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# Hidden presences: the role of next-of-kin in shaping the context and experience of POW captivity

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## ABSTRACT

This article explores the role next-of-kin played in framing discussion over the treatment of military prisoners during the era of the two world wars. Prisoners' next-of-kin came to assume an influential position during the First World War, and this was reflected in the 1929 POW convention, which deliberately anticipated their involvement in shaping public debate and government policy in future wars. These assumptions proved faulty; the Second World War saw a sharp decline in the influence of next-of-kin, and, as a consequence, the updated convention of 1949 looked to other mechanisms, notably the neutral inspection regime, to hold governments to their humanitarian obligations towards captured enemy combatants.

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Visitors to the United States are often struck by the sight of distinctive black and white Prisoner of War/Missing in Action (POW/MIA) flags displayed above official buildings. Flown on six occasions across the year, the flag is one of only two permitted to fly above the White House and Capitol Rotunda. It was formally recognised in September 1979 when Congress bowed to pressure from the families of some 2,500 Vietnam War prisoners of war and 'missing in action' who demanded full accountability to finding their loved ones and bringing them home. The 'National POW/MIA Recognition' day on the third Friday of September is a central element in the ritual of US political and civic life when the country honours those servicemen and women who suffered wartime captivity or whose whereabouts remain unknown. The flag speaks to the success of veterans and their 'next-of-kin' in shaping popular and official attitudes towards

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wartime surrender and imprisonment. Anyone captured in a US uniform can draw comfort from the fact that their government is duty bound to secure their release.<sup>1</sup> Although the POW/MIA lobby is especially prominent in the United States – perhaps only in Israel do the authorities show a similar regard towards securing the safe return of their nationals, dead or alive – POWs' next-of-kin groups have exercised an influence over official policy elsewhere too. Within weeks of the outbreak of fighting in Ukraine in early 2022, families of Ukrainian prisoners began lobbying the authorities in Kyiv to ensure that their loved ones were not overlooked in prisoner exchange agreements negotiated with the Russian regime.

The ability of prisoners' families to affect government policy in this manner has fluctuated over time. In the late medieval and early modern eras, it was the next-of-kin's 'word of honour' that guaranteed a prisoner lived up to the conditions of his parole and it was invariably their treasure that secured the ransom for his release.<sup>2</sup> With the emergence of the nation-state in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, families' influence over the fate of their loved ones declined. Universal male conscription underscored the bond between the state and its citizen soldiers. Ransoming fell out of favour as prisoners stopped being the chattel of individual captors and instead became the responsibility of the enemy state.<sup>3</sup> The tradition of periodically exchanging prisoners across the battlefield gave way to the mass incarceration of prisoners for the duration of hostilities. 'Detaining powers' assumed an increasingly broad set of responsibilities for prisoners' upkeep and wellbeing.<sup>4</sup> The Hague conventions of 1899 and 1907 formalised these developments, deliberately curtailing the role of next-of-kin so as not to dilute the responsibilities of the detaining authorities. Families were free to communicate with their loved ones and contribute to the work of charitable relief societies. But if released on parole, responsibility for upholding the terms lay with the prisoner's government, not their family. Anyone breaking parole forfeited their rights as POWs and laid themselves open to criminal prosecution, but the ultimate sanction lay in the danger of wider contagion if instances of parole breaking undermined the mutual trust and confidence in reciprocity on which the whole system relied.<sup>5</sup>

The codification of detention practices in the Hague conventions did not imply a softening of official or popular sensitivity over the question of surrender. Indeed, as Eyal Benvenisti and Amichai Cohen have argued, the *fin de siècle* military looked upon the nascent humanitarian codes not to 'humanise' or 'civilise' warfare but rather as a mechanism for the state to

strengthen its control over mass conscript armies.<sup>6</sup> The long-held reluctance to admit civilians into the preserve of the military elite remained. So too did objections to bestowing 'privileges' upon servicemen who choose 'ignoble' imprisonment over a heroic death on the battlefield.

Attempts to build on the 1864 Geneva convention and create a POW code in the early 1870s or to include protections in a treaty on the laws of war in 1874 were vehemently resisted. Critics argued that any 'comforts and indulgences' promised to prisoners would encourage 'cowardly or effeminate soldiers to escape the dangers and hardships of war by surrendering themselves to the enemy'.<sup>7</sup> Such doubts only multiplied as the ranks of European armies were swelled with men who were unaccustomed to the rigours of military life or whose political loyalties were less than secure. Reflecting on the 1907 Hague convention, the British military analyst J. M. Spaight spoke for many when he complained of prisoners becoming 'spoilt darling[s]' and military captivity sold as 'a kind of inexpensive rest-cure after the wearisome turmoil of fighting'.<sup>8</sup>

There is little doubt that the 'stigma of surrender', as Brian Feltman has termed it, continued to colour individual responses to and wider perceptions of captivity over the first decades of the twentieth century.<sup>9</sup> Shortly after fighting broke out in 1914, French soldiers were informed that anyone who surrendered unscathed would be subject to investigation. Four years later, Britain's War Minister warned against indiscriminately viewing POWs as 'objects of sympathy and indeed almost as heroes', as this would 'go far towards undermining the fighting discipline of the Army'.<sup>10</sup> Recognition of medals, pension rights and time in service were consequently withheld, as they had been after the Second South African War (1899–1902), until former prisoners had satisfied inquiries into the circumstances of their capture.

Similar attitudes were held across Europe as the strain of total war took its toll on military discipline.<sup>11</sup> The Italians arguably occupied the most extreme position: Rome's refusal to supply relief parcels to the 270,000 men who surrendered at Caporetto unquestionably contributed to the high death rates of Italian prisoners in Austro-Hungarian captivity in the final year of the conflict.<sup>12</sup> After the war there were, as Heather Jones has shown, marked differences between states, but in the main, former prisoners struggled to insert the experience of captivity into national wartime narratives. In Britain, interest in POWs waned after the successful prosecution, by a German court, of three German defendants accused of abusing POWs at the Leipzig trials in 1921.<sup>13</sup> Despite a prolific literary

output and energetic championing by veterans' associations, former French prisoners never fully overcame official reluctance to accord them a place in the national conversation, which remained dominated by the desire to honour those who had fallen in battle.<sup>14</sup>

In Germany, while many ex-prisoners struggled to come to terms with their nation's defeat, their collective interests were generally well represented by the next-of-kin's People's League for the Protection of German Prisoners of War and Civilians (*Volksbund zum Schutze der deutschen Kriegs- und Zivilgefangenen*) and a broad based veterans' group, the Reich Association of Former Prisoners of War (*Reichsvereinigung ehemaliger Kriegsgefangener* or ReK), which campaigned, with some success, to secure moral recognition and financial support for their members.<sup>15</sup> Increasing pacifist sentiments in the late 1920s spawned a number of initiatives involving former prisoners, but in general veterans' associations tended to associate with national – even National Socialist – interests and shun the opportunity to embrace pan-European ideals.<sup>16</sup>

Notwithstanding persistent official discomfort over the issue of 'premature surrender', the first half of the twentieth century witnessed a transformation in the *legal* status of military prisoners. The path leading from the Hague conventions in 1899/1907, via the 1929 POW convention to the third Geneva convention of 1949, laid the foundations for contemporary international humanitarian law as it relates to POWs. This legal development reflected, and in some respects foreshadowed, a subtle change in social attitudes towards wartime captivity.

In seeking to explain both phenomena, this article examines the influence exercised by prisoners' next-of-kin on official policy making. It focuses on military prisoners, rather than civilian internees, as the latter were not formally subject to international humanitarian law until after the Second World War.<sup>17</sup> The next-of-kin and their supporters not only changed the way state authorities viewed POWs, but they also helped mould the emergent POW legal regime. They did so in three ways. First, their activities promoted the idea that POWs should be considered as 'privileged' combatants, like the battlefield wounded, deserving of sympathy rather than suspicion or derision. Second, their determined advocacy of prisoners' interests after 1914 influenced post-war thinking over the content of the 1929 POW convention and thereby strengthened the legal protections prisoners could expect to receive during captivity. Finally, expectations about how the 1929 convention would be applied in future wars took for granted the existence of active next-of-kin groups. The next-

of-kin thus not only shaped the written provisions of the 1929 POW convention; they set expectations around how these would be applied in practice.

The article begins by examining the impact of next-of-kin groups on state practices after 1914, before turning to explore how these practices fed into discussions over the POW regime in the 1920s and left their imprint in the resultant POW convention of 1929. It then considers the various positions occupied by next-of-kin groups during the Second World War, showing how the collapse of humanitarianism over the war narrowed the opportunities for the next-of-kin to intervene in policy discussions. Finally, it concludes by looking at how the revised code, the third Geneva convention of 1949, sought fresh ways to protect the humanitarian interests of POWs and ensure state compliance.

### **The First World War and next-of-kin communities**

The sheer number of men captured between 1914 and 1918 – estimated at nearly nine million in total – coupled with the length of captivity many were forced to endure inevitably prompted governments and their societies to reconsider traditional attitudes towards military imprisonment. The majority of prisoners were captured on the eastern front but with approximately one in nine mobilised men falling into the hands of their enemies, belligerent governments of all hues were forced to grapple with the reality of mass imprisonment.<sup>18</sup> One of the most immediate challenges they faced concerned the provision of relief parcels. The internment of civilians, which became a global phenomenon from 1915, helped justify a ‘national’ relief effort in support of the state’s ‘citizens’ abroad.<sup>19</sup> Contributing to the relief effort quickly became seen as a patriotic duty and consumed an increasing proportion of families’ time and funds. In France, for instance, it is estimated that prisoners’ families funded parcel production to the tune of 7.4 million francs.<sup>20</sup>

One of the striking features of the POW relief after 1914 was the way the private interests of the next-of-kin meshed with broader social currents and ‘normalised’ the practice of extending charity to men who, in other circumstances, may have been deemed unworthy of consideration. This process largely played out at local rather than national level, where the next-of-kin benefited from the support of local elites and capitalised on their readiness to patronise the parcel packaging work of regimental associations or relief bodies. In County Kilkenny, the example, the

Marchioness of Ormonde presided over the Royal Irish Regiment's POW Fund as well as the local branches of the British Red Cross Society (BRCS) and the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association. Her neighbour, Lady MacDonnell, steered the Irish Women's Association into providing parcels for Irish prisoners, producing up to 2,700 a fortnight by mid-1916. Significantly, the husbands of these energetic women routinely drew on their charitable work, and the reports of repatriated local soldiers or escapees, to inform their discussions in parliament.<sup>21</sup> Lord Carnarvon's family achieved the distinction of spawning two POW funds, named after his two daughters, Lady Victoria Herbert and Lady Winifred Burghclere, who exhibited a healthy sibling rivalry in collecting money and equipment for POWs.<sup>22</sup> Similar networks existed in other countries, where garrison towns, Red Cross organisations and a raft of voluntary and private associations worked assiduously to support prisoners and internees. Prince Max of Baden, honorary president of the Baden section of the German Red Cross, for instance, intervened to ensure reciprocity in working with Allied relief organisations and championed the legislation for a 'people's subscription' to fund relief efforts for military and civilian prisoners in 1916. He also drew on family in Russia and Sweden and acquaintances in Switzerland to promote the interests of POWs in and outside Germany.<sup>23</sup>

While most prisoners' family members were content to devote their energies towards relief work, some used the information they received from their loved ones to engage more actively in POW affairs. Constrained though it was, POW mail provided insights into the prisoners' lived experience that could inform press reporting and challenge official policy. Interruptions to mail deliveries was a regular bugbear and often triggered calls for retaliatory measures.<sup>24</sup> Delays in parcel delivery was another emotive issue: unrelenting criticism compelled all belligerent governments to overhaul relief arrangements as the war progressed. In Britain's case, it led to a parliamentary investigation into the BRCS's handling of parcel packaging which came close to censuring the organisation.<sup>25</sup> Similar dissatisfaction at the lack of attention paid to POW matters forced the government to open a dedicated POW department in the Foreign Office.<sup>26</sup>

One of the principal areas where the next-of-kin were able to frame public discussion was over the issue of prisoner ill-treatment. Though family members were especially alert to stories of prisoner abuse, unease at the level of ill-treatment meted out on all fronts began to seep into

public discourse over the winter of 1914–15. Reports were, as Britain's Foreign Secretary noted, 'conflicting' and 'mainly [derived] from private sources', but the 'almost hopeless tangles and lies about prisoners' in the British tabloid press led the US ambassador in London to dispatch a member of his staff to report on camp conditions in Germany and Austria-Hungary in November 1914. His initiative spawned the system of reciprocal camp inspections by neutral diplomats that remained in place for the remainder of the war and framed subsequent thinking about the humanitarian services provided by neutral protecting powers.<sup>27</sup>

Similar concerns prompted the Russian, German and Austro-Hungarian authorities to agree to camp visits by aristocratic 'nurses' from 1915. It was the deluge of appeals from anxious next-of-kin that drove the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to arrange for its delegates to visit camps from the same date.<sup>28</sup> By mid-1915 the narrative of POW ill-treatment had become firmly rooted in public consciousness and the expansion of the war into Asia Minor only accentuated the trend. It was partly to satiate public clamour and prepare for a settling of scores after the war, that the British, French, Belgian and Austro-Hungarian governments instigated official investigations into their adversaries' treatment of civilian and military prisoners.<sup>29</sup> Real or imaginary cases of abuse supported the imposition of reprisals and occasionally justified *ad hoc* retaliatory measures by local camp commandants. Studies of reprisals against POWs suggest that governments typically resorted to these measures for political or strategic advantage, rather than out of a desire to compel their adversaries to adhere to their legal obligations.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, the publicity given to POW issues, their conditions of detention, treatment and well-being, ensured that they were rarely absent from public attention. Newspaper editors, parliamentarians and officials were routinely pressed to publicise funding drives or speak out on POW matters. Far from being neglected, prisoners were a matter of regular comment in the press and parliament.<sup>31</sup>

But how did the next-of-kin and their supporters translate public concern into effective advocacy? Policy debates around the repatriation of POWs illuminates this issue. The principle of repatriating men made *hors de combat* by their wounds, injuries or illnesses was central to the Geneva convention of 1864 (and as updated in 1906). Over the course of the war, however, campaigners pressed to have the government extend the principle to prisoners of war, widen the range of qualifying ailments, professionalise the selection process



(recruiting neutral doctors to mixed medical commissions) and agree to hospitalise prisoners suffering from tuberculosis in Dutch and Swiss spas and infirmaries. Matthew Stibbe is certainly correct in cautioning against exaggerating the appeal of humanitarian ideas in official circles. Governments of all hues preferred to soften the impact of captivity – providing opportunities for education, sport and theatrical and artistic pursuits – rather than do away with captivity entirely.<sup>32</sup> Proposals to this effect, such as Berlin's offer to release all civilian internees, were in every case self-serving and designed to embarrass their opponents. But suggestions to abandon large-scale imprisonment as a matter of state policy, emanating from next-of-kin groups, the ICRC or sections of the medical community, were routinely greeted with derision.<sup>33</sup>

Still, the level of resistance overcome, and the distance travelled in shifting once entrenched attitudes and their associated policies is nevertheless impressive. The British case is instructive. For most of 1915, the official attitude towards repatriating injured POWs was dominated by military considerations. Despite mounting concern over prisoners' well-being, London refused to countenance direct talks with their German counterparts and lagged behind the French in exchanging severely wounded men or arranging for their hospitalisation in Switzerland.<sup>34</sup> By early 1916, however, with the war entering its second year and the blockade eroding living conditions in Germany, some officials began to question whether deference to 'military considerations' was appropriate. A letter from the BRCS urging the government to judge prisoner exchanges 'on the grounds of humanity' prompted the Foreign Office minister, Lord Robert Cecil, to ponder whether the balance between military and humanitarian considerations ought to be reassessed.<sup>35</sup> 'Among the most important ... military considerations', he wrote, 'are the spirit of the army and of the nation from which it is drawn and the public opinion of the world. These are all largely affected by humanitarian arguments. ... In dealing with questions like the exchange of prisoners', he concluded, policies had to be designed around their 'effect on the ordinary man [and] allow due weight [to] humanitarian considerations'.<sup>36</sup> Despite being outnumbered by military colleagues, the wisdom of acknowledging the opinions of the next-of-kin was not lost on members of the Prisoners Exchange Committee. Policy noticeably softened over the spring, and compromises agreed for arrangements governing the exchange, repatriation or hospitalisation of POWs and civilian internees.<sup>37</sup>

The question of repatriating physically fit prisoners was naturally more contentious. Medical opinion was divided on the impact of 'barbed wire disease' and the effect of any mitigations carried out while prisoners remained in captivity. Nevertheless, by 1917 most commentators accepted that the effects of prolonged detention could not be dismissed.<sup>38</sup> The basic position taken in London was that 'the more you exchange prisoners, the more you prolong the war'.<sup>39</sup> Concern that Russia might agree to a wholesale exchange of prisoners, as part of a peace deal with Germany, encouraged the western powers to hold firm, but pressure from the families of French prisoners led Paris to conclude a series of agreements that shifted the ground beneath London's feet. Officials riled at the 'sentimental rubbish' colouring French judgement but felt compelled to follow their lead and reach an agreement at The Hague in July 1917 that recognised 'barbed wire disease' as qualifying a prisoner for internment in a neutral country, or direct repatriation if symptoms proved persistent.<sup>40</sup>

The British were again compelled to return to the negotiating table after the Franco-German agreement of 27 April 1918 conceded the right to repatriation for prisoners held for longer than 18 months and fathers of large families. While the primary factor for the change of policy was the action of the French government, officials clearly understood that public opinion would not countenance a situation in which British prisoners were denied privileges that were enjoyed by their French counterparts.<sup>41</sup> The same was true for disparities that emerged between prisoners held by different enemy powers. The next-of-kin of POWs in Ottoman Turkey proved particularly adept at mobilising in support of their loved ones, partly because of the poor state of health of servicemen in Turkish hands, but partly too, out of a concern that the relatively small number of prisoners involved might lead the authorities into neglecting their interests. Family representatives of over a hundred officers and men combined in early 1918 to petition parliament and have discussions opened in Berne to extend the advantages recently secured for prisoners in Germany to their compatriots in Turkey.<sup>42</sup>

### **Crafting a new POW regime, 1929**

That prisoners of war slowly acquired privileges that had hitherto been reserved for the traditional recipients of humanitarian attention – medical orderlies, wounded and shipwrecked servicemen – can thus in part be

explained by the influence exercised by next-of-kin over the course of the war.<sup>43</sup> As the war progressed, in most countries 'domestic public opinion ... from all sides of the political spectrum was increasingly on the side of the prisoners' families'.<sup>44</sup> The armistice in November 1918 did not bring imprisonment or the trauma of captivity to an end. For many, the outbreak of revolution in Russia delayed homecoming until 1923.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, as noted above, the challenge of integrating into post-war society was compounded by lingering suspicions over prisoners' conduct and the reluctance of many in authority to acknowledge their 'contribution' to the war effort.

Some wartime next-of-kin associations remained in business: Lady Victoria Herbert's fund continued to disperse payments to former prisoners and their families until her death in 1957. French delay in repatriating its prisoners prompted German next-of-kin to assemble a new association in December 1918 to lobby the Weimar authorities. But in the main, the prisoners' cause was taken up by the former prisoners themselves – the ReK in Germany, the Austrian Federal Association of Former POWs (*Bundesvereinigung der ehemaligen österreichischen Kriegsgefangenen*), the National Federation of Former Prisoners of War (*Fédération nationale des anciens prisonniers de guerre*) in France, and so on. In addition to interceding on domestic matters, some veterans' associations – notably the ReK – sought to influence debates over the shape of a new POW code, convening international meetings on the subject and commissioning legal opinions and studies.<sup>46</sup> The very fact that such a code was deemed necessary and that regulations governing the treatment of POWs shifted from The Hague to Geneva, i.e., from the 'laws of war' to the realm of international humanitarian law, was symptomatic of the wider shift in attitudes towards wartime imprisonment and recognition of the grim experiences that most prisoners had endured.

Although the 1929 POW convention has recently attracted renewed interest from historians, to date, commentators have overlooked the extent to which the post-war POW regime reflected the experiences of the prisoners' next-of-kin and their supporters over the course of the war.<sup>47</sup> This can best be seen in the compromise struck between two competing visions of what the new convention should look like. On the one hand, the veterans' associations and members of the ICRC, who had spent much of the war pressing governments to live up to their legal responsibilities, looked to craft as comprehensive a convention as possible and secure states' commitment to specific responsibilities and

obligations.<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, there were those – mostly found in US and British official and legal circles – who felt the convention should be restricted to key principles, and states left to apply them in the light of actual conditions.<sup>49</sup> There was nothing intrinsically sinister about this approach. The global nature of internment between 1914 and 1920 had confounded efforts to apply regulations in a consistent manner and had frequently led to accusations of bad faith.<sup>50</sup> At base, the preference for a less-detailed convention derived from a belief that reciprocity and self-interest would prompt belligerents to trade concessions over POWs more expeditiously than slavishly following a prescribed list of responsibilities set out in a legal code.

The position was articulated well by two individuals who had direct experience in POW affairs during the war: the high court judge Sir Robert Younger and the head of the Swiss political department, Paul Dinichert. Younger had chaired Britain's wartime investigations into the treatment of British POWs and helped negotiate Britain's POW accord with Germany in mid-1917. In opening the 1920 International Law Association conference, in which a draft POW code was tabled for discussion, Younger used his address to insist on the importance of allowing belligerents to strike their own deals. When issues were dealt with as existing difficulties, he said, 'belligerents were prepared to come to a far more elaborate arrangement than you could ever have committed them to in advance'.<sup>51</sup> The key point for Younger, then, was flexibility. The second 'lesson' drawn from the wartime negotiations was that the content of any agreement concluded between the belligerents ultimately reflected practical rather than humanitarian considerations.

POW negotiations were classic 'two-level' games, in which negotiators like Younger had simultaneously to engage with those sitting across the table *and* their domestic constituencies at home. Agreements that failed to meet the interests of both parties, domestic and foreign, were unlikely to stick.<sup>52</sup> One person who had seen these compromises work out in practice was Dinichert, who, as head of the Swiss political department, had hosted talks between belligerent parties in 1917 and 1918. In reflecting on these meetings in late 1923, he was clear that the wartime agreements had been driven less by the spirit of humanity than by the need of the belligerent delegations to satiate the demands of the prisoners' next-of-kin and their supporters at home. Without this domestic political imperative, Dinichert believed, there was little chance of governments' living up to their 'humanitarian' pledges.<sup>53</sup>

The *procès-verbal* of the 1929 Geneva conference does not indicate whether Younger and Dinichert's views were ever formally raised, but there was ample opportunity for their opinions to be aired. It was Dinichert who presided over the conference and one of Younger's colleagues, Sir Horace Rumbold (who had worked in the Foreign Office POW department until 1916, before moving to Berne as minister for the remainder of the war) who chaired one of the two sub-commissions tasked with drafting the convention.<sup>54</sup> The resulting text was certainly framed to reflect their reading of the next-of-kin's influence over government policy. Though it was significantly more detailed than the pre-war Hague regulations, the privileges, responsibilities and expectations were tightly drawn and tackled issues that had proved most contentious to the next-of-kin community. Prisoners were accorded privileges as of right, rather than as grace or favour from their captors. The use of reprisals against prisoners were explicitly prohibited and prisoners accorded the right to 'correspond personally' with their families 'as soon as possible' after their capture, within a week after their move to a new camp and at regular intervals thereafter. Article 24 foresaw the transfer of funds between POWs and their supporters at home, while, in addition to sanctioning the work of relief societies, the convention confirmed the right of prisoners' families to send private parcels. Brushing aside the reservations that had repeatedly stymied wartime negotiations over the repatriation of POWs, the convention confidently set out the conditions under which badly injured prisoners could be sent home and outlined basic provisions covering internment in neutral countries for those with less serious ailments. It also established a framework for 'mixed medical commissions'. Perhaps even more radical was the expectation that 'physically fit' prisoners could be exchanged before the end of hostilities: the issue that London had only agreed to after the Franco-German agreement of April 1918 had ignited public interest and made continued resistance to the proposal untenable. Prisoners were to be assessed for their physical *and* mental health and considered for repatriation based on the length of their captivity.<sup>55</sup>

In sum, the new convention explicitly protected prisoners from being made the subject of reprisals and articulated its provisions as a set of rights bestowed on POWs rather than as a series of duties and responsibilities pertaining to the detaining power. Perhaps equally significant, however, the convention was purposely malleable – adaptable to changing contexts and belligerents' needs – and porous – allowing for the

possibility of external parties to affect the application of the convention in practice. The convention took both Younger and Dinichert's views to heart in explicitly envisaging the kind of inter-belligerent negotiations that had played such a prominent part in POW diplomacy during the war and which had allowed the authorities to respond to the demands of 'public opinion'. It reserved for state parties the right to conclude special conventions to supplement and augment the terms of the convention and expressly authorised the meeting of officials at the start of any conflict to facilitate these discussions. Moreover, to meet the objections of those who counselled against making the convention overly prescriptive, a 'model draft agreement', covering both guiding principles and detailed provisions, was appended to the convention to inform wartime discussions around prisoners' repatriation or neutral internment. The final act, though not legally binding, called on state parties to promote the peacetime development, expertise and legislative framework to enable their national Red Cross and voluntary aid societies to fulfil their responsibilities in time of war.<sup>56</sup>

## The impact of the Second World War

The faith placed on next-of-kin communities to hold governments to their obligations under the 1929 POW convention appeared to be partially borne out over the first two years of the Second World War. True, Germany's refusal to recognise a Polish state after the collapse of Polish resistance in 1939, left Polish prisoners open to abuse and ill-treatment and closed down any opportunity for their next-of-kin to lobby on their behalf.<sup>57</sup> But on the western front, where Danish, Norwegian, Belgian, French and British forces succumbed to the German *Blitzkrieg* over the summer of 1940, next-of-kin communities quickly emerged to help family members share news and provide succour and mutual support.

Different national contexts influenced the way communities interacted with state authorities and the opportunities open to them to influence official policies. France offers perhaps the most striking case. For most of the remainder of 1940, families of the 1.58 million soldiers captured over the summer remained relatively passive, as most assumed that the cessation of hostilities would lead to the repatriation of their loved ones. It was only when Berlin's decision to hold on to its prisoners became apparent in early 1941 that the Vichy authorities established formal institutions to address the needs of the next-of-kin, and relatives began to coalesce into

self-help groups, often based on their locality or the prison camp where their husbands or sons were held.<sup>58</sup> By early 1942, many of these groups had come together as a *Fédération des associations de femmes de prisonniers*.<sup>59</sup>

The sheer number of prisoners held in Germany left little chance of their fate being overlooked. Nevertheless, the centrality of the POW issue for the Vichy regime, and the legitimacy of its project of national renewal at home and collaboration with the Reich abroad, meant that discussions regarding the fate of POWs were suffused with political and ideological significance. Far from amplifying the next-of-kin's voice in policy debates, the importance accorded to prisoners and their families in the regime's political agenda led to the next-of-kin being coopted into Vichy propaganda and stifled their development as active humanitarian lobbyists. The repatriation of POWs was carefully orchestrated by the French 'Scapini mission', based in Berlin, and used to burnish the paternalistic image of Marshal Pétain's regime. The return of sick or injured prisoners and the fathers of large families, following the Franco-German precedent of April 1918, reflected humanitarian concerns but the majority of repatriations were prompted by other considerations. The *Relève* saw 91,000 prisoners return home but only after Vichy had agreed to exchange them for three times their number of civilian labourers. Others were released to meet Berlin's political interests, such as the gesture made to Dieppe, whose imprisoned townsfolk were allowed home after the successful repelling of an Allied landing near the town in August 1942.<sup>60</sup>

By contrast, circumstances in Britain over the first two years of the war left more room for the next-of-kin to influence events. Unlike the First World War, when the next-of-kin had largely mobilised around local or regimental loyalties, prisoners' families recognised the need to develop agency at a national level. A Prisoners of War Relatives Association (POWRA) was established in London in May 1940, drawing inspiration from the association that had formed in support of the Kut prisoners in First World War Ottoman Turkey. In time POWRA assumed a coordinating role for the upwards of 180 regional and local groups across the country (by 1943) and its 'sister' agencies in the Dominions and later in the United States.<sup>61</sup> Like its French equivalents, POWRA's principal *raison d'être* was to provide emotional and material support for prisoners' next-of-kin. But from the outset it was clear that the leadership was intent on using information gleaned from prisoners' letters to establish itself as a 'useful liaison' between the prisoners, the BRCS and government departments.

For the first six months, as the association busied itself in forging links with groups outside London, the ambition remained latent. The BRCS's astute offer of office space for the association in its London headquarters may account for POWRA's initial hesitancy to intervene in official policy.

This did not, however, prevent individual next-of-kin from taking the Society and government to task for their failure to keep British prisoners adequately supplied with relief parcels. The most effective campaigner was Winifred Coombe-Tennant, mother of an officer in Oflag VII C/H in Germany, who orchestrated an extremely effective campaign to raise the matter in the press and parliament. By November 1940, the issue was being raised in the House of Commons at least twice a week. Many of the details deployed by MPs in cross-examining government spokesmen were derived from memoranda distributed by the redoubtable Coombe Tennant, whose actions served not merely to fuel debate but actively shape it.<sup>62</sup> It was another next-of-kin, Mrs Ian Campbell, who exposed the ineptitude of official efforts to expand parcel production and overcome transport bottlenecks. Based in Lisbon, Mrs Campbell marshalled the British community and contacts in her native America, into producing and dispatching parcels to her husband's camp in Bavaria, accomplishing a feat which neither the British government nor the BRCS seemed capable of achieving at that time.

Although parcels started reaching the camps in satisfactory numbers by early 1941, there is little doubt that the actions taken by the BRCS and the government – right up to the Prime Minister – were principally driven by the need to defuse public criticism and placate the next-of-kin.<sup>63</sup> Having spent the autumn trying to evade responsibility, the government stirred into action in the winter, sending cabinet ministers to field questions in parliament and forcing the BRCS to employ a transport expert, Stanley Adams, to manage the parcel traffic, notwithstanding the fact that the task of transporting the parcels ostensibly lay with the government Post Office. Coombe Tennant's campaigning emboldened POWRA, which recruited the services of Dame Adelaide Livingston, a veteran on POW affairs from the First World War, and went onto the offensive in the spring of 1941, coordinating agitation across the country in support of a wholesale reform of government administration of POW affairs.

As Paul Dinichert had noted back in 1923, government policy was crafted as much with an eye to meeting the political requirements at home, as satisfying the humanitarian needs of its prisoners or, indeed, meeting its diplomatic objectives in Berlin. The two principal POW issues on the government's agenda in mid-1941 – finalising talks for the repatriation of badly



wounded prisoners and maintaining the flow of parcels to prison camps in Germany – were both pregnant with domestic political consequences. When an inter-departmental meeting was convened in mid-June 1941 to discuss the parcels issue, Richard Law, the War Office's financial secretary, revealingly framed the issue in political not humanitarian terms. 'A breakdown in the present parcels route', he warned, 'would confront us with a still greater and more bitter agitation on the part of relatives and the public than that with which we were faced last year'.<sup>64</sup>

The parcels crisis turned out to be the high-point of next-of-kin influence in Britain. In many respects, the issue played uniquely to their strengths. It spoke directly to the prisoners' wellbeing, was a matter whose resolution lay squarely within the remit of the British authorities and did not overly impinge on the government's prosecution of the war. In demonstrating the strength of public support and the ease with which this could be translated into political pressure, the episode helped cement POWRA's position as a legitimate actor in POW affairs. It emerged from the affair as the mouth-piece for the next-of-kin community across the country. From the early summer of 1941, both the government and the BRCS sought to head off incipient tensions by arranging regular briefings with POWRA representatives and their allies in parliament. The London delegate of the ICRC also brought POWRA into his confidence, offering them advice on the content of their newsletters and providing the leadership with a channel of communication with the committee in Geneva.<sup>65</sup> POWRA's claim to represent prisoners' interests was strengthened by the fact that prisoners themselves only began returning home from Germany in late 1943 after the first repatriation operation took place.

Notwithstanding these impressive organisational developments, the next-of-kin never came to enjoy the kind of influence their predecessors had achieved after 1914. Repeated calls to centralise policy in a separate government department went unanswered, despite the energetic interventions of Lord Vansittart, former permanent undersecretary at the Foreign Office, who joined POWRA as acting president in early 1943. Vansittart's enthusiasm for POW matters sprung from the First World War when he had headed the POW department and helped negotiate the Anglo-German agreement in July 1917.<sup>66</sup> If next-of-kin pressure had been decisive in convincing the belligerents to extend the criteria for selecting prisoners for repatriation during the First World War, as Dinichert claimed, there was little to show for such pressure after 1939. Ironically, it was precisely because Hitler believed Churchill could be led by public opinion that he

overplayed his hand and scuppered a cross-Channel exchange operation that was due to commence in October 1941.<sup>67</sup> Britain's seriously ill and wounded prisoners had to wait another two years before an Anglo-German exchange could be arranged; many succumbed to their injuries before the opportunity arrived. No amount of next-of-kin hand-wringing in London would persuade Berlin to transfer sick prisoners to neutral sanatoria or release *longue durée* prisoners on humanitarian grounds.<sup>68</sup> There was to be no repeat of the direct talks that had so improved the lot of prisoners after 1915, partly due to London's fear about how these would be perceived by its inveterately suspicious ally in Moscow. Finally, while the next-of-kin vehemently criticised the use of reprisals during the so-called 'shackling' crisis in late 1942, it was not public nervousness that finally convinced Churchill to back down so much as the determination of the Canadian government to abandon the measures unilaterally if the Prime Minister refused to change course.<sup>69</sup>

The most significant challenge facing the next-of-kin after 1941 was the reluctance of belligerents to accept humanitarian constraints on the conduct of the war. For the next-of-kin to be able to influence policy, there had to be room for humanitarian arguments to be played out. Once fighting spread to the Soviet Union and the Far East, this space became vanishingly small. Barely 20 per cent of servicemen captured by their enemies between 1939 and 1945 benefited from the protections of the 1929 POW convention. In the Far East, where Tokyo only agreed to apply the convention *mutatis mutandis* (i.e., as it saw fit), early hopes that an exchange of diplomats might give way to a return of wounded prisoners foundered on Tokyo's belief that surrendered servicemen of whatever shade, whether their own or their enemies, were unworthy of sympathy or humanitarian attention.<sup>70</sup> Tenacious relatives, hewn from the same rock as Coombe Tennant, could pester the authorities into taking up individual cases and were occasionally able to secure small improvements for their loved ones. But the scope for effective action was minimal and the collective impact of their activities ultimately slight.<sup>71</sup>

The humanitarian space open to prisoners' next-of-kin in the Soviet Union, Japan and Nazi Germany was even more slender. Although the Soviet and Nazi regimes lauded the mothers who were prepared to sacrifice their sons' lives on the battlefield, attitudes towards the relatives of those who fell into enemy hands were more complex. Up until the tide of war turned in early 1943, the German authorities and their allies in the German Red Cross and denominational associations such as the Catholic Church

War Aid (*Kirchliche Kriegshilfe*) and the Protestant Aid Society for POWs and Internees (*Evangelisches Hilfswerk für Kriegsgefangene und Internierte*) depicted POWs in western hands in a positive light and worked hard to keep them supplied with relief parcels and sustain their loyalty and morale. Berlin was swift to institute reprisals whenever London failed to accord German officer prisoners the respect and privileges it felt was their due.<sup>72</sup> This remained the case until the last 12 months of the war, when frustration at the scale of surrenders to western forces, facilitated in part by the persistence of rumours over the good treatment soldiers could expect to receive in British or US captivity, hardened attitudes. In late November 1944, the Army Administrative Office (*Heersverwaltungsamt*) began to wind down parcel-deliveries to German prisoners in France on the grounds that the majority were rear echelon troops who had given themselves up too easily. That 'ordinary soldiers and brave fighters' would suffer as a result was merely 'unfortunate'.<sup>73</sup>

It was, however, the attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941 that comprehensively upended the benevolent narrative, based as it was on an unshakeable belief in a German victory. Berlin not only rejected Moscow's offer to apply the Hague regulations in the conduct of fighting but blithely denied the existence of any prisoners in Soviet hands on the grounds that the Soviets refused to give quarter.<sup>74</sup> This position became increasingly untenable after 91,000 men marched into captivity following the surrender of Paulus' 6th army at Stalingrad in February 1943. The thirst for information on German soldiers in Soviet captivity spawned a subculture of informal networks among family members of missing soldiers, who passed around what little information they had. This number included the wife of the second highest ranked German officer in Soviet captivity, General Walter Heitz, who received a letter from her husband in April 1943 and corresponded with hundreds of anxious relatives over the following months. The authorities actively discouraged discussion on the fate of their loved ones, whose very survival in Soviet hands undermined the logic of the regime's 'war of annihilation' in the east, and hinted at the possibility of a future that did not depend on a German victory. Prisoners' letters were routinely intercepted, and in November 1944 the Wehrmacht Supreme Command (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*) made families personally liable for any relative found to have deserted their post. While the next-of-kin were not barred from communicating with each other, they lacked the capacity to challenge, far less overturn, the regime's genocidal policy towards imprisonment

and captivity on the eastern front. As Frank Biess observes, ‘family members engaged in myriad activities to investigate the fate of missing relatives, [but] these activities remained scattered and devoid of a more unified political direction’.<sup>75</sup>

## Conclusion

The stifling of public debate inside Nazi Germany on the fate of soldiers in Soviet hands underscored the extent to which the next-of-kin’s ability to influence thinking over the treatment of prisoners had eroded since the international community had gathered in Geneva to draft a POW convention in the summer of 1929. The belligerents’ increasing rejection of constraints on the conduct of warfare over the course of the war – in some instances consciously abandoning the POW convention as a set of guiding humanitarian principles – did not, in itself, end any chance of the next-of-kin aiding their loved ones, either through providing relief parcels or lobbying the authorities on their behalf. But by weakening the normative environment within which policy decisions over POWs were made, it changed the language of debate and radically reduced the next-of-kin’s capacity to engage in the policy-dialogue.

So long as governments were prepared to recognise prisoners as humanitarian subjects, judicious lobbying by the next-of-kin communities could bring about improvements in the lives of POWs. But after 1941, the demands of total war came to dominate thinking over POW policy and encroach on areas which had hitherto been left open to humanitarian considerations. Under such conditions, POW camps and work detachments became sites not of detention, where prisoners’ lives were governed by legal norms and the aimless monotony of camp life, but sites of exclusion, of political indoctrination, economic exploitation and physical extermination. The architecture of mass incarceration was integral to the conduct of total war and central to Germany’s pursuit of genocide. It is scarcely surprising that those defending the humanitarian interests of their nationals in enemy hands – and, by implication, the interests of enemy nationals – found their voices drowned out. As Hitler ominously remarked in late 1944, ‘in a struggle for life or death, [i]f someone gives himself up as a prisoner, ... he can’t expect us to show consideration for American or British prisoners because of him’.<sup>76</sup>

The onset of total war after 1941 brought an end to a period in which next-of-kin communities had emerged as recognised and legitimate

stakeholders in debates surrounding the development of humanitarian norms. Their advocacy during the First World War had helped shift popular attitudes towards POWs and led, in nearly all cases, to an extension of humanitarian privileges and protections to servicemen in enemy hands. Their impact was also seen in post-war discussions over the shape of the world's first dedicated POW convention, where they simultaneously promoted prisoners' status as 'privileged combatants', deserving of special rights and protections, and acquired for themselves a latent position as informal 'organs of control', keeping a watchful eye over official policy and ensuring governments lived up to their legal obligations. They thus shaped the content of the POW convention while shouldering some of the responsibility for ensuring its effective functioning.

The widespread ill-treatment of POWs during the Second World War did, at least, silence the sceptics who had long complained that imprisonment had become an 'inexpensive rest-cure after the wearisome turmoil of fighting'. The traumatised inmates disgorged from German and Japanese camps at the end of the war made it clear that surrender was no longer the 'easy way out'.<sup>77</sup> From 1945, the next-of-kin in western states could count on a level of public understanding and sympathy and advocate for their loved ones from a position of moral authority. Captivity was acknowledged as an unavoidable consequence of armed conflict, and recruits increasingly provided with 'conduct after capture' training to sit alongside more traditional measures to strengthen their discipline under fire.

Nevertheless, for humanitarians, one of the cardinal lessons to be drawn from the Second World War was the realisation that pressure from prisoners' next-of-kin was insufficient to guarantee state compliance with international humanitarian norms. The war had shown how little influence they could exercise on governments embroiled in conflicts fuelled by ideological hatred. As a consequence, when lawyers, humanitarians, government officials and their military considered how to update and improve on the 1929 POW convention, they concluded that the convention needed to be built on an entirely different premise. The resulting convention, the third Geneva convention of 1949, privileged details over principles and provided a more comprehensive description of rights, privileges and obligations than had been the case in 1929. More significantly for our purposes, the new convention included an enhanced system of neutral oversight and supervision, with a suite of governmental and non-governmental actors authorised to inspect POW camps and hold detaining powers to their

responsibilities.<sup>78</sup> Next-of-kin would continue to come together to advocate for their loved ones, and in the US case, establish permanent associations to sustain their activities, but their engagement in legal developments, influencing and shaping the broader context of POW policy making, had come to an end.

## Notes

1. This is true even for those like Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl and Pte. Travis King, 'captured' by the Taliban and North Koreans in 2009 and 2023 after deserting their posts. Both were returned following successful negotiations to secure their release.
2. See Ambuhl, *Prisoners of War in the Hundred Years War*.
3. See Neff, "Prisoners of War in International Law."
4. See Daly, "Napoleon's Lost Legions"; and Morieux, *Society of Prisoners*, 131–237.
5. While three articles were devoted to parole, the regulations were silent over wartime release or exchange, and merely urged for prisoners to be repatriated 'as quickly as possible' after the cessation of hostilities. For shifting attitudes, see Heinzen, "Une question d'honneur entre gentilshommes?" 107–22.
6. Benvenisti and Cohen, "War as Governance," 1363–1415.
7. Austrian emperor (1874) cited in Best, *Humanity in Warfare*, 157.
8. Spaight, *War Rights on Land*, 58. POW treatment during the Russo-Japanese war was generally good but deteriorated sharply in the latter stages of the Boer War. See Marx, "Die im Dunkeln sieht man nicht," 255–76; and van Heyningen, "South African War as humanitarian crisis."
9. Feltman, *Stigma of Surrender*.
10. Hampshire Record Office, Winchester. (Papers of Sir George Warner. 5M79 A8). Army Council memorandum by Lord Milner, (no date). Circular from the War Ministry, 16 December, 1914, cited in Jones, *Violence Against Prisoners of War*, 328.
11. There is a growing literature on this subject: see, for instance, Smith, *Between Mutiny and Obedience*; and Watson, *Enduring the Great War*. Also Matthew Stibbe's contribution to Part II of this special issue.
12. Gorgolini, "Prisoners of War (Italy)."
13. Jones, *Violence Against Prisoners of War*, 319–26; and Wilkinson, *British Prisoners of War*, 276–83.
14. Jones, *Violence Against Prisoners of War*, 327–38.
15. *Ibid.*, 338–52. Jones' generally positive reading of the post-war context in Germany, which I follow, contrasts with the more sombre assessment provided by Feltman in *Stigma of Surrender*. For the reception of Austro-Hungarian prisoners, see Rachamimov, *POWs and the Great War*, 221–8.
16. See Pöppinghege, "Kriegsteilnehmer zweiter Klasse?" 391–423.
17. For attempts to create a code for civilians, see Wylie and Landeveld, "POWs, Civilians."
18. Jones, "A Missing Paradigm?" 19–48.

19. For the impact of the war on the concept of a national community, see Caglioti, *War and Citizenship*, 194–209. Also Manz and Panayi, *Enemies in the Empire*; and Murphy, *Colonial Captivity*.
20. Jones, *Violence Against Prisoners of War*, 329.
21. See interventions by Lord Mayo on behalf of the Dublin Fusiliers, and Lord MacDonnell on the Irish Women's Association: Hansard. House of Lords Debates, 31 May, 1916, vol. 22, cc. 252–53.
22. See Lady Burghclere, "Letter to the Editor," *The Spectator*, 27 May, 1916; and "Lady Burghclere's prisoners fund," *The Musical Times*, 1 October, 1916. Also Lady Victoria Herbert, "Letter to the Editor," *The Spectator*, 19 January, 1918.
23. Feltman, *Stigma of Surrender*, 80–2.
24. The National Archives, Kew, London (henceforth TNA) FO383/407 file 112,876. W. Alexander to Lord Newton, 2 September, 1918, enclosing copies of *The Territorial Gazette* Aug. 1918. Newton minuted on 9 September, 'Replied to him privately that no doubt [his suggestion for a public statement] would be considered by H.M.G'. See also J. M. Henderson, "Letter to the Editor," *The Times*, 24 December, 1914.
25. British Red Cross Society, *Reports by the Joint War Committee*, 545. For an example of criticism, see C. F. Magrath, "Letter to the Editor," *The Times*, 2 January, 1915.
26. For the Foreign Office's POW department, see Newton, *Retrospection*, 214–19.
27. Walter Hines Page to Arthur W. Page, 6 November, 1914, in Hendrick, *Walter H. Page*, vol. ii, 345. Sir Edward Grey. HC Deb 2 March, 1915, p. 70. For press reaction: *The Times*, "British Prisoners in Germany. Result of American Official Investigation," 18 November 1914. In general, see McAllister et al., *Neutrality and Humanitarian Relief*, 60, 61; and Wylie, "Neutrality and the Politics of Protection."
28. Archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Geneva. (hereafter AICRC) C G1 A 21–01. ICRC memo, 'Visites', (n.d. pre April 1917).
29. Vienna's investigations remind us that concerns over breaches in international norms were not limited to the Entente powers; see k.u.k. Ministerium des Äussern, *Sammlung*.
30. For the corrosive use of reprisals, see Jones, *Violence Against Prisoners of War*, 127–61; Becker, *Oubliés de la Grande Guerre*, 279–92; and Hull, *Scrap of Paper*, 276–316.
31. Vance, *Objects of Concern*.
32. Stibbe, *Civilian Internment*, 226, 227.
33. TNA, FO383/472. ICRC, 'Manifeste relatif a l'accord sur le repatriement des prisonniers et des civils conclu a Berne entre l'Allemagne et la France, le 26 Avril, 1918', 15 May, 1918.
34. For the rejection of direct talks, see TNA, FO383/172 file 21,132. Lord Newton to Lord Beresford 2 March, 1915.
35. TNA, FO383/172 file 13,780. Louis Mallet (BRCS) to Lord Robert Cecil (Foreign Office) 21 January, 1916.
36. TNA, FO383/172 file 31,243. Memorandum, Lord Robert Cecil, 14 February, 1916.

37. See "British Prisoners of War. Transfer to Health Resorts," *The Times*, 25 April, 1916. Also TNA, FO383/172 file 35,837. Memorandum, "Prisoners of War," 24 February, 1916.
38. For a discussion on this subject see Stibbe, *Civilian Internment*, 211–27. Also Stibbe's contribution to Part II of this special issue.
39. Statement by Lord Newton, HL Deb 14 May, 1918 vol 29.
40. Imperial War Museum, London 91/44/1 HEB 1/1. Diary of Lt. Gen. Sir Herbert Belfield, Diary, 29 June, 1917.
41. TNA, FO383/472 file 109,696. Minute for Lord Newton, 22 July, 1918.
42. TNA, FO383/459 file 11,042. Donald Laing (Secretary, Committee for Prisoners of War captured at Kut) to Lord Newton (POW Department) 5 January, 1918; File 27,651. H. Courthope-Munroe K.C. (Chairman) to R. Vansittart (POW Department), containing a resolution addressed to Lord Newton, 5 February, 1918.
43. For this wider transformation, see Wylie and Cameron, "Impact of the First World War," 1327–50.
44. Stibbe, *Civilian Internment*, 171, 172.
45. See, for instance, Nachtigal, "Repatriation and Reception," 157–84; and Tate, "Internment after the War's End," 296–322.
46. A meeting of the *Fédération Interalliée des Anciens Combattants* in 1928 drafted a set of proposals. For ReV lobbying, see Wolle, *Grundsätzliche*; and ReK, 'Vorschläge für ein neues Kriegsgefangenenrecht unterbreitet von der Reichsvereinigung ehemaliger Kriegsgefangener e. V.', April 1929. AICRC, C177.3.
47. Best, *Humanity in Warfare*, 220. For renewed interest, see Wylie, "The 1929 Prisoners of War Convention"; Tate, 'Le Comité international de la Croix-Rouge,' 203–20; and van Dijk, "Human Rights in War."
48. See Cameron, "ICRC in the First World War."
49. TNA, WO32/5337. Minute by Lt. Col. E. E. B. Holt-Wilson (War Office), 22 August, 1929.
50. See, for instance, the recollections of the British War Office official Belfield, "The Treatment of Prisoners of War," 131–47.
51. International Law Association, *Report of the 29th Conference*, 241, 242.
52. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics."
53. AICRC, CR119–7. 'Notes sur l'entretien du 11 Decembre 1923 de M. Lescaze avec M. Dinichert'. Meeting with M. Dinichert, 15 December, 1923.
54. The second sub-commission dealing with the POW convention was chaired by the US delegate, Hugh Wilson.
55. Articles 2, 8, 36, 24, 78, 37, 69, 72 and 83. Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. Geneva, 27 July, 1929: IHL – Treaties & Commentaries – FULL ([icrc.org](http://icrc.org)).
56. This reflected the success of the new League of Red Cross Societies in establishing a peacetime footing for national red cross societies, and the inclusion of article 25 in the Covenant of the League of Nations, which called upon members to establish national red cross organisations for the purpose of improving health, the prevention of disease and the mitigation of suffering.



57. See Moore, *Prisoners of War*, 27–49.
58. For the work of the Vichy organisations, *Famille du prisonnier*, founded in April 1941 by Madame Huntziger, the wife of the Armistice Army chief, and the *Commissariat général au reclassement des prisonniers de guerre*, established in September 1941, see Fishman, *We Will Wait*, 77–98.
59. Fishman, *We Will Wait*, 101–22.
60. The release of men hailing from Alsace and Lorraine was likewise prompted by political calculations. See Overmans, “Kriegsgefangenenpolitik,” 729–875.
61. For the Canadian P.O.W.R.A., see Vance, “Canadian Relief Agencies,” 133–47.
62. National Library of Wales. Mam O Need Collection, W. Coombe Tennant. folio 3528. ‘Note to accompany Documents re. Prisoners of War ...’, 3 March, 1941.
63. For the BRCS reaction, see Wylie, “The British Red Cross Society,” 245–63.
64. TNA, FO916/47. Minutes of a meeting, War Office, 25 June, 1941.
65. AICRC, D EUR GB1–02, C. R. Haccius (ICRC, London) to P. M. Stewart (POWRA), 16 February, 1942; and P. M. Stewart (POWRA Organising Secretary) to C. J. Burckhardt (ICRC) and Questionnaire sent to the ICRC by POWRA, 7 May, 1943.
66. Wylie, *Barbed Wire Diplomacy*, 155–8.
67. Hitler’s ‘reading’ of British social dynamics was fanciful. ‘The great thing is to capture as many “honourables” as possible. The handcuffing of a hundred and thirty officers after the Dieppe raid had a splendid effect. They are completely indifferent to the fate of the ordinary soldier, but the hanging of half a dozen British Generals would shake British society to its very foundations’. Trevor-Roper, *Hitler’s Table-Talk*, 666, 667.
68. Hitler vetoed a proposed exchange of 25,000 long term POWs in early 1945.
69. Wylie, *Barbed Wire Diplomacy*, 151, 152.
70. For the exchanges, see Corbett, *Quiet Passage*, esp. 56–71. For Japanese attitudes towards surrender and its effect, see, for instance, Roland, *Long Night’s Journey into Day*, esp. 303–20; and Straus, *Anguish of Surrender*.
71. The efforts of a ‘Mrs Hunt’ to secure support for her daughter and granddaughter interned in Hong Kong, was ‘extremely well known to all voluntary societies concerned with the Far East’. See the correspondence in AICRC, D EUR GB1–02, C.
72. See Berlin’s response to the withdraw of shaving equipment to German officer POWs discussed in Moore, “The Last Phase of the Gentleman’s War,” 41–55.
73. Bundesarchiv Berlin Lichterfelde, NS19/778. SS Hauptamt, Berlin, to Obergruppenführer Karl Hermann Frank (Chef des Heersverwaltungsamt, Berlin), quoting Heinrich Himmler, n.d. (November 1944).
74. Moscow was not party to the 1929 POW convention but offered to apply the earlier Hague rules.
75. Biess, *Homecomings*, 24–42.
76. Heiber and Glantz, *Hitler and his Generals*, 501. Evening Sit. Rep., 17 September, 1944.
77. For the killing of prisoners by western forces see, for instance, Weingartner, “Massacre at Biscari,” 24–39; Cook, “The Politics of Surrender,” 637–65; and Ferguson, “Prisoner Taking and Prisoner Killing,” 148–92.

78. See Wylie and Crossland, "The Korean War." 439–56; van Dijk, *Preparing for War*, 269–300; and ICRC *Commentary on Convention (III)*, articles 8–10, IHL Treaties – Geneva Convention (III) on Prisoners of War, 1949 - Commentary of 2020 Article | Article 8 - Protecting Powers | Article 8 ([icrc.org](https://www.icrc.org)).

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