



2013

# First World War Central Power Prison Camps

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## WMU ScholarWorks Citation

Steuer, Kenneth, "First World War Central Power Prison Camps" (2013). *History Faculty Publications*. Paper 1.  
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## FIRST WORLD WAR CENTRAL POWER PRISON CAMPS

This photo gallery is a companion work to my e-book, *Pursuit of an "Unparalleled Opportunity": The American YMCA and Prisoner-of-War Diplomacy among the Central Power Nations during World War I, 1914-1923*. <[www.gutenberg-e.org/steuer/](http://www.gutenberg-e.org/steuer/)> The images include a wide range of photographs, drawings, paintings, maps, and other images from Austrian, Hungarian, Bulgarian, German, and Turkish prison camps during the First World War which illustrate the daily life of Allied war prisoners in and outside of prison facilities. The text and database images show the activities in these camps and address the general topics of capture, prison camp order and operations, nutrition, fire safety and prevention, welfare and relief services, entertainment, education, sports, religion, medical care, hygiene and sanitation, postal systems, labor, finances and banking, crime and punishment, repatriation, and post-war relief work for Russian war prisoners. A detailed overview of the subject headings and key terms used in the categorizing the collection are provided in an appendix. While life in Central Power prison camps was difficult for Allied POW's, German and Austro-Hungarian authorities attempted to follow international law and promote the health and welfare of war prisoners under their care. Exceptions to this thesis were few in number and often implemented by individual camp commandants. In contrast to Allied POW experiences in World War II, Entente prisoners received far better treatment and care in the Great War.

## CENTRAL POWER PRISON CAMP SUMMARY

### German Prison Camps—Incarceration and Repatriation

By the end of World War I, the Germans incarcerated approximately 2.8 million prisoners of war in military prison camps. To provide a context for this figure, this number roughly equaled the population of the state of Indiana and exceeded the population of Canada at that time. Large numbers of French, British, and Belgian prisoners arrived in Germany as a result of the German implementation of the von Schlieffen plan (the invasion of France through neutral Belgium) at the beginning of the war. By the Summer of 1914, the Germans began to incarcerate great numbers of Russian prisoners due to their victory at the Battle of Tannenberg in East Prussia. Russians streamed into Germany during the course of the war and they became the largest single group of prisoners in the German POW system. Serbian prisoners arrived in Germany with the collapse of Serbia as a result of the Austro-German-Bulgarian invasion of September 1915. The Romanian government's decision to declare war on the Central Powers in August 1916 led to the occupation of that kingdom and the influx of Romanian prisoners into Germany. Large numbers of Italian prisoners appeared in the German empire after the Italian front collapsed as a result of the Battle of Caporetto in September 1917. With the Russian collapse in November 1917 and the subsequent signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918, the Germans began to repatriate Russian POW's. By the Armistice of November 1918, there were still almost half a million Russian prisoners in the *Reich*. These men remained in German prison camps during the immediate post-war period by Allied demand, to prevent their conscription into the Red Army. The last

prisoners of war did not leave Germany until 1921.

This huge influx of Allied POW's caught the Germans unprepared and placed a tremendous burden on the German war economy. Initially, the Germans sent prisoners to fortresses or revised existing military bases (such as Köln, Magdeburg, and Königstein). As Entente POW's continued to arrive and new recruits needed training bases, the Germans constructed brand new facilities to house Allied prisoners. The Germans established different types of prison camps on a functional basis. Prisoners arriving from the various fronts passed through *Durchgangslagern* (transit prison camps) and were sent into the interior of the empire. The Germans assigned the POW's to *Stammlagern* (parent prison camps), large facilities that housed tens of thousands of prisoners. By the end of 1915, these *Stammlagern* exceeded their full capacity on paper as the Germans assigned large numbers of Allied prisoners in prison camps to *Arbeitskommandos* (labor detachments) to work on farms, in factories, and in mines in support of the German economy. The Germans also operated specialized prison camps, such as *Strafenlager* (punishment camps) in a policy of reprisal to deter Allied governments from certain actions. At the other end of the spectrum, the Germans developed propaganda camps, *Sonderlagern*, which offered better conditions for favored POW population groups, especially nationalities that might support the Central Power cause during and after the war. In addition, the Germans administered *Heimkehrlagern* (repatriation camps) for sick, wounded, or exchanged prisoners who were about to be transferred to a neutral country for internment or returned home.

The Imperial German Army established and maintained 165 parent prison camps (*Stammlagern*) and over 120 secondary POW facilities during the war. Allied war prisoners were transported by rail to prison camps located in 24 army corps districts in Prussia, Saxony, Wuerttemberg, and Bavaria (these German states maintained independent Ministries of War before and during the conflict). These districts and their headquarters included:

Garde de Corps	Berlin
I Army Corps	Koenigsberg
II Army Corps	Stettin
III Army Corps	Berlin
IV Army Corps	Magdeburg
V Army Corps	Posen
VI Army Corps	Breslau
VII Army Corps	Muenster
VIII Army Corps	Coblentz
IX Army Corps	Altona
X Army Corps	Hannover
XI Army Corps	Cassel
XII Army Corps (I Royal Saxon Corps)	Dresden
XIII Army Corps (Royal Wuerttemberger Corps)	Stuttgart
XIV Army Corps	Carlsruhe
XV Army Corps	Strasburg in Elsass
XVI Army Corps	Metz
XVII Army Corps	Danzig
XVIII Army Corps	Frankfurt-am-Main
XIX (II Royal Saxon Corps)	Leipzig
XX Army Corps	Allenstein

XXI Army Corps

Saarbruecken

IB (I Royal Bavarian Corps)

Muenchen

IIB (II Royal Bavarian Corps)

Wuerzburg

IIIB (III Royal Bavarian Corps)

Nuernberg

Entente POW's were assigned to prison facilities that were located in all of these army corps districts with the exception of the I and XX Army Corps Districts (which were located in East Prussia and German Lorraine, areas close to heavy fighting).

The German government also maintained internment camps during World War I for enemy aliens. These facilities were not operated by the Ministry of War but came under the supervision of the Ministry of the Interior. After the British government began imprisoning German subjects living in the Commonwealth, the Germans retaliated by sending British and colonial subjects to internment camps. The Germans also incarcerated leading French and Belgian notables as hostages to prevent guerilla or obstructionist activities in these occupied territories. When threats to German security emerged, these hostages were sent to punishment camps in the east.

The repatriation process from German prison camps began in March 1918 after the Russians signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with the Central Powers. Russian, Romanian, and Polish prisoners were technically released but the Germans prioritized the transportation of troops from the Eastern Front to the Western Front rather than Russian prisoners returning home. With the signing of the German Armistice on 11 November 1918, British, French, American, Belgian, Italian, and Eastern European prisoners received their freedom from captivity. The last of these troops left Germany via seaports in the Netherlands and Denmark or south through Switzerland by February 1919. The situation for Russian POW's remained tenuous; the Allies demanded that the new Weimar Republic prevent the repatriation of these troops due to the Russian Civil War. Many of the repatriated POW's were drafted by the Red Army to augment the Bolshevik forces. The fighting also undermined transportation between Germany and Russia. Between 1918 and 1921, the Germans maintained 40 prison camps for Russian POW's. The populations in these camps swelled in 1920 when Red Army troops crossed the border into East Prussia as a result of the Polish counter-offensive during the Polish-Russian War to avoid capture by the Poles. This infusion of new Russian POW's brought Bolshevism into German prison camps which undermined prisoner morale. With the end of the fighting in Poland by 1921, the Germans dispatched Russian POW's from seaports such as Stettin and Danzig to Estonia.

### **German Prison Camps--Operations**

Prison camps varied greatly in size, especially during the early months of the conflict as Allied POW's poured into the Reich. Eventually the Ministry of War standardized the system of housing and organization through its Prisoner of War Department, under the command of General Friedrich. At the beginning of the war, Friedrich held the rank of colonel, but as the scale of POW operations increased, he was promoted to the rank of major general. This reflected the responsibility he held in terms of housing,

feeding, transporting, and securing huge numbers of Entente prisoners.

While camps were not uniform in construction, the Germans built most frequently two general types of barracks. The most common was a one-story wooden barrack, with a tar paper roof, and lots of windows for ventilation. The second type of barrack was built partially underground and was referred to as earthen barracks. This took advantage of the insulation provided by the ground, but suffered from ventilation problems. Most barracks accommodated about 250 prisoners. The Germans installed wood stoves to heat the dormitories and most had electric lighting. Each prisoner had his own bunk and received a straw sack, to serve as a mattress, and a blanket. The Germans equipped barracks with running water for washing and drinking. Prison camps also had a common bathhouse, which included showers and bath tubs, and a common laundry building.

Security was a high priority for German military authorities. The Germans enclosed new prison camps with double barbed-wire fences eight feet high. Sometimes these fences were electrified to deter prisoners from scaling the wires. Fences stood about five feet apart and German guards, often accompanied by dogs, conducted sentry duty between the wires. In addition, German soldiers maintained security from guard towers equipped with search lights. Some camps featured a defensive position inside prison camps which included artillery pieces and machine guns to put down any potential rioting inside the facility. In the early years of the war, the vast majority of guards in prison camps were *Landsturm* members (the third tier of the German military personnel after active duty and reserve troops). The officers in command of prison camps were often retired and had returned to service or were badly wounded in combat. As the war dragged on and the number of Allied prisoners increased, the Germans utilized women as guards and trust-worthy Russians after the Russian Armistice in December 1917.

Camp administration was extremely complex due to the large numbers of POW's and the various languages they spoke. Each camp had a POW Record Office which kept track of the troops incarcerated in the facility. This office maintained correspondence with the International Red Cross in Geneva to convey information regarding the location, health, or death of POW's, information that was then forwarded to Allied governments and the war prisoners' families. The Censorship Office inspected incoming parcels and letters and outgoing POW mail to make sure that the prisoners did not receive contraband (war news, propaganda, weapons, maps, or other material that would aid escapes or sabotage the economy). Censors monitored outgoing mail for espionage reports or other subversive material. Prison camp authorities also engaged translators to allow German guards to communicate with their charges. Other services included medical care, banking, and fire safety, which will be addressed below.

German military officials maintained the infrastructure of prison camps, which grew to the size of small cities. Installations often featured generators to produce electricity and boilers to provide another source of power. To maintain a healthy camp, the Germans constructed water systems that tied into municipal systems or pumped ground water. Transportation was another major concern and most prison camps were located on railway lines. Trains brought Allied POW's to prison camps as well as food, construction material, parcels, and other supplies. Some of the larger prison facilities had narrow gauge railway systems inside of the camps to help move men and materials.

## Austro-Hungarian Prison Camps

During World War I, Austria-Hungary incarcerated over one million Allied prisoners of war. Most came from Russia, but Serbian, Italian, and Romanian POW's were also well represented. The majority of prisoners, over 830,000, held by the Dual Monarchy spent the war in Austrian prisons. The Hungarians incarcerated a much smaller number, less than 220,000 captives. The Austro-Hungarians received their first large influx of Russian prisoners during the first year of the war during campaigns in Russian Poland and the Carpathian Front. Russian POW's continued to flow into Austro-Hungarian prisons as the Central Powers advanced along the Eastern Front until the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918 ended the fighting in Russia. Serbian POW's flooded Dual Monarchy prison camps after the successful Austro-German-Bulgarian offensive against Serbia in October 1915. The Italians declared war on Italy in May 1915 and fighting ensued in the Alps. Although the Italians mounted a number of offensives on Isonzo Front, the Austro-Hungarians dominated the peaks and there was little movement in the lines and few POW's captured. This situation changed when an Austro-German offensive netted approximately 300,000 Italian prisoners of war as a result of the Battle of Caporetto in October 1917. Austro-German forces broke out of their alpine redoubts and advanced to the Piave River in northeastern Italy. The relatively small number of casualties and large numbers of surrenders convinced Italian officials that treason was involved in the Italian Army collapse and the government radically reduced the delivery of food parcels to Italian POW's. The Romanian government's decision to declare war on Austria-Hungary in August 1916 resulted in large numbers of Romanian prisoners of war falling into Dual Monarchy hands by December 1916 when the Germans, Austro-Hungarians, and Bulgarians occupied Wallachia.

Compared to prison camps in other countries, the Austro-Hungarians established large military prison facilities on the concentration camp model. These prisons were much larger in size than German *Stammlagern*, holding from 40,000 to almost 100,000 prisoners, and the Ministry of War designed these facilities with economies of scale in mind. The Austro-Hungarian Ministry of War constructed most of their military prison camps from scratch, utilizing POW labor to build the facilities (with the exception of camps in the 3rd Army Corps district in Upper Austria, which were established in reserve hospitals and troop barrack facilities). They established the majority of these prison camps near major railway lines, which supported easier transportation of prisoners and supplies.

As in Germany, the *Kriegsministerium*, or Ministry of War, supervised the operation of military prison camps, while the *Innenministerium*, or Ministry of the Interior, administered the civilian internment camps. For the most part, the civilian internment camps were much smaller in size in relation to military prison camps and the imperial authorities tended to set up civilian prisons in castles or barracks constructed before the war. Civilian internment camps greatly outnumbered military prison camps and included a wide range of facilities including work camps, quarantine stations, punishment stations, confinement stations, as well as large prison camps. Dual Monarchy officials incarcerated enemy aliens in internment camps for the duration of the war.

In the Dual Monarchy, the military operated two prison camp systems: one for Austria and the other for Hungary. Since Austria had the greatest number of Allied POW's, the Austrians also operated a larger number of military prison camps. The Austrians maintained 28 principle prison camps, *Stammlagern*, in five army corps districts. These facilities were located in Lower Austria (Niederösterreich) in the II Army Corps district (Vienna); in Upper Austria (Oberösterreich) in the III Army Corps district (Graz); in southern Bohemia in the VIII Army Corps district (Prague); in northern Bohemia in the IX Army Corps district (Leitmenitz); and in Salzburg and the Tyrol in the XIV Army Corps district (Innsbrück). Camp commanders reported directly to the army corps commander in his district regarding camp operations and administration. With a smaller number of prisoners, there were eleven *Stammlagern* in Hungary. Most of these principle prison camps were located in the IV, V, and VI Army Corps districts, with one in the VII Army Corps region. Unlike Austrian officers, all Hungarian prison camp commandants reported to the same headquarters at the V Army Corps at Pozsony (Pressburg).

There were also political ramifications for POW's in the Dual Monarchy during the war. The Austro-Hungarian government immediately interned a considerable number of Polish and Czech civilians whom the government considered political liabilities in an attempt to quell nationalist aspirations among the subject peoples of the empire. Simultaneously, the Austrians supported the formation of the Polish Legion, under Marshal Jozef Pilsudski. These Polish volunteers fought for the independence of Russian Poland and the reestablishment of an independent Polish state. After it became clear that the Germans and Austro-Hungarians planned to set up a protectorate in Poland through the Regency Council in Warsaw in 1916, Pilsudski and most of the Polish Legion refused to take the oath of allegiance to the new Polish government. In response, the Germans and Austrians incarcerated Pilsudski and these legionnaires in prison camps. The Dual Monarchy also set up special propaganda camps for Russian POW's from the Ukraine and Georgia which provided these prisoners with better food and living conditions. Included in this propaganda program was instruction in Ukrainian and Georgian, an education policy banned by the imperial Russian government. The Austro-Hungarians had post-war imperial aspirations for these tsarist lands and the first step in this policy was to win the hearts and minds of these POW's in support of Hapsburg goals. At the other extreme of POW treatment, the Austro-Hungarians did not hesitate to execute minorities who had defected to the Allies in support of nationalist objectives. The Dual Monarchy held courts martial on the Italian and Eastern Fronts to try captured members of the Czechoslovak Legion and other national armies which generally resulted in executions.

### **Bulgarian Prison Camps**

The Kingdom of Bulgaria joined the Central Powers in October 1915 after the British failed to seize control of the Dardanelles and the Germans and Austro-Hungarians forced the Russians to retreat from Poland. Bulgaria was a war-weary nation when it entered the Great War. The Bulgarians had fought in the First Balkan War of 1912-1913 and lost the Second Balkan War of 1913. Wartime conditions in the kingdom were grim during the First World War, which undermined the Bulgarian government's ability to care for Allied prisoners of war. The Bulgarians captured their first large group of

prisoners in October 1915, when the Bulgarians invaded Serbia and seized Serbian Macedonia. The Bulgarians took thousands of Serbian prisoners, as well as small numbers of British, French, Italian, and Greek POW's when Bulgarian forces seized part of Greek Eastern Macedonia during the campaign. The Saloniki Front stabilized and the Bulgarians instituted a military government in the Serbian-occupied territory. The Bulgarian Army took the offensive again in September 1916, after Romania declared war on Austria-Hungary and launched a failed offensive in Transylvania. The Bulgarians seized southern Dobrudja and captured a large number of Romanian and some Russian prisoners of war.

In response to the large numbers of Allied prisoners that fell into Bulgarian hands, the Ministry of War established a POW system with limited resources. The Bulgarians established their largest prison camps in Sofia, Sliven, Philippopolis, and Haskovo, as well as smaller working camps across the kingdom. They also set up civilian internment camps in Sofia and Rakhovo and military prison camps in occupied Serbia, including Nish and Struga.

Conditions for Entente POW's in the kingdom were challenging due to the country's economic situation. When the World's Alliance of YMCA's and the International Committee of the American YMCA offered to establish War Prisoners' Aid (WPA) programs in Bulgaria for Allied prisoners, the Bulgarian government readily accepted the offer. The American YMCA paid for the construction of Association huts and rooms in the principle prison camps and sent a few secretaries while the World's Alliance set up the WPA headquarters in Sofia and provided the bulk of the secretarial manpower for the operation.

In September 1918, the Allied forces in Saloniki launched a major offensive into southern Bulgaria and overwhelmed the Bulgarian Army. The Allies quickly occupied most of the kingdom and advanced into Serbia. With the collapse of the army, the Bulgarian government signed an armistice on September 29, 1918, which liberated Allied prisoners in Bulgarian POW camps.

### **Turkish Prison Camps**

Allied prisoners incarcerated in the Ottoman Empire during World War I experienced a wide range of treatment. Post-war investigations revealed abysmal conditions which Entente soldiers faced due to neglect and abuse by their Turkish captors. After the British Army surrendered at Kut-al-Amara in April 1916, the Turks marched British and Indian prisoners across the Syrian Desert without food, water, and access to shelter. Thousands of POW's died as a result of inadequate medical care. The British government attempted to ransom their troops, but Ottoman authorities saw greater propaganda value in having British prisoners imprisoned in the empire. Allied prisoners also experienced a remarkably liberal POW policy in which prisoners had relatively free access and even held supervisory positions in railroad construction projects.

The Ottoman Empire entered World War I in November 1914 after a series of negotiations with the Central Powers. The Turks fought four major campaigns during the war. On the Caucasian Front, the Turkish Army fought against the Russians and struggled for control of Armenia. While the Russian Army gradually advanced south into Turkish territory, the Bolshevik Revolution resulted in the collapse of the Russian offensive. In response, the Ottomans advanced and drove deep into Russian Caucasia in



the Fall of 1918. The Turks acquired a considerable number of Russian prisoners of war throughout this campaign. The second front focused on control of the Turkish Straits and the Allied goal of establishing a secure supply route to the Russian Black Sea ports. In February 1915, Allied naval units bombarded the Gallipoli peninsula and British, Australian, and New Zealand troops landed in April. The Allied troops were unable to advance off the beaches and trench warfare resulted. By January 1916, the British decided to evacuate the Dardanelles and evacuated their forces. Despite the heavy fighting, the Turks took relatively very few Entente prisoners during the campaign. The Palestinian Front was the third major area of combat operations for the Turks. In January 1915, the Ottomans launched an invasion across the Sinai Peninsula towards Egypt to gain control of the Suez Canal. The British forced the Turks to withdraw and immediately bolstered their defenses in this strategic region. Supported by the Arab revolt, which began in June 1916, the British slowly moved east and captured Gaza in November 1917. The British, under General Sir Edmund Allenby, then struck north capturing Jerusalem in December. The British and Arabs advanced north reaching Aleppo in Syria in October 1918, when the Turks signed their armistice. The fourth campaign involving the Ottomans was fought in Mesopotamia. The British landed forces from India at the head of the Persian Gulf in November 1914 to protect their oil interests in Abadan, Persia and marched north to capture Basra within a month. An Anglo-Indian army, under General Charles Townshend, began their advance along the Tigris River from Basra in May 1915. By November, they had reached Ctesiphon, just outside of Baghdad, and encountered stiff Turkish resistance. Suffering 8,500 casualties at Ctesiphon, the British retreated to Kut-al-Amara, where more than 30,000 Turks surrounded the city and began a siege. Facing starvation, General Townshend surrendered in April 1916 and the Ottomans achieved a major victory, which included the capture of a large number of British and Indian prisoners. The British launched a second offensive in Mesopotamia, under General F.S. Maude, recapturing Kut-al-Amara in February 1917 and seizing Baghdad in March. The British continued to advance up the Tigris River and reached oil-rich Mosul in northern Mesopotamia in November 1918, when fighting in the Near East ended.

Unlike the Germans and the Austro-Hungarians, the Turks did not establish many large concentration-style prison camps. They chose instead to house their prisoners of war in houses and buildings in Turkish towns. They often incarcerated Entente POW's in the Armenian Quarters of towns, where they were vacancies due to the Turkish genocide program (see below). The Turks did take advantage of Allied POW labor during the war. The Ottomans established working camps and detailed Entente prisoners to railroad construction projects, especially through the Cilician Mountains and in eastern Syria. These railroad lines were strategic lines of communications which supported Turkish military operations on the Mesopotamian and Palestinian Fronts. The Turks did not place the same emphasis on sanitation in prison camps as their Teutonic allies and outbreaks of dysentery, cholera, and typhus raged through Ottoman prison camps.

The Turks interned Allied enemy aliens in the Ottoman Empire late in 1914. When Allied warships threatened to bombard coastal Turkish towns, the Ottomans replied by threatening to deploy Entente civilians in these areas as hostages. The Turks issued a similar warning during the Gallipoli

campaign. The greatest abuse of civilians began in the Spring of 1915, when the Turks began the systematic annihilation of Armenians within the empire. After Turkish losses to the Russians in eastern Anatolia in December 1914, the Ottomans accused the Armenians of assisting the Russians. In April 1915, the Turks rounded up tens of thousands of Armenian men and shot them. While approximately 250,000 Armenians escaped to Russian Caucasia, the Ottomans killed between 500,000 to one million Armenians (estimates place the actual number close to 800,000). While the Turks killed many civilians outright, their policy was to march Armenians south through waste lands without access to food, water, or shelter towards Syria and Mesopotamia. Most of the Armenians died of starvation, exhaustion, exposure, or disease. German missionaries and Italian, Vatican, and Greek consular officials reported on the atrocities and Britain, Russia, and France issued a joint declaration on 24 May 1915 condemning the Armenian massacre. Even the German ambassador, Baron von Wangenheim, issued a formal protest to the Sultan's government in August 1915, condemning the policy. The Turks finally ended their Armenian campaign in the Summer of 1915, but Turkish soldiers continued to kill Armenians with impunity for the rest of the war.

### **CAPTURE**

The Central Powers captured several million Allied prisoners of war during the four years of the Great War. Large numbers of men became wards of the German state during massive offensives. The Germans acquired French, British, and Belgian POW's during the Summer Offensive of 1914 on the Western Front in the implementation of the von Schlieffen Plan; a Russian army during the Battle of Tannenberg in East Prussia in October 1914; a considerable number of Serbians during the invasion of that kingdom in October 1915; a large group of Romanians during the invasion of Wallachia and Dobrudja in November 1916; and an impressive number of Italians as a result of the Battle of Caporetto in northern Italy in October 1917. Another massive influx of British, French, Belgian, and American troops flooded the Reich from March to June 1918 as the Germans conducted the Ludendorff Offensive on the Western Front.

Entente troops became war prisoners as the result of getting caught during general retreats or as individual POW's as the result of German trench raids or cavalry patrols. Both the wounded and sick fell into German hands during military encounters. Once captured, the Germans congregated Allied prisoners at prisoner collection points behind the front lines. They sent wounded prisoners to first aid stations for immediate treatment, receiving the same service as wounded German soldiers, and then to field hospitals for medical care. Once on the road to recovery, the Germans transferred Allied patients to reserve hospitals, some of which were dedicated to Entente prisoners. The Germans would assign healthy prisoners to labor detachments to work in the immediate rear area but sent most POW's by rail to prison camps in Germany. Entering the *Reich*, most prisoners arrived at a *Durchgangslager* (transit camp) and eventually moved to a final assignment to a *Stammlager* (parent camp).

Although Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia on 28 July 1914, in response to Serbian participation in the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the Danubian Front became a relatively quiet sector for the first year of the war after the Austro-Hungarians failed in their first attempts to invade the small kingdom. The Austro-Hungarians were tied down fighting the Russians on the Carpathian Front and the Italians on the Isonzo Front. Dual Monarchy forces made a half-hearted attempt to invade Serbia in December 1914, which the Serbian army repulsed. By October 1915, the situation on the Danubian Front changed dramatically. The Germans and Austro-Hungarians staged several armies on Serbia's northern and western frontiers and Bulgaria, which joined the Central Power alliance in September 1915, mobilized on Serbia's eastern border. The Central Powers prepared to envelope the kingdom of Serbia from three sides. On October 7th, German Field Marshal August von Mackensen ordered the attack to begin. German forces captured the capital, Belgrade, two days later and Austro-German forces broke through the Serbian lines in the north. Simultaneously, two Bulgarian armies invaded Serbian Macedonia in the east. The Serbian Army fought its way south in a general retreat as the Austro-Hungarian and German armies seized northern and central Serbia and Montenegro. The British and French landed forces in Salonika in Greece in October to assist the Serbians, but the Allies withdrew to Greek territory by November. The Serbian Army and civilian refugees faced terrible conditions during the retreat, lacking food and supplies and facing difficult winter conditions. Civilians carried their possessions in wagons with the army train. The Serbs faced starvation, disease, and exhaustion as they fled through mountain passes through Albania to the Adriatic coast. Allied warships evacuated the last remnants of the Serbian Army from Durazzo by February 1916 to the island of Corfu.

Following the German model, the Austro-Hungarians captured large numbers of Russian, Serbian, Montenegrin, Romanian, and Italian POW's during large scale offensive operations. Individual war prisoners were more likely to be seized by cavalry patrols during scouting missions, due to the fluid movement of the Eastern Front, rather than through trench raids. Wounded prisoners received first aid on the battlefield and then traveled to military hospitals for treatment. Due to the plethora of infectious diseases that infested Russian troops, the Austro-Hungarians often captured sick POW's who had to be quarantined to prevent the spread of an epidemic in a crowded prison camp.

Upon arrival at a prison camp in either Germany or Austria-Hungary, camp officials identified POW in their Record Offices and contacted the International Red Cross. War prisoners were immediately disinfected: their clothing was fumigated and cleaned, soldiers were sent to baths or showers, and hair was cut in the delousing process. Prisoners with inadequate uniforms received new clothing after the sanitation process. The POW's then received medical exams and vaccinations; many were sent to isolated quarantine camps to determine if they carried any diseases and to start treatment. War prisoners also surrendered any money they carried and received prison camp script in receipt. At this point, they began their captivity in Central Power prison camps.

## **CAMP ORDER AND OPERATIONS**

### **German Prison Camps**

Based on military experience since the end of the Napoleonic wars, both Central Power and Allied commanders anticipated a short war in August 1914. None of the Great Powers were prepared for the large numbers of prisoners of war both sides would amass during the conflict. In Germany alone, the number of Allied prisoners exceeded the populations of most German states, with the exceptions of Prussia, Bavaria, and Saxony. The belligerents became responsible for the care and welfare of prisoners in prison camps which grew to the size of small cities. In order to feed, house, and clothe such large numbers of men on a daily basis, German administrators had to develop a POW system which provided critical services such as housing, diet and nutrition, sanitation and hygiene, and general safety.

After passing through the initial medical inspection and delousing process, each prisoner received an identification number, which the POW's painted or sewed on their uniforms. Different camps used different symbols to identify war prisoners from bands around their arms, distinctive marks on their breast tunics, and/or badges on their caps. The Germans organized the POW ranks on a military basis. Allied non-commissioned officers assumed responsibility for discipline of enlisted men and reported to German officers. By implementing a system of self-government within the prison compound, the Germans were able to reduce the number of guards and officers required to secure these facilities. Later in the war, the Germans developed a trustee system, in which trusted prisoners, usually Russian POW's after the Russian Armistice in December 1917, assumed supervisory and limited guard roles and hired women to augment the prison guard. The large number of Allied prisoners in Germany placed a serious drain on German manpower to ensure prison security.

Adequate housing was a major concern for the care of prisoners. The Germans assigned the first Allied prisoners to vacant barracks and caserns, but as the war dragged on, German commanders realized that such facilities would be needed to support military training for new recruits. The Germans then constructed new prison installations using POW labor to build the barracks, support, and administrative buildings. Prisoners lived in tents while this construction proceeded, a practice that led to protests from Entente governments. The Germans generally erected two types of barracks: one story wooden quarters and earthen barracks. The Germans built earthen barracks in eastern Germany, where the winters were more severe and these types of buildings were better suited for the climate. The Allies protested against the use of this type of building, which they considered unhealthy. Because of the crowded conditions enlisted men encountered in barracks, architects emphasized proper ventilation to prevent the outbreak of communicable diseases. Such ventilation led to drafty quarters in the winter, although most barracks were equipped with stoves. Enlisted men often lived in crammed accommodations, sometimes in two-tiered or even three-tiered bunk bed systems. Non-commissioned officers generally enjoyed better housing, often sharing individual rooms with other NCO's, and officers had the best facilities. Junior officers had to share rooms but senior officers had their own accommodations. Officers had orderlies from the enlisted POW ranks to attend to their needs and had

access to game rooms and sport facilities. They also dined on white tablecloths with silverware in comfortable dining rooms.

The population of prison camps in Germany reflected the vast array of nationalities the Central Powers faced during World War I. Despite protests from the Western Allied nations, the Germans adopted a policy early in the war of integrating camps with different nationalities (the Western powers argued that Russian, Serbian, and Romanian prisoners should be segregated in different camps because they were more likely to carry communicable diseases). While a small number of prison camps held prisoners from only one country, most held sizeable Russian, French, British, Italian, Serbian, and Romanian populations. The Germans used photographs of these diverse groups as propaganda tools to emphasize the Entente's reliance on colonial and subject peoples to fight their battles, in spite of their claims that they were defending democracy, and to instill pride in Germans in their fight against most of the world.

### **Austro-Hungarian Prison Camps**

The administration and support of over one million Allied prisoners of war caught Austro-Hungarian authorities unprepared in the Great War. Military planners did not foresee the empire's ultimatum to Serbia as the spark that set off a world war, which would last for four long years. The imperial government became responsible for the care and welfare of Allied prisoners in camps which grew to huge dimensions. To feed, house, and clothe such large numbers of men on a daily basis, Austro-Hungarian administrators had to develop a POW system which provided critical services such as housing, feeding, sanitation and hygiene, medical care, and security.

Adequate housing and shelter was a major concern for POW operations. The Austro-Hungarians adopted a concentration camp system where they assigned large numbers of prisoners of war in a relatively small number of prison camps. They used POW labor to construct these facilities and supporting facilities, such as kitchens, laundries, bath houses, hospital wards (lazarettos), guard barracks, steam plants, and administration buildings. Diet and nutrition were top priorities for prison camp administrators. The Austro-Hungarians located prison camps on railway lines, which eased the transportation newly captured prisoners and supplies to prison facilities. The care and good treatment of Allied POW's was a major drain on the war economy of the Dual Monarchy.

### **Bulgarian Prison Camps**

The majority of prisoners of war incarcerated in Bulgaria during World War I were Serbian and Romanian POW's captured during the campaigns against those kingdoms in 1915 and 1916. The Bulgarians also interned enemy aliens in prison camps and acquired relatively small numbers of British and French prisoners of war during fighting on the Saloniki Front. After fighting in the First and Second Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, the Bulgarians had limited resources to support prisoners of war. Like the other Central Power governments, the Bulgarians assigned Allied prisoners to labor detachments, especially in agricultural and transportation work, to help support the war economy and reduce the burden

these POW's placed on national resources.

### **Turkish Prison Camps**

The Turkish prison camp system was not up to European standards in most ways. Captured Allied soldiers had to march across deserts and mountains with inadequate preparations for food and water. Wounded POW's received minimal medical care for their wounds. War prisoners often had to purchase their meals from local inhabitants during their trek to prison camps. Soldiers that were wounded, sick, or weak from lack of food and water often fell by the wayside and received care from the native Arabs. Due to the limited transportation network, which was under development before the war, Entente prisoners rarely traveled by rail.

The Turks assigned enlisted men to crowded barracks in towns, usually in the vacant Armenian Quarter. Some of these POW's went on labor detachments to work on various projects, including road or rail construction. Many lacked suitable clothing for the winter months of Anatolia, especially if they had been captured in the desert fighting of the Mesopotamian or Sinai/Palestine campaigns. Officers received much better treatment under Turkish rule. Their quarters were less crowded and they had access to better amenities of life. Often Turkish security was not too stringent due to the isolation of the prison camps and the adverse climatic conditions. Senior officers lived like sultans in luxurious accommodations. Historically, captives under Ottoman control did not receive outstanding treatment.

## **NUTRITION IN CENTRAL POWER PRISON CAMPS**

### **German Prison Camps**

In terms of nutrition, the Germans sought to provide enough healthy food to keep prisoners in good physical shape. The Allied blockade of the North Sea and English Channel placed a tremendous strain on German food supplies and the Germans gradually reduced daily rations in prison camps over the course of the war. By 1914, the Reich had become a net food importing country and relied on manufactured exports to obtain foreign foods. The Germans, however, provided POW's with the same level of rations provided to German troops and civilians, as required by the Hague Conventions. The *Kriegsministerium* took a scientific approach to prisoner diets. The command held conferences on nutrition for prison camp officers beginning in 1915 and developed nutritional guidelines and recipes based on scientific research. With the large number of prisoners in camps, cooks had to resort to mass food production, primarily soup, but also recognized that palates varied tremendously between nationalities and strived to meet those needs where possible. Food was cooked in steam cookers, similar to systems found on ships, in a central kitchen in most camps. Normally, a chief German cook supervised meal preparation with the assistance of Allied prisoners. Allied officers then tested the food for quality and quantity before distributing rations to the men. POW's then marched to the central kitchen for their individual meals or prisoners received their food in small kettles in the camp kitchen and distributed to the men inside their barracks.

Diet and nutrition became top priorities for prison camp administrators. The Germans assigned prisoners to work in the camp kitchens, bakery, warehouses, and canteens to prepare three meals every day for all of the POW's in a prison camp. Prisoners baked bread for the camp population, cooked meals, slaughtered and butchered animals, and maintained warehouses as part of daily prison camp operations. The POW's raised their own chickens, rabbits, pigs, and sheep to increase their protein diets. Most war prisoners grew vegetables in gardens to add variety to their rations during the spring and summer months. Social organizations, such as the American YMCA, provided seed stocks to help POW's start their gardens. During the fall, prisoners stocked away potatoes, carrots, apples, and other fruits and vegetables in warehouses for use during the long winter months. POW's often formed their own messes in which members shared their German rations, home grown vegetables and eggs, and food parcels from home.

Most prison camps were located on railway lines, which made it easy for the Germans to transport prisoners and supplies to camps. Under the Hague Agreements, captors provided their prisoners of war with the same rations the soldiers in that army received. This effort was undermined by the effectiveness of the Allied Blockade, which had a tremendous impact on the German war economy. The blockade reduced food imports into Germany to a trickle, which significantly reduced food rations for everyone in Germany, including prisoners of war. During the first year of the war, the Germans regularly published menus of the meals served in prison camps. As food supplies declined, the Germans reduced rations for both POW's and civilians. By August 1917, the German command gave up coordinating a national dietary program for German prison camps and decreed that Allied POW's would receive the same rations as civilians in their local districts (*Bezirke*). At the beginning of the war, the Germans established and maintained canteens where prisoners could purchase additional food and drinks with the money they received from their homes or governments or earned as wages on labor detachments. POW's could purchase additional food, tobacco, and clothing, and in some camps featured restaurants where prisoners could order meals a la carte. Local businessmen or farmers often ran these stores but food supplies declined as the war progressed and German food production was redirected to supporting military operations. While canteens remained open during the war, their food supplies disappeared as a result of the blockade.

Access to food parcels were important in improving prisoners' living standards. British, French, Belgian, and American POW's had regular access to food parcel deliveries, which improved their general health and normally exceeded the rations received by German guards. Various private charities tasked specifically to aid Allied prisoners emerged in Britain, France, Russia, and the U.S. to provide food parcels and clothing relief. The major food suppliers who regularly sent packages on a bi-weekly basis included the British Red and Order of St. John, the Australian Red Cross, the Canadian Red Cross, and the American Red Cross. The British Red Cross set up a special British POW Commission that established a food production system in Great Britain and Ireland, a relief distribution center in Rotterdam, and bakeries in Copenhagen and Berne. On the other hand, Russian, Serbian, Romanian, and Italian prisoners did not receive food parcels from their home governments, a situation reflected by the political

and military situations of these countries, and their quality of living was far lower in comparison to their Western allies. Despite the ravages of the Allied Blockade, the vast majority of POW's in German prison camps survived their captivity (approximately 96 percent, including the sick and wounded) and returned home after the war.

### **Austro-Hungarian Prison Camps**

Dual Monarchy prison officials faced the same challenges as their German counterparts. The feeding of over a million Entente POW's three times daily was a daunting process. Each prison camp had its own kitchen, bakery, butcher shop, and warehouses to provide rations to war prisoners. Camp officers utilized prison labor to cook, bake, slaughter, and stock food rations. Like Allied POW's in Germany, prisoners in the Dual Monarchy practiced husbandry and planted gardens to augment their increasingly meager diets. The Austro-Hungarians also established prison camps close to rail lines to transport food and supplies to facilities across the empire.

As a signatory state to the Hague Conventions, the Austro-Hungarians provided their prisoners of war with the same rations their troops received. Due to the Allied Blockade of the southern Adriatic, the Dual Monarchy lost access to most of its foreign trade, which included food imports. Allied prisoners in Austria felt the adverse effects of the blockade as imperial authorities reduced food rations as the war progressed. As the war wore on, rations fell in Austria, the industrial center of the empire, as food supplies dwindled. Prisoners in Hungary, however, faced a better food situation since they had greater access to labor detachments working on farms. The arrival of food parcels was important in improving prisoners' living standards.

Food conditions varied widely in Dual Monarchy prison camps. American, British, and French POW's in Austria-Hungary received generous food and clothing assistance from Western sources during the war and few suffered from lack of aid. Prisoners from Russia, Serbia, and Romania, on the other hand, rarely received food parcels from home. Most of Serbia and Romania was occupied by Central Power forces and the Russians lacked the resources to send substantial aid to POW's in the Dual Monarchy. Italian prisoners were a special case. The Italian government supported the shipment of food parcels to prisoners in Austro-Hungarian prison camps until the Caporetto disaster in September 1917. Italian authorities determined that many of the POW's captured in this battle were deserters and ineligible for physical relief. As a result, the Italians reduced food shipments to Austria-Hungary to the detriment of Italian prisoners in central Europe.

### **FIRE SAFETY AND PREVENTION**

Safety was a critical concern in prison camps and fire was the greatest hazard. A fire in a crowded barrack could kill hundreds of men. Prisoners were not permitted to smoke or cook inside their barracks and most of the support buildings. When stoves were lighted in the barracks in the winter, POW's were allowed to boil water for tea or coffee indoors. As a result, it was common practice for Western POW's to cook the contents of their food parcels outside on grills. The camp administration



formed camp fire brigades, usually composed of prisoners, but sometimes staffed by guards. These fire brigades had access to ladders, fire engines, hoses, and safety chutes. The POW's practiced fire escape drills and with the fire-fighting equipment on a regular basis to fight fires.

## **WELFARE SERVICES FOR ENTENTE POW'S**

### **German POW Camps**

As discussed above, a variety of POW relief organizations arose to address the plight of Allied war prisoners incarcerated in prison camps. The British Red Cross and Order of St. John, the Canadian Red Cross, the Australian Red Cross, and American Red Cross focused on physical relief for interned prisoners through regular shipments of parcels containing food, clothing, and toiletries. These shipments greatly eased the daily lives of Western European and American POW's in German prison camps. For the vast majority of prisoners, food parcels significantly enhanced their diets. Under international parcel post regulations, prisoners could receive parcels that weighed up to 22 and a half pounds. There was no limitation on the number of parcels a prisoner could receive. German camp inspectors had to search for contraband in these parcels, primarily current newspapers with war news, weapons, and alcohol. French and British prisoners received their parcels in six to twelve days, which allowed them to receive fresh fruit, vegetables, eggs, cakes, and other delicacies. The British Red Cross sent British POW's 15-pound food parcels bi-monthly. American prisoners received an abundance of food and clothing supplies through the American Red Cross and from friends and relatives. These 22-pound shipments were organized with different foods, clothing, and toiletries in each of four categories every two weeks. Often British, French, Belgian, and American prisoners ate far better than their German guards, a situation that resulted in a great deal of envy and occasion theft of parcels by the latter. These POW's continued to take their increasingly meager German rations and discarded the meals. While they had sympathy for the malnourished Russian, Italian, and Eastern European prisoners, they dared not share their German rations which would have allowed the Germans to further reduce the prison camp rations. Such action was viewed as aiding the German war effort.

The International Red Cross also played an important role in inspecting the nutritional, sanitary, and medical needs of Entente POW's in Germany. All of the belligerents accepted neutral inspections of prison facilities which resulted in reports to the German and Allied governments. The International Red Cross also maintained an extensive database of Allied prisoners in their record office in Geneva. Deficiencies identified in these reports usually resulted in action to rectify adverse conditions. They facilitated correspondence between prisoners and their families and informed Allied governments of the location and condition of POW's. Due to the limited food supplies in Switzerland, the International Red Cross could not conduct a major food relief program for prisoners in Germany.

Although the primary focus of the German National Red Cross Society was on the treatment and care of wounded and sick German troops, the organization extended as much assistance to Allied POW's as possible. State chapters provided books, musical instruments, and other materials to prison camps in

their regions. The war effort limited the ability of the German Red Cross to provide resources especially as the war continued.

The Vatican also extended aid and spiritual support to Allied prisoners of war in Germany through the efforts of Eugenio Pacelli, the Archbishop of Sardis and future Pope Pius XII. Pope Benedict XV appointed Pacelli the Nuncio of Bavaria in May 1917 (and de facto Nuncio of Germany since there was no papal representation in Prussia) and he directed the Vatican's humanitarian relief efforts for POW's.

Inside prison camps, Allied POW's organized Welfare Committees which became responsible for identifying and assisting destitute war prisoners inside the facility. They maintained lists of needs (clothing, special diets, and toiletries) and contacted that prisoners' home government or Red Cross for assistance. Relief organizations often provided supplies which the Welfare Committees kept in stock to meet emergencies or the immediate needs of recently captured POW's. These committees also held special fund raisers inside the camps to augment their limited budgets. The Welfare Committees became a key tool in distributing aid to needy individuals.

The only welfare organization that sent relief workers directly into prison camps was the Young Men's Christian Association. Shortly after the war broke out, the World's Alliance of YMCA's in Geneva directed national YMCA's to provide relief programs for their young men in arms. Since the British YMCA and the German YMCA were two of the largest organizations, there were few resources available to extend aid to prisoners of war. The American YMCA was the only neutral Association in the conflict and the General Secretary, John R. Mott, dedicated the organization to providing relief work for both Allied and Central Power POW's. Through intense diplomacy conducted by Archibald C. Harte, the American YMCA gained access to prison camps in Germany by February 1915. Facing a long war and lacking the resources to provide services to millions of Allied prisoners of war, the German Ministry of War decided to allow American YMCA to enter prison camps and provide WPA relief to Allied POW's. Under the terms of this agreement, the German military allowed the American YMCA to construct Association halls in prison camps and permit secretaries to conduct social, physical, mental, and spiritual relief to war prisoners. The one proviso was that the American Y would have to establish similar services to German prisoners in Allied nations. Because the Germans integrated their prison camps with POW's from various Entente powers, the Association began a process which became known as the "Diplomacy of Reciprocity" and negotiated access to prison camps in Britain, France, Russia, Austria-Hungary, Italy, Serbia, Japan, and Romania. An agreement with the Ottoman Empire was delayed until the Turks signed their armistice with the Allies.

With ready access to German prison camps, the International Committee of the American YMCA dispatched Red Triangle workers to begin operations. Conrad Hoffman was a member of the "Flying Squadron" which arrived in Europe in the Spring of 1915 and he became the Senior WPA Secretary for Germany. He established WPA headquarters in Berlin and directed the activities of American and neutral secretaries across the German Empire. In the United States, the Association building was the center of the organization's social activities and the Red Triangle building in German prison camps were designed to serve the same purpose. Although the American YMCA constructed a number of halls in German

prison camps, their high cost and limited access convinced Hoffman to adopt a more flexible policy in establishing and extending Association programs in prison camps. WPA secretaries recruited and took advantage of prisoners of war who already had experience in YMCA work. To expand operations, a WPA secretary would enter a prison camp and organize a YMCA committee composed of prisoners with Association experience and special talents (teachers, musicians, athletes, and librarians). The visiting secretary would normally spend about a week helping to organize an Association and provide the necessary supplies (stationery, books, musical instruments, sports equipment, theatrical props, and other equipment). The WPA secretary would then move on to another camp and repeat this process. After setting up the second organization, the WPA worker would return to the first camp to make sure that operations were running smoothly and resupply the YMCA committee. This policy became known as the Principle of Visitation and became the hallmark of YMCA service. It allowed a relatively small number of WPA secretaries to serve a large number of Allied POW's.

By November 1916, the American YMCA had fifteen secretaries serving as Field Secretaries in Germany, plus a support staff in Denmark and Switzerland. The Wilson administration's decision to break diplomatic relations with Germany in February 1917 imperiled the future of WPA operations in the empire. To save the program, the YMCA brokered an agreement with the Ministry of War. Hoffman remained the Senior WPA Secretary in Germany, with free access to prison camps, and neutral Association secretaries, recruited by the World's Alliance of YMCA's would replace the departed American Red Triangle workers. The World's Alliance obtained secretaries from Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland to restore WPA services, but the process was slow. In addition, crises arose during the last year of the war as the German government threatened to shut down WPA operations in response to continued American WPA service to German prisoners of war in Allied countries and John R. Mott's participation in the Root Mission to Russia. With the support of Prince Maximilian of Baden, Harte and Hoffman persuaded the Ministry of War to maintain WPA operations despite these difficulties. Hoffman's decision to remain in Germany was a great asset to American POW's sent to Rastatt and Villingen who received the benefits of YMCA service.

With the signing of the Armistice in November 1918, the American YMCA returned to Germany to resume WPA operations. American WPA workers helped Allied prisoners of war return home in the repatriation process. In addition, Association workers provided services to Russian prisoners of war trapped in Germany by the Russian Civil War and the Allied decision not to repatriate these unfortunates. The Russo-Polish War and internment of Red Army internees in German prison camps led to the infusion of Bolshevism into these facilities. American YMCA secretaries became involved in an ideological war with Bolshevik agitators for the "hearts and minds" of Russian prisoners. As a result, the American YMCA maintained WPA operations in Germany until the last prison camps closed at the end of 1921.

### **Austro-Hungarian Prison Camps**

As in Germany, the British, Canadian, Australian, and American Red Cross Societies conducted food and clothing relief for Allied prisoners and private charities sent aid as well. The International Red

Cross conducted neutral inspections and issued reports on the conditions they observed in the Dual Monarchy. The Austrian Red Cross and Hungarian Red Cross also extended assistance to these war prisoners. The Vatican conducted a major effort to provide relief for Italian POW's in the Dual Monarchy and for Austro-Hungarian prisoners in Italy after the Italians entered the war in 1915.

During World War I, the YMCA succeeded in establishing a full program of War Prisoners' Aid operations for Allied prisoners incarcerated in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Because he had worked to promote the growth of the Austrian YMCA before the war, Christian Phildius, General Secretary of the World's Alliance of YMCA's, visited Vienna early in the war to negotiate access to prisoners of war. While the Ministry of War supported Phildius' plans to establish *Soldatenheime* (Soldiers' Homes) for the welfare of Austro-Hungarian troops, authorities did not grant permission to extend operations in prison camps. This policy changed after Archibald C. Harte, representing the American YMCA, successfully negotiated a WPA agreement with the German government in February 1915. Under the terms of this agreement, the Germans allowed the American YMCA to conduct relief operations with the proviso of this agreement was that similar welfare activities had to be established for German prisoners in Russian prison camps. Harte visited Russia in June 1915 and received similar concessions from the tsarist government for the establishment of WPA operations. The Russians, however, required that the American YMCA set up relief work for Russian POW's in Austro-Hungarian prisons as a stipulation of the agreement. Recognizing that the war would now last far longer than originally anticipated and faced with limited resources, Austro-Hungarian authorities welcomed Harte and readily agreed to open prison camps in Austria and Hungary to Red Triangle secretaries.

With ready access to Austro-Hungarian prison camps, the American YMCA sent secretaries to the Dual Monarchy to set up WPA operations. Edgar MacNaughten became the Senior WPA Secretary and organized his headquarters in Vienna. The Italian entry into the war further complicated WPA operations in Austria-Hungary. Imperial officials demanded that the YMCA set up reciprocal services for Austro-Hungarian prisoners in Italian prison camps. The WPA system faced a potential collapse when the Italians lacked the resources to support the construction of Association halls. Disaster was averted when the American YMCA agreed to finance the operations in Italy and Austro-Hungarian authorities permitted relief work for POW's to continue unabated.

The U.S. declaration of war against Germany in April 1917 seriously undermined relations with the Dual Monarchy. The YMCA decided to withdraw the American WPA Secretaries from Austria-Hungary and the World's Alliance agreed to recruit neutral secretaries from Switzerland, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden to replace the Americans. In July 1917, MacNaughten was the last American secretary to leave and Max Wilhelmi became the new Senior WPA Secretary for the Dual Monarchy. The World's Alliance secretaries resumed and maintained WPA operations but had only limited success in extending relief work to new prison camps. Despite these challenges, the YMCA provided Allied prisoners of war in Austria-Hungary with an important service.

## **Bulgarian Prison Camps**

Christian Phildius, General Secretary of the World's Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations, was successful in opening Bulgarian prison camps to War Prisoners' Aid activities by December 1916. Bulgaria entered the war in October 1915 and joined the Austro-German offensive, which led to the occupation of Serbia. Due to Bulgaria's strapped resources, the result of fighting in the First and Second Balkan Wars in 1912-1913, and the influx of Serbian, and later Romanian, prisoners of war, the Bulgarian government welcomed the World's Alliance's offer to provide WPA relief services to Allied prisoners. The World's Alliance assigned Ernst Sartorius to serve as the Senior WPA Secretary and a number of Swiss secretaries to establish operations. Sartorius organized WPA headquarters in Sofia and, due to the relatively small size of the kingdom, coordinated relief work through monthly meetings with Red Triangle workers. Phildius signed a formal agreement with the Bulgarian government in December 1917 which outlined the rights and responsibilities of the Association in providing aid to Allied POW's in the kingdom.

## **ALLIED POW ENTERTAINMENT**

Prisoners facing an interminable period of incarceration often fell victim to depression or "barbed-wire disease." This depression resulted from the daily monotony of camp life and the stress of indefinite confinement. German and Austro-Hungarian prison camp officials permitted and supported efforts by POW's to provide a wide range of musical and theatrical performances to entertain inmates. Inmates acquired gramophones and records for use in recreation rooms or barracks. Camps featured bands, orchestras, and choirs who provided music for general performances, hospital programs, and religious services. The Germans captured musical virtuosos who were willing to organize and lead orchestras and bands. Prisoners also modified barracks into theaters which allowed them to produce plays, musical and theatrical performances, and gymnastic events. Playwrights reproduced classic works or wrote their own plays and prisoners painted elaborate sites. Famous actors who were in prisons continued their craft during their confinement. These theaters became one of the most popular buildings in prison camps in which audiences consisted of war prisoners and German officers and guards. POW's were encouraged to take up painting, sculpting, and other works of art. Prisoners converted vacant rooms and buildings into art studios where they could develop their skills. Many prison camps produced statues and memorials for fallen comrades or hope for the future. Horticulture became a favorite pastime, which not only included vegetable gardens to improve diets but flower gardens as well. POW's were encouraged to improve the appearances of their barracks and competed in flower shows for prizes. Prisoners spent much of their free time playing cards and board games. Other prisoners engaged in hobbies such as wood-working, modeling, and carving and produced quality works. Reading was another important pastime for POW's. German authorities allowed POW's to publish their own newspapers and magazines which covered camp news, poetry, humor, history, science, sports news, and other topics of interest. These publications were issued in English, French, and Russian. POW's were also permitted to

subscribe to German newspapers during their captivity. Circulating libraries sprang up in prison camps as POW's voraciously devoured books to mentally escape their confinement. The origins of many of these libraries began with the books prisoners carried into captivity and were approved by the camp censors. The problem was that there were too few books and too many prisoners. German and Austro-Hungarian authorities were greatly concerned regarding the content of books which could contain war information that was prohibited for distribution to prisoners. As a result, officials limited books to pre-war publications to avoid potential conflicts of interest. While books printed in English, French, and Italian were available in large quantities in Germany and the Dual Monarchy, there was a finite number of publications in Russian, Serbian, and Romanian.

The availability of entertainment on such a large scale was made possible primarily through the efforts of the YMCA. WPA secretaries recognized that entertainment served a critical role in reducing depression and enhancing morale in prison camps. The YMCA provided a wide range of supplies to help prisoners organize orchestras, bands, theatrical performances, art studios, and hobby clubs to promote mental diversions in the prisons. Music was an important element in the Red Triangle program. The Association obtained musical instruments and sheet music for distribution to musicians behind barbed wires to form orchestras and bands. Professional musicians gained the opportunity to practice their art, so they could resume their careers after the war, and beginners could receive musical instruction. WPA secretaries formed bands with incarcerated boys as part of their education. The entire camp population benefitted from musical performances, especially since these concerts were high quality productions. Musicians also supported theatrical performances, enhanced church services, and provided comfort to patients in the hospital wards. The Association also supported the development of the theater in prison camps by providing play scripts, costumes, and other props needed to produce plays. Allied prisoners developed English, French, and Russian theatrical companies and performed to sold out audiences. For the actors, participation in plays helped reduce the monotony of prison camp life, while the plays provided the audience with an escape from their surroundings. Proceeds from admission sales often went to finance the prison camp's Welfare Committee to aid destitute prisoners. WPA secretaries provided art supplies to prisoners interested in painting, drawing, and sculpting. The Association made arrangements to display POW art work at exhibitions in neutral countries and helped sell these works to provide the artists with additional income. For hobbies, the Red Triangle provided supplies needed to support horticulture societies, wood-carving clubs, bridge clubs, chess clubs, and other wholesome pastimes. In addition, Red Triangle secretaries provided audio-visual equipment, such as gramophones, slide projectors and slides, and movie projectors and films to provide a wide range of entertainment for prisoners of war. WPA Secretaries visited local book shops to purchase materials to augment camp libraries, especially Eastern European works. The World's Alliance in Geneva established a book depository to expand prison camp libraries. Association secretaries also provided POW's with training and material to repair books whose condition deteriorated due to extensive use.

Red Triangle entertainment made YMCA halls very popular social spots in prison camps. These facilities featured a library and reading room as well as game rooms. For POW's assigned to labor

detachments, working away from the parent camp meant giving up these mental diversions. To address this problem, the YMCA developed entertainment boxes, which the Association sent to *Arbeitskommandos*. Each entertainment box contained small musical instruments (usually an accordion and harmonicas), games (lotto, *Mensch aergere dich nicht!*, and dominoes), stationery, and a selection of books. Prisoners away from their prison camps could still enjoy their evenings after work with the YMCA entertainment box.

While conditions were spartan in Turkish prison camps, Allied prisoners of war still found the resources needed to provide entertainment during their incarceration. Entertainment played a critical role in the mental health of prison camps as these performances offered much needed diversions for the captives. Unlike POW's in German and Austro-Hungarian prison facilities, Allied prisoners in the Ottoman Empire had to rely on their own ingenuity to organize and produce events. Music was especially important in helping prisoners cope with incarceration. The POW's obtained musical instruments, through purchase or through camp construction, and formed bands and orchestras. They performed in a variety of events and provided prisoners with a touch of life back home. Prisoners also organized theatrical performances including comedies, dramas, singing, poetry readings, gymnastics, and vaudeville acts. These productions provided the musicians, actors, and stage crews with a sense of purpose as they prepared for and conducted performances, but the shows also gave the general camp population an opportunity to enjoy themselves and escape the monotony of prison camp life for a short period of time.

### **EDUCATION IN PRISON CAMPS**

An important opportunity for POW's was the availability of schools for POW's and interned civilians in German prison camps. German authorities made buildings available for instruction and captured teachers continued their professions inside these facilities. These schools offered a wide variety of classes from elementary reading for illiterate POW's to advanced math and engineering courses for college students. The Germans arranged for the construction of schools and playgrounds for interned children so they could continue their studies. War prisoners with specialized training often gave lectures or conducted seminars on a range of subjects such as botany, ornithology, history, or the classics. In addition to traditional schools, the prison camp library became an important source of knowledge as war prisoners could obtain books ranging from simple picture books to professional works. Private charities emerged in Britain and Russia which accepted donated books which they forwarded to prisoners in Germany. POW's received vocational training through hands on experience. Prisoners without a trade could become apprentices and learn carpentry, wood carving, shoemaking, tailoring, or other trades by working in the prison camp workshops. They would return home after the war with work skills that would provide their families with better incomes.

The YMCA made the education of prisoners of war a priority in its War Prisoners' Aid relief program. The Association sought to help prisoners spend their idle time in productive activities. The primary goal of the Association was to improve the lives of young men and make them better citizens after

their repatriation. Red Triangle secretaries strove to make the prison experience one which improved each man's future quality of life. For illiterate prisoners, this meant the YMCA provided books and organized instructors for elementary education in reading, writing, and arithmetic. For university students, whose studies were interrupted by the war, the YMCA recruited college professors to supervise their course work and gain access to university libraries. Association huts featured classrooms which offered a wide range of courses at different levels on any given night. The Association also worked to provide books and journals for prisoners as a means to help them pass their idle time in a productive pursuit. The YMCA purchased pre-war books, which did not make reference to the war and more readily passed prison camp censors, in a variety of languages. Secretaries found it very difficult to obtain reading material in Russian, Serbian, and Georgian in Germany during the war and made every effort to acquire books in these languages. The World's Alliance of YMCA's developed a book bureau through which prisoners could request specific books needed for their studies. The Geneva organization then acquired the material and sent it to the POW with instructions that the books should be turned over to the YMCA Library upon completion of their study. The Association also provided laboratory equipment to captured Allied scientists who continued to conduct their research in German prison camps. Under the leadership of Gustav White, the American YMCA established an education program where POW's could earn degrees. White developed a broad curriculum with instructions on how to establish this program in prison camps. The WPA Secretary assigned to a camp formed an Education Committee, provided the instructional materials and books, and organized the classes. The secretary then followed up with regular visits to assess the development of the program, restock materials, and address any problems that might have developed.

The Association also wanted to provide reading material to prisoners assigned to *Arbeitskommandos* and no longer had access to the prison camp library. The YMCA sent circulating libraries, chests with thirty books in different sets, which POW's could exchange for a new collection of books. These circulating libraries were different from recreation chests in that they contained only book sets and not games or musical instruments. The World's Alliance recognized that by establishing series of books pre-approved by the German Ministry of War, they could get literature to labor detachments faster and avoid delays in censorship offices. The World's Alliance set up ten different series which made 300 titles available to POW's working in factories, mines, or farms.

In the Dual Monarchy, the YMCA provided similar educational services to Russian, Italian, Serbian, and Romanian POW's. But WPA Secretaries encountered different challenges that they sought to address. With the support of the Austro-Hungarian government, secretaries set up a variety of special schools to meet prisoner needs. A large number of Russian and Serbian boys followed their fathers into the army and into captivity. Red Triangle secretaries arranged to have these boys concentrated in a few prison camps where they received formal educations and gained protection from the general prison camp population. The YMCA also offered reading and writing courses in Ukrainian and Georgian for these nationalities. Under the policy of russification and tsarist law, instruction in these languages was prohibited in Russia. The Association provided books for libraries and classrooms in Dual Monarchy



prison camps. This was often a challenge since the supply of Russian, Serbian, and Georgian books was very limited before the war began. The Red Triangle supported a book distribution program where Russians could forward books to Dual Monarchy prison camps through Geneva. In addition, the YMCA arranged for the publication of Russian books in Switzerland which helped address the availability of reading material. The Association also provided reading material to Allied prisoners assigned to *Arbeitskommandos* in Austria-Hungary by sending out traveling libraries. Although these men were working outside of their parent prison camps, they still had access to Association libraries.

Unlike Allied prisoners of war in Germany and Austria-Hungary, POW's in the Ottoman Empire did not have ready access to social welfare programs, including education. Books were at a premium and prisoners looked forward to the arrival of parcels carrying reading material. Despite the lack of resources, many prisoners, however, organized their own schools in which non-commissioned officers served as instructors, especially for vocational training. In addition, POW's with classical civilization educations took advantage of their situation and studied the ruins they found in Anatolia. Prisoners often formed archaeological projects to find and analyze ancient ruins in the vicinity of prison camp sites.

### **SPORTS IN CENTRAL POWER PRISON CAMPS**

Entertainment and education helped boost POW's mental state but a key component of surviving incarceration during the war was to stay in physical shape as well. German and Austro-Hungarian authorities provided war prisoners with access to playing fields, both inside and outside the camp compound. Sports not only kept the participants in shape, it provided entertainment for spectators. Enlisted men played soccer, cricket, field hockey, croquet, bowling, rugby, swimming, fencing, wrestling, and boxing and often competed in athletic leagues or clubs. Officers and internees also played golf, tennis, badminton, billiards, and fishing. Canadian POW's introduced lacrosse into prison camps while American prisoners played football, baseball, and volleyball. Seasonal sports were also permitted including ice skating and cross-country skiing. To maintain the general health of the POW population and retain discipline, non-commissioned officers led the men in daily calisthenics. Walks were also encouraged within camp compounds to maintain good health and social conversation. German authorities gave officers who gave their parole not to escape the opportunity to stroll through local villages or the woods. Prison camps often conducted "Sports Days" in which the prisoners competed in track and field events which included long distance running, sprints, the high jump, broad jump, weight-lifting, and other track and field events. POW's also formed gymnastics clubs which provided entertainment for camp residents through tumbling, parallel bars, rings, or other exercises.

The Young Men's Christian Association placed a high premium on the promotion of sports in Central Power prison camps during World War I. Sports was one of the four main principles of the organization and when secretaries organized Associations in prison camps, they provided the POW's with a wide range of sports equipment to play soccer, basketball, tennis, volleyball, skating, lawn bowling, croquet, football, and baseball. Secretaries encouraged the prisoners to establish leagues to promote competition among the prisoners to help them pass their time in captivity. Sports kept prisoners in shape

and provided entertainment for spectators. Y workers also encouraged calisthenics and gymnastics for the prison camp population to improve their physical condition and improve their chances of survival during their captivity. Despite their emphasis on the importance of sports, secretaries realized during the last years of the war that physical exercise became an increasing challenge as rations declined and Y workers focused on keeping body and soul together to allow POW's survive the conflict.

### **RELIGION IN CENTRAL POWER POW CAMPS**

The third major effort to combating mental depression was care for POW's spirits and German and Austro-Hungarian authorities recognized that religion was critical for these needs. Prison camp authorities allowed the POW's to establish chapels or synagogues inside buildings or construct churches within the camp compound. Officials allowed POW's in camps without places of worship to visit churches outside the prison facility if they gave their parole (for the sake of security, guards accompanied the enlisted men. Military chaplains from among the prisoners or clergy from outside the camp performed divine services for prison camp inmates. The Germans arranged for the construction of Protestant churches for British, Commonwealth, and American POW's, Catholic chapels for French, Belgian, Irish, Italian, and Polish prisoners, Greek Orthodox churches for Russian, Serbian, and Romanian inmates, and synagogues for Russian and Polish POW's. The Germans even constructed a mosque for Muslim prisoners from French North Africa and India at Zossen-Halbmondlager.

Religious observation was important in prison camps during funerals and church holidays. Deaths were inevitable in prison camps due to wounds, sickness, and malnutrition. German and Austro-Hungarian authorities established cemeteries near prison camps where dead POW's could be interned. Artisans in the camps often produced stone memorials to their fallen comrades. The Germans provided a military guard for burials with full honors. A chaplain or local church official conducted a service over the grave and it was not unusual for burials to include bands or choirs. Camp authorities allowed POW's to visit these cemeteries during All Saints' Day for religious services. Another important issue for incarcerated war prisoners was religious holidays, especially Christmas and Easter. These were times of acute depression and home sicknesses since POW's were isolated from their homes and families. Special religious services were held during these holidays which included the decoration of churches in the spirit of the season.

Spiritual work was a critical objective of Association secretaries in their service to prisoners of war in World War I. While POW's no longer faced death on the battlefield, they languished in prison camps not knowing how long they would be incarcerated. As the war dragged on and material conditions became worse in the prisons as a result of the Allied Blockade, many men began to doubt their ability to survive the war. Maintaining morale under these conditions was a serious challenge and many prisoners turned to faith to keep up their hopes for a better post-war life.

The Association responded to this challenge in a variety of ways. YMCA workers strove to provide Bibles and other religious tracts to any soldier which requested these readings. Spiritual comfort was an important work for men isolated from friends and family in a hostile land. The YMCA provided religious paraphernalia (crosses, altar cloths, vestments, censers, candles and candle holders, icons, banners, hymnals, and other materials) to support Protestant, Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Jewish, and Islamic divine services. Secretaries also urged Central Power authorities to reassign chaplains to prison camps where they could do the most good for their troops. Red Triangle secretaries made a major effort to provide prisoners with special services during Christmas and Easter festivities, which included decorations and special foods. The Association made sure that Jewish POW's had access to the foods that were necessary for Passover meals. Christmas was always a special event for the Y. Secretaries helped print Christmas cards, decorate churches with garlands and ornaments, and provided music for bands and choirs. While not as dangerous as life in the trenches, death was never far away from prison camps and the YMCA strove to provide the deceased with decent burials and memorials to their sacrifice. The YMCA secretaries put into practice John R. Mott's pre-war goal of ecumenical service to men of many faiths.

### **MEDICAL CARE IN CAPTIVITY**

In terms of medical care, the Germans and Austro-Hungarians equipped prison camps with lazarettes (hospital wards), infirmaries, dispensaries, quarantine stations, and apothecaries to care for wounded and sick Allied prisoners. Captured Allied doctors joined German and Dual Monarchy medical staffs in providing care for infirm prisoners. Under the terms of the Hague Conventions, medical personnel were not to be treated as prisoners of war but immediately be repatriated. Allied doctors recognized that their medical skills were in serious demand in most prison camps and continued to serve their comrades in arms. Officers of the German Medical Corps commanded the camp hospitals and German troops as well as Allied field medics served as orderlies to meet patient needs. German doctors sent seriously ill POW's to military hospitals for more intensive care. The German National Red Cross provided medical assistance to prisoners in the Reich while the Austrian Red Cross and Hungarian Red Cross extended similar aid to Entente POW's in the Dual Monarchy. The Germans and Austro-Hungarians recognized the importance of providing medical care and sanitation to prisoners which resulted in a remarkable percentage of POW's surviving their incarceration.

Many Allied prisoners of war fell into German and Dual Monarchy hands through battlefield wounds. For the most part, German and Austro-Hungarian medics treated both Allied and their own wounded on the same basis. Wounded Entente prisoners received initial treatment at the first aid station and were then transported to field hospitals. Central Power doctors sent light casualties to prisoner collection points for transportation directly to prison camps for treatment and recuperation, while more serious cases were referred to military hospitals for more advanced treatment and recovery. Upon arrival at prison camps, POW's would be quarantined for a period of time to identify and contain communicable

diseases. The medical staff would assign sick and wounded prisoners to the prison camp lazarette for continued observation and treatment. Many German prison camps had modern surgeries and skilled surgeons to conduct operations. Pharmacies were well stocked and doctors had access to laboratories to determine illnesses.

Severely wounded Allied POW's who were not expected to recover and rejoin the armed forces were sent to internment camps in neutral Switzerland or the Netherlands or exchanged for seriously wounded German POW's in Allied hands. Candidates for exchange were transferred to *Heimkehrlagern* (repatriation prison camps) where they received a final medical exam and then sent home. The Germans did not want to augment Entente military ranks with troops who might recover nor did they want to feed and care for seriously sick or wounded POW's who placed a further drain on the war economy. Exchanges between Germany and Russia took place through Denmark and Sweden, transfers between Germany and France were conducted through Switzerland, and shipments between Germany and Britain went through the Netherlands or Denmark.

The Germans strove to maintain high sanitary standards after the outbreak of cholera and typhus epidemics in several camps. The most infamous epidemic occurred at Wittenberg in 1915 when cholera emerged among the camp population. The German staff, including the medical personnel, evacuated the facility leaving the disease to be treated by British medical officers. The Germans delivered food to the inmates via a chute and refused to allow any POW's to leave the infected camp. The disease took a deadly course, but the British doctors organized a sanitation program and eventually ended the outbreak, but after a great loss of life. The British government condemned the German action and demanded an end to integrated POW populations (Russian prisoners carried in the disease). The Germans refused to end their integration policy but took major steps to expand initial medical inspections, conduct vaccinations, and expand quarantine facilities. The German decision to enhance medical care was not driven solely for humanitarian goals for Allied POW's but also took into consideration the impact of an epidemic to local populations that could have been infected. Medical staffs also treated diseases due to malnutrition, such as tuberculosis, in special barracks.

In addition, the Germans and Austro-Hungarians, with the assistance of the YMCA, provided rehabilitation and physical therapy to prisoners who had lost limbs or suffered from paralysis. These unfortunates gained access to prosthetics and training programs which helped them learn new trades to support their families after repatriation. For WPA Secretaries, the goal was to make the prison experience a period of improvement which included providing physical rehabilitation for grievously wounded war prisoners.

## **HYGIENE AND SANITATION**

The prevention of the transmission of infectious diseases in crowded prison camps became a major priority for German and Austro-Hungarian authorities during the Great War. Prisoners often carried a variety of diseases into captivity and these illnesses quickly spread through prison facilities via rodents, lice, and other forms of vermin. After combating several epidemics in prison camps in 1915, especially

after the Wittenberg fiasco and the British protest, the German Medical Corps conducted a very aggressive campaign against filth and vermin to avoid a wide range of diseases. The potential outbreak of epidemics in Austro-Hungarian prison camps was particularly high due to the poor health conditions of Russian, Serbian, and Romanian prisoners of war which made up the majority of the populations of Dual Monarchy prison camps. Eastern European POW's carried diseases that had been eradicated in Germany and the Dual Empire and officials recognized the potential threat to local communities.

When POW's arrived at prison camps, they immediately reported for a medical inspection. German or Dual Monarchy and Allied doctors examined all of the incoming inmates to determine their health condition. POW's suspected of carrying contagious diseases were assigned immediately to quarantine camps outside the main camp for a period of 40 days and kept away from the general camp population. Prisoners who passed the medical exam proceeded to the disinfection station. POW's surrendered their uniforms and clothing for aggressive disinfection; ragged clothing that was beyond redemption was disposed of and the prisoners received new uniforms. While their clothing was being disinfected, the prisoners proceeded to showers or special chemical baths to kill any vermin carried on their bodies. Due to different cultural norms, Russian POW's were loathe to bathe while the Germans used the closure of bathhouses as a form of punishment for British prisoners for camp infractions. The prisoners' salvageable clothing, in the meantime, spent a minimum of 20 minutes in a disinfection oven, exposed to live steam. During the early months of the war, the German Army dispatched mobile sterilization units to prison camps. Once a camp was established, sterilization plants became an important part of the facility. The next stage of the process sent prisoners to the barber which resulted in short haircuts and the loss of beards to destroy any vestiges of possible lice contamination. Seriously ill prisoners who did not carry communicable diseases went to the camp lazarette for medical treatment. The last step in the process involved medical personal vaccinating POW's for a variety of diseases.

Even after the disinfection process, the Germans maintained tight sanitation regulations in prison camps. Prisoners bathed or showered on a weekly basis and had access to barbers. The Germans established camp laundries to clean linens and prisoners regularly washed their uniforms. POW's also aired out their mattresses and cleaned their barrack furniture on a regular basis to eliminate "cooties" and get rid of rodents. In designing the barracks, the Germans made sure that there was adequate ventilation, which often challenged prisoners who sought to warm their rooms in the winter. German authorities also required prisoners to exercise, either through military drill or mass calisthenics to keep POW's in physical shape. While contagious diseases continued to appear in prison camps, the Germans avoided the large-scale epidemics that broke out early in the war.

### **CORRESPONDENCE, PARCELS, AND THE POSTAL SYSTEM**

Correspondence between POW's and home played a critical role in maintaining the mental health of prisoners of war during their incarceration in prison camps. To allay worries about the health and well-being of family members and businesses, prisoners looked forward to receiving information from home. The issue of prisoner correspondence was addressed in the Hague Agreements. Under

international law, prisoners could send two letters of two pages every month and receive an unlimited supply of correspondence. POW mail traveled internationally free of charge. Even the limited amount of outgoing mail became a huge administrative burden for prison camp administrators. Translators had to censor all mail exchanged by prisoners to make sure that prisoners did not pass along intelligence and families and friends did not provide contraband information. This process required large staffs to process mail and censors had considerable freedom to ban correspondence. With lots of time on their hands, prisoners could easily overwhelm the censorship system if given the opportunity to send as many letters as they wished. The volume of letters and these regulations slowed down prisoner correspondence.

Another major issue for POW's was the arrival of parcels from home. Many POW's relied on these packages to augment their meager rations for survival. For security purposes and the search for contraband (especially maps, compasses, weapons, and money or non-approved war news), censors sometimes ruthlessly opened all the contents of parcels which undermined their storage shelf life, much to the dismay of the recipients. Theft in the mail was also another problem, particularly when food rations dwindled, although authorities did take action to apprehend the criminals. To alleviate these problems, Allied officers or non-commissioned officers worked in camp post offices with German and Austro-Hungarian censors.

Establishing contact between prisoners of war and their friends and family was an important goal of the International Red Cross and the YMCA. Such contact provided tremendous relief for the POW and relatives and represented a first step towards taking an optimistic attitude about captivity. The Red Cross had primary responsibility for establishing and maintaining contact with war prisoners. However, this was a difficult task as recently captured POW's were sent from the front to *Durchgangslagern* (transit camps) and eventually to *Stammlagern* (primary prison camps). Even after arrival as captives, war prisoners were transferred to other prison camps or sent out to work in *Arbeitskommandos* (labor detachments). The YMCA helped families and friends locate missing soldiers through the World Alliance's War Prisoners' Aid (WPA) Inquiry Office. Administrators in Geneva would contact national WPA headquarters and these secretaries would work with the Ministry of War prisoner information bureau. When Archibald Harte traveled to Russia in 1915, he received a tremendous amount of mail from German and Austro-Hungarian families seeking news about their fathers and sons in Russia. WPA secretaries working in prison camps also worked to connect prisoners with family members. Red Triangle workers often sent telegrams to relatives from prisoners recently captured as the best means to let families know that loved ones were not killed or missing in action.

### **POW LABOR IN THE CENTRAL POWERS**

With the increasing demands of the war, the strain Allied idle prisoners placed on the war economy, and the growing labor shortage, the Germans adopted a policy of utilizing Allied POW's in agriculture, industry, raw material extraction (especially coal, iron, and salt), state projects (like flood control and moor reclamation), and government projects (such as railroad work). Under the articles of

the Hague Convention, the Germans could not employ Allied prisoners in work that directly supported the German war effort. The Germans, however, could conscript Allied enlisted men and encourage non-commissioned officers to volunteer for labor detachments and provide them with wages. Given the choice of marking time in a prison camp with little to do and gaining the opportunity to get outside camps and earn some money, a large number of prisoners accepted their assignment to *Arbeitskommandos*.

Allied prisoners were employed in two broad categories of labor during the First World War: in camp work inside prisons and in labor detachments (*Arbeitskommandos*) outside of the prison facilities. Many prisoners welcomed the opportunity to work: work could break the monotony of daily prison camp life and would provide a supplemental salary by which they could purchase additional food or other amenities. Prison camps were generally huge facilities and the POW's provided the bulk of the labor in building and maintaining prison camps. During the early stages of the conflict, war prisoners constructed the new camps which included security fences and guard towers, barracks, and various administration buildings. Prisoners with special skills or talents could work in the camp administration (as clerks, cooks, butchers, teachers, medical orderlies, bankers, and postmen) or in prison workshops as cobblers, tailors, carpenters/joiners, coopers, weavers, sculptors, or barbers. They provided invaluable services providing new products or repairing broken or worn out materials. Unskilled prisoners could work in gardens, collect fire wood, maintain flocks and herds, or transport materials for daily camp life. Unskilled soldiers gained the opportunity to learn a trade in prison camps as apprentices to master workers. Enterprising prisoners could set up their own businesses and sell a variety of items based on their pre-war trades.

As the Germans collected an ever-growing number of Allied prisoners, the military administration recognized that it was impractical to support a largely idle population of POW's, especially with a critical labor shortage in Germany. Allied POW labor was especially valuable as a work force to replace Germans who were mobilized for military service. As a result, the Germans recruited prisoners to work on labor detachments outside of parent prisons and assigned these laborers to work camps. Prisoners worked on road and railway infrastructure, manufacturing in factories, mining, building reconstruction, and agriculture. Most of the Russian prisoners, the majority with peasant backgrounds, worked on German farms and became instrumental in harvesting crops. While they received little pay for their work, POW's on agricultural detachments enjoyed better diets, especially in relation to their prison camp fare. French, Belgian, and British prisoners usually had better skills and training than their Russian comrades and worked in German factories for higher wages. This additional income allowed prisoners to enhance their standard of living and made their incarceration experience easier. While prisoners worked long hours, often in dangerous conditions, they welcomed the opportunity to get out the drudgery of prison camp life.

Like Germany, Austro-Hungarian authorities employed Allied prisoners in two broad labor categories: in prison camp labor and in *Arbeitskommandos* outside of the prison camps. As a result of the Austro-Hungarian decision to construct large concentration camps, Allied prisoners provided the labor to construct new prison facilities in Austria and Hungary early in the war. Prisoners also provided the work force to operate these installations: POW's worked in the kitchens preparing meals, in the laundry washing clothing, collecting fire wood to heat the camps, transporting supplies to support camp

operations, and offering a wide range of professional skills (tailors, cobblers, smiths, carpenters, joiners, basket weavers, coopers, and barbers) that were necessary for the smooth operation of the prison camp.

As the war progressed, Dual Monarchy officials found it expensive to incarcerate large numbers of Allied prisoners in prison camps when general labor was in short supply due to military mobilization. As a result, the Austro-Hungarians implemented *Arbeitskommandos* (labor detachments) to support the war economy. In Austria, many of these prisoners worked in factories and raw material extraction industries. Because of the effectiveness of the Allied blockade, POW's in Austria suffered from lower nutritional standards in relation to prisoners in Hungary. On the other hand, labor detachments in Hungary worked primarily on farms where prisoners had easier access to food supplies. Like Germany, Russian, Serbian, and Romanian prisoners suffered greatly from the lack of food parcels from home simply because these nations lacked the resources to support their incarcerated soldiers. Due to their peasant backgrounds, the Eastern European POW's received labor assignments on farms which helped ease their situation. As a result, prisoners gained the chance to work outside of the prison camps in a variety of occupations. Many POW's welcomed the opportunity to break the monotony of daily prison life and earn a salary which could augment their daily rations or purchase other amenities.

Allied prisoners in the Ottoman Empire also provided an important source of labor inside and outside of prison facilities. Unlike prison camps in Germany and Austria-Hungary, POW's could sometimes hire local people to provide services inside prison camps with the permission of the Turkish commandants. In regard to labor detachments, the Turks readily employed British and French prisoners of war in railroad construction. These prisoners had the technical skills to undertake road bed, bridge, and tunnel construction which was often unavailable in the local labor market. Although Allied POW's were slow workers and projects were subject to sabotage, the Turks pressed these men into service and offered them good wages and preferential treatment. The expansion of the Turkish railway system was critical for the support of the Ottoman Empire's defense against the British offensives in Mesopotamia and in Palestine.

### **FINANCES AND BANKING IN CENTRAL POWER PRISON CAMPS**

Money played an important role in the economy of a prison camp and represented a great deal of potential trouble for camp officials. The German and Austro-Hungarian authorities issued *Lagergeld* (prison money) to Allied POW's instead of German or Dual Monarchy bank notes for Entente currencies the POW's carried when captured or received from home or their governments. Larger prison camps issued their own script while German Army Corps headquarters issued general prison camp notes for smaller prison camps under their authority. Prison camps maintained banks where POW's could deposit their gifts and earnings and withdraw prison script when they needed to make purchases.

Camp officials did not allow prisoners to receive German or Austro-Hungarian currency for a number of reasons. First, prison camp script could be easily controlled by imperial authorities and these notes could only be used to make purchases inside the prison camp (such as the canteen, various stores, and for the payment of services). Careful control of these notes made it far more difficult for prisoners to



bribe German guards, who could not use the notes outside of the camp nor could they make purchases easily inside of the facility. Second, Central Power authorities gained access to Entente currencies during the war. When friends and family sent money to POW's, the latter received *Lagergeld* in the POW camp bank instead of their national currencies. The Germans and Austro-Hungarians could then use these funds to make purchases in neutral countries for desperately needed supplies. Most importantly, the Germans and Austro-Hungarians used prison script as a means of dissuading escapes. Prisoners would not be able to bankroll their escape plans since *Lagergeld* was not an acceptable form of currency outside of the prison camp. Instead, travelers carrying prison script would receive a lot of attention from German or Dual Monarchy security forces.

Prisoners received *Lagergeld* for their work in prison camps and in *Arbeitskommandos* outside of the camp facilities, in addition to their regular military salaries. In Germany, most enlisted men carried small bank notes, ranging from one *Pfennig* to one Mark. Officers had access to much larger bills and officer prison camps issued notes as high as one-hundred Marks. Some prisons issued currency in the denomination of the largest nationality instead of German bank notes. For example, Rastatt issued *Lagergeld* in kopeks, since the majority of prisoners were Ukrainians. In the Dual Monarchy, most enlisted men carried small bank notes, ranging from one *Heller* to one *Krone*. Officer prison camps issued notes as high as one-hundred *Kronen* because officers were more likely to have access to larger sums of money than enlisted men.

## **CRIME AND PUNISHMENT IN THE CENTRAL POWER STATES**

### **German Prison Camps**

During the war, Allied propagandists attributed a number of crimes by the Germans on helpless Allied prisoners of war. The Allies held expositions on German atrocities which purportedly demonstrated evidence of German cruelty to civilian internees and the execution of Allied military prisoners. Many of these accusations were fabrications, but it did not stop Allied propagandists from drawing pictures of the Hun monsters or creating statues of crucified Canadian prisoners. Despite this propaganda, the Germans did resort to cruel punishment in dealing with rule infractions, including tying prisoners to the stake, incarcerating them in cages, and assigning them to solitary confinement. In addition, the Germans imprisoned Allied soldiers in state jails if prisoners violated civil laws. For minor camp infractions, German officials closed down the theater, canceled movie nights, or denied access to showers. These practices were designed to keep POW's in line within the strictures of international law.

Both the Allied and Central Powers resorted to the use of reprisal camps in an effort to redress perceived injustices on the part of the enemy or to attempt to force their opponents to change their policies. POW's assigned to reprisal camps received meager rations, poor accommodations, and faced inhospitable conditions. They often had to work in difficult and dangerous jobs such as draining swamps or working in mines. When the British Admiralty declared that U-boat crews violated international law, declaring them pirates, these prisoners were sent to prisons. In response, the Germans rounded up

British sailors and sent them to punishment camps in reprisal. Rarely did reprisal camps work and governments often quietly closed down these facilities through the intervention of the neutral powers. In the case of U-boat crews, the British government quietly returned crews to their parent camps and the Germans reassigned their captives. The prison camp system was also used for political purposes as well. The Germans resorted to seizing civilian hostages from Belgium and Occupied France to suppress any potential opposition to their occupation. These hostages sometimes sat in fortresses or were assigned to special punishment camps if they were not sent to civilian internment camps.

In addition, the Germans treated escapes by prisoners of war as crimes. While it was the duty of Allied troops to escape and return to their units, the Germans made every effort to prevent escape attempts. Security included rows of barbed wire fences around the perimeter of facilities, electric fences, guard towers with search lights, and guards with specially trained dogs. Despite these efforts, prisoners undertook a variety of plans to escape from prison camps ranging from digging tunnels to elaborate disguises to sneak past the guards. YMCA secretaries always had to be on the guard to make sure that they did not inadvertently assist in prison escapes. A crisis ensued when a POW, who had given his parole not to escape, was sent into town to make purchases to support an Association activity. The prisoner did not return and the secretary had a difficult time assuring the commandant that the POW acted on his own volition.

The Germans also accused Allied POW's of committing other types of crimes while in captivity. Prisoners that smuggled in cameras or made their own were accused of espionage. Secret photographs taken by prisoners of poor medical care or dismal rations caused serious problems for prison camp administrators. Sabotage was another crime that led to serious punishment. The Germans accused Allied POW's of cutting the eyes out of potatoes which destroyed the seed crops for the next planting season, a practice that was designed to further undermine the empire's growing food crisis. German censors intercepted biological weapons in the mail sent to Entente prisoners. Attempts were made to inject anthrax into the German horse populations to hinder transportation. Censors also intercepted coded messages sent to POW's with instructions to cause havoc whenever possible behind the lines.

As official policy, the Germans rarely used capital punishment as a means to discipline war prisoners. The exception to this rule were interned civilians accused of violating international law. Edith Cavell was a British nurse that worked in a Belgian hospital when the war began. She helped 200 wounded British POW's escape from the German occupation zone. Cavell was eventually arrested and readily confessed to the crime. A German court-martial found her guilty of treason and despite international pressure she was executed in October 1915. Captain Charles Fryatt, a merchant ship master, attempted to ram a German U-boat which had surfaced and demanded to inspect his ship in March 1915. Under international law, merchant ships were not to conduct offensive military operations at sea. However, the Admiralty issued orders that merchant captains were to take offensive action and attack German submarines. In June 1916, Fryatt's ship was intercepted by German destroyers off the coast of the Netherlands and the captain was arrested. He was tried in a court-martial, found guilty of being a *franc-tireur* (partisan), and executed by firing squad in July. The Germans used these cases as a

deterrent to others who might violate international law.

### **Austro-Hungarian Prison Camps**

Under the terms of the two Hague Conventions, belligerents were required to provide proper care and treatment of enemy combatants after capture. The Austro-Hungarian army followed these regulations with the exception of treatment of subject nationalities caught fighting with Allied forces for national independence. The First World War represented a struggle for independence for many Eastern European subject peoples and national politics played a critical role in the fighting. Even the Austro-Hungarians promoted nationalist aspirations, organizing and supporting the Polish Legion in its fight to liberate Russian Poland. When a large number of Polish Legionnaires refused to take an oath of allegiance to the new Regency Council established in Warsaw in 1916, the German and Austro-Hungarian governments interned these troops for the duration of the war. Most Poles concluded the new state fell far short of the true independence that they were seeking for their country. For former Austro-Hungarian nationals captured while fighting for Allied armies, their fate was far worse. Czechoslovak nationalists established Czech Legions which fought on the Italian and Russian Fronts against Dual Monarchy forces. When captured, these troops faced court-martial and summary justice. The Austro-Hungarian army attempted to stifle national self-determination to maintain the integrity of the empire.

### **Turkish Prison Camps**

While Allied propaganda extensively published reports of crimes against prisoners of war in Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Bulgaria, the Ottoman Empire achieved far greater notoriety in its abysmal treatment of prisoners. This poor treatment can be explained by the lack of resources to provide for the needs of Allied prisoners and the Turkish government's policy of using POW's as a means of supporting the war effort among its subjects. With the fall of Kut-al-Amara in April 1916, the Ottomans acquired a large number of British and Indian POW's. The Turks forced these men to march across desert tracts without adequate food, water, shelter, or medical treatment and thousands of prisoners died during their trek into the Anatolian interior. Conditions were so bad that the British government attempted to ransom the release of their soldiers but the Turkish government rejected the offer. The Ottomans made it a policy to march Allied prisoners through cities to demonstrate the success of the Turkish Army and to garner support for the war effort.

The Turks were not above using interned Allied civilians for military purposes as well. When the Ottoman Empire entered the war in November 1914, the Royal Navy conducted bombardments of Turkish coastal towns and seaports. The Ottomans relocated Allied internees to these areas as hostages to deter the British from shelling these ports.

The Turkish government did not focus their abusive policies solely on Allied war prisoners and civilian internees. The Ottomans had a long history of discrimination against Christian Armenians which had reached a head in 1895 when the Turks massacred Armenians within their empire. World War I became a new opportunity for the Ottomans to end the Armenian problem. In the Spring of 1915, the

Ottomans conducted an extensive campaign to eradicate the Armenians within the empire. A successful Russian offensive in the Caucasus encouraged the Armenians to seek their independence from the Ottoman Empire which led to uprisings in a number of cities in northeastern Anatolia. The Turks responded with a massive campaign of genocide which killed hundreds of thousands of Armenian men, women, and children. Turkish troops marched Armenians across desert wastelands without access to food and water which resulted in death from sickness, starvation, or exhaustion. The Allies evacuated Armenians whenever possible and relocated these refugees to camps in Egypt.

### **CENTRAL POWER PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGNS**

The ability to control enemy morale through propaganda was a major objective for both the Allies and Central Powers during World War I. At the battle front, the Germans employed various means to encourage fraternization to persuade Allied troops to lay down their arms and surrender. The promise of ample food and relief from the constant threat of death in the front lines was often effective in encouraging soldiers to surrender. Persuading soldiers to question their role in the war and their post-war benefits was another avenue where propaganda was successful. The Germans found such propaganda techniques were very effective on the Italian Front and the Eastern Front.

Propaganda did not end at the battle front as the Germans utilized propaganda campaigns in prison camps as well. The German *Kriegsministerium* published *The Continental*, a newspaper dedicated to spreading propaganda to British POW's. The War Ministry also printed newspapers with similar information in Russian and French as well. These news sources were written by propaganda experts and highlighted German battlefield triumphs and Allied defeats and the inevitability of a Central Power victory in an effort to undermine Entente POW morale.

To expand manpower reserves during the war and achieve post-war objectives, the Germans recruited soldiers to fight for their national liberation; this was an important element in persuading POW's to volunteer for national legions. The Germans sought Irish volunteers at Limburg to join Roger Casement's efforts in fomenting the Easter Rebellion in Ireland. They formed the Irish Legion and provided training and equipment for an invasion of the Emerald Isle. The Germans were even more successful in recruiting Islamic troops from the French North Africa and British South Asia to fight for the Caliph in the Near East. Even if prisoners did not volunteer for combat, they often received special privileges, in terms of better rations and quarters, if they were members of a nationality the Germans sought to cultivate for their post-war foreign policy. For example, Ukrainian prisoners were assigned to special propaganda camps (*Sonderlagern*), such as Rastatt, where they enjoyed a higher quality of life in relation to other Eastern European prisoners. The Germans had long range plans for the Ukraine and sought to establish better relations through these men. The Germans also set up special facilities for Flemish POW's in Goettingen to win their allegiance. Propaganda prisoners had access to libraries and special schools which provided readings and instruction in their native language. Despite the advantages of enhanced conditions, POW's in propaganda camps suffered from threats of retribution and isolation

from non-favored Allied prisoners.

The Germans achieved the greatest success in their propaganda campaign among the Muslim POW's of the French, British, and Russian Empires. After Sultan Mohammed V, as Caliph, declared a *jihad* against the Allied Powers in November 1914, the Germans developed a three-fold program to achieve wartime and post-war objectives in the Near East: the Germans sought to demonstrate their friendship to Muslims in the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia to encourage their neutrality; the Germans also sent special operation teams to promote revolution against the Allied colonial powers in Muslim lands; and the Germans strove to recruit Muslim POW's to join the Islamic Brigade and fight on behalf of the Sultan. German military authorities concentrated Muslim prisoners in propaganda camps in Zossen at Weinberge and at Wünsdorf (*Halbmondlager* or the Crescent Moon Camp) and Kaiser Wilhelm II built a mosque specifically for the faithful. The Germans raised several battalions of British, French, and Russian colonial troops who fought with the Turkish Army in Palestine and Mesopotamia during the war.

The Austro-Hungarians conducted similar propaganda campaigns for captured nationalities under their care. The Dual Monarchy encouraged the instruction of native language reading for Ukrainian and Georgian POW's. The Russians tried to eliminate these cultures during the 19th century in an effort to russify the empire. Tsarist authorities outlawed the teaching of these languages in schools and did not recognize them as legal languages in courts or government business. The Austro-Hungarians established *Sonderlagern* for Russian POW's as well. The Dual Monarchy raised the Polish Legion from Polish volunteers to gain control of Russian Poland. When the Central Powers established the Polish Regency in 1916 as an interim government that would lead to a new Polish kingdom, the troops of the Polish Legion refused to recognize the new regime. They expected a future Poland to include German and Austrian Poland with a government chosen by the Polish people. As a result, the Austro-Hungarians incarcerated members of the Legion in internment camps until the war in the East ended in March 1918.

Propaganda in Central Power prison camps also played an important role outside of the facilities. The Germans published books by Reverend Charles Correvon (three different editions of *Aus deutschen Kriegsgefangenen* or *From German Prison Camps*) and D. Backhaus (*Die Kriegsgefangenen in Deutschland* or *The Prison Camps of Germany*) in an effort to allay the concerns of Allied citizens about the conditions in German prison facilities. Correvon's books were printed in German and French while Backhaus' work was printed in German, French, English, Russian, and Italian. The books displayed daily life in prison camps across the empire. The Austro-Hungarians published a similar book, *Quelques Vues de Prisonniers de Guerre en Autriche-Hongrie*, with the same purpose. Allied POW's also served an important role in German domestic propaganda. Authorities published photographs of different nationalities captured in battle to emphasize two goals: the Entente fight for democracy was based on the deployment of colonial troops who were denied the same freedom; and that German forces, facing overwhelming numbers, still won victories because the Germans were superior.

## REPATRIATION OF ENTENTE POW'S

The end of the war and release from prison was the dream of every prisoner of war. Under the terms of the Armistice, signed by the Germans on 11 November 1918, all Allied prisoners of war and civilian internees had to be released from German prison camps. Many prisoners simply left the prison camps and walked towards Allied territory. Most took trains to neutral Switzerland for repatriation to France or to neutral Holland or Denmark for transit to Britain. Some prisoners in northern and eastern Germany took ships home to Britain, Belgium, and France. Seriously sick and wounded prisoners who could not move remained in German hospitals under the care of prisoner Self-Help Committees and Red Cross officials. The American Red Cross set up headquarters in Berlin to provide medical treatment for American sick and wounded in Germany. With the end of the fighting on the Western Front, Germany could not close its prison camp system. While fighting ended on the Eastern Front in March 1918 with the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the lack of German transportation (which was dedicated to transferring military units in the East to the Western Front) and the emerging Russian Civil War prevented many Russian prisoners from returning home. Under the terms of the Armistice of November 1918, the Allied governments forbade the Germans from releasing Russian prisoners who could swell the ranks of the Red Army. The Russo-Polish War of 1920 resulted in a new influx of Russian prisoners as Red Army troops had the choice of annihilation by the Poles after the Battle of Warsaw or internment in East Prussia. With the Red Army victory, the last Russian prisoners departed German prison camps in 1923.

In the Dual Monarchy, the combined Austro-German armies had achieved victory in the East and the Russians sued for an armistice in December 1917. After protracted negotiations, the Russians signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and the Romanians signed the Treaty of Bucharest, which ended the fighting on the Eastern Front in March 1918. Under the terms of these treaties, prisoners of war were to be released and returned to their homelands and Austro-Hungarians released their Eastern prisoners. Austro-Hungarian fortunes waned during the Fall of 1918. Allied offensives from Saloniki and Italy resulted in the occupation of Bulgaria and liberations of Serbia, Romania, and northeastern Italy. Faced with imminent invasion, the Austro-Hungarian monarchy signed an armistice on 3 November 1918 and Allied terms demanded the immediate release of Allied prisoners of war. The Austro-Hungarian POW system collapsed overnight as guards simply left their posts and former prisoners streamed home. The repatriation process for Austro-Hungarian prisoners returning home from Russian prison camps was far more complicated. The Russian Civil War undermined the Russian railway system, which made travel difficult, and military recruitment forced prisoners to again take up arms. It took years for many former Dual Monarchy subjects to return home, often in new lands which had gained independence upon the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

## POST-WAR INCARCERATION AND WELFARE WORK FOR RUSSIAN POW'S

The fate of Russian prisoners of war in Germany was especially tragic after World War I. The February Revolution resulted in the overthrow of the Tsar and the establishment of the Provisional Government. The October Revolution ushered in the Bolsheviks and a new socialist government, which promised the people "Bread, Land, and Peace!" Russian POW's celebrated the news that the war on the Eastern Front was over in March 1918 with the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. The Germans, however, concentrated their resources on moving the German forces in Russia across the *Reich* to fight in a last ditch offensive on the Western Front and did not allocate resources for the repatriation of Russian prisoners. When the Germans agreed to the Armistice which ended the fighting on the Western Front in November 1918, the Allies insisted on the immediate release of all Entente prisoners of war in German hands, with the exception of Russian POW's. They were to remain under German custody until the upcoming peace conference determined their fate. The Allied powers had a stake in seeing the White Russian Armies defeat the Bolsheviks and the Allies did not want to provide man power to augment the Red Army from German prison camps. As a result, the Russians remained captive in German prisons.

With the signing of the Armistice, the American YMCA redeployed secretaries to Germany to resume War Prisoners' Aid work for Russian prisoners. The Americans recognized that these men were especially vulnerable to "barbed-wire disease" as a result of their prolonged captivity. Bolshevik agitators appeared in German prison camps near the end of the war among the last batches of Russian POW's and they sought to indoctrinate their fellow prisoners to the new Proletariat order emerging in the East. When the Red Army invasion of Poland was repulsed in August 1920 during the Russo-Polish War, a large number of Russian soldiers chose internment in East Prussia over annihilation by the Poles. This resulted in another influx of Bolsheviks into the German prison camp system. American YMCA secretaries found themselves in an ideological conflict with the Bolsheviks, offering two different world views, to win the hearts and minds of the Russian prisoners, who simply wanted to go home. The Red Army's victories over the Whites in the Russian Civil War cemented the Bolsheviks in power in European Russia by 1921. The Allies allowed the Germans to begin the repatriation process and the last Russian prisoners left Germany by 1923. The YMCA maintained WPA services to these unfortunates until they returned home.

With the end of the Great War, the American YMCA expanded its War Work operations into Eastern Europe to develop new national Associations based on the North American model. An outgrowth of this social work included services to former Russian POW's and Russians who had fled the Civil War and sought to re-establish their lives in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and the Far East. The American YMCA worked closely with the National Bulgarian Association to reorganize the latter's program and purchase a building in Sofia. The Americans established a technical school in Sofia, which focused on vocational education. Both Bulgarian and ex-Russian POW students attended this unique institution. The technical college was an innovation developed in the United States and had not yet been introduced in Europe.

## **CONCLUSION**

The images in this gallery reflect the daily lives of Allied prisoners of war in German, Austro-Hungarian, Bulgarian, and Turkish POW camps during the Great War. While life in captivity was safe from the horrors of trench warfare, it was monotonous and depressing, which often resulted in "barbed-wire disease." Prisoners had access to entertainment, education, sports, and spiritual comfort in Central Power prison camps. Daily existence was especially hard for enlisted men who had to work, often under hard conditions, to meet the needs of the German war economy. Officers, in comparison, had an easier time due to the amenities associated with their rank. As the war dragged on, rations decreased in response to the Allied Blockades and POW's faced the specter of starvation. British, French, Belgian, and American POW's could rely on food parcels from home to maintain their strength in captivity. Prisoners from Russia, Serbia, Romania, and Italy had to survive on their Central Power rations and suffered from malnutrition. The work of relief organizations helped alleviate some of this suffering and aided POW's in their struggle for survival. The vast majority of war prisoners in Germany and Dual Monarchy survived their incarceration and returned home after the war. This would not be case in World War II when international law was not observed and authorities took advantage of free POW labor to support the war effort. Conditions were abysmal and prisoners did not enjoy the amenities their earlier comrades enjoyed during the First World War.