

Prisoners of the Home Front

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Prisoners of the Home Front

German POWs and “Enemy Aliens”
in Southern Quebec, 1940-46

Martin F. Auger



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Foreword

In so many ways, Canada's story in the Second World War was one of success. Its navy kept the sea lanes open in the North Atlantic; its air force played an indispensable role in Britain's Bomber Command; and its army assumed a seminal part in securing victory in the Italian and Northwest European campaigns. At home, Canada transformed itself into an industrial giant through the massive production of armaments. Public demand for services for soldiers and their families encouraged an increasingly prominent federal government to usher in the modern welfare state. Despite the tremendous suffering of those years, the Second World War became known as the "Good War," a characterization born of the conviction that if there ever were a war that had to be fought, it was this one. How could it be otherwise? Did the Nazis not epitomize evil, as revealed by the concentration camps and the Holocaust? Had the Japanese not brutalized Allied prisoners of war through starvation, torture, and slave labour? But what of the Canadian record in this domain? Did we, too, succumb to hatred of the enemy and commit violations of international law in our treatment of prisoners?

Few Canadians today realize that nearly 40,000 Germans were interned or imprisoned in Canada. Yet not one was killed or tortured. Although the internment system was initially unprepared for such numbers, and although significant tensions were experienced by the imprisoned, improvements took place steadily over time. By 1945, five camps were established in southern Quebec, and these are the focus of Martin Auger's study. Each camp was designed to house prisoners according to their service branch or according to the intensity of their Nazi beliefs.

Martin Auger's work provides a comprehensive account of the administrative development of the Quebec camps and furnishes a significant contribution to social history by describing day-to-day life behind barbed wire. Although conditions in the camps conformed to the requirements of the Geneva Convention, Auger shows that psychological strain – among other difficulties – remained an integral part of POW life, and that outbreaks of violence and attempted escapes occurred. We also learn about the substantive efforts by Canadian authorities to make camp life more tolerable. One example is the off-site farm labour programs that relieved monotony for the inmates, enabled them to earn a little money to purchase extra provisions, and helped the local economy by providing desperately needed workers. Canadian authorities also implemented educational programs, including ones designed to impart the principles of democracy – an initiative that

apparently altered the thinking of many former Nazis and led to several applications to stay in Canada. Overall, Martin Auger has provided an exceptionally valuable addition to local, military, and social history, and revealed yet another dimension of Canada's participation in the Second World War in which Canadians can justly take pride.

Jeffrey A. Keshen
Professor, Department of History
University of Ottawa
July 2005

Preface

Several years ago, my grandfather told us stories about a German prisoner of war who had worked on his brother-in-law's farm near Granby, Quebec, during the Second World War. He explained to us that this man was one of several inmates from a local internment camp to have volunteered for employment on local farms. The prisoner worked the fields by day and stayed in the farmhouse at night. He ate all of his meals with his employer's family. No armed guard supervised him. According to my grandfather, communication was the major problem, as the German understood very little English or French. I remember him laughing when he told me that many people in the area feared that the prisoner might kill his brother-in-law and his whole family. Influenced by wartime propaganda that often portrayed the enemy as savage beasts, local inhabitants assumed that because he was German this internee was a dangerous Nazi. They firmly believed that it was only a matter of time before he attempted to escape or committed acts of barbarity. Fortunately, no such thing happened, and the man was repatriated to Germany when war was over.

This story is one of many about the German prisoners and the internment camps of southern Quebec during the Second World War. From that rainy July evening when the first trainload of internees rolled into the region in 1940 to the repatriation of the last inmate in June 1946, the five permanent internment camps located on the south shore of the St. Lawrence River at Farnham, Grande Ligne, Île-aux-Noix, Sherbrooke, and Sorel held thousands of German internees.

Fascinated by my grandfather's story, I began research on this topic in 1998 as part of my history MA thesis project at the University of Ottawa. I was surprised to find out that no historian, journalist, or other researcher in the humanities or social sciences had written an in-depth analysis of any of the internment camps of this region. Aside from first-hand accounts such as Eric Koch's *Deemed Suspect* (1980) and inclusion in broader studies dealing with the entire Canadian internment operation like Yves Bernard and Caroline Bergeron's *Trop loin de Berlin* (1995), David J. Carter's *POW behind Canadian Barbed Wire* (1998), Chris M.V. Madsen and R.J. Henderson's *German Prisoners of War in Canada* (1993), and John Melady's *Escape from Canada* (1981), little has been written about the camps of southern Quebec. In fact, no thorough study of southern Quebec's internment facilities exists. Until recently many of the official government documents relating to Canadian internment camps remained closed to public consultation. Only in the late

1980s and early 1990s, when these sources were opened at Library and Archives Canada (then known as the National Archives of Canada), did researchers become aware of these documents and begin venturing into the uncharted waters of the Canadian internment operation. By focusing on the internment camps of southern Quebec, this book fills an important gap in the existing literature on Canada's Second World War internment operation. Not only do I hope to shed light on a still obscure topic in Canadian history, I also hope to please both readers and researchers alike.

Acknowledgments

Researching and writing the history of the internment camps of southern Quebec has been a wonderful and fascinating journey, and there are many people I would like to thank for helping to bring this project to fruition. First, I wish to extend special thanks to my MA and PhD supervisor, Professor Jeffrey Keshen of the University of Ottawa. A great mentor and military historian, his guidance and valuable commentary proved indispensable in transforming the first draft of my manuscript into the book that is today. I also wish to thank Professors Peter Bischoff, Serge Durlinger, Jan Grabowski, and Mark Stolarik of the University of Ottawa for their insightful comments, all of which strengthened this work.

I would like to thank Dr. Dean Oliver, Director, Historical Research and Exhibit Development, at the Canadian War Museum, for his encouragement and for agreeing to include this book in the Studies in Canadian Military History series. My appreciation also goes to my former colleagues and friends at the Canadian War Museum; I am especially indebted to the museum's outstanding and highly professional team of historians for their support, particularly Dr. Laura Brandon, Dr. Tim Cook, Dr. Peter MacLeod, Glenn Ogden, and Dr. Cameron Pulsifer.

Many people at UBC Press devoted time and energy to improving this book and making it more readable. I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Emily Andrew, for showing an interest in this project and overseeing it until the end, and to Camilla Blakeley, for guiding this work through the editing and production process. I was most impressed by their professionalism, thoroughness, and dedication. I am also particularly grateful for financial support from the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences' Aid to Scholarly Publications Programme, which uses funds provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

The completion of this project required countless hours of research at several archival centres. I particularly wish to thank the staff of the Eastern Townships Research Centre, the Department of National Defence's Directorate of History and Heritage, and Library and Archives Canada for their assistance in facilitating access to their vast archival collections.

I would not have been able to accomplish this undertaking without the support of family and friends. I am profoundly indebted to my parents, Robert and Yvette Auger, as well as my brother, Yannick, for their years of support and encouragement. *Merci beaucoup*. I would also like to thank my Acadian in-laws, Ronald,

Edmonde, Leesa, and Carole Richard, for always having shown interest in my work. Finally, I wish to thank my friends Ludovic Béliveau, Mélanie Brunet, Andrew Burtch, Gaéтан Guilbert, Dominic Jasmin, Yves Pelletier, Jean-Sébastien Plante, and Ryan Touhey for making university life, as well as the writing of this book most enjoyable.

Last but certainly not least, I must thank my wife, Sacha, for her continuous and seemingly unending support, patience, inspiration, and love over the years. Je ne serais pas où je suis aujourd'hui sans ta présence dans ma vie. Je t'aime de tout mon coeur.

Prisoners of the Home Front

1

A History of Internment

When Canada declared war on Nazi Germany on 10 September 1939, the federal government immediately took measures toward incarcerating “enemy subjects,” believing internment to be an effective method for preventing the threat of subversive activities on Canadian soil. Initiated by the federal government as part of the War Measures Act, the Canadian internment operation was run entirely by the Department of National Defence. During the war, approximately 38,000 Germans were detained in twenty-five permanent internment camps and in dozens of smaller work camps located throughout Canada. Among the internees were some 34,000 prisoners of war who came from all branches of the German armed forces. The rest consisted of German civilians and refugees, and of enemy merchant seamen, to whom British and Canadian military authorities had granted prisoner of war status in 1942.¹ As part of these precautionary measures, Canadian authorities authorized the construction of five internment camps in southern Quebec: Farnham, Grande Ligne, Île-aux-Noix, Sherbrooke, and Sorel.

The internment operation in southern Quebec can be divided into two phases. The first, from 1940 to 1943, witnessed the incarceration of civilians. The goal was to neutralize any potential threat to the defence of the Canadian nation. Any person suspected of sympathizing with the enemy was perceived to be a potential spy and saboteur and was placed in an internment camp. Individuals of German origin were first among these. During this phase, the camps in southern Quebec were used to detain men of German descent, most of whom were civilians who had been initially interned in the United Kingdom and transferred to Canada for security reasons.² As the war progressed, it became evident that these civilian internees were no threat to the nation. Consequently, most were either transferred to other camps or liberated between 1941 and 1943. However, when more and more German prisoners of war came to be captured by British and Commonwealth soldiers overseas, the Canadian government agreed to ship many of them to Canada for confinement. The Department of National Defence decided to use the camps of southern Quebec to incarcerate this new class of captives. The new inmates (all of them were men) began to arrive in southern Quebec’s internment camps in early 1942. The incarceration of German prisoners of war constituted the second phase of the Canadian internment operation in southern Quebec, lasting from 1942 to 1946. Canadian soil became the home of thousands of such prisoners.

The purpose of this book is to evaluate the importance of the internment camp operation and examine how it developed on the south shore of the St. Lawrence River. The choice of this area is significant: half of the internment camps in Quebec were located in this small region. This study analyzes how these camps functioned and how the region's internment operation evolved. It also takes a look at life behind barbed wire and at the physical and psychological strains that inmates suffered. Most of these camps operated work programs, and this study observes how the internment enterprise contributed to the local economy. Educational programs for inmates are analyzed as well. This study of the camps of southern Quebec demonstrates that the internment operation in Canada, although occasionally lacking proper organization, was a positive experience overall. Canada's treatment of internees was humane, in contrast to what took place in the internment operations of other countries, namely Germany and Japan.

Before an analysis of Canada's internment camps can be properly undertaken, a definition of what is meant by the term "internment operations" and some historical background are necessary. Internment operations consist of a complex network of prisoner of war camps and concentration camps. Each type of facility serves a specific purpose. Prisoner of war camps can be defined as centres for the detention of enemy combatants (normally members of regularly organized armed forces) captured on the field of battle or elsewhere by a belligerent power.³ They are usually set up in times of war. Concentration camps, on the other hand, are designed specifically to incarcerate civilians. They have been used during times of war and peace to confine political prisoners and minority groups for reasons of state security, exploitation, or punishment.⁴ During the Second World War, all belligerents used both types of establishments.

Prisoner of War Camps

Although prisoners of war have been a reality of warfare for thousands of years, their treatment has rarely been humane. For many centuries, war prisoners were brutalized, beaten, tortured, mutilated, exchanged for ransoms, enslaved, and executed by their captors. On every continent and in every culture, such practices were customary at some point in history.⁵ It was not until the eighteenth-century Enlightenment that modern rules relating to the treatment of captives in war appeared. The writings of philosophers like Montesquieu, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Emmerich de Vattel led to an awareness in most European countries that prisoners of war should be humanely treated. Captives were no longer to be disposed of at the whim of their captors, but were to be removed from the fight and protected until the end of hostilities.⁶

With the advent of large, conscripted national armies during the Napoleonic Wars, it became clear to most European nations that they needed to establish special facilities to detain prisoners of war. Old prisons and dungeons were no longer

adequate to house the masses of surrendered enemy troops captured in battle. The result was the creation of large camps suited for the incarceration of large populations of prisoners. The use of such facilities became widespread throughout the nineteenth century, when they became officially known as prisoner of war camps. Although better than their predecessors, these camps were still often inadequate to handle and sustain large numbers of prisoners.⁷ No armed conflict highlights this shortcoming better than the American Civil War. During that struggle, the men captured by both sides were forced to endure terrible hardships. Overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, lack of heat, disease, starvation, thirst, and death were all realities of life in the prisoner of war camps of the American Civil War. The most notorious of these was the Confederacy's Andersonville camp in Georgia, where it is estimated that as many as 13,000 Union inmates died between 1864 and 1865.⁸

It soon became apparent that the treatment of captives in war had to improve. A first attempt occurred in 1863 when American jurist Francis Lieber formulated a document entitled *Instructions of the Government of Armies of the United States in the Field*, whose provisions dealt almost exclusively with the protection of war prisoners. Later known as the Lieber Code, this innovative set of regulations stipulated that "a prisoner of war is subject to no punishment for being a public enemy, nor is any revenge wreaked upon him by the intentional infliction of any suffering, or disgrace, by cruel imprisonment, want of food, by mutilation, death, or any other barbarity." The Lieber Code was significant because it was the first government-issued comprehensive codification of laws relating to prisoners of war. The document became the base on which subsequent international lawmakers wrote about the subject of prisoners of war.⁹

It was only a matter of time before an international set of rules protecting war prisoners appeared. The first step was the creation of the Geneva Convention in 1864, which provided for the relief of wounded combatants. Although none of the clauses addressed the issue of prisoners of war, the convention, which was signed by most European countries, proved that it was possible to reach an international consensus on certain regulations regarding warfare.¹⁰ At the 1874 Brussels Conference, an attempt was made to establish an international standard for the treatment of war prisoners. Known as the Brussels Declaration, this set of rules reiterated most of the provisions of the Lieber Code. Unfortunately, it was never ratified by the European delegates attending the conference. It was not until the Hague International Peace Conferences in 1899 and 1907 that prisoners of war became protected by international law.¹¹

Widespread concern about the development of new weaponry and the possibility of world war led to the Hague conferences. The Industrial Revolution had provided the perfect breeding ground for the progress of military technology and the creation of new and more lethal weapons. The wars of the second half of the

nineteenth century were testimonies to the increased levels of destruction and casualties caused by the industrialization of warfare. The aim of the conferences was to limit armament development and to find ways to “humanize” war through law. Although both conferences achieved nothing in the field of disarmament, they did produce regulations on the laws and customs of war. Regarding the status of prisoners of war, the Hague Rules expressly forbade the killing of enemy soldiers who had surrendered. They stipulated that captors had to protect their captives “from violence, insults, and public curiosity.” A captive who was being interrogated was obliged to reveal only his name and rank and “no pressure may be brought to bear to force him to give any other information.” All forms of corporal punishment were prohibited. The rules also emphasized that prisoners should “be detained in safe conditions.” All inmates were to be fed, clothed, and accommodated on the same footing as the troops of the government that captured them.¹² During the First World War most belligerents complied with the Hague Rules.

Concentration Camps

Civilians have been victims of war since the dawn of warfare. Throughout the centuries, non-combatants have suffered the worst atrocities at the hands of soldiers: destruction of property, pillage, mistreatment, rape, torture, imprisonment, deportation, enslavement, and death. It was not until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that modern rules of conduct regarding the treatment of civilians in wartime were developed in Europe. This change was partly prompted by the humanist writings of several intellectuals, namely Hugo Grotius and Emmerich de Vattel. These thinkers believed that war was the domain of regular armies and that civilians should be spared. Although by the nineteenth century most western armies adhered to the principle of non-combatant immunity, the absence of international laws governing the treatment of civilians in wartime made it difficult to control the actions of soldiers.¹³ Irregular or guerrilla warfare eroded the barrier that distinguished combatants from non-combatants. Because armed civilians formed the bulk of guerrilla movements, it was difficult for legitimate authorities and regular armed forces to differentiate between innocent civilians and guerrilla fighters. Complicating matters was the fact that guerrilla forces often relied on the support of local populations to survive. Consequently, regular soldiers committed ruthless acts of reprisal against innocent civilians.¹⁴

The concentration camp system was created in the late nineteenth century as an instrument for the suppression of guerrilla activities. The original purpose of the camps was to incarcerate civilian populations suspected of providing aid to guerrilla forces. It was during the 1895–98 Cuban War of Independence that concentration camps were used for the first time. Upon his arrival in Cuba in 1896, Spanish General Valeriano Weyler y Nicolau immediately instituted what became known as the *reconcentrado* or “reconcentration policy.” The program called for the con-

centration of civilians in fortified towns placed under Spanish military jurisdiction and the destruction of the Cuban countryside through a scorched earth policy, to contain the rebels and deprive them of support. General Weyler believed that implementing the reconcentration program would prevent Cuban civilians from joining the insurgents and make it impossible for them to furnish the rebels with food, shelter, other material support, or intelligence on Spanish military movements. He also believed that the policy would undermine the rebels' morale by dooming their families and relatives. Reconcentration was forced upon the entire population of the island. Anyone failing to obey the evacuation orders was considered a rebel and killed.¹⁵ In practice, however, the program, was ill conceived and badly implemented. There were numerous problems with housing, sanitation, food, and supplies. Estimates suggest that as many as 200,000 Cubans died of famine and disease in reconcentration camps before the policy was rescinded in 1898.¹⁶ Condemnation of the reconcentration program by the United States was one of many factors that led to the 1898 Spanish-American War.

Ironically, American troops resorted to similar procedures during the 1899-1902 Philippines insurrection. In order to neutralize Filipino guerrilla movements, American commanders adopted a "pacification" policy intended to isolate the insurgents from the population. The aims were similar to those in Cuba: demoralizing the guerrilla forces and preventing them from relying on the support of the local populace. In several zones of operations, American soldiers placed civilians into controlled areas where food and shelter were provided. The brutal 1901-2 campaign launched by General J. Franklin Bell in the province of Batangas became a testimony to the ruthlessness of this policy. The entire population of Batangas was herded into purposely designed concentration camps, and everything outside of these enclosures was systematically destroyed under a scorched earth policy. It is estimated that more than 11,000 Filipinos perished from malnutrition and disease in these camps, which one author of the period labelled "models of health and sanitation."¹⁷

Concentration camps were also used by the British during the 1899-1902 South African War. When the Boer *Kommandos* turned to guerrilla warfare in 1900, Lord Kitchener and the British authorities in South Africa implemented a scorched earth and population clearance policy designed to break the Boers' will to fight. The goal was to systematically destroy the two Boer republics of the Transvaal and Orange Free State and to punish their inhabitants for their continued resistance to British occupation. As British troops burned villages, confiscated livestock, and ravaged the countryside, the Boers who were captured during these operations – mostly women, children, and old men – were deported to so-called refugee camps. The intention was to deprive the guerrillas of the support of the civilian population. These concentration camps were set up in haste and were poorly regulated, unsanitary, overcrowded, and badly managed.¹⁸ Indifferent care eventually led to

some 28,000 deaths from disease and hunger. These deaths amounted to about 10 percent of the Boer population of the two republics. Also, it is estimated that up to 20,000 Africans died in similar camps during the war. The high death rate among camp inmates shocked the public in many parts of the world.¹⁹ Interestingly, it was during the South African War that the term “concentration camp” was officially used for the first time. It was borrowed in 1901 by British politicians C.P. Scott and John Ellis from the notorious Spanish *reconcentrado* camps in Cuba.²⁰

As demonstrated by the American, British, and Spanish experiments, colonialism played an important role in the origins of concentration camps between 1898 and 1902. The camps not only permitted these three western nations to isolate guerrillas, they also allowed these countries to subjugate hostile populations in their overseas colonies. Although these early concentration camps were often inadequate and much criticized on humanitarian grounds, the experience created a precedent that was imitated by other western states. An example is the incarceration by German soldiers of Africans in labour camps during the 1904-7 Herero and Nama Revolt in German South West Africa. It is estimated that more than half of the 17,000 Herero and Nama prisoners died in these facilities from exhaustion, hunger, and disease. Overall, the Germans exterminated more than 75,000 Hereros and Namas during the rebellion.²¹ It was the coming of the First World War that transformed the concentration camp system from a repressive measure designed to crush colonial insurrections to one that modern states could use in times of warfare to neutralize potential internal enemies. During that war, most belligerents resorted to concentration camps to intern political prisoners and civilians of “enemy nationality.”

Internment Operations and the First World War

It was during the First World War that internment operations combining both prisoner of war camps and concentration camps came into being. Belligerents organized complex networks of internment facilities purposely designed to incarcerate civilians and war prisoners. In many countries, special departments were created to manage these camps under the auspices of internment operations. Though their status was different, both types of internees often saw their fate administered by the same authorities. This phenomenon was to repeat itself throughout the twentieth century.

Canada was among the first to adopt such measures, and its policies, therefore, arguably represent the best example of how internment operations were organized during the war by all belligerents. The United Kingdom declared war on Germany and its allies on behalf of the British Empire on 4 August 1914. Internment facilities were created in all British colonies to detain civilians of “enemy descent” and to incarcerate prisoners of war. The belief was that “enemy subjects” could become threats to the security of the British Empire. It was assumed that a

man who owed his first allegiance to the land of his birth could endanger the British war effort. The result was that the United Kingdom, the dominions of Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Canada, along with India and other regions of the British Empire, detained thousands of civilians and prisoners of war of Austro-Hungarian, Bulgarian, German, and Turkish descent.²²

In Canada, the introduction of the War Measures Act on 22 August 1914 played an important role in establishing the Canadian internment operation. This emergency legislation enabled “the Governor-in-Council to do whatever was deemed necessary or advisable for the security, defence, peace, order, and welfare of Canada ... during war, invasion or insurrection.” It gave the Canadian government “extraordinary powers with which to meet the emergency” created by the war. Among those extraordinary powers was the right to “arrest, detain, exclude, and deport” all individuals believed to be “enemy aliens.”²³ These were foreign-born residents of enemy nationality who were not Canadian citizens by virtue of parentage or naturalization. Though the government initially maintained a policy of tolerance towards civilians of “enemy descent,” this situation soon changed. Keeping in step with British policy as well as with wartime hysteria and xenophobic sentiments in Canada, Ottawa authorized the appointment of civilian registrars in major urban centres on 28 October 1914. All enemy aliens who had not yet been naturalized as Canadian citizens were obliged to report to the nearest registrar and were forbidden to leave the country. If a registrar so decided, a suspected enemy alien could be interned.²⁴ Individuals ordered for internment were kept in temporary detention centres until their transfer to permanent internment camps. Overall, some 85,000 enemy aliens were registered by the Canadian authorities during the war.²⁵

Coordinating and administrating internment operations was the Department of Militia and Defence (1914-15) and the Department of Justice (1915-20), with Major-General Sir William Dillon Otter placed in charge.²⁶ Throughout the war, some 8,579 men of enemy alien origin were detained in twenty-four internment camps in Canada. These were located in Nova Scotia, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta, and British Columbia.²⁷ The inmates included persons of Austro-Hungarian, Bulgarian, German, and Turkish origins. Only 3,138 of these internees, according to Major-General Otter’s calculations, could be regarded as prisoners of war; the remainder were civilians. Families were permitted to accompany the men into internment, and a total of 81 women and 156 children were also detained in the Canadian camps. The total number of Germans incarcerated during the war was estimated to be around 2,000.²⁸ The bulk of the internees were Austro-Hungarian subjects, mostly Ukrainians who had been born in the provinces of Galicia and Bukovyna.²⁹

All of these so-called enemy aliens were interned because they were considered to be either dangerous or potential burdens to the local welfare system (many were unemployed). The greatest fear was that they might resort to espionage, sabotage,

or other means to undermine Canada's war effort. Those incarcerated as prisoners of war were mostly young men suspected of belonging to enemy military reserves. Internment prevented these individuals from leaving Canada and rejoining enemy armies. The reliance of most First World War armies on universal conscription was a major factor leading to the detention of these potential enemy reservists.³⁰ Moreover, at the United Kingdom's request, some 817 prisoners of war, mostly sailors caught in various ports under British jurisdiction, were transferred to Canada in 1915 from Barbados, Bermuda, British Guiana, Jamaica, Newfoundland, and St. Lucia. These were the only prisoners interned in Canada to be categorized by Otter as "captured in arms."³¹ As for enemy soldiers captured by Canadian troops on the European battlefields, most were interned in the United Kingdom. This was done for logistical reasons, namely the United Kingdom's proximity to the European front lines. In fact, Great Britain absorbed most of the prisoners of war caught by British Imperial forces. By 1918, some 250,000 prisoners of war were detained in close to 500 camps throughout the British Isles.³²

Canadian authorities treated both civilian internees and prisoners of war in accordance with the 1907 Hague Convention. In all Canadian internment camps, inmates were given the same standard of clothing, food, and quarters as Canadian soldiers and were free to entertain themselves. They held concerts, played sports, viewed weekly movies, wrote letters, attended educational classes, practised hobbies, and participated in numerous other recreational activities. In addition, prisoners had access to camp libraries where they could read censored books, magazines, and newspapers. Medical facilities and religious services were also provided.³³ Moreover, the internees benefited from the services of relief societies such as the International Red Cross and the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). The International Red Cross was the most important of these associations. It had been founded at Geneva in 1864 by Henri Dunant to prevent and alleviate human suffering. During the war, it kept track of all prisoners of war and enemy aliens detained by all belligerents, provided medical assistance, and coordinated a huge traffic of parcels usually filled with clothes, food, and medicine intended for war prisoners.³⁴ The YMCA, a benevolent organization founded in 1844 by Sir George Williams, contributed greatly to the welfare of prisoners during the war, providing recreational and sports equipment, games, and books to internees.³⁵ Camps were constantly inspected by delegations from neutral powers, namely Switzerland and Sweden, to ensure the humane treatment of inmates.

Work projects were also integrated into camp life. According to the 1907 Hague Convention, prisoners could work on various tasks "as long as the projects had no connection to the war effort, the labour was not excessive, and the men were paid a rate equivalent to that of soldiers."³⁶ When the labour shortage became critical in Canada during 1915, the federal government believed that it could compensate by employing both civilian internees and prisoners of war on work projects. Not only

was this strategy advantageous for the government, it also afforded a way of distracting the prisoners from the monotony and constraint of internment. Numerous duties awaited inmates. They were used to clear land, work on farms, build roads and railways, cut wood, and work in mines and mills. The federal government was not the only benefactor of internee labour. Prisoners were also employed by municipal and provincial governments and by many private companies and businesses that were short of manpower owing to the war. At all times, armed guards followed the prisoners in their tasks.³⁷ As of 1916, selected prisoners were released into the custody of farmers who agreed to pay internees the prevailing rate for farm labour and to report on their behaviour.³⁸ Prisoners were paid 25 cents a day for their work, which was the same as the working pay of a Canadian soldier. They could use this money to buy tobacco and other goods from camp canteens.³⁹

Despite the protection of the Hague Rules, life behind barbed wire was a strenuous experience. The pressures imposed by years of captivity as well as by the difficult living and working conditions in the camps took their physical and psychological toll. Consequently, insubordination and other acts of dissension on the part of prisoners became quite frequent, as did escape attempts. Passive resistance was also common in the camps, with the prisoners simply refusing to work. On rare occasions, there were more serious demonstrations of discontent. Such was the case in 1916 when a full-scale riot involving several hundred internees took place in the Kapuskasing Camp in northern Ontario.⁴⁰

The majority of the internees proved to be no threat to the security of Canada, and most were released between 1916 and 1917 after signing a parole agreement that demanded "loyalty and obedience to the laws of Canada and a periodical report to the nearest police authority."⁴¹ Many internment facilities were closed as a result of this decision. When the Armistice agreement of 11 November 1918 ended hostilities, there were approximately 2,200 prisoners still confined in Canadian internment camps. The majority were prisoners of war.⁴² The release of these inmates would be somewhat slower. With Canada's military commitment to fight Bolshevism in Siberia in the winter of 1918-19, Ottawa threatened to expand the Canadian internment operation by adding Russians and Finns to the category of enemy aliens.⁴³ The repatriation of the prisoners began only after the Treaty of Versailles, which officially ended the First World War, was signed in June 1919. Although most remaining enemy aliens were released at that time, the repatriation of prisoners of war lasted until May 1920, owing to logistical problems.⁴⁴ Altogether 107 internees died in Canadian internment camps during the war. A high percentage of these deaths resulted from tuberculosis and the influenza epidemic of 1918.⁴⁵ The Canadian example illustrates how intensified internment operations had become a reality of modern war by 1914-18.⁴⁶ It also showed how nations at war possessed the ability to detain large populations. During the First World War,

similar internment experiences also took place in Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, the United States, the Ottoman Empire, and most other belligerent nations.⁴⁷ Overall, some 3,847 Canadian soldiers were captured by the enemy on the field of battle during the First World War.⁴⁸

Internment Operations in the Interwar Years

The First World War internment experience proved its worth, and in the interwar years numerous nations resorted, once again, to such measures. During those years, the treatment of prisoners of war continued to be a topic of interest. The First World War experience had demonstrated the deficiencies of certain clauses of the Hague Rules, namely those dealing with the labour, punishment, relief, and repatriation of prisoners of war.⁴⁹ Finding ways to overcome these problems became the order of the day. It was in 1929 that delegates of thirty-eight nations, including Canada, met in Geneva to frame a new treaty that would supersede the Hague Convention. The result was the Geneva Convention Relating to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. This set of international rules elaborated and corrected many of the provisions that had proven troublesome. Unlike the Hague Convention, which was effective only if ratified by all of the belligerents in a war, the 1929 Geneva Convention's importance lay in the fact that it was effective between any two states that had ratified it.⁵⁰ Consequently, it was the Geneva Convention of 1929 that regulated the treatment of prisoners of war during the Second World War.

The problem, however, was that no international set of rules regulating the treatment of civilians existed. Although it was universally recognized that hostilities were restricted to the armed forces of belligerents and that the ordinary citizens of the contending states had to be treated leniently, this understanding excluded those who took up arms against enemy forces. It was this exclusion that had led to the creation of concentration camps in the late nineteenth century and that had given carte blanche to some First World War belligerents to act with great ferocity against civilian populations. For example, when the invading Germans came into conflict with insurgents in Belgium in 1914, they responded by shooting several hundred innocent Belgian civilians.⁵¹ It was in the Ottoman Empire, however, that the handling of non-combatants was at its worst. The genocidal massacre of more than 1.5 million Armenians by the Ottoman Turks between 1915 and 1923, of whom more than 600,000 died in concentration camps, was by far the most inhumane treatment of civilian populations by military forces during the First World War.⁵² But the lessons of such events were not taken into account when the Geneva Convention was ratified in 1929. This neglect would have grave consequences for civilian populations worldwide in later years.⁵³

It was during the interwar years that totalitarian regimes began to use concentration camps to neutralize and annihilate so-called enemies of the state. In the Soviet Union, Fascist Italy, Imperial Japan, Nazi Germany, Antonio Salazar's Portugal, and

Francisco Franco's Spain, concentration camps were intensively used throughout the interwar period and subsequent years.⁵⁴ The first serious case occurred in Russia during the 1918-21 civil war. During those years, the newly established Bolshevik, or "Red," government that took power in the middle of the 1917 Revolution was forced to fight a brutal civil war against "White" counter-revolutionaries and the foreign armies that supported them. Desperately struggling to remain in power, the Bolsheviks instituted a complex system of internment camps designed to detain both prisoners of war and civilians. The Bolsheviks used such camps, commonly known as gulags, as "instruments of terror" for the repression and eradication of counter-revolutionaries, political opponents, and other dissidents. The goal was to isolate all potential adversaries of the newly formed Bolshevik regime. Numerous gulags were established in northern Russia, Siberia, and Central Asia.⁵⁵

Although deportations to these regions had been common in Russia under the czars, it was Bolshevik revolutionary Leon Trotsky who, as commissar of war, decided in 1918 to integrate this tradition into the concentration system. Trotsky used his experience as an internee in a Canadian internment camp in 1917 to lay the foundation of his internment policy, which by 1919 included hundreds of corrective labour camps and penal colonies. In such facilities, thousands of political prisoners were used as forced labour to clear land; to build railways, roads, airports, and waterways; and to work in factories, oil fields, and mines. Gulags became known as "institutions of slavery."⁵⁶ In the aftermath of the civil war, the gulag system expanded; the number of internees rose from approximately 150,000 in late 1921 to an estimated nine million in 1939.⁵⁷ This radical increase coincided with the rise to power of Joseph Stalin and the purges he implemented in the 1930s, which resulted in the death of millions of people throughout the Soviet Union. It is estimated that thirty million people, perhaps even more, were sent to the gulags between 1917 and the early 1990s, when the system was abolished with the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. It is believed that approximately half of these prisoners died of hunger, disease, exhaustion, overwork, cold, torture, and execution.⁵⁸

It was in Germany, however, that the harsh nature of concentration camps was exploited to its maximum. When Adolf Hitler and the Nazis came into power in 1933 and established the foundations of the Third Reich, concentration camps, otherwise known as *Konzentrationslager*, were used for the containment, suppression, and exploitation of political enemies of the state. Any individual suspected of conspiring against or opposing Hitler's regime was sent to such facilities, where many were tortured and killed. Nazi racial policies ultimately led to the radicalization and expansion of the German internment system. Concentration camps became used as tools in the persecution of minority groups, especially the Jews.⁵⁹ The advent of the Second World War marked the expansion or "internationalization" of the Third Reich's concentration system. As German armies

overran and conquered most of continental Europe between 1939 and 1941, the number of civilian prisoners increased dramatically in the occupied territories. The Nazis responded to this problem by building an enormous and highly complex concentration system that consisted of hundreds of concentration and labour camps, as well as subsidiary facilities. Most of these were spread throughout Central and Eastern Europe.⁶⁰ In these camps, living conditions were minimal and prisoners were kept barely alive. The bulk of the inmates were used as slave labour on farms and in factories and mines, thus contributing to Germany's war effort. Many died of overwork, beatings, torture, sickness, disease, cold, hunger, and murder.⁶¹

The Nazis also added a new dimension to concentration camps by introducing death camps. These were facilities designed and deliberately used with one single aim in mind: the complete and systematic extermination of all people considered to be "undesirable," "subhuman," or "inferior" by the Nazis, notably Jews, Gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses, Slavs, homosexuals, and several other groups. Mass extermination became general policy following the German conquest of Poland in 1939, and killing centres and extermination camps were the backbone of the Nazi concentration system by 1941. The efficiency of the killing process was borrowed from industry. Trainloads of prisoners entered these camps and were exterminated in gas chambers, their bodies disposed of in mass graves, in the ovens of crematoria, and in bone-crushing machines.⁶² Hair, teeth, skin, skulls, bones, and ashes were sometimes used for various commercial purposes, such as in pillows and fertilizers.⁶³ Millions of prisoners died in extermination camps like Auschwitz, Belzec, and Chelmno in Poland.⁶⁴ Many prisoners also died from deadly medical experiments. Nazi doctors and scientists used prisoners as human guinea pigs. Medical experiments in the camps included evaluations of human reaction to freezing temperatures, low air pressure, high altitudes, and to various seawater experiments; the testing of drugs on people in whom diseases such as malaria and typhus had been artificially induced; the removal and transplantation of bones and muscles to examine regeneration; the ingestion of poisons and toxins to find antidotes; the infliction of phosphorus burns to analyze their effects; the testing of new surgical techniques; and sterilization and castration.⁶⁵ It is estimated that between 1933 and 1945, more than eighteen million people were interned in Nazi concentration camps, eleven million of whom died including more than six million Jews.⁶⁶ The Holocaust became a testimony of the inhumanity and evil of the Nazi regime.

Internment Operations and the Second World War

During the course of the Second World War, internment operations expanded. This expansion was in large part due to the intensity and global nature of that conflict. The war affected a great number of countries around the world, and internment operations were initiated on every continent. All belligerents, including

Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States, used internment camps to contain civilian populations and prisoners of war.⁶⁷ Even neutral states such as Sweden, Switzerland, Spain, and Ireland resorted to such facilities to detain civilian refugees and belligerent soldiers caught inside their territories, and to hold exchanged prisoners of war. Switzerland alone housed almost 300,000 military and civilian internees during the Second World War.⁶⁸ It is estimated that around 80 million people served in the armed forces of the belligerent powers between 1939 and 1945 and, while exact figures will probably never be known, it is estimated that as many as 35 million of them spent some time in enemy hands. These numbers deal solely with prisoners of war and do not include the millions of interned civilians.⁶⁹

Throughout the war, nearly 10,000 Canadian soldiers, sailors, and airmen fell into enemy hands while serving with the Canadian forces.⁷⁰ This number was quite small when you consider that more than one million people served in the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN), the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF), and the Canadian Army during the Second World War.⁷¹ Compared with other Allied countries, Canada had very few prisoners of war held by the enemy. More than 190,000 members of the British armed forces and over 110,000 American servicemen were held captive during the war. The armed forces of these two powers were, of course, much bigger than Canada's. Some British Commonwealth nations also had more war prisoners than Canada. For example, close to 30,000 Australians and over 12,000 South Africans were captured in battle.⁷² Clearly, all of these countries had a much bigger stake in prisoners of war matters than Canada had.

Not all countries treated civilians humanely or abided by the provisions of the Geneva Convention when dealing with prisoners of war. The Nazi concentration system is a perfect example of the barbaric ways in which some belligerents treated civilian internees. But prisoners of war also suffered abuses. For instance, because the Soviet Union had refused to ratify the Geneva Convention in 1929, the Soviet army felt no obligation to live up to the terms of the treaty when it invaded Polish territory in September 1939. Thousands of Polish officers and servicemen were executed by the Soviets and buried in mass graves in a forested area known as Katyn, near Smolensk, Russia.⁷³ Likewise, the German army felt no obligation to abide by the provisions of the Geneva Convention when it invaded the Soviet Union in 1941. It is estimated that more than three million Soviet prisoners of war died in German captivity during the war.⁷⁴

Similarly, the handling of prisoners of war by Japan, which had also refused to ratify the Geneva Convention, also fell short of any sense of humanity. The Japanese Army committed some of the worst atrocities against prisoners of war. According to bushido, the centuries-old samurai code of conduct espoused by the Japanese military, a soldier's greatest calling was to die on the battlefield. Surrender was unthinkable; Japanese soldiers were required to commit hara-kiri, or ritual

suicide, in the advent of capture rather than face disgrace. Prisoners of war were viewed with utter disdain, which may explain why Japanese troops behaved so cruelly against captured enemy soldiers.⁷⁵ Tens of thousands of Allied troops caught on the field of battle, among them 1,689 Canadian soldiers captured during the fall of the British Colony of Hong Kong in December 1941, experienced the horrors of Japanese captivity.⁷⁶ Prisoners of war were relentlessly humiliated, mistreated, beaten, and tortured, and many were cold-bloodedly killed by ruthless Japanese captors.⁷⁷ It is estimated, for example, that some 10,000 American and Filipino prisoners of war died during the infamous Bataan Death March that followed the American surrender of the Bataan peninsula in the Philippines in April 1942.⁷⁸

Prisoners of war were also exploited as slave labour. Many were forced to work on farms and in mines, munitions factories, and shipyards. Others were assigned to heavy manual labour projects that included constructing airfields, roads, and railways. The most notorious project was the infamous Burma-Thailand Railway, which involved approximately 64,000 prisoners of war, many of whom died in the ordeal.⁷⁹ Like the Nazis, the Japanese also conducted medical and biological warfare experiments on humans, many of whom were prisoners of war. These included the testing of poisons, gases, and flame throwers; electrocutions; transfusions using horse blood; the explosion of bombs containing gangrene, anthrax, and cyanide; exposure to high doses of X-rays; transplantations; the injection of diseases such as syphilis, cholera, and tetanus to test new drugs; vivisections; and experiments analyzing the time it took to die from fatigue, malnutrition, cold, lack of sleep, and dehydration.⁸⁰ These acts were in complete defiance of the fundamental principles of the laws of war and clearly exemplify the dreadful treatment prisoners of war received in Japanese hands. It is estimated that approximately one in four of the 140,000 Allied personnel captured by the Japanese died in captivity.⁸¹

The barbarous ways in which Japanese troops treated prisoners of war also was reflected in their handling of non-combatants. Captured civilians were systematically beaten, tortured, and often executed.⁸² Estimates claim that 5 percent of the British, 11 percent of the American, and 17 percent of the Dutch civilians captured by the Japanese died in captivity. But it was against the civilian populations of Asia and the Pacific region that the Japanese committed the worst atrocities and, as a result, millions were killed.⁸³ In some instances, Asian civilians, were used by Japanese soldiers as human guinea pigs for martial arts and bayonet practices.⁸⁴ Many died as slave workers on Japanese labour projects. Of the more than 250,000 civilians who worked on the construction of the Burma-Thailand Railway, half of them perished.⁸⁵ Others were used as human guinea pigs in medical and biological warfare experiments. It is estimated that as many as 30,000 people were killed in these experiments between 1933 and 1945.⁸⁶ The experience of captured women was particularly harsh. At least 200,000 women were forcibly abducted by invading

Japanese armies and placed in “comfort stations” where they became sexual slaves. In these special camps, women were made to serve up to ninety soldiers per day and were repeatedly beaten and raped. Between 70 and 90 percent of these women died in captivity.⁸⁷

The German and Japanese examples show how great extremes existed in the treatment of war prisoners and civilian internees during the Second World War. At one end of the spectrum were the western Allies, who largely complied with the provisions of the Geneva Convention when dealing with interned enemy subjects, civilians, and prisoners of war alike. At the other end were those, like Germany and Japan, who ignored humanitarian ideals and deliberately chose to act with brutality against enemy prisoners and civilian populations. However, despite the differences, it would be wrong to believe that all prisoners were badly treated by the Axis powers. Germany, for example, generally respected the provisions of the Geneva Convention when dealing with western Allied prisoners of war, including Canadians.⁸⁸ Nor would it be right to maintain that the Allied powers were always fair in their treatment of prisoners. The forced relocation and internment of civilians of Japanese origin in Canada and the United States, for instance, serves as a reminder of the drastic policies and decisions that were taken against ethnic and racial minorities in the name of national security by some democracies.⁸⁹ But in the end, when all the evidence is weighed, nothing that the Allies did can compare with the loss of millions of lives at the hands of brutal and sadistic German and Japanese captors during this war that caused more than 55 million deaths worldwide.

As a result of the outrageous war crimes committed by countries such as Germany and Japan during the war, the Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War was revised in 1949 and, for the first time, a Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War was set up. Both conventions were ratified by sixty-one nations. The convention covering prisoners of war reiterated most of the provisions of the 1929 Geneva Convention, but redefined the term “prisoners of war” to include not only members of regular armed forces but also members of resistance movements and persons who accompanied armed forces without being a member thereof, such as war correspondents and civilian supply contractors. It also re-emphasized the humane treatment of prisoners of war and broadened clauses dealing with the delivery of relief supplies, food rations, prisoner of war work, and punishments.⁹⁰ The second convention, which dealt exclusively with the treatment of civilians in wartime, guaranteed certain immunities for non-combatants. It strictly forbade the deportation of individuals or groups; the taking of hostages; outrages upon personal dignity; torture; collective punishment and reprisals; the unjustified destruction of property; and discrimination in treatment on the basis of race, religion, nationality, or on political grounds.⁹¹

The Second World War showed the extent to which internment operations integrating prisoners of war and concentration camps had become generally accepted by most world powers. The fact that all belligerents used internment camps as a means of incarcerating enemy combatants and potentially hostile civilian populations demonstrates that establishing internment operations had become standard procedure in times of war. When compared with the internment operations of major powers like the United States, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Japan, the Canadian internment experience was fairly limited. The internment camps built by the Canadian government in southern Quebec never housed more than a thousand prisoners each at a time. Nevertheless, the Canadian example provides a fascinating account of how well one Allied power treated its enemy prisoners. Until now, no thorough study of the camps of southern Quebec has been made. This book provides a view of how the Canadian internment operation worked in one region and how strictly it abided by the provisions of the Geneva Convention.⁹²