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# Southern Rhodesia's Adherence to the 1929 Geneva Convention on the Treatment of Italian and German Internees, 1939–1945

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## Abstract

The article looks at the Southern Rhodesian government's efforts to implement the 1929 Geneva Convention's provisions in establishing and administering internment camps during Second World War, despite the fact that the convention did not apply to civilian internees. The article contends that, although the Southern Rhodesian government was committed to the Geneva Convention of 1929, which specified the guidelines and norms for the treatment of prisoners of war, this was fraught with ambiguities. This was partially due to the fact that internees were not initially considered prisoners of war and also because the pro-British Southern Rhodesia white community had conflicting feelings towards Germans and Italians. Hence, although the Geneva Convention obliged capturing states to adhere to certain norms, there was a limit to how far South-

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ern Rhodesia could go in terms of executing these stipulations. This article is based on archival documents from the National Archives of Zimbabwe.

**Keywords**

internment – fascism – Italian – Germany – Southern Rhodesia

## 1 Introduction

Immediately after the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939, several governments put restrictive measures against enemy aliens (nationals of the belligerent states) in their countries for national security reasons.[1] In southern Africa, colonial regimes in South Africa and Southern Rhodesia interned Italians and Germans allegedly fearing that they would conspire with Germany or Italy because they suspected that they had conflicting political loyalties.[2] Recent literature has shown that the pro-British Southern Rhodesian white community held conservative anti-Nazi and fascist perceptions which also complicated the position of Italian and German civilian internees in the internment camps and the entire colony during WWII.[3] In the context of the Second World War, the term enemy aliens often referred to citizens of countries that were at war with the British Empire officially who were seen as a threat and sympathised with the enemy's war aspirations. The British internment policy shifted when war broke out in September 1939, it first considered the systematic internment of refugees, and a departure from the mass internment it followed during the First World War, which it deemed ineffective. The new strategy was centred on the use of tribunals to classify refugees depending on the level of danger and harm they presented.[4] This was abruptly replaced in May 1940 by the introduction of wholesale internment as a result of Adolf Hitler's attack on Western European countries, which shifted public opinion, and the country began to intern more enemy aliens, including women, for security reasons.[5] After significant criticism, the British government altered its internment pol-

1 Lacovetta and Perin 2000, 3; Cesarani and Kushner 1993; Chappell 2017.
2 Hendrich 2012, 231; Furlong, 1991, 3–5.
3 Bishi2022,1–21.
4 Dove 2005, 11.
5 Denness 2012, 217–220.

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icy, allowing certain internees in particular categories to be released.[6] Due to the vast number of refugees it was receiving, Britain depended on its empire to assist it in hosting internees and in caring for the alien civilians living within the empire.

At the request of the imperial government, Southern Rhodesia accepted hosted thousands of German and Italian subjects from Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, German women and children from Tanganyika, and Italian internees from Abyssinia.[7] Southern Rhodesian also justified the internment of Italians and Germans allegedly to prevent counter-raids by the Axis powers.[8] However, others came from Bechuanaland and later South Africa as they became 'enemies within' because they were citizens of countries which were at war with Britain.[9] Southern Rhodesia more or less followed the same policies and international treaties that Britain was a signatory to as a British colony because it was not like Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa that were signatories to this treaty.[10]

The Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War of 27 July 1929 was the sole international treaty governing the treatment of prisoners of war at the time of the Second World War, but there were no recognised international treaties governing the treatment of non-combatants.[11] The UK ratified the 1929 Geneva Convention on the Treatment of Prisoners of War.[12] Southern Rhodesia, as a British colony, adopted this pact to manage internees, even though they were not prisoners of war, but rather as enemy aliens.[13] Prisoners of War (PWO) were treated differently depending on their nationality, the period of the war and treatment varied from strict adherence to the requirements of the 1929 Geneva Convention to starvation and cruelty, frequently resulting in mass deaths of prisoners.[14] Italian and Germans held in Southern Rhodesia internment camps, whether from inside the colony or from other

6 Denness 2012, 222.

7 Rupiah 1995, 138.

8 Rupiah 1995, 140.

9 National Archives of Zimbabwe, hereinafter NAZ S482/1/39/1/119/21-C/12/352, Internment of Enemy aliens in times of war, 15 May 1939, NAZ, S482/1/39, Telegram Governor Secretary, Mafeking to the secretary, Prime Minister, Salisbury, 5 September 1939.

10 *Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War*, Geneva, 27 July 1929, https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/gc-pow-1929/state-parties?activeTab=historical#footnote-1, accessed 11 April 2023.

11 Felicia 2016, 419; Hack andBlackburn 2008,13.

12 *Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War*, Geneva, 27 July 1929.

13 S826/203/42 Education No. 2 Tanganyika, 12 February 1945.

14 MacKenzie 1994, 487.



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British colonies in Africa, were all civilians, not prisoners of war, and were interned as a security precaution to ensure the successful execution of the Allied war effort. Consequently, this article examines how Southern Rhodesia used the 1929 Geneva Convention to treat civilian internees by establishing a 'conducive environment' in the internment camps as they were not prisoners of war with more freedoms. Therefore, this article examines how internment campsin Southern Rhodesia were established and, how the camps were administered as well as the privileges which were offered to the internees. It asserts that since internees were civilians classed as enemy aliens, their treatment was a little more lenient, and that internment camps were not penal settlements. Southern Rhodesia's commitment to the Geneva Convention of 1929 helped manage the internment camps and maintained a free atmosphere that protected the internees' rights to a certain degree. This is because, although Southern Rhodesia offered internees with a variety of amenities like as hospitals, canteens, monetary allowances, dormitories, sporting facilities, and kitchens, it did not expect them to fully express their political opinions. In addition, the application of the international treaties governing the treatment of internees has received less attention in previous studies on the internment camps in Southern Rhodesia.[15]

## 2 The Establishment of Internment Camps in Southern Rhodesia

Although the war broke out in September 1939, plans to intern German and Italian internees in Southern Rhodesia began as early as January 1939. For example, in April 1939, the Southern Rhodesia government planned to place all alien men on parole in the event of a war as a precautionary security measure giving the state room to build their accommodation.[16] In various British Southern African colonies, colonial administrations undertook measures to identify enemy aliens. By May 1939, the Northern Rhodesian colonial authorities had identified roughly 260 enemy aliens including women and children and planned to intern them in Southern Rhodesia if war broke out.[17] Although there was no clear effort in the construction of internment camps before September 1939, issues of their establishment were discussed and places for their establishment were identified.

15 Rupiah 1995; Bishi, 2022.

16 NAZ, S482/1/39/1/119/21, Internment: Enemy Aliens in Times of War, 14 April 1939.

17 NAZ, S482/1/39/1/119/21-C/12/352, Internment of Enemy Aliens in Times of War, 15 May 1939.

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It is not surprising, however, that when WWII broke, Southern Rhodesia issued a proclamation requiring all enemy subjects inside the colony to register and surrender their weapons and ammunition to the officer in charge of the nearest police station.[18] This resulted in the internment of German and Italian subjects in Southern Rhodesia, while others from Northern Rhodesia, Bechuanaland, and Nyasaland were first held at Hartley School until No. 1 General (Salisbury) Internment Camp was created.[19] Just males were first interned, but women and children were afterwards interned in October of the same year, at a cost of more than five shillings per person paid on a *pro-rata* basis between governments.[20] The first wave of internees saw the formation of the No. 1 (General) Internment Camp, Salisbury which housed all German and Italian subjects from southern Africa save South Africa, and the No. 2 (Tanganyika) Internment Camp, Salisbury which held all German women and children from Tanganyika.[21]

The second wave of internees comprised of Italians taken from African Oriental Italiana, mainly Abyssinia, when Italy joined the Axis forces in the Second World War in 1941. These Italians were captured after the Eastern campaign in which the Italians were defeated by the allied forces, particularly the British forces.[22] The majority of the captured officers were sent to India and the Union of South Africa while the civilian subjects were sent to British East Africa (Kenya).[23] Some civilian internees were transferred from Abyssinia and British East Africa to Southern Rhodesia, where they were housed in Internment Camps No. 3 (Gatooma), No. 4 (Umvuma), and No. 5 (Fort Victoria). The above group of Italian internees from African Oriental Italiana were heavily influenced by fascist political views that emerged in Italy in the 1920s and 1930s. Southern Rhodesia intelligence officials noted report that this category of Italian internees were civil servants in Abyssinia employed and paid by the Italian government to promote fascism in internment camps Nos. 3, 4, and 5, as well as the Fort Victoria extension camp.[24] These Italian internees, number-

18 NAZ, S482/1/39, Proclamation by the Governor of Southern Rhodesia, 3 September 1939; Rupiah 1995, 140–151.

19 NAZ, S482/1/39, Telegram Governor Secretary, Mafeking to Secretary, Prime Minister, Salisbury, 5 September 1939.

20 NAZ, S482/1/39, Letter from Commandant, Southern Rhodesian Forces To the Secretary Department of Justice, 6 September 1939.

21 Rupiah 1995, 146–148.

22 For the Eastern Campaign and the capture of the Italians see Jowett 1951; Brown 1990,45; Glover 1987.

23 Moore 2015, 176–177.

24 Bishi 'Filthiest Gangs of Thugs', 12.


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ing over 300 government officials, frequently caused political disturbances in the camps, which irritated the pro-British and Southern Rhodesian settler community, who opposed fascism and Nazism. The state segregated fascists from anti-fascist Italian internees to monitor their political activities, but tensions between different factions along political lines at No. 3 persisted and often escalated into confrontation.[25] The authorities distributed English newspapers to reduce fascist sentiments in internment camps and established a nucleus intelligence personnel from internees to provide it with political information.[26] The state's efforts to continuously monitor and control internees' political thinking violated Article 40 of the 1929 Geneva Convention, which states that combatants' communication bans for military or political reasons must be temporary and short.[27] While Southern Rhodesia attempted to adhere to the provisions of the 1929 Geneva Convention, the lived experiences of internees in internment camps were somewhat tenuous in terms of their freedoms.

All civilian internees were searched, and any British East Africa currency they held was retained by the camp commandant, who issued a receipt for the money. The camp commandant also kept any non-British East Africa currency and issued a receipt that clearly identified the money.[28] In essence, all monies held by the camp commandant were deposited and credited to the internees' accounts in compliance with Geneva Convention Article 24. Part of Article 24 stipulated that any surplus taken or withheld from the prisoner would be credited to his account, just like any monetary deposit made by him could not be converted into another currency without his approval.[29] Upon their arrival, the internees were also given clothing. Each internee was given one pair of shoes, six handkerchiefs, one hat, one cardigan or jersey, two blankets, one pillow, three shirts, three trousers, three vests, six socks and three towels.[30] The giving of clothes to internees demonstrates that the internees were properly treated upon arriving at the internment camps, demonstrating that the government was committed to adhere to the Geneva Convention. Article 4 stated that 'the power detaining prisoners of war is bound to provide for their maintenance' while Article 12 stated that 'clothing, linen and footwear shall be furnished pris-

25 NAZ, S826/284/42/148 Movement of Italians Transfers Nos. 3, 4 and 5, Closing of No. 4, 3 April 1945.

26 NAZ, S826/1149/42 Intelligence, 10 December 1942.

27 Geneva Convention relative to the treatment of prisoners of war, 27 July 1929.

28 NAZ, S887/9/7/42, Standing Rules for internment camps; Organization and administration of internment camps.

29 Geneva Convention relative to the treatment of prisoners of war.

30 NAZ, S887/1/10/42, Clothing Scale: Internees.



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oners of war by the detaining Power.'[31] The state also attempted to adhere to Geneva Convention provisions in the organisation of internment camps, but it retained complete control of the internment camps to monitor the actions of internees, as seen in the next section.

## 3 Organization and Administration of the Internment Camps

Each internment camp was under the charge of a camp commandant who was responsible for the supervision and control of both the camp guards and the internees. The commandant was subject to the orders and directions of the Directorof Internment Camps and Refugee Settlements.[32] The camp commandant was the overall head of the internment camp and reported to the Director of internment camps and Refugee Settlements concerning the progress and challenges at the internment camp. The camp commandant appointed a Deputy Camp Commandant who was responsible for the supervision and control of the camp during the absence of the camp commandant.[33] In the absence of the camp commandant, his deputy assumed his duties and became the head of the internment camp. Although internees took an active role towards the daily management of internment camps, the state had a vested interest in the internment camps' administration so that the panopticon statemaintained its permanent visibility of the internment camps.[34] Internees participated in the administration of the internment camps as there were allegations that politically inclined internees always assumed leadership in the camps.[35] When the *Rhodesia Herald* reported that there were Nazi and fascist propaganda activities in the internment camps, one of the camp leaders threatened to sue it arguing that it had infringed on their rights as prescribed by the 1929 Geneva Convention.[36] Most internees believed that they were free to do what they liked regarding the organisation, schooling, and social life inside the camps.[37] Article 2 of the 1929 Geneva Convention provided for the human treatment of protected persons 'against all acts of violence or threats, insults and public

31 *Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War*, 27 July 1929.

32 NAZ, S887/9/7/42 Standing Rules for Internment Camps; Organization and Administration of Internment Camps.

33 Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, 27 July 1929.

34 For more on the see Foucault 1978.

35 NAZ, S826/1149/42, Intelligence, Italian civil servants, 21 February 1943.

36 Rhodesia Herald, 14 November 1944.

37 S826/203/42 Education No. 2 Tanganyika, 1 February 1945.



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curiosity.'[38] Thus, they felt insulted by the press because it infringed on their rights as also provided by Section 5 of the Geneva Convention, which allowed the protection of their civil rights.[39]

The civilian internees who were appointed to office were responsible for ensuring that orders of the commandant and any camp official acting by the directions of the camp commandant were duly performed and observed.[40] They were also responsible for bringing the petitions of the internees to the camp's commandant. Thus, any petition by a civilian internee was made to the camp commandant through the Lines Captain and was transmitted immediately to the camp commandant.[41] It was only serious or urgent matters that an internee could bring his petition to the camp commandant directly. The incorporation of civilian internees into the administration of the internment camps suggests that internees were 'fairly' treated. This was done so that grievances could be easily addressed. One can therefore note that the internment camps were not penal settlements in which the voices of the internees could not be heard, rather, in the internment camps Italian and German subjects were free to raise complaints and suggestions in which their camp representatives could discuss such matters with the commandant. The voice of the internees was accommodated by the camp administration through their camp representatives. In this particular context, internment camps in Southern Rhodesia offered a fairly free environment for the Italian and German subjects who were interned there.

The guards in the internment camps were under the orders of the camp commandant. The guard commander was responsible to the camp commandant for the efficiency and conduct of the guards.[42] Guards were not allowed to adopt any aggressive or bullying manner towards the civilian internees.[43] This is a clear reflection of the efforts made by the Southern Rhodesian administration to abide by the regulations of the Geneva Convention of 1929. Article 2 of the Geneva Convention stated, 'they (prisoners of war) must at all times be humanely treated and protected, particularly against acts of violence, insults and public curiosity. Measures of reprisal against them are prohibited.'[44] With Southern Rhodesia's efforts to abide by these regulations, internees' rights were

38 *Geneva Convention relative to the treatment of prisoners of war*, 27 July 1929, 179.
39 Geneva Convention relative to the treatment of prisoners of war, 27 July 1929, 179.
40 NAZ, S887/9/7/42, Standing rules for internment camps.
41 NAZ, S887/9/7/42, Standing rules for internment camps.
42 NAZ, S887/9/7/42, Standing rules for internment camps.
43 NAZ, S887/9/7/42, Standing rules for internment camps.
44 *Geneva Convention Relative to the treatment of prisoners of war*, 27 July 1929.


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protected and preserved in the internment camps. All acts or forms of violence by the internment camp guards against the internees were condemned. Therefore, while the Italian subjects were in the internment camps, they continued to enjoy the freedom of expression, freedom of movement within the internment camps and freedom from any administrative torturealbeit with some limitations as the government strictly discouraged contact between internees and the public. The government enacted rule No. 1 (b) of the Rules for Internment Camps made by the Director of Internment Camps under the powers conferred by the government notice No. 376/41 prohibiting unauthorised persons from entering the camps without the approval of the Camp Commandants.[45] There were notice boards erected near each camp prohibiting the public from entering the camp without approval by the camp commandants who also had powers to arrest unauthorised persons entering the camp. Thus, although the state tried to provide a friendly environment in which the internees could enjoy their life in the camps, the freedoms had elasticity as the government could not lower the guard by giving internees ultimate freedoms. This also included Commandants always making sure that there was no conduct between staff members and the internees except those whom he ordered to do that.[46] Such was the paranoia of the colonial state holding anti-fascist and anti-Nazi perceptions, ethnic chauvinism, and white-on-white prejudice that was broadly a reflection of Southern Rhodesia's 'British' identity.[47] These prejudices against other white ethnic groups that were not of British cultural extractionand holding divergent political ideas such as Italians were simply undesirable whites although they were European.[48]

One of the laws governing internment camps required all camp commandants and camp officials to take personal interests in the welfare of the civilian internees under their charge but they were not supposed to discuss any war or political issues with them.[49] Furthermore, all protected people under the 1929 Geneva Convention who were in internment camps received the same treatment as civilian internees.[50] This portrays the idea that internees were treated according to the Geneva conventions and that their rights were not violated

45 NAZ, S1604/12 Internees contact with labourers in camp and the public generally, 16 October 1941.

46 NAZ, S1604/12 Internees contact with labourers in camp and the public generally, 16 October 1941.

47 See, Bishi 'Filthiest gangs of thugs', 2; Tavuyanago, Mugutiaand Hlongwana 2012, 951–965; Mlambo 2000, 139–160; Hodder-Williams 1974, 611–641.

48 Bishi 'Filthiest gangs of thugs', 59–77.

49 NAZ, S887/9/7/42, Standing rules for internment camps.

50 NAZ, S887/9/7/42, Standing rules for internment camps.


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by the camp officials. Moreover, the government cooperated closely with the Spanish and Swiss consuls in South Africa, who served as Protecting Powers for German and Italian interests in southern Africa, as well as the International Red Cross representative in Southern Rhodesia.[51] This was all in accordance with the Article 86 of the Geneva Convention which allowed the detaining power to work with Protecting Powers to oversee the interests of prisoners of war through diplomatic channels.

## 4 Provision of Privileges to the Internees

The internees were granted various privileges in the internment camps such as wireless radio receiving sets which were under the control of the camp commandant.[52] However, the state only allowed internees to listen to local radio stations in Southern Rhodesia as a way of controlling the spread of fascist and Nazi ideologies in the internment camps.[53] Despite these strict measures by the state, internees voiced their concern arguing that it was within their rights to listen to Italian and German news.[54] The state also informed internees that the wireless radio was subject to immediate withdrawal at any time at the discretion of the camp commandant for security reasons or on account of any abuse, or misbehaviour.[55] For example, in December 1943, wireless radios were withdrawn from No. 5 (Fort Victoria) Extension Internment following a series of demonstrations and escapes by the internees. The provision of the radio sets at the internment camps shows thatSouthern Rhodesia was willing to treat the Italian internees in a manner that was acceptable by the regulations of the Geneva Convention of 1929. However, it is clear that although the state was willing to be strict with the 1929 Geneva Convention, there was a limit to which it could go. It was not ready to see the flourishing of Nazi and fascist propaganda activities so it strictly monitored the radios and letters coming and going out of Southern Rhodesia internment camps.[56] In addition, there

51 NAZ, S824/149/42/2 Department of Internment Camps to the Spanish Consul, 5 March 1942; NAZ S826/990/42 Swiss Consul-General, Protecting Power Italians, Telegram, 24 September 1942; MS300/1 Copies of reports of ICRC Delegate to camps and other institutions in Southern and Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland and in Portuguese East Africa (Beira region), 1 December 1943.

52 NAZ, S887/9/7/42, Standing rules for internment camps.

53 S826/92/1942/3 Censorship and Interpreters, 30 April 1942.

54 S826/92/1942/3 internee wireless, 22 September 1943.

55 S826/92/1942/3 internee wireless, 22 September 1943.

56 S1604/3/1–12 Censorship of internees' letters, 1941–1946.

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were perceptions that the state was lenient towards alleged fascists and Nazi internees in the internment camps. These allegations angered Southern Rhodesian white settlers who advocated for the ruthless eradication of the alleged fascist and Nazi propaganda activities in the internment camps.[57] With these misgivings towards alleged fascist and Nazi propaganda activities in the internment camps, the state was not entirely happy.

Apart from radios, internees were also provided with recreational facilities in the form of various recreational games. At No. 3 (Gatooma) Internment Camp, sporting activities such as football, bowling, handball, tennis and athletics were exceptionally well organized and sponsored by the Fascist party.[58] Three sporting groups or clubs were dominant at Gatooma camp in which some internees were active participants. Football was also played infrequently in No. 5 (Fort Victoria) Internment Camp, which had bladders for footballs and one 'bocce' pitch with electric lights.[59] The internment camps were therefore provided with recreational facilities for the internees. These sporting activities were played without any state regulations that could limit the participation of the internees. This was in accordance with Article 17 of the Geneva Convention which stated that 'so far as possible, belligerents shall encourage intellectual diversions and sports organized by the prisoners of war.'[60] Internees were fairly treated, and the camp representative could always take the internees' decisions on the sporting activities to the camp commandant. To some extent, the voice of the internee was always heard and respected within the internment camps. However, in November 1943, at No. 5 (Fort Victoria) Extension camp there was no attempt to organize collective activities, except in the form of political meetings and demonstrations.[61] The Southern Rhodesian government provided the necessary facilities for the organization of sporting activities, however, it was the internees who abused these facilities and used them for political reasons.

Apart from the wireless radio and the sporting activities, the internees were allowed to take walks outside the camps. At first, the walks were escorted by which internees were accompanied by some armed African Askari guards. However, by 1944, the walks were in most cases carried out without escorts. For example, by 1944, at No. 5 (Fort Victoria) Extension Camp walks were not escorted and they were taking place twice a week.[62] Twenty-six internees were

57 Bishi 2022, 2; New Rhodesia, 19 July 1946.
58 NAZ, S826/1149/42/48, Report on No. 3 (Gatooma) Internment Camp, 18 June 1944.
59 NAZ, S826/1149/42/ Report on No. 5(Fort Victoria) Extension Camp, 23 May 1944.
60 *Geneva Convention relative to the treatment of prisoners of war*, 27 July 1929, 179.
61 NAZ, S826/ Report on Number Five Extension Camp, 27 November 1943.
62 NAZ, S826/1149/42/44, Report on Number Five Extension Camp, 23 May 1944.


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allowed to take a walk in the morning and a similar number in the afternoon was also allowed. This is a reflection that the internees were enjoying a lot of freedom in the internment camps. Their camps were different from the penal settlement such as jails. However, some internees abused these unescorted walks as they ended up escaping from the internment camps.[63] The internees could not entirely live independent lives as the state kept a close eye on them and monitored their movements or made conduct with other people after special approval by the camp commandant. In essence, any unauthorized person found within 25 yards of the fence surrounding the camps was liable to arrest and prosecution.[64] Virgilio Vincenzo Garlzlo, an Italian internee who was 12 years during his internment, remembers that;

> outside camps consisted of an inner barbed wire fence about 12 feet high and an outer fence which was of high voltage and if any animal came in contact with the fence the alarm would go off and the guards would run around the outside of the fence to see what had set the alarm off. We were not guarded by the police but by the army who were very nice and friendly to us always very helpful.[65]

The internees were also given pocket money every month. Any internee who was prepared to work but for whom no work was found was paid an allowance (referred to as substance allowance) at the rate of ten shillings a month.[66] Substance allowance was paid on the first day of each month. This is an indication that the state did not use a firm hand on the internees, rather they were provided with some benefits within the internment camps. Throughout the internment of the Italians in Southern Rhodesia, the government observed the regulations of the Geneva Convention of 1929. It should be noted that the regulations of the Geneva Convention protected the internees and required the detaining power to develop interests on the internees.

Apart from the provision of substance allowance, all internees who were having money in their possession were supposed to submit it to the chief accountant upon arrival at the internment camp. In exchange, they were given

63 NAZ, S826/1149/42/44, Report on Number Five Extension Camp, 23 May 1944.
64 NAZ, S826/1149/42/44, Report on Number Five Extension Camp, 23 May 1944.
65 Virgilio Vincenzo Garlzlo, 'Memories of Number 1 Internment Camp Harare', 10 June 2013, http://rhodesianheritage.blogspot.com/search/label/Italians, accessed 4 October 2022.
66 NAZ, S887/9/7/42, Standing rules for internment camps. Organization and Administration of internment Camps.


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a receipt of the amount deposited.[67] These internees were allowed to apply for the payment of deposit allowances. One of the laws on deposit allowances stated that,

> Certain internees having each deposited a sum not exceeding ten pounds, which will come into the possession of the Chief Accounting Officer following the reception of such civilian internees at a camp and the production of the receipt for such monies, and the Director having to authorize the payment out of such monies to the civilian internee depositing the same at a rate not exceeding ten shillings per month, the camp commandant shall, on any application being made by the civilian internee for a payment (herein referred to as deposit payment) not exceeding ten shillings a month out of the monies deposited by him as aforesaid, forthwith notify the Chief Accounting Officer and arrange for such payments to be made accordingly.[68]

Though the internees were required to deposit their monies they were able to apply for the payment of these deposit allowances. It was a requirement that the internees were supposed to produce the receipt to the camp commandant who transmitted the receipt to the Chief Accounting officer. Though the internees were forced to submit their monies to the camp commandant upon their arrival, they were always having access to the money. This was per the regulations of the Geneva Convention which required the internees to have access to their monies. Article 6 of the Geneva Convention states that,

> Money in possession of prisoners may not be taken away from them except by the order of an officer and after their amount is determined. A receipt shall be given. The money thus taken shall be entered to the amount of each prisoner.[69]

This shows that throughout the period 1939 to 1947 Southern Rhodesia continued to safeguard the interests of the internees in the internment camps. The provision of deposit and subsistence allowances reflected the desire by the British in Southern Rhodesia to preserve the regulations of the Geneva Convention.

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67 NAZ, S887/9/7/42, Standing Rules for Internment Camps: Organization and Administration of internment Camps.

68 NAZ, S887/9/7/42, Standing Rules for Internment Camps: Organization and Administration of internment Camps.

69 *Geneva Convention relative to the treatment of prisoners of war*, 27 July 1929, 179.



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Various infrastructural facilities were established in the internment camps for the Italian subjects. Firstly, internees were accommodated in dormitoriesthough these dormitories were different from camp to camp they were mainly built of corrugated iron in concrete pillars while the floors were made of wood.[70] In some camps, the dormitories were blocks built from bricks and in others they were huts. These dormitories were not overpopulated as only a maximum of three internees could occupy a room. In terms of earlier internment camps such as Number One General Internment Camp, no building was supposed to house more than twenty-four internees. At every internment camp, there was a kitchen for the interneesequipped with kitchen utensils.[71] The internees could ask about dishes which they prefer in place of those which were served to them, this was done without restriction.[72] The internees could store up considerable reserves of food in anticipation of holidays.[73] In this case, the delegate of the Red Cross pointed out that; "I have been able to ascertain that more than fifty per cent of the local population do not receive, in respect of quantity and quality, the same nourishment as the internees receive. That is why their health was excellent."[74] Virgilio Vincenzo Garlzlosummarizes by recalling that 'the living conditions at the camp were quite reasonable and food was ample'.[75] These remarks suggest at Southern Rhodesian officials made significant efforts to provide good living conditions for the internees.

Although the camp administration made efforts to provide good quality food there were challenges in catering for interns with special dietary needs. For example, at No. 5 (Fort Victoria) Extension camp, there were no steps taken concerning the possibility of a diet kitchen for internees suffering from stomach

70 NAZ, S482/1/39, Report of the Delegate of International Committee Of The Red Cross On His Visit to Number One Internment General Internment camp from the 7th to the 20th February 1941.

71 NAZ, S482/1/39, Report of the Delegate of International Committee Of The Red Cross On His Visit to Number One Internment General Internment camp from the 7th to the 20th February 1941.

72 NAZ, S482/1/39, Report of the Delegate of International Committee Of The Red Cross On His Visit to Number One Internment General Internment camp from the 7th to the 20th February 1941.

73 NAZ, S482/1/39, Report of the Delegate of International Committee Of The Red Cross On His Visit to Number One Internment General Internment camp from the 7th to the 20th February 1941.

74 NAZ, S482/1/39, Report of the Delegate of International Committee Of The Red Cross On His Visit to Number One Internment General Internment camp from the 7th to the 20th February 1941.

75 Virgilio Vincenzo Garlzlo, Memories of Number 1 Internment Camp Harare, 10 June 2013.

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problems.[76] Similarly, at No. 5 (Fort Victoria) Internment Camp's main enclosure there were no facilities for internees who were suffering from gastric troubles (ulcer) and who require a special light diet.[77] Though most of the internees were having no cause for complaint since the food was plentiful, there was a lack of fruits at the camp. This was later provided in form of dried fruit.[78] Food was available in the internment camps; nevertheless, the state failed to consider the need for a light diet for individuals suffering from gastrointestinal ailments. In this instance, despite the state's inadequacies in terms of food provision, it is apparent that the government worked hard to keep the Geneva Convention of 1929 provisions in place.

Every camp had an infirmary or a camp hospital built to supply the internees with the required medical services. The delegate from the International Committee of the Red Cross reported that the hospitals were likewise well-stocked with medications.[79] Internees were only admitted to public hospitals when their conditions demanded it. Medical personnel were sent to all internment camps to oversee the camps' sanitary conditions. If the medical officer believed that an internee needed immediate medical attention that was not being provided sufficiently at the camp, he reported the circumstances of the case to the superintendent of the General Hospital or to his deputy on duty, who was expected to issue orders as he saw fit.[80] In this particular case, the internment camps were equipped with the required health facilities to care for the internees' health. This demonstrates that the administration of the internment camps was based on the 1929 Geneva Convention, which stipulates in Article 14,

> Every camp shall have an infirmary, where prisoners of war shall receive every kind of attention they need. Prisoners affected with serious illness or whose condition necessitates an important surgical operation must be admitted, at the expense of the detaining power to any military or civil medical unit qualified to treat them.[81]

76 NAZ, S826/1149/42/33, Report on Number Five (Fort Victoria) Extension Camp, 27 November 1943.

77 NAZ, S826/1149/42/7-LO/5/1 Report on Number Five Internment Camp (Fort Victoria): Italian administration and general internal position, 21 February 1943.

78 NAZ, S826/1149/42/7-LO/5/1 Report on Number Five Internment Camp (Fort Victoria): Italian administration and general internal position, 21 February 1943.

79 NAZ, S482/1/39, Report of the Delegate of international Committee Of The Red Cross On His Visit to Number One Internment General Internment camp from the 7th to the 20th February 1941.

80 NAZ, S887/16/3/42: Rules for internment camps.

81 *Geneva Convention relative to the treatment of prisoners of war*, 27 July 1929, 179.



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The internees did not encounter an epidemic as a result of a lack of health services during their internment in Southern Rhodesia. But, among the Askari guards, there were isolated occurrences of malaria, 'summer diarrhea', hysterical paralysis, and venereal diseases.[82] The provision of health care for internees was in accordance with Geneva Convention regulations, which stated that the liberties of prisoners of war should not be compromised.

In addition, every internment camp had a canteen for the interneesunder the control of the internees equipped with tables, benches and shelves.[83] These internment camp canteens were selling goods and all kinds at cheap prices.[84] A small profit for the benefit of the internees was earned from the purchases that were made by the internees from the canteen.[85] All internees who were working in the kitchen, camp canteen, and workshops among others were paid a shilling a day. Life in the internment camps was therefore favourable for the internees because they were having access to various luxurious goods such as beer and cigarettes which free men were enjoying outside the camps. The provision of groceries also ensured the availability of food in the camps, thus internees who wished to enjoy shopping could do it at the internment camps. This was in accordance with Article 12 of theGeneva Convention which states that,

> Canteens shall be installed in all camps where prisoners may obtain, at the local market price, food products and ordinary objects. Profits made by the canteens for camp administration shall be used for the benefit of prisoners.[86]

It is worth noting that the establishment of internment camps did not serve to punish the internees; rather, their rights were preserved, and the government upheld requirements of the Geneva Convention. Britain and its colonies continued to dedicate themselves to the requirements of the Geneva Convention of 1929. What became rampant were internal political faction fights that were independent of the government's administration of the internment camps.

The internees were also organized to participate in camp farming. At No. 3 (Gatooma) Internment Camp the farm around the camp was used for camp

82 S826/206/42/9 Monthly reports, All Camps, June 1944.
83 NAZ, S482/1/39 Report on Number One Internment Camp.
84 NAZ, S482/1/39 Report on Number One Internment Camp.
85 NAZ, S482/1/39 Report on Number One Internment Camp.
86 *Geneva Convention relative to the treatment of prisoners of war*, 27 July 1929, 179.

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farming. Internees were given plots outside the enclosure of one to two acres.[87] In most cases, internees worked in pairs to dig wells, build thatched huts, grow vegetables, and raise poultry so that by 1944, there were about 250 internees working on the farm that had two thousand fowl at the camp farm and all the products were belonging to the internees.[88] About one hundred and fifty acres were under cultivation at government expense and it also employed about fifty internees daily.[89] Although half of the vegetables eaten in the camp were produced on the camp farm, the farm's goods were marketed to Europeans outside of the camp.[90] The internment camps were therefore administered in a way that could reduce boredom among the internees. Apart from this, the organization of labour was also in accordance with the requirements of the Geneva Convention of 1929, which in Article 31 states that,

> Labour furnished by prisoners of war shall have no direct relation with war operations. It is especially prohibited to use prisoners for manufacturing and transporting arms or munitions of any kind, or for transporting material intended for combatant units.[91]

Internees were not employed in any kind of war labour; rather the internees were kept occupied in their plots thus reducing cases of desperation in the camp. This shows that Southern Rhodesia was dedicated to complying with the regulations of the Geneva Convention. Southern Rhodesia can be credited for its effort to avoid employing the internees in wartime employment. Through their farm projects, the internees enjoyed the freedom they could leave the enclosure and spent much of their time in the plots. However, their activities were closely supervised since the State was afraid that some hardliner fascists would influence Africans. More so, the participation of the Italians in this farming also resembles a form of paid labour as they were benefiting from the profits generated from the farm. By organizing such projects for the internees, the administration reduced instances of resistance from the internees as they were always occupied with their farming business.

87 NAZ, S826/1149/42/48, Report on Number Three (Gatooma) Internment Camp, 18 June 1944.

88 NAZ, S826/1149/42/48, Report on Number Three (Gatooma) Internment Camp, 18 June 1944.

89 NAZ, S826/1149/42/48, Report on Number Three (Gatooma) Internment Camp, 18 June 1944.

90 NAZ, S826/1149/42/48, Report on Number Three (Gatooma) Internment Camp, 18 June 1944.

91 *Geneva Convention relative to the treatment of prisoners of war*, 27 July 1929, 179.



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Some artisan internees were engaged in the production of various articles. For example at Number Three Internment Camp, in 1944 sixty internees were involved in the production of rope products, handbags, ivory cigarette holders, toys and paintings for sale.[92] At Number Five Internment Camp, about one hundred and eighty internees were paid labor in and around the camp in 1944; one hundred of these were paid for by internees' canteen funds for internal camp duties.[93] All internees were encouraged to find occupation in the camp, in the manufacture of articles for sale. However, considerable difficulty was experienced in the disposal of the goods due to the disease attributed to shopkeepers who were charging abnormal prices.[94] Despite this obstacle, about fifty internees find distraction in the making of ornaments, cigarette boxes, pipes, and cigarette holders.[95] All the internees were kept occupied in the internment camp. This was done to reduce instances of boredom which could cause escapes.

## 5 Conclusion

By April 1945, repatriation had started at the No. 4 (Umvuma) camp and it closed down. This was followed in 1946 by the closure of all camps except that at Norton, which now housed 900 internees. In 1947, the inmates of the three refugee settlements were moved to No. 3 (Gatooma) Internment Camp pending this repatriation and the internment camp corps stood down finally at the end of March, after which date the remaining camps were 'civilianised' and put under the control of a superintendent. As of July 1947, responsibility for the repatriation of all internees was taken over by the International Refugee Organisation and by March 1949, the remainder of the Polish refugees had been returned to Europe. By this time, all camps had been closed and the disposal of their movable assents the Department of Internment Camps and Refugee Settlements was dissolved.

Throughout the history of the internment of Italians in Southern Rhodesia, the government tried to stick to the Geneva Convention of 1929. While in different parts of the world such as Russia, Japan, some other parts of America and Germany, prisoners of war camps were characterized by hostile environments

92 *Geneva Convention relative to the treatment of prisoners of war, 27 July 1929, 179.*
93 NAZ, S826/1149/42/43, Report on Number Five (Fort Victoria) Main Camp, 22 May 1944.
94 NAZ, S826/1149/42/43, Report on Number Five (Fort Victoria) Main Camp, 22 May 1944.
95 NAZ, S826/1149/42/43, Report on Number Five (Fort Victoria) Main Camp, 22 May 1944.

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where inmates were badly treated,[96] the Internment Camp administrators in Southern Rhodesia provided various privileges to the internees. The internment camps were constructed in a way in which the rights of the internees were highly respected regardless of the anti-fascism feeling in Southern Rhodesia. As recent literature has suggested, the Southern Rhodesia white community held anti-fascist and anti-Nazi perceptions and the state did not allow the teaching of fascist and Nazi political ideologies in the internment camps and the country at large.[97] The state closely controlled internment camps and discouraged contact between internees and the public for security reasons. Thus, although Southern Rhodesia tried to follow the 1929 Geneva Convention, it could not allow internees to carry out political activities in the internment camps. This article has also contributed to the scholarship on the history of internment during Second World War in southern Africa.[98]

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96 Scheck 2020; Concerning how the Japanese treated European prisoners of war see, Sturma 2019; Charlotte 1987; on how the Americans treated prisoners of war see Doyle 201; Hirofumi 2005.

97 Bishi 2022, 1–21.

98 Horn 2022, 1–26.

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