trace the foundations of defensive humanitarianism through Swiss history, to explore the international aspects of the Swiss internment camp system, and to draw conclusions on the strengths of defensive humanitarianism. This thesis posits that the overlapping evolutions of international law, neutrality politics and humanitarianism intersected to create of defensive humanitarianism in Switzerland due to the outbreak of WWI. This synthesis of different domestic and international components created a policy platform with distinctly collaborative mechanisms. The international character of defensive humanitarianism, therefore, arose from its basis in international diplomacy and international humanitarian advocacy. This also played a role in the favorable linking of the Swiss state with international humanitarianism still noticeable today.

Chapter 2 then looks at the context of Swiss neutrality politics in regard to the treaty negotiations during WWI, before the full implementation of the internment camp system in 1916, which narrows the focus thematically to defensive humanitarianism in theory and chronologically to 1914-1916. It closely studies defensive humanitarianism as a policy platform applied by Swiss government domestically and internationally. The focus of Chapter 2 also extends to the specific language of the treaty in order to evaluate the how each of the three pillars of defensive humanitarianism influenced the deliberations. By understanding how the internment

camp system created by these treaties represents the influence of defensive humanitarianism, this thesis illustrates how this platform succeeded domestically and internationally during this period.

Chapter 3 further restricts the scope to evaluate the structure of the internment camp system in practice, as well as the experiences of individual internees. This varies from the theory based structures in Chapter 1 and 2. It explores the daily life of internees in the Swiss internment camp system through a social history lens. The filling of leisure time through labor, education, and recreational sports figures prominently into this structure. It allows for an analysis of health concerns and wellness practices in the Swiss internment camps in comparison to POW and internment camps in belligerent and non-belligerent states elsewhere during this time period. This chapter also analyzes the institutional structure and practical functioning of the internment camp system in order to gauge the impact of defensive humanitarianism in practice on treatment outcomes and the morale of internees. The unique aspects of Swiss internment camps offered a revolutionary conceptualization of work and leisure for prisoners of war, which this thesis argues arose specifically due to the nature of defensive humanitarianism, as it combined the ideology of humanitarianism with modern norms around human productivity and idleness.

The conclusion seeks to offer explanations for the role of neutrality and humanitarianism in Switzerland, as well as to offer insights into the unique Swiss position in global politics and diplomacy. With the current centennial commemoration of WWI, the parallels between international law, neutrality, and humanitarian issues in WWI, compared to in the present, make the subject of defensive humanitarianism relevant today. In a globalized world that increasingly witnesses the failures of the largest states to respond to international humanitarian crises, smaller players may well again rise to meet these crises as Switzerland did during WWI. Historiographically, this thesis pioneers a new methodology for understanding not only the Swiss

internment camp system during WWI, but also the larger debates around humanitarianism, diplomacy, and WWI in Switzerland and Europe currently absent in the historical literature through the idea of defensive humanitarianism.

Chapter 1

A body of international law, international humanitarian ideas, and an early form of internment camps already existed in Switzerland long before William McGilvray's internment in Chateaux d'Oex in 1916. The history of interned prisoners of war in Switzerland traces its roots to the creation of the International Committee of the Red Cross in 1863, the Geneva Convention of 1864, and The Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907. This chapter investigates these international treaties for their role in legitimating the Swiss internment camps during World War I. It then examines the internment of the French Army of the East under General Charles-Denis Bourbaki, better known as the Bourbaki Army, in Switzerland during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871. This preliminary form of internment camps in Switzerland helped to prove the feasibility of internment camp systems in Switzerland and set Switzerland up for implementing defensive humanitarianism. Finally, the chapter closes with the investigation of the pressures that WWI put on Switzerland and the specific crises it created or exacerbated. This chapter argues that defensive humanitarianism first occurred during in the Bourbaki internment and that the legitimacy of defensive humanitarianism arose from its international collaboration.

The evolution of Geneva, Switzerland as an international hub for humanitarian organizations began in the nineteenth century. In 1864, Geneva became the home of both the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Convention for the Amelioration of the Conditions of the Wounded in Armies in the Field, later known as the Geneva Convention. Henri Dunant, a native of Geneva and active philanthropist, travelled to Italy in 1859 and witnessed the Battle of Solferino between June 24 and 28, a pivotal moment in the Second Italian War of Independence. In his account of the battle, he claimed,

The personnel of military field hospitals is always inadequate, and would still be inadequate if the number of aids were two or three times as many, and this will always be the case. The only possible way is to turn to the public ... The imploring appeal must therefore be made to all men of all countries and of all classes, to the mighty ones of this world, and to the poorest workman.²¹

Dunant's experiences with philanthropic organizations in Geneva, coupled with his observations in Solferino, caused him to publish his account, *A Memory of Solferino*, in 1862. His account not only detailed the battle, but also called for a volunteer society that could mobilize in times of crisis to care for the casualties of war. The recognition of the humanitarian concerns expressed in the book by many elites in Geneva led Henri Dunant and a group with four other French Swiss aristocratic philanthropists from Geneva to create the International Committee of the Red Cross. The ICRC acted as the touchstone for the later creation of individual, nation-based Red Cross organizations. The motivations of this group came from their Calvinist convictions, the strong tradition of philanthropy in Geneva, and their unassailable beliefs in the tenets of humanitarianism.²² This group represents the first iteration of Swiss citizens actively engaging with humanitarianism as a public platform. The Swiss Red Cross eventually entered as the first national chapter.

The following year the ICRC continued grow in importance both in Switzerland and abroad through the proliferation of the Geneva Convention. The successful completion of the Geneva Convention firmly solidified international acceptance of the neutral, volunteer, and humanitarian actors in military conflicts. The ICRC presented itself as an impartial, non-governmental proponent of all things humanitarian through its mission statement. The

²¹ Henri Dunant, *A Memory of Solferino* (Geneva: American Red Cross, 1959), 57.

²² Caroline Moorehead, *Dunant's Dream* (London: Harper Collins, 1999), 15.

organization today still credits itself as the initiators of the 1864 convention.²³ The Geneva Convention elevated the international acceptance of the ICRC through its recommendations on the treatment of civilian and military victims of war. In an era of state power and exclusionary nationalism, the rise of an internationally recognized NGO with an international humanitarian mission was significant. While the ICRC could not compete on the global diplomatic stage, it engaged in international humanitarian campaigns that the governments of nation-states at this time could not. The Geneva Conference allowed for this opportunity in the 57 states that signed, ratified, or made reservations, accessions, or declarations on the final document before WWI.²⁴

This conference also secured the neutrality of ambulances and hospitals, as well as medical personnel and chaplains. It set guidelines for the safe return of medical staffers along with all of their possessions and equipment to their respective units. It provided for their immunity from capture and destruction, for the treatment of wounded and sick soldiers and their personnel, and for their impartial reception and treatment by foreign states. It also stipulated for the protection of civilians providing aid, and the recognition of the Red Cross symbol as a means

²³ The ICRC's mission statement is as follows: "the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance." See "The ICRC's Mandate and Mission," The International Committee of the Red Cross, accessed March 15, 2018, <https://www.icrc.org/en/mandate-and-mission>.

²⁴ Signatory states participate in treaty deliberations and added their signatures at the time of completion. There is a set period of time that states can sign to join the treaties, after which other states may only accede or succeed to join them. Finally, states sometimes choose to produce reservations or declarations when acceding to treaties, meaning these states make unilateral statements that seek to modify or exclude the legal effects of specific areas of the treaty. For more information, see "Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded in Armies in the Field. Geneva, 22 August 1964," International Committee of the Red Cross, accessed March 25, 2017, https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/States.xsp?xp_viewStates=XPages_NORMStatesParties&xp_treatySelected=120.

of identifying persons and equipment covered by the agreement.²⁵ The Geneva Convention offered distinctly humanitarian guidelines for the conduct of war not just for the generals in boardrooms, but for officers and soldiers on the battlefield. It succeeded in normalizing the presence of neutral actors in conflicts, specifically medical personnel and humanitarian observers. The internment camp system could not have existed without these neutral actors on the ground, as their absence would have precluded the evaluation of POWs for internment in Switzerland. These articles represent only the major suggestions; smaller wording within the articles themselves engendered opportunities for humanitarian internment as a viable system.

Articles 5 and 6 of the convention played the most determining roles in the future of the internment of prisoners of war in Switzerland. In Article 5 the clause, “inhabitants of the country who bring help to the wounded shall be respected and shall remain free ... the presence of any wounded combatant receiving shelter and care in a house shall ensure its protection,” allowed for the further protection of Swiss neutrality by means of housing sick or injured prisoners of war.²⁶ The dispersal of interned soldiers throughout all regions of Switzerland during World War I assisted in the conceptualization of Switzerland as a sanctuary. Belligerent states could not target Red Cross volunteers, as well as local individuals that assisted in the internment camp system, for reprisals. Article 5 effectively allowed for the protection of Swiss territory and sovereignty, as long as the Swiss government and military interned soldiers throughout the country on humanitarian grounds.

²⁵ “Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded in Armies in the Field. Geneva, 22 August 1864.” The International Committee of the Red Cross. Accessed March 25, 2017, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/ART/120-40005?OpenDocument>.

²⁶ Ibid.

The convention also explicitly discussed opportunities for wounded or injured soldiers during wartime. It utilized language that later linked humanitarian internment with the Swiss government's neutrality and sovereignty concerns in 1914. Article 6, which states that, "those who, after their recovery, are recognized as being unfit for further service, shall be repatriated. The others may likewise be sent back, on condition that they shall not again, for the duration of hostilities, take up arms."²⁷ This allowed for the possibility of transferring prisoners of war from belligerent states that adopted the treaty to Switzerland. There, POWs could receive medical care outside of the warzone. The soldiers' transfer to Switzerland solidified Swiss neutrality. Internment in Switzerland allowed all belligerents to believe that their wounded and sick soldiers would truly be kept away from the battlefield, a belief that kept all sides honest and greatly reduced the chance for reprisals. The importance of trust in international diplomacy is paramount to successful diplomacy, as largely customary law practices had the consequence of reprisal acts for perceived non-compliance.²⁸ The honesty that the internment camp system engendered had a direct impact on the success of defensive humanitarianism in Switzerland.

The application of the humanitarian principles of the Geneva Convention to protect Swiss neutrality intermingled with Swiss neutrality politics and international diplomacy to form the wider policy platform of the Swiss government during World War I: defensive humanitarianism. The Geneva Convention codified the humanitarian goals of the ICRC and granted legal protection to their international activities. As the ICRC gained international prestige, their collaboration with the Swiss state after 1864 also increased.²⁹ The internment camp system benefited from this history of collaboration, for when it came time to theoretically and practically

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Speed, 38.

²⁹ Moorehead, 20.

construct the internment camp system through defensive humanitarianism, the partnership was natural. A second wave of international humanitarian legal work followed these events, which bolstered these newly codified humanitarian norms and relationships. The history of defensive humanitarianism's practical application, as well as the working relationship between the ICRC and Swiss state, first occurred in 1870 with the experimental internment of the Bourbaki Army.

The internment of the Bourbaki Army during the Franco-Prussian War acted as a practical trial for the Swiss internment camp system during WWI. The French and Prussian governments signed an armistice agreement to end the conflict on January 27, 1871, however, the agreement did not extend to the Army of the East. To avoid further losses, the French Army of the East sought refuge in Switzerland, initiating deliberations between the French and Swiss Armies. On February 1, the Swiss General Hans Herzog and French General Justin Clinchant signed an internment agreement that promised medical attention, lodging, and protection within Switzerland for the troops of the French Army of the East, as long as the French troops handed over their weapons to the Swiss military.³⁰ The Prussians did not attend these talks. The Swiss Army managed the internment of the 87,847 French soldiers in coordination with the Swiss Red Cross, dispersing the soldiers throughout the country.

Although the internment of the French Army of the East lasted only six weeks, this occurrence opened the door for future iterations of Swiss internment camps. The Prussian army did pursue the French troops into Switzerland, nor did they demand their ejection from Switzerland. Rather than invading Switzerland, the Prussian army respected the humanitarian undertones of the internment of the Bourbaki soldiers as well as the international agreements

³⁰ "Die Internierung der französischen Bourbaki-Armee in der Schweiz," Schweizerisches Rotes Kreuz, accessed April 15, 2016. <https://geschichte.redcross.ch/ereignisse/ereignis/die-internierung-der-franzoesischen-bourbaki-armee-in-der-schweiz.html>.

supporting it.³¹ Respect for international treaties formed the basis for defensive humanitarianism. Without international trust in diplomatic endeavors, the Swiss state could not protect its sovereignty. The French soldiers' internment in Switzerland acted as the model for the Swiss when WWI broke out in 1914. The internment of the Bourbaki Army functioned as the first iteration of defensive humanitarianism in Swiss foreign policy leading up to WWI. However, the Geneva Convention and the internment of the French Army of the East represent only two segments in the foundation of defensive humanitarianism.

The Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 added to the international legal basis of Swiss internment camps. One of the first multilateral compilations of international laws on war, the conventions attempted to formalize the standards for states' conduct during times of war and disarmament. This included proscribing military practices under the new category of war crimes, and defining the terms of treatment for prisoners of war, internees, and civilians.³² The language of The Hague Conventions, in terms of its effects on Swiss internment, changed significantly between the two conventions. While the 1899 convention elaborated on the terms of internment during wartime, the 1907 convention changed its approach by deferring in its language to the Geneva Convention. The 1899 document referenced the Geneva Convention three times, each time citing the articles located therein as the governing language on the issue.³³ The 1907 document referenced the Geneva Convention only twice, but with broader allowances to the

³¹ Hervé de Weck, "Bourbakiarmee," *Historisches Lexicon der Schweiz*, accessed March 25, 2017, <http://www.hls-dhs-dss.ch/textes/d/D26892.php>.

³² Department of the Army, *Treaties Governing Land Warfare* (Washington: Department of the Army, 1956).

³³ "Convention (II) with Respect to the Laws and Customs of War on Land and its Annex: Regulations Concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land. The Hague, 29 July 1899," International Committee of the Red Cross, accessed April 21, 2017, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/150?OpenDocument>.

authority of the Geneva Convention on the subject matter of internment and prisoners of war. The section on prisoners of war states that, “prisoners of war may be interned in a town, fortress, camp, or other place, and bound not to go beyond certain fixed limits ... the obligations of belligerents with regard to the sick and wounded are governed by the Geneva Convention.”³⁴ This conferment of authority, specifically on the subject of the sick and wounded, onto the Geneva Convention added to the legal basis for the internment of soldiers in Switzerland. The Geneva Convention secured the protection of interned soldiers through Swiss neutrality politics and humanitarian aid, upon which The Hague Conventions reiterated and elaborated \. These protections, however, handled only normative codes for behavior.

These conventions, ratified or acceded to by the states involved, lacked concrete enforcement mechanisms and relied on the collective international community’s honesty and trust in diplomacy.³⁵ Defensive humanitarianism cannot function without a certain level of honesty and trust in international treaties that neutral third parties participating in negotiations and implementation engender. While the Geneva Convention and The Hague Conventions codified the international consensus on war and the treatment of soldiers and civilians, the internment of the French Army of the East provided a practical test for internment camps in Switzerland. As WWI unfolded, these moments of international diplomatic history resurfaced in

³⁴ “Laws of War: Laws and Customs of War on Land (Hague IV); October 18, 1907,” Yale Law School the Avalon Project. Accessed April 21, 2017, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hague04.asp.

³⁵ This continues to be an issue in international diplomacy that plagues states of the present. With no supranational enforcement mechanisms, compliance remains a tedious issue. Reservations and declarations also minimize the enforceability of treaties by effecting removing whatever teeth they do possess. For more information on this topic, see Abram Chayes and Antonia Handler Chayes, *The New Sovereignty: Compliance with International Regulatory Agreements*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), Samuel B. Crandall, *Treaties: Their Making and Enforcement*, (Clark, New Jersey: The Lawbook Exchange, 2005), and Srinivasan, *State Participation in International Treaty Regimes*, (New York: Routledge, 2009).

the minds of military and government personnel in Switzerland as they evaluated their options for grappling with the crises of WWI.

Switzerland faced distinct political, economic, and social challenges both internationally and domestically during WWI. The Swiss government wanted to protect Swiss sovereignty from foreign invaders through its neutrality and feared a possible invasion of its borders. This fear rose to the level of an existential threat when Germany violated Belgium's neutrality on August 4, causing the Swiss government in turn to reiterate its neutrality to the international community the same day.³⁶ Newspapers in Switzerland distributed this news and the announcement of the Swiss government to mobilize Swiss troops on August 6.³⁷ At the same time, Switzerland attempted to continue economic relations with states on both sides of the war, as its economy quickly stagnated with the decline in tourism.³⁸ In addition, the conscription of young men into the Swiss army also depleted labor forces throughout the country. The labor shortage represents only the beginning of the domestic issues that Switzerland faced.

At home, the Swiss state faced staunch internal cultural-linguistic nationalism that divided its populace. The Franco-Swiss in the French speaking cantons largely supported France and the Allies, while the Swiss-Germans in the German speaking cantons favored Germany and the Central Powers.³⁹ In an age of intense cultural nationalism, the Swiss government sought to unite its populace behind the idea of Swiss civic nationalism instead of cultural-linguistic

³⁶ Federal Council, "Procès-verbal de la séance du 4 août 1914," Diplomatic Documents of Switzerland 1848-1975, accessed April 3, 2018. <http://dodis.ch/43291>.

³⁷ "Der Krieg der Großmächte," *Berner Intelligenzblatt*, (Bern, Switzerland), Aug. 6, 1914, <http://intelligenzblatt.unibe.ch/Default/Skins/BernA/Client.asp?Skin=BernA&AW=1522082165408&AppName=2>.

³⁸ Susan Barton, "*Dropped from 'ell into 'eaven: Interned POWS in Switzerland 1916-1918*," accessed February 16, 2018, http://www.ruralhistory2015.org/doc/papers/Panel_12_Barton.pdf.

³⁹ Cotter, "Un pays divisé?," 291-296.

loyalties.⁴⁰ The government searched for a policy platform that could solve these issues as WWI showed signs of turning into a protracted conflict.

In response to the crises mentioned above, the Swiss state, as well as the Swiss Red Cross and International Committee of the Red Cross, initially searched for solutions individually. The ICRC, with Gustave Ador as president, created the International Prisoners of War Agency two months in to the war. This agency served as the ICRC's main office for internment camp matters after 1916.⁴¹ This development transpired in part as a response to the new injuries and illnesses that emerged on the continent, including trench foot and neurasthenia, also known as "barbed wire disease," or PTSD today.⁴² The ICRC, however, found itself unable to influence states at the level of international diplomacy required to create new codes around the treatment of POWs through its lobbying alone. As the war progressed, the ICRC, Swiss Red Cross, and Swiss government increasingly worked together to organize and facilitate treaty deliberations between the belligerent states in order to formulate a new solution, both for POWs and the Swiss state. This solution came in the form of the transfer of prisoners of war from POW camps in warring states to Switzerland for treatment and internment for the duration of the war. The Swiss government coopted the good international reputation of the ICRC and Swiss Red Cross by supporting their humanitarian efforts through material assistance and good offices in order to

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ The main function of the International Prisoners of War agency was on reconnecting POWs with their families through information collecting. See: Daniel Palmieri, "The International Committee of the Red Cross in the First World War," The International Committee of the Red Cross, accessed March 26, 2017, <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/international-committee-red-cross-first-world-war-0>.

⁴² John Yarnall, *Barbed Wire Disease: British & German Prisoners of War, 1914-1919* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2011), 163.

protect their sovereignty.⁴³ In defensive humanitarianism and the internment camp system, the Swiss government found its panacea.

The international diplomatic community did not create the body of international law assembled before the creation of the internment camps with such camps in mind. Further, belligerent states had to draft treaties to handle the minutia of the terms of internment. As early as four months into WWI, the Geneva Convention norms on internment in neutral states appeared as a viable to the physical devastation soldiers met on the battlefield. The language of the Geneva and The Hague Conventions provided Switzerland with a basis to act as the neutral state to safeguard these POWs. For a policy of defensive humanitarianism to function, international consensus needed to exist. This explicitly international characteristic of defensive humanitarianism both allowed for and legitimated its existence. As will be explored in Chapter 2, Switzerland instituted these bases for defensive humanitarianism through their offering of good offices in the treaty formations that led to the birth of the WWI Swiss internment camps.

⁴³ Cédric Cotter and Irène Hermann, “Hilfe zum Selbstschutz: Die Schweiz und ihre humanitären Werke,” in *14/18: Die Schweiz und der Grosse Krieg* (Zürich: Hier und Jetzt, 2014), 241.

Chapter 2

Despite the long history of neutrality in Switzerland, the military and government nonetheless feared that belligerent states would violate their borders and sovereignty when WWI broke out in August of 1914. Germany breached the eastern Belgian border on August 4, 1914, just seven days after the beginning of the war, despite more than 80 years of Belgian neutrality. In addition to the external threat to Swiss neutrality, an internal rift also existed between the western and eastern regions of the country. Since the creation of the German Reich in 1871, the western region, Romandie, inhabited primarily by French speakers supported France, while the eastern region with a German-speaking majority supported Germany.⁴⁴ This schism, created by linguistic and cultural loyalties in an era of intense cultural nationalism, threatened Swiss neutrality from within by destabilizing popular support for Swiss neutrality and giving the appearance of popular support for either the Central Powers or the Allied Forces. The Swiss government and military, therefore, searched for a solution that could solve both the external and internal issues simultaneously. Smaller states often have to pursue different strategies in times of conflict than larger states, as they lack the territory and manpower to compete with larger, more populous states on the global stage. By maintaining absolute international neutrality and their commitment to humanitarianism with a policy platform of defensive humanitarianism, the Swiss state hoped to defuse competing cultural nationalisms at home and preserve their territorial sovereignty through neutral international diplomacy and politics abroad.

The initial rumblings of a future internment plan started in 1914 at the ground level in two places: Geneva and Rome. The Vatican lobbied for prisoner exchanges for those soldiers

⁴⁴ Carlo Moos, "Domestic Politics and Neutrality (Switzerland)," *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, published January 24, 2017.

incapable of further combat starting in late 1914 on humanitarian grounds.⁴⁵ The International Committee of the Red Cross first proposed the plan for the internment of mildly injured prisoners of war in Switzerland also in 1914. With the permission of the Swiss government, the ICRC initiated treaty talks with France and Germany.

In addition to the urgings of the ICRC, the Holy See, through their representative Charles Santucci, also campaigned for the broadening of ailments and ranks meriting internment. They interpreted the prospect of internment as too important an opportunity for POWs to restrict to only tuberculosis patients.⁴⁶ On March 6, 1915, after securing a loose agreement of the terms of internment, Gustav Ador wrote to the president of Switzerland, Giuseppe Motta, asking for the Swiss government to take over treaty negotiations:

Our Committee is continuing with the realization of the project, which I have spoken to you of interning in Switzerland the wounded officers whom they would not wish to return to their country of origin. I take the liberty of asking you again to support this proposal with your high influence. There are so many families of officers in Germany, France, and England, who wait with anguish for the realization of this project, that if it were not to succeed, it would be a cruel disappointment. Do you not think that it would be a very good thing for the Federal Council to officially submit this proposal to the governments concerned? I know that you agree with this idea and I am quite sure that no government would oppose a refusal to a firm proposal made by the Federal Council.⁴⁷

While the ICRC initiated the talks between France and Germany on the subject of prisoners of war, they could not exert enough pressure upon either government to come to an agreement, even with the support of the Holy See. Diplomacy at this stage of the war was tense; without the ability to offer good offices, the Vatican and ICRC failed to instill the same sense of trust that the Swiss state had during the internment of the French Army of the East.

⁴⁵ Yarnall, 155.

⁴⁶ Picot, 36.

⁴⁷ Édouard, *L'Internment en Suisse* (Geneva: Georg, 1917), 188.

On May 1, 1915, the Swiss government reinitiated and finalized the negotiations between France and Germany. The Swiss delegation's offering of good offices played no small part in bringing the two powers to the table.⁴⁸ In addition, assurances that Swiss military order would prevent soldiers from escaping, as well as the condition that belligerent states would return escapees, enabled the signing of an agreement on January 26, 1916.⁴⁹ The Swiss government and military readily seized the opportunity presented by the ICRC and Holy See to propel the agreement talks between France and Germany towards a conclusion, in order to both transform internal pressures into interest for the soon-to-arrive soldiers and to secure external respect for Swiss neutrality. The Swiss defensive humanitarianism platform offered one holistic solution to the combined the internal and external threats to the Swiss state. The signing of the treaty on January 26, however, did not immediately initiate the transfer of prisoners of war into Switzerland.

For the following three weeks, negotiation on the terms and criteria of internment continued. The issues most intensely discussed included the definition of internment, methods for surveillance of prisoner of war camps in belligerent states, selection criteria, and the conditions for repatriating soldiers after the conflict ceased. Many of the issues of contention focused on which diseases and injuries warranted internment in Switzerland, and which did not. To settle this issue, the Surgeon-General of Switzerland created the Bureau of Internment within the medical branch of the Swiss military, which conducted a temporary internment period with 100 French and 100 German prisoners of war suffering from tuberculosis in the towns of Davos,

⁴⁸ Probst, 20.

⁴⁹ François Olier, "Suisse (1914-1918): L'Internement des Prisonniers de Guerre Allies, Malades et Blessés," accessed March 5, 2017, <http://hopitauxmilitairesguerre1418.overblog.com/2014/01/la-suisse-et-l-internement-des-prisonniers-de-guerre-allies-malades-et-blesses-1914-1918.html>.

Montana, and Leysin.⁵⁰ This temporary internment functioned as a barometer for the trust of the belligerent signatories. As the test showed early success, France and Germany warmed to the idea of accepting the Swiss internment camp system on a full scale.

After France, Germany, and Switzerland reached an agreement on the terms, definition, and requirements of internment, they also debated the evaluation of soldiers for internment. This represented a critical point in the discussions, as it ultimately decided the number of prisoners of war eligible for internment in Switzerland. At the beginning of deliberations, Germany called for an equal quota system in which only an equal number of soldiers from each state qualified for internment, as they worried about the possibility of French soldiers benefiting more from the system than the German soldiers.⁵¹ However, after many requests from the Holy See, who sought to have the largest number of POWs ameliorated of their conditions and ailments, to the German Kaiser Wilhelm II, Germany eventually acquiesced and agreed to a case-by-case inspection, as long as neutral teams of medical personnel conducted the examinations.⁵² This system entailed “ten Sanitary Commissions for each country, composed of two Swiss doctors reinforced by a third, an officer of the captor States, who should have the place of President, with power to examine and designate prisoners for dispatch to Lyons or Constance, as the case might be, for a final inspection by a Board of Control.”⁵³ The structure of the Sanitary Commission represents the culmination of both humanitarian and diplomatic concerns surrounding the selection process.

⁵⁰ Édouard Favre, *Swiss Internment of Prisoners of War*, 10.

⁵¹ This was probably warranted, as the German POW camps were notoriously known for their poor conditions. For more information, see John Yarnall’s *Barbed Wire Disease: British & German Prisoners of War, 1914-19*.

⁵² Picot, 37.

⁵³ Favre, *Swiss Internment of Prisoners of War*, 9.

The platform of defensive humanitarian arose as a domestic policy platform, however, its implementation at the international level only succeeded due to these trust-assuring mechanisms. The Swiss doctors, as neutral actors, formed the majority of the group and assured fair examinations of POWs, regardless of nationality. The third member, from the captor state, ensured for their home states that the Swiss would not overreach the boundaries of the treaty. This double-checking system solidified trust among the treaty's signatories.

The Sanitary Commission then sent their selections of POWs for further evaluation in Konstanz if held in Germany or Austria, and Lyon if held in France, Britain, or Belgium before their final journey into Switzerland. These major cities, closest to the Swiss border for each country and equipped with the railway infrastructure necessary for the transportation of the internees, represented logical choices for the main examination centers. Through the legal protections created by the Geneva Conventions and The Hague Conventions, the inspection teams traveled through war zones with reduced fear of assault, capture, or deterrence. The small group sizes also allowed for greater efficiency and mobility. The ICRC, Swiss Red Cross, and military medical units of France and Germany, with their Red Cross armbands in place, quickly outfitted the sanitary commissions. On February 14, France, Germany, and Switzerland entered into the final agreement on the terms of internment.

The final terms of Swiss internment camps during WWI differed from previous iterations. The previous understanding of internment, as suggested in the Geneva Convention, had entailed the safe movement of prisoners of war, incapable of fighting in the future, through a neutral state back to their homeland, as well as their internment within neutral states. The agreement between France and Germany defined internment as the removal of prisoners of war from these states to Switzerland for medical care in Swiss facilities, and as well as their

surveillance for the duration of the conflict. The treaty also included clauses promising the return of interned soldiers to Switzerland if they escaped to their home country.⁵⁴ The codification of Swiss defensive humanitarianism into this international treaty benefited not only the Swiss state, but the belligerent states and the internees as well. Defensive humanitarianism during this period signified a unique form of diplomatic policy, as it benefited all states involved.

This new definition of internment allowed for the opportunity of extended healing in Switzerland for POWs excluded by the previous understanding of internment. Belligerent states and neutral states alike did not want injured soldiers returning to the front lines, where their chances of survival plummeted. Deliberation on what ailments would now qualify under the new definition, however, took another three weeks after the original, tentative agreement. The debate focused on short-term or easily treatable ailments that the conditions in the POW camps worsened.

New soldiers entered Switzerland on February 21, 1916, with an estimated maximum of 30,000 interned by January 1917.⁵⁵ The arrival of these initial internees created a spark of celebration for the Swiss populace. The entrance of the internees into Swiss cities, as pictured below in Figure 1, illustrates the warm reception of some German internees in Lucerne. Those healthy enough walked first with canes and flowers, the latter provided to them by members of the crowd. Soldiers too sick to walk continued behind in cars. The Swiss populace attended in droves in celebration of their national project. Promoted as not only the saving plan for the Swiss economic and political situation, many in the government promoted the plan as the charitable duty of the Swiss. This rhetoric lessened the linguistic tensions of the country and promoted

⁵⁴ Picot, 37.

⁵⁵ Favre, *Swiss Internment of Prisoners of War*, 46.

Swiss nationalism and identity.⁵⁶ The Swiss government seized the chance to promote Switzerland's humanitarian mission through the internment camp system.



Figure 1: German soldiers arriving in Lucerne, breaking before the next leg of their journey, 1916.

Source: Andrew Whitmarsh, "Prisoners of War Interned in Switzerland," accessed October 27, 2016, <http://www.switzerland1914-1918.net/prisoners-of-war-interned-in-switzerland.html>.

By July 1916, the French, German, and Swiss governments expanded the treaty to signify 18 diseases in total that merited internment in Switzerland. These included: chronic diseases of the blood, respiratory, circulatory, central and peripheral nervous systems, digestive organs, urinary and sexual organs, organs of the senses, the skin, rheumatism, as well as blindness and deafness. The majority of the internees fell under the criteria of suffering from: tuberculosis, any tumors, severe debility, severe syphilis, loss of limb, long-term paralysis, maladies that would preclude military service for one year, and cases deemed severe enough on a case-by-case basis.⁵⁷ Tuberculosis represented an especially critical point to the concerned parties, as it had

⁵⁶ Cotter und Hermann, 242.

⁵⁷ Swiss Government, "Vorbereitung für die kriegsrechtliche Internierung, u.a. Konventionentwurf, 1914-1915," Dossier, E27#1000/721#13951* (Bern, Switzerland: Schweizerisches Bundesarchiv).

been previously disqualified during talks in 1914 before internment, due to the chance for soldiers to recover and reenter the war.⁵⁸ At the time, these diseases needed heavy medical attention in hospitals to increase the chance of survival. The change from POW camp to internment camp addressed the medical needs of these particularly vulnerable soldiers, as it changed their environment from one based on detaining them to one focused on healing them. The ideology of humanitarianism was foundational in this shift in the conceptualization of the internment camp system.

Not all major conditions from which POWs suffered, however, made the cut. The treaty excluded mental health afflictions, alcoholism, and sexually transmitted diseases still transmittable at the time of inspection.⁵⁹ The agreement disqualified soldiers with mental health issues, as they referred these cases to special institutions and not general hospitals in Switzerland, as well as soldiers with sexually transmitted diseases or infections, for fear of infecting citizens of the Swiss populace or family members of the soldiers.⁶⁰ This list of ailments illustrated the level of strictness that the countries involved desired for the agreement. The belligerent governments, not the Swiss government, paid for the costs of interning their soldiers in Switzerland. This agreement expanded the number of soldiers removed from prisoner of war camps in belligerent states, as well as increased the chances of survival for wounded prisoners of war.

While the Swiss internment camp system increased the chances of survival for internees, the locations of camps in Switzerland at times inhibited their healing. Montana, pictured in

⁵⁸ Yarnall, 156.

⁵⁹ “Vorbereitung für die kriegsrechtliche Internierung, u.a. Konventionsentwurf, 1914-1915.”

⁶⁰ Parliament, “Correspondence with the United States Ambassador Respecting the Transfer to Switzerland of British and German Wounded and Sick Combatant Prisoners of War,” (London: Harrison & Sons, 1916).

Figure 2, was one of the first towns open to internees and housed primarily French and Belgian citizens. Its populace predominately spoke French, and many of the tourists to the area had been predominately French. However, this consideration on the familiarity of the locals with French nationals failed to take into account the hard to traverse mountainous terrain of the area.⁶¹ This failure in the practical planning of the internment camp system arose from its structure: the hierarchical aspects of the camp, as well as the general rules, result from the higher level treaty negotiations, which failed to consider practical issues, such as mobility on mountainous terrain or division of internees from different states devolved to local officials.⁶² While the issue of which ailments merited internment reached a conclusion, the topic of how to select prisoners of war for internment persisted.



Figure 2: French soldiers in Montana, supervised by the Swiss army and greeted by the local populace, February 1916.
Source: Whitmarsh, "Prisoners of War Interned in Switzerland."

In 1916 alone, the itinerant commission undertook twenty trips into Germany, reviewed 82,439 French soldiers, and designated 20,677 for internment. Eighteen visits into France

⁶¹ Yarnall, 158.

⁶² The internment camps were divided by type of care needed and ability, not necessarily only by linguistic familiarity. This is part of the reason different nationalities of internees existed in the same regions, or even towns. Favre, *Swiss Internment of Prisoners of War*, 11.

allowed for the examination of 46,339 German POWs, with 6,411 selected.⁶³ By having members of the selection committees from different states, this system allowed the belligerent states to trust that the other group would not receive preferential treatment. As defensive humanitarianism required collective trust to ensure its goals, clauses similar to that that created the Sanitary Commission needed to exist. However, with only German and French soldiers under consideration, many other POWs of other nationalities in Western Europe continued to suffer in the same POW camps that the Sanitary Commissions visited. As news of the successes of Swiss internment camps spread, the pressure by the citizens of these non-party states on their governments to enter into similar treaties grew.

While the deliberations between France and Germany lasted over a year to reach agreement on the treaty terms, similar arrangements between Germany ,Great Britain, Austria-Hungary, and Belgium followed almost immediately thereafter. The relative speed with which Great Britain and Germany reached an agreement on internment of British and German prisoners of war in Switzerland occurred due to the fact that the United States, still a neutral power in 1916, handled the majority of the communication for Great Britain. As the United States entered the conflict one year later in 1917, they still maintained their diplomatic channels within Germany in 1916. Great Britain requested that the United States' ambassador in London communicate with his counterpart in Berlin to appeal on Great Britain's behalf for an agreement on internment in Switzerland, similar to the one created between Germany and France. The communications lasted from March 25 to May 13, 1916, with nine messages in total exchanged between Sir Edward Grey, Secretary of Foreign Affairs of Britain, and W.H. Page, United States ambassador to Great Britain. That six of the nine messages came from Sir Grey illustrates the

⁶³ Speed, 35-36.

urgency felt by the British government to secure an agreement for the internment of British soldiers held as prisoners of war in Germany.⁶⁴ On April 9, the urgency of Sir Grey's telegrams reached their climax, with him writing, "it is not possible to make an official request to the Swiss Government to inaugurate the necessary arrangements pending the receipt of the reply of the German Government, and much unnecessary hardship is being caused by the failure of the German Government to send a reply."⁶⁵ The response on May 1 to this message contained the German acceptance of the internment agreement with the same terms as the French agreement. Almost immediately, on May 14, Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Philip Picot arrived from London in Switzerland as commanding officer of the British prisoners of war interned in Switzerland. He then formalized their accommodations across the country with the Swiss military. The first 305 British soldiers arrived on May 28, 1916.⁶⁶

The urgency of the British government originated in part from international reports of the arrival of the German and French soldiers in Switzerland and the level of care that they received. Figure 3 depicts British internees arriving for a brief stop in Zurich before travelling to smaller towns, flanked by crowds of Swiss citizens. As the international agreements fell into place, the Swiss military planned out the locations, regulations, and accommodations of the incoming prisoners of war. These initial stages in the formation of Swiss internment camps and Swiss defensive humanitarian policy rested on both the history of internment during the Boubaki internment and on the foreign policy initiatives of the Swiss government, ICRC, and Holy See in the first few years of World War I.

⁶⁴ Parliament, *Correspondence with the United States Ambassador Respecting the Transfer to Switzerland of British and German Wounded and Sick Combatant Prisoners of War*, 15.

⁶⁵ Schweizerisches Rotes Kreuz, "Die Internierung der französischen Boubaki-Armee in der Schweiz."

⁶⁶ Mittler, 17.



Figure 3: British soldiers arriving in Zurich in the evening, greeted the crowds of Swiss citizens and escorted by the Swiss military, 1916. Source: Whitmarsh, "Prisoners of War Interned in Swizerland."

Changes to the original treaties that created the internment camps eventually came in 1917. An Anglo-German conference was held in The Hague to discuss POWs, extended internment and exchange agreements, and fixed issues with the previous treaty. Many of these changes directly affected the Swiss internment camps, as the diplomats in attendance added new categories to the list of internment conditions. First, those in captivity for at least 18 months and suffering from "barbed wire disease" now qualified for internment in Switzerland, as well as any officer, commissioned or not, in captivity for 18 months.⁶⁷ This treaty also created the opportunity for the internment of 16,000 POWs in the Netherlands, though this treaty only extended to German and British soldiers.⁶⁸ The challenge of interning thousands of sick and wounded POWs, however, was a logistical feat that the Swiss state and military struggled to meet alone, due to resource restrictions caused by the war. The assistance of the Swiss Red Cross, ICRC, and other charitable NGOs made the internment system possible by supporting the system with non-

⁶⁷ Speed, 36-37.

⁶⁸ Yarnall, 159.

governmental resources. These groups also energized and engaged the Swiss populace to also participate and support through their individual charity the goals of the internment camp.

Switzerland also relied on the assistance of non-governmental international agencies to increase the legitimacy of the humanitarian portion of humanitarianism. The internment camp system needed the investment and trust of other belligerent and neutral states. With the ICRC and Holy See support of internment in Switzerland on the grounds of humanitarian aid, violating Swiss neutrality changed from an issue of national sovereignty to an issue of international image and respect for the lofty ideals of humanitarianism. This denotes an especially significant point when considering the case of Belgium's neutrality in WWI.⁶⁹ Switzerland's ability to offer good offices and house POWs in internment camps originated from its commitment to neutrality and humanitarianism, which allowed for enough trust between the belligerents to create a treaty that both sides could support and fulfill. Had a belligerent state violated Swiss neutrality, or the ICRC and Vatican backing not existed, the Swiss defensive humanitarianism platform would have failed. Defensive humanitarianism functioned on an explicitly domestic level despite being a form of national foreign policy. It required international acceptance for its legitimacy for its implementation at the ground level. This international acceptance formed with the first newspaper stories in countries throughout Europe after internment began.

Defensive humanitarianism benefited the Swiss, the internees, and the belligerent nations through its international reputation. Governments with or without interned soldiers took an interest in the project due to its novel aim of alleviating the suffering of POWs through the reconceptualization of internment camps. The main successes of the internment camp system

⁶⁹ As far as neutral states acting as hosts for internment treaties, the Netherlands held British and German soldiers after a treaty between those states was formed in 1917. For more information, see John Yarnall's *Barbed Wire Disease: British & German Prisoners of War, 1914-19*.

arose from the benefits it provided to all parties involved. A plethora of reports exist in English from both British government officials and the British internees in Switzerland that attest to this point. One report, from Heron Charles Goodhart, a member of the British legation in Switzerland, states that, “fruit, cigarettes, chocolate and postcards, besides flowers in profusion, were the principal gifts brought by private individuals, many of whom were Swiss. The British Colony were [sic] in full force.”⁷⁰ While the level of enthusiasm of the Swiss populace recorded by many British officials illustrated more the international use of internment in Switzerland as a form of morale building for their local populations, the vast majority of accounts captured the truly positive feelings of the Swiss welcoming of interned soldiers. The governments involved disseminated the initial reports on the arrival of interned soldiers in Switzerland came and the vast majority contained very positive sentiments. Many accounts, especially from British officials, contain descriptions of the high levels of enthusiasm of the Swiss populace at the arrival of newly interned soldiers. Reports conflict as to whether soldiers arrived on third-class cars that had been transformed into medical cars, or if officers rode in first class and enlisted men in second, but this is truly minor in the grand scheme of the internment camp system.⁷¹ Almost all reports contain accounts of the types of gifts soldiers received at stations and restaurants as they travelled through Switzerland to their assigned internment location, where they also garnered attention and gifts from individual Swiss citizens. These citizens had many reasons to celebrate their country’s humanitarian project.

In addition to the protection of Swiss neutrality and international prominence for the humanitarian goals of internment, the financial benefits to the tourism sector of the Swiss

⁷⁰ Ibid., 7.

⁷¹ Grant Mountstuart, Evelyn Duff and Heron Charles Goodhart, *The Reception of Wounded Prisoner Soldiers of Great Britain in Switzerland* (London: Jas. Truscott & Son, 1916), 6.

economy through the housing of interned soldiers in hotels and hostels likely explain the overwhelmingly positive Swiss reception of interned soldiers. The Swiss government, with the input of NGOs and other states, created defensive humanitarianism and the internment camp system primarily to protect Swiss sovereignty by deterring outside attacks, but also to allow for humanitarian ideals to shine and create better health outcomes for prisoners of war. Both sides of the coin, defense and humanitarianism, defined the internment camp system.

In addition to benefiting the POWs, the internment camp system united the Swiss populace behind the Swiss humanitarian effort. Seen below as Figure 4, the excitement of the Swiss populace at their national humanitarian project drove crowds of thousands to train stations to meet arriving internees. The Swiss citizens had good reason to rejoice; the internment camp system represented the best possible option for the Swiss government and populace politically, economically, and socially. The agreements preserved Swiss neutrality, since all areas of Switzerland housed recovering soldiers from each belligerent state party to the agreement. It supported the declining Swiss wartime economy by bringing in payments for the housing and care of internees from their home government, and by providing labor where shortages existed from the removal of young Swiss men for military service. Finally, it allowed for the solidification of the Swiss image, internationally and domestically, as inextricably linked to humanitarianism.⁷² This process, originally started with the internment of the Bourbaki Army discussed in Chapter 1, continued through the internment camp system during this war. The

⁷² Some postcards of Switzerland during this time even show Switzerland as an island with a lighthouse in the middle, the ray of light symbolizing the Swiss' shining of humanitarianism on the dark warfare of the continent, see Georg Kreis, *Schweizer Postkarten aus dem Ersten Weltkrieg* (Zürich: Hier und Jetzt, 2013). For an extensive study of Swiss nationalism during this period, see: Cédric Cotter, "L'Humanitaire comme Exutoire?," (*s'*)*Aider pour Survivre: Action Humanitaire et Neutralité Suisse pendant la Première Guerre Mondiale* (Geneva: University of Geneva, 2016), 253-342.

image of charitable Switzerland, state and populace alike, increasingly appeared in postcards and political cartoons during this time period.⁷³



Figure 4: French prisoners of war arriving in Fribourg, Switzerland, February 1916. Large crowd has gathered to get a glimpse of the soldiers and greet them. Source: Whitmarsh, “Prisoners of War Interned in Switzerland.”

The evolution of defensive humanitarianism during the years of 1914-1916 included the realization of the last century of international law in mitigating human suffering during armed conflict. The formation of the Swiss internment camps required more than the urgings of the ICRC or the Vatican; the unique position of Switzerland as a neutral state capable of enacting the Geneva Convention and The Hague Conventions created the conditions suitable to craft the internment camp system. Solidifying the practicality of defensive humanitarianism to the Swiss populace and the international community at large, the treaty negotiations of 1915-1916 marked a huge turning point in the prestige of Swiss good offices. With the initial internees’ journeys

⁷³ For example of Swiss postcards from this period, see: Georg Kreis, *Schweizer Postkarten aus dem Ersten Weltkrieg* (Zürich: Hier und Jetzt, 2013).

into Switzerland, the next phase of defensive humanitarianism began, in which the Swiss government asserted the humanitarian half of its policy platform.

Chapter 3

When William McGilvray arrived in Chateaux D'Oex late in 1916, he could scarcely believe the improvement in treatment that he received. The Swiss military and the ICRC operated all of the internment camps in Switzerland for the duration of World War I, however, their daily maintenance and administration rested in the hands of non-commissioned Swiss soldiers and a few of the internees themselves. This chapter explores the humanitarian aspect of defensive humanitarianism by illuminating the unique opportunities and freedoms afforded to interned soldiers. From job training to education, leisure, and recreation, the Swiss internment camps overhauled the traditional POW system. Not all of these changes happened smoothly, and some failed, but the humanitarian ideals in the internment camp system proved that incorporating lofty principles into international law engendered practical change. The improvement in the experiences of these soldiers from their time in POW camps in France, Germany, Britain, and elsewhere, during their time in the internment camp system represent more than just a difference in scenery. This chapter elucidates out the structure of the internment camp system, elaborates on the changes between POW camps and internment camps, and analyzes how the unique humanitarian aspects of the Swiss internment camp system constitutes the second half of defensive humanitarianism.

The Swiss military housed the interned soldiers primarily in hostels and hotels and sent severe cases to hospitals and sanatoria.⁷⁴ The Swiss army required military-level discipline in the

⁷⁴ Sanatoria, an early form of health resorts, were medical facilities that existed primarily during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Sanatoria patients generally stayed over long periods of time and most suffered from tuberculosis, before the creation of antibiotics. For more information, see: P. Ehrler, "Swiss hospitals and sanatoria 1850-1940," *Gynakologische Rundschau* 18, no. 1 (1978): 165-168, accessed April 10, 2018. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/367904>.

camps. The Swiss army personnel in each camp called frequent roll calls, with tardy or absent soldiers punished after reprimanding with a short imprisonment.⁷⁵ The interned soldiers only had the legal rights of prisoners of war, due in part to the small amount of international law written specifically on the rights of internees as opposed to POWs. However, in their accommodations, internees experienced abundant comfort in rooms normally meant for paying customers, with between two and four men noncommissioned internees inhabiting each fully furnished room and interned officers in private rooms.⁷⁶ The day-to-day undertakings of the internment system relied on daily reports sent to the two regional superintendents, with information on attendance, fees accrued by soldiers for their rent and board, work assignments, changes in soldiers' health, and disciplinary incidents recorded by the staff at each hostel, hotel, hospital, and sanitarium, not necessarily by military personnel.⁷⁷ Indeed, many non-commissioned Swiss soldiers served in this position, but they also delegated duties to the internees healthy enough to work.

On the surface, the personnel structure of the Swiss internment camps appears at first glance as extremely hierarchical. The Surgeon-General of the Swiss military, located centrally in Bern, sat at the top of the administrative system, followed by a quartermaster-general who oversaw two sectional superintendents. One was for the Central Powers' soldiers in Lucerne, and the other for the Entente Powers in Montreux, with non-commissioned Swiss officers acting as individual area supervisors. In addition, a Bureau of Information, centered in Bern, maintained all written records of the camp, including the number of soldiers interned in Switzerland. To

⁷⁵ Whitmarsh, "Prisoners of the War Interned in Germany," *Switzerland and the First War*, accessed March 10, 2017, <http://www.switzerland1914-1918.net/prisoners-of-war-interned-in-switzerland.html>

⁷⁶ "Internierten-Zeitungen (1916-1918)," Dossier, E27#1000/721#14038* (Bern, Switzerland: Schweizerisches Bundesarchiv).

⁷⁷ Favre, *Swiss Internment of Prisoners of War*, 20.

maintain discipline among the internees, trusted officers from each individual location would be allowed the authority to overview their fellow soldiers' behavior.⁷⁸ Despite the hierarchical appearance of the system, non-commissioned Swiss soldiers and internees completed much of the day-to-day work of the camp by compiling attendance sheets, distributing mail, and assuring that work, recreational activities, and leisure time proceeded smoothly.⁷⁹ In fact, in areas with internees from multiple nations, groups of mixed internees could complete tasks together, as seen in Figure 5, in which French, British, and German internees work together to deliver mail, accompanied by a Swiss soldier. This relaxed system paralleled the relaxed military character of the internment camp system; the humanitarian and neutral aspects of the system removed the need for a rigid hierarchy of power.



Figure 5: Right to left, a Swiss soldier supervises a French, a British, and a German internee as they deliver mail in one of the major hospitals in Lucerne. Mail delivery was one of the largest jobs undertaken by interned soldiers.
Source: Whitmarsh, "Prisoners of War Interned in Switzerland."

While the treaties focused on the higher-level problems of selection, transportation, and payment, the Swiss military and ICRC primarily handled the ground level issues of running the

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ "Verschiedene Listen betr. den Internierten-Bestand (1916-1919)," Dossier, E27#1000/721#14032* (Schweizerisches Bundesarchiv: Bern, Switzerland).

day-to-day aspects of the system. This dichotomy between state level and individual level authority mirrors a similar dichotomy between the defensive and humanitarian aspects of defensive humanitarianism. While the defensive aspect functioned mainly at the international level, with state leaders and diplomats as actors, the individuals who ensured the daily survival of the camps accounted for the humanitarian half. It is important to keep in mind that the humanitarian aspects of the internment camp system in Switzerland created their structural and theoretical differences from the POW camps in Western Europe.

The humanitarian aspects of the internment camp system came, in part, as a response to the evolution of the conditions in POW camps in Western Europe during WWI. Due to more robust railway lines, new food preservation methods, and mass vaccinations of the twentieth century, militaries installed POW camps far from interned foreign civilians or domestic populations.⁸⁰ The advances allowed for more prisoners to inhabit smaller spaces. Labor characterized lives of POWs, especially in Germany, where POWs constructed the camps themselves.⁸¹ Swiss internment camps lacked the opportunity for reprisals against internees, as Switzerland did not participate in the war and thereby lacked the chance to accrue hostility towards the internees that existed in traditional POW camps. Compensation for labor in POW camps either did not exist, or came in the form of camp based coupons, which many POWs found useless.⁸² The main difference between POW camps in Western Europe during WWI and

⁸⁰ Heather Jones, "A Missing Paradigm: Military captivity and the prisoner of war, 1914-18," in *Captivity, Forced Labour and Forced Migration in Europe during the First World War*, ed Matthew Stibbe (New York: Routledge, 2009), 20.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 22.

the Swiss internment camps arose from the focus of the Swiss government on the health, instead of the detention, of internees.⁸³

Forced labor always existed in the prisoner of war system; however, the internment camp system utilized work as a tool to improve internee health. Favre's work evidences this sentiment, as he felt that, "work is a necessity for interned war prisoners. It is the only way to restore them after the ravages that sickness, wounds, and a long captivity have made on their minds and bodies."⁸⁴ The physicians of the camps classified the internees into the six categories of work, removing the chance for misunderstanding as to why the soldiers originally interned for illness participated in laborious activities. These categories included: those incapable of work, those capable of light work within the camp, those capable of light work outside the camp, those capable of regular work outside the camp, those needing to learn a new profession through apprenticeship due to injury, and those in university before the war who wanted to continue their studies.⁸⁵ The Swiss government employed internees only in industries that did not compete with Swiss labor.⁸⁶ This dramatically lessened the exploitative characteristic of traditional prisoner or interned labor, as well as reduced any internal fears of labor competition within Switzerland. Labor, therefore, took on a humanitarian characteristic: internees labored to the benefit of their health and the future welfare of their families and states. While the Swiss army required all those

⁸³ For more information on POW camps in Western Europe during WWI, please see: Uta Hinz, *Gefangen im Grossen Krieg. Kriegsgefangenschaft in Deutschland 1914-1921* (Essen, Germany: Klartext Verlag, 2006). For information on POW camps in Eastern Europe, see: Reinhard Nachtigal, *Kriegsgefangenschaft an der Ostfront 1914 bis 1918: Literaturbericht zu einem neuen Forschungsfeld* (Frankfurt a. M., Germany: Peter Lang, 2005).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ "Vorbereitung für die kriegsrechtliche Internierung, u.a. Konventionsentwurf, 1914-1915."

⁸⁶ "Mitteilungen des Armeefeldarztes an die Presse (1916-1918)," Dossier, E27#1000/721#14034* (Schweizerisches Bundesarchiv: Bern, Switzerland).

chosen as capable to work to do so, they could not force non-commissioned officers of the rank of sergeant or above, nor did they require labor of civilian internees.⁸⁷

The unique humanitarian goal of the internment camps, reducing the unnecessary suffering of prisoners of war due to injury and disease, created an entirely new method for handling prisoners of war. The new structuring of the internment camps resulted in the Swiss military avoiding gross loss of active Swiss soldiers to the cause of guarding interned foreign soldiers.⁸⁸ Medical staff, hotel staff, and non-commissioned soldiers, in addition to the internees themselves, took over these roles. As the health of soldiers represented the primary goal of internment, the labor, education, and recreation of interned soldiers also differed dramatically from the traditional experiences of prisoners of war.

This humanitarian reconceptualization of interned soldiers' labor differed dramatically from the structuring of prisoner's time in traditional prisoner of war camps. Both The Hague and Geneva Conventions allowed for governments to require prisoners of war to perform labor if healthy enough to do so, in accordance with their skills.⁸⁹ The unique Swiss system of internment included a new aspect to the occupation of captive's time: the opportunity to work in their prewar professions, and the opportunity to receive further vocational or academic education. Favre held that:

Switzerland must furnish the interned prisoner with diversion so that he does not become lazy and fall a[sic] prey to the numerous temptations that he finds in our country. She must make, or remake, men of them, so that once the war is over they will be capable of establishing a family; or if they have a family, of resuming their life with it on a proper basis and so to lift up their country.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Civilian internees are not covered in this thesis, but would make a very interesting future area of research.

⁸⁸ Favre, *Swiss Internment of Prisoners of War*, 40.

⁸⁹ "Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded in Armies in the Field. Geneva, 22 August 1864."

⁹⁰ Favre, *Swiss Internment of Prisoners of War*, 37.

The utilization of the word diversion, as opposed to labor, points to the focus on health and not on utility that the internment system engendered. It also signifies the administration's focus on idle time, because they understood it as a detriment to the soldier's character. Why was the Swiss military so concerned with the idleness of internees? One of the biggest worries of the Swiss arose from the fear that interned men with too much money and free time would fall into deleterious social behaviors like alcoholism or gambling.⁹¹

To this end, the Swiss government required all interned soldiers after arriving in Switzerland to report their previous occupations before the war, and to undergo routine health assessments by the military medical staff to check for work status. Prisoners could not refuse the work or studies assigned to them, as the Swiss government and army held that idleness caused the deterioration of the mental, moral, and physical health of the soldiers. These positions ranged from administration to physical labor, assisting Swiss citizens in the areas around their internment camps. Figure 6 illustrates one such example, with German sailors assisting Swiss women in Walzenhausen with their laundry.



Figure 6: German interned sailors assist Swiss women in washing in Walzenhausen. Source: Whitmarsh, "Prisoners of War Interned in Switzerland."

⁹¹ Ibid, 38.

Favre's personal fixation on idleness came from his belief that idle men had a greater risk in falling into poor health or breaking rules than men with less free time. This paradox of diversion, suggesting relaxation and leisure, versus the concern with idleness, which implies productivity and usefulness, illustrates the tension of running the internment camp system with humanitarianism as the ideology. New and old concepts of internment camps clashed and caused cognitive dissonance in Favre's reports on how men should spend their time, but the result produced a middle ground: while soldiers labored to their own physical benefit and to the benefit of their state, they also participated in recreational sports and pastimes, as well as studied at university and relaxed in local establishments.

The transformation of labor from a compulsory measure to a health initiative radically improved the experiences of the interned soldiers, while at the same time boosting sectors of the Swiss economy lagging due to the loss of manpower and tourism. The transformative nature of the internment camp system pleased not only the interned soldiers, but their home governments, and the citizens of Switzerland more broadly. It saved many internees from their deaths in the POW camps, as well as painted Switzerland as the humanitarian bastion of Europe. The possibility for and success of defensive humanitarianism developed from its unique quality of suiting the needs and desires of all sides. This also increased its international profile, as the home countries of the internees promoted the internment camps domestically to boost morale.

The education of internees also played a central role in the health initiatives of the internment camps. The healthcare goals of the ICRC and Swiss army extended past the time period during internment and continued into the soldiers' return to civilian life. Favre particularly focused on interned soldiers matriculated in university before the war, or on those who needing

to learn a new skill or trade as a result of complications from injury or illness. As Favre noted in his report:

The *Swiss University Work* divided the regions and sections among the different university committees of Geneva, Fribourg, Neuchâtel, Berne, Zurich, Bâle; procured books for study, created or developed regional libraries, facilitated access to the libraries already in existence, and organized conferences and lectures ... the normal, secondary, and professional schools, the schools of commerce, etc., opened their courses to interned pupils and students ... Only the interned men fulfilling the regular conditions were to have the status of regular students. The others who gave evidence of satisfactory educational training were admitted as auditors.⁹²

Favre and the Swiss army, while allowing the interned soldiers almost complete access to the Swiss education system, had the concern that the internees would abuse the opportunity to enter major cities to attend classes due to distraction in the “agreeable pursuits of a stay in the city,” or those “who do not see anything better, the lazy, the incapable, the non-serious.”⁹³ The Swiss army maintained the education and reeducation of the interned soldiers compared in importance to the physical health of the internees. This focus on the future lives of the internees illustrates the institutionalizing of humanitarian ideas in the internment camp system.

While Favre’s report shows that he held a level of cynicism towards the intent of student internees, as a whole he regarded the internees in a positively. He included in his reports that any only in a fraction of the student internee population committed infractions, as trusted internees acted as observers for the less trustworthy students for the camp administration, just as other officer-level internees oversaw their men in their area.⁹⁴ This illustrates the give-and-take aspect of defensive humanitarianism: while the humanitarian aspect of the internment camp system pursued as many beneficial opportunities for interned soldiers as possible during their time in

⁹² Favre, *Swiss Internment of Prisoners of War*, 25.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

Switzerland, the defensive aspect attempted to hold them to traditional military standards of behavior and conduct. The humanitarian half cared for the internee, while the defensive half utilized the internee to protect Swiss national security. The focus on the education of internees demonstrates the humanitarian focus of the internment camp system. The ideas around time shifted in the internment camps system from considering only the physical location of these soldiers for a set period of time to caring for the lives of internees to ensure a smooth transition into the future. By expanding the health and quality of life goals for the internees into the future, instead of continuing to consider their lives only during the period of their detainment, the humanitarian ideas institutionalized in the internment camp system produced a new approach to the detainment of foreign soldiers.

The reeducation of internees through both vocational training and university schooling presented the most apparent transformation and showcases the future-oriented outlook of the internment camp system. Keeping the future lives of internees after internment always in mind, the structuring of the internment camp system sought to prepare soldiers for the transition back to civilian life in the smoothest way possible. As a non-belligerent in the conflict, the Swiss had no acrimony towards the internees, which removed structural opportunities for pernicious intent. This enabled the humanitarian aspect of the camps to flourish, resulting in the change from conceptualizing the soldiers' stay from short-term confinement to long-lasting health and professional goals. In addition to the new approaches to labor and education in the internment camps, the Swiss military also took a different approach to the structuring of recreational activities for the internees.

Before internment, Sergeant William McGilvray could have hardly imagined that he would spend his unoccupied hours in Switzerland frequently participating in recreational

activities. He definitely never dreamed that his tenure would include the duty of officiating curling tournaments for internees and civilians alike. As a non-commissioned officer at the level of sergeant upon his arrival, McGilvray oversaw the British soldiers interned at the Chateaux d'Oex internment camp as the highest-ranking officer interned there in 1916. In addition to maintaining military-style behavior and conduct, McGilvray oversaw the implementation of labor, education, and recreation programs that saw to the mental welfare of the internees. In June of 1917, this entailed overseeing a curling tournament between the British interned men of Chateaux d'Oex and the local female curling team. As one of the internees, British Lance Corporal Gruchy, wrote home, "I am extremely comfortable and can hardly realize my good fortune. The days as a 'gefangener' [prisoner] seem like a particularly horrible nightmare; thank God they are over..."⁹⁵ The internment system in Switzerland revolutionized how states could handle POWs, by shifting the purpose from captivity to health. This allowed internees to participate in a myriad of recreations, ranging from soccer clubs to symphony orchestras that collaborated with the local populace, as seen in Figures 7 and 8.



Figure 7: German interned soldiers playing soccer as their recreational activity.

⁹⁵ "Letter from Sergeant William McGilvray," 136.

Source: Whitmarsh, Switzerland1914-1918.net.



Figure 8: Allied internees perform as a symphony orchestra at Chaux-de-Fonds. Internees could interact with Swiss civilians during recreational activities. Source: Whitmarsh, “Prisoners of War Interned in Switzerland.”

Additionally, the social halls in each camp acted as a creative refuge, as opposed to a café or bar where alcohol functioned as the relaxant. Favre’s report illustrates that the morale of internees also played a role in the humanitarian goal of long-term physical health. As Favre noted,

It is obviously good for the interned men that alcohol is not an indispensable element of sociability. The help to each is beneficial and the morale is elevated by lectures, dramatic performances, and concerts given from time to time. Interned men who take part in these things find an interest which keeps them from idleness. At St. Legier, Blonay, the social hall is opened only twice a week and yet is a source of constant interest. These meetings are attended, on average, by two-thirds of the interned men in the section. Certain social halls are used for other purposes. That at Mürren, the English social hall shelters the Temperance Rambling Club, with seventy members, and the orchestra of interned men, and courses are given, with instruction in wood-carving.⁹⁶

In addition, various commissions of Swiss nationals worked to broaden the opportunities of the interned, including the Commission from the Christian Associations, Commission of German

⁹⁶ Favre, *Swiss Internment of Prisoners of War*, 43.

Switzerland, The Swiss Catholic Mission, and the Swiss Society of Chaplains.⁹⁷ The role of these commissions focused primarily on religion and the spirituality of the internee.

The uniquely humanitarian aspects of the Swiss internment camp system differentiated them from traditional prisoner of war or internment camp systems by focusing on long-term health and lifestyle goals, instead of punitive or reprisal measures during detainment. The internment camp system, run to a large extent by the internees themselves, focused on improving more than just the immediate health of the interned. While work was a traditional aspect of both POW and internment camps, the utilization of work for the express purpose of healthcare goals distinguished internment camps dramatically from traditional POW camp models. The humanitarian aspects of defensive humanitarian cannot be understated. While the defensive attribute, enabled by the internment camp system, benefitted the neutral Swiss state in political and economic terms and kept the Swiss safe from external invasion and internal conflict, the humanitarian portion greatly impacted the individual internee. The defensive and humanitarian aspects intertwined and mutually depended on each other, and their disentanglement would have crippled the system.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 44.

Conclusion

The Swiss internment system evolved in response to the new challenges presented by WWI. The emergence of internment camps could not have transpired without the existing international legal framework of the Geneva and The Hague Conventions, as well as international humanitarian organizations such as the ICRC and the Swiss Red Cross. One of the main ideas historians have about WWI is that it represented a definitive rupture between what Eric Hobsbawm called the generally peaceful “long nineteenth century” of 1789-1914 and the chaotic, ideological struggles of the “short twentieth century” of 1914-1991.⁹⁸ However, the emergence of defensive humanitarianism embodied developments from both eras. The continuities it shared with earlier Swiss domestic and foreign policy, the development of international law, and the treatment of POWs illustrate the salience of these “long nineteenth century” developments. On the other hand, the utilization of international humanitarian ideology by the Swiss state to protect its sovereignty also signified this smaller state’s own ideological entrenchment vis-à-vis its belligerent neighbors. The outbreak of the war exacerbated old problems and created new crises to which Swiss state had to respond. The Swiss government chose to transform the developments of the past 125 years into a new solution that took into account the destruction of the status quo. This allowed the Swiss state to navigate this new era, while at the same time continuing its dedication to humanitarian causes.

⁹⁸ Hobsbawm elaborated on these two terms in several books. He wrote three books on the “long twentieth century,” including: *The Age of Revolution: Europe 1789-1848* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1962), *The Age of Capital: 1848-1875* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), and *The Age of Empire: 1875-1914* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1987). His book *The Age of Extremes: 1914-1991* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994) covers the “short twentieth century.”

The move to incorporate international humanitarianism into its policy platform was not only a self-interested move on the part of the Swiss government, as defensive humanitarianism expanded the understanding of internment and improved the health outcomes of thousands of POWs. By reevaluating the costs of total war and revolutionizing the care of its casualties, the incorporation of humanitarian ideas into the internment camp's theoretical goals and practical structure shifted the focus of the institution from detention to long-term health. The Swiss government chose to move forward with internment not exclusively out of humanitarian ideals, but also out of financial and political considerations. The reconfiguration of norms around POW treatment remains an important example of how modern nation-states may incorporate humanitarian ideology into their domestic and foreign policies today. While these policies are inherently self-interested, self-preservation and humanitarianism may be pursued and advanced simultaneously. While the defensive half of defensive humanitarianism employs the use of humanitarian ideology and the internment camp system as a quasi *Realpolitik* method to ensure Swiss sovereignty and territorial integrity, the humanitarian portion saved soldiers' lives through the goal of improving their health not only during their internment, but after internment as well.

The concept of defensive humanitarianism is useful for understanding the policy platform implemented by the Swiss state to assuage the crises of WWI. The Swiss applied their unique policy platform through international agreements and humanitarian law, which presented a unique approach that this small states may employed to maintain its sovereignty. This episode in history shaped not only domestic Swiss politics and society, but also influenced the histories of WWI, international diplomacy, and humanitarianism as well. The unique strategy of the Swiss state still offers innovative, but often overlooked, methods for the treatment of foreign soldiers by captor governments today. Understanding Swiss domestic and foreign policy through the

mechanism of defensive humanitarianism enables historians to understand the Swiss reaction to the myriad of issues that the state faced during WWI. This analysis adds another layer to the understanding of international diplomacy through its reevaluation of Swiss methods for internment. Historians have not recognized the unique blend of domestic needs for neutrality, a stable economy, and peaceful sociocultural relations with the international ideas and institutions of humanitarianism at play in the policy platform of the Swiss government during WWI. It is the hope of this study that the benefits of incorporating humanitarian ideas into the policy platforms of nation-states receive more attention.

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