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Number 22 Internment Camp German Prisoners of War and Canadian Internment Operations in Mimico, Ontario, 1940-1944

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Article abstract

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NUMBER 22 INTERNMENT CAMP

German Prisoners of War and Canadian Internment Operations in Mimico, Ontario, 1940-1944



by Kirk W. Goodlet

Captured German soldiers in Europe awaiting shipment to POW camps. Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society 984.113.38

In January 2011, as part of its tough-on-crime plan, Stephen Harper's Conservative Government announced its commitment to spend 150-million dollars on the construction or expansion of prisons throughout Canada.¹ This announcement came at a crucial time for the Ontario government, which, by July 2008, had agreed to build a new maximum-security prison in Mimico to reduce overcrowding at facilities across

the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Located about fifteen kilometres west of downtown Toronto, the Ontario government chose the site, which has a correctional history dating back to 1887, because "it is accessible by major city and provincial highways" and the site "is government owned and can accommodate ministry needs."²

Whether or not either government realized it, this was not the first time the

¹ CTV News, "Government Pledges Millions for Prison Expansions," Monday 10 January 2011 <http://toronto.ctv.ca/servlet/an/local/CTVNews/20110110/prison-upgrades-110110/20110110/?hub=TorontoNewHome> (accessed 10 September 2011).

² Ontario Ministry of Community Safety & Correctional Services, "Toronto South Detention Centre: Background on Location," 12 March 2010 http://www.mcscs.jus.gov.on.ca/english/corr_serv/ProposedTorontoSouthDetentionCentre/BackgroundontheLocation/Toronto_South_background.html (accessed 10 September 2011).

federal and provincial governments engaged in a dialogue about the future of Mimico's correctional facility. During the 1940s, the Ontario government willingly placed Mimico's Reformatory at the disposal of the federal government for the internment of German prisoners of war (POWs) and civilian internees. The internment operation in Mimico, known as either Number 22 Internment Camp or Camp M, was primarily intended for pro-Nazi German enemy merchant seamen (EMS) who were captured by Allied troops, and it remained open from 1940 to 1944.³

This article investigates the development of internment operations in Mimico from its inception in July 1940 to its expeditious closing in April 1944. It focuses on the experiences of the Canadian authorities charged with overseeing the smooth operation of Camp M, while it also illustrates how German prisoners perceived their captivity and camp life in general. Using a combination of archival materials from Library and Archives Canada (LAC), Archives of Ontario (AO), and the Toronto Reference Library (TRL), this microhistory sheds light on the unique development of one of the only internment operations es-

Abstract

This article investigates the development of internment operations at Camp M in Mimico, Ontario, from 1940 to 1944. Using a variety of archival sources, this study sheds light on one of the only camps built near a major Canadian city during the Second World War, and one that remains recondite to most Canadians. From its inception Camp M suffered from a series of administrative, organizational, and personnel issues, which exacerbated operations. This was compounded by severe infrastructure problems that led to its expeditious closing in July 1944. Today both provincial and federal governments are constructing a 1,650-person "superjail" on the very site that once housed over 500 German POWs. This article, therefore, serves to inform further discussion about the past and present utility of the site.

Résumé: Cet article examine les opérations d'internement au Camp M à Mimico, Ontario, de 1940 à 1944. Basé sur des documents d'archives, il éclaire l'histoire d'un des très rares camps construits près d'une grande ville canadienne pendant la seconde guerre mondiale, un camp qui, encore aujourd'hui, est inconnu de la majorité des Canadiens. Depuis son ouverture, une série de problèmes administratifs, structurels, et personnels ont gêné ses opérations, et ces problèmes, ainsi qu'une très sérieuse déficience d'infrastructure, ont mené à la fermeture anticipée du camp en juillet 1944. Aujourd'hui les gouvernements provincial et fédéral sont en train de construire une immense "superprison" pouvant abriter 1,650 personnes sur le lieu où plus de 500 prisonniers de guerre allemands ont été enfermés jadis. Cet article pourrait donc contribuer à la discussion sur l'utilité, passée et actuelle, du site.

³ Although the documentation is inconsistent with usages of either "Camp M" or "No. 22" an entry in the Military Hospital war diary in early 1942 elucidates the change in nomenclature. Captain H. R. Conn wrote "The Camp Commandant Major C. G. Kerr, M.C. later requested that the name MIMICO be discounted as the Internment Camp had become known as Camp 22. Internment Camp, New Toronto, Ontario, Accordingly we have used the term "Military Hospital, Internment Camp, New Toronto," although Headquarters still addresses us as the MIMICO Military Hospital." See Library and Archives Canada (hereafter cited as LAC) Record Group (RG) 24 vol. 15,918, 2. "War Diary: Camp 22 Military Hospital, New Toronto, Ont." 1 March 1942, Capt. H.R. Conn (officer commanding R.C.A.M.C Camp Hospital, New Toronto).

tablished near a major Canadian city during the Second World War. Typically, the Canadian government established internment operations in remote and rural locations, making escape attempts more futile and keeping the POWs out of sight from Canadian citizens. By considering this evidence it assesses Martin Auger's assertion that Canadian internment operations were a "home front victory" and that it "was a positive experience overall."⁴ To speak in such platitudinous terms, however, would neglect the multifaceted nature of Canadian internment operations, as though any two camps functioned in the same way. On the contrary, and as this article demonstrates, historians must recognize how much each operation could differ depending on the individuals in charge of administrative and organizational tasks. While Auger argues that internment operations in southern Quebec were generally free from any major administrative or logistical conflict, the evidence from Camp M paints a very different picture. From its inception, Camp M continually suffered from administrative and organizational fissures between various personalities that could not be reconciled. These issues were compounded by immense infrastructural problems that led to the camp's early close in April 1944. Importantly, despite internal dissension among the authorities at Camp M, life for POWs remained fairly orderly and regulated, indicating a degree of agency that prisoners themselves exercised. Prisoners at Camp M petitioned and

demanded their rights in 1943 when they felt the Canadian authorities treated them poorly or provided them with inadequate supplies. They also benefitted from external agencies like the Red Cross and YMCA, which furnished them with books, sports equipment, musical instruments, and religious texts. These agencies also helped locate family members of POWs in Europe when the tides of war began to change in 1942 and 1943, and eased some consternation about the state of their loved ones. The prisoners, for the most part, remained polite and subservient to their captors. While camp life for Canadian authorities was anything but organized and uniform, the surfeit of administrative and infrastructural problems did not reflect the experiences of their prisoners. In this way, I argue to understand more fully Canadian internment operations during the Second World War historians must take into account such vastly distinct experiences, of both captor and captive. Before delving into the development of internment operations at Camp M, this article begins by providing a brief review of some key themes in studies on Canadian internment, followed by some historical context behind why Britain turned to Canada to transfer up to 24,633 German POWs by 1944.⁵

1. Key Historiographical Themes

The purpose of this section is not to present a serial list of studies on Ca-

⁴ Martin F. Auger, *Prisoners of the Home Front: Germany POWs and 'Enemy Aliens' in Southern Quebec, 1940-1946*. (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005), 4; 147-152.

⁵ Peters, *Das Schicksal der deutschen Kriegsgefangenen: Wir haben Euch nicht vergessen!* (Tübingen: GrabertVerlag, 1995), 169.

nadian internment operations during the Second World War, but rather to identify some significant trends in the existing literature. For the sake of brevity, I will discuss only two: first, the use of the Geneva Convention as a measurement of “success” in internment operations, which can be found in various studies and often used, either tacitly or explicitly, to substantiate claims of Canada’s operations as an overall success.⁶ Second, the value of microhistory in identifying nuances and differences between internment operations, and to recognize that since no satisfying, systematic, and all encompassing study on Canadian internment during the Second World War has been written, historians need to scrupulously reconstruct the history of individual camps and their experiences. In so doing, historians might get closer to achieving a better and broader understanding of internment operations throughout Canada during the Second World War.

Almost all studies on internment and

POWs in Canada include an examination of the Geneva Convention of 1929 and the amendments thereafter. In some ways, however, the emphasis historians place on the Geneva Convention and its application in Canada leads us to believe that Canada’s record was without spot or wrinkle. The work of John Kelly, Stefania Cepuch, and, most recently, Auger, for instance, illustrates that Canada adhered to the Geneva Convention as much as possible. For these scholars the treatment of POWs in Canada was successful because the Canadian government closely followed the Geneva Convention relating to the installation of camps (Article 10), feeding and clothing POWs (Article 11), providing for the intellectual and moral needs of the POWs (Article 16), and paying POWs accordingly for work they did inside and outside of the camps (Article 23).⁷ Although most Canadian camps set up medical hospitals or infirmaries, a considerable number of prisoners died of illnesses while in Canadian

⁶ For example, see Auger, *Prisoners of the Home Front*; Eric Koch, *Deemed Suspect: A Wartime Blunder* (Toronto: Methuen, 1980); David J. Carter, *Behind Barbed Wire: Alien Refugee and Prisoner of War Camps in Canada, 1914-1946* (Calgary: Tumbleweed, 1980); John Malady, *Escape from Canada! The Untold Story of German POWs in Canada, 1939-1945* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1981); Ted Jones, *Both Sides of the Wire: The Fredericton Internment Camp*, 2 vols. (Fredericton, NB: New Ireland Press, 1989); William Repka and Kathleen Repka, *Dangerous Patriots: Canada’s Unknown Prisoners of War* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1982); John Joseph Kelly, “The Prisoner of War Camps in Canada, 1939-1947” (Master’s thesis, University of Windsor, 1976); J. A. Ciccocelli, “The Innocuous Enemy Alien: Italians in Canada during World War II” (Master’s thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1977); Stefania H. Cepuch, “Our Guests are Busy”: The Internment and Labour of German Prisoners of War in Ontario, 1940-1946” (Master’s thesis, Queen’s University, 1992); Margret Bevege, *Behind Barbed Wire: Internment in Australia during World War II* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1993); Andrée Laprise, “Des civils internés pendant la deuxième guerre mondiale: Le camp des femmes de Kingston (1939-1943)” (Master’s thesis, Université de Montréal, 2000); Peters, *Das Schicksal*; Cecil Porter, *The Gilded Cage: Gravenhurst German Prisoner-of-War Camp 20, 1940-1946* (Gravenhurst, ON: Gravenhurst Book Committee, 1999).

⁷ See for instance, Cepuch, “Our Guests are Busy,” 5-7, Auger’s section on re-education, and John O. Buffinga, “The War Prisoners’ Aid of the YMCA and Hermann Boeschenstein’s Role as an Ethnic Mediator (1943-1947),” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 20 (1988), 53-70.

captivity. This is a topic to which very little attention has been given and one that I address below. Causes of death for some POWs ranged from pulmonary tuberculosis and diabetic comas, to a variety of cancers and organ failures.⁸ The fact that some of the POWs died due to terminal ailments puts into question the extent to which the Canadians followed, or could follow, certain articles of the Geneva Convention. Under Section II A, "Special Principles for Repatriation," "all sick prisoners whose condition is such as to render them invalids whose cure within a year cannot be medically foreseen" must be repatriated to a neutral country. Among the illnesses listed, for example, is "progressive tuberculosis."⁹ Of course, there is no way to ascertain whether these prisoners had previous health problems prior to entering the camps, but it does raise a series of questions about the extent to which a government can adhere to international convention during wartime. The death of some POWs casts doubt on proper medical inspections and the availability of doctors to supervise "the general state of health and cleanliness, and the detection of infectious and

contagious diseases, particularly tuberculosis and venereal complaints."¹⁰ This possibility also raises questions about malnutrition, clothing, and camp living conditions in general. Most historians interpret the application of the Geneva Convention as a measure for success and the focal point of internment politics. It is unlikely that Canadian authorities treated all German POWs well because of their unfeigned good nature, and cases of abused prisoners from Mimico help elucidate this.¹¹ Far more important to Canadian authorities, however, was the threat of reprisals against Canadian prisoners in Europe, and this fear increased after Dieppe in August 1942.¹² For example, when authorities at Camp M were debating about the quantity of soap to be issued to POWs, one inspectors report noted that "Canadian Prisoners of War in Germany are not issued with soap and none is available for purchase in the Cantons."¹³ The Canadian authorities were thus acutely aware of the circumstances facing Canadian prisoners overseas, and considered treating German POWs in kind. The existing interpretations see Canadian internment operations as a

⁸ Carter, *Behind Canadian Barbed Wire*, 316-30.

⁹ "Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. Geneva, 27 July 1929." See Annex to the Convention, C "Guiding Principles for the Repatriation of Prisoners in a Neutral Country." Section 3, clauses (a)-(p).

¹⁰ "Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. Geneva, 27 July 1929." Chapter 3, Article 15.

¹¹ For instance LAC RG24 vol. 15,391 fol. 1, 2-8-1940. "War Diary: Internment Camp M (no. 22), New Toronto, Ontario." It reads: "More complaints reached me about the behaviour of the Veterans Guard personnel toward the prisoners..."

¹² Jonathan Vance, *Objects of Concern: Canadian Prisoners of War through the Twentieth Century*, 248. See also *The Advertiser*, "Parcels for Prisoners," 20 February 1941.

¹³ LAC Reel C-4983, file no. 8328-492 "Inspection Reports by Inspector General- No.22 Internment Camp (formerly Internment Camp M) Mimico, Ontario. 14-6-1943.

success because the Canadians adhered to the Geneva Convention. Yet, these interpretations ignore crucial evidence that suggests a very different understanding of internment operations. In this way, some historians have selected specific elements of the Convention that are conducive to only parts of available evidence. A far more interesting and sophisticated approach to show how effective internment operations were in Canada, for example, would be to compare the treatment of POWs and the state of federal prisons in Canada during the 1940s. Instead of using the Convention to determine the efficacy of Canadian internment, historians should use it to highlight the difficulties in supplying resources and materials in the context of total war, and how far stated objectives can differ from their application. As we shall see in the case of Camp M, its quick conversion to an internment camp contributed to problems later on that would threaten the conditions of the prisoners.

Secondly, what, if any, is the value of a local history over a broader one, or a microhistory versus a cross-comparative one? Microhistories allow for a closer look at specific events, which enable historians to make more concrete conclusions about their regional impact. The problem with these types of studies, however, lay in attempts to interpret microhistorical findings in a macrohistorical framework. Nonetheless, without local

histories any attempt to begin a cross-regional study on POWs in Canada will be at a serious disadvantage, which is one of the reasons why a comprehensive and systematic study on Canadian POW camps has yet to be written. Out of over twenty internment camps in Canada from 1940 to 1946, only a handful has been subject to historical investigation. Although studies by Auger, Carter, Cepuch, Yves Bernard and Caroline Bergeron, for example, include appendices that list Camp M, it has yet to be explored in detail. In this way, this article sheds light on Camp M's role in internment operations and, more broadly, Mimico's war effort.

2. Political, Administrative, and Logistical Context

When the Nazis invaded and occupied the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Denmark, and Norway in 1940, the British became increasingly concerned about the possibility of a direct assault on British soil. One of the reasons why the Low Countries, France, and especially Norway had fallen so quickly, many believed, was the presence of the "fifth column" or an enemy within the country.¹⁴ According to popular, and sometime official, opinion, Hitler and the Nazi regime had vast networks of *Volksdeutsche* across Europe and North America.¹⁵ When Germany was preparing to invade, the "fifth column" would facilitate the assault by preparing logistical

¹⁴ Yves Bernard and Caroline Bergeron, *Trop loin de Berlin: Des prisonniers Allemands au Canada (1939-1945)* (Sillery: Septentrion, 1995), 43-55.

¹⁵ Lita-Rose Betcherman, *The Swastika and the Maple Leaf: Fascist Movement in Canada in the Thirties* (Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1975).

information and intelligence necessary to overthrow the legitimate government.¹⁶ With this in mind, the British government believed it absolutely necessary to detain all subversive individuals, who were typically people of German descent or suspected communists, and to find places for previously captured Nazi Prisoners of War (POWs). To alleviate these pressures, the British looked to Canada, whose vast territory, far removed from the theatres of combat, was an ideal location for POW camps. When the British government requested that Canada and other former dominions accept POWs, the government of Mackenzie King reticently accepted. Britain initially asked Canada to accept around 4,000 internees and an additional 3,000 POWs.¹⁷ On 10 June 1940, the same day Italy entered the war to fight alongside the Axis powers, the government authorized the transfer of enemy aliens and German POWs from Britain.¹⁸ The first POWs set sail from England on 21 June 1940 and the government quickly realized that the only existing internment camps, Kananaskis, Alberta and Petawawa, Ontario were inadequate to hold 7,000 POWs. These camps had been used as relief camps for the swathes of unemployed Canadians during the 1930s. The government authorized the immediate construction of several sites that needed to be finished within roughly fourteen days. Under

these pressing circumstances, the government chose Mimico's reformatory to be transformed into a POW camp. The government looked for pre-existing mills, factories, jails, and other facilities that had heating, adequate septic systems, lighting, and were close enough to railway platforms. If these types of sites, like Mimico and Fort Henry at Kingston, could be reasonably transformed into camps, the government estimated that they could accept up to 9,000 POWs, requiring roughly five million Canadian dollars.¹⁹

Just before dawn on 25 June 1940, and while working in the office of the Deputy Judge Advocate General (DJAG), Lieutenant-Colonel R.S.W. Fordham received instructions to proceed immediately to Camp Borden just outside Barrie, Ontario. Upon his arrival Fordham's superiors designated him Commandant of a new Prisoner of War (POW) camp, which would be established shortly at Mimico, Ontario. Fordham's superiors stressed that the organization and administrative work was to begin as soon as possible, since they expected the first prisoners to arrive within several days.²⁰ The following day, Fordham visited the former Ontario Reformatory in Mimico and supervised the initial renovations necessary to transform the site into an internment camp. On 19 July 1940, 347 German POWs arrived by train from Tr-

¹⁶ Bernard and Bergeron, *Trop loin de Berlin*, 43ff.

¹⁷ Kelly, "The Prisoner of War Camps in Canada, 1939-1947," 49.

¹⁸ Bernard and Bergeron, *Trop loin de Berlin*, 15.

¹⁹ Kelly, "The Prisoner of War Camps in Canada, 1939-1947," 51.

²⁰ LAC RG24 vol. 15,391 vol. I, fol. 1. "War Diary: Internment Camp M (no. 22), New Toronto, Ontario," 25 June 1940.

oisRivières, Quebec to begin their indefinite detention.²¹

3. The Establishment of Camp M and its Organization, 1940-1942

The internment camp in Mimico that Fordham's superiors put him in charge of was hastily established. Just one day prior to the arrival of Camp M's first POWs on 19 July 1940, Major C. Lindsey informed the authorities that No. 2A Company of the Veterans Guard of Canada (VGC) was to supply the guard.²² When 347 POWs arrived by train from Camp T at Trois Rivières, Quebec, the guards commented that the prisoners were clean and most of them were in excellent physical condition. They also noted, however, that prisoners had been poorly searched in Quebec as they possessed "many prohibited articles."²³ That same morning, the Commandant of Camp M ordered the first civilian interpreter, who came from Owen Sound, to report for duty.

When planning began in late June 1940 after being summoned to Camp Borden, Lt.-Col. Fordham estimated that on the basis of 500 internees, Camp M required a total staff of 24, which included one commandant, an adjutant, one civilian interpreter, and six privates. The guards of Camp M, supplied by the

VGC which was comprised mainly of First World War veterans unfit for service in the present war, numbered 95. This included one captain, two subalterns, six sergeants, six corporals, and 78 privates.²⁴ Although Canadian authorities estimated Camp M could house up to 500 POWs, by 1944 the number of inmates exceeded the maximum and almost reached 550.

The early stages of the internment operation at Camp M were characterized by a variety of challenges, ranging from quarrelling between Canadian authorities, early escape attempts, and even abuse. Major Lindsey, according to one Canadian officer, proved "very difficult to get along with and has to be kept from access to the prisoners. [Lindsey] obviously favours abusing them at every opportunity, by word of mouth and physically. He also seems quite unable to realize that the Guard Commander is under the orders of the Camp Commandment."²⁵

In addition, Lindsey soon acquired a reputation for pedantry and frequently made recommendations to Fordham about the aesthetics of the camp. On more than one occasion, he urged the staff to remove all shrubs and hedges in the vicinity of the main building, leaving one discomfited officer to comment that "the need for this is far from clear."²⁶ Lindsey became preoccupied by these details to the point where other security

²¹ *Ibid.*, 19 July 1940.

²² LAC RG24 vol. 15,391 fol. 1, 1. "War Diary: Internment Camp M (no. 22), New Toronto, Ontario"

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Appendix I. 29-6-40.

²⁵ LAC RG24 vol. 15,391 fol. 1, 4. "War Diary: Internment Camp M (no. 22), New Toronto, Ontario"

²⁶ *Ibid.*

related issues were neglected. On the evening of 29 July 1940, after only ten days at Camp M, one guard discovered that the POWs housed in the north hut had cut through the wooden floor. In another incident, on 17 August shortly after eight o'clock in the morning, a prisoner named A. Siegel escaped while in a carpenter working party. Siegel, who spoke fluent English, managed to slip away undetected, but was recaptured by the authorities nearly forty kilometres away in Burlington.²⁷ Both of these incidents forced the camp authorities to take a hard look at their security.

The following day, on 30 July 1940, Brigadier-General Panet, Director of Internment Operations, visited and conducted the camp's first of many meticulous inspections. After the inspection, Panet made the following recommendations: that having two guards with rifles and fixed bayonets escort a German officer into the compound was unnecessary; prisoners were required to work both inside and outside the compound; and fire extinguishers should always be placed beyond the reach of prisoners.²⁸ Prior to his departure, Panet also disagreed with Lindsey's repeated desire to cut down all the hedges around the camp. Near the end

of his visit, Panet "almost flew into a rage" while talking to Herr G. Dräger, a representative of the POWs, about whether or not the prisoners should work whilst in captivity. According to Auger, "for the camp authorities, labour projects were an effective method for neutralizing unrest."²⁹ This might have been true for internment camps in southern Quebec, but questions surrounding labour projects at Camp M provoked a great deal of hostility among the authorities.³⁰ By August 1940, the debate over how, when, and in what capacity prisoners should work showed no sign of stopping, and complaints about Major Lindsey continued. For example, one officer laconically commented: "Mjr. Lindsey very troublesome to-day, again, about the written orders for the [working?] parties and pretended not to understand them."³¹ Although it is unclear from the official documentation, debates about the use of POWs for labour projects in and around the camp might have been connected to the opposition of the New Toronto Council, which will be discussed below. Other inspectors' reports from 1941 show that Major R.S. Harrison, commander of No. 2C Company of the VGC, refused to subordinate himself to the commandment.³² These issues were

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 17-9-1940. Another escape attempt was discovered on 29 May 1943, when a hole, dug by POW Lorenz, was discovered under dormitory "B." Lorenz was punished with 28 days detention. See LAC RG24 vol. 15,391 fol. III, 128. "War Diary: Internment Camp M (no. 22), New Toronto, Ontario" 29-05-1943.

²⁸ LAC RG24 vol. 15,391 fol. 1, 4. "War Diary: Internment Camp M (no. 22), New Toronto, Ontario," 30-7-1940.

²⁹ Auger, *Prisoners of the Home Front*, 93.

³⁰ See for instance LAC RG24 vol. 15,391 fol. 1, "War Diary: Internment Camp M (no. 22), New Toronto, Ontario," 31-7-1940.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 7-8-1940.

³² LAC Reel C-4983, file no. 8328-492 "Inspection Reports by Inspector General- No.22 Internment

not uncommon. Adding to the intensity of these problems was an incident in which a guard, likely under the influence of alcohol, fired a round at the car of reformatory superintendent J.R. Elliott as he drove away from the camp.³³

These anecdotes illustrate that from its inception the Mimico internment operation was fraught with internal dissension and disagreement over a variety of issues, whether directly related to the POWs or not. The personalities of Lindsey, Panet, Fordham, and others clashed on a number of occasions in the early months of the operation. Of course, the administrative and organizational problems experienced in the early weeks of Camp M's existence were probably inevitable given the Canadian government's mandate to locate, select, retrofit, and construct internment camps across Canada. In this case, Camp M needed to be ready within weeks of the first transfer of POWs from Europe.

Although the Geneva Convention stipulated that Canada is "required to take all necessary hygienic measures to ensure the cleanliness and salubrity of camps and to prevent epidemics" and that "each

camp shall possess an infirmary," it took the Canadian authorities a year and a half to authorize the establishment of a camp hospital.³⁴ In a letter dated 18 December 1941, Military District No. 2 Headquarters stated "that the Unit wuld [*sic*] be a 15 bed Hospital, effective 1 Mar 42," which would include one medical officer, a sergeant dispenser, a corporal, and five privates.³⁵ Prisoners had prior access to medical care, however. There were medical staff at Camp M before 1 March 1942, but the evidence suggests they were probably subsumed into the RCAMC (Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps) unit at Chorley Park once the camp hospital was established.³⁶ It is unclear from the documents how active the medical staff at Camp M were prior to March 1942, but that the authorities established a separate hospital almost two years after the camp opened suggests there might have been a greater need to do so than in 1940.

The hospital at Camp M was divided into two sections. The first had six beds and was designated for the camp guards and administration, while the second section, called an "Enclosure Hospital," possessed nine beds for "Internees."³⁷

Camp (formerly Internment Camp M) Mimico, Ontario. 5-6-1941.

³³ LAC RG24 vol. 15,391 fol. 1. "War Diary: Internment Camp M (no. 22), New Toronto, Ontario," 2-8-1940. "One of the V.G. sentries fired a round in the direction of Mr. Elliott's car. Mjr. Lindsey remained in his tent all day, sick and had the M.O. Majors McGarry and McLean make a tour inspection of the hospital, etc., and stayed for lunch."

³⁴ Geneva Convention, "Chapter 3: Hygiene in Camps," Article 13, 14, 15.

³⁵ LAC RG24 vol. 15,918, 1. "War Diary: Camp 22 Military Hospital, New Toronto, Ont." 1 March 1942, Capt. H.R. Conn (officer commanding R.C.A.M.C Camp Hospital, New Toronto).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 1 March 1942, Capt. H.R. Conn (officer commanding R.C.A.M.C Camp Hospital, New Toronto): Capt. H.R. Conn wrote "The Personnel who had served on the Camp 22 Medical Staff before this date now transferred to the R.C.A.M.C Unit and were attached to Camp 22 for All Purposes except Duty and Discipline while on duty."

³⁷ *Ibid.* Here Capt. H.R. Conn changed the terminology, using "internees" rather than "P/W" which

Each morning at 8:30 the hospital held a sick parade for the guards and administration and, at both 9:00am and 4:00pm, sick parades were held for internees. The earliest cases of illness documented by the medical officers dealt with “mentally ill” internees. On 17 March 1942, Captain H. R. Conn³⁸ received word that a POW named Berger, who had been sent to Westminster Hospital in London a couple days earlier, died due to mental illness.³⁹ In another case, Captain H.R. Conn sent internee A. Herrde to Chorley Park Military Hospital⁴⁰ to treat a case of “senile psychosis.”⁴¹ Other cases from that week included an internee who refused fatigue duty and another who had had a heart condition ever since his arrival in Camp. On 31 March 1942, an officer reported two other cases of mental illness and five “mild influenza cases.”⁴² Speckmann, a German POW also diagnosed as mentally ill, was de-

clared “dangerously ill” upon arrival at Chorley Park and died a few days later on 3 April 1942.⁴³ Mental illness was thus a common diagnosis in the hospital’s initial months. Camp M’s military hospital and the medical officers frequently invited “psychiatrics doctors” to make the appropriate diagnoses. On 21 June 1942, for example, Dr. Lawson and Dr. Valens visited the camp and “certified that Internees Frese and Paprock were mentally ill.”⁴⁴ On 18 April 1942, fifty POWs arrived from overseas and were examined and weighed. During the inspection, Conn noted that several cases of skin disease among the POWs were discovered, but did not prescribe any treatment. As this evidence suggests, when finally set up, the camp hospital oversaw a variety of different maladies often requiring serious medical attention.

The war diaries of Camp M’s hospital demonstrate that the Canadians invited

was the norm for the Camp M documentation.

³⁸ Hartley Robert Conn was a well-known and long time resident of Mimico. He studied medicine at the University of Toronto and practiced for 24 years in Mimico before dying at Chorley Park Military Hospital due to a heart condition. After serving in the First World War, he became Mimico’s chief coroner in 1919 and worked at St. Joseph’s Hospital in Parkdale. When Camp M opened its hospital, Conn became its chief medical officer. See article in *The Advertiser* “Captain Hartley Conn Dies 12 Days After Father: Veteran of Two Wars-Practiced 24 Years in Mimico” 28 July 1943, 1.

³⁹ LAC RG24 vol. 15,918, 2. “War Diary: Camp 22 Military Hospital, New Toronto, Ont.” 17 March 1942, Capt. H.R. Conn (officer commanding R.C.A.M.C Camp Hospital, New Toronto).

⁴⁰ Chorley Park is located in Rosedale, north of Bloor Street East and between Bayview Avenue and Mount Pleasant Road.

⁴¹ On 12 July 1943, Capt. Conn was sent to Chorley Park Hospital and was deemed “seriously ill.” He later died on 22 July 1943. See LAC RG24 vol. 15,391, fol. III, 3. “War Diary: Internment Camp No. 22, New Toronto, Ontario,”

⁴² LAC RG24 vol. 15,918, 3. “War Diary: Camp 22 Military Hospital, New Toronto, Ont.” 18-31 March 1942, Capt. H.R. Conn (officer commanding R.C.A.M.C Camp Hospital, New Toronto).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 4 April 1942, Capt. H.R. Conn (officer commanding R.C.A.M.C Camp Hospital, New Toronto).

⁴⁴ LAC RG24 vol. 15,918, 19. “War Diary: Camp 22 Military Hospital, New Toronto, Ont.” 23 June 1942, Capt. H.R. Conn (officer commanding R.C.A.M.C Camp Hospital, New Toronto).

doctors from other Toronto-area hospitals when diagnoses might have been too difficult given their resources and materials, or if the illnesses were beyond their expertise. In this way, the medical staff at Camp M complied closely with the Geneva Convention in so far as they sought medical assistance for prisoners when conditions worsened. But what happened when prisoners were “dangerously ill” or close to death?⁴⁵ As mentioned above, the Geneva Convention contains a specific amendment for the repatriation of prisoners to a neutral country, normally Switzerland, but also Spain or Sweden, in the event that medical treatment by the detaining power is futile or incapable of curing the prisoner within a year. Reasons for repatriation to a neutral country include a wide variety of illnesses and maladies, ranging from organ failure to cancers, from communicable diseases to “neurasthenia and hysteria.”⁴⁶

Like the dissension among the military authorities at Camp M, the medical staff also disagreed on a number of issues, including recommendations as to which prisoners could apply for repatriation on medical grounds. On 8 August 1942, for instance, the “Mixed Medical Commission,” consisting of Lt.-Col. Warner, Dr. Ceresole, and Dr. Rikben arrived at Camp

M to make several recommendations related to the Camp hospital and, particularly, to see which POWs deserved to be repatriated. The following day, “tempers flared at times” between the Commission and hospital authorities about why prisoners should be sent out of the camp. Other than the fact that “tempers flared” and that “there was some dissension among the members,” the official documents do not detail particular arguments that took place between the Commission and Captain H.R. Conn’s staff. In another case in 1943, Dr. Adamson of the Mixed Medical Commission rejected 26 POWs who had requested repatriation on medical grounds.⁴⁷ Again, on 13 March 1944, all 13 POWs who requested repatriation were denied.⁴⁸ We do know, however, that from when the first POWs arrived in July 1940 to the closing of the Camp in April 1944, ten prisoners died in captivity, which is an unusually high figure given the total number of prisoners held there, and all were interned at Park Lawn Cemetery about five kilometres from Mimico.⁴⁹ For instance, Camp 20 at Gravenhurst, comparable to Camp M in that it also contained around 500 inmates, had only two recorded deaths from 1940 to 1946.⁵⁰ That there was a clash of opinions regarding repatriation on medical grounds, and

⁴⁵See for instance, LAC RG 24 vol. 15,391 fol. III “War Diary: Internment Camp 22,” 29 March 1943.

⁴⁶ Geneva Convention, Annex to the Convention of 27 July 1929, Section II (A)f.

⁴⁷ LAC RG24 vol. 15,391 fol. III. “War Diary: Internment Camp no. 22, New Toronto, Ontario” 2-09-1943.

⁴⁸ LAC RG24 vol. 15,391 fol. IV. “War Diary: Internment Camp no. 22, New Toronto, Ontario” 13-03-1944.

⁴⁹ This number is based on the appendix found in Carter’s *Behind Canadian Barbed Wire*.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 304-33.

by extension adhering to the Geneva Convention, indicates that some Canadian authorities did not view the Convention as the only framework within which internment camps operated. The authorities involved had their own ideas about how to treat prisoners and why. In short, some of the Canadian authorities did not view the Geneva Convention as a “yardstick” for success, but rather they were bound by various other resource and material constraints.

3.1 Prisoners and Camp Life

Discipline and hierarchy continued to characterize POW life once they reached Canada. Compared to their captors, prisoners at Camp M experienced relatively firm order and organization. This is true for most internment camps, but the degree of rigidity in organization depended on the types of interned prisoners. Camp 20 at Gravenhurst, for example, consisted mainly of *Wehrmacht* and *Luftwaffe* officers who maintained a firm military order.⁵¹ By November 1942, the number of POWs at Camp M exceeded the maximum capacity of 500, numbering 537.⁵² A considerable number of these were pro-Nazi merchant seamen captured in the Atlantic during late 1940.⁵³ Intelligence reports suggest that many of the EMS were pro-Nazi and in

fact, by 22 October 1941, only 6 POWs claimed they were anti-Nazi. These prisoners told the Inspector-General that they were ostracised by their inmates for maintaining more liberal ideologies, and they also complained that they were treated unfairly as a result. During the same inspection, one of the prisoners informed the authorities “that one man is suspected of being a member of the Gestapo.”⁵⁴

At about the time of the failed Dieppe raid in August 1942, and after the capture of many Canadian soldiers, the Canadian government addressed several important questions surrounding internment operations at home. The primary issue was the status of enemy merchant seamen. When the first POWs arrived at Camp M in 1940, the captured seamen were classified as POW Class II, or civilian internees of an enemy state. Following the promulgation of Order-in-Council P.C. 4121 in 1942, however, the status of EMS changed and the Canadian government ordered that they would be treated as POW Class I, which meant these individuals, the vast majority of Camp M’s prisoners, were entitled to all privileges extended to combatant prisoners under international convention.⁵⁵ They were therefore equal to prisoners from all sections of the German armed forces. The new definition stated that:

⁵¹ Cecil Porter, *The Gilded Cage*, 51-56; Bernard and Bergeron, *Trop loin de Berlin*, 18.

⁵² LAC RG 24 vol. 6583, 1. “Gifts and Donations Camp 22.” Letter from Capt. H. Schaefer to Dr. Hoffmann of the YMCA, 2 November 1942.

⁵³ The documents in the war diary allude to the initial 347 “P/W” being EMS from Germany.

⁵⁴ LAC Reel C-4983, file no. 8328-492 “Inspection Reports by Inspector General- No.22 Internment Camp (formerly Internment Camp M) Mimico, Ontario. 22-10-1941

⁵⁵ Kelly, “The Prisoner of War Camps in Canada, 1939-1947,” 109-110.

An Enemy Merchant Seaman is an enemy national who at the time of his capture is the member of a crew of any ship or is proceeding abroad in accordance with an agreement to join and serve in any ship, or who has been at any time since 1 September 1939 a member of the crew of any ship.⁵⁶

From 1 July 1942, therefore, the EMS at Camp M obtained POW Class I status and could only perform maintenance work inside the camp and would not be asked to work outside the camp area. This would be done on a volunteer basis only. They would, in accordance with the Geneva Convention, not receive payment from the Canadian government and not contribute to the Canadian war effort in any capacity. This change is significant for Camp M because it modified the internal camp structure and allowed an EMS prisoner to become the Camp's new *Lagerführer*, or camp leader. It also gave the POWs a degree of leverage in petitioning for their rights and refusing to take part in work projects. Immediately after the altering of their status, Camp M elected Captain Heinrich Schaefer as camp spokesman. In this capacity he corresponded with Camp M's commandant, Canadian authorities, and other relief

organizations to address grievances and concerns on behalf of his inmates.⁵⁷ In a letter to Dr. Hoffmann of the YMCA in New York, Schaefer wrote about his modified POW status:

We have the honour to inform you that since the month of October [1942] all seamen belong to P.O.W.'s Class I, according to the decree issued by the National Defence Department, Ottawa. For this reason the eldest officer in rank beeing [*sic*] our Camp-Leader. Cpt. H. Schaefer is now in charge of the Camp...⁵⁸

The change of POW status for enemy merchant seamen in 1942, and the immediate change of spokesman, suggests that Camp M consisted mainly of EMS. In this way, Camp M stands out among the other twenty-three camps across Canada, the majority of which did not contain a considerable number of EMS.⁵⁹

Writing about POW experiences in Canada is challenging because Canadian authorities wrote about POWs and internees, and the official perspective proves difficult to elude. Historians have made clear the challenges in determining what types of prisoners were at which camp, and the interchangeable nomenclature Canadian authorities used

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁵⁷ In a letter dated 16 October 1942, we find out that Schaefer's predecessor was Captain H. Wieting, but his position or trade is unknown. See LAC RG 24 vol. 6583, 9. "Gifts and Donations Camp 22." Letter from H. Schaefer to the Secretary, YMCA, 16 October 1942.

⁵⁸ LAC RG 24 vol. 6583, 1. "Gifts and Donations Camp 22." Letter from Capt. H. Schaefer to Dr. Hoffmann of the YMCA, 2 November 1942.

⁵⁹ Bernard and Bergeron, *Trop loin de Berlin*, 17-19. According to these authors, the only camps to house EMS were at Mimico (Camp M), Monteith (Camp Q), Neys (Camp W), Red Rock (Camp R), all of which are Ontario. On 18 November 1943, Capt. J.P. Dobell received a phone call from Ottawa advising him that "all seamen are to be moved to Monteith in about a week." See LAC RG 24 vol. 15,391 fol. III, "War Diary: Internment Camp no. 22, New Toronto, Ontario" 18-11-1943. Numbers reduced from 338 on 23 November 1943, to 106 the following day. This suggests that 232 EMS were moved at this point.

to describe "P/W," "P.O.W.'s," "Pr.O.W.," "Ps. O.W.," or "Internees." This is true of Camp M, where authorities employed both "Internee" and all variations of "P/W" in the records. In trying to assess the qualitative experiences of POWs at Camp M, the records of donations from the YMCA and International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) prove useful. In many cases, the camp spokesman, for whom all inmates voted and to whom all addressed their grievances, wrote to the YMCA and Red Cross personally. Although the Canadian authorities almost certainly censored this correspondence, it still contains valuable information regarding what the prisoners hoped for and desired. Furthermore, the YMCA and Red Cross were Canadian sanctioned organizations, but were not necessarily Canadian. Unlike war diaries and other official documents, the records of the YMCA and Red Cross were written by relatively dissociated individuals who, in theory, were impartial and provided for all POWs equally. It is important to note, however, that the sources of the YMCA and Red Cross used here were found in the records of the Department of National Defence (RG24).

The prisoners at Camp M, like POWs across Canada, benefited from the services of the YMCA and the Red Cross. Both organizations were based in neutral

Switzerland and in principle remained unprejudiced throughout the war. During the course of the war the Canadian authorities became increasingly insensitive towards the needs of the lower ranks and, in lieu of more supportive federal structures, external agencies stepped in to provide for POWs in various capacities.⁶⁰ The same can be said of Camp M. The Canadian government authorized both organizations to operate in Canada in August and September 1940, and the first meeting of the National Committee for Canada of the War Prisoners' Aid of the YMCA was held in Toronto on 1 February 1941.⁶¹ This meant that the prisoners incarcerated in 1940 would have been without the support of the YMCA until mid to late 1941.⁶² As Auger shows, the Red Cross concentrated primarily on the material, physical, and hygienic conditions of Canadian internment camps, while the YMCA focused on the intellectual, religious, and recreational needs of the prisoners.⁶³ The correspondence between the camp spokesman and representatives of the YMCA and Red Cross reveals a great deal about the type of recreational activities available to the POWs. We can therefore use it to reconstruct what part of life was like for the prisoners at Camp M.

Some of the earliest extant correspondence between H. N. Streight, Com-

⁶⁰ Graeme S. Mount, review of *Objects of Concern: Canadian Prisoners of War Through the Twentieth Century* by Jonathan Vance, *The International History Review* 17, 3 (August 1995), 614.

⁶¹ John O. Buffinga, "The War Prisoners," 57.

⁶² The earliest documentation between Camp M and the YMCA/Red Cross comes from November 1942. LAC RG24 vol. 6583, 1. "Gifts and Donations Camp 22."

⁶³ Auger, *Prisoners of the Home Front*, 46-47.

missioner of Internment Operations, and Camp M's commandant details a request made by Dr. Jerome Davis in November 1942 to make recordings of the POW orchestra at Camp M.⁶⁴ Davis, the Director of the War Prisoners' Aid of the YMCA, mentioned only three camps that had orchestras and that he wished to record: Mimico, Espanola, and Neys, which suggests that, for these camps in particular, music formed an integral part of camp life. Davis received authorization to make recordings of the POW orchestra at Camp M and, eventually, the proceeds would go to the prisoners themselves.

The YMCA also took great care of either loaning or repairing musical instruments. For instance, when internee P. Becker's violin was damaged, "presumably owing to the joint of the two bottom-parts having opened," the YMCA arranged for its repair in Toronto so the POW orchestra could play their scheduled shows.⁶⁵ In these situations, Camp M's authorities sometimes let civilians loan their instruments to prisoners in camp. On 11 September 1942, a local named Mr. Schwedler loaned his violin to POW Lange for the duration of his detention.⁶⁶ The spokesman for Camp M, Schaefer, also worked diligently to obtain films and

sports equipment for the camp. In a letter to the YMCA, Schaefer noted that they already had the following films: *Ruggles of Red Gap*, *I met him in Paris*, *Waikiki Wedding*, *Texas Ranger*, *Jungle Prinzess* [sic], *Union Pazific* [sic], *The Bride Comes Home*, and *Our Neighbors the Carters*, among others.⁶⁷ Other correspondence between Schaefer and the YMCA shows that the POWs played tennis, badminton, and other sports including hockey and football. If their equipment broke or became unusable, the YMCA provided the prisoners with new ones.⁶⁸ When the YMCA delegates visited Camp M, as Davis did on 21 April 1943, they met with Schaefer or the camp spokesman and discussed individual requests. From examining the papers of Hermann Boeschstein, the leader of the YMCA POW Aid and renowned scholar of German literature who eventually became a professor at the University of Toronto, John Buffinga has made the following conclusion: "although these requests varied from camp to camp, depending on the age, size, and type of camp, they centered around supplies for athletics, theatre and films, music, arts and crafts, libraries, education, and religion."⁶⁹ The correspondence from Camp M also supports Auger's

⁶⁴ LAC RG 24 vol. 6583, 1. "Gifts and Donations Camp 22." Letter from Lt.-Col. H.N. Streight to Camp Commandants of camps 21, 22, and 100. 16 November 1942.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, H. Schaefer to the Secretary YMCA. 22 September 1942.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, Intercepted Letter by Internment Operations Censorship, redirected by Lt.-Col. C. G. Kerr on 11 September 1942.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, Letter to the Secretary, YMCA, from H. Schaefer. 10 November 1942.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, Letter to the Secretary, YMCA, from H. Schaefer. 14 September 1942. Schaefer wrote "I beg to send to you 8 rackets to be repaired; further one fiddle bow (Bass) to be restrung. We would be very much obliged if you could return the bow as soon as possible..."

⁶⁹ Buffinga, "The War Prisoners", 59.

observation that the prisoners considered physical activities and music vital for their health and well being.⁷⁰

As Eric Koch recounted, however, many prisoners took advantage of the learning opportunities in Canadian camps, and the same can be said about the POWs at Camp M.⁷¹ The YMCA provided items like notebooks, textbooks, pencils, and other stationary supplies for prisoners to study.⁷² At Camp M, like in many other camps across Canada, the prisoners had the chance to take courses, either through correspondence or taught by qualified prisoners in camp, often former professors. One civilian internee, Theodor Dehrendorf, requested the YMCA help him obtain "literature for the study of African languages and culture," particularly publications on the Jorubas of Southern Nigeria and Haussas of Northern Nigeria.⁷³ Acknowledging the potential scarcity of these materials, Schaefer closed his letter by writing "any publications concerning African problems, particularly West-African- cultural, religions, economical [*sic*] etc.- would be welcome."⁷⁴

When it came to religious literature, representatives of the YMCA like Boeschstein realized some discrimination would have to be exercised.⁷⁵ The Nazi regime had used the figure of Martin Luther, the sixteenth-century church reformer whose followers became known as Lutherans, as a nationalist hero, likening his crusade in 1517 to the one on which the German *Volk* was currently embarking.⁷⁶ In at least one case, Boeschstein and the YMCA recommended such emphasis on Lutheran beliefs be assuaged by reading Huldrych Zwingli, the reformer of Protestant Switzerland, who, at the same time as Luther, became involved in socio-political problems and who tried to imbue into all Christians the democratic principles inherent in Christ's message.⁷⁷ Boeschstein's discretion demonstrates that the relief agencies working for the POWs and internees recognized some of the dangers in the material the prisoners sought, and the importance they attached to their reintegration into and re-education for post-war society.

The International Red Cross, par-

⁷⁰ Auger, *Prisoners of the Home Front*, 50-51.

⁷¹ Koch, *Deemed Suspect*, 146ff.

⁷² LAC RG 24 vol. 6583, 4. "Gifts and Donations Camp 22." Letter from H. Schaefer to the Secretary, YMCA, 4 November 1942. Schaefer wrote "Please order for our classes: 200 note books, quadrille, as already delivered, 50 note blocks, same size as above, 10 sheets for drawing purposes. 1 box of white chalk..." See also LAC RG 24 vol. 6583, 10. "Gifts and Donations Camp 22." Letter from H. Schaefer to the Secretary, YMCA, 15 October 1942. "Various P.O.W.'s have the desire to purchase aset (*sic*) of coloured pencils. For your kind offer I would be obliged."

⁷³ LAC RG 24 vol. 6583, 5. "Gifts and Donations Camp 22." Letter from H. Schaefer to the Secretary, YMCA, 3 November 1942.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, Letter from H. Schaefer to the Secretary, YMCA, 3 November 1942.

⁷⁵ Buffinga, "The War Prisoners", 63.

⁷⁶ Roger Chickering, *Imperial Germany and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Prologue.

⁷⁷ Buffinga, "The War Prisoners", 63.

ticularly the representative Ernest Maag, also played a vital role for Camp M's prisoners. The Red Cross, unlike the YMCA, focused on the physical conditions of camp life and sometimes filtered requests regarding aid to families in Europe. In a letter to Maag, Schaefer asked that the Red Cross assist a prisoner at Camp M in locating relatives who had not received any of his correspondence. Schaefer wrote that "the internee Willy Bischoff #57150 would like to inquire about the whereabouts and health of the following siblings in Germany. He has not heard from them in two to three years."⁷⁸ Although just one example, these types of requests became increasingly more common as the war progressed, and especially in late 1942 and 1943 when the Soviet Army began pushing westward into German occupied territory. The services the Red Cross and Swiss Consul provided were essential to alleviate prisoners' concerns about the safety of their family members in Europe. Furthermore, these requests demonstrate that although camp life offered many recreational and educational activities to ease anxiety, POWs remained deeply concerned about the effects of war in Europe and how their families were managing without them.

The prisoners also had the opportunity to make recommendations to the Canadian authorities through the camp spokesman on issues of hygiene and camp infrastructure. In an intelligence report from 29 December 1942, the Inspector General, Major-General R.O. Alexander, noted that the prisoners requested that the amount of permissible toilet soap to be purchased from the camp canteen be increased to more than one cake per three months. Another request filed in the same report indicated a need for sole leather to repair the prisoners' shoes. However, as the report notes, leather was becoming increasingly difficult to obtain.⁷⁹ On 14 June 1943, however, one request was granted and the Canadian authorities issued sixty-five bars of soap per 100 prisoners.⁸⁰

Another aspect of camp life to which historians have attached importance is the use of POWs and internees in labour projects. Auger points out that "labour projects gave the internees a constructive pastime and an opportunity to earn money to buy goods from camp canteens," but having prisoners outside of the camp could also provoke fear and hostility among nearby citizens.⁸¹ Following an earlier argument advanced by

⁷⁸ LAC RG24 vol. 6583, 16. "Gifts and Donations Camp 22." Letter from H. Schaefer to Ernest Maag, 3 September 1942. "...Der Int. Willy Bischoff #57150 bittet nach dem Verbleib und Befinden der nachstehend bezeichneten Geschwister in Deutschland anfragen zu wollen. Er hat teils 2 bzw. 3 Jahre nichts mehr von ihnen gehoert.

1. Wwe. Freidchen Mathem, Schjerning Promenade 5, Saarbruecken, 6

2. Karl Bischoff, Theodor Rumpelsweg 4, Hamburg 33.

3. Walter Bischoff, Hubert Mueller Strasse 90, Saarbruecken, 5."

⁷⁹ LAC Reel C-4983, file no. 8328-492 "Inspection Reports by Inspector General- No.22 Internment Camp (formerly Internment Camp M) Mimico, Ontario. 29-12-1942.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 14-6-1943.

⁸¹ Auger, *Prisoners of the Home Front*, 93.

Stefania Cepuch, Auger argued that so long as POWs were not producing items or materials contributing to the war effort (Article 31 of the Geneva Convention), the labour projects constituted a success as they eased the shortage of labour.⁸² For southern Quebec, Auger claimed that “farmers were satisfied with the presence of the prisoners on their farms.”⁸³ An example from Mimico, however, illustrates how a less rural town might react to the idea of releasing internees or POWs from captivity on labour projects.

In the spring of 1943, the president of Donnell and Mudge Limited, Charles Annable, petitioned the Dominion Department of Defence and Department of Labour to help alleviate a shortage of labour in his leather tannery. Initially, negotiations took place discreetly, but before long individuals from Mimico and New Toronto discovered that prisoners were going to be released from the nearby internment camp to work at the facility on Eighth Street. The citizens of Mimico and New Toronto protested vehemently and filed many complaints to the New Toronto Town Council, whose members became principally involved after July 1943. For the most part, *The Advertiser*, Mimico and New Toronto’s newspaper, did not mention Camp M until the debate about the use of prison-

ers for work, but the paper followed this story closely. It provided many details for its readers, outlining the proposed plan for the prisoners to be domiciled in a dormitory adjacent to the camp and to be “guarded in the usual manner.”⁸⁴ The New Toronto Council was “unalterably opposed” to the plan, as “it would create a hazard to war industries now operating in the town as well as danger to citizens from escapes.”⁸⁵ Furthermore, the Council warned, “vital war industries near the leather plant and also a large railway centre would be placed in danger.”⁸⁶ The paper cited Councillor R.T. Greer who stated that “we felt that [the plan] would not be in the interests of the war effort, labor or our citizens.”⁸⁷ Two years before the New Toronto Council turned down a suggestion that POWs from Camp M be employed in a variety of other capacities in the town to ease the labour shortage.

On 12 August 1943, Charles Annable held a private meeting with New Toronto councillors to answer objections to his proposition. Annable and the councillors negotiated about whether using civilian internees rather than prisoners of war for work would be permissible. Although the proceedings and all the details could not be revealed, *The Advertiser* wrote that “the matter at the moment stands at deadlock.”⁸⁸ For the rest

⁸² *Ibid.*, 93-115.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁸⁴ *The Advertiser* “New Toronto Opposes Plan of Factory to Hire War Prisoners,” 22 July 1943, 1.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *The Advertiser* “N.T. Council Not Reconciled to Plan for Hiring Internees: leather plant representatives fail to sway town fathers at early morning session,” 12 August 1943, 1.

of August, the president of Donnell and Mudge petitioned both Town Council and Department of Labour to ease the shortage. He suggested that using civilian internees to alleviate the shortage in Mimico would benefit the town. By 1943, the council listed over 4,000 jobs in Mimico and New Toronto as “unfilled.”⁸⁹ Finally, on 26 August 1943, Donnell and Mudge received authorization from the Department of National Defence (not the New Toronto Council), to use thirty internees at his tannery. Even after the internees arrived the following Monday, the town continued to lodge complaints against the project.⁹⁰ By December 1943, 50 POWs worked in the facility.

Many POWs or internees who worked outside Camp M were normally sent to different towns or regions in southwestern and central Ontario. On 16 August 1943, fifty POWs were sent to South River “for work in [the] bush.”⁹¹ Later that month, another fifty POWs were sent to work on the Welland Canal, while the following day an additional fifty were sent to Mumford, Ontario.⁹² That these prisoners and internees were sent to work up to 280 kilometres away might suggest that the authorities recognized the animosity that existed over the issue

in Mimico. However, the Canadian authorities also recognized that “the camp is handicapped by lack of suitable work on which internees can be employed,” suggesting that pressure from the New Toronto Council was not the only issue the federal government considered.⁹³ *The Advertiser* followed this debate quite closely, but other than this story it kept silent on internment operations in their town.⁹⁴ Despite the fact that prisoners could have been utilized in certain sectors that suffered from acute labour shortages, Mimico residents expressed uneasiness when it came to POWs working in the town, even when they were escorted by armed guards. The idyllic image of a POW working alongside a Canadian farmer, as expressed by Auger, does not apply to Camp M’s labour projects. Instead, POWs and internees were sent far away to work on projects in more rural environments than could be offered in the town of Mimico.

In some cases, POWs simply refused to perform work on the farm adjacent to the camp. Incidents in which POWs refused to work occurred following the change in POW status described earlier. In December 1942, for example, some prisoners were told that they would “re-

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *The Advertiser* “30 Civilian Internees Arrive Monday to Work in Local Plant- will be under guard at Donnell and Mudge Factory- critical labor shortage reason for use here,” 26 August 1943, 1.

⁹¹ LAC RG24, vol. 15,391, III, 2. “War Diary: Internment Camp no. 22, New Toronto, Ontario,” 16-8-1943.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 23-8-1943; 24-8-1943.

⁹³ LAC Reel C-4983, file no. 8328-492 “Inspection Reports by Inspector General- No.22 Internment Camp (formerly Internment Camp M) Mimico, Ontario. 5-6-1941

⁹⁴ The author went through *The Advertiser* from 1939 to 1944 and, other than the Donnell and Mudge controversy, found only one mention of an escapee.

ceive the profits on the produce at prevailing market prices" for agricultural work they did at Camp M.⁹⁵ Apparently, however, the Commissioner of Internment Operations did not approve of the arrangement and confusion ensued among the prisoners, who quickly became dissatisfied by their situation. R.O. Alexander reported that "the P. of W. feel that faith has been broken with them and will not undertake to farm the 30 acres this year as they feel they will not be paid for the work done."⁹⁶ In another instance, when the authorities asked for twenty-six volunteers for work at the Clarke Tannery, nobody volunteered, perhaps indicating that the prisoners engaged in a form of non-violent and passive resistance, something which might not have taken place prior to the change in their POW status.⁹⁷

3.2 Concluding Internment Operations Early, 1943-1944

By late 1943, the movement and exchange of prisoners dominated war diary entries and reports. Whether sent out on work parties or transferred to other camps, the number of prisoners housed at Camp M from 1943 to its abrupt close in April 1944 was in constant flux. The authorities in Ottawa con-

sidered "the possibility of distributing in other Internment Camps the Ps.O.W. interned at New Toronto, with a view to closing the Camp there and returning the premises to the owners [in May 1944], in order to avoid the very considerable expense involved in its continued use."⁹⁸ A few civilian internees were sent to Hull, Quebec or Fredericton, New Brunswick, while 43 internees came to Mimico from Fort Henry in Kingston. Other POWs from Camp M were sent elsewhere in Ontario, mainly to Camp 21 in Espanola and Camp 23 in Monteith. In addition, the number of escape attempts increased as the number of POWs permitted to leave on work expeditions also grew.⁹⁹ As a rule, the prisoners who tried to escape were awarded 28-day detentions, which were normally spent at Camp 20 in Gravenhurst.

What happened in late 1943 and 1944 that made Mimico one of the first internment camps in Canada to close? Mimico's internment operation was as hastily shut down as it was established and, from a variety of documents, this section briefly addresses how and why the authorities closed Mimico before the majority of other camps. In a report to the Department of National Defence on 25 February 1944, Major-General

⁹⁵ LAC Reel C-4983, file no. 8328-492 "Inspection reports of Inspectors General- No.22 Internment Camp (formerly Internment Camp M) Mimico, Ontario." 29-12-1942.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 12-5-1943

⁹⁷ LAC RG24, vol. 15,391, III, 2. "'War Diary: Internment Camp no. 22, New Toronto, Ontario," 18-10-1943.

⁹⁸ LAC Reel C-4983, file no. 8328-492 "Inspection Reports by Inspector General- No.22 Internment Camp (formerly Internment Camp M) Mimico, Ontario. 7-1-1944.

⁹⁹ LAC RG24, vol. 15,391, III, 2. "'War Diary: Internment Camp no. 22, New Toronto, Ontario," 12-10-1943; 16-10-1943.

Howard Kennedy wrote that “since it has been decided that the maximum number of internees at this camp would not exceed 200, the overcrowding would be automatically corrected by a corresponding reduction in the strength of the guard to two platoons.”¹⁰⁰ At some point in late 1943 or 1944 officials decided to reduce the number of POWs and internees to 200 from the original number of 500. This decision was likely made around 10 January 1944.¹⁰¹ This report also infers that the accommodation for the VGC was both inadequate and overcrowded. In another instance on 14 February 1944, A.E. Potts reported that Camp M was so overcrowded that “there is a guard detention room in Guard Hut #10...this was used as O.R. [Other Ranks] sleeping quarters, owing to the condition of overcrowding.”¹⁰² According to some authorities, the camp had a “down at heel look,” and “a depressing atmosphere,” which was detrimental to morale. By 1943, two officers were living in a farm house $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile away, while 22 Veteran’s Guard stayed in another farm house adjacent to the camp.¹⁰³ Numerous other reports from late 1943 and 1944 demonstrate that the authorities were dealing with a

number of infrastructure related problems, specifically with water pressure and sewage systems. This is hardly surprising given that the original structure was built in the 1870s. Other inspectors remarked on the poor interior conditions of the camp, notably painting and general repairs. According to the engineers who reported on Camp M’s infrastructure, an improved sewage system would cost an estimated \$2,500, improvements to the administrative offices were estimated at \$9,460, and repairs to the water system would cost \$2,200.¹⁰⁴ When engineers from the Department of National Defence arrived to inspect Camp M in December 1943, they remarked that both the ceilings and sinks needed to be repaired due to leaks.¹⁰⁵

At some point in late 1943, the authorities debated over whether Camp M should remain open. It is clear that by January 1944, Ottawa considered reducing the number of prisoners at Camp M by sending them to Monteith for the duration of their time in Canada.¹⁰⁶ By January 1944 Camp M contained only 148 prisoners, 89 of whom were civilian internees.¹⁰⁷ In February, Camp M received word that, for the time being, it

¹⁰⁰ LAC Reel C-4983, file no. 8328-492 “Inspection Reports by Inspector General- No.22 Internment Camp (formerly Internment Camp M) Mimico, Ontario. 25-2-1944.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 10-1-1944.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 14-2-1944.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 21-1-1944

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 16-6-1943.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 8-12-1943

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 12-1-1944; see LAC RG24 vol. 15,391, 4. “War Diary: Internment Camp no. 22, New Toronto, Ontario,” 23-11-1943: “written instructions received for movement of Merchant Seamen to Monteith, Ont.”

¹⁰⁷ LAC Reel C-4983, file no. 8328-492 “Inspection Reports by Inspector General- No.22 Internment Camp (formerly Internment Camp M) Mimico, Ontario. 28-12-1943

would remain operational: "now that it is known that this camp is to continue in use, action will be taken to proceed with repairs and redecorating."¹⁰⁸ During inspections camp staff were expected to use the fire hose, but Major-General Kennedy advised Camp M's authorities that the water pressure was so poor the "fire hose should not be used each time a practice is held; that once in three months would suffice."¹⁰⁹ Despite recommendations to make extensive repairs to the water and sewage systems, as well as improvements on Camp M's buildings, extensive renovations never took place and the internment operation continued.

At the beginning of April 1944, Camp M held 129 internees with 11 on work projects, one in Chorley Park Military Hospital, and one escapee, a POW named Kunz, who had been missing for several days and who was later apprehended by U.S. immigration officials in Detroit.¹¹⁰ By the end of the month, however, the Camp was virtually emptied. The number of prisoners decreased to only 37, all of whom worked at Donnell and Mudge. On 26 April the authorities at Camp M received a message from Ottawa informing them that four Canadian officers and 23 "other ranks" would soon be sent to Camp 10 at Chatham, Ontario. The next day, they received further

orders that following an extensive clean up of the facility, an additional sixteen other ranks would be sent to Chatham. On 30 April, Camp Commandant S.C. Sweeny observed that the camp was almost silent and:

around camp most of the staff [were] putting the finishing touches to all their routine. Commandant, Adjutant, and the H.Q. Staff are patiently waiting for their movement order, authorizing them to move to their official destination. This completes 4 years here as a German Prisoner of War Internment Camp. The official No. 22. Camp Officially closed at 23 59 tonight.¹¹¹

The Mimico Reformatory reopened the following day after the Canadian authorities finished their clean up, and the Ontario provincial prison registers show that Canadian prisoners were serving their sentences uninterrupted from 1 May 1944 onward. From 20 June 1940 to 30 April 1944, however, the spaces in the registers remain blank.¹¹²

4. Conclusion

This has been a preliminary reconnaissance into a relatively unknown internment camp and a vital part of Mimico's long history. As such, it has done little more than scratch the surface of the operation and experiences of both inmates and Canadian authorities.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 25-2-1944. 18-2-1944

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 25-2-1944. 25-2-1944

¹¹⁰ LAC RG24 vol. 15,391 (IV), 1. "War Diary: Internment Camp no. 22, New Toronto, Ontario," 2-4-1944.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 30-4-1944.

¹¹² Archives of Ontario, RG20-43-1, "Mimico Correctional Centre Prison Registers" D-365472 (1927-1945), D-365474 (1945-1948); AO RG20-43-2 "Mimico Correctional Centre Case Files," MS 3043-MS 3057.

Although this investigation is far from comprehensive, one can still draw tentative conclusions about Camp M in particular and the development of internment operations in general.

From what official documentation tells us about its establishment and early development, Camp M was hastily set up and, as a consequence, disorganized. Its leaders, like Fordham and Lindsey, quarrelled over a number of different issues about camp operations and the POWs. The federal government chose Mimico as the site for an internment operation because it possessed all the criteria necessary, as described above. As a reformatory that first opened in the 1870s, however, the site was far from ideal, especially given its age and the fact that an inchoate urban population had grown up around it. The camp thus required considerable repairs and became overcrowded and dilapidated by 1943. In addition, and from its inception, Camp M suffered from internal dissension among the authorities on both military and medical levels, which authorities commented on during inspections and visits. That disagreement existed between camp medical authorities over issues of repatriation, for instance, suggests that they did not necessarily see it within their mandate to abide by every clause of the Geneva Convention. About ten POWs died while at Camp M due to a variety of diseases, including cancers, tuberculosis, and organ failures. Accord-

ing to international convention, these prisoners should have been repatriated to a neutral country. The documentation from Camp M's military hospital does not mention one case of repatriation on medical grounds, which, in the context of total war, is hardly surprising. This undermines the use of the Geneva Convention as a measurement of "success" in internment operations, and broaches questions about the extent to which *any* country could adhere to the Convention under the circumstances of total war. It also puts into question Auger's conclusion that Canadian internment operations "strictly abided by the provisions of the Geneva Convention."¹¹³ Significantly, this study demonstrates the general impracticality of the Geneva Convention in the context of Canadian internment operations during the Second World War. After 1941, Sweden and Spain were arguably the only reliable neutral countries to which Canada could repatriate German troops.¹¹⁴ But to travel across the Atlantic during the 1940s would have been costly and dangerous for all parties involved, as the torpedoing of the POW-carrying *Arandora Star* testified.¹¹⁵

Regarding the experiences of the POWs, what we find is that many of these prisoners were cultured and well educated, while also obedient to their captors. At the same time, they could be demanding if their rights were infringed or not recognized, exemplified in passive

¹¹³ Auger, *Prisoners of the Home Front*, 18.

¹¹⁴ Neville Wylie, *Barbed Wire Diplomacy: Britain, Germany, and the Politics of Prisoners, 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

¹¹⁵ Koch, *Deemed Suspect*, 59-64.



Mimico Correctional Centre, slated for opening in 2013. Photo by the author.

resistance to labour projects and petitions about camp conditions. The documentation from external agencies also illustrates the extent to which the Red Cross and YMCA went to provide for POWs in Canada. As a result, the POWs were furnished with a variety of books, instruments, sports equipment, and religious texts, which together helped alleviate the strains of captivity in a foreign country. These positive aspects of POW life did not reflect the administrative, organizational, and infrastructural obstacles Camp M authorities attempted to surmount. In other words, prisoners did not require orders from “above” to organize their lives and maintain composure, nor were they considerably influenced by the many problems facing Canadian authorities. In this way, the disparate nature of

experiences at Camp M between Canadian authorities and POWs highlights that to speak of internment operations as a “success” in general requires much further attention. The divergent experiences of both groups show that POWs and internees did not require a regimen imposed on them by Canadian authorities to remain docile and composed. Likewise, the dissension and hostility among Canadian authorities did not significantly influence life for prisoners, and never manifested in unruly and disorderly conduct, as it did in Bowmanville or Medicine Hat.¹¹⁶ It is therefore important to recognize how multi-dimensional each internment operation was, and how each camp’s composition, on the levels of both the authorities and prisoners, could significantly alter the course of its

¹¹⁶ Carter, *Behind Canadian Barbed Wire*, 135-148; 235-71.

development. Canadian internment operations were not monolithic endeavours subject to positive overall experiences,¹¹⁷ but they differed immensely depending on the personalities who administered and oversaw operations, and what types of prisoners were held there.

Finally, internment labour projects, a topic to which historians have attached special significance as a measure of operational success, proved divisive in the towns of Mimico and New Toronto, which was exemplified by the Donnell and Mudge controversy in the latter half of 1943. This controversy was likely tied to the change in prisoner status in late 1942. A series of negotiations between the Department of Labour and Charles Annable were required to mollify on one hand the shortage of labour and, on the other, the citizens of Mimico. This dilemma forced Canadian authorities to send prisoners from Mimico to distant locations for work, which included South River, Mumford, Welland, and even St. Faustin, Quebec. This is one method the authorities used to reconcile the proximity of Camp M to the community and alleviating labour shortages. In this respect, the evidence from Camp M suggests that Auger might have overstated his case regarding obedience and labour projects in southern Quebec. His idyllic image

of POWs working alongside Canadian farmers contrasts sharply against the passive resistance and, in some cases, outright refusal to work exercised by Mimico's POWs. It should be stressed, however, that Auger does document some problems with Quebec's internment operations and issues related to obedience in particular. Nonetheless, an examination of Camp M presents something quite different than what Auger found in his study on POWs in southern Quebec.

The new 1,650-person "superjail" is scheduled to open in 2013, on the very site that housed over 500 POWs from 1940 to 1944.¹¹⁸ On some levels, the vehement protests of Mimico citizens in the 1940s resonate with today's debates about community safety and the future of the neighbourhood once the Toronto South Detention Centre becomes fully operational. It is important to remember that this is not the first time the residents of New Toronto and Mimico have felt uneasy about the site's transformation. This article has tacitly demonstrated the continuity in discussions about perceptions of communal safety, and the proximity of prisoners to and its effects on Mimico residents. It serves to inform debate and further discussion, rather than allowing historical myopia to dominate discourse about the site's utility.

¹¹⁷ Auger, *Prisoners of the Home Front*, 4.

¹¹⁸ Toronto Sun, "Etobicoke 'Superjail' Leaves Some Neighbours Uneasy," 8 January 2011 <http://www.torontosun.com/news/torontoandgta/2011/01/08/16812906.html> (accessed 12 September 2011).

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