

The Internment of Civilian ‘Enemy Aliens’ in the British Empire

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Investigating civilian internment in the British Empire feeds into a number of new perspectives in First World War studies. The overarching connector of these new perspectives is a recalibration away from the traditional focus on Western battle fronts and military combatants. They stress the truly global repercussions of the conflict which led to significant social, cultural, political and economic transformations in virtually all world regions.¹ The wider focus has also been applied to the political units entering into conflict. These did not necessarily consist of nation-states but of empires. In August 1914 it was not ‘Britain’ declaring war. Rather, it was the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and the associated Dominions and Colonies of the British Empire.² If we take this context seriously as a methodological stepping stone for further analysis, our notion of the First World War as a clash of European nation-states has to be widened. A convincing framework speaking of ‘Empires at War’ has been suggested by scholars such as Robert Gerwarth and Erez Manela. The authors show that these multi-ethnic and polymorphous empires mobilised millions of imperial subjects, mainly combatants but also non-combatant labourers, turning the conflict into a truly global war in multiple locations.³ This approach, however, largely focuses on military operations. The following chapter takes the Imperial scope seriously but complements it by concentrating on *civilian* victims of imperial internment policies. In doing so, our chapter builds on a recent scholarly strand which focuses primarily on the war’s impact on civilians rather than active combatants. Scholars such as Alexander Watson and Tammy Proctor have shown that the First World War had a devastating effect on many civilian communities, leaving deep traumas and resentment which would eventually lead to further military conflict during the twentieth century.⁴

Within this conceptual framework the following chapter will be the first to investigate British internment policies vis-à-vis civilian German, Austrian and, to a lesser extent, Turkish and Bulgarian ‘enemy aliens’ from an imperial perspective. We argue that this methodological perspective adds significant explanatory value to those studies that are confined to specific dominions. Examples of the latter include the contributions on New Zealand and on Canada in this volume.⁵ What connects these and other colonial possessions with each other and, in turn, with the metropole? To understand the pace with which the policy of internment radiated across the world from August 1914 onward, one has to identify established imperial structures as efficient transmission belts. These include the administration, military, chains of command, transport, and communication structures.

Notes

¹ Hew Strachan, *The First World War* (London, 2005); John Horne, (ed.), *A Companion to World War I* (Malden, 2010); Daniel Marc Segesser, *Der Erste Weltkrieg in globaler Perspektive* (Wiesbaden, 2010); Santanu Das, project *Cultural Exchange in a Time of Global Conflict: Colonials, Neutrals and Belligerents during the First World War*, <http://www.cegcproject.eu> (accessed 27 July 2017).

² Adrian Gregory, ‘Britain and Ireland’, in Horne (ed.), *Companion*, pp. 403-17 (here p. 403).

³ Robert Gerwarth and Erez Manela (eds.), *Empires at War, 1911-1923* (Oxford, 2014).

⁴ Tammy M. Proctor, *Civilians in a World at War, 1914-1918* (New York, 2010); Alexander Watson, *Ring of Steel. Germany and Austria-Hungary at War* (London, 2014).

⁵ Also see Gerhard Fischer, *Enemy Aliens. Internment and the Homefront Experience in Australia, 1914-1920* (St Lucia, 1989); Andrew Francis, *‘To be Truly British We Must Be Anti-German’: New Zealand, Enemy Aliens and the Great War Experience, 1914-1919* (Bern, 2012); Panikos Panayi, *Prisoners of Britain: German Civilian and Combatant Internees during the First World War* (Manchester, 2012); Stefan Manz and Tilman Dederig, ‘“Enemy Aliens” in Wartime: Civilian Internment in South Africa during World War I’, *South African Historical Journal*, 68.4 (2016), pp. 536-56.

The case history of Wilhelm Kröpke shall serve to illustrate the extent to which metropole and colonial possessions were, in fact, inter-linked. Kröpke had been living and working in British colonies for fifteen years before settling in Nigeria in 1913. After the outbreak of war, Nigeria, as a crown colony, followed direct instructions from Whitehall to round up its tiny 'enemy alien' population. Kröpke was detained in Lagos prison on 9 August 1914 together with a number of his German countrymen. After several weeks, the cohort was transported to the central Nigerian internment camp, Ibaddan, about 250 miles inland from Lagos. This was a former banana plantation surrounded by barbed wire where many prisoners contracted malaria. In mid-November, the group was taken back to Lagos and shipped to Britain on board the *Accassa*, on its way picking up more Germans in other West African ports. After arriving in Liverpool on 22 December in a 'sick and run-down state',⁶ the prisoners were distributed to internment camps throughout Britain. For Kröpke, an odyssey through various facilities ended in the Alexandra Palace Camp in London in early January 1916, from where he managed to escape and make his way back to Germany. The normal route, however, was for former internees to be repatriated to Germany during or after the termination of war.

Wilhelm Kröpke's fate epitomises the fact that Britain was the epicentre of global mass internment and deportation operations. In November 1918, 91,428 military prisoners of war and 24,522 civilian 'enemy aliens' of German, Austro-Hungarian and Turkish nationality were held in numerous camps on the British Isles. The peak number of civilian internees was 29,511 in November 1917.⁷ We have to add those held in the colonies and dominions. A compilation for the Home Office from February 1918 tried to assess the extent of potential repatriation operations. The total internment figure of 14,421 in overseas territories was composed of 11,707 civilians and 2,714 combatants. The civilians had either settled abroad in the decades before the war; or were taken from ships crossing the oceans; or were deported from seized German colonies in Africa and the South Pacific. The latter policy of 'ethnic cleansing' played into British war aims of colonial expansion. Internment did, however, not only affect those behind barbed wire but also their families. The Home Office report continues:

To these must be added women and children dependent on civilian prisoners and women and children whose nearest relatives are in enemy countries. Of these no statistics are available... There are also the people of occupied territory to be considered. About 1,600, mostly women and children are in German East Africa. It is very desirable to get rid of them. 200 women and children from Nyasaland are at Tempe [Camp] in the Union of South Africa. There is a large number of soldiers, officials and civilians in South West Africa and a few in New Guinea.⁸

The Home Office figures are corroborated by a report written for the German Reichstag in 1927. Its slightly higher figure of 14,767 civilian internees in the colonies is due to the fact that it also includes women and children, and that a wider time framework is considered (August 1916 to March 1919). Figures on individual camps in this report are, however, in line with those in other sources, including neutral inspection reports, and therefore not exaggerated.⁹ If we add the 29,511 civilian internees in Britain (November 1917) to just

⁶ Wilhelm Kröpke, *Meine Flucht aus englischer Kriegsgefangenschaft 1916: Von Afrika über England nach Deutschland zur Flandern-Front* (Flensburg, 1937), p. 20.

⁷ Panayi, *Prisoners*, p. 44.

⁸ Report 'Repatriation Overseas', filed 5 June 1918, in The National Archives, Kew, London (henceforth TNA) FO 383/297.

⁹ See 'Die Zivil- und Kolonialgefangenen', in Deutscher Reichstag (ed.), *Das Werk des Untersuchungsausschusses. 1919-1928. Reihe 3: Völkerrecht im Weltkrieg*, Bd. III, 2. Teil (Berlin, 1927), pp. 719-855. (here pp. 820-22).

under 15,000 in the colonies, and also consider several thousand who, by then, had been interned and often repatriated in earlier stages of the war, an approximate total figure of 50,000 civilian internees in Britain and its Empire during the First World War is a realistic approximation.

The narrative which follows will demonstrate how internment in the British Empire needs understanding as a global experience. It will outline how transportation could take place from one part of the globe to another, although a series of hubs would evolve so that incarceration tended to take place near the place of arrest for an individual internee. The chapter will also create a typology of camps within the Empire and investigate life behind barbed wire. Although each individual camp may have had its own distinct characteristics and while each internee may have experienced internment uniquely, the chapter will demonstrate the global nature of British imperial internment.

Bureaucracy and Transport

Britain had decades of experience in deporting or concentrating groups which were deemed to operate on the margins of legal, political and social norms. These included paupers and criminals in workhouses and labour camps, convicts being sent to penal colonies, the internment of plague affected and starving Indian colonial subjects, and Boers' mass internment during the South African War in 1899-1902, which included deportation to Ceylon, the Bermudas and Canada.¹⁰ These examples were relatively localised in that they took place in, or emanated from, one specific location. World War I presented a new organisational challenge since mass internment on a global scale was unprecedented.¹¹ Now subjects of the Central Powers who were literally spread across all corners of the Empire¹² had to be registered and contained in order to preserve the safety of the realm. This presented a challenge to bureaucratic structures and processes. There was no single authority responsible for the matter, and despite efforts to streamline administration a number of ministries continued to fulfil various functions right through the war. A comment from 1916 by Robert Cecil, Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, gave an indicative assessment of the situation:

Yesterday there was a meeting held in my room, of representatives of the War Office, the Home Office, the Colonial Office, the India Office, and the Prisoners Department of the Foreign Office. It appeared from that meeting that the present organisation of prisoners questions was chaotic in the extreme.¹³

Administrative units were established to bring some coordination into cross-ministerial responsibilities. Most importantly these were the Prisoners of War Department and the Destitute Aliens Committee. Nevertheless, the ministerial 'chaos' continued to apply on the Imperial scale: The India Office was responsible for its own sphere and the Colonial Office for the other colonies. The Dominions organised internment largely through their own

¹⁰ Aidan Forth, *Barbed-Wire Imperialism: Britain's Empire of Camps, 1876-1903* (Berkeley, CA, 2017).

¹¹ See also Matthew Stibbe, 'Ein globales Phänomen: Zivilinternierung im Ersten Weltkrieg in transnationalen und internationalen Dimensionen', in Christoph Jahr and Jens Thiel (eds.), *Lager vor Auschwitz: Gewalt und Integration im 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 2013), pp. 158-76.

¹² While Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Citizens faced incarceration within the Empire, both imperial policy and public opinion focused especially upon the Germans, who had become a global minority by the First World War. See John R. Davis, Stefan Manz and Margrit Schulte Beerbuhl (eds), *Transnational Networks: German Migrants in the British Empire, 1670-1914* (Leiden, 2012); Stefan Manz, *Constructing a German Diaspora: The "Greater German Empire", 1871-1914* (Abingdon, 2014); and Panikos Panayi, (ed.), *Germans as Minorities During the First World War: A Global Comparative Perspective* (Farnham: 2014).

¹³ War Committee, Prisoners of War, Confidential Minute by Lord Robert Cecil, 24 October 1916, in TNA FO 383/241.

administrations but were firmly integrated, in matters of warfare which included internment, into Whitehall command structures.

Although fractured, there was a high degree of central coordination from London, in particular when it came to prisoner capture, deportation and transportation between different camps, countries and continents. Distinct prisoner types and transport routes can be identified. One prisoner type consisted of those taken from ships on the high sea and in British ports. A circular from Colonial Secretary Lewis Harcourt stipulated in November 1914 that ‘enemy reservists... should be removed on the high seas as well as in British territorial waters’.¹⁴ Three months later, a similar circular stated that ‘any enemy subjects, whether crew or passengers, on board neutral vessels’ entering forty-seven listed ports from Otago to St John’s would ‘be liable to removal and detention’.¹⁵ The policy was implemented from August 1914 onwards as revealed in a range of personal accounts. One case is that of Karl Wrischek, a fourteen-year-old cabin boy working on the *Derfflinger* docked in Port Said on 2 August 1914 which received an order from ‘an English higher officer’ not to proceed further. Passengers and crew were transported to a collection camp in Malta. Wrischek remained here until March 1916, returning home to Germany via the Stratford camp in East London.¹⁶ The camp established in Gibraltar, meanwhile, took 882 German, Austrian and Turkish nationals landed here immediately after the war broke out.¹⁷ These included one of the most celebrated First World War internees, the aerial explorer, adventurer and author Gunther Plüschow. When travelling back to Germany from Kiao Chow via the USA and across the Atlantic, he docked in Gibraltar and was captured. After a spell in the Gibraltar camp he was transported to England where he spent time in several camps, including the officers’ camp at Donington Hall, from where he managed to escape.¹⁸ Others held in Gibraltar included a group removed from the Italian steam ship *Re Vittorio* which docked here on 24 August 1914: ‘About 500 Germans, among them 42 officers, were held back as prisoners of war’.¹⁹ On 4 January 1915, eight German passengers, including one doctor, three architects, one painter and one mechanic on the Italian steamship *Principe de Udine* ‘were captured by the English in Gibraltar and brought to land’.²⁰

The Royal Navy seized numerous ships on the high seas sailing in all directions, taking the passengers to the nearest port and internment camp, in some cases thousands of miles away. Often this involved neutral ships and ports. In August 1917, for example, a total of 323 internees from Camp 4 in Knockaloe (Isle of Man) sent a letter to the German Foreign Office in Berlin, stating that they ‘were taken from neutral ships by representatives of the English regime while we found ourselves on a journey from one neutral land to another’, believing that sailing under a neutral flag offered them protection. The signatories all provided details of their Atlantic journeys, for example Botho Lilienthal (Rosario to Copenhagen on the Swedish *Alida*), and nine others travelling on the Belgian *Zeeland* from New York to Amsterdam before being intercepted and forced to dock in Liverpool. Other journeys included, for example, Las Palmas to Rotterdam, Buenos Aires to Malmö, and Mississippi to Stockholm.²¹

¹⁴ Lewis Harcourt, Circular Confidential, 30 November 1914, in TNA FO 383/239.

¹⁵ Lewis Harcourt, Circular Confidential, 5 February 1915, in TNA FO 383/239.

¹⁶ Report Wrischek, 27 July 1916, in Bundesarchiv Militärarchiv Freiburg (Federal Military Archive, henceforth BA-MA) RM3/5386.

¹⁷ Behandlung der auf Gibraltar (Spanien) internierten Kriegsgefangenen, 21 March 1915, in BA-MA RM3/5373.

¹⁸ Gunther Plüschow, *My Escape from Donington Hall* (London, 1922), pp. 136-83.

¹⁹ Letter from Hassermann, 1 December 1914, in BA-MA RM3/5371.

²⁰ Kaiserlich Deutsches Generalkonsulat Genua, 22 January 1915, in BA-MA RM3/5372]

²¹ Gesuch der von neutralen Schiffen genommenen Gefangenen des Lagers IV, Knockaloe, to Auswärtiges Amt, Abteilung Kriegsgefangene Berlin, 16 August 1917, in Bundesarchiv Berlin (henceforth BArch) R901/83967.

All oceans were scoured for 'enemy aliens'. Dr Friedrich Hacker sailed on the Austrian steamship *Koerber* from Hong Kong to Trieste: 'At the end of October [1914] all the Germans and Austrians - perhaps 1000 persons - were carried to Port Said on the transport steamer *Osmanieh* and transferred to Malta'. Meanwhile, on 12 August 1914 'the Cargo boat *Walkure* was seized by the Gunboat *Zelee* and taken to Papeete in Tahiti, where the captives faced short-term internment.²² Paul Helbig, a baker who had boarded the steamship *Lothringen* bound for Australia on 24 June 1914 became a prisoner of war when his vessel approached Melbourne on 15 August and was greeted by a British warship. 'On our arrival in Melbourne there were already anchored several other German steamships'.²³

Australia, together with New Zealand, became the destination for most of the Germans captured by the British throughout South East Asia, not only at sea, but also in both German and British colonies throughout the area. In fact, of the total of 6,890 persons interned in Australia, only 4,500 had lived in the country by the outbreak of war. The remainder had been transported from other parts of the Pacific during the first year of the conflict.²⁴ The principle of concentration in strategic 'hotspots' was applied throughout the world. 'Enemy aliens' seized in the Mediterranean and Middle East would end up in the camps in Gibraltar, Malta and Egypt. For example in 1918, following the British advance in Palestine, as many as 450 Germans in Jaffa were deported to Egypt, together with those in Jerusalem.²⁵ Those captured in the Caribbean would be brought together in camps on Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados and the Bermudas. The American consul on Trinidad reported in July 1915 that there were two prisons on the island:

In the larger prison, known as Camp 'A' are interned those prisoners arrested on various vessels calling at this port, most of them being sailors, seamen, stokers, cooks, firemen, etc.; in the smaller prison, known as Camp 'B' are interned those Germans who were residents of Trinidad, business men, accountants, etc.²⁶

Germans in sub-Saharan Africa need consideration in three geopolitical areas. First were those in West Africa both in the German colonies of Togo and Cameroon as well as in British possessions, who experienced transportation to Britain. The latter included the above mentioned Wilhelm Kröpke. Second were those in British and German East Africa. They first spent some time in temporary camps near their places of residence before being mainly transported to the Ahmednagar camp in India by the end of 1914. Smaller numbers ended up in Malta and in the Sidi Bishr camp in Alexandria.²⁷ Third, Germans in South Africa and in German South West Africa would spend time in camps in both of these areas. The main place of concentration in South Africa was Fort Napier in Pietermaritzburg. After South African troops had taken German South West Africa by mid-1915, places of internment in the (now former) German colony included Aus, Okanjande and Swakopmund, although some Germans, including women and children, were temporarily transported to Pietermaritzburg.²⁸ The location of the camps in which Germans in sub-Saharan Africa were interned therefore

²² American Consulate, Tahiti, Society Islands to Secretary of State, Washington, 15 December 1914, in BArch -MA RM3/5371. This episode appears to have involved the British operating in a French possession.

²³ Martin Heinrich, 'Ein Internierter. Tagebuchblätter von Paul Helbig, 1914-1919', in BA-MA MSG200/1211, p. 3.

²⁴ Gerhard Fischer, *Enemy Aliens*, p. 77.

²⁵ Secret Operations, Egypt to War Office, 10 May 1918, in TNA FO 383/439.

²⁶ Andrew J. McConnico, American Consul Trinidad to Secretary of State, Washington DC, 17 July 1915, in BArch R901/83829.

²⁷ Daniel Steinbach, 'Challenging European Colonial Supremacy: The Internment of 'Enemy Aliens' in German East Africa during the First World War', in James E. Kitchen et al. (eds.), *Other Combatants, Other Fronts: Competing Histories of the First World War* (Newcastle, 2011), pp. 153-76; Mahon Murphy, *Colonial Captivity during the First World War: Internment and the Fall of the German Empire, 1914-1919* (Cambridge, 2017)..

²⁸ Manz and Dederig, 'Enemy Aliens'.

depended on which part of the continent they lived. Those in the West travelled towards Britain, those in the East mostly ended up in India, and those in the South remained on that part of the continent.

The Germans transported to Australia and New Zealand divide into a series of groups. The first and best documented were those who lived in the German colonies in the Pacific. By the summer of 1915 over ninety were interned in the New Guinea administrative capital of Rabaul, and an additional 168 had been deported to Australia, mostly to the Holsworthy Camp near Sydney.²⁹ As the rest of the German Pacific Islands fell to the forces of Australia and New Zealand, deportations took place towards these countries from a variety of locations, including Nauru, Samoa, and Fiji. Some Germans in Samoa, however, remained in a camp in Sogi in Apia for most of the war.³⁰

Australian camps also took in Germans from elsewhere in South East Asia and even further afield. Male Germans in Singapore had first been interned locally, on St John's Island and in the Tanglin Barracks, while women and children were sent to Kuala Lumpur.³¹ By the summer of 1916, 296 'enemy aliens' had been transported from Singapore to Australia. This plight also befell those in Hong Kong. Internment had begun locally on 28 October 1914. Men faced incarceration in a camp in Kowloon, while fourteen of their wives, together with their children, experienced confinement nearby. At the beginning of 1916 the government of Australia agreed to take the internees from Hong Kong which meant that 337 prisoners arrived in Sydney on four different transports. In August and September 1915, four ships took a total of 338 people from Colombo to Sydney while in November 1917 a smaller group from Borneo and Fiji, mostly naturalised British citizens, arrived in Australia.³²

The system of global transportation and internment was highly complex, but it was not, as the above frustrated quote from Under-Secretary Robert Cecil suggested, entirely 'chaotic' or dysfunctional. The various government departments involved in its administration managed to establish a number of clear routes and hubs, depending on distance and availability and capacity of suitable facilities. The most substantial German ethnic communities which had settled in Britain and its largest colonial possessions were simply incarcerated in the countries in which they lived, most notably Great Britain, Canada, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand and India. Ports throughout the Empire became traps which caught any Germans and Austrians who may have found themselves on ships within them in the early stages of the war. In addition, the British Navy intercepted ships throughout the world, dragged Germans from these vessels and took them to the nearest port and internment camp. The pattern of entrapment used a series of routes which revolved around the existence of major internment facilities as follows. First there was Great Britain, which essentially interned those in the country, whether short or long-term residents, together with others captured in the North Atlantic and others sent from West Africa. Second, Canada incarcerated its own Germans as well as some of those who arrived from the western hemisphere. Third, the Mediterranean, especially Malta and Gibraltar, became an internment hub. While the latter took in people captured at sea, Malta incarcerated Germans and Austrians from North Africa and the Middle East. Africa proves more complicated but represents the fourth hub. South and South West Africa became the major internment place

²⁹ List of Germans interned in Rabaul; and List of Persons sent from New Guinea to Australia, in TNA FO 383/434 [nd].

³⁰ *Correspondence Respecting Operations against German Possessions in the Western Pacific* (London, 1915); Hermann Joseph Hiery, *The Neglected War: The German South Pacific and the Influence of World War I* (Honolulu, 1995); Report on the island of Nauru [n.d.], in TNA FO 383/434].

³¹ American Consulate General, Singapore, to Secretary of State, 7 April 1915, in BArch R901/83829.

³² Fischer, *Enemy Aliens*, p. 139-40; Überführung der in Ceylon internierten Zivilgefangenen nach Australien, 8 August 1916, in BArch R901/83019.

for Germans living in these areas, but those in west Africa faced deportation to Britain, while those in the East went to India. The fifth hub consisted of India which not only interned local 'enemy alien' residents but also those transported from East Africa and Siam. Finally, the camps in Australia and New Zealand need consideration together, housing not only their own German residents but also those found anywhere in the South Pacific as far away as Ceylon, whether captured on land or at sea.

Extent and Typology of Camps

It is impossible to determine the exact number of civilian camps and their inmates in the Empire. This is due to a number of reasons. Many camps, especially in the early stages of the war up to mid-1915, were of a transitory nature. They merely existed to concentrate 'enemy aliens' in a given area for later dispatch to permanent camps. Throughout the war, camps were established or abandoned depending on situational needs. The number of inmates in most places of internment fluctuated constantly, depending on practical and policy decisions such as intensified incarceration after the sinking of the *Lusitania* in May 1915. In addition, many inmates were moved around from camp to camp, often over great distances. And whilst in Britain there was a clear distinction between military and civilian camps (or compounds in camps), this distinction was often blurred in overseas territories, not least because reservists were both civilians as well as potential combatants. The following data should therefore be seen as the best possible approximation based on primary sources which often only provide synchronic snapshots on a given date. Despite these limitations, the overview will give an insight into the extent of the camp system.

The transition from provisional to permanent camp structures can be studied throughout the Empire. In the metropole, temporary solutions included facilities such as Newbury race course, the exhibition hall in Olympia (London) and several prison ships, before consolidation took place, especially in the Knockaloe camp on the Isle of Man.³³ In Gibraltar, 882 prisoners had gone through the camp by March 1915. Most of them, 709, had been shipped to England and the remainder released and allowed to return home. Thereafter it continued to function as a low-key transit point for around fifteen enemy aliens at a time.³⁴ In South Africa, although the main camp, Fort Napier in Pietermaritzburg, was established in August 1914, other camps acted as transit stations before feeding into Fort Napier. There was also an element of experimentation because at this stage no one knew how long internment operations would have to be conducted and whether provisional camps might have to develop into permanent ones. 'Enemy Aliens' in Johannesburg were first brought together in the local Agricultural Show Ground which existed from 19 August to 11 September 1914 and held 1,055 prisoners. The equivalent in Pretoria was the Roberts Heights military base which held 'enemy aliens' between September 1914 and May 1915. When the expansion of operations after the *Lusitania* sinking necessitated a sudden increase in capacity, the compound of a diamond mine in Kimberley was quickly turned into a provisional camp, holding 963 in July 1915. By the end of 1915, these had all been concentrated in Fort Napier, which held an average of 2,500 until operations ceased and the last prisoners were released in August 1919.³⁵

In the Pacific, temporary makeshift camps existed in various places before their inmates were shifted towards Australia. On Ceylon, the Diyatalawa camp survived for less than a year, holding local embassy and company staff, planters, hotel owners and employees,

³³ Panayi, *Prisoners*, pp. 78-122.

³⁴ American Consulate Report on 'Treatment of Prisoners Interned at Gibraltar', 25 March 1915, in BArch R901/83070.

³⁵ Man and Dederig, 'Enemy Aliens'.

eighteen Catholic clerics, and one Austrian and seven German Buddhist monks.³⁶ Internment in Hong Kong initially took place on Stonecutter's Island, but as the number of prisoners and the threat of malaria grew, the internees were moved to Kowloon to an encampment area sometimes used by British troops.³⁷ Another short-term camp in the Pacific was Tenom in North Borneo which, according to a US consular official, consisted of 'the most commodious house in the district and affords all the comforts and conveniences usually found in tropical residences.' Apart from boredom and the loss of freedom, one complaint was that 'their beer supply had been shut off' due to the fact that three of the six Germans held there had previously 'got drunk and created a disturbance in the town of Tenom by parading up and down the streets singing German songs'.³⁸

Australia itself also opened camps which only existed during the early stages of the war. Claremont, about six miles from the capital of Tasmania, held sixty Germans and four Austro-Hungarians in August 1915, but this closed by the end of the year as the prisoners were removed to New South Wales.³⁹ Rottnest Island, just off the coast of Perth, held 214 prisoners in the summer of 1915 who were transferred to Sydney during the course of the autumn.⁴⁰ Torrens Island held about 400 in some of the worst conditions in Australia before these internees went to Holsworthy in New South Wales in August 1916.⁴¹

A number of characteristics connected these short-lived camps. The time they existed varied from a few weeks to almost two years, depending on decisions for further concentration. Inspection reports written by US consular officials in the Pacific usually viewed them in a positive light. Like the longer established camps, some of them developed camp communities with a rich social life. Diyatalawa, Kowloon, Roberts Heights and some of the other camps which emerged in these early days of the war had a section for women and children, but no long-term facilities were established to hold these family members. Permanent mass internment facilities were a male only affair, although some low-scale exceptions existed in India and in South Africa. British incarceration of Boer women and children during the South African War (1899-1902) had caused international criticism, and not least the lessons learnt from this 'PR-disaster' led to a British-German agreement to restrict large-scale internment to male adults.⁴²

Apart from the differentiation into short-term and long-term, there are a number of further criteria working towards a typology of camps. The examples in the remainder of this section all fall under the category 'permanent'. One type were those facilities that had initially been built for British troops but were turned into internment camps after the outbreak of war. In fact, the biggest camp in India, Ahmednagar, had a long history as a military station and had also been used as an internment facility for Boers during the South African War.⁴³ The central camp in Scotland, Stobs near Hawick, had been used as a military training ground since 1903 but received completely new buildings to house up to 4,500 'enemy alien'

³⁶ Interner Bericht, 20 March 1915, in BA R67/255; 'Ceylon', BArch R67/1329; Bericht über die Ceylonlager Ragama und Diyatalawa, 2 August 1916, in BArch R901/83019.

³⁷ Inspektion des Gefangenenlagers zu Hongkong auf Ansuchen der Englischen Regierung, 15 December 1914, in BArch R67/824; Inspection of Camp for German and Austrian Prisoners at War at Hongkong, 28 August 1915, in BArch R901/83830; Bericht über das Internierungslager bei Hunghon (Hongkong), in BArch - MA/MSG200/1585.

³⁸ Report on Civil Camp at Tenom, British North Borneo, 25/26 November 1915, in TNA FO 383/180.

³⁹ Interner Bericht 16, Tasmanien, 20 March 1915, in BArch R67/1641; Report by American Consul on Tasmania, 14 September 1915, in BArch R901/83830.

⁴⁰ Interner Bericht 37, Rottnest Island, 25 August 1915, BArch R67/1367; Fischer, *Enemy Aliens*, pp. 188-94.

⁴¹ Fischer, *Enemy Aliens*, p. 194.

⁴² Isabel V. Hull, *A Scrap of Paper: Breaking and Making International Law during the Great War* (Ithaca, 2014), p. 132; Manz and Dederling, 'Enemy Aliens'.

⁴³ Swiss Consular Report on Ahmednagar, 23 April 1917, in National Archives of India (henceforth NAI), Home/Police/April1918/180.

prisoners.⁴⁴ Similarly, the camp in Malta, Fort Verdala situated above Valetta, opened on a site previously used by British troops. In August 1915 the camp held 1,355 civilians and 141 military POWs. By April 1918 numbers had risen to 1,906, including 1,325 Germans, 320 Austro-Hungarians, 326 Turks and twenty-seven Bulgarians. The US consular reports were broadly positive, focusing on the well-developed social activity including celebration of the Kaiser's birthday on 27 January. The reports also mention frictions between the inmates, which were viewed as inevitable because of the amount of time the men spent together.⁴⁵ A fourth example of a pre-existing military facility was Fort Napier. With British troops gradually withdrawing from the newly established Union of South Africa after 1910, Fort Napier had recently been abandoned as a garrison fort for colonial troops. It presented itself as an ideal facility with sufficient capacity and security. The site was surrounded by solid corrugated iron fence with barbed wire entanglements. Armed guards were stationed in elevated tower platforms around the whole. The site was divided into four main camps, and these were in turn separated by the same corrugated iron and barbed wire structure.⁴⁶

Notwithstanding some minor differences, this topography was also representative of another type of camp, namely those that were newly built from August 1914. The prototype of this category was Knockaloe, which started off as one new compound on an open plain on the western coast of the Isle of Man, but was gradually extended to a maximum of 23,000 as demand increased. Kapuskasing in northern Ontario held 934 Austro-Hungarians, 135 Turks and seven Bulgarians in March 1916, reflecting the tendency in Canada to have separate camps for Germans on the one hand, and other nationalities on the other hand.⁴⁷ Australia's largest camp, Holsworthy near Sydney, was also a newly built structure. This camp 'grew from a collection of tents to a small town of huts complete with theatres, restaurants and cafes, other small businesses, an orchestra and sporting and educational activities'.⁴⁸ Holsworthy had the same significance in the southern hemisphere as Knockaloe did in the north because of the range of geographical origins of prisoners, coming not simply from other places of internment closed down in Australia, but also from other parts of the Pacific, while others would have spent virtually all of their experience of incarceration here. Its population increased from 1,695 in August 1915 to 4,299 by May 1916 (including 3,421 Germans and 811 Austro-Hungarians) and 4,500 by July 1916, a total which would remain stable until 1919.⁴⁹

The camp typology includes a number of former civilian structures which were turned into camps. Oldcastle Camp in County Meagh, Ireland, had been a former workhouse, signifying clear continuities of social group confinement in the British Empire since the nineteenth century. In October 1914 the military authorities took command of the site and fortified it. Two blocks of stone-built structures contained twenty-six dormitories, housing 435 German and ninety-nine Austrian prisoners in June 1915. When prisoners climbed on rooftops to watch anti-conscription and pro-independence demonstrations in the nearby town

⁴⁴ <http://www.stobscamp.org> (accessed 27 July 2017)

⁴⁵ Danish Consular Report on Malta, 26 April 1918, in BArch R901/83109; Bericht über Zivil- und Kriegsgefangenenlager in Verdala, 1 August 1915, in BArch R901/83001/a, TNA FO383/239.

⁴⁶ Manz and Dederling, 'Enemy Aliens'.

⁴⁷ Inspection report American Consulate General, Ottawa, 17 March 1916, in TNA FO 383/239.

⁴⁸ <http://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/exhibition/enemyathome/holsworthy-internment-camp/index.html> (accessed 27 July 2017).

⁴⁹ American Consular Report on Visit to German Concentration Camp, Liverpool, New South Wales, 13 August 1915, in BArch R901/83830; American Consular Report on Visit to German Concentration Camp, Liverpool, New South Wales, 20 May 1916, in TNA FO383/239; Camp President and Camp Secretary, German Concentration Camp, Liverpool, N.S.W., to Australian Minister of Defence, 20 July 1916, in TNA FO383/240; Report of Visit to German Concentration Camp, by Swiss and Danish Consuls, 17 February 1919, in TNA FO 383/536; Fischer, *Enemy Aliens*, pp. 199-228.

centre in April 1918, the camp was considered a security risk, evacuated, and its inmates transferred to Knockaloe.⁵⁰ Former factory sites were another type of civilian buildings. The camp at Handforth in Cheshire came into existence in November 1914 on the site of a former print works. Although it had developed into a camp for military internees by 1916, it initially held a combination of local Germans largely from Manchester, the crews of German trawlers, and people brought from the colonies. Numbers totalled between 2,000 and 2,500. According to inspectors' reports, by early 1915 it had become fairly well organised and the factory buildings held acceptable accommodation.⁵¹ Less favourable reports emerged about the Amherst camp in Nova Scotia, Canada. This was the former Malleable Iron foundry, consisting of one building that was 100 feet wide and a quarter of a mile long, holding around 800 internees. In an unusually blunt way, the inspecting American local consul reported in October 1916 that 'originally the building in which they are situated was not in all respects entirely suitable for the uses to which it has been adapted'. Recent improvements, however, had made the premises 'comfortably habitable'.⁵² The German Red Cross received a litany of complaints, some censored, but others smuggled out in full in encoded form or invisible ink. Inmates complained about filthy conditions, odour in combination with boarded-up windows, iron dust remaining from the building's previous function, cramped conditions in bunk beds, and a shooting in which one prisoner was killed by a guard.⁵³

There were also prison islands. By this we do not mean Knockaloe on the Isle of Man and Fort Verdala on Malta, both of which were situated on large populated islands. We rather refer to very small islands with little or no population which were turned into places of internment. In Australia, these included the above mentioned Rottneest Island off the Perth coast, and Torrens Island near Adelaide. New Zealand had two prison islands, Somes Island in Wellington Harbour and Motuihi Island in Auckland Harbour.⁵⁴ Another prison island in an entirely different world region was Ports Island in the Bermuda Great Sound. The inspecting American consul described the island as 'a small piece of ground about one-half mile in circumference. There are no residents on the island other than the prisoners and a guard varying from twelve to fifteen men'. There were fifty-six German and two Austrian prisoners, mostly taken from merchant vessels at the beginning of the war but also some residents of Bermuda. Fifteen former officers resided in the first class compound, the remaining crew in the second class compound. The American consul found Ports Island 'an ideal location for a detention camp. It is conveniently situated, being easily accessible to Hamilton and is of such size that only a small guard is required... The prisoners are permitted to bathe as much as they wish, but are warned not to swim further than thirty yards from the island'. After the American entry into the war, camp inspections were conducted by Swiss officials who found the general conditions equally satisfactory. In their report they also mention long-term continuities of British imperial internment since 'during the South African War of 1899-1902 the island hosted a large number of Boer prisoners of war'.⁵⁵

'Enemy Aliens' were usually arrested by the police and taken to the next police station where they would spend a short spell in a prison cell before removal to a camp. The

⁵⁰ Declan O'Connor, 'Das Kriegsgefangenenlager/The Prisoner of War Camp Oldcastle, Co. Meath, 1914-1918', *Die Harfe* 33.130 (2015), p. 38-41.

⁵¹ Panayi, *Prisoners*, p. 92.

⁵² Report E. Verne Richardson, American Consul at Moncton, N.B., 2 October 1916, in TNA FO 383/240.

⁵³ Red Cross Hamburg to German Foreign Office, reports and letters on Amherst, 18 June 1915, 11 August 1915, 10 September 1915, 20 September 1915, 16 October 1915, all in BArch R901/83090, R901/83088 and R901/83089.

⁵⁴ See the contribution of Sandra Barkhoff to the present volume.

⁵⁵ Bericht der Schweizer Kommission, Inspektion des Kriegsgefangenenlagers auf Ports Island, Bermuda, 1., 3., 5. and 8. January 1918, and Report American Consul, Hamilton Bermuda, 12 July 1916, both in BArch R901/83031.

short period Wilhelm Kröpke spent in Lagos prison is indicative of this pattern. There were, however, also a number of prisons which were converted into long-term internment facilities for 'enemy aliens'. Berrima and Trial Bay Gaols were both in New South Wales, 'thus establishing a clear and distinct link with the colony's penal system'.⁵⁶ In Trial Bay Gaol, two or three detainees were accommodated in one stone gaol cell, and others in newly-built huts outside the main building. A US consular inspection from June 1916 described 'a spirit of contentment as well as satisfaction' and asserted that the camp 'is in excellent condition'.⁵⁷ The 580 internees held here in June 1917 had developed orchestras, a library of 2,500 books and a theatre with 240 seats.⁵⁸ The two prisons in Trinidad have been mentioned above. Another prison facility was the Glendairy Prison on Barbados which continued to hold ordinary criminals alongside those who were incarcerated as enemy aliens. The American consul, visiting in August 1916, found fifty-eight inmates and described the topography as follows:

This camp is situated within the walls of the criminal prison of this Island, but is detached from the balance of the prison buildings, and there is no communication between the prisoners of war and the criminal prisoners, except that a portion of the camp sanitary work is done by the criminal prisoners. The camp compound is separated from the prison yard by a strong barbed wire barricade, the wall of the prison enclosure form the other three sides of the compound.⁵⁹

Although the consul found general conditions to be satisfactory, he also remarked that this setting was not conducive to internees' mental health: 'The proximity of the convicts, the prison walls, and the cries of the convicts receiving corporal punishment, according to the testimony of [internees], affects their nerves and makes them restless and irritated'.⁶⁰

The typological overview has given an insight into the complexity of the internment experience. Knockaloe with its endless rows of wooden huts, built on an open plain, is often seen as the prototype, but in reality there existed a whole series of different camp forms, sizes, and durations. Some camps only existed for weeks, others for the whole duration of the war and, indeed, beyond. Some were newly built, modelled on the layout of military barracks. Others were accommodated in former military bases. Pragmatic solutions *in situ* led to further conversions: race courses, exhibition halls, ships, agricultural showgrounds, plantations, factories, a diamond mine, a workhouse, islands, and prisons. Some of them (for instance Holsworthy and Forth Napier) were in urban locations, others (such as Kapuskasing and Knockaloe) in very isolated ones. The term 'internment camp' encapsulates very different shapes and locations.

Camp communities and cultural life

The notion of 'prison camp societies' was first put forward by John Davidson Ketchum, a professor of psychology at the University of Toronto, writing decades after his First World War confinement in the Berlin civilian camp in Ruhleben. Ketchum described that after a period of accommodation, the British internees took part in a range of activities and formed associations leading to a community structure, which helped them to survive years of confinement.⁶¹ Part of the reason for engaging in social activity lay in the fact that civilian

⁵⁶ Fischer, *Enemy Aliens*, p. 247.

⁵⁷ American Consular Report on Trial Bay, 4 June 1916, in TNA FO 383/239.

⁵⁸ Report of Visit of Inspection of the German Detention Barracks at Trial Bay, 17 June 1917, in BArch R67/1646.

⁵⁹ Report American Consul, Barbados, 14 August 1916, in TNA FO 383/240.

⁶⁰ Governor of Barbados to Walter H. Long, M.P., 28 January 1917, in TNA CO 28/291/48; 'Zur Lage der deutschen Kriegsgefangenen auf Barbados', *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, 12 March 1916,

⁶¹ John Davidson Ketchum, *Ruhleben: A Prison Camp Society* (Toronto, 1965), pp. 153-4.

prisoners were not forced to work,⁶² which meant that they had to kill time ‘for it was the arch-enemy’.⁶³ In actual fact, despite the Hague Convention work did take place amongst civilian internees in Canada.⁶⁴ Although this forced labour appears unique within the Empire and certainly caused controversy and complaint, voluntary employment for the purpose of ‘killing time’ certainly took place elsewhere. In South Africa, prisoners could even be sent to do agricultural work on the Standerton Government Farm as a reward for good behaviour in Fort Napier.⁶⁵

The sporting, educational and cultural activities in Ruhleben described by Ketchum also developed in camps run by the British throughout the world, as well as in establishments opened by the other belligerents. Gilly Carr and Harold Mytum have seen internment camps during both World Wars as spaces of creativity. Despite ‘traumas’ caused by separation from families, ‘the years of internment were coupled with unprecedented leisure time for many which led to a flowering of creativity in numerous forms and across a variety of media’.⁶⁶

A range of activities therefore developed within British and other camps during the First World War, supported by organisations such as the Red Cross and the Society of Friends. Prison camp communities emerged in a variety of ways, especially the celebration of major festival days in the German calendar, including those of a religious nature. Christmas proved particularly important for interned Germans as it did for those beyond the wire, even though it caused mixed feelings as internees reflected on their situation and separation from families.⁶⁷ German nationalism surfaced in the celebration of the Kaiser’s birthday on 27 January, which had become established beyond the wire before the outbreak of the war in many diasporic communities.⁶⁸ This resulted in festivities such as the one in the Tanglin Barracks in Singapore on 27 January 1915.⁶⁹ German regionalism also survived as revealed in the celebration of the birthday of King William II of Württemberg on 27 February 1915 by forty-seven Württembergers interned in Malta.⁷⁰

Community also developed through a range of regular activities. Theatre became perhaps the most important of these, bringing together a wide range of people as actors, spectators and technical staff. Cross-dressing actors helped to keep the image of women alive in camps.⁷¹ A total of sixty-nine camp theatres existed in Britain alone, made up of nine for

⁶² According to J. C. Bird, *Control of Enemy Alien Civilians in Great Britain, 1914-1918* (London, 1986), p. 280, this stemmed from the Hague Convention of 1907. However, while Article 6 of the Annex mentions the fact that ‘The State may utilize the labour of prisoners of war according to their rank and aptitude, officers excepted’, it makes no mention of the civilian internees, perhaps because they were not recognised as a distinct group before 1914 See https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/0/1d1726425f6955aec125641e0038bfd6_Convention_IV_respecting_the_Laws_and_Customs_of_War_on_Land_and_its_annex_Regulations_concerning_the_Laws_and_Customs_of_War_on_Land_The_Hague_18_October_1907.

⁶³ Paul Cohen-Portheim, *Time Stood Still: My Internment in England* (London, 1931), p. 91.

⁶⁴ See Chapter 7 below.

⁶⁵ Manz and Dederig, ‘Enemy Aliens’.

⁶⁶ Gilly Carr and Harold Mytum, ‘The Importance of Creativity Behind Barbed Wire. Setting a Research Agenda’, in Carr and Mytum (eds.), *Cultural Heritage and Prisoners of War: Creativity Behind Barbed Wire* (Abingdon, 2012), pp. 1-15 (here p. 1).

⁶⁷ See, for example, ‘Verdala Camp Nachrichten, Weihnachts-Nummer 1915’, in BArch R901/83107; interview with Stefan Manz in *BBC History Magazine*, Christmas Edition December 2014, pp. 9-10.

⁶⁸ Manz, *Constructing a German Diaspora*.

⁶⁹ Feier des Geburtstages Sr. Majestät Kaiser Wilhelm II. im Kriegsgefangenen Lager Tanglin Barracks, Singapore, 27 January 1915, in BArch MSG200/2067.

⁷⁰ Festordnung zur Geburtstagsfeier S.M. König Wilhelm II. von Württemberg, 25 February 1915, in BArch R67/1803,.

⁷¹ Alon Rachamimov, ‘The Disruptive Comforts of Drag. (Trans) Gender Performances among Prisoners of War in Russia, 1914-1920’, *American Historical Review* 111 (2006), pp. 362-82; Jennifer Kewley Draskau, ‘Drag Performance and its Effects in Great War Internment Camps on the Isle of Man’, *Proceedings of the Isle of Man Natural History and Antiquarian Society*, 12 (April 2007-March 2009), pp. 187-204.

officers, twenty-seven for privates and thirty-three for civilians.⁷² In Holsworthy the 125th new performance took place on 31 August 1918, on this occasion featuring a play by Henrik Ibsen.⁷³

Camps developed their own orchestras, helped by the fact that many Germans, especially those from middle-class backgrounds, played instruments. An advanced musical life evolved on the Isle of Man with symphony orchestras, choirs and ensembles, music critics and the use of music in plays and religious festivities.⁷⁴ This found reflection in camps throughout the Empire. With some pride, a former inmate of Fort Napier wrote that ‘musicians established genuine music schools. It is right to say that nowhere in the whole of South Africa were to be found better classical performances than in the internment camp in Pietermaritzburg’.⁷⁵ Another example was the orchestra in the St. Clement’s Camp in Malta which held a symphony concert on 11 May 1918 featuring Beethoven’s first symphony, a Chopin nocturne, Grieg’s piano concerto and Wagner’s entry of the Gods into Valhalla from *Das Rheingold*.⁷⁶

Another major form of popular culture which played a central role in creating community consisted of sport and exercise, which may have involved more people than any other type of activity in view of the range of games which the prisoners developed, both competitive and non-competitive and encompassing English and German sports. The Verdala ‘Camp Nachrichten’ from 28 March 1915 pointed to tennis, boxing, football and fencing here.⁷⁷ While some Germans played sport as individuals, others participated in team games which would lead to the development of football leagues. Sporting festivals allowed prisoners to again develop their sense of community as happened in Holsworthy on Christmas Day 1917 where the games played included football, athletics and hockey. Such events also allowed those who did not participate in sport to take part as this particular festival also included a concert by the camp brass orchestra.⁷⁸ On Ports Island regular football games between guards and inmates were organised. When the American consul visited on 8 March 1916, ‘the best of feeling was exhibited by all concerned during the progress of the game, which was won by the prisoners by a score of three goals to nothing’.⁷⁹

Community and creativity were also apparent in the ubiquitous newspapers which became a phenomenon amongst German, English and French internees held in camps throughout the world. At least seventeen emerged in Great Britain during the course of the war together with many more in overseas camps. These evolved in co-operation with camp censors and necessitated the existence of some form of printing press. Those who ran them invariably came from educated middle-class backgrounds. While these publications initially devoted space to events beyond the barbed wire, they increasingly became focused on the camps themselves. One of their key functions consisted of providing information on social and educational activity within individual camps, although they also allowed prisoners to express their feelings about internment, especially through literary sketches and poems. They

⁷² Hermann Pörzgen, *Theater ohne Frau: Das Bühnenleben der kriegsgefangenen Deutschen 1914-1920* (Königsberg, 1933), p. 166.

⁷³ DTL Programm, in BArch MA/MSG200/1084.

⁷⁴ Jutta Raab Hansen, ‘Die Bedeutung der Musik für 26000 internierte Zivilisten während des Ersten Weltkrieges auf der Isle of Man’, in Richard Dove (ed.), *‘Totally un-English?’: Britain’s Internment of ‘Enemy Aliens’ in Two World Wars* (Amsterdam, 2005), pp. 63-81.

⁷⁵ Hans Weiland and Leopold Kern (eds.) *In Feindeshand: Die Gefangenschaft im Weltkriege in Einzeldarstellungen*, vol. 2 (Vienna, 1931), p. 112.

⁷⁶ Sinfonie Konzert des Streichorchesters, Malta, in BArch R67/1803.

⁷⁷ Verdala ‘Camp Nachrichten’, 28 March 1915, in BArch MA/MSG200/2138.

⁷⁸ Programm des Allgemeinen Sportfestes, Weihnachten 1917, Deutsches Kriegsgefangenenlager zu Liverpool, in BArch MA/MSG200/1084.

⁷⁹ Inspection report American consul, 8 March 1916, in TNA FO 383/239.

had an overarching aim of creating community within specific camps. Many prisoners sent editions, which might have a print run of several thousands, to their relatives, keeping them informed about camp life. These newspapers also helped to create a sense of *Heimat* (homeland), fuelled by the feeling of alienation which the prisoners felt as a result of their incarceration and encouraged by the exclusively male environment in which they usually found themselves.⁸⁰

Conditions

The treatment of internees throughout the Empire was in essence humane. Food rations were adequate, there was little deliberate mistreatment, and with the exception of Canada⁸¹ there was no forced labour. While the incarceration of tens of thousands of men in the Empire constituted an act of liberty infringement which those affected understandably resented, the British authorities did not want to repeat the mistakes of the Boer War, as revealed in the views of a Government of India civil servant determined to avert the attention of the ‘atrocities mongers’ by not interning women and families in Ahmednagar.⁸² Since the Boer War the 1907 Hague Convention had also come into operation, and the British now played by the rules of warfare when it came to civilian internees. This included allowing US and then Swiss Embassy officials access to camps where they could meet the prisoners and discuss problems and complaints.⁸³

While some of these protests focused on serious issues, others seem minor as a culture of complaining emerged. These protests, however, reflected a deeper anxiety about the loss of freedom which the internees experienced, often leading to the development of ‘barbed wire disease’, the psychosis caused by years of captivity. This was first described by A. L. Vischer, a Swiss embassy official and camp inspector. The causes of this psychosis, from which ‘very few prisoners who have been over six months in the camp are quite free’⁸⁴ included: the ‘social standing of the prisoners before internment’,⁸⁵ which meant that middle-class males used to physical space and control of their time became particularly prone to mental illness;⁸⁶ ‘the general camp conditions and treatment of the prisoners’; lack of contact with the outside world, especially womenfolk; and the uncertainty of the length of captivity.⁸⁷ The fact that prisoners did not work also played a role. While creativity and community may have emerged, the lack of real employment impacted on many internees.

The spread of the ‘barbed wire disease’ provides the best example of the negative consequences of internment in the Empire during the Great War. Sometimes the depression caused by confinement led to suicide. Those who took their own lives included Karl Kibbert who hung himself in Malta ‘whilst under the influence of alcohol’.⁸⁸ The German-American Dr Walter Gellhorn took an overdose of morphine in the Stobs Camp in Scotland because ‘I really cannot help it being sick and tired of everything’.⁸⁹ But such extreme cases of

⁸⁰ Rainer Pöppinghege, *Im Lager unbesiegt. Deutsche, englische und französische Kriegsgefangenen-Zeitungen im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Essen, 2006), pp. 183-294 and 318-20; Jennifer Kewley Draskau, ‘Relocating the Heimat: Great War Internment Literature from the Isle of Man’, *German Studies Review* 32 (2009), pp. 83-106.

⁸¹ See the contribution of Bohdan Kordan below.

⁸² Grant of allowance to the wives and children of prisoners of war interned at Ahmednagar, in NAI Home/PoliticalA/September1914/394-397.

⁸³ Richard B. Speed III, *Prisoners, Diplomats, and the Great War: A Study in the Diplomacy of Captivity* (New York, 1990), pp. 19-25.

⁸⁴ A. L. Vischer, *Barbed Wire Disease. A Psychological Study of the Prisoner of War* (London, 1919), p. 53.

⁸⁵ Rudolf Rocker, ‘Alexandra Palace Internment Camp in the First World War’, British Library typescript, p. 4.

⁸⁶ Cohen-Portheim, *Time Stood Still*, p. 85.

⁸⁷ Rocker, Alexandra Palace, p. 4.

⁸⁸ Death Certificate of Karl Hibbert, in BArch R67/909.

⁸⁹ Suicide farewell letter Walter Gellhorn to Capt. C. B. Dobell, 11 July 1916, in TNA FO 383/293.

depression remained rare, and the relatively small number of internees who did perish behind barbed wire mostly did so as a result of physical rather than mental conditions.⁹⁰ One prisoner, Arno Friedrich, actually drowned while swimming at the Trial Bay camp.⁹¹ In February 1915, E. F. Senftleben was accidentally shot in the Singapore camp by Indian mutineers who attacked the barracks in protest against their pending transfer to the Ottoman Empire, where they would have to fight against fellow Muslims.⁹² One prisoner drowned in the Nile on his escape route from the Maadi camp in Egypt.⁹³

Some prisoners also died at the hands of the camp authorities. The worst incident occurred in the Douglas Camp on the Isle of Man on 19 November 1914, caused by the poor living conditions in a rapidly expanding camp. The guards suppressed a riot using live ammunition, causing the death of five internees.⁹⁴ Individual soldiers also sometimes fired on internees for breaking camp rules as happened, for example, to Max Arndt in Holsworthy who 'was shot when deliberately running away to avoid arrest, after being ordered to stand, the sentry having no other means of preventing his escape'.⁹⁵

A propaganda conflict ran alongside the military operations in which both the German and British authorities and public opinion tried to prove that the other side behaved in a less civilised manner towards its enemy citizens.⁹⁶ The German press played a key role in this, publishing stories about alleged mistreatment. The *Tägliche Rundschau* recounted the experiences of Dr Walter Kain who spent ten months in Malta. He gave a negative account of the conditions which he and his fellow prisoners had experienced, focusing especially on medical facilities.⁹⁷ Similar stories of the experiences of captured Germans appeared in newspapers throughout the war.⁹⁸

The authorities also collected stories of mistreatment by interviewing individual Germans when they arrived home after a period of internment. The information gathered in this way fed the commission established for the purpose of recording violence against German civilians abroad (*Reichskommissar zur Erörterung von Gewalttätigkeiten gegen deutsche Zivilpersonen in Feindeshand*), which also invited individuals to speak to them. They included Rudolf Krüger who had worked as a clerk in the German Consulate in Alexandria and was interned in the Ras-el-tin camp in the city despite recent hospital treatment for typhus. He was then moved to Malta. While he provided a matter-of-fact account, he also pointed to the problems he encountered which included, in the Verdala Barracks, living with five other Germans in one room, which still compared favourably with other rooms which 'were covered with dirt and full of bugs'.⁹⁹ Walter Kain's series of articles addressed a range of issues in addition to medical facilities including the summer heat, the

⁹⁰ See, for example, the following Prisoners of War Information Bureau death certificates: Willi Kromm (Holsworthy) and Hans Wagener (Ahmednagar) in BArch R67/909; Heinrich Janzen (Malta) in BArch R67/1039; August Monthly (Holsworthy) in BArch R67/1040; and Paul Garth, Maximilian Wiedemann, Georg Carl Krafft, Henry Naserowsky (all Holsworthy) and Franz Xaver Dietrich (Ahmednagar) in BArch R67/1041.

⁹¹ Details of the circumstances of his death can be found in TNA FO 383/440.

⁹² Downing Street to Under Secretary of State, Colonial Office, 13 May 1915, in TNA FO 383/62; Interner Bericht, Singapore, 12 April 1915, in BArch R67/1614; Murphy, *Prisoners*, p. 80.

⁹³ Hermann Röseler, 'Bilder aus englischer Gefangenschaft im deutsch-ostafrikanischen Kolonialgebiet, in Ägypten und in England', in Weiland and Kern (eds.), *In Feindeshand*, vol. 2, pp. 105-9 (here p. 108).

⁹⁴ *Disturbance at the Aliens Detention Camp at Douglas on Thursday November 19th, 1914: Inquiry by the Coroner of Inquests on Friday, November 20th, and Friday, November 27th, 1914* (Douglas, 1914).

⁹⁵ Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to United States Ambassador, 3 March 1916, in TNA FO 383/184.

⁹⁶ Matthew Stibbe, *British Civilian Internees in Germany: The Ruhleben Camp, 1914-18* (Manchester, 2008), pp. 3-4; Panayi, *Prisoners of Britain*, pp. 231-33.

⁹⁷ *Tägliche Rundschau*, 21, 22, 23 February 1916.

⁹⁸ See, for example, 'Wie England einen deutschen Gouverneur behandelt', *Neue Preussische Zeitung*, 23 July 1915; 'Die Behandlung der Samoanischen Deutschen', *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 22 August 1916.

⁹⁹ Königlichliches Amtsgericht Berlin Mitte, 2 July 1915, in BArch R901/83012.

monotony of the diet and the water supply, although he believed that conditions in Malta were not as bad as those in Russia, the French colonies or the experiences of ‘our soldiers in the field whose lives were in danger’.¹⁰⁰

In the Tanglin camp in Singapore, ‘all members of the Teutonia Club’, an educated middle-class group, entered into correspondence with the American consul which was fairly representative for camps in the Empire. The complaints in Singapore included: objection to the very fact of internment under international law; the unsuitability of the accommodation ‘for gentlemen who have spent so many years in Tropical climate’ as the ‘barracks with about 50 men in each compartment are to say the least overcrowded’; and the food, which, while the same as that ‘provided for British soldiers in this part of the world ... are absolutely insufficient for anybody living out here’.¹⁰¹ The American consul had previously replied to this group of internees in an objective manner but his letter included a rather barbed comment:

It is unfortunate of course, that civilians who have been accustomed to home comforts and luxury as is procurable in this community, should be deprived of same, but considering the misfortunes of war, an internment camp conducted on a basis comparing favourable with the usual military camps is all that can be expected.¹⁰²

Conclusion: British Internment as a Global Experience

The individual experience of internment in the British Empire was much dependent on the location and type of camp. In the severe climate of north Ontario temperatures went down to -40°, and prisoners suffered from asthmatic and rheumatic pains. Kurt Zöllner wrote to his family from the Kapuskasing camp, asking them to send ‘thick socks, felt hat with ear flaps, thick gloves, sweater and woollen underwear’.¹⁰³ In contrast, those who found themselves in the camp near Kingston, Jamaica, suffered from ‘burning summer heat’, and for this reason some were taken to the Amherst and Halifax camps in Nova Scotia.¹⁰⁴ In many camps, social class determined the quality and space of accommodation since inmates were separated into first and second class compounds. And although most camps brimmed with cultural life, this was not the case everywhere, especially in smaller camps holding inmates with less varied social backgrounds. The fifty-eight internees on tiny Ports Island, for example, were made up almost entirely of seamen. The Swiss inspectors stated that ‘some individuals exercised a little music’, but there existed ‘neither sport nor other clubs for the purpose of entertainment among the prisoners. The people entertain themselves with gardening and keep poultry and rabbits’.¹⁰⁵

The global perspective has shown that it proves difficult to generalise the experience of internment in the Empire. At the same time, however, this wide perspective allows for a number of observations which cannot necessarily be drawn from approaches which only focus on one camp or overseas territory. Overall, internment was a humane experience. Unlike in the Boer War, little mistreatment took place. Conditions were as good as they could be in a situation where the detention of tens of thousands of ‘enemy aliens’ had to be organised - on top of having a war to fight. Despite complex challenges to governmental and administrative departments, transport and internment across countries and oceans was

¹⁰⁰ *Tägliche Rundschau*, 21, 22, 23 February 1916.

¹⁰¹ Letter to the American Consul General in charge of the interests of German subjects, Singapore, 27 March 1915, in BArch R901/83010.

¹⁰² American Vice Consul, Singapore, to W. Woelber, 25 March 1915, in BArch R901/83007.

¹⁰³ Letter Kurt Zöllner, 22 May 1917, in BArch R67/1631.

¹⁰⁴ Internal government reports, 9 March 1915, 24 April 1915, 11 September 1915, 13 November 1915, in BArch R67/1598.

¹⁰⁵ Report Swiss commission, January 1918, in BArch R901/83031.

conducted in a relatively coordinated fashion. But this does not change the injustice experienced by tens of thousands of Germans and Austro-Hungarians. Taken away from their wives and families, incarcerated in camps which, in some cases, lay thousands of miles away from the homes they had established abroad, they felt that they had lost control of their existence. In order to stabilise their lives they managed to create the type of prison camp societies suggested by Ketchum in Ruhleben, with patterns of social activity and creativity replicating themselves in camps throughout the world, whether run by the British or by the other interning empires.

Internment in the Empire was a truly global affair. Although no single order emerged at any time from the Colonial or Foreign Office in London calling for the internment of all Germans throughout the imperial domains, the dominions were quick to follow London's lead and issue their own internment orders. Arrest on the high seas and in ports, as well as prisoner transport between different parts of the Empire point to a centrally coordinated policy which spanned the world. As the war dragged on and the numbers of internees increased following the sinking of the *Lusitania*, the need to create more long-term camps meant that temporary establishments disappeared, resulting in the emergence of hubs in Britain, Canada, South Africa, Australasia and India. The infrastructure of the Empire facilitated the transport and housing of military troops across continents and oceans. The chapter has shown that this infrastructure was also conveniently used to do the same to approximately 50,000 civilian 'enemy aliens'. Ethnic diaspora communities which had grown over decades of German mass emigration disintegrated. The conflict had both immediate and long-lasting repercussions on this diaspora group. This finding supports, and indeed broadens the concept of 'total war'¹⁰⁶ by putting the lens on global and civilian aspects which were far more than a side-show of the Great War.

¹⁰⁶ Roger Chickering and Stig Förster (eds.), *Great War, Total War: Combat and Mobilization on the Western Front, 1914-1919* (Cambridge, 2000).