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Rough and Ready Relief: American Identity, Humanitarian Experience, and the Commission for Relief in Belgium, 1914-1917

Thomas D. Westerman

University of Connecticut, tomwesterman@gmail.com

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Rough and Ready Relief: American Identity, Humanitarian Experience,
and the Commission for Relief in Belgium, 1914-1917

Thomas David Westerman, Ph.D.

University of Connecticut, 2014

This dissertation examines a group of American men who adopted and adapted notions of American power for humanitarian ends in German-occupied Belgium with the Commission for Relief in Belgium (CRB) during World War I. The CRB, led by Herbert Hoover, controlled the importation of relief goods and provided supervision of the Belgian-led relief distribution. The young, college-educated American men who volunteered for this relief work between 1914 and 1917 constructed an effective and efficient humanitarian space for themselves by drawing not only on the power of their neutral American citizenship, but on their collectively understood American-ness as able, active, yet responsible young men serving abroad, thereby developing an alternative tool—the use of humanitarian aid—for the use and projection of American power in the early twentieth century.

Drawing on their letters, diaries, recollections as well as their official reports on their work and the situation in Belgium, this dissertation argues that the early twentieth century formation of what we today understand to be non-state, international humanitarianism was partially established by Americans exercising explicit and implicit national power during the years of American neutrality in World War I. Many of these Americans, Hoover and Maurice Pate, for example, would go on to serve in future humanitarian missions and, in the case of Pate, would even lead an international, non-state, non-governmental organization, UNICEF. The CRB was an early proving ground for a new kind of American influence in the world.

Rough and Ready Relief: American Identity, Humanitarian Experience,
and the Commission for Relief in Belgium, 1914-1917

Thomas David Westerman

B.A., Adelphi University, 2003

M.A., University of Connecticut, 2005

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at the
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2014

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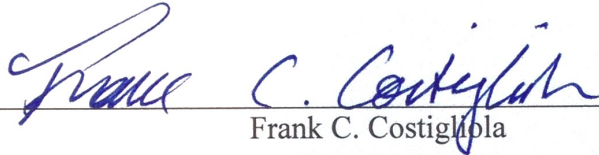
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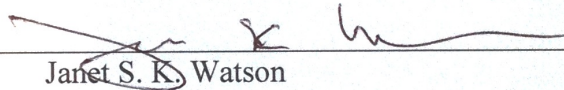
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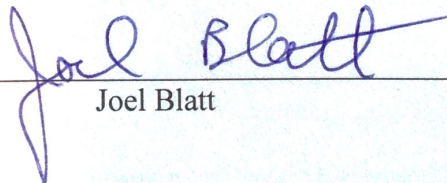
Major Advisor


Frank C. Costigliola

Associate Advisor


Janet S. K. Watson

Associate Advisor


Joel Blatt

University of Connecticut
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Introduction

“With a few rough-and-ready clothes such as one takes for a few weeks’ outing in the country,” wrote Francis Wickes, some 150 American men went to Belgium and northern France to work for the Commission for Relief in Belgium (CRB) during the early years of World War I.¹ They were college-educated, professional men who came from all over the United States to serve as delegates of the CRB. They worked all across Belgium during the German occupation and British blockade. The CRB was unique: it held a monopoly on the importation and supervision of relief goods in Belgium through special arrangements with both the British government (to let food through the British blockade) and the German occupation authorities (to allow neutral Americans entrance into the Occupation and Army Zones).² It was not formally associated with the American government, though it did have a special relationship with numerous high-level American diplomats in Belgium, France, Germany, Britain, and the Netherlands. It also had relationships with Spanish and Dutch officials stationed in Brussels. While it was an early non-governmental organization and nominally international, it was very much an American project. The CRB’s staff drew on the implicit and sometimes explicit power of the United States to

¹ Francis Cogswell Wickes, “The American Delegate in Belgium,” in *The Public Relations of The Commission for Relief in Belgium: Documents*, Volume I, ed. George I. Gay and H. H. Fisher (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1929), 478. (*PR CRB I*) This “150” number represents the approximate number of American volunteers who served in Belgium as delegates. There was a paid clerical and accounting staff, but they are not addressed in this study, nor are those who worked in CRB offices in Rotterdam, London, or New York except where explicitly noted. Over the course of the CRB’s existence the term “delegate” was replaced with “representative.” For the sake of consistency, I have chosen to refer to the men who worked in Belgium by their original title of “delegate.” See the appendix to Herbert Hoover, *An American Epic*, Volume 1 (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1959), 455-461 for a list of all the volunteers and their dates of service.

² For the CRB’s relationship with other relief organizations seeking to work in Belgium, see Branden Little, “Band of Crusaders: American Humanitarians, the Great War, and the Remaking of the World” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2009).

maintain their status in Belgium, make their work effective, and create an identity for themselves as delegates and agents of American power while they lived and worked far from home in a war-torn country, sometimes for six months or longer. They were “Americans abroad” (in Europe) at a time when the United States was both emerging as a world power and trying to remain above the fray of Old World political and military disputes. Their work was an early example of not only deeper American involvement with the wider world in the twentieth century, but also an example of a potential alternative for how the United States could engage the world, through non-state, independent, yet American-led relief work.

Herbert C. Hoover led the CRB as its chairman. A successful mining engineer before taking the helm of the CRB, Hoover’s staff called him “the Chief,” and he oversaw the operation from his office in London, while delegating much of the on-the-ground work to young men like Wickes, a recent graduate of Williams College. Though Wickes wrote of a “rough and ready” atmosphere, the Americans were often the privileged guests of the Belgians, often living with them in their homes, dining with them frequently, and often acting as witnesses and spectators to the first great European war of the twentieth century. They detailed their experiences in their diaries, letters, and postwar accounts of their service.³ Like later groups of American men involved in U.S. foreign relations—such as the men in the diplomatic corps and those who served in the national security circle surrounding Presidents Franklin Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, Dwight Eisenhower, and John F. Kennedy—the CRB’s staff developed a powerful identity and ethos through their common backgrounds, assumptions about American power and

³ On how these Americans were witnesses and spectators see Thomas D. Westerman, “Touring Occupied Belgium: American Humanitarians at ‘Work’ and ‘Leisure’ (1914-1917),” *First World War Studies* 5, no. 1 (March 2014): 43-53. For more on varied personal experiences during World War I, see, for example, J. M. Winter, *The Experience of World War I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Janet S. K. Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory, and the First World War in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

position in the world, and activities.⁴ In doing so, they created a fairly homogenous staff and set of alumni who would go on to conduct future relief and recovery efforts around the world after World War I.

The work the Americans did between 1914 and 1917 was difficult, and the conditions were not optimal, requiring improvisation and flexibility. The CRB recruited men who were well educated with professional careers ahead of them. After the war, for example, Wickes studied law and became a lawyer.⁵ The very first group of delegates was made up of American students from Oxford University, some of whom were Rhodes Scholars. Later the CRB volunteers came from some of the best universities in the United States: Harvard, Princeton, and Stanford, for example. The CRB's leadership viewed the educational and social background of the delegates as powerful markers of their suitability to the relief work in Belgium. They were "intelligent thinkers with a practical turn of mind" who had "an ingrained quality of adaptability, accustomed to independence and initiative."⁶ They marked themselves out not only as well qualified for the task at hand, but as exemplars of American leadership and influence. While Europe collapsed into chaos and crisis, they would come across the Atlantic Ocean to carve out a space where some safety and security could be maintained for the Belgian people.

For the CRB delegates, this American-ness was central to their identity, experience, and work in Belgium. By American-ness I mean something more than just their status as American

⁴ See Robert Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001); John Garry Clifford, *The Citizen Soldiers: The Plattsburg Training Camp Movement, 1913-1920* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1972); Martin Weil, *A Pretty Good Club: The Founding Fathers of the U.S. Foreign Service* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978).

⁵ Wickes, interview by John Niven and Enid Douglass, 1 March 1967, transcript, Oral History Program, Claremont Graduate School Library, Claremont, CA.

⁶ Wickes, "The American Delegate," *PR CRB I*, 480.

citizens, though that was important. Without their legal neutrality as citizens of a neutral country with the implicit power of the United States behind them, they would not have been allowed through the British blockade and allowed to remain in German-occupied Belgium. By American-ness I mean their cultural and social background as a certain “type” of American man—indeed Anglo-Saxon man—as popularized by men like Theodore Roosevelt, and organizations like the Boy Scouts and the Rhodes Scholarship.⁷ As the United States came into its own on the world stage after the War of 1898, it was competing with established powers like Great Britain, France, and Germany, for a prominent place in the international system. Assumptions about American Exceptionalism, however, meant the United States could seek different ways to present itself as a new kind of world power, even as it took colonial possessions in the Pacific Ocean and Caribbean. An American-organized and American-run humanitarian mission to Europe—while Europe tore itself apart—could strengthen the idea that American power was different from that of the older European powers, but just as necessary and legitimate. A humanitarian effort—that is, an effort that seeks to help another person or group without linking that help to anything other than a common humanity and respect for the other—could be a new and powerful tool for

⁷ See Stuart Anderson, *Race and Rapprochement: Anglo-Saxonism and Anglo-American Relations, 1895-1904* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1981); Kirsten L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995); Nicoletta Gullace, “*The Blood of Our Sons*”: *Men, Women, and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship During the Great War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Sarah Watts, *Rough Rider in the White House: Theodore Roosevelt and the Politics of Desire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Michael Rosenthal, *The Character Factory: Baden-Powell and the Origins of the Boy Scout Movement* (London: Pantheon, 1986); David I. Macleod, *Building Character in the American Boy: The Boy Scouts, the YMCA, and their Forerunners, 1870-1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983); David Alexander, “The American Scholarships,” in *The History of the Rhodes Trust, 1902-1999* ed. Anthony Kennedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 100-202; Thomas J. Schaeper and Kathleen Schaeper, *Cowboys into Gentlemen: Rhodes Scholars, Oxford, and the Creation of an American Elite* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1998).

Americans to represent and project their country's power abroad, especially in Europe. This challenged the notion, held since the articulation of the Monroe Doctrine in 1823, that the United States would not involve itself in the affairs of European nations.⁸ The CRB represents an example of this approach in practice.

This muscular American-ness was tempered, however, by another strain of cultural norms represented by the restraint and deliberateness evidenced in President Woodrow Wilson's call for neutrality by Americans at the outbreak of the war and his eventual, if unsuccessful, proposals for peace and a new legalistic world order.⁹ While Roosevelt was a vocal advocate for preparedness (and, indeed, entrance into the war on the side of the Britain and France), Wilson sought an alternative.¹⁰ He hoped to be an honest broker, and thus the United States had to stay out of the fighting. The American delegates in Belgium melded these two seemingly conflicting approaches in their humanitarian activities and created their own alternative approach: they were mobilized, engaged, and ready for action; but by putting their political neutrality to work for humanitarian ends, they stood apart from the grand questions of war and peace, and focused on

⁸ For a very brief discussion of the Monroe Doctrine, see <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1801-1829/monroe>

⁹ For more on Wilsonianism and neutrality issues, see Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Wilsonianism: Woodrow Wilson in American Foreign Relations* (New York: Palgrave, 2002); Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Robert W. Tucker, *Woodrow Wilson and the Great War: Reconsidering America's Neutrality, 1914-1917* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007); Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). On new ideas of law and U.S. foreign relations at this time, see Benjamin A. Coates, "Transatlantic Advocates: American International Law and U.S. Foreign Relations, 1898-1919," (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2010).

¹⁰ On the Preparedness Movement in the United States, see Clifford, *The Citizen Soldiers* and Michael Pearlman, *To Make Democracy Safe for America: Patricians and Preparedness in the Progressive Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984).

the narrow problem of the food crisis in Belgium. Though they stood in Belgium as neutrals, they were American neutrals, bringing with them and acting upon deeply held values as a certain type of early twentieth century American man, acting as agents of expanding American power and influence in the world.¹¹

The Belgians were in need, and the Americans wanted to help. The desire and ability to help Belgium and the Belgians was rooted in the Americans' deeply held, privileged values of American mission and power.¹² As agents of humanitarian relief, they were also new agents of American power in the twentieth century. They constructed a humanitarian world for themselves out of the familiar context of their understanding of their place in an American-influenced world and what was possible for the United States to accomplish. They heralded the influential American publisher Henry Luce's call in 1941 for the United States to act as "the Good Samaritan of the entire world." "It is," Luce wrote in "The American Century" in his own *Life Magazine*, "the manifest duty of this country to undertake to feed all the people of the world."¹³ Since the CRB was wholly independent of any previous humanitarian agency, religious organization, or national-based aid program, it allowed for its members to shape their identity at this particularly important and dynamic moment of 1914-1917. Unlike the American ambulance drivers or members of the American Red Cross, the CRB delegates were not attached to specific

¹¹ For a summary of the development of how American power expanded both actually and intellectually and notions of American Exceptionalism, see Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansion and the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995).

¹² See Ibid.

¹³ Henry Luce, "The American Century," *Diplomatic History* 22, no. 3 (Spring 1999): 170. Originally published in *Life Magazine* on 17 February 1941.

fighting units or chartered by the United States government.¹⁴ Their charge was to help a non-American civilian population living under a foreign occupation. The CRB delegates were able to create their organization and conduct their affairs independent of any potentially limiting national political agenda, but still utilize the power of United States neutrality and the emerging consensus among American political elites that the United States was destined for greatness on the world stage.¹⁵ The CRB was, then, a vehicle for expression of that kind of power.

Since it was in the first two decades of the twentieth century that the United States took its first steps onto the world stage and, especially, into Europe, the CRB is a particularly powerful and important vehicle with which to explore how American power was expressed by those who adopted and adapted it for humanitarian outcomes. While Belgium was of no strategic value to the United States at the time, it was of international moral and ideological importance in the World War I era.¹⁶ The work the American men undertook in Belgium was an early example of later American-led relief, recovery, and development programs after World War II and during the Cold War.¹⁷ The idea that the United States could feed the world—actually or through controlling the logistics—aided in the nation's movement toward greater influence, not just as an

¹⁴ Arlen J. Hansen, *Gentlemen Volunteers: The Story of the American Ambulance Drivers in the Great War, August 1914-September 1918* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1996); Julia F. Irwin, *Making the World Safe: The American Red Cross and a Nation's Humanitarian Awakening* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹⁵ Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny*, chapter III.

¹⁶ See Sophie de Schaepdrijver, "Champion or Stillbirth? The Symbolic Uses of Belgium in the Great War," in *How Can One Not Be Interested in Belgian History: War, Language, and Consensus in Belgium since 1830* (Dublin and Gent: Trinity College and Academia Press, 2005).

¹⁷ On the role the United States played in later twentieth century international development, modernization, and famine relief that can trace its origins to earlier developments in American led humanitarianism, see David Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle Against Poverty in Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

international policeman, but as a large-scale welfare administrator or, as the historian Branden Little has noted, the world's "fireman."¹⁸

This dissertation, which is divided into four chapters, argues that these Americans used their national identity and notions of American power for a humanitarian purpose, fostering a new outlet for American involvement in the world just as the United States was embarking on a "humanitarian awakening" as noted by the historian Julia Irwin.¹⁹ The CRB was part of that process, and many members of the CRB went on to do further humanitarian work. Maurice Pate, for example, who served with the CRB in 1916, later became the first director of UNICEF.

Chapter One argues that Belgium was a useful site for Americans to begin their international humanitarian work. It was useful because although it was a war-ravaged country, it had been (and would again be) a modern, industrial state. This put it in a unique category, making it capable of participating in its own amelioration, but still in need of American help. It was, therefore, a particularly safe site for new American ventures into international humanitarianism. Chapter Two argues that the CRB delegates came from relatively privileged backgrounds, and many of them were supported by a network of associates who supported a more active place in the world both for Americans as individuals and the United States as a nation. These were the kinds of people who set the stage for a path of greater international and humanitarian intervention that the United States would follow in the twentieth century. Chapter Three, using a representative sample of delegates' experiences, argues that while the Americans attempted to be neutral and dispassionate agents of relief, and saw this superior status as an

¹⁸ Branden Little, "An Explosion of New Endeavors: Global Humanitarian Responses to Industrialized Warfare in the First World War Era," *First World War Studies* 5, no. 1 (March 2014): 3.

¹⁹ Irwin, *Making the World Safe*.

inherent part of their standing as Americans, they were not immune to the visceral experiences of being in a war zone. This dilemma, of course, has continued to complicate the position of NGOs ever since.²⁰ Lastly, Chapter Four argues that though the CRB had a great deal of power and clout in Belgium, it was still not without limitations, and the respect it was accorded could vary considerably. Part of this chapter is organized geographically to show how individual Americans could often work independently and had to exercise their own judgment in order to balance the needs of individual Belgians possibly destined for labor camps in Germany against the larger work of the relief effort. Humanitarian goals, the new American actors were finding out, could be mutually exclusive, and require difficult decisions even for those who only wanted to do what was best for those whom they had come to help. Once United States neutrality in the war ended, however, so did their place as humanitarians in Belgium. No matter how important or developed their status as non-state actors was, their connection by way of their citizenship to the American state was a powerful factor that in the early years benefited the work, but later forced them to leave. Few, however, abandoned their self-identification as agents of American humanitarian power, and many continued to work with international relief projects after the war and into the later half of the twentieth century.²¹

Recently, historians have begun to not only look at the lives and experiences of new groups who served with or assisted with war making, but also to examine those people who have tried to prevent or minimize the suffering associated with war and violence, often through

²⁰ A portion of this chapter, especially the part dealing with the spectating activities of the delegates, was previously published as “Touring Occupied Belgium: American Humanitarians at ‘Work’ and ‘Leisure’ (1914-1917) in the March 2014 issue of *First World War Studies*, and is adapted here with permission from the publisher, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group. See Westerman, “Touring Occupied Belgium,” 43-53.

²¹ Hal Wert, “Hoovermen: Working with ‘The Chief’ for Polish and Finnish Relief, 1939-1941,” (unpublished manuscript), in author’s possession.

organized humanitarianism.²² This dissertation and the story of the CRB contribute to this new scholarship by taking an in-depth look at one such organization and its staff to see how national background and lived experience can influence humanitarian work, especially when the group or groups being helped have no national or experiential connection to the helpers. I argue that the cultural values and national background of a humanitarian group—no matter how independent of a nation-state or avowedly international—has a profound influence on the ways in which it organizes itself and operates.

This dissertation also intersects with scholarship that investigates new ways the United States and Americans engaged with the world beyond traditional military, political, and diplomatic efforts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and especially how “Americans abroad” acted as agents of American power through their travel and interaction with citizens of other nations.²³ With the outbreak of the war came opportunities for new forms of

²² Gary Bass, *Freedom’s Battle: The Origins of Humanitarian Intervention* (New York: Knoph, 2008); Davide Rodogno, *Against Massacre: Humanitarian Interventions in the Ottoman Empire, 1815-1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); Tammy M. Proctor, *Civilians in a World at War, 1914-1918* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); Keith David Watenpaugh, “The League of Nations’ Rescue of Armenian Genocide Survivors and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism, 1920-1927,” *American Historical Review* 115, no. 5 (December 2010): 1315-1339; Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); “Special Issue: Humanitarianism in the Era of the First World War,” ed. Branden Little *First World War Studies* 5 no. 1 (March 2014); Little, “Band of Crusaders”; Michael McGuire, “An Ephemeral Relationship: American Non-Governmental Organizations, the Reconstruction of France, and Franco-American Relations, 1914-1924,” (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 2012); Jennifer Polk, “Constructive Efforts: The American Red Cross and YMCA in Revolutionary and Civil War Russia, 1917-1924,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 2012); Melanie Tanielian, “The War of Famine: Everyday Life in Wartime Beirut and Mount Lebanon, 1914-1918,” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2012).

²³ For the most recent broad synthesis of U.S. foreign relations history, see George Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). For more targeted discussions of new forms of U.S. power in the early twentieth century, see Frank Costigliola, *Awkward Dominion: American Political, Economic, and Cultural Relations with Europe, 1919-1933* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1988); Emily Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945* (New

civic engagement and service on the part of Americans.²⁴ Civic and, indeed, international engagement for charity, philanthropy, and peace were not new for the United States and Americans before 1914, but the size and scope of twentieth century philanthropy was.²⁵ Although most participants had no prior experience in humanitarian work, their background as good, volunteer-minded men from the middle and upper classes enabled them to bring a Progressive Era and professional scientific rationalization to their work with the CRB.²⁶ At times they may have approached their work a little too innocently. This avowed rational approach, however, could often be challenged by emotional attachments and reactions to specific situations

York: Hill and Wang, 1982) and *Financial Missionaries to the World: The Politics and Culture of Dollar Diplomacy, 1900-1930* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Michael Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987). For Americans abroad, see Christopher Endy, "Travel and World Power: Americans in Europe, 1890-1917," *Diplomatic History* 22 (Fall 1998): 564-594 and *Cold War Holidays: American Tourism in France* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Dennis Merrill, *Negotiating Paradise: U.S. Tourism and Empire in Twentieth-Century Latin America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Brooke Blower, *Becoming Americans in Paris: Transatlantic Politics and Culture between the Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

²⁴ See, for instance, Christopher Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Jill Frahm, "The Hello Girls: Women Telephone Operators with the American Expeditionary Forces during World War I," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 3, no. 3 (July 2004): 271-293.

²⁵ The classic study of American international philanthropy is Merle Curti's *American Philanthropy Abroad: A History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1963). See also Alan Dawley, *Changing the World: American Progressives in War and Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Lawrence J. Friedman and Mark D. McGarvie, eds., *Charity, Philanthropy, and Civility in American History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Oliver Zunz, *Philanthropy in America: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

²⁶ While the Progressive Era is a contested subject for historians, one can gain some insight into the major outlines of the time from Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955); Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (New York: Belknap Press, 2000); Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1966).

in which the Americans found themselves as well as when confronting the particular problems of local politics and the German occupation government.²⁷

And today, with the centenary of World War I upon us, new works reevaluating the causes and meaning of World War I are being published.²⁸ While the armies of the great European powers were doing their best to destroy one and other, this group of Americans went to Europe to create a sense of safety and security for the Belgian people until such a time as the governments of the war's participants could see fit to end the war, with or without the aid of President Wilson in an "honest broker" role. The first great war of the twentieth century did not just break up the old world order; it also set the stage for a new international humanitarian regime, in which the CRB was one early player and the United States would have a large role in shaping after World War I and later in the century.²⁹

The humanitarian tradition is a long one, as Michael Barnett outlines in his history of humanitarianism. He demonstrates convincingly that humanitarianism and human rights are related ("cousins") but "over the decades they have had distinct meanings."³⁰ For this dissertation, I adopt his definition of humanitarianism and accept his differentiation of it from human rights: "Human rights typically focuses on the long-term goal of eliminating the causes of

²⁷ For more on the role of emotion in foreign relations history, see Andrew Rotter, "Empire of the Senses: How Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching Shaped Imperial Encounters," *Diplomatic History* 35 (January 2011): 3-19.

²⁸ See, for instance, Margaret Macmillan, *The War that Ended Peace: The Road to 1914* (New York: Random House, 2013); Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (New York: HarperCollins, 2013).

²⁹ For what World War I bore in terms of new humanitarianism, see Watenpaugh, "The League of Nations' Rescue of Armenian Genocide Survivors." On the role Americans, including Hoover, played in post-World War I relief see, for example, MacMillan, *Paris 1919* (New York: Random House, 2001).

³⁰ Barnett, *Empire of Humanity*, 16.

suffering, humanitarianism on the urgent goal of keeping people alive.”³¹ This distinction is important for this dissertation, especially in Chapter Four where I discuss a dilemma the American humanitarians confronted; they had to choose whether to work to stop illegal deportations (a human rights violation) and risk their larger mission, or to allow the deportations to continue, while serving as witnesses and saving those they could, but keeping the larger work alive for the sake of the majority of Belgians who still needed food relief. These questions plague present day humanitarianism as well.

Unlike previous foreign relief or philanthropic missions in which Americans participated, the CRB effort was not motivated by religion (missionaries, YMCA) or ethnicity (Irish immigrants and the Great Hunger in Ireland) or politics (the debate over intervention in Greek Revolution in the 1820s) or military adventure (Cuba during the War of 1898).³² The sense of American mission and purpose, however, was strong, even acting as a form of civil religion.³³ By virtue of the situation the CRB entered into—a great world war—and through effective use of publicity, often through the writings and lectures by American delegates themselves, the CRB was a prime early example of a modern-day humanitarian organization—more so even than better known organizations like the American Red Cross. Though the American Red Cross existed, it was closely associated with the U.S. state, having received its charter from Congress.³⁴

³¹ Ibid.

³² See Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad*.

³³ Ian Tyrell, *Reforming the World: The Creation of America's Moral Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

³⁴ See Irwin, *Making the World Safe*.

The CRB more closely fit what historian Akira Iriye has categorized as a “voluntary non-state, non-profit, non-religious, and non-military association.”³⁵ He argues that international non-governmental organizations are part of a de facto “third space” between the private (individual) and the state (national group or government) and are not “restricted to certain categories of people, whether nationality, gender, religion, class, region, or any other division.”³⁶ The CRB was nominally international—with Dutch and Spanish diplomatic officials serving as honorary chairmen and even managing the CRB in Belgium after April 1917 until it was returned to American control after the armistice—but it was thoroughly American in its conception, management, and institutional identity. While Hoover at first wanted it to be only American, he decided to add an international component. Hoover explained after the war:

Our original idea was to make the Commission wholly American. However, within a few days we realized the organization would be stronger if we had patronage of the Spanish Ambassadors in London, Paris, and Berlin, the Spanish Minister in Brussels....We eliminated the word ‘American’ from our title....We also received the assurance of every assistance from the Netherlands Minister of Foreign Affairs, through whose country our supplies would have to pass....The Spanish and Dutch officials were to prove invaluable.³⁷

The supplies shipped to Belgium had to go through the Netherlands, so having Dutch representation on the CRB’s masthead made perfect sense. The primary Spanish official, Le Marquis de Villalobar, was the one Hoover would turn to when the CRB had to “make more headway with the Germans...[and] he was devoted to the Relief and after the United States joined the war became our major support in Belgium.”³⁸ The other international patrons were

³⁵ Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 2.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Hoover, *An American Epic*, 4-5.

³⁸ Ibid., 48.

Alfonso Merry del Val y Zulueta, Spanish Ambassador to Britain; Luis Polo de Bernabé, Spanish Ambassador to Germany; Le Marquis de Villalobar, Spanish Minister to Belgium; Jonkheer De Weede, Dutch Minister to Belgium; and Johan Loudon, the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs. This international cooperation was necessary for the American organization to work properly, but at its core it was an American project. Being non-state does not necessarily make an organization non-national.

Though the CRB was non-governmental, it operated with the support of American diplomatic officials in Europe. Brand Whitlock, Walter Hines Page, James W. Gerard, and Henry van Dyke were the U.S. officials affiliated with the CRB. Whitlock was the U.S. minister to Belgium; Page, the U.S. ambassador in Britain; Gerard, the U.S. ambassador to Germany; and van Dyke was the U.S. minister to the Netherlands. All four were honorary chairmen of the CRB, and Hoover often called on their good services to help him and the CRB out of problems, especially with suspicious elements within the British and German governments in order to keep the CRB operating with as much ease and security in its position as possible.

The Belgians readily accepted the CRB's American identity. During and after the war, the Belgian people knew exactly whom they wanted to thank for the help: the Americans. The Belgians did so in many ways, including embroidering flour sacks with gratitude to the United States, represented by inclusion of American flags stitched into the fabric.³⁹ After the war, Belgians named streets and squares after Hoover in honor and gratitude for his service with the

³⁹ For examples, see this online exhibit from the Hebert Hoover Presidential Library in West Branch, Iowa: <http://www.hoover.archives.gov/exhibits/collections/flour%20sacks/index.html> (last accessed 10 June 2014).

CRB. There is a bust of Hoover at the library in Louvain and a plaque honoring him at the Free University of Brussels.⁴⁰

Previous studies of the CRB have either focused on its instructional and organizational importance or on its singular leader: Herbert Hoover.⁴¹ In contrast, this dissertation is a cultural study of how the CRB delegates created a humanitarian identity for themselves based on their national cultural background as Americans and their experiences in Belgium, and helped develop a new way for the United States and Americans to engage with the wider world. Though the group is a small one and the intense work of the American staff only lasted from 1914-1917, the scale and scope of the work was immense.

Hoover, with the blessings of British, German, and Belgian officials, organized the CRB in London on 22 October 1914. During its operation—which extended beyond exclusive American control after April 1917—the CRB imported 5,174,431 tons of supplies, of which 3,894,941 tons went to Belgium. The rest went to Northern France. The majority of that was for wheat, barley, and rye. But bacon, maize (corn), rice, beans, cocoa, coffee, soap, and sugar among other goods were also imported. Importing these supplies was dangerous: 52 cargo-bearing vessels were torpedoed, mined, or otherwise damaged in the course of their sailing. Thirty-eight ships were lost, and fourteen were damaged. All told, 114,000 tons of cargo was lost at sea. The CRB ran 134 warehouses in 2,598 Belgian communes (the smallest municipalities in

⁴⁰ For a collection of essays on the contribution Hoover made to Belgium, see the Proceedings of the Seminar on the Humanitarian Work and Legacy of Herbert Hoover, “Remembering Herbert Hoover and the Commission for Relief in Belgium,” held at the University Foundation, 4 October 2006.

⁴¹ Ryan Thomas Austin, “Creating a ‘piratical state organized for benevolence,’ the Commission for Relief in Belgium: 1914-1915,” (Ph.D. diss., Iowa State University, 2009); Little, “Band of Crusaders,” ch. 5; George H. Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover: The Humanitarian, 1914-1917* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988). A delegate, Tracy B. Kittredge, wrote a history of the CRB and a few copies were eventually published, but it is long out of print.

Belgium) providing help to some 7,000,000 Belgians in a country about the size of the U.S. state of Pennsylvania.⁴² About 500 Americans all told were involved with the CRB's work, including paid clerical and accounting staff members, who worked primarily in London, New York, and Rotterdam, the importation port for CRB relief goods. At any one time about 55 Americans were serving with the CRB in Belgium. About 40,000 Belgians worked for either the CRB or for their Belgian partners, the Comité National de Secours et d'Alimentation (CNSA).⁴³ (The CNSA is discussed in more depth in Chapter One.)

Many governments provided generous subsidies: The United States provided \$386,632,260.44; the British \$109,045,328.73; the French \$204,862,854.21 for a total of \$700,540,443.38. Add to that many charitable donations from all over the world (\$52,290,795.51) and other income from Commission-run exchanges, interest, and other sources the total income of the CRB was \$930,518,276.93. At the end of the CRB's work, a surplus of some \$38,000,000 remained. Some \$33,000,000 of that went to Belgium, primarily as gifts to various Belgian universities. One organization was created directly as a result of the CRB's largess: the CRB Educational Foundation, which, in 1938, was renamed the Belgian American Educational Foundation (BAEF). The BAEF has facilitated study in the U.S. for hundreds of notable Belgians and has allowed many Americans to study in Belgium. (I was a grateful

⁴² Exact figures for the population of Belgium during the war are hard to come by. In Nash's *Herbert Hoover*, he puts the figure at "nearly 8,000,000" at the war's start, but anywhere from one million to "perhaps 2 million" Belgians fled the country at the start of the war, taking up temporary residence in the Netherlands, Britain, and France. Nash, *Herbert Hoover*, 17; Larry Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium: The Untold Story of World War I* (New York: New York University Press, 2004). 85.

⁴³ "Statistical Summary of the CRB's Five Years," in Hoover, *An American Epic*, 412-416. Additional detailed accounting for the CRB's work can be found in Gay, ed., *Statistical Review of Relief Operations* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1925).

recipient of a BAEF Fellowship to conduct research in the Belgian State Archives.) The CRB's overhead was less than one percent of the CRB's operations.⁴⁴

Hoover's leadership of the CRB cannot be overestimated. He was the central figure around which the organization revolved, and in later years those who worked for him remained steadfast in their admiration. His word was law, and his work with the CRB launched his second career as a public figure in the United States. While Nash's monumental multivolume biography of Hoover is the best reference, other historians have looked at Hoover's interesting character, such as Hal Wert in *Hoover: The Fishing President* and Joan Hoff Wilson in *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive*.⁴⁵ Both of whom look at Hoover from perspectives that challenge the common knowledge of the Hoover of Great Depression "Hooverville" fame.

Herbert Clark Hoover was born on 10 August 1874 in West Branch, Iowa to Quaker parents. Hoover was not a particularly religious man, but he was imbued with Quaker values growing up. His parents died when he was nine years old, and an uncle in Newberg, Oregon took him in. Hoover studied at the Friends Pacific Academy (now George Fox University) and eventually joined the inaugural class of the new Leland Stanford Junior University in 1891.⁴⁶ He graduated from Stanford in 1895 with a degree in geology and began an engineering career. While at Stanford, Hoover met his future wife, Lou Henry. Henry entered Stanford in 1894 as

⁴⁴ "Statistical Summary," in Hoover, *An American Epic*, 412-416.

⁴⁵ Nash, *Herbert Hoover*, 3 volumes; Joan Hoff Wilson, *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1975); Hal Wert, *Hoover: The Fishing President, Portrait of the Private Man and his Life Outdoors* (New York: Stackpole Books, 2004). See also Bertrand M. Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand: The American Relief Expedition to Soviet Russia in the Famine of 1921* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

⁴⁶ There was not anything "junior" about the university (then or now). Leland Stanford Jr. was the deceased son of Leland Stanford, a former California governor and U.S. senator and railroad industrialist. Stanford Sr. founded the university in 1891 and named it after his son.

the school's only female geology major and she became an important part of Hoover's future careers in both mining and humanitarianism; they co-translated a classic Latin text on mining, *De re metalica*, and Lou Henry Hoover became a strident advocate for the CRB's work. They married in 1899.

In the years between his graduation and marriage, Hoover worked in Australia; once he and Lou Henry married, they went to China (where they were present for the Boxer Rebellion), and finally to London. During these twenty years, Hoover established himself as a successful mining engineer, well respected by those in his professional community.⁴⁷ By the outbreak of World War I his gross personal worth from his mining career and investments could have been as high as \$30,000,000.⁴⁸ Not only did his professional career put him in a position to lead Belgian relief, through it he also met the man who would be his Belgian counterpart—Emile Francqui—when the two were in China at the same time. As a man of independent wealth, Hoover was well positioned to take on the unpaid responsibility of running the relief effort.

Once the United States entered World War I, President Wilson asked Hoover to lead the newly formed Food Administration and help the United States develop a food conservation program. After the war he led the relief effort to Europe and headed up the American Relief Administration (ARA) during his time with the Commerce Department where he was secretary under both Presidents Harding (1921-1923) and Coolidge (1923-1929). According to the Hoover Presidential Library, Hoover's contemporaries said he was "secretary of commerce and under secretary of everything else" because of his propensity to meddle in the affairs of other

⁴⁷ Little, "Band of Crusaders," 297-298.

⁴⁸ Nash, *Herbert Hoover*, 274.

departments.⁴⁹ His background in extreme emergencies led Hoover to continue to play important roles in relief projects in the United States, such as in the Mississippi Flood of 1927.

His election as president in 1928 was the culmination of hard work and patience, but the stock market crash, the resulting Great Depression, and the wide perception of his administration's ineffective response to the financial and human disaster doomed his presidency and his memory by the American people.⁵⁰ Hoover was a talented, if aloof, technocratic professional, rather than a warm-hearted politician. Even his management of the CRB was from a distance. It was others—the delegates—who were charged with the hands-on effort to help in need Belgians. Hoover made sure the Americans in Belgium had everything they needed to be effective, but he himself did not live and work among them.

Hoover alternately spent the next thirty years of his life in resentment of Franklin D. Roosevelt, but also as an active proponent of humanitarian efforts by the United States around the world and he traded on his Belgian experience, even as he was often blamed for the Depression.⁵¹ After Germany invaded Poland in 1939, he organized a relief commission on a

⁴⁹ No direct attribution can be found. It seems to have been simply something commonly repeated about Hoover. The Hoover Presidential Library quotes it in an online exhibit about Hoover: <http://hoover.archives.gov/exhibits/Hooverstory/gallery04/index.html> (last accessed 10 June 2014).

⁵⁰ Historians, like Joan Hoff Wilson, take a more charitable view of Hoover's tactical responses to the crash and subsequent Great Depression than is the popular view of "Hoovervilles" and the like. Hoff Wilson makes the important point that Hoover's "inability to relate in person or via radio to the plight of those stricken by economic disaster was not a new Hooverian characteristic, but previously it had not been so glaringly apparent." Hoff Wilson, *Forgotten Progressive*, 140. Franklin D. Roosevelt's sunny and outgoing personality starkly contrasted to Hoover's more dour and technocratic demeanor and undoubtedly contributed to Hoover's losing the presidency by such a wide margin in 1932.

⁵¹ On Hoover's dislike of FDR, see Nash, *The Crusade Years, 1933-1955: Herbert Hoover's Lost Memoir of the New Deal and Its Aftermath* (Palo Alto: Hoover Institution Press, 2013) and Nash, *Freedom Betrayed: Herbert Hoover's Secret History of the Second World War and Its Aftermath* (Palo Alto, Hoover Institution Press, 2011).

much smaller scale than the CRB that included some of his former CRB colleagues, such as Maurice Pate. Hoover toured post-World War II Germany at the request of President Truman to assess that defeated country's food needs. Hoover died in 1964. In the aftermath of World War I, the Belgian government gifted Hoover a statue of Isis, the Egyptian goddess of life, representing their thanks for the work he did giving Belgium life during the war. It stands to this day outside his Presidential Library in West Branch, Iowa.⁵²

This powerful connection between Hoover, the CRB, its delegates, and Belgium is why this dissertation focuses almost exclusively on the delegates' activities within Belgium and not with the work it did in Northern France. By early 1915 it was clear that Northern France, in a closely monitored German Army Zone, needed similar help to what was being offered in the Occupation Zone of Belgium and work was extended there. Many delegates moved across the Belgian and French border to work in the different regions, but the vast majority worked in Belgium, and their experiences were informed by that particular national connection. Northern France was under a much stronger and stricter military government during the war. The Americans who worked there had much less freedom of movement than they did in Belgium, and the relief effort is much more closely associated with American-Belgian relations. For these reasons, the effort in Northern France is left out of this study.⁵³

For the sake of consistency, the French names for locations are used throughout. Today the language politics of Belgium are complicated and fraught. At the time of the First World War, French was the official language of the State. I have also Americanized the spelling of words in

⁵² <http://www.nps.gov/heho/historyculture/isis-statue.htm> (last accessed 10 June 2014).

⁵³ For life in Northern France during the German Occupation, see Helen McPhail, *The Long Silence: Civilian Life under the German Occupation of Northern France, 1914-1918* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2001).

quotations so translations from French and the delegates' own words are consistent within the narrative.

The Americans' work in Belgium is the focal point of this project. To get at their story, this dissertation privileges their letters, diaries, oral histories, and, for some, published and unpublished personal narrative accounts of their time in Belgium. As the literature scholar James Dawes notes, "storytelling is the very nature of the work" of humanitarians and human rights workers.⁵⁴ Through these personal accounts, this dissertation can help us better understand the origins of American involvement with organized, sustained, humanitarian work in the twentieth century. As the United States began to emerge as a world power, it often sought different ways to wield its influence than what European powers had traditionally done, even as the United States expanded its colonial footprint overseas. The humanitarian work of the CRB in Europe was another projection of American power. It used food, not arms, to make an impression. The Americans abroad in Belgium acted not as soldiers, but saw themselves as saviors. In later decades, especially after World War II, the United States and Americans would play an even greater role in the development of international NGOs and humanitarian organizations. The CRB is one place to start to see how Americans became enamored with this kind of soft power and could use it as a tool to keep the United States and Americans engaged with the world.

⁵⁴ James Dawes, *That The World May Know: Bearing Witness to Atrocity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 1.

Chapter 1

“A Primitive and Almost Medieval State”: Belgium before, during, and after Invasion

David Nelson, an early CRB delegate who was studying in England when World War I broke out, wrote home in the fall of 1914 to tell his parents about his plan to help provide humanitarian assistance in Belgium. He wrote that Belgium was “in a terrible state of desolation,” highlighting his (and others’) powerful emotional response to what had happened on the Continent. Another delegate, Edward Hunt, who served from December 1914 to October 1916, wrote soon after he left the CRB’s service that “[t]he superstructure of civilized society [in Belgium] was stripped away” because of the German invasion and occupation. And, according to Francis Wickes whose words would be included in the public and published records of the CRB after the war: “[i]n those first days of the war the highly developed and largely industrialized country of Belgium had been, without warning, reduced as it were to a primitive and almost medieval state by the hostile military occupation.”¹ In his memoirs, Herbert Hoover admitted that he—like most of the world—thought the war would be over fairly quickly. “[N]one of us thought that the war would last longer than until the next summer,” Hoover wrote: “Therefore, if we could tide the Belgians over for eight months until the next harvest that would end the job.”² Of course, the war was not over by Christmas or by the next summer. The CRB’s mandate was

¹ David Nelson to Parents, 30 November 1914, *The Letters and Diary of David T. Nelson*, David T. Nelson Collection, Box 1, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA; Edward E. Hunt, *War Bread: A Personal Narrative* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1916), 175; Francis Cogswell Wickes, “The American Delegate in Belgium,” in *The Public Relations of The Commission for Relief in Belgium: Documents*, Volume I, eds. George I. Gay and H. H. Fisher (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1929), 481. (*PR CRB I*)

² Herbert C. Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover: Years of Adventure, 1874-1920* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1952), 156.

to keep Belgium adequately supplied until normalcy, structure, and peace returned; that turned out to be a far longer charge than was anticipated, but the organization, if in changing forms, continued its work until (and well beyond) the armistice that finally came in November 1918.

At the start of World War I, however, Belgium was a modern, industrial, state with sufficient international standing to have its own colonial holdings. It was not at all a place of desolation, but one that a *New York Times* writer, reviewing the travel book titled *Belgium and the Belgians* by Cyril Scudamore, described as a lively and industrious place, with “excellent” education and possibilities for the development of its “African State” (the Congo). The reviewer also noted that “such [was] the industry of the Belgians that there [was] no suffering.”³ Belgium, coming into existence only in 1830, was a young country, younger than the United States. The *New York Times* reviewer quoted the author’s perspective on Belgium, as if to note the work the Belgians still had to do to truly be a modern country: “Belgium is a young country, and one which is now passing through a probationary period of storm and stress. From this she is likely to emerge happily, if only she remembers in the future, as in the past, to act up to and to justify her well-chosen motto, ‘L’union fait la force.’”⁴ Germany’s wartime invasion and occupation tested that unity and strength, not only because of the difficult conditions related to being cut off from trade and proper industrial production, but because of German policies which attempted to divide the Flemish north from the Walloon south: a policy known as *Flamenpolitik*.

Belgium was (and still is) a complex country. Two distinct linguistic groups inhabit it: the Flemish-speakers are in the north (Flanders) and the Francophone Walloons are in the south (Wallonia). It was not a place many Americans thought much about before the outbreak of the

³ “The Belgians,” *New York Times*, 30 May 1903, 1.

⁴ Quoted in *Ibid.* (Translation: “Unity makes strength.”)

war, but with war came great world-wide interest in Belgium through reports of the invasion and the propaganda surrounding German actions during their army's attempted quick march to Paris.

The Origin of the CRB

The CRB's eventual chairman, Herbert Hoover, was in London when war broke out in the summer of 1914. Unlike the thousands of Americans who left Europe to escape the war, Hoover stayed in Europe and he helped organize a repatriation effort for stranded Americans before working on the organization of the CRB.⁵ As reports of the dire situation in Belgium made their way to London, Hoover became concerned: "This is not a question of charity or relief to the chronically poor, it is the question of feeding an entire population. This situation affects the rich and the well-to-do as well as the poor. It touches every home in Belgium."⁶ It would be up to America and Americans to provide the necessary aid. Americans were in a new and particularly powerful position as neutrals, but also as citizens of a growing international power. From the first days of the CRB's existence, Hoover and his colleagues would draw on prevailing conceptions of American-ness to create and sustain their successful humanitarian mission. Hoover also worked hard to have the CRB recognized by the U.S., Britain, and Germany as the only institution allowed to import foodstuffs into Belgium. He wanted—and for all intents and purposes got—a monopoly in Belgium.⁷

⁵ See Branden Little, "Band of Crusaders: The American Humanitarians, the Great War, and the Remaking of the World," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, 2009), 293-296.

⁶ Hoover quoted in *Ibid.*, 297, from CRB minutes, 22 October 1914.

⁷ George Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover: The Humanitarian* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988, 46.

A group of Belgian elites, including Emile Francqui, was in London that fall calling on the British government—and anyone who would listen—for help in their time of need. One person who listened was Millard Shaler, another American mining engineer. Through a series of connections, Hoover met Shaler who had been working with the Belgians. Hoover then met with the American Ambassador in London, Walter Page, and got the okay to help the Belgians. Soon after that meeting Hoover and the Belgians announced that the CRB would work with the emerging centralized Belgian relief committee to import food and provide support. In a statement to the American press, Hoover said that, “a stream of supplies must be started from America if the Belgians are to be saved from famine.”⁸ That stream meant food, but it could also have meant the staff necessary to supervise the imports and live and work inside Belgium.

The Americans who later volunteered their efforts in Belgium had their own ideas about the country; these visions were foundational in the ways they devised meaning and reason for their actions. Going to Belgium was both a drastic and powerful act: they left either their studies in England or their homes in the United States to go to a fairly unknown country to do difficult and unfamiliar work. Their relationship to Belgium became more complex over time. It was a place for the amelioration and a basic reconstruction of civil society, a process that they believed had to be overseen by Americans, but the actual distribution of relief goods could be effectively run by the Belgians themselves through their own relief organization: the Comité National de Secours et d’Alimentation (CNSA), which began as a small, emergency committee and then broadened its mandate to cover the entire country. The CRB provided the imports and moral and legal protection of the foodstuffs right up until the actual distribution to the Belgians. The German invasion and occupation as well as the British blockade drastically altered Belgian life

⁸ For a detailed account of how the CRB came into existence, see *Ibid.*, 15-33; Hoover, Statement to the American Press, 22 October 1914, *PR CRB I*, 18.

and necessitated new internal systems of food distribution and importation of goods from overseas. While Hoover was emotionally moved by the situation in Belgium, he had not yet been there to see first hand the scope of the problem in Belgium that necessitated the creation of new and powerful relief organizations led by him and populated by young, eager American men.

The Invasion

On the morning of 2 August 1914, the German government sent an ultimatum to the Belgians. That night, King Albert and his Council of State met to discuss their response and decided to not accept.⁹ The next day the British foreign secretary, Sir Edward Grey, stood before Parliament and argued that Britain needed to defend Belgian neutrality against German aggression, even if it meant war. The transcript recorded “loud cheers” following Grey’s statement that “[w]e have great and vital interests in the independence—and integrity is the least part—of Belgium.”¹⁰ Grey’s “vital interests” included, among many other ancient and modern reasons, defense of international law in the form of Belgian neutrality, something agreed to decades before by all the major powers of Europe. This treaty was the “scrap of paper” that

⁹ For a classic narrative on these early days of the war see Barbara Tuchman, *The Guns of August* (New York: Macmillan, 1962). For more academic narratives and analysis of the outbreak and conduct of World War I, see James Joll, *The Origins of the First World War* (Harlow: Longman, 1984); Lawrence LaFore, *The Long Fuse: An Interpretation of the Origins of World War I* (Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 1971); John Keegan, *The First World War* (New York: Knopf, 1999); Margaret MacMillan, *The War That Ended Peace* (New York: Random House, 2013); Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (New York: Harper, 2013); J. M. Winter, *The Experience of World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

¹⁰ Sir Edward Grey, “Speech Before Parliament,” 3 August 1914, *Great Britain, Parliamentary Debates, Commons, Fifth Series, Vol. LXV, 1914*, columns 1809 - 1834.
http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Sir_Edward_Grey's_Speech_Before_Parliament

German chancellor Bethmann Holweg and Germany tore up, thus ushering in the first great European war of the twentieth century.

The 1839 Treaty of London had formalized Belgian statehood and guaranteed the small kingdom's neutrality if Europe found itself at war again. At the time, this status was good for broader European power politics and security concerns: Belgium became a buffer between France and the German states (two traditional groups that often found themselves in conflict) and, for Britain, it was a neutral state across the North Sea on the Continent. The treaty also required the Belgians themselves to defend their neutrality if it were ever threatened. Though by 1914 Germany was set on ignoring the 75-year old treaty, the Belgian government was not. Even with anti-militarist sentiment in Belgium becoming more powerful in recent decades, the king and his government refused to ignore their own internationally recognized responsibility to defend not only their territory, but also their neutrality. Because of longstanding German war strategy, known as the Schlieffen Plan, Belgium stood on the path to Paris and, the Germans hoped, to victory in a general European war. The Netherlands, Belgium's neighbor and former ruler was left out of the German plan of attack for strategic reasons: as one historian has argued, "If the war turned out to be longer than expected, the Netherlands would be a very useful 'windpipe' that would allow Germany to get supplies by ship from other neutral countries."¹¹ The unanticipated British wartime blockade of the continent, however, greatly disrupted that plan and very quickly both Germany and Belgium were to be cut off from imports.

When the Germany Army invaded Belgium on 4 August it encountered resistance at the fortified city of Liège in eastern Belgium. Although the Belgian Army was able to slow the Germans, it could not stop the superior fighting force from driving towards the capital, Brussels,

¹¹ MacMillan, *The War That Ended Peace*, Kindle Edition, Location 6675.

and then Antwerp, the country's major port, resulting in the capitulation to and the subsequent occupation of most of Belgium by the Germans. The Belgian Army and its government retreated westward, eventually holding onto a small piece of land on the North Sea and the northwest border with France. As the Germans marched through Belgium, they conducted a violent and destructive campaign that resulted in the powerful "Rape of Belgium" trope for the Allied cause.¹² This was a term used for propaganda purposes by the countries fighting Germany to drum up support for the war. The Germans who quickly went from being invaders to occupiers in the course of a month had to establish civil security in the newly occupied territory, even as they were far more concerned with finding a way to Paris. Conquering Belgium was never a goal in and of itself; it was a product of tactical planning rather than broader strategy by the German high command. For Berlin, Belgium soon became a complication.

Back in the United States the press followed the unfolding war closely. The editors of the *New York Times* marveled at the fact that the Belgians put up a fight against the Germans: "The unexpectedly formidable opposition of the Belgians to the passage of a German army corps across their territory has won for them the admiration of the world," they wrote on 7 August.¹³ By 12 August, reports of German "outrages" had made their way across the Atlantic. Again, the *New York Times* reported, "The Paris press has devoted most of its attention to alleged acts of barbarism on the part of Germans.... Not content with firing the houses, it is alleged, the Germans shot a farmer and others who tried to extinguish the flames."¹⁴ The *New York Times* also included reports that supported the German army's contention that Belgian civilians

¹² See Larry Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium: The Untold Story of World War I* (New York: New York University Press, 2004).

¹³ "The Prowess of the Belgians," *New York Times*, 7 August 1914, 10.

¹⁴ "Assert Germans Burned a Village," *New York Times*, 12 August 1914, 2.

engaged in illegitimate attacks on German soldiers. An American doctor from Boston who was in Belgium reported to the *Times*: “I was told by German soldiers that at Verviers most of the shots fired were from houses at the troops, two soldiers being killed outright and one wounded.... Then the Germans shot up every house in town, planted cannon at advantageous points, and threatened that if any more house firing was done the city would be blown to pieces.”¹⁵ The debate over German abuses in response to potential Belgian *francs-tireurs* (un-uniformed sharpshooters) became part of a grand propaganda scheme on the part of the British, especially after the publication of the Bryce Commission’s Report in 1915. This was a British government commissioned report on the atrocities conducted by the Germans. It was the first attempt to write the history of the invasion and occupation. Historians have confirmed that German abuses did indeed take place and that the German army’s fears of *francs-tireurs* were misplaced and drew more heavily on the historical idea and fears from the Franco-Prussian War, rather than on any real threat from Belgian civilians.¹⁶ These stories of German violence against Belgian civilians and the countryside, however, provided motivation for some members of the CRB, especially in how they imagined Belgium as a “desolate” place lacking civilization.

One of Britain’s first responses was to declare a blockade of Germany and then, in November 1914, to declare the North Sea a war zone, thus cutting off not only Germany, but also Belgium, from international trade. The industrial development of the Belgian economy and its large laboring population meant that the Belgians imported most of their food. The invasion, occupation, and blockade stemmed the flow of food into Belgium, immediately requiring local efforts to ration and distribute what foodstuffs were already available in the country. As the war

¹⁵ “Germans Winning as He Passed By,” *New York Times*, 14 August 1914, 2.

¹⁶ John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

moved from the summer to the fall and then to the winter of 1914, it became apparent to the Belgian elites who remained behind the German lines that a more systematic and perhaps even international effort was needed. To help provide aid to those in need in Brussels and its suburbs, Belgian businessmen and industrialists formed the Comité Central de Secours et d’Alimentation (CCSA) in September and took a first step toward controlling domestic production and distribution. This organization quickly broadened its scope and linked its work with the work of smaller organizations all over Belgium to become the Comité National de Secours et d’Alimentation (CNSA). Hoover’s simultaneous organization of the CRB in October 1914 then solved the larger importation problem, eventually bringing Americans and American know-how to Belgium.

While Belgium was known to Americans in the years prior to World War I, it was not necessarily at the center of Americans’ international consciousness. Newspapers like the *New York Times* ran the occasional story about Belgium in their pages, but these stories did not take up many column inches. For instance, there was the occasional advertisement of bicycle tours in Belgium.¹⁷ Colonial abuses of Africans in The Congo by King Leopold II accounted for some significant reportage, especially relating to human rights abuses and then the colony’s eventual acquisition by the Belgian state in 1908.¹⁸ The Congo spurred the creation of the American Congo Reform Association to protest Leopold II’s rule. It was modeled on the work of E. D. Morel in England.¹⁹ In 1911, *The New York Times* printed a long article announcing King

¹⁷ Robin Pennell Elizabeth. “The Best Cycle Tours on the Continent,” *New York Times*, 12 June 1904, 1.

¹⁸ See Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (New York: Mariner Books, 1999).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 241.

Albert's plan to visit the United States. The article detailed the virtues of Belgium and its peoples' continuing desire to modernize in the early 20th century.²⁰ (His trip was deferred by the war; he eventually visited the United States in 1919.)

Belgium as a Nation and a State

Part of why Belgium remained far from the minds of most Americans could be attributed to its young age as a country and the fact that it was not an easily understood place. Belgium sat at the border of a cultural and linguistic divide in Europe. The country was unofficially divided into a southern Latin (Walloon/Francophone) region and a Germanic (Flemish) region in the north. The monarch and the people's Roman Catholicism were the two strongest unifying elements in Belgium.²¹ Belgium was a tricky place to pin down as a "nation." Indeed, the *New York Times* reviewer in 1903 stated that it was:

difficult to give what may be the racial traits of the Belgians. Because French is largely spoken that does not make the Belgian a Frenchman. The probability is that if he were called a Frenchman he would resent it. The Belgian has a two-fold nationality. He is a mixture of the Walloon and the Fleming, with the good qualities of both. The difference between the two languages is marked; Flemish is Teutonic and shows its relationship to English, German, and Dutch, whereas Walloon shows a derivation from the Celtic-Latin.²²

During the war, the German government attempted to divide the Belgian people along these linguistic and cultural lines with the policy of *Flamenpolitik* in an attempt to break Flanders off from the southern part of the country and keep the Flemings loyal and responsive to the whims and needs of the Germans. The francophone Walloons stood as the dominant force in Belgian

²⁰ A Veteran Diplomat. "King Albert of Belgium Will Visit the United States," *New York Times*, 17 September 1911.

²¹ Today it is mainly the national soccer team, "The Red Devils."

²² "Belgium and the Belgians," *New York Times*, 30 May 1903, 1.

society, culture, and politics at the time.²³ This pro-Flemish policy was an attempt by the Germans to curry favor with the Flemish speaking people by addressing their historical grievances against the Walloons and dominant francophone culture.²⁴

At the start of the war, Belgium meant different things to those who became entangled with it. In the United States, the reaction, especially in the press, was generalized about the war and its potential opportunities for trade.²⁵ Both Britain and Germany tried to define Belgium for their own purposes. The Germans created what one historian has called a “defensive discourse” over Belgium, seeing it as a place of British and French duplicity, thus negating its supposed neutrality and necessitating (or, at least, justifying) the invasion in the summer of 1914. For the British, Belgium was “an innocent being bullied” and this trope “mobilized Victorian/Edwardian notions of honor and dictated a line of duty” for defense of the small state.²⁶

In a 4 August 1914 editorial, the *New York Times* seemed to endorse British action to defend Belgium. The editors wrote, “[f]oremost in the public mind stands the obligation of England under the Triple Entente; but with this, and hardly less important, are the obligation and

²³ Sophie de Schaepdrijver, *La Belgique et la Première Guerre mondiale*, trans. Claudine Spitaels et Marnix Vincent (Bruxelles: Archives & Musée de la Littérature, 2004), chapter 5.

²⁴ A century later, the power dynamic has reversed, with Flanders becoming the political and cultural powerhouse of Belgium, though unlike Wallonia of the early twentieth century, there is a strong secessionist movement in Flanders. Much power has been devolved away from the central Federal government in Brussels so that the two “Regions”—as Flanders and Wallonia are now designated—are autonomous in nearly all the regular competencies of modern government except in diplomacy, military policy, the national debt, and some social policies. The Brussels Capital Region is the third distinct constitutional region in Belgium. Belgium was then and is now a complicated place.

²⁵ See Phillips Payson O’Brien, “The American Press, Public, and the Reaction to the Outbreak of the First World War,” *Diplomatic History* 37, no. 3 (2013): 446-475.

²⁶ Sophie de Schaepdrijver, “Champion or Stillbirth? The Symbolic uses of Belgium in the Great War,” in *How Can One Not be Interested in Belgian History: War, Language, and Consensus in Belgium since 1830* (Gent: Academic Press, 2005), 57-58.

the need of England to defend the neutrality of Belgium. Each strengthens the other. The force of the two is irresistible.”²⁷ A later editorial entitled, “Through Evil Good May Come,” advanced the idea that “permanent peace could be assured to Europe only through the overthrow of the Hohenzollern [German], Hapsburg [Austrian], and Romanoff [Russian] dynasties.”²⁸ Russia, though an imperial power, fought alongside Britain and France against the German and Austrian dynasties. Belgium itself had emerged out of the older dynastic order that many in the American press (and in the Wilson Administration) hoped could be wiped away by the general European war.

Prior to the 1815 Congress of Vienna the Spanish Hapsburg dynasty ruled over the area that became Belgium. The end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 led to the established a United Kingdom of the Netherlands under the House of Orange. That new kingdom included what would eventually become Belgium within its borders. The conservative and Protestant William I of Orange was installed as king. This arrangement lasted until August 1830 when the largely Catholic and more liberal elites of the southwestern provinces, which make up present day Belgium and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, revolted. By July 1831 Belgium emerged as a nominally independent state with a constitutional monarchy led by a minor German prince of the House of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. Leopold took his oath before the Belgian people in Brussels on 21 July 1831, but the Dutch did not recognize the new nation right away. For eight years the Great Powers of Europe debated the future of this new, small, coal-rich, and flat state that existed between France and (then) Prussia and across the North Sea from Great Britain. Its position between the Latin western Europe and Germanic central Europe, between major economic and

²⁷ “Editorial,” *New York Times*, 4 August 1914, 10.

²⁸ “Through Evil Good May Come,” *New York Times*, 6 August 1914, 10.

political powers, and its proximity to Great Britain had long made it an important piece of European real estate.

In April 1839, at the London Conference, the Dutch finally recognized Belgian independence and the Great Powers set the terms of Belgium's existence. The 1839 Treaty of London established Belgium as a neutral state, due in part to fears that Belgium would ally with France, thus altering the balance of power in northern Europe.²⁹ To help ensure Belgian neutrality, the five major powers—Prussia, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, and Austria—agreed to maintain Belgian neutrality among themselves and against others who might seek to influence Belgian allegiances.

Because Belgium was established as a neutral state and because of the treaty guarantees of its neighbors and the Great Powers of Europe, its political leaders saw little need for a large military budget, though in the 1910s Belgium began to invest in rearmament. Such efforts, of course, did not keep pace with the military budgets of France and Germany during the armaments race preceding World War I.³⁰ Beginning in 1911, the reform and rearmament of Belgium was led by Belgian prime minister Charles de Broqueville. This plan, while intending not only to enhance Belgian neutrality but to act as a deliberate deterrence to German invasion in the long term, actually weakened Belgian war preparedness and even seemed to give some credence to German claims of encirclement by its presumed enemies—France and Russia—as the reforms were primarily directed against a possible German invasion.³¹ Belgium had quickly

²⁹ Sally Marks, *Innocent Abroad: Belgium at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 7.

³⁰ David Stevenson, "Battlefield or Barrier? Rearmament and Military Planning in Belgium, 1902-1914," *The International History Review* 29, no. 3, (2007): 477.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 474.

developed as an industrial and commercial power between 1839 and 1914. As the southern provinces in francophone Wallonia were rich in coal, much of the industrial (and social and political) power was located there. The northern half of Belgium was more pastoral. Brussels, the capital, sat between these two regions, but was dominated by the francophone royalty and political elite.

Though a linguistically divided state, Belgium needed the whole country to work together in order to become a power beyond its modest size. Belgian businessmen focused on developing the northern city of Antwerp as an important port, thus helping Belgium to become the fifth largest trading nation in the world.³² With British investment, the Belgians built the first railroad network on the continent in 1835, and that early start allowed Belgium to become a major point of transit for travel in northern Europe. Belgians built on that experience by investing around the world in transportation projects in China, Russia, and France, not to mention colonization in Africa. Belgium achieved all this growth with a relatively small population. By 1910, the Belgian population numbered 7.4 million. Forty-five percent were Flemish-speaking, forty percent were French-speaking, and twelve percent were bilingual. Forty-three percent of the population worked in manufacturing. Belgium was urban and industrialized and had more than 250 persons per square kilometer.³³ Because of the industrial nature of the Belgian economy, the country imported about 80% of its wheat in the years before the war.³⁴ The CRB could not bring imports back to pre-war levels during the war, but it was able help the Belgians meet their needs.

³² See Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 477; de Schaepdrijver, *La Belgique et la Première Guerre Mondiale*, 15.

³⁴ Peter Scholliers and Frank Daelemans, “Standards of Living and Standards of Health in Wartime Belgium,” in *The Upheaval of War: Family, Work, and Welfare in Europe, 1914-1918*, eds. Richard Wall and Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 140.

The German war machine was not designed to feed its occupied territory, and as the war settled into a stalemate, the German agricultural system became unable to support its own troops and citizens with enough food, let alone millions of Belgians who were not contributing to the German war effort. Organized relief efforts from the outside were therefore necessary and the CRB's American organizers and volunteers were well placed to do so because of their neutral status and desire to be more involved in the world.

Over the course of its short existence, Belgium became not only a modern industrial state, but also a modern colonial one. During the late nineteenth century mad dash for colonies, Belgium, in a unique way, joined in along with the larger and stronger imperial powers of Europe. King Leopold II, who ascended to the Belgian throne in 1865 and reigned until 1909, claimed the Congo in Africa for himself—not for Belgium—in the 1880s, culminating with the recognition of his personal rule over the Congo at the 1884-85 Berlin Conference. Leopold ruled there, though never visited, until 1908 when the Belgian Parliament, tired of the international press criticism of abuses of native people in the Congo, transformed the territory into a state-run colony. The Belgian Parliament reformed the policies and practices put in place by Leopold in an attempt to construct a more humane colonial relationship.³⁵

Belgium, then, was as much a modern, imperial, industrialized, and densely populated country as any other when Germany invaded in August 1914. The invasion and subsequent occupation inflicted significant damage to the country. In addition to the physical damage to Belgian industry in terms of ravaged or requisitioned factories and equipment, some one million

³⁵ See Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*. The Congo gained independence from Belgium in 1960 when the Belgian government basically walked away from its African interests resulting in unrest and bloodshed, especially during the Mobutu regime (1965-1997) that changed the country's name from the Democratic Republic of Congo to Zaire in 1971.

Belgians fled the country.³⁶ The loss of so many able-bodied workers exacerbated the country's wartime decline and Belgium's ability to support itself financially during the occupation.

The German Conquest

When the German army entered Brussels on 20 August 1914, it made quite a show of it. Paul Max, the mayor's cousin, recorded in his diary that a "truly formidable," "disciplined," and "admirably equipped" army marched through the city. The Germans, in earth colored uniforms, marched under the Arc du Cinquantenaire, a monument celebrating the first fifty years of Belgian independence from the Dutch. Soldiers passed the parliament building on the Rue de la Loi on their way to Grand Place, the historic center of Brussels. There, the German troops assembled before the fifteenth century city hall and the seventeenth century guildhalls to hoist their flag above the city, cementing their conquest of the capital of the small but strategically important Kingdom of Belgium.³⁷ It took sixteen days from the initial invasion of Belgium on 4 August to reach the capital. That pace, however, was much slower than the Germans had hoped or planned for with their Schlieffen Plan. While the Belgian army fought the invading force in Liège near the German border, they ultimately were no match for the Germans seeking passage through low-lying Belgium on their way to their ultimate goal of Paris. As King Albert and his government fled the capital, those Belgians who remained in Brussels and elsewhere behind German lines had to contend with growing difficulties. Though defeated, the Belgian army

³⁶ Michael Amara, *Des Belges à l'épreuve de l'Exil: Les réfugiés de la Première Guerre mondiale; France, Grande-Bretagne, Pays-Bas 1914-1918* (Brussels: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2008).

³⁷ Paul Max, 20 August 1914, *Journal de Guerre de Paul Max: Notes d'un Bruxellois Pendant l'Occupation (1914-1918)*, eds. Benoît Majerus and Sven Soupart (Brussels: Font Bruxellae, 2006), 1.

eventually took up a position with British forces in and around Ypres. Many Belgians expressed their indignation at the German invasion and surrender ultimatum by flying Belgian, French, and British flags. They also published a newspaper cover featuring a towering “Mannequin Pis” showering the invading Germans.³⁸ Unfortunately, patriotism could not fill empty bellies. Very quickly, the price of foodstuffs soared, and Adolphe Max, the mayor, had to intervene in the market to stop unscrupulous price gouging.³⁹

On the black market, the price of many foodstuffs rose by 1,200 percent above 1914 prices by the end of the war.⁴⁰ In the early days of the occupation in Brussels, a resident named Constance Graeffe noted in her diary, “The bakers only bake every other day,” and “A real white loaf is not to be had for love or money.”⁴¹ Over the course of the occupation, the price of food in Belgium increased dramatically. For example, a kilo of butter cost 3.37 Belgian francs in 1914. By 1916 butter cost 6.43 per kilo and in 1917 it was up to 8.35. Bread prices rose from .23 Belgian francs in 1914 to .61 Belgian francs in 1917. The price of milk rose from .17 Belgian francs in 1914 to .85 Belgian francs in 1917. Bacon went from 2.73 Belgian francs in 1914 to

³⁸ Serge Jaumain, Valérie Piette, and Gonzague Pluvinage, *Bruxelles 14-18, Au jour le jour, une ville en guerre* (Bruxelles: Historia Bruxellae, 2005), 9. Mannequin Pis is a small water fountain that is part of the Brussels public water supply. It represents a small, naked peeing boy and is something of a mascot for the city of Brussels.

³⁹ Ibid., 10.

⁴⁰ Winter, *The Experience of World War I*, 167.

⁴¹ Constance Graeffe, “*We Who Are So Cosmopolitan*”: *The War Diary of Constance Graeffe, 1914-1915*, ed. Sophie de Schaepdrijver (Brussels: Archives Générales du Royaume, 2008), 204. Graeffe wrote her diary in English, as though they were letters to a friend or relative living in Britain.

over 25 Belgian francs in 1917.⁴² Both the early local Belgian and the later American-led relief organizations sought to mitigate the effects of these cost escalations by providing food for those who could not afford it, but at the same times those who could afford to buy food were asked to pay for it. Some Belgians, like Constance Graeffe's family, were lucky; they had access to fresh food for themselves. Others had to wait in lines to receive their allotment of provisions.⁴³

Daily intake of food for Belgians decreased during the years of occupation. In December 1915 the per capita daily caloric intake was 1,928 for unemployed workers in Belgium. By September 1917 that fell to 1,387 calories. For employed workers, their caloric intake in September 1917 was not much better, averaging 1,500.⁴⁴ By comparison, the United Kingdom's National Health Service suggests that, in 2012, the average man needs 2,500 calories per day to maintain his weight, while a woman requires 2,000 calories.⁴⁵

Other metrics of Belgian society changed dramatically as well. In 1914 Belgium recorded 156,389 births and 41,095 marriages. A year later births were down to 124,291 and marriages were down to 24,654, the lowest rate of the decade. This was likely because of the exodus of Belgian refugees to Britain as well as because of the occupation. By 1918, births reached an all-time low for the decade of 85,056, likely because of the war and occupation.⁴⁶

⁴² Data is taken from tables in Peter Scholliers and Frank Daelemans, "Standards of Living and Standards of Health in Wartime Belgium," in *The Upheaval of War: Family, Work, and Welfare in Europe, 1914-1918*, eds. Richard Wall and Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), Table 4.2, p. 143.

⁴³ See Graeffe, "We Who Are So Cosmopolitan" and Jaumain, Bruxelles.

⁴⁴ Table 4.6 in Scholliers and Daelemans, "Standards of Living," in *Upheaval of War*, 147.

⁴⁵ <http://www.nhs.uk/chq/Pages/1126.aspx?CategoryID=51&SubCategoryID=164> Last accessed 23 July 2013.

⁴⁶ Table 4.8 in Scholliers and Daelemans, "Standards of Living," in *Upheaval of War*, 150.

Constance Graeffe recorded in her diary that in the immediate aftermath of the invasion there was a run on the banks. The Belgian and then German armies took what they wanted as they moved through the city, and it was hard for residents to get bread and milk.⁴⁷ The Graeffes were German-speaking Belgians and by the end of the war they became German partisans, but during the initial invasion they suffered along with everyone else. They owned a house outside of Brussels, and one of their sons, Robert, went there in August to check on it. When Robert returned home he had “brought vegetable [sic] eggs, butter with him & told us no Germans had gone to our house but our opposite neighbor who lived about ½ mile from us across our little valley, had had all his cattle taken, his house broken in & his wine drunk by the Germans, because his caretaker had run away from his house when the Germans arrived.”⁴⁸ Conditions grew only worse in the weeks and months ahead, and Brussels residents sought out any glimmer of hope of help from abroad.

On 22 August, Paul Max heard talk around town that the United States had given Germany a twenty-four hour ultimatum to evacuate.⁴⁹ The next day, however, Max’s hopes for American intervention were dashed: such news was false.⁵⁰ Americans who were in Belgium were confronted with questions about what role the United States would play in the emerging global war. Hugh Gibson, the secretary of the American mission in Belgium, visited the city of Louvain east of Brussels at the end of August.⁵¹ He had gone to see first hand if the damage and

⁴⁷ Constance Graeffe, “*We Who Are So Cosmopolitan*,” 173.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 174-175.

⁴⁹ P. Max, 22 August 1914, *Journal de Guerre*, 2.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 23 August 1914, 3.

⁵¹ It would not be until after the war that the United States would have a formal Ambassador-rank embassy in Belgium. Brand Whitlock, the U.S. minister during the war, became the first full-fledged Ambassador to Belgium in 1919 and served in that capacity until 1921.

destruction to that ancient city of learning was as widespread as some of the initial reports had indicated. Gibson recorded in his journal that he and his colleagues saw “frightened civilians carrying away small bundles from the ruins of their homes.” As the Americans continued to approach Louvain they saw “a great column of dull grey smoke that completely hid the city” and “could hear the muffled sound of firing ahead.”⁵² The scene they confronted made a great impression on Gibson:

They were pathetic in their confidence that the United States was coming to save them...Nearly every group we talked to asked hopefully when our troops were coming, and when we answered that we were not involved, they asked wistfully if we didn't think we should be forced to come in later. A little boy of about eight...asked me whether we were English, and when I told him what we were, he began jumping up and down, clapping his hands, and shouting: *Les Américans sont arrivés! Les Américans sont arrivés!*⁵³

Though no American soldiers would come to Europe for several years, these hopes for American intervention were, in a way, realized with the arrival of the first CRB delegates that winter, and the Belgians quickly and enthusiastically received those humanitarian volunteers. Until then, however, the Belgians were on their own. The fall of Antwerp in Flanders on 10 October, after a two-week siege, effectively ushered in the formal German occupation of Belgium. The British blockade then completed the isolation of Belgium.

The battle for Belgium was violent and resulted in real atrocities in addition to exaggerations in the British, French, and American presses that would contribute to the disillusionment of the post-war world. The German Chief of Staff publicly justified the German invasion: “Our method in Belgium is certainly brutal, but for us it is a matter of life or death, and

⁵² Hugh Gibson, 28 August 1914, *A Journal from Our Legation in Belgium* (Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1917), 156.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 157.

anybody who gets in our way has to take the consequences.”⁵⁴ In Brussels, Constance Graeffe wondered in her diary why the “Germans spread this awfull [sic] terror around them?” She reasoned that it was “[b]ecause they want[ed] to get on as quickly as possible.”⁵⁵ Ideas about history played an important role in this violent German perspective. The German high command and the rank-and-file soldiers both feared a reoccurrence of the *franc-tireurs* of the 1870 Franco-Prussian War.⁵⁶ The German Army then set up an occupation regime under the command of General Moritz von Bissing, who governed occupied Belgium from November 1914 until his death in April 1917. While the eventual arrival of the CRB suited von Bissing’s needs to some extent by easing the burden of civilian support, he and the Commission’s leadership were often at odds. According to Hoover, “Von Bissing was a pompous, arrogant little man who disliked all Americans and resented the independence of our organization as imposed by the Allied Governments and the German civil authorities in Berlin.”⁵⁷ Von Bissing ruled Belgium with an eye toward eventual future Belgian dependency on Germany or even outright annexation.⁵⁸ While von Bissing hoped to reconstruct Belgian industrial society, he was not particularly successful; Belgium instead eventually became a place for German leaders to look for forced labor later in the war. (See Chapter 4.) While the CRB and the CNSA could threaten German authority in Belgium, the two organizations served a useful purpose: they provided what the

⁵⁴ Quoted in Isabel Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 208.

⁵⁵ Graeffe, “*We Who Are So Cosmopolitan*,” 194.

⁵⁶ See John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

⁵⁷ Herbert Hoover, *An American Epic: Introduction, the Relief of Belgium and Northern France, 1914-1930* Volume I (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1959), 50.

⁵⁸ Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 230.

Germans could not and would not provide—food.⁵⁹ The German occupation grew harsh. The historian Isabel Hull wrote that “[e]ven with CRB aid, Belgium faced stringent military administration, far-reaching economic exploitation, forced labor, and deportation.”⁶⁰ Three considerations made the German occupation particularly difficult: Germany’s ongoing shortage of manpower and material, a more rigid idea of what order meant than Belgian citizens were used to, and a German presumption of deference to authority that was not so forthcoming by the Belgians.⁶¹

The results of the invasion were not confined to changes in the price or availability of foodstuffs. The 1915 Bryce Report was commissioned by the British Prime Minister, H. H. Asquith, in December 1914 and published in May 1915, the report detailed alleged abuses by the German army.⁶² The British and Belgians in Britain used the report during the war to solicit support and produce propaganda for their war causes. They described vividly the abuses of the Germans, often using specifically selected eyewitness evidence of systematic rape and plunder. The committee used hundreds of interviews with Belgian refugees as well as some captured German diaries to detail the crimes committed against individuals, especially women and children, by Germans. The Bryce Report was published in thirty languages and disseminated widely, including in the United States. While some of the accounts were certainly sensationalized, there were systematic uses of terror employed against the Belgian civilian population. The report was an essential tool in Britain’s propaganda scheme to highlight the

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 231.

⁶² “The Bryce Report,” 12 May 1915, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/brycere.asp. Last accessed 18 August 2012.

powerfully gendered image of the “Rape of Belgium”: A helpless feminine Belgium at the mercy over-masculinized men, in need of virtuous protection by British men at arms. As we will see in Chapter 2, these perceptions became powerful motivators for some of the Americans who signed up to help the Belgians. Horrors of war (both real and sensationalized) were then and are now powerful forces for humanitarian efforts.⁶³ While the CRB’s organization may have been founded out of a well-reasoned conclusion that it was better to find a way to feed the Belgian people than let them starve, there were deeply emotional reasons for it as well as Hoover and others attested to in their reasoning for taking on the work.

While the British did use the atrocities for exaggerated propaganda aims, the Germans really did commit many violations of international law and norms during their invasion of Belgium as set down in the 1907 Hague Convention on Land Warfare.⁶⁴ Refugees were not the only sources of these German crimes; stories circulated within Belgium as well. For instance, Constance Graeffe recorded in her diary an account she had heard. She wrote she could “scarcely believe it” and so “[would] only tell the facts” as she understood them:

A lady teacher of one of the principal government schools here in Brussels came back and told her principal this: I live near Mons & when the Germans came there they passed through our village & took 40 women of different ages, put them in front of them & ordered them to walk on! One understanding a little German turned round & said to the officers, aren’t you ashamed to protect yourselves behind women? He ordered the first row to go back & of these was this teacher, but the next had to go on & suddenly from afar the English fired & she saw 2 women fall & the others ran away & then the Germans went on & fought hard against the English.⁶⁵

⁶³ Kevin Rozario, “‘Delicious Horrors’: Mass Culture, The Red Cross, and the Appeal of Modern American Humanitarianism,” *American Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (September 2003): 417-477.

⁶⁴ Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities*, 419-420.

⁶⁵ Graeffe, “*We Who Are So Cosmopolitan*,” 221.

Graeffe thought, though, that the situation was complex. Her diary continued, also explaining what she had heard about the German advance through Belgium:

In almost every village the German troupers came to, they were shot at by the villagers; now in such a case they had the orders to bombard each village before entering to ascertain if the enemy was not there! Instead of destroying in this way every village they came to, they said we will take the villagers of one village & drive them to the next so that those shall not fire at us, not as protection only for our men but for the good of their own homes! Is such a thing right & wise that is another point of view. If they had only always had soldiers to deal with it would be a very cowardly act but having so often had 'franc tireurs' I wonder which was best.⁶⁶

The invasion turned Belgian civil society on its head and left the Belgians incredibly fearful. The eventual arrival of Americans with the CRB would provide a layer of security for the Belgians. While the CRB delegates provided relief, they would also act as witnesses to the occupation from a neutral perspective.

The Belgian cityscapes changed as well as a result of the German invasion. The burning of the city of Louvain was one of the most famous large-scale destructive acts of the war. It was the very place that the American diplomat Gibson visited and where he met Belgians clamoring for American intervention. (After the war, Americans would help rebuild the library with funds solicited from American universities. The names of the schools' who donated to its rebuilding are inscribed on stones surrounding the library.)

In the late fall of 1914, hope spread through Brussels and elsewhere that help was on its way. It was certainly needed; in November, Constance Graeffe wrote that in some places "each head only gets 200 gr[am]s of bread a day" and that "[w]omen cry for bread & when will it arrive?"⁶⁷ At this time, she knew that Great Britain had allowed foodstuffs to move through the blockade and that much of it would be sent from America, though "with these seafights & all that

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 222.

goes with it, will there not be still some disappointment?”⁶⁸ Indeed, the CRB lost seventeen ships to torpedoes and fourteen to mines out of 2,323 total shipments.⁶⁹

Before the arrival of Americans and their supplies, however, the Belgians worked on their own relief efforts. The Americans may have found themselves in a “desolate” and “reduced” nation, seemingly pushed back from modern civilization, but they encountered the real efforts by the Belgian people to provide for themselves against all odds. There were structures within Belgian society trying to make headway in providing food and relief to those who needed it. It was with these local efforts that the American-led CRB would partner to make for an effective relief program.

The First Local Efforts

The Belgian historian Sophie de Schaepdrijver has emphasized two main themes in Belgian society after the invasion: “civilian helplessness” and “civilian action.”⁷⁰ De Schaepdrijver analyzed the diary of Charles Gheude who visited the town of Aarschot in October 1914 and recorded the damage done to the town. He also worked to set up a local relief organization: “[i]n one hospitable house, still standing and only half pillaged, we assemble[d] our best endeavors around a table weakly lit by two candles, and we d[rew] up the first measures.”⁷¹ In the city of Namur a young woman named Germaine recorded in her diary in

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Hoover, *An American Epic*, Volume I, 414.

⁷⁰ Sophie de Schaepdrijver, “A Civilian War Effort: The Comité National de Secours et d’Alimentation in Occupied Belgium, 1914-1918,” in *Remembering Herbert Hoover and the Commission for Relief in Belgium: Proceedings of the Seminar on the Humanitarian Work and Legacy of Herbert Hoover* (Brussels: Fondation Universitaire, 2006), 26.

⁷¹ Ibid.

August 1914 that “[t]he people of Namur are making provisions: potatoes, bacon, ham. Worthy of note,” she continued, “some women who in normal times would not carry the smallest package go by loaded with boxes and bags. Everybody fraternizes; people seem to know each other; in short, worldly conventions are suspended; people’s interest is higher and we forget the pettiness of ordinary life.”⁷² Before the Americans arrived and interjected their values and new ideas of doing things, the Belgian people were engaging with each other in new ways while enduring hardship, especially in the first few months before systematized relief efforts came to Belgium. The Americans would see a different Belgium from the one that they would have seen had they made a stop in Brussels or Louvain or elsewhere while taking a “Grand Tour” of Europe before the outbreak of the war.

War and occupation wreaked havoc on the day-to-day lives of the millions of Belgians who remained behind the German lines during the war. Their health, lives, and overall social well-being relied on an effective organization of supply and relief, but that supply and relief would arrive under the constant threat of war and maybe even requisition by the Germans without any kind of third-party guarantee. In the early months of conflict, relief was haphazard, but nonetheless important, and set in motion the larger relief efforts that the CNSA and the CRB would put in place for the remainder of the war. These included efforts by the smallest communes to the largest towns and cities around Belgium to organize some sort of system of food distribution. For example, in the industrial region of Charleroi in Wallonia, action was taken quickly. On 3 August 1914, the communal council of Charleroi was called to order and the head of the council, M. Devreux, announced three immediate steps the administration was taking

⁷² Germaine Attout, *Love in a Time of War: Based on letters and diaries of Germaine Attout and Francis Wickes Beginning in Belgium during the First World War, 1914-1918*, ed. Mariette Wickes, (Self Published, 2011), 19.

on behalf of the people: 1) a meeting of all the local mayors, 2) an agreement with millers to sell flour at a price not to exceed 30 francs for 100 kilos, and 3) an agreement with bakers to make bread at no profit. These proactive measures were necessary to combat the impending scarcity of foodstuffs, especially flour, in the region. According to a report from Charleroi, from the start of the war the Belgian Army requisitioned flour that was held in the old fortified city of Namur. The Germans also requisitioned flour and other items as they moved across Belgium.⁷³ As a result of all these factors, scarcity increased.

Many of the smaller cities also took immediate steps to help those who were or might soon become destitute or hungry because of the war. In Berchem-Sainte-Agathe, for example, the town's elites organized a committee to collect funds and goods for families of those who had men called to the front to defend Belgium during the German invasion.⁷⁴ At the same time, a philanthropic group called "Le Lilas" provided localized aid to those who needed it. These activities continued until January 1915 when local leaders were able to tap into the emerging nation-wide relief efforts of the CNSA and CRB through "la soupe communale." In Tubize, poor workers were given one franc per day to help purchase food and other goods during the early period of the war.⁷⁵ Not every town or commune had a program of aid and relief, however.⁷⁶ A

⁷³ "Le Ravitaillement de l'Arrondissement de Charleroi avant l'Arrivee de la Commission for Relief in Belgium," CNSA Collection, Folder 155, Belgian National Archives, Brussels, Belgium.

⁷⁴ M. Helman to M. Petre, 8 June 1916, CNSA Collection, Folder 155, Belgian National Archives.

⁷⁵ Comité Local de Tubize, 8 July 1916, CNSA Collection, Folder 155, Belgian National Archives.

⁷⁶ For instance, Willebringen. Comité Local de. Willebringen, 6 June 1916, CNSA Collection, Folder 155, Belgian National Archives.

national relief program, expanded from the work being done by the relief committee that had been organized in Brussels, was not put into effect until the fall.

Brussels had one of the first sophisticated efforts to relieve the civilian population of the hardships presented by the invasion, occupation, and blockade. Ernest Solvay, a Belgian industrialist, pledged around a million francs to Mayor Adolphe Max for Brussels' use. This effort on an individual level, however, while generous, was not sufficient. Local Belgian elites appealed for help to the largest and most important bank in Belgium: the Société Générale de Belgique.⁷⁷ Its director, Emile Francqui, was a well-established figure in Belgium and would soon head the CNSA. He was born in 1863 during the reign of the first king of the Belgians, Leopold I. In his 20s, according to his biographer Liane Ranieri, Francqui associated himself with the colonial ambitions of King Leopold II in the Congo. Francqui "play[ed] a decisive role in the exploration and occupation of Katanga, the richest and most coveted province of the Congo."⁷⁸ At thirty, Francqui headed up Belgian economic interests in Asia, in particular China, where he first met Hoover where they were both working at the time, but it was his work during World War I with the CNSA that would set him apart from other well-to-do financiers in Belgian and European society.⁷⁹ When approached about the emerging relief effort Francqui reportedly exclaimed: "I am your man. Count on me!"⁸⁰

The Comité Central du Secours et d'Alimentation

⁷⁷ Liane Ranieri, *Emile Francqui ou intelligence créatrice, 1863-1935* (Paris: Éditions Duculot, 1985), 116.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 9. [Author's translation.]

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Albert Henry, *L'oeuvre du Comité national de Secours et d'Alimentation pendant la guerre* (Brussels, 1920), 20. See also Ranieri, *Francqui*, 116. [Author's translation]

At 11:00 a.m. on 1 September 1914 at the headquarters of the Société Générale in Brussels, a group of Belgian notables met to form the CCSA. Francqui presided over the meeting and announced that this relief committee was being founded to provide aid to the citizens of Brussels and was under the patronage of the Spanish and American ministers to Belgium, the Marquis de Villalobar and Brand Whitlock.⁸¹ Francqui made it clear that the CCSA would be made up of a number of different people and would be organized without regard to political loyalties (“sans couleur politique”).⁸² This evenhandedness would often prove difficult for local committees to emulate. Finding the right balance between the powerful Liberals and Catholics as well as the emerging Socialists resulted in the dissolution of not a few local committees during the course of the war.⁸³ The meeting also heralded American involvement: Hugh Gibson, the secretary of the American Legation, attended, noting in his diary, “The hour I had put in there had been well spent.”⁸⁴ Gibson likely felt that the Belgians were effectively trying to find a solution to dire distress they found their country to be in.

Four days later, the CCSA met again. The elite of Belgium decided that Solvay would be the president of the CCSA, an important but primarily titular position, while Francqui would become the chairman of the Executive Committee, and, thus in charge of the day-to-day mechanics of their work.⁸⁵ With these matters of position resolved, Solvay gave a speech that extolled the spirit of solidarity that he claimed existed throughout Belgium, and argued that the

⁸¹ 1 September 1914, Process Verbal, CNSA Collection, Folder 24, Belgian National Archives.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ For detail on the Belgian experience during the occupation, see de Schaepdrijver, *La Belgique et la Première Guerre Mondiale*.

⁸⁴ Hugh Gibson, 1 September 1914, *A Journal from our Legation in Belgium* (Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1917), 183.

⁸⁵ Ranieri, *Emile Francqui*, 116.

CCSA was part of that solidarity. He also thanked the Spanish and American ministers for their help in protecting the work of this new and unique organization in Belgium.⁸⁶

Very quickly, the CCSA in Brussels became the national CNSA for all of Belgium and in October 1914 the CNSA became the Belgian partner with the just-formed CRB. On 24 November 1914, Francqui explained how equal distribution would take place. He told his fellow committee members the CRB delegates would “be joined by a Belgian citizen familiar with the needs of the province [the American is assigned to].”⁸⁷ The relief effort, then, was to be a firm partnership between the Americans and the Belgians, who each needed the other in order to achieve their shared goals, but the Americans occupied a position of significant power as the organization recognized to import the needed supplies through the British blockade and to supervise the transport and distribution of those goods in Belgium. The Americans would work with the locally appointed and run Belgian provincial committees to find the most effective and efficient way to feed an entire nation.

The CNSA was not a neutral humanitarian organization. It was decidedly patriotic. Not an unreasonable position for it to take, but certainly one that set it apart from the CRB’s non-state neutrality. The CRB sought to help and feed the Belgians because it was the humanitarian thing to do. The Belgian CNSA wanted to help and feed Belgians because they were their fellow countrymen. At a 26 November meeting, for example, M. Frank, the president of the Antwerp Provincial Committee, praised King Albert and the queen, Elizabeth. Albert was still actively opposing the Germans, even though he had retreated to the coast. The CNSA emerged as a powerful Belgian organization alongside the powerful neutral, American-led CRB.

⁸⁶ 5 September 1914, Process Verbal, CNSA Collection, Folder 24, Belgian National Archives.

⁸⁷ 24 November 1914, Process Verbal, CNSA Collection, Folder 24, Belgian National Archives. [Author’s Translation]

Conclusion

Belgium endured a great deal at the outbreak of war. Ancient treaty obligations and national pride set Belgium up for a violent few months at the start of the war, followed by an occupation that, combined with the British blockade, left the basic needs of Belgian citizens unmet. Local efforts in the cities and countryside to stabilize the food system and provide relief where necessary were not enough for the long term, even though they did establish a structure the Americans were able to work with once the CRB was founded and began its work by in late 1914. Though Belgium became a victim of German aggression and British strategy, its efforts in the early days of the war were those of a modern European state. The Americans who eventually arrived in Belgium as humanitarians confronted a complex humanitarian emergency, exacerbated by the country's industrial top-heaviness: it was unable to feed itself because its modern industrial base was stalled and, in many cases, destroyed, and the British blockade prevented the country's continued importation of food. While the Belgians set up their own local relief councils and eventually a central CNSA, there was still a void that needed to be filled. The American-led CRB was just the thing to fill that void.

The Americans who arrived in December 1914 were in positions of power and privileged. They were not part of the local Belgian political or social system, nor were they members of a defeated and occupied people. They were neutral outsiders representing only humanitarian interests: the feeding of a people in need. They would be able to draw on their American-ness (as citizens of neutral America and as people with a self-described particularly powerful "know-how") to carve out a space where they could effectively manage the importation and distribution of relief goods in Belgium. Carving out a space for humanitarian work is key for humanitarian

groups who must guard their neutrality carefully, otherwise they cannot do their work effectively. For instance, in its role inspecting the conditions of detainees around the world, the present day International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) “seeks solutions to humanitarian problems through confidential dialogue with the detaining authority.”⁸⁸ By relying on confidentiality, the ICRC shields those it is investigating, but enables itself to be seen as an “honest broker” with no hidden agenda for publicity in order to effect change. While the CRB was wholly different from today’s ICRC and did use the press to make its case for its relief efforts in Belgium, it, too, had to establish its authority and carve out its humanitarian space to effect change in Belgium. To do so, the CRB drew on its staff’s American-ness, both in terms of their national citizenship and the characteristics and values with which the delegates identified.

⁸⁸ ICRC, “Respect for the Life and Dignity of the Detainees,” 29 October 2010, <http://www.icrc.org/eng/what-we-do/visiting-detainees/overview-visiting-detainees.htm>. Last accessed 30 June 2014.

Chapter 2

Who Should Go to Belgium? The American Membership of the CRB

Once established at its organizational meetings in London, the CRB recruited its first American volunteers from Oxford. Many were Rhodes Scholars, but others, like Tracy Kittredge, were there on private scholarship. Kittredge described Oxford as “Spartan” in November 1914 when about twenty-five Americans gathered at the American Club to sign up for work with the CRB.¹ Herbert Hoover wrote to one student there that “We are badly in need of Americans to take charge of our work in various relief stations in Belgium,” he was looking for young men who had “some experience of roughing it, who [spoke] French, [had] tact, and [could] get on with the Germans.”² The combination of the volunteers’ neutral citizenship as well as their American-ness (their “experience of roughing it” and “tact”), their proximity to Belgium by being in England when the war broke out, and presumptions of their character by virtue of their status as Americans studying at Oxford set the tone for the American membership of the CRB, even after the CRB tightened its recruitment standards when it became clear that some of the early recruits were not up to the task.

Back in the United States, when President Wilson heard about the organization of the CRB and that some American citizens and diplomatic officials were attached to it, he was clear that they were all acting as private citizens and not as agents of the United States government.³

¹ Tracy B. Kittredge, “A Belgian Holiday,” typescript, n.d., 1, Kittredge Papers, Box 5, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA.

² Hoover to Galpin, 24 November 1914, Galpin Papers, Folder 1, Hoover Institution Archives.

³ In October 1914, Woodrow Wilson was asked about the nature of the CRB and its relation to the United States Government. He stated that those who worked for it, including American diplomats, were acting as private citizens. See “Remarks at a Press Conference,” 22 October

While the American members of the CRB had no official connection to the U.S. government, their cultural connections and the assumptions of power that came with them, were very much a part of their identity and experience on the ground in Belgium. Hoover and the U.S. minister in Belgium, Brand Whitlock, also believed that Americans would make better executives than the local Belgians not only because they were stretched thin trying to provide relief for themselves, but by virtue of them being Americans and the Americans would have freer mobility and “could negotiate unhesitatingly with local German commanders” because of their neutral status.⁴ While the CRB’s letterhead indicated Spanish and, later, Dutch patronage, these neutral nations provided different support than the Americans did. The Netherlands acted as a neutral port for imports (of goods and for new American volunteers) and the Spanish provided additional diplomatic support in Belgium itself, but the CRB was very much an American enterprise and its organizers sought certain types of American men to work for it. This chapter argues that CRB officials sought out a particular kind of American man who represented the new dynamic power of the United States in the world, and marshaled that power through humanitarian work.

There was one practical reason to solicit men from a class of men for whom money was not a pressing concern: all the in-Belgium workers were not salaried. They were entitled to a stipend, though, and they benefited from the good graces of their Belgian hosts who would often take them into their homes to dine and live. For instance, long after his service Wickes said that he had an expense account of 700 francs a month—“roughly the equivalent of \$100 at the then exchange rate.” This was a comfortable sum, “but it wasn’t in the nature of a salary of any sort,”

1914, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, ed. Arthur S. Link, Vol. 31 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 206-208.

⁴ George H. Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover: The Humanitarian, 1914-1917* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988), 66. See Chapter 1 for what the Belgians did for themselves.

he recalled. “We weren’t supposed to benefit financially from the work.”⁵ The CRB was not a place to make money, but to give service and do one’s duty as a privileged member of the neutral United States and a humanitarian organization. While the United States was not directly involved in the European fighting, work with the CRB was an opportunity for Americans to go “over there” and engage with the war.

Many factors motivated these early delegates from the reports of German atrocities to the desire to do some sort of war service. “Everyone we knew,” wrote Kittredge, “was taking some part directly or indirectly in the war. So as [Christmas] vacation time came we too began to wonder what we should do.”⁶ The pull of adventure and desire to serve in some capacity across the English Channel led these men into humanitarian work while their British friends went off to fight for King and Country.⁷ Kittredge, at Oxford on a private scholarship, was one of the first to volunteer in Belgium in December 1914: “Belgium was a land of horrors to us,” he wrote soon after the war. “We thought it a country in ruins, with gray-clad ‘Huns’ stalking about seeking what they could devour. The fascination of the unknown, the attracting of adventure, the desire

⁵ Francis Wickes, interview by John Niven and Enid Douglass, 1 March 1967, Oral History Program, Claremont Graduate School Library, Claremont, CA. p. 7.

⁶ Kittredge, “Belgian Holiday,” 1. Kittredge mentions the ambulance brigades in France and local YMCAs where they would “keep the ‘Tommies’ from the lure of wine, woman, and song.” For more on Americans serving in the war before United States belligerency see, for instance, Robert B. Bruce, *A Fraternity of Arms: America and France in the Great War* (Lawrence, University of Kansas, 2003) and Arlen J. Hansen, *Gentlemen Volunteers: The Story of American Ambulance Drivers in the Great War, August 1914 – September 1918* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1996).

⁷ In a message to Congress, Wilson said, “The United States must be neutral in fact as well as in name during these days that are to try men’s souls. We must be impartial in thought as well as in action.” Wilson: “Message on Neutrality,” 19 August 1914, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.uscb.edu/ws/?pid=65382>.

to see for ourselves a bit of actual war or the results of war” was partially what drove him and others to sign up for the work.⁸

The CRB organizers sought candidates who would practice neutrality by representing American values of leadership, ability, and restraint as emphasized in American public discourse and by political leaders like Teddy Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, to carry out their humanitarian mission. Many men answered the call because the CRB offered them an opportunity to experience the war while the United States maintained its neutrality. With this in mind, the CRB selected men who at times exhibited traditionally masculine and American qualities that were beginning to shift away from the solely martial sphere to a more philanthropic one. Not all applicants were accepted. Some could be rejected because of gender (no women), race, nationality (whites and American citizens only; some non-whites did apply, but were rejected), age (though this was often overlooked), language ability (again often ignored), and character (no ne’er-do-wells). While the CRB staff sought Americans who could be neutral, they sought well-educated, cosmopolitan, athletic, and responsible men to shape the particular humanitarian identity of the CRB through the period of U.S. neutrality. This set of characteristics came to define many who would work in later U.S. national security positions.⁹ These ideas of the proper American man were not isolated to World War I humanitarianism, but were central to the development of a particular American leadership class that would see the United States into World War II and through much of the Cold War where humanitarian efforts would often find

⁸ Kittredge, “Belgian Holiday,” 1.

⁹ See Robert Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001).

expression in government funded programs such as the Food For Peace Program originally developed under President Dwight D. Eisenhower.¹⁰

In the early days of the CRB a man who was deemed physically and emotionally strong, ready for adventure, with good experience and character (as in the morally “good” man of the late Victorian and Edwardian eras), and possessed the potential for successful executive and administrative leadership was thought to be all that was needed. These qualities were not limited to Rhodes Scholars or those at Oxford, but they were associated with that group and formed the template for future candidates, even after Hoover and others realized there needed to be a more detailed vetting process than just being at Oxford.¹¹

In fact, these qualities were part and parcel of a broad ideal of the proper American man during the early twentieth century. Historians have been correlating such ideals with respect to the emergence of American empire, and the values and motives in domestic Progressive politics and American culture.¹² At the end of the nineteenth century, many political and social leaders

¹⁰ For a brief overview of the United States’ Food for Peace Program, see <http://foodaid.org/resources/the-history-of-food-aid/>

¹¹ Rhodes scholars were, of course, drawn not just from the United States, but also from all over the British Empire and even Germany. The close connection of American and Anglo-Saxon culture and values, as articulated by the Rhodes scholarship, does not exclude a distinctive American-ness. In fact, during the war men in Britain were not seen as acting in their proper role if they were not serving in the military. The “White Feather” campaign applied to both conscientious objectors and, often, to men engaged in non-military work. For Americans, they could not serve in the war and, thus, humanitarian work could be coded as acceptable and “manly.” See Nicoletta F. Gullace, *“The Blood of Our Sons:” Men, Women, and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship During the Great War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) and J. Branden Little, “Humanitarian Relief in Europe and the Analogue of War, 1914-1919” in *Finding Common Ground: New Directions in First World War Studies*, eds. Jennifer Keene and Michael Neiberg (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010).

¹² See, for instance, Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Kristen L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Emily S.

feared that American men were becoming “over civilized” with the closing of the Western frontier, the changing economy necessitating less and less physical activity, and the lack of military experience on the part of many men. The War of 1898 and the expansion of American power into the Pacific and Caribbean helped not only position the United States as an emerging world power, but also enabled a new generation of American men to either fight in a war or act as overseas administrators, representing the interest of their country in exotic locales like the Philippines. Because of Wilson’s call for neutrality, Americans could not participate in the fighting on behalf of the United States, but the CRB provided an avenue for many men to engage with the war in a new way as humanitarians.¹³ And because the CRB was a thoroughly American organization, it was American culture and ideas of the proper American man that influenced who became a CRB delegate.

The CRB, though a neutral and non-governmental humanitarian organization, was imbued with such values from the start. While Hoover was certainly limited in the early stages of the relief effort in choosing who could participate as delegates because of the American exodus from Britain after the war began, examining CRB delegates and their backgrounds can help us better understand how humanitarian work can be made effective, how humanitarian culture was constructed in a particular time and place, and how a group of Americans navigated between their status as neutral citizens in a war zone and as effective humanitarian agents. This chapter uses those delegates’ own writings from during and immediately after their work in Belgium, as

Rosenberg, *Financial Missionaries to the World: The Politics and Culture of Dollar Diplomacy, 1900-1930* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); and Sarah Watts, *Rough Rider in the White House: Theodore Roosevelt and the Politics of Desire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

¹³ Some Americans did volunteer for service with the French Army especially. See Bruce, *A Fraternity of Arms*, chapter 3.

well as the detailed personnel records of the CRB, to elucidate who was accepted—and who was blackballed—by the CRB “fraternity” between November 1914 and April 1917. Afterward, the United States became a belligerent, and many of these “manly” men joined the American armed forces. The values that made one a good American humanitarian could also make one a good military man.¹⁴

A Delegate Template

Three interlocking organizational and socio-cultural systems played a part in establishing the cultural norms that CRB delegates and executives would exemplify and seek out. The Rhodes Scholarship Trust was an organization dedicated to reinforcing the values of English-speaking peoples and helping to develop a class of men able to properly govern society.¹⁵ The scouting movement in Britain and in the United States, too, focused on good works, altruism, and “being prepared,” thereby developing a new generation of good, manly, citizens ready to defend the values of the nation.¹⁶ In the years leading up to the CRB’s work, reform-minded social service inculcated in institutions of higher education also began to emerge as an important arena in which young men could become good American citizens and full members of civil

¹⁴ On domestic American preparedness during the World War I era, see John Garry Clifford, *The Citizen Soldiers: The Plattsburg Training Camp Movement, 1913-1920* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1972).

¹⁵ There were a number of German Rhodes scholars, in keeping with tentative ideas of Anglo-Saxon and Germanic association, but increased German aggressiveness and the outbreak of World War I severed that link. See Thomas J. Schaeper and Kathleen Schaeper, *Cowboys into Gentlemen: Rhodes Scholars, Oxford, and the Creation of an American Elite* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1998).

¹⁶ See David I. Macleod, *Building Character in the American Boy: The Boy Scouts, YMCA, and their Forerunners, 1870-1920* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1983) and Michael Rosenthal, *The Character Factory: Baden-Powell and the Origins of the Boy Scout Movement* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986).

society.¹⁷ The ideas of public service were being exhorted by leading American educators like Charles Eliot of Harvard, Endicott Peabody of Groton, and Woodrow Wilson when he was president of Princeton. Traditional values of masculinity—strength and military service—were encountering a new “fatherhood” ethos, thus mandating service to individuals and in local communities, and not just to the nation-state. Skills and talents other than those learned at drill became a part of the positive value system of gendered masculinity. A broader “Rough Rider” ethos of service, activity, and manliness emerged in the imagination of and vivid language used by delegates in their writings during and shortly after war. One such delegate, Francis C. Wickes, wrote that those first delegates were “possessed [with] a certain spirit of adventure together with a desire for service.”¹⁸ A later delegate, Maurice Pate, while sailing to Europe for a position with the CRB wrote in his diary that while he was enjoying excellent meals aboard his ship, they “were a hard fore-runner for European ‘war bread,’” a reference to the hard, dense, dark bread most Belgians lived off of during their years of occupation.¹⁹ Another participant, Joseph C. Green, who in later decades would help shape the Truman Doctrine, described his peers as “strong [Teddy] Roosevelt men.”²⁰

¹⁷ Emily Mieras, “Tales from the Other Side of the Bridge: YMCA Manhood, Social Class and Social Reform in Turn-of-the-Twentieth-Century Philadelphia,” *Gender and History* 17 (August 2005): 409-440. See especially p. 413.

¹⁸ Francis C. Wickes, “The American Delegate in Belgium,” in *The Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium* Volume I, eds. George I. Gay and H. H. Fisher (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1929), 479. (*PR CRB I*)

¹⁹ Maurice Pate, “Diary of Maurice Pate: Service with the Commission for Relief in Belgium.” PDF Files (3 Parts). Online UNICEF Archives: <http://www.cf-hst.net/UNICEF-TEMP/Doc-Repository/M.Pate-1st-exd-hs-2004-308.html>, p. 1.

²⁰ Green to Green, 15 February 1917. Quoted in Branden Little, “Band of Crusaders: American Humanitarianism and the Remaking of the World,” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2009), 312.

An original purpose of the Rhodes scholarship was the development of elite colonial administrators through the best education. Applicants were chosen on the basis of various categories of accomplishment and potential: “scholastic attainments;” “fondness of and success in manly outdoor sports;” “his qualities of manhood, truth, courage, devotion to duty, sympathy for and protection of the weak, kindliness and fellowship;” and “his exhibition during school days of moral force of character.”²¹ While the United States embarked on a different imperial project than did Britain, a man’s association with the Rhodes scholarship could open doors by the ready identification of society’s elites. In the case of the CRB, delegates were not only drawn initially from the ranks of Rhodes scholars; subsequent delegates also fit the categories of that prestigious scholarship, even if a number of those early participants were not really up to the task (leading Whitlock at one point early in the relief effort to declare that it was dangerous to recruit “a lot of impulsive, ignorant, young doctors of Philosophy.”)²² CRB officials learned from their earlier mistakes and undertook a sophisticated recruitment regimen including formal references, interviews, and even language tests, even though they often stretched the requirements to allow in those who did not completely meet the new guidelines. While the recruitment practices may have changed, the virtues required did not. The ideal as represented by the early values of the CRB was very powerful and dictated recruitment policy throughout the war.

As the early delegates were still students and many of the subsequent delegates were products of American higher education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, new ideas on the role and power of education (formal and informal) can help shed light onto how and

²¹ Schaeper and Schaeper, *Cowboys into Gentlemen*, 16-17. These were the requirements laid out by the originator of the scholarship, Cecile Rhodes. The first group of Americans arrived in 1914.

²² Quoted in Nash, *Herbert Hoover*, 77.

why these men chose humanitarian work. Recent work by Emily Mieras argues that the turn of the twentieth century saw an emphasis on public or “social” service as a masculine endeavor for civic engagement and self-fulfillment. Mieras writes, “Young people in a liminal stage between childhood and independence....found a way to identify themselves by practicing social service. This process of identification had different implications for men and women. For young men, it marked a way of reasserting middle-class male privileges.”²³ As members of the CRB were drawn from these academic settings and as recent graduates they were not yet fully established in their careers, they were both part of this “liminal space” where they were creating their own personal and professional identities. The CRB was just the place to do so because it meant identifying not only with public service, but a new expansion of American power overseas during what was shaping up to be an important historical event, a world war. Mieras writes that “[m]ale youth who performed service redefined manhood to incorporate nurturing tendencies usually associated with women.”²⁴ In reconstituting non-martial service as manly, humanitarian assistance could be seen, then, as not necessarily an alternative to combat, but war service itself, albeit as neutrals, not belligerents, and as bearers of bushels of wheat, not arms.²⁵ CRB delegates nonetheless did still draw on those older conceptions of manhood and power in their work and to help create their identities. Male college students’ work with social service organizations like

²³ Emily Mieras, “‘A More Perfect Sympathy’: College Students and Social Service, 1889-1914,” (Ph.D. diss., The College of William and Mary, 1998), 27. Thanks to Robert A. Gross for directing me to this dissertation.

²⁴ Ibid., vi.

²⁵ For more on transformation of non-combatant work into war service, see Janet S. K. Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory, and the First World War in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). For a discussion of issues surrounding those (exclusively women) who worked in the agricultural sector of British non-combatant war service see pages 118-127.

YMCAs and settlement houses was indicative of the inclusion of broad relief activities within the culture of those who would go on to serve in the CRB. While a direct connection between participation in YMCA or settlement house work is not possible for CRB delegates, some did work for aid organizations like the American Red Cross. Princeton University's president, John Grier Hibben, referred Maurice Pate to the CRB on partial account of his work with the Red Cross as an undergraduate in 1914 and 1915.²⁶

The delegates' work in Belgium placed them in the outdoors quite frequently. Being out of the office, on the road, and visiting relief depots was a big part of the job. Being comfortable with that was a basic requirement. In this way delegates fit into societal norms of American men as expressed in the newly developed scouting movement. In the 1911 edition of the *Official Handbook for Boys* the Canadian-born, naturalized American citizen, Ernest Thompson Seton asked the youth of America if they had a "desire for the knowledge to help the wounded quickly, and to make [themselves] cool and self-reliant in an emergency" and if they had a belief in "loyalty, courage, and kindness...[and wished to] form habits that [would] surely make [their] life success in life."²⁷ Work with the CRB required (or desired) men who had these exact qualities and, in many cases, contributed to their later careers.

Wickes had read Seton as a boy and, along with his family, became an avid camper and participant in "the outdoor life" both before and after his time with the CRB.²⁸ Wickes, like all

²⁶ Hibben to Sir Gilbert, 6 May 1916, CRB Collection, Box 316, Folder 25, Hoover Institution Archives.

²⁷ Ernest Thompson Seton, "A Message from the Chief Scout," in *The Official Handbook for Boys* (Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1911), xi-xii. On the concept of the over-civilization of young men in the United States, see Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines*, especially "Part V," and see Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*.

²⁸ Emails from George Wickes to Tom Westerman, 31 March 2011 and 1 April 2011.

members of the CRB, was too old to have been a member of the Boy Scouts, given that they were founded in the United States in 1910. And it should be noted that the outdoor life meant many things to many people. In fact, Francis Wickes' son made it a point to indicate that both he and his father likely picked up Seton's work for its interest and attention to nature and animals rather than for any martial purposes as may have been intended by the British founder of the Scouts, Lord Baden-Powell.²⁹ But those broader ideas and applications of the outdoor life for a national purpose were still likely important to Wickes, who used language of the active life in the outdoors in his writings about the CRB's work and the importance and necessity of engaging with the outdoors in Belgium.

The natural world and a man's involvement with it became important, though, for the proper development of an American if he was not to be over-civilized, but rather able to exercise control over an uncivilized natural environment.³⁰ Wickes wrote that the Americans' "acquaintance with [Belgium] ... betrayed sometimes the[ir] deepest ignorance," and they:

Discovered conditions far different from what they had conceived and soon found themselves embarked upon a project whose vastness they had never imagined. Neither their anticipations nor their training had in any way prepared them for the work, which they were to do....[but] [w]hat they lacked in specific [knowledge of the Belgians' conditions] they more than made up for in their zeal and in their possession of more fundamental characteristics.³¹

Belgium was indeed in terrible shape after the invasion. Many citizens fled to London as refugees, cities like Louvain were damaged greatly by the war, and the normal function of

²⁹ Email from George Wickes to Tom Westerman, 1 April 2011.

³⁰ E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 227-232. The fears of "over-civilization" necessitated some contact with the "primitive" "in hope of establishing a better balance between civilization and the inner savage," p. 232.

³¹ Wickes, "The American Delegate in Belgium," *PR CRB I*, 479-80.

government and economy had ceased. They would have to make sense of an unknown situation very quickly and establish their authority right away. According to Wickes, this required characteristics and men who were “intelligent thinkers with a practical turn of mind...an ingrained quality of adaptability, accustomed to independence and initiative—they were Anglo-Saxons of the western world.”³²

These were the men, then, who could do the job and do it well. While the world around them was chaotic and disordered, by virtue of their particular cultural background they could bring some order to Belgium. It was a declaration of American Exceptionalism, but tied to a longer trajectory that reached back to Old England. The early twentieth century was also a period of growing cultural and social ties between the United States and Britain, especially between rich American women and cash-poor, but land- and title-rich, English nobles. For instance, the future British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, was the son of an American woman, Jeanette Jerome, and an English nobleman, Lord Randolph Churchill.³³ Though the United States stood apart from the Old World, it was also connected to the “best” of its history and culture, especially that represented by civilized and powerful Great Britain.

They would need to possess qualities of education and intellect, a sense of duty and service to their fellow man, and an ability to engage with difficult circumstances with self-control and strength. These were the qualities sought after for and by the first American delegates from Oxford and later from many of the premier colleges and universities in the United

³² Wickes, “The American Delegate in Belgium,” *PR CRB I*, 480.

³³ For more on these marriages, see Gail MacColl and Carol McD. Wallace, *To Marry an English Lord* (New York: Workman Publishing Company, 2012). U.S. President Wilson was known to greatly admire the British form of parliamentary government. His 1886 Ph.D. dissertation at Johns Hopkins, “Congressional Government: A Study in American Politics,” critiques what he deemed the ineffective nature of American checks-and-balances and he proposed adopting a British model of government in the United States.

States. Whether or not the men actually had these qualities, they believed these attributes were necessary for themselves and for others to succeed in the humanitarian mission. The CRB brought together two ideas—adventure and service. It helped to fuse older concepts of the masculine outdoors (in this case a war zone) and fears of over civilization, with a more protective and nurturing desire to help an injured and weak people, the Belgians, without guns or force.

Once the Americans got to Belgium to begin to act on their desires to do good and be active Americans abroad in an emergency situation, they were assigned a specific area to work in. The CRB used Belgium's provincial divisions and designations for its organizational purposes. Each had its own Belgian-run provincial committee. Each committee provided relief for roughly the same Belgian province. These committees consisted of local politicians, businessmen, and community leaders. Each had to have a fair political representation among the parties: Liberal, Catholic, and Socialist. Attached to each provincial committee was a principal American delegate and then one or more assistants, sometimes based in a major city aside from the provincial "capital." The Antwerp, Limbourg, Brabant, Brussels, Hainaut, Namur, Liège, and Luxembourg committees were all located, more or less, within the German "Occupation Zone." This zone was governed from Brussels by an occupation government headed by a German general. The committees for West Flanders (North), West Flanders (South), and East Flanders, fell within the Army Zones and under stricter military control. Northern France, which came under CRB auspices in April 1915 was also part of the Army Zone.³⁴ Delegates stationed in the southern provinces like Luxembourg, Namur and Liège were located in the francophone, coal-

³⁴ See map of the "Relief Area of Belgium and Northern France," in *PR CRB I*, 394. See also listing of provincial committees from the *Fourth Annual Report, Nov. 1, 1914 – Oct. 31, 1918*, vii-xv. CRB Collection, Box 558, Folder 1 no. 174, 1914. Hoover Institution Archives.

rich south. Delegates in the Army Zone and the Antwerp Province were in the more pastoral, Flemish north. Hainaut, Brabant, and Limbourg straddled the linguistic divide, not yet official in Belgium, while Brussels, as the capital city, had its own committee. It was up to Hoover and his senior officials to assign delegates to an appropriate region of Belgium, but it was up to each individual volunteer to make his case about why he should be chosen for work with the CRB.

Candidates' Self Characterizations

David T. Nelson was one of first to take up the Wilson's challenge of neutrality and impartiality and Hoover's call for action and involvement in a new humanitarian endeavor. A native of North Dakota, Nelson was neither part of the "Eastern Elite" nor Hoover's own West Coast network of Californians and Stanford University faculty and alumni.³⁵ Despite these differences, however, Nelson's background as a "westerner," placed him within the context of the Rooseveltian idealization of "the frontier" and those who came from it.³⁶ Nelson had graduated from Luther College in Iowa in 1912 and took up his studies as a Rhodes scholar at New College, Oxford in September 1914. In late November, the young man wrote his parents that with his vacation coming, he might join up with a "scheme" to go to Belgium. "There's no danger attached to the work," he wrote in what must have been an effort to calm his parents' fears of their son leaving safe Oxford to go to a war zone. "[T]he relations between the Germans and American Committee are very cordial, - but one will very likely have to rough it as the

³⁵ Hoover drew on his many contacts in California and at Stanford for executive and delegate staff.

³⁶ See Watts, *Rough Rider in the White House*.

country is in a terrible state of desolation.”³⁷ Nelson’s reference to “roughing it” echoes Hoover’s call for men who could live such a life.

Francis Wickes also emphasized the outdoor life and its attendant meanings. Wickes learned about CRB work through established delegates and joined on the partial recommendation of a friend, Lawrence “Duke” Wellington. In May 1917, Wickes wrote an account of the delegates’ experiences in Belgium. Though written in the comfort of London and in the month after the United States entered the war, it was included in an official volume of documents that tell the history of the CRB.

Born in Rochester, New York on 7 July 1890, Wickes graduated from Williams College in 1912 where he was a friend and a fraternity brother of Wellington’s. Wickes went on to Harvard Law School, graduating in 1915. Wellington had attended Oxford before being among the first Americans to go to Belgium. Wellington then returned home to Amherst, Massachusetts, where Wickes visited him in the summer of 1915. On that visit Wellington spoke of his CRB experience and thus piqued Wickes’ interest “having been bitten by the travel bee from [his] year in Germany.”³⁸ Being willing to travel and spend time away from home was a necessary part of being a CRB delegate. One could not return home for a visit or to see family. Once a delegate left the CRB it was difficult—but not impossible—for him to come back for another tour. That Wickes was used to travel and had spent significant time abroad was a plus in his file.

³⁷ David T. Nelson to Mr. and Mrs. Nelson, 30 November 1914, in John P. Nelson, ed., *Letters and Diaries of David T. Nelson, 1914-1919* (Decorah, IA: Anundsen Publishing, 1996), David Nelson Papers, Hoover Institution Archives.

³⁸ Wickes interview, Oral History Transcript, Claremont Graduate University, 7. Many of the men of the CRB were well traveled and cosmopolitan. This was common for men of their social and economic background.

Wellington had returned home on the account of an illness in his family, but the staffing of the CRB remained very much on his mind and he knew that the CRB was now seeking more mature men than his first cohort had been. In their rush to get a staff up and running, the CRB had let in a number of ill suited volunteers. At one point, an early delegate told Whitlock that he was in Belgium on an inspired mission from God. Whitlock wrote to Ambassador Page that he wanted “to obtain, through Hoover’s intercession a call for him to go back.”³⁹ The general assumption that good-stock Americans would make good humanitarians had its limits. These limitations did not dissuade delegates from recruiting and Hoover from accepting men with the same value set, but they tried instituting a better process before permitting the new volunteers to go to Belgium, overseen by successful and trusted veteran CRB delegates or a Belgian consul, Pierre Mali, in New York City.

Wellington wrote to his superiors in the CRB that he knew some men “who would seem to come up to the qualifications—young men who have themselves well under control” and had worked for a year or two in some junior business capacity.⁴⁰ Wickes, in Wellington’s and the CRB’s eyes, seemed to be a perfect candidate: less than a month after his initial letter to the CRB’s New York Office, Wellington wired a simple and direct message: “Recruit Francis Coggsell [sic] Wickes 229 Oxford St. Rochester NY.”⁴¹ Wickes was to join the club and set off for Belgium.

³⁹ Quoted in Nash, *Herbert Hoover*, 77.

⁴⁰ Wellington to CRB New York Office, 4 August 1915, CRB Collection, Box 317, Folder 31, Hoover Institution Archives.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Once recruited, Wickes left for Washington to get his passport and then back to New York City to sail across the Atlantic and begin his work with the CRB.⁴² Like the other Americans who traveled to Europe for work with the CRB, he knew of the dangers. Wickes recalled he “didn’t have any U-boat scares, although we were all very conscious of the fact that that was a possibility. But the passage was uneventful.”⁴³ The adventure began with high seas suspense. Even though the Americans were not going to Belgium to engage in the fighting, their travel to Europe and conception of what life would be like there was filled with a certain amount of danger.

Wickes was stationed first in Namur, in the francophone south of Belgium. There he stayed with Emile Attout, who worked with the local Belgian committee. Wickes’ son, George, has written that his father—and many of the American delegates—either could not speak French or spoke it poorly. In the case of the Americans who stayed at Attout’s house, his two “attractive daughters,” who had spent time in England, helped out with communication. In fact, in the case of Wickes, he quickly learned the meaning of “l’amour” in Belgium. George Wickes later wrote that his father met his mother, Germaine Attout, “almost immediately upon his arrival in Belgium and fell in love on the spot. ‘C’est le coup de foudre,’” George recalled his father saying about that first meeting with the daughter of his Belgian host.⁴⁴ Wickes served with the CRB until the American withdrawal from humanitarian action.

A great bond developed between the delegates over time. They were a fraternity, meeting frequently after the war and publishing alumni newsletters that updated each other on weddings,

⁴² Wickes interview, Oral History Transcript, Claremont Graduate University, p. 8.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ George Wickes, “The Great War,” typescript, n.d., Wickes Family Papers, Eugene, OR.

jobs, and the other milestones of life after the war. The fraternal bonds were strong. In his article “Yankee ‘Culture’ Makes Good” by Gardner Richardson and published in *Hearst’s Magazine*, Gardner Richardson described fellow delegate John Llyles Glenn Jr. from South Carolina, a Rhodes scholar, as standing six feet tall and weighing two hundred pounds. Glenn had “light hair and blue eyes [that] gave a boyishness to his otherwise serious mien,” and “when off duty he would amuse himself, and the Belgians still more, by throwing stones out into a lake twice as far as they could.”⁴⁵ An odd way to spend one’s free time, but an example of how the Americans imagined themselves as stronger than the Belgians they worked for and with. Whether the Belgians in question were actual children or adults and just not up to the physical standard of Glenn remains unknown. Through this article and over eighty like it, the men of the CRB played an active role in their organization’s public messaging. Their stories, as crafted for the public, were one way the CRB got its message of war-time, American-led humanitarian service out into world, revealing a desire by those associated with the CRB to make their work and experiences widely known to the American people in order to develop support back in the United States, even as the war dragged on in Europe.⁴⁶

The Personnel Files: Who Could Make the Cut

⁴⁵ Gardner Richardson, “Yankee ‘Culture’ Makes Good: The Inspiring Story of how Hoover’s Men through Pluck and Efficiency Saved Northern France from Starvation,” *Hearst’s Magazine*, November 1917, 384, 413. I have found no evidence of any romantic relationships between delegates, but the powerful language indicates a strong affection or, at least, a deep appreciation of the physical characteristics of this particular delegate.

⁴⁶ The CRB kept records of what was written and even published; see “Books, Pamphlets and Magazine Articles on the Work of the Commission for Relief in Belgium, or by Members of the Commission, [1914-1919],” 1 January 1920. Kittredge Papers, Box 5, Hoover Institution Archives. These were published in *Literary Digest*, *World’s Work*, *Colliers*, *New Republic*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *Outlook*, *Hearst’s*, *National Geographic*, *Saturday Evening Post*, among others.

Tracy Kittredge stressed the group's privileged backgrounds in his own writings on the CRB. His unpublished essay "The Emergence of an American Aristocracy" made that clear.⁴⁷ So did his article titled "Californians with Hoover In Europe," published by the University of California's alumni magazine in 1920. Kittredge incorporated ideas from his "American Aristocracy" and compiled statistics of the college affiliation of the CRB's membership including twenty from Harvard, eighteen from the University of California, and seventeen from Princeton. Stanford sent eleven, Yale ten, Columbia six, and Cornell had five alumni serve in Belgium; other universities and colleges were also represented.⁴⁸ This was a geographically diverse group of men—coming from coast to coast and, with the smaller colleges, north and south—but the vast majority came from the elite institutions of the United States, similar to those who populated the American foreign service of the Department of State in the early twentieth century.⁴⁹ Like the diplomatic corps, the CRB volunteers formed a "club" of men with their own rules and requirements and assumptions about who could and should participate in the work at hand. Over time, the American diplomatic corps would professionalize and so too would international humanitarian work, but the foundation for both were laid by these kinds of men.

New delegates came by way of recruitment by veteran delegates or by application, usually by sending a letter of interest into the New York City office. Sometimes the CRB would solicit specific institutions for possible candidates. Princeton University President John G. Hibben responded favorably to a request by the CRB's New York office director, John Beaver

⁴⁷ Tracy Kittredge, "The Emergence of an American Aristocracy," unpublished typescript, n.d., Tracy B. Kittredge Papers, Box 5, Folder 2, Hoover Institution Archives.

⁴⁸ Kittredge, "Californians With Hoover in Europe," *The California Alumni Fortnightly*, 13, no. 1 (Berkeley: Alumni Association of the University of California, 1920).

⁴⁹ See Martin Weil, *A Pretty Good Club: The Founding Fathers of the U.S. Foreign Service* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978).

White, for the names of Princeton men who would be suitable for work in Belgium.⁵⁰ Even so, White was reluctant to promise Hibben that “men just out of College” would be able to go in the summer of 1916.⁵¹ The “recent appeal from London,” wrote White, “asked to have men not only speaking French fluently but having business experience and more mature.”⁵² While the age requirement may have gone up and more business experience may have become desirable, the reality of the situation required a more case-by-case hiring of delegates. After the initial group, delegates submitted letters of reference to establish what kind of character they possessed and what experiences they had. Such references enabled the CRB staff to weed out “clubmen or dilettantes” who were undesirable.⁵³ Once the CRB had a firmer footing in Belgium and had a better understanding of the scale and scope of the work, Hoover and his colleagues realized that they would need to not only rely on subjective cultural markers of competence, but looked for men with some professional experience. Professional experience would mean that the new recruits could manage Americans and Belgians appropriately, often without direct intervention from Brussels or London. Thus, they put in a stronger vetting process and felt no need to accept just anyone into their ranks. Of course, they made exceptions for men who had exceptional references.

In addition to the CRB’s executive in London and the delegates in Belgium, the CRB employed a staff in New York and London responsible for the overall bookkeeping and clerical

⁵⁰ Hibben to White, 6 January 1916, CRB Collection, Box 312, Folder 1, Hoover Institution Archives.

⁵¹ White to Hibben, 12 January 1916, CRB Collection, Box 312, Folder 1, Hoover Institution Archives.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Poland to CRB London Office, 29 May 1916, CRB Collection, Box 312, Folder 1, Hoover Institution Archives.

work of the CRB. These men, especially the accountants, were paid.⁵⁴ They were often the first people to meet applicants. An assistant director in New York wrote to Hoover in the fall of 1916 that they were “having a difficult time to meet the requirements in regard to the delegates” but that one of the former delegates, Robert Arrowsmith, had proved “of great assistance.” In one instance, staffers interviewed thirty applicants who wanted to go to Belgium but after having “gone over this bunch with a fine tooth comb” were only able to identify four acceptable candidates: “They are all absolutely first class men, and we have no doubt concerning them.”⁵⁵ Later in this chapter, we will see what could disqualify an applicant. Sometimes it was because of race or sex, sometimes because of bad timing, or because the application did not come close enough to even the sometimes subjective requirements for acceptance.

After the initial influx of Rhodes scholars, Hoover established a more organized system of staffing and control in Belgium. Arriving in the country just before Christmas 1914, he celebrated the holiday at the American legation with Whitlock and his American staff in Brussels. While Hoover managed the CRB from London, he centralized Belgian-based executive work in new offices at 66 Rue des Colonies. This new office stood around the corner from the massive Cathedral of St. Michel from where the Belgian Catholic prelate, Cardinal Mercier, preached patience and fortitude and sometimes resistance during the German occupation.⁵⁶ The American delegates acted as the agents of Brand Whitlock, to whom all imports were originally charged. In this way, the America delegates served as guardians and overseers of the imports, not actual

⁵⁴ Hoover, *An American Epic*, 455.

⁵⁵ Assistant Director, New York to Hoover, 29 November 1916, CRB Collection, Box 312, Folder 1, Hoover Institution Archives.

⁵⁶ Larry Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium: The Untold Story of World War I* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 99-100.

distributors of the foodstuffs.⁵⁷ Though they were not official agents of the U.S. government, there was an implicit relationship between the CRB and American government officials in Belgium that provided an added level of protection to the CRB's work. The relationship between an international NGO and its state of origin can complicate a group's work or, in the case of the CRB, it can be a helpful one. Once the United States entered the fighting in April 1917, the Americans' relationship to their country of origin was a complication and led to their withdrawal from Belgium.

Not only were delegates drawn from recently graduated university classes, some delegates were drawn from the ranks of university administration. David Barrows was a dean at the University of California when Kittredge recruited him in the winter of 1915-16.⁵⁸ Frank Brackett, a Dartmouth University graduate, was a dean and professor of mathematics at Pomona College in Claremont, California when he joined the CRB in the spring of 1916. In fact, he asked for a leave of absence from the college to join the CRB, sailing from New York on 28 June 1916. He served with the CRB until December 1916. As he was preparing his trip, he also offered his son's services. Not yet twenty, the son was not taken on, but Brackett described him as of the type capable for the humanitarian work: "he is a good worker, strong, tactful, with some executive ability."⁵⁹ Even with his father's recommendation, the younger Brackett did not serve. As it became apparent that the CRB's work would not be brief and the work became more systematized, Hoover sought more mature men. Being a teenager disqualified Brackett's son.

⁵⁷ Nash, *Herbert Hoover*, 78-79.

⁵⁸ Kittredge to White, 25 November 1915, CRB Collection, Box 313, Folder 4, Hoover Institution Archives.

⁵⁹ Brackett to CRB NY, 5 June 1916, CRB Collection, Box 313, Folder 10, Hoover Institution Archives.

While the delegates had to be Americans through and through, their experience in and with the wider world, especially Europe, could work in their favor in the application process.⁶⁰ Milton Brown, who served in Belgium from February 1916 until the American withdrawal in 1917, came highly recommended from Howard McClenahan, Dean of Princeton University. Brown, originally from Glendale, Ohio, graduated from Princeton in 1913 and was recommended “very heartily” by McClenahan in September 1915. Brown was a self-described “travel-lecturer” according to his own publicity pamphlet. “Mr. Brown,” the pamphlet reads, “invites you to accompany him with your eyes and ears and your imagination, rambling with him familiarly through the scenes made famous in song and story, in history and legend,” in his talk on “Rambles Beneath Italian Skies.”⁶¹ Brown exemplified the cosmopolitan nature of many of the delegates selected for work in Belgium.

McClenahan was so confident about Brown’s potential that he wrote the CRB without Brown’s knowledge. McClenahan hoped that Brown’s maturity would work to his advantage: “He is a man of very fine ability, fine character, and of excellent judgment. I believe that he would do the work which a younger man can do in Belgium most admirably.”⁶² Since the CRB received many more applications for positions than were available, Brown’s was one that was kept on file. He was called up a few months later.⁶³ Over time, the CRB went from an

⁶⁰ On the role travel and tourists played in the development of American power see Christopher Endy, “Travel and World Power: Americans in Europe, 1890-1917” *Diplomatic History* 22 (Fall 1998): 564-594.

⁶¹ “Rambles Beneath Italian Skies: The Milton McIntyre Brown Travel-Lectures,” (c. 1915). CRB Collection, Box 313, Folder 14, Hoover Institution Archives.

⁶² McClenahan to Williams (CRB NY Office), 2 September 1915, CRB Collection, Box 313, Folder 14, Hoover Institution Archives.

⁶³ Williams (CRB NY Office) to McClenahan, 23 September 1915, CRB Collection, Box 313, Folder 14, Hoover Institution Archives.

organization reaching out to the nearest group of Americans potentially well suited for the work at hand, to an organization that had so many applications that they could keep them on file and return to them at a later date. This enabled the CRB to be more discerning in its choosing of delegates and, thus, continue to strengthen its position in Belgium with a well developed staff of proper, American men exemplifying their American-ness. Since patience was a desired virtue, men like Brown, who could wait to be called into service, were excellent candidates.

Though Brown's application would later include a letter from his father and from Princeton's president, John Grier Hibben, he also advocated for himself, drawing on the characteristics that the CRB sought for its staff. "At present," wrote Brown, "I am in good health, and my general condition is such that I am rarely indisposed in any way."⁶⁴ Health, certainly, mattered for work in Belgium. As the members of the CRB were there to help Belgians, having to spend time caring for their own because of illness was not helpful. To paint oneself as healthy and therefore not a potential drain on the resources of the CRB was an obvious plus. It could also be a way to reassure the CRB that one's age was not going to be a problem in far off Belgium. Brown reported that "due to the fact that at college I was engaged in a department of athletics which is one of the very best trainers for endurance and good physical condition, long distance cross-country running, and, too, to the fact that my summers were usually spent in the rough life of a camp in the Canadian woods" he was prepared for life in war torn Belgium.⁶⁵ Like Wickes, the outdoor life was important to Brown, who used it as a way to indicate his understanding and expectation of the work ahead in Belgium.

⁶⁴ Brown to CRB NY Office, 3 November 1915, CRB Collection, Box 313, Folder 14, Hoover Institution Archives.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

After the declaration of American belligerency, Brown joined the 324th Field Artillery. He wrote in a letter to a friend that he was now “a plain, ordinary, common, dish-washing, floor-sweeping, cuspidor cleaning, heavy artillery, rear rank, lowest grade, 2nd class, buck private!” and that he was “getting hard as nails and hoped to go over before too long.”⁶⁶ Brown, like many other CRB men joined up with the U.S. Army, some seeing action in Europe. After the war, Brown fathered a son who also went to Princeton and then joined the Peace Corps. Brown had established a pedigree of elite education and humanitarian service with his work in the CRB.

Cosmopolitanism was valued, but business experience was a prime characteristic for CRB officials in their recruitment. Hoover was a man of business and the CRB operated as a large logistical organization, not a charity or soup kitchen. The men who worked for the CRB had to have (or quickly learn) how to manage people, time, and resources under difficult circumstances. As an example of a person who brought some business experience, Prentiss N. Gray enjoyed a very distinguished career with the CRB. Born in Oakland, California in 1884, he graduated from the University of California in 1906 and entered the lumber and shipping industry in San Francisco. He joined the CRB in February 1916 and served as representative in Antwerp, Brussels, and Valenciennes, France before becoming an assistant director of the CRB in Brussels in June 1916. He was promoted to director (still a volunteer position) in Brussels in April 1917, just as the United States entered the war and, upon returning to the U.S., worked in the New York office as an assistant director.⁶⁷ Gray went on to serve on the executive council of the Belgian American Educational Foundation, the bi-national philanthropic and educational

⁶⁶ Brown to Healy, n.d. [c. April 1918], CRB Collection, Box 313, Folder 14, Hoover Institution Archives.

⁶⁷ Index Card in Gray’s Member File, CRB Collection, Box 315, Folder 4, Hoover Institution Archives.

exchange group founded with leftover funds from the CRB. Gray was just one example of CRB members maintaining their relationship with Belgium and with philanthropic work related to the CRB long after the war. A great many former CRB delegates served as officers of the BAEF in the decades after World War I. Hoover was the honorary chairman of the board from 1941-1951 and from 1962-1964.⁶⁸

After the war, many delegates went on to careers in the law or business, but some continued to work within the growing humanitarian space. Probably the most important one was Maurice Pate of Denver, Colorado, who became the first director of UNICEF after World War II. He became a CRB delegate in the summer of 1916. He had offered his services in April 1916. He wrote that he worked with the American Red Cross at Princeton University until he graduated in 1915 and that he was “willing to volunteer my services while in your employ.”⁶⁹ Pate, 22 years old, was upfront about his lack of French language skills, but neither that deficiency nor his relatively young age kept him from starting his work in July 1916.⁷⁰ During his preparations for work with the CRB, Pate spent time in New York City from 16 May. He met with CRB officials and Mali, the Belgian official who evaluated CRB members for their French fluency. He studied French for three weeks and eventually received his appointment with the CRB on 13 June and left for Europe on 17 June.⁷¹ Pate is an example of how the requirements were more like guidelines than hard-and-fast rules for recruits. Here again, subjective values of who could make

⁶⁸ “Officers of the BAEF since 1920,” <http://www.baef.be/documents/about-us/governance/officers-since-1920.xml?lang=en> Last accessed 1 July 2014.

⁶⁹ Pate to CRB NY, 26 April 1916, CRB Collection, Box 316, Folder 25, Hoover Institution Archives.

⁷⁰ Ibid.; R. E. Pate to CRB NY, 6 May 1916, CRB Collection, Box 316, Folder 25, Hoover Institution Archives; Pate to CRB NY, 6 May 1916, CRB Collection, Box 316, Folder 25, Hoover Institution Archives.

⁷¹ Pate, “Diary,” 1.

a good delegate sometimes trumped the stated requirements the CRB tried to put into place after the first few months.

Pate's recommendations placed him well within the bounds of the value-set and humanitarian identity sought after by the CRB. Hibben, Pate's university president reference, called Pate "helpful and resourceful"—"a man of resolute purpose" who "can be trusted implicitly." Hibben was "delighted to have one of [Pate's] ability and character represent Princeton."⁷² One of his English professors, Morris W. Cross, wrote that Pate had a "remarkably clear head" and was "a most efficient manager and executive."⁷³ Another letter by a Princeton official called Pate, "a young man of the finest character....[and] in all personal things he is a fine, straightforward, reliable young gentleman of the highest type."⁷⁴ Pate served with the CRB in Hainault Province until the American withdrawal. Pate's references highlighted the right type of characteristics in the right way—"efficient manager and executive" and a willingness to serve as a volunteer—and this was enough to let Pate in. By taking a chance on Pate, Hoover and the CRB helped foster one of the more important international humanitarians of the twentieth century.

Who Did Not Make the Cut

Because of the CRB's publicity in the United States by returning delegates, the CRB received many more applications for work than they had spots to fill and more importantly, some

⁷² Hibben to Sir. Gilbert, 24 April, CRB Collection, Box 316, Folder 25, Hoover Institution Archives.

⁷³ Cross to CRB NY, 22 May 1916, CRB Collection, Box 316, Folder 25, Hoover Institution Archives.

⁷⁴ McClenahan to CRB NY, 7 July 1916, CRB Collection, Box 316, Folder 25, Hoover Institution Archives.

applicants were not acceptable candidates even when positions were available. Sometimes, an applicant applied when there was no need for new volunteers. Delegates were asked to serve for a minimum of six months.⁷⁵ A. Piatt Andrew wrote a letter to Lindon W. Bates, the CRB's New York Office director in early December 1914. Bates responded that that because Hoover and the Commission had "secured the services of a number of American Rhodes scholars of Oxford University, the Commission does not wish any more sent over from this country at the present time."⁷⁶ Andrew, however, found work with the American Ambulance Corps in France.⁷⁷ While unique, the CRB was still one of a variety of organizations Americans could seek out for wartime service before U.S. belligerency. It would take time for the CRB to publicize its efforts and to then have applicants seeking to work exclusively with the CRB, though it still would receive many applications from men who simply wanted to just "do something," which was not something that worked in their favor.

While the CRB certainly sought men from elite backgrounds, that alone was not always enough to guarantee acceptance. If and when the CRB could be particular about its candidates, it was. For instance, the nephew of President Ulysses S. Grant's secretary of state, Hamilton Fish, was rejected for being too young.⁷⁸ In his application letter, Hamilton Fish Armstrong impressed upon his potential employers that he and his family "have been entirely Americans for

⁷⁵ CRB Telegram to Caspar Whitney, 29 May 1916, CRB Collection, Box 321, Folder 1, Hoover Institution Archives.

⁷⁶ Bates to Andrew, 12 December 1914, CRB Collection, Box 318, Folder 8, Hoover Institution Archives.

⁷⁷ Andrew to Bates, 28 December 1914, CRB Collection, Box 318, Folder 8, Hoover Institution Archives.

⁷⁸ White to Armstrong, 5 July 1916, CRB Collection, Box 318, Folder 8, Hoover Institution Archives.

Generations.”⁷⁹ At twenty-four and even with awards and honors from Princeton University, he was not acceptable. His is a prime example of the inconsistent standards the CRB often had. Sometimes it seemed that there was no justification beyond “no.” At twenty-four, Armstrong was too young, but Pate, at twenty-two was acceptable. Armstrong would go on to a distinguished career as a journalist and long-time editor of *Foreign Affairs*, the influential American foreign policy journal.

While recommendations counted, they, too, were often not sufficient. Timing, also mattered. In the case of Lawrence C. Murray, the recommendation of former president Theodore Roosevelt could only get him a cool reception and delayed appointment with the CRB until February 1917, just as the CRB’s American position in Belgium was unraveling, given the imminent end of the nation’s neutral status. “There is no man,” wrote Roosevelt, “in whose judgment, tact, and diplomacy I have more confidence, and I cannot speak too highly of his straight-forward sincerity of character.”⁸⁰ Murray, who had been Roosevelt’s controller of the currency, did not have the appropriate French language skills.⁸¹ Again, another example of the inconsistency of CRB recruitment practices. Murray was, however, considered as being of a “high type man” who might be an able assistant to the American executives in Brussels.⁸² Applying just as the United States was about to enter the war ultimately prevented him from taking up an official position with the CRB.

⁷⁹ Armstrong to Healy, 20 June 1915, CRB Collection, Box 318, Folder 8, Hoover Institution Archives.

⁸⁰ Roosevelt to Arrowsmith, 21 December 1916, CRB Collection, Box 321, Folder 1, Hoover Institution Archives.

⁸¹ Arrowsmith to Roosevelt, 27 December 1916, CRB Collection, Box 321, Folder 1, Hoover Institution Archives.

⁸² Rickard to CRB London, 31 January 1917, CRB Collection, Box 321, Folder 1, Hoover Institution Archives.

Being an American citizen was essential. A number of non-Americans did apply but were turned down. In July 1916 James Barnes, a physics professor at Bryn Mawr College, applied but his Canadian citizenship, as a citizen of a belligerent nation, disqualified him from CRB service. “Authorities require that all of the members of the Commission be native Americans,” wrote Lucey.⁸³ The power of American citizenship and a “natural” American identity was the very first requirement for acceptance into the CRB delegates. In this way, the CRB could never be truly “international.” Though it had non-American honorary chairmen from Spain and the Netherlands, the actual body of humanitarians had to be natural-born Americans. Without that underlying American legal status as a citizen, no broad based desire for humanitarian work could get someone into the CRB.

Some communication between the CRB and its applicants was remarkably blunt. H. B. Barton, a twenty-nine year old teacher from Worcester, Massachusetts was turned down ostensibly because of his lack of proficiency in French, though other candidates had been allowed through with similar limitations. (An undated note in his file that recommends him has a red slash across it and “can’t use” written in the margin.⁸⁴) In a lively letter from an unnamed CRB official in New York, Barton was told that “[m]erely a reading knowledge [of French] is not sufficient” but the official saw “no reason why [Barton] could not get busy with some French companion” to get his conversational French up to par for work with the CRB. Even more interesting is how this CRB official presents the qualifications necessary to Barton: “tact, the

⁸³ Lucey to Barnes, 29 July 1916, CRB Collection, Box 318, Folder 8, Hoover Institution Archives.

⁸⁴ Undated note re: H. H. Barton, CRB Collection, Box 318, Folder 8, Hoover Institution Archives.

ability to keep your feet on the ground, and your head cool and your mouth shut.”⁸⁵ A CRB delegate needed to be adventurous and represented the forceful attitude of a Roosevelt-type to get difficult work done, but also needed restraint in their words and deeds as Wilson articulated in his neutrality speech in August 1914.

Barton was not only interested in CRB work, but ambulance work as well. In October 1916 a CRB official answered a question from Barton differentiating the type of work the CRB did from that done in the ambulance corps:

I fear I cannot give you any first hand advice. Of course there is no question of the great service that can be rendered in that work, but it is after all, a work in which physical traits count perhaps for more than the mental maturity which is the most valuable factor of the work required from a Belgian representative, whose labors affect more closely a large number of individuals than do those of the members of the ambulance corps.⁸⁶

This response emphasized the CRB’s intellectual work and privileged food relief over medical relief. This was one way the CRB distinguished itself from other forms of humanitarian war service and could justify its exclusivity: it was one thing to provide medical care, a long-standing humanitarian practice, but it was quite another to provide food relief for millions of people. In this particular case, the balance between the values of the mature mind and the mature body had shifted toward the mind and the powerful element of self-control for the neutral delegates. In the CRB’s view, the work of a CRB delegate was more complex than driving an ambulance from the front to the hospital and back again, or so they presumed. Even with another recommendation from a CRB delegate that praised Barton as “mature, thoughtful, enthusiastic, manly, [and]

⁸⁵ Unknown to Barton, 20 July 1916, CRB Collection, Box 318, Folder 8, Hoover Institution Archives.

⁸⁶ Arrowsmith to Barton, 27 October 1916, CRB Collection, Box 318, Folder 8, Hoover Institution Archives.

experienced,” he was not selected to go.⁸⁷ It was likely not a smart idea for an applicant to suggest that they wanted to do any kind of humanitarian work. Rather, the CRB looked for men who wanted to do its kind of work. The Americans were developing their own humanitarian identity, one that was new and engaged in something different than what one would do as a medical aid or ambulance driver closer to the front.

The CRB was not a refuge for young men to run to forget their problems, either. Men, however, did write to the CRB asking for just that change. W. G. Beach was “about ‘busted’” in November 1916 and had “a great deal to forget.” Though he was twenty-seven and a Harvard graduate, he probably was not physically up to the task as he was “five feet none, 150 [pounds].”⁸⁸ His letters of reference did not help his cause. A father who employed Beach as a tutor for his son described him as “erratic and something of a ‘floater.’”⁸⁹ While many delegates did find their professional calling in Belgium, some even found love, Belgium was no place solely “to find oneself” post-graduation. Perceptions of a person were also disqualifying features. For instance, C. J. Becker’s application in December 1915 was turned down because of his “German name,” even though he was born in the Netherlands and a naturalized American citizen.⁹⁰ He also asked for a \$200 a month salary as he had a wife and three children.⁹¹ Asking for money was a safe bet to make one’s acceptance less likely.

⁸⁷ Undated note re: Barton, CRB Collection, Box 318, Folder 8, Hoover Institution Archives.

⁸⁸ Beach to CRB NY, 20 November 1916, CRB Collection Box 318, Folder 8, Hoover Institution Archives.

⁸⁹ McCulloh to Arrowsmith, 14 December 1916. CRB Collection, Box 318, Folder 10, Hoover Institution Archives.

⁹⁰ Healy Note re: Becker, undated [January 1916?], CRB Collection, Box 318, Folder 8, Hoover Institution Archives; and Becker to Hoover (via CRB NY), 17 December 1915, CRB Collection, Box 318, Folder 8, Hoover Institution Archives.

Being perceived as (or being actually) too pro-British or pro-French was also a problem. For instance, Charles Bennett, a professor at Cornell University, would have been a great addition, delegate Robert Arrowsmith thought—but he was *persona non grata* in German-occupied Belgium because of his outspoken pro-British statements.⁹² CRB officials in London and Brussels preached strict neutrality almost religiously. When Pate arrived in Brussels in July 1916, he and his fellow new delegates reported to the Commission's office where they “were given a heart-to-heart talk by Mr. Brown (Director) and Mr. Richards (Secy.) on ‘neutrality’ and what it meant to the Commission's work.”⁹³

Being a woman also disqualified an applicant from service. Most of the delegates were single men, but the CRB's files contain over a dozen applications from women. All were turned down. Clara Dunn from Monroe City, Missouri applied to work for the CRB in July 1916. She had read about the CRB's work in *Outlook* magazine and was responding to the appeal for more workers in Belgium. Dunn was twenty-eight and had graduated from the University of Missouri where she studied French. “I believe that I could do the work as capably as a man,” she wrote, “and I know that my enthusiasm for the cause could not be surpassed.”⁹⁴ Notwithstanding her capability, the CRB turned her down because “we regret...that the conditions under which the Commission operate do not permit women workers.”⁹⁵

⁹¹ Becker to Hoover (via CRB NY), 17 December 1915, CRB Collection, Box 318, Folder 8, Hoover Institution Archives.

⁹² Arrowsmith to Bennett, 18 August 1916, CRB Collection, Box 318, Folder 8, Hoover Institution Archives.

⁹³ Pate, “Diary,” 10 July, 6.

⁹⁴ Dunn to CRB NY, 30 July 1916, CRB Collection, Box 319, Folder 5, Hoover Institution Archives.

⁹⁵ Lucey to Dunn, 3 August 1916, CRB Collection, Box 319, Folder 5, Hoover Institution Archives.

The CNSA and CRB used Belgian women for some work, especially for bookkeeping in the local provincial offices. So, Mrs. A. de Beyersdorff who wrote to the CRB in March 1915 about working in “any capacity,” was turned down.⁹⁶ Her Germanic name aside, the CRB informed her that even “relief work that women can handle is thoroughly organized and is being carried on very efficiently by Belgian women who are naturally devoted to the work and understand the needs of their countrymen.”⁹⁷ The division of work between Americans and Belgians even applied to the sexes. Work that could be done by women was not outsourced or necessary for American supervision beyond the supervision already provided by American male delegates. The CRB sought men for masculine work. That was part of the cultural identity of the CRB: masculine American-ness. Even though the CRB was not engaged in martial work it was still a place for American men to engage in this new kind of expression of American power and influence overseas.⁹⁸

Not all denied applicants took their rejections quietly. Some, like Yale sophomore John Ellington, pushed for their acceptance. The chance to go overseas and participate in something as new and seemingly important was often a key motivating factor. He wrote to the CRB’s New York office in November 1916 that he was “deeply disappointed” and he felt that he “did not think [his] years an honest measure of [his] maturity” and would have further references forwarded to the CRB on his behalf.⁹⁹ One recommender, Charles Brown, Dean of the School of

⁹⁶ de Beyersdorff to Bates, 21 March 1915, CRB Collection, Box 314, Folder 4, Hoover Institution Archives.

⁹⁷ Bates to de Beyersdorff, 23 March 1915, CRB Collection, Box 314, Folder 4, Hoover Institution Archives.

⁹⁸ See Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*.

⁹⁹ Ellington to CRB NY, 14 November 1916, CRB Collection Box 319, Folder 6, Hoover Institution Archives.

Religion at Yale, wrote that Ellington was “a big, strong, wholesome type, brim-full of energy and with extraordinary resourcefulness.” Brown also noted that Ellington had lived for a while in Alaska.¹⁰⁰ Even this frontier experience was not enough for the CRB to overlook the young age of the candidate this time.

A few days later, Ellington wrote telling the CRB that he had received and would accept a commission with the American Ambulance Service in France. It was his hope, he wrote, that he could work in France for six months or so and then enter into the CRB’s employ.¹⁰¹ This scenario would, he was told in a follow-up letter, permanently ban him from service with the CRB since Ellington would then have served behind French lines.¹⁰² The Germans would not allow anyone who had served behind French lines to enter into German occupied territory for fear of espionage.

Race, too, was a limiting factor. Not many non-white Americans applied, but those who did were turned down. In December 1915 Alonzo Esannson wrote the CRB:

It might interest you to know that I have lived for 4 years in Belgium....and can speak French, Spanish, and a large amount of German....I am native of Puerto Rico (colored), refined, and intelligent and came to this country in 1900 in the employ of the Officers of the 11th US Infantry.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Brown to CRB NY, 15 November 1916, CRB Collection, Box 319, Folder 6, Hoover Institution Archives.

¹⁰¹ Ellington to CRB NY, 19 November 1916, CRB Collection, Box 319, Folder 6, Hoover Institution Archives.

¹⁰² Arrowsmith to Ellington, 27 November 1916, CRB Collection, Box 319, Folder 6, Hoover Institution Archives.

¹⁰³ Esannson to CRB NY, 16 December 1915, CRB Collection, Box 319, Folder 6, Hoover Institution Archives.

Attached to his letter was a note from a CRB official that read: “Porto [sic] Rican—Colored. Unavailable.”¹⁰⁴ The CRB assumed that the only Americans able to work for it were white and male. These were the paramount markers of proper American-ness needed to be a member of the CRB. Beyond Esannson’s “colored” status he was “Porto Rican” and thus not an actual U.S. citizen, but a “non citizen national” of the United States. Familiarity with Belgium and the French language, even German, and service with the American military were not enough to allow Esannson into the CRB.

Sorting out men with ulterior motives was also part of the application process. Many men went to see the Belgian consul in New York, Pierre Mali, who judged their language skills and character. In at least one instance, Mali noted the pro-German sympathies of one applicant, Paul Myron Linebarger.¹⁰⁵ The freedom of movement for Americans had to be guarded carefully and the inclusion of someone who would not be neutral—in the eyes of the CRB, the British, and the Germans—would only damage the credibility of the CRB and inhibit its work for the Belgian people. The legal status afforded American neutrality was part of the identity of the American CRB delegate just as much as social and cultural qualifications were.

Many different reasons barred applicants from joining the ranks of the CRB. Most often it was lack of French-speaking ability or being clearly younger than the target age. Of course, constant exceptions were made to that rule, but age and French language served as an early vetting tool by the CRB staff. Though many of those who sought work with the CRB had the valued qualities that the CRB sought, as the CRB became more established it could be more

¹⁰⁴ Esannson to CRB NY, 16 December 1915, CRB Collection, Box 319, Folder 6, Hoover Institution Archives.

¹⁰⁵ Note from Mali re: Paul Myron Linebarger, 21 January 1917, CRB Collection, Box 320, Folder 7, Hoover Institution Archives.

careful with whom it let in. The simple act of having the stated attributes of a man of good character did not always suffice; applicants also had to measure up to a slowly developing identity of an American CRB “humanitarian” that drew on those qualities. The network of delegates who recruited their friends and peers created a somewhat closed group of potential relief workers. In so doing, the personnel of the CRB began to rest upon a set of assumptions that were often not articulated, but important nonetheless in the development and sustenance of the CRB’s staff because it allowed for the CRB to have a well of possible recruits that was self-selected. Like many other self-selecting groups, the CRB wanted to populate itself with people who looked and acted like one another. Belgian relief was not a time to experiment with diversity or new ideas in its staffing or in the execution of its work. Once Hoover and his colleagues discovered what worked and who worked well, they kept to that script, only making exceptions when they could identify some exceptional qualification that trumped a deficiency in age or language ability.

Conclusion

In his essay on “The Emergence of an American Aristocracy,” Kittredge connected the delegates to the cultural values of elite American education at the turn of the twentieth century:

They were nearly all at the beginning graduates of American colleges who had been [at] Oxford as Rhodes Scholars or advanced students when the war began in 1914. Later many men were sent over from the United States, but the type was still the same. They were men whose education had fitted them to leadership and to service of the common good, and had provided them with the training, tact and experience that made it possible for them to handle large business affairs, complicated matters of administration, and delicate and involved diplomatic questions with equal felicity.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Kittredge, “The Emergence of an American Aristocracy,” typescript, n.d., 5-6, Kittredge Papers, Box 5, Folder 2, Hoover Institution Archives.

His essay detailed the service of “the American college man” who participated admirably during World War I. Members of the CRB, according to Kittredge, were just one subset of this particular new “American aristocracy.” It was a group of men who were forged in American institutions and culture. That fact gave Kittredge the confidence to write that we “now know that the type of man shaped by [American colleges and universities] has given the world a demonstration of efficiency in action, altruism in ideals, adaptability in habits and ideas, that can only be characterized as wonderful.”¹⁰⁷ These values were considered the primary values for proper American men and an idea of what the United States, as a presumed Anglo-Saxon nation, could be on the world stage.¹⁰⁸ These values applied to the CRB as well and helped to determine who would be allowed to participate in the CRB’s humanitarian mission and how they went about their work in Belgium, leading to a legitimization of humanitarian endeavors as another way for the Americans and the United States to exercise power in the new twentieth century.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 1-2.

¹⁰⁸ See, especially Chapter 1, of Srdjan Vucetic, *The Anglosphere: A Genealogy of a Racialized Identity in International Relations* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011). Vucetic argues that “[t]he turn-of-the-twentieth-century rapprochement between the expanding United States and declining Britain was caused by a discourse of identity that implied natural unity and moral superiority of the ‘Anglo-Saxon race.’” p. 3. While the notion of British decline is disputable, there was no doubt that the United States was “catching up” to the British in terms of economic output at this time.

Chapter 3^{*}

On The Ground in Belgium: The World of the CRB Delegates

While in Belgium, CRB delegates lived in a theater of war. They were relief workers, but they were also spectators to one of the greatest calamities in history. Their humanitarianism came to mean more than supervising relief goods, but also participating in the life of Belgian society and witnessing the war and occupation. Despite the difficult circumstances of their labor, they often experienced the war as “war tourists” who absorbed the sights and sounds of the conflict and they also reflected on the foreign peoples they encountered. These experiences, coupled with their privileged place as American outsiders, influenced how they thought and, indeed, how they conducted their humanitarian work over the course of their time in Belgium. By witnessing the spectacle of war in addition to their aid activities they constructed a humanitarian identity for themselves to comprehend the war and their place within it. This new identity was shaped by their American-ness, their neutral status, and the amorphous space they inhabited in Belgium: they were neither combatants nor victims; neither occupied nor occupiers. At times they became tourists, unofficial ambassadors of the United States, and agents of mercy to people threatened with starvation. Their official role as neutral arbiters of relief aid was complemented by their informal role as travelers in a strange land. A new generation of Americans was experiencing an overseas war firsthand, complete with all its sights and sounds.

^{*} Portions of this chapter were previously published, see Thomas D. Westerman, “Touring Occupied Belgium: American Humanitarians at ‘Work’ and ‘Leisure’ (1914-1917),” *First World War Studies* 5, no. 1 (2014): 43-53. Portions are adapted here with the permission of Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group. Please see the published article for citation.

As neutrals the Americans tried to stand apart from the politics of the war, but they were also very much a part of the day-to-day life as civilian aid workers living in a distressed land.¹

The CRB delegates encountered a dynamic country full of the strange machinery of war, but also characterized by aristocracy, abbeys, and culture often unlike what they were used to in the United States. Historians have recently argued that Americans traveling overseas act as agents of American power.² Those Americans' identities were shaped by their foreign experiences.³ Despite the increasing regularity of American travel to Europe in the early twentieth century, many of the CRB's delegates assumed new roles in an unfamiliar place. Susan Sontag contended that "[b]eing a spectator of calamities taking place in another country is a quintessential modern experience."⁴ Indeed, the outbreak of a great European war was a profound calamity as the historian Julia Irwin has discussed, and the attendant humanitarian disaster in Belgium was one as well.⁵ Sontag argued that journalists were "specialized tourists" who could observe and then report on the spectacle of the disaster they witnessed.⁶ Whereas

¹ Sophie De Schaepdrijver and Emmanuel Debruyne, "Sursum Corda: the underground press in occupied Belgium," *First World War Studies* 4 (March 2013): 23-38; Tammy Proctor, *Civilians in a World at War* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 189-192.

² Christopher Endy, "Travel and World Power: Americans in Europe, 1890-1917" *Diplomatic History* 22 (Fall 1998): 565. See also Brook Blower, *Becoming Americans in Paris: Transatlantic Politics and Culture Between the World Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

³ Endy, "Travel and World Power," 566. See also Endy *Cold War Holidays: American Tourism in France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004) and Dennis Merrill, *Negotiating Paradise: U.S. Tourism and Empire in Twentieth-Century Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), for more on how historians are using the lens of tourism to understand the development of American power in the 20th century.

⁴ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003), 18.

⁵ Julia F. Irwin, "The Disaster of War: American Understandings of Catastrophe, Conflict and Relief," *First World War Studies* 5, no. 1 (2014): 17-28.

⁶ Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 18.

journalists are widely acknowledged to be powerful mediators of war for a wider public, agents of humanitarianism were also powerful interpreters of the First World War. Their witnessing was just as important as any of their doing as it began to inform many delegates' future views on the need for American involvement with the wider world, especially with American-led humanitarian aid during the middle of the twentieth century.

Their doing, however, was still extraordinarily important. It was not only critical for the Belgian people who needed the Americans' aid, but it was essential to how this group of Americans fashioned their identity as humanitarian workers during the early years of the First World War. Since the CRB was a new organization and this was the first real American effort at a logistical footprint in Europe of any sort, what they did and how they did it took on deep meaning for the men who were there to do the work. Those meanings were then shared with fellow delegates and shaped their interactions with the Belgian people, and those interactions influenced how the delegates thought about their work and their place as agents of American power. This chapter argues that even though the CRB delegates were recruited to be neutral and professionalized humanitarians, they were often influenced by emotional and sensory factors that impacted their understanding of their place in Belgium and within an emerging humanitarian space populated by Americans seeking to be more involved with the world.

Hoover unleashed his operational and business know-how to make the CRB effective and efficient. While the Belgians themselves were expected to handle the actual distribution of the imported food, the American agents in Belgium were commissioned to be "controlling and inspecting managers" of the relief effort "to see that the Belgians did the job properly and

honestly.”⁷ This did not always sit well with the CNSA chairman, Emile Francqui, and some Belgians. For instance, Francqui was never fond of the Department of Inspection and Control, led by Joseph C. Green, a 29-year-old Princeton graduate. Inspection and Control was supposed to be a joint endeavor by the CRB and the Belgians, but it was dominated by Americans, which caused a good deal of tension because Francqui felt that the Americans were not trusting of the Belgians and encroaching more and more into Belgian-led distribution of relief.⁸ For the Americans, it made perfect sense that they would have as much influence as possible, since it was they who were providing for the protection and freedom of movement of goods around Belgium by virtue of their status as American neutrals.

The CRB agents accounted for and reported back to CRB executives in Brussels and, ultimately, to Herbert Hoover in London. They did this through detailed bookkeeping at offices in cities, towns, and communes all around Belgium and through frequent inspection tours of CRB warehouses and Belgian-run distribution centers. The American agents regularly gathered in Brussels to report in writing and verbally on their work and the Belgians’ efforts. Their status as official representatives of a relief organization and as citizens of a neutral power enabled the CRB to be a successful example of a Progressive-era professionalized philanthropic machine whose members would often be called on for future international humanitarian endeavors, like when Hoover toured post-World War II Germany to investigate that country’s food needs at the behest of President Harry S. Truman.

CRB delegates also forged emotional and sentimental relationships with their hosts and their surroundings. Francis Wickes became so connected to Belgium that he married a Belgian

⁷ Hoover quoted in George Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover: The Humanitarian, 1914-1917* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983), 79.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 212-213.

woman and many maintained ties to the country after the war through philanthropic work with joint U.S.-Belgian organizations like the BAEF. These connections formed between the CRB men and the land and people they were helping transcended the routine of work and refashioned earlier more dispassionate sensibilities that had encouraged distance from aid recipients. Instead, the Americans allowed for some personal attachment to place and people, although that approach was challenged in the months leading up to the Americans' withdrawal in 1917 when they were confronted with a German policy of labor deportations and had to often choose between the larger, and seemingly less personal, relief effort and the wellbeing of Belgians right in front of them.

In some ways the men of the CRB resembled those involved with American settlement house efforts in that they lived with and among the people they were working with.⁹ While the CRB delegates were not trying to "Americanize" the Belgians or "develop" them in the ways that some Progressive Era reformers had wanted to do with immigrants, the Americans did bring with them American perceptions of efficiency and effectiveness that they at least hoped would influence the Belgians in the short term. The Belgians were too close to problems in their own country, and local political issues could get in the way of efficient work. The Americans, though, were free of such baggage and could try to render more impartial service.

But the Belgians were also dedicated to making the relief effort as successful as possible. For instance, Maurice Pate noted that he was impressed with "the people in charge of the ravitaillement in the small villages...a word or hint for improvement of any details in the stores

⁹ See, for instance, John E. Hansan, "The Settlement House Movement," *The Social History Welfare Project* (Online), <http://www.socialwelfarehistory.com/programs/settlement-houses/>.

or book-keeping I saw at once carried out.”¹⁰ The CRB delegate’s job was to dispassionately support the work of the Belgians wherever they could through observation, accounting, and suggesting improvements when and where necessary.

Their visceral experiences, however, invariably tempered the CRB delegates’ ostensible objectivity and impartiality as neutrals, and the relationships they made with Belgians enabled them to really put the “human” in the humanitarian. These American relief workers in Belgium experienced and sensed—in a literal way—the theater of war, revealing that they comprehended the war and their work as not something clinical and their job as a distant one, but as something they were experiencing right along with those they were trying to help. In some cases, these experiences challenging their stated neutrality as they could see first hand who was causing pain and suffering to the Belgian people. Finding the right balance between dispassion and emotional investment is still debated by humanitarian organizations to this day.¹¹

Humanitarians at Work

In 1917, toward the end of the CRB’s initial work in Belgium, the Commission published a forty-seven page “Manual for CRB Representatives.” Pate was its editor, but the manual was likely the collective work of the CRB delegates, shaped by the experiences—formal and informal—of the nearly 150 men who served at one time or another in Belgium. According to the manual, the work of the CRB “demands business ability, honorable and serious undertaking,

¹⁰ Maurice Pate, “Diary of Maurice Pate: Service with the Commission for Relief in Belgium.” PDF Files (3 Parts). Online UNICEF Archives: <http://www.cf-hst.net/UNICEF-TEMP/Doc-Repository/M.Pate-1st-exd-hs-2004-308.html>, Tuesday, 12 September, 27.

¹¹ See David Rieff, *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002).

tact, breadth of vision and action.”¹² These broad values were certainly important to the work of the delegate. The CRB embodied elements of both “Rooseveltian” notions of honor and action and a Wilsonian emphasis on efficiency and dispassion. CRB men also walked a delicate line during their stays in Belgium. A key feature of humanitarian work is the relationship between being intimately part of the community being helped while at the same time being apart from it, and often accorded special accommodations by virtue of being an outsider. Their exact role in Belgium was, however, constantly being reevaluated and reinterpreted, especially as the CRB slowly established itself as less of an ad-hoc organization helping to import food in the early months of the war to a more established organization in Belgium, staying in that country until whenever the long war would come to an end.

As it became clear that the European war would not end anytime soon and that the relief work in Belgium would have to continue, American delegates assembled in Brussels in July 1915 to discuss their role going forward. Hoover attended this meeting at 66 Rue des Colonies. “This work was undertaken in a spirit of idealism,” he said in his remarks. “And has been held higher than ever before and which will leave a mark in our history.”¹³ This meeting debated how large a role the American delegates should have in making decisions at the local level. In one exchange, the delegate Robinson Smith asked if “members sitting on Provincial Committees [would] have the right to vote” on various matters. Hoover replied, “Our idea is that it is not necessary. You may have the right of presence and argument.”¹⁴ The Belgians would make the

¹² “Manual for CRB Representatives,” ed. Maurice Pate, 1917, Maurice Pate Papers, Box 1, Folder CRB Representatives Manual, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, IA.

¹³ Minutes of CRB Delegates Meeting, July 1915, CRB Collection, Folder 1, Belgian National Archives.

¹⁴ Ibid.

ultimate decision for their local committees, but Americans could offer advice when necessary. This was part of the balance Hoover and his staff had to strike with the Belgians, who did have their own interests to look after even with Americans there to help.

Calls for extensive American involvement did not always sit well with the Belgian leadership of the CNSA. There were frequent debates between the CRB and CNSA about the proper role of the Americans. In the fall of 1916, for instance, disagreements bubbled to the surface. Francqui expressed gratitude for CRB assistance, but was resistant to any increase in American control or interference with the Belgian efforts of the CNSA. Francqui made it clear to the American CRB director in Brussels, Vernon Kellogg, “that the C.N., which is a national institution, sprung from the will of the Belgian people, is alone responsible towards the Belgian people and their government for the repartition of food.”¹⁵ This friction often arose when there were claims of malfeasance by local Belgian committees or individual Belgians. Both the Americans and the CNSA wanted to protect the integrity of relief work, but they often came to different conclusions about how to do so.¹⁶ The CRB was, from the start, an “outsider” since the Americans would leave after the war. The Belgians, however, had been there, were there then, and would be there after the war. Local political and petty considerations became part of the world of relief work, no matter how hard the Americans tried to stop them by trying to serve as a neutral arbiter.

The issue of local favoritism and the role of the Americans had come up in earlier CRB meetings. In February 1915, at a meeting where Hoover was present, the CRB delegates

¹⁵ Francqui quoted in Nash, *Herbert Hoover*, 213.

¹⁶ See *Ibid.*

discussed favoritism “on account of political differences in certain places.”¹⁷ The delegates expressed their understanding that each Belgian provincial committee needed some flexibility, though how much was left open to debate. The CRB director in Brussels at the time, Albert Connett, told the delegates that the CNSA could act on specific complaints but not generalities and that those complaints had to be sent up the chain of command of the CNSA.¹⁸ This would, in effect, cut the CRB out of this process.¹⁹ In other ways, though, the CRB was central to how the Belgians conducted the business of relief.

Over time a system of hearings (though they were called “trials” at the time) was put in place jointly by the CRB and the CNSA to adjudicate abuses by bakers. Prentiss Gray, a delegate who arrived in Belgium in the late winter of 1916 and was stationed in Antwerp Province presided over some of these hearings. On 3 March, just after being promoted to chief delegate of the Antwerp Province, Gray had his “first taste of judicial authority.” “It appears,” he wrote in his diary, “that it falls within the province of the American Delegate to preside at the trials of bakers who have violated the rules imposed upon them by the Provincial Committee, also to mete out to such offenders punishment which he deems in accord with the ‘crime’ committed.”²⁰ Because of Gray’s status as the American CRB delegate he was the “judge,” but he realized that power was very much limited:

¹⁷ Minutes of CRB Delegates Meeting, 10 February 1915, CRB Collection, Folder 2, Belgian National Archives, Brussels, Belgium.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ As of 2014 there is no history of the CNSA in English. For more on the occupation from a Belgian historical perspective, see Sophie de Schaepdrijver, *La Belgique et la Première Guerre Mondiale*. Claudien Spitaels and Marnix Vincent, trans. (Brussels: Archives & Musée de la Littérature, 2004).

²⁰ Prentiss N. Gray, “Fifteen Months in Belgium: A Diary,” 3 March 1916, 61-62. Gray Family Papers, Morristown, NJ.

These trials are staged with all the impressiveness of a real court, but they are carried on entirely outside the military or civil German law. In fact they are frowned upon by the German authorities.

Mr. Friling, of the Department of Inspection and Control, and I, presided over the assembly. We were seated at the end of a long hall. Proceedings were conducted entirely in Flemish, so I knew as little at the end of the trial as I did at the beginning. Mr. Friling had, however, prepared a slip of paper with the various degrees of punishment. In a few words he explained to me what it was all about and why a particular penalty should be imposed, whereupon I announced the punishment.

Usually, at this point, the baker wept copious tears.²¹

Even though the CRB wanted French speakers, it did not seek out anyone with a particular knowledge of Flemish, a variant on Dutch, but a language not spoken outside of Flanders. This posed a problem for delegates like Gray who were posted in Flemish speaking areas. He could not understand the language of the trial. His lack of language ability was not a hindrance to his authority to be an arbiter of justice in this matter, but did make it clear that he was only serving as an imprimatur for Belgian justice. Gray was not independently passing judgment, but rather providing legitimization to the proceedings, legitimizing both the CRB's role by being the representative to hand out punishment and also legitimizing the punishment itself. If the verdict came from an American CRB official, it gave the impression of being uninfluenced by local Belgian politics.

The only thing Gray seemed to be independently judging was the Belgian character vis-à-vis trading flour for love (and that only for himself):

Despite the onward march of the Germans, Romance still lives in this saddened country. Among thirteen offenders who appeared before us today, they had wayward sons, who had stolen flour and sold it fraudulently in order to support some girl with whom they were in love.

I am inclined to think that this is a Belgian trait. The excuse seemed to impress many of the onlookers as justifying the crime.²²

²¹ Ibid., 62.

Life, of course, went on in Belgium even under the difficult conditions of occupation. This was something Gray and other delegates witnessed on a daily basis and had to account for in their work and detailed in their writings about the life in Belgium with the CRB. They could not help but be witnesses of the daily ups and downs of the Belgian people, which had an effect on their service and especially on their ideas of their place in Belgium as privileged outsiders who did not have to contend with the same daily difficulties of the Belgian people. Witnessing served as a reminder of their outsider status, enhanced, sometimes, by their use of powerful symbols of their American status: the American flag and use of automobiles.

In early 1915 the American flag was frequently flown over relief facilities and on the automobiles the Americans used to get around Belgium. The flags were used as a diplomatic symbol, but their use sometimes disturbed the Germans and Belgian elites because of the publicity it gave to the United States. In response, in April 1915 the CRB ordered the American flag to be flown only over the main CRB offices and warehouses. At other sites, Belgian or CNSA flags were to be used.²³ While the physical symbol of the United States could be limited the cultural value set of the Americans could not. It was their work, in addition to their physical symbols that coded their humanitarian activities as American-inspired. Simply removing the flags did not diminish the delegates' use of American power in their efforts to make their work effective.

The automobile served as a great representation of power for the CRB's work. Early on in the relief effort Hoover worked out agreements with the Germans that the Americans were

²² Ibid.

²³ Nash, *Herbert Hoover*, 135.

able to travel around Belgium quite freely.²⁴ Not only was the automobile an effective and necessary tool to get the American delegates to and from meetings in Brussels and to tour the food depots, their privileged use of automobiles made an impression on the Belgian people and reinforced the fact that it was the Americans who had a superior and privileged position within Belgium.

This travel was, of course, necessary for the work of the delegates. Part of their job was to visit facilities where relief goods were stored in order to keep an accurate account of what was moving through Belgium. Though the challenges delegates encountered varied, Pate provided a useful example from one such day in August 1916:

Spent the morning visiting communes. At each place I see the secretary, inspect the local food-distributing station and examine the account-books. The spirit of self-sacrifice shown by the workers in many communes is laudable—out of 82 communes in this district we pay no rent for the stores; in the majority of the communes the farmers haul the food without charge and volunteers do the distributing and keep records. This has been going on for two years, and yet the original interest and sacrifice is shown. We have two chemists working at Tournai (R. R. men temporarily out of work) who spend 10 hrs. per day at the laboratory—examining specimens of grain, flour, bread, milk—without remuneration. In many places the books are kept by young ladies.²⁵

Pate seemed to think highly of the work the Belgians did and was impressed by the continued sacrifice and the scientific nature of the Belgians at work. He followed a routine of inspection that kept him moving even when out of the car. At the stations he met with various officials and observed the activities of the Belgian workers. He mentioned the close cooperation among all those who were working together. Pate's experience, and that of other delegates, highlights the nature of the various elements of the humanitarian work: business-like and scientific, but charitable; American-led, but a Belgian undertaking; everyone—men and women—pitching in;

²⁴ Ibid., 67, 111-113.

²⁵ Pate, "Diary," Thursday [10 August 1916], 13.

near-constant activity. The American delegates embodied these values, and their presence was very visible as they moved around the Belgian countryside.

As the delegates were explicitly chosen for being a “certain type,” this active style was not only necessary for the work at hand, but for the development of their American identity in the era of the First World War. They were professionalized and worldly men, engaged with their environment for practical and productive purposes, harnessing technology and using their privilege for effective outcomes. There was a broad assumption in Anglo-American culture during the early twentieth century that the sedentary life was not only unbecoming, but also dangerous. From too little activity—proper activity, of course—could come a wasting away.²⁶ The indoors was considered the domain of women, while the outdoors was considered the men’s. In fact, Pate pointed out that “[i]n many places the books are kept by young ladies.”²⁷ Of course, that was likely due to necessity in an “all hands on deck” kind of way, but the juxtaposition highlights an attention paid to who was doing what kind of work.

As the delegates moved around, they met many Belgians. “Everywhere as we pass along in the villages,” wrote Pate, “the people come out of their homes and line the streets at the rare sight of an auto.” Both parties were struck by what was novel to them: while the Belgians watched the passing Americans, Pate registered the visual impact of war: “[a]long one street we passed, marks of August 24th [1914] were on every door—bayonet holes, cartridge holes, dents and breakage caused by forcing doors with gun-butts.”²⁸ Even though Pate was one of the later delegates to serve, the marks of war were still evident and still made an impression. The

²⁶ Michael Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 153.

²⁷ Pate, “Diary,” Thursday, 10 August, 13.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

delegates, though, experienced the war as spectacle, observed from somewhat of a distance and from the position as a neutral in a car, riding past the scars left by the Germans. For the neutral Americans, they were very much present in a war zone where the values of “rough-and-ready” American-ness and comfort with adventure played just as important a role in their levelheaded business approach to routine inspection.

Pate’s travels around Belgium in his car represented not only the power and allure of the CRB and its American-ness, but were also exemplary of his and his colleagues’ expectations of how the delegates were supposed to do their work. In Francis Wickes’s post-war narrative, he noted that the presence of automobiles contributed to “a large measure of independence” on the part of the delegate to “[make] regular weekly rounds of his province.”²⁹ These “rounds” were like those of a doctor visiting patients in need. Pate, Wickes, and their colleagues were, in effect, inspecting the health of Belgium and the Belgians’ relief activities. They were assessing the country’s vital statistics by checking the books, interviewing Belgian officials, and witnessing the post-invasion landscape. This work took the men outside their posts in cities like Tournai and Brussels and put them in communes of 500 or so people, three kilometers apart from each other.³⁰ Though the CRB was a centralized organization, the work required a freedom that fit with American self-conceptions of independence and proper use of power. “The delegate...had an office,” wrote Wickes in the summer of 1917, “but he spent little time there. His work was in his province, and whatever problems arose he had to solve them there—Brussels could not help

²⁹ Wickes, “The American Delegate in Belgium,” in *The Public Relations of The Commission for Relief in Belgium: Documents*, Volume I, ed. George I. Gay and H. H. Fisher (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1929), 481, 482. (*PR CRB I*)

³⁰ Pate, “Diary,” Thursday [10 August], 13-14.

even when he appealed to it.”³¹ Even though the delegates had a great deal of independence and their work was “in the field,” as often as once a week they all traveled to Brussels to discuss what was going on in their districts, what others were doing, and what new procedures they were supposed to follow. They also shared stories of the gratitude they received for their work, which made an impression on the Americans.

The Belgians expressed their thanks in many ways. Belgian buildings, like schools, sometimes had the American flag centered between pictures of their King and Queen.³² The Belgians also gave gifts to the Americans for the service they rendered to the Belgian people.³³ These gifts were often returned sacks, which had previously contained American flour that the Belgian bakers used. Before being returned to the Americans, Belgian women would embroider them with words and images of gratitude to the United States and the Americans of the CRB. One example consisted of two flags—one Belgian, the other American—crossed with the words “La Belgique Reconnaisante,” which translates as “Grateful Belgium.”³⁴ Years after the war, Hoover himself received a gift: a statue of the Egyptian goddess Isis, the goddess of life and motherhood. Though the CRB delegates conceived of their work as masculine and even as more important than humanitarian work with actual combatants, the Belgians delivered a feminine-gendered gift of an Egyptian goddess to say thank you. World War I changed notions

³¹ Wickes, “The American Delegate in Belgium,” *PR CRB I*, 482.

³² Larry Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium: The Untold Story of World War I* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 100.

³³ For more on gratitude, see Louis A. Perez, Jr. “Incurring a Debt of Gratitude: 1898 and the Moral Sources of United States Hegemony in Cuba,” *American Historical Review* 104, no. 2 (April 1999): 356-398.

³⁴ The Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum has a great number of these embroidered flour sacks on display and in storage. For an example see <http://www.hoover.archives.gov/exhibits/collections/flour%20sacks/index.html>

of proper service for men and women.³⁵ The CRB is an example of this. As the scale of warfare grew—in scope and duration—so too did the scale of relief. It was no longer something that could be left to charity or a traditionally feminine sphere of aid and nurturing; men had to take on the responsibility of providing organized and professionalized assistance when needed. Later in the twentieth century the United States would adopt distinct humanitarian policies (like Food for Peace) as part of its foreign policy, traditionally the purview of men.

Humanitarians as Spectators

Although the American delegates were surrounded by constant reminders of the violence of the war and engaged in the difficulty of their work, most still found time to experience life as Americans abroad. Pate, for instance, often found beauty in his surroundings. He also described moments of danger in terms of awe. In October 1916, Pate recorded in his diary an account of “a beautiful aeroplane raid during the morning. The sky was perfectly clear,” he wrote,

except for a few very high white clouds. Three allied aeroplanes flying very high—above the clouds—surveyed the district....Several bombs were dropped, bursting with a deep intonation. These were answered by a steady fire from the German guns....The greater part of the time the planes were hidden by the white clouds—reappearing now and then at clear spaces, and thus giving a very picturesque effect.³⁶

Pate’s language evoked an airshow performance as much as it did a description of an air raid. He described the bombs dropped by the Allied planes as “bursting with a deep intonation” akin to the deep register of percussion instruments from an orchestra, maybe like the one aboard the ship he sailed over to Europe on, the *Rijndam*. In the same entry he described a meeting with a German official and how expected food shortages meant more Belgians would have to eat “black

³⁵ See Watson, *Fighting Different Wars* and Gullace, “*The Blood of Our Sons*.”

³⁶ Pate, “Diary,” 16 [October 1916], 38. He has this event recorded as “July 16,” but the preceding entry is recorded as “Oct. 15th” and the following entry is recorded as “Oct. 17.”

bread,” a wartime staple that was poor in nutritional value but eaten by all classes of Belgians during the occupation. In a single entry, Pate discussed the artistic beauty of the war and the harsh reality of the lack of food. Belgium was a strange place, but an exciting one, and one where Pate and his colleagues could attach themselves to a new and developing aspect of U.S. intervention in the world. Pate’s war involved more than daily drudgery of ledgers, distribution lists, and meetings. It was also a spectacle of modern technology and a sensory experience like no other he had encountered just as he was at the formative point in his career.

The sight of the German Army impressed Pate as well. “To see them drill or make an ‘arms-at-rest,’” he recorded the day after the air raid, “is a marvel. It is a perfect machine, lacking only in individuality.”³⁷ His remark about the lack of individuality in the German action has an anti-German undertone since individuality is a hallmark of Anglo-American identity. Here Pate’s neutrality conflicted with his subjective American identity that prized individuality. Nonetheless, he was struck by what he saw. Pate demonstrated the duality of his role as a humanitarian, a provider of relief, and as an American abroad, a sightseer-commentator. For Belgians, the drilling of German soldiers represented military oppression and occupation, for Pate it was “a marvel.”

Delegates used automobiles not only for work, but for taking in the Belgian countryside either during moments of rest from work or even during travel to and from the various communes where they inspected relief operations. For instance, on a trip to Terveren, “a beautiful suburb of Brussels,” Pate remarked that “[t]he avenues of grand trees and the bordering forests are magnificent.” He also visited Louvain, where he “look[ed] over the ruined section of

³⁷ Ibid., 17 October, 39.

the town.”³⁸ Later, Pate visited Liège’s major attractions including the city’s storied churches, Parc d’Avory, Place du Theatre, Place S. Lambert, and the Palais de Justice.³⁹ These visits were part of the experience the Americans had in Belgium. It was a real place with real sights and a real history that they wanted to experience.

The American delegates were often the honored guests of Belgians, especially the elites of the country. Wickes eventually married into the relatively wealthy francophone Belgian Attout family. He served from August 1915 to June 1917, mainly in Namur province. Wickes wrote that he would sometimes “drink a glass of Burgundy with a village burgomaster, or honor a bourgeois family by dining at its table, or spend a weekend at a chateau, playing tennis with the daughters of an aristocrat.”⁴⁰ The delegates were privileged people in Belgium. By virtue of being college educated at that time, the Americans were part of a social elite in the United States, but it was not the same as the formal and official hierarchy that existed in Belgium. As members of the CRB, they were allowed to enter into the upper echelons of Belgian society even though they were not aristocratic themselves. These experiences fit into conceptions of American-ness because the qualities that made them proper members of the CRB also prepared them to interact in an effective way with Belgian elites. Even if they were not technically the Belgians’ social equals, they could meet the challenge of new social situations, just as easily as they could meet the challenge of the physical landscape of war-torn Belgium.

³⁸ Ibid., 24 August, 19-20.

³⁹ Ibid., 25 August, 20.

⁴⁰ Mariette Wickes, ed., *Love in a Time of War: Based on letters and diaries of Germaine Attout and Francis Wickes, Beginning in Belgium during the First World War, 1915-1918* (Self Published, 2013), 71.

These meetings allowed for interaction between American humanitarians and Belgian citizens in an informal manner. Germaine Attout, the eventual wife of Wickes, recorded in her diary that she and her family were “happy to have the diversion brought by the arrival of a substantial part of—America!!”⁴¹ The intimate ties cultivated in numerous conversations and social events offered the Americans distractions from their profound responsibilities maintaining Belgium’s food supply. During one such event Germaine and her family entertained a number of American delegates, although her future husband, Wickes, was not present. The Americans sang “folk songs, their Negro lullabies, and their university songs! What music!” at that dinner.⁴² Through their singing uniquely American tunes the delegates brought American culture to the Belgian people, continuing a trend in U.S. foreign relations that saw more and more Americans go overseas and share the American culture with the world.⁴³

The Americans were fascinated by such encounters, which were full of exciting discoveries. Like Pate, Wickes traveled around Belgium and embraced what the country and the people had to offer. On Christmas Eve 1915, Wickes, his fellow delegate Robert Jackson, and a Belgian nobleman attended a midnight mass at the Maredsous Benedictine Abbey near Namur with the Attout family. Wickes, a Protestant, declared it to be “a most beautiful and impressive service.”⁴⁴ The abbey was not as old as some in Belgium, but it certainly stood apart from almost anything in the United States. The liturgy, too, would have been different for him. Wickes was deeply affected by the service and confessed: “The world had completely vanished for me for the

⁴¹ Quoted in Ibid., 86.

⁴² Quoted in Ibid.

⁴³ For example, see Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

⁴⁴ Quoted in Wickes, *Love in a Time of War*, 95.

time.”⁴⁵ After Mass, Wickes dined with his hosts and talked into the early hours with “G.A.,” Germaine, his future wife.

When Wickes was transferred away from where the Attouts lived in Namur, he expressed how sad he was to be stationed elsewhere. In early January 1916, he wrote that he was “desperately homesick for Namur and lonely for G.A.,” but would soon return to Namur where he would be “supremely happy.”⁴⁶ In the short time he was stationed there Wickes had embraced Namur as his home and the Attouts as his family; he had been profoundly changed by his experiences. His desire to return to Namur is understandable. He was in love. As a humanitarian official, however, it could have been more problematic. It was hard for Wickes to practice strict neutrality when he became emotionally invested with a particular Belgian family. This is a challenge for all humanitarians who spend significant time with the people they are helping. On the other hand, they can gain great knowledge of the people and that can serve them well in helping them.

According to Wickes, one of the delegate’s unofficial responsibilities was to “[s]upport...Belgian morale.”⁴⁷ These human interactions were important, according to Wickes. “Were it not that the material relief was absolutely essential to the life of the country,” he wrote, “it might almost be said that this moral contribution meant more to the people than did the physical support.”⁴⁸ This might be somewhat of an overstatement, but it illustrated Wickes’ belief that the CRB’s humanitarian service was multifaceted and that the Americans understood their role was to safeguard Belgium in complex ways. He was explicit about the American

⁴⁵ Quoted in *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 97.

⁴⁷ Wickes, “The American Delegate in Belgium,” *PR CRB I*, 490.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

delegate's unique position within the social structure of German occupied Belgium: "The mere fact that they [the Belgians] had by their side, for the time intimately associated with their lives, one who still possessed rights, who enjoyed certain privileges, was to them [the Belgians] a comfort."⁴⁹ The Americans did occasionally act as protectors in instances where the Germans attempted to alter the conditions of the occupation, such as with labor deportations in late 1916 and early 1917. While the Americans were not always successful in protecting the civilians, the shift from a more observer status to an active role of intervention was a tension the Americans had to settle. An emotional bond formed between the Americans and the Belgians that complicated the Americans' identities as purely neutral aid givers. The CRB delegates reconciled their dual roles as humanitarians and spectators by becoming advocates for Belgium, especially in their writing in popular magazines back in the United States highlighting the CRB's work and their own experiences in war-torn Europe.

Robert Withington was another American delegate who walked the same difficult line of struggling to maintain absolute neutrality while identifying with the plight of Belgium. He served from March to December 1916, primarily in the provinces of Antwerp and Limbourg, in the Flemish area of the country. In 1921 he had a recollection of his time in Belgium privately published. In it, Withington recounted a trip he took at the invitation of a Belgian friend to the pilgrimage site of Montaigu in (Flemish) Brabant Province. In one of the abbeys he visited along the route, Withington described how the priests he met told him of the German invasion in "mediaeval [sic] surroundings of the Flemish abbey, echoed from the Dark Ages."⁵⁰ Though Belgium came into being only in the 1830s, the history of the area went back much longer than

⁴⁹ Ibid., 491.

⁵⁰ Robert Withington, *In Occupied Belgium* (Boston: Cornhill, 1921), 42.

the American history Withington knew. The war brought him and his colleagues to the Old World where they could not only bring new ideas of American involvement in the world, but could also investigate the artifacts of an ancient world while doing their work. He wandered around the grounds talking with the priests about “war, art, and music, and heard the pleasant gratitude of the priests for what America had done for *la pauvre, petite Belgique*.”⁵¹

The next day, Withington was shown around the abbey itself. His Belgian hosts displayed church vestments “embroidered with borders so fine that it seemed as if the scenes and figures thereon were painted.”⁵² The beauty and the vulnerability of the place were what struck Withington, who was acting both as a tourist and as a representative of the relief organization responsible for “saving” Belgium from further harm. “One could not help trembling,” he wrote, “at the thought that a shell might fall through the Abbey before the war ended: or, what was more likely, the Boche, in his pleasant way, might set fire to the place, having plundered it.”⁵³ Here, Withington used a slur for the Germans, a term that Germaine Attout used in her diary to describe her occupiers. Withington’s postwar recollections were no doubt colored by searing tales of the German invasion and the burning of Louvain and by the fact that Germany was the United States’ enemy after April 1917. His great concern with the cultural and aesthetic protection of Belgium when discussing his time as a humanitarian, however, exemplified the complex relationship these humanitarians formed with their work as being deeply engaged with the place and people, but also requiring some distance in order to be effective. While a trip to a beautiful abbey certainly provided Withington some physical and emotional distance from the

⁵¹ Ibid., 43.

⁵² Ibid., 43-44.

⁵³ Ibid., 44.

difficulties of the relief work, it also altered or maybe highlighted his loyalties in Belgium's favor. He blamed the Germans for Belgium's suffering, and found it impossible to remain objective and non-partisan. When remarking on the town of Aarschot, Withington wrote of the damaged town that "[a]lmost two years after the tragedy, there was nothing sinister in the ruins themselves: but when you realized they were the result of an ordered campaign of destruction. . . ."⁵⁴ He did not finish the sentence, leaving it up to the post-war reader to infer the palpable anger he seems to have felt for what had been done to Belgium before he arrived as a humanitarian. He came to see his role as protecting Belgium, its people and its places.

Since Americans were invited to and attended so many Belgian social engagements they often increased their identification with the occupied population. In a series of gestures of solidarity the Belgians and the Americans celebrated one another's national independence days.⁵⁵ Withington recounted how he and other Americans were invited to attend a Mass at the Cathedral at Antwerp where he was stationed, to commemorate Belgium's national holiday on 21 July. The Americans were seated in a place of honor behind the former Belgian governor of Antwerp Province and the city's mayor. The Mass was decidedly patriotic, ending with the playing of the Belgian national anthem, the *Brabançonne*. Withington noted that German authorities forbade the song to be played in public, but that its playing deeply stirred those in attendance, including the Americans. Though the Germans ran a strict occupation, they did not seek unnecessary fights with the Belgians. This demonstration of patriotism was one such example of when the Germans let the Belgians alone. "Perhaps we were not strictly neutral in going to the Mass," Withington wrote of the principled demonstration, "But none of us regretted

⁵⁴ Ibid., 45.

⁵⁵ Whitlock, 4 July 1915, in Allan Nevins ed., *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock: The Journal* (New York: D. Appleton Century, 1936), 174.

having gone. And if the German secret-service agents noted our presence, none of us ever heard it.”⁵⁶

Conclusion

In their daily work the American delegates engaged with not only Belgians committed to the relief work, but those who tried to skirt the laws as they applied at the time. By virtue of the delegates’ status as not only aid givers, but American ones, they meted out justice, even if that sometimes meant they were a rubber stamp. The Americans also kept up an active routine, checking on the Belgian distribution and the supplies, thus demonstrating that an active life as proposed by men like Teddy Roosevelt and Baden-Powell could apply to humanitarian affairs and not just militaristic adventure. Their American-ness allowed them to establish their authority, but over time, maintaining their composure and neutrality proved difficult for the men of the CRB as they spent more and more time with Belgians in social situations and toured the country like they would have in peace time. No matter a humanitarians’ intent and desire for some sort of “objectivity” and purely rational approach to the work, the unique circumstances in which they found themselves invariably had an impact and could change their perspective on their role in a disaster zone. Their composure and neutrality would be even more challenged when German authorities began deporting thousands of Belgian laborers to Germany in the fall and winter of 1916. CRB delegates watched uneasily as those deemed “unemployed” were whisked away, only able to save those whom they could prove were working for the CNSA or otherwise aiding the CRB in its relief endeavors.

⁵⁶ Withington, *In Occupied Belgium*, 47-48.

Chapter 4

Where Have All the Belgians Gone?: The Deportation Crisis of 1916 – 1917

The deportation of Belgians for labor in Germany began in the fall of 1916. Stories about what the Germans were doing came “like a storm approaching from the West, [and] the grief and sorrow and fear of the deportations spread over the land,” as CRB delegate Robert Withington recalled. “As yet, nothing had happened in our province [Limbourg]: but we understood that elsewhere men were being taken from good positions. ‘Quite naturally,’ said the people. ‘The Boches [Germans] don’t want the loafers and ne’er-do-weels [sic].’”¹ Withington expressed the dilemma he and the rest of the CRB faced: “It was hard not to be able to help the people, who looked to the Americans with a trust one rarely finds save in dumb beasts. But we had to remember that we were in Belgium for the *ravitaillement* alone, and that we had no interest in the deportations, unless they affected our own men.”² Withington expressed deeply held ideas of American Exceptionalism and was more than a little patronizing about the Belgians. He made an assumption that it was up to Americans to stop the mistreatment of Belgians, but he noted that there was no easy way to do it, especially if he and his colleagues wanted the broader relief effort to go on. He expressed the tension between ameliorative humanitarianism and restorative or preventative human rights. The CRB and its delegates were acting as agents of humanitarianism, not human rights, but they could also act as witnesses.

Though the Americans’ sense of “absolute” neutrality had been changing during their stay in Belgium, the German deportations of Belgian laborers—which led to increased tension

¹ Robert Withington, *In Occupied Belgium* (Boston: The Cornhill Company, 1921), 105.

² *Ibid.*, 107-108.

with the Wilson Administration—was a serious and painful challenge to their identity as humanitarians. They could step in and protest the deportation policy of the Germans and jeopardize broader relief effort or they could advocate only for those who worked for the CRB directly or indirectly in order to keep their larger mission going. The Americans had to find a way to continue their humanitarian work when the ideal of impartiality and neutrality came up against obvious and observed violations of a people's human rights. This chapter argues that though the CRB had a great deal of power and clout in Belgium, that power and clout was not absolute. The Americans had to choose when to use the CRB's influence and when to not. This chapter is partially organized by Belgian region to show that when confronted with a German policy of labor deportation, individual Americans had to exercise their own judgment in order to balance the needs of individual Belgians against the larger work of the relief effort, even though there was a general policy outline from CRB headquarters. In the end, the CRB and many individual delegates developed a cold or "tough love" approach in order to protect the broader work of the CRB. The real object was the broader humanitarian mission, even at the expense of the violation of individual human rights. The main mission was feeding an entire people. Trying to do "too much," even if it would have resulted in fewer people being sent to Germany to do work, could have harmed that broader mission. These are the difficult questions humanitarians have to ask and answer each day. The CRB chose to act in a limited fashion, and the American delegates did their best to translate that policy into effective interventions into the German deportation scheme.

In October 1916, German authorities in Berlin and Brussels upended the tense status quo governing occupied Belgium by ordering the deportation of tens of thousands of Belgian

civilians to Germany for military-related and industrial work.³ This deportation policy violated decades-old international law that forbade the “compulsion of the population of occupied territory to take part in military operations against its own country.”⁴ This action outraged international observers like the CRB, as well as many in the United States, including the Wilson Administration. This development was not an original German war aim nor was it an uncontroversial policy for German Imperial and Occupation authorities. It was, as the historian Isabel V. Hull argues, a new policy for Germany and an illustration of the wartime government’s “incremental, short-term nature of decision making, the lack of overt guiding principles, and the strength of covert assumptions.”⁵

Because the deportations were a new facet of occupation policy, the executives and the delegates of the CRB had to adapt their own decision-making, principles, and assumptions. They had to alter the existing boundaries of their humanitarian mission to incorporate and exclude those whom they could and could not prevent from being sent to Germany, while sustaining their

³ For an overview of the deportations see Larry Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium: The Untold Story of World War I* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 142-182. Zuckerman addressed the deportations in light of the difficult economic and social circumstances in Belgium and Germany in late 1916. He examined the efforts of the CRB, but he confined most of his exposition to exploration of the scope and criminal nature of the German policy. He wrote about the CRB, but only insofar as that some delegates observed and attempted to intervene. He did not address what that intervention meant for the CRB as a neutral humanitarian body and how it struggled with the criminal acts of the German occupation during an increase in tensions between the U.S. and German governments. See also Sophie de Schaepdrijver, *La Belgique et la Première Guerre Mondiale* (Bruxelles: Peter Lang, 2005), 219-230.

⁴ Article 44, “Convention with Respect to the Laws and Customs of War on Land” (Hague II), 29 July 1899. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/hague02.asp#art44 and Article 52, Section 1, “Convention with Respect to the Laws and Customs of War on Land” (Hague IV), 18 October 1907. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hague04.asp#art52. (Last accessed 20 October 2010.)

⁵ Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 233, 235.

broader relief effort. Because of the egregious and publicized nature of these actions international opinion cried out for an end to the deportations, including in the United States.⁶

Thousands of Belgians working for the CRB and the CNSA were subject to deportation, even if they had proof of employment with the CRB or CNSA. Hoover and his delegates, however, tried their best to keep those who worked with them from being deported. In some cases they succeeded; in other cases they failed. In all, they made an active choice to limit their intervention in an effort to protect the broader work. The best protection, of course, came from the eventual end of the war, made possible by the arrival of new American troops to refresh the Allied trenches.

While Hoover and his colleagues were disturbed by the German policy, the CRB judged this new issue a political problem and, thus, beyond the scope of the Commission. Hoover wrote to Whitlock in November 1916 informing him of the situation. Whitlock believed that making too much of an official protest might harm the relief effort.⁷ That did not, however, keep the delegates from paying close attention to what the Germans were doing and, when possible, intervening to save those who worked for them. The Wilson Administration eventually made a formal protest to Germany, but not until after much hand-wringing in Washington and the realization by German officials that the deportations were not only not a boon in industrial manpower, but were actually a disaster not worth continuing.⁸

⁶ “Proceedings of Meeting to Protest against Deportation of Belgian Citizens into Servitude in Germany,” at the Academy of Music, Philadelphia, PA, Sunday Afternoon, 7 1917. Belgian National Archives Library, Brussels, Belgium.

⁷ Herbert Hoover, *An American Epic*, Volume 1 (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1959), 273.

⁸ Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 240; Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium*, 179-182.

Previously, the CRB had encountered the deportation of workers in northern France in April 1916, and had been forced to formulate a response. The Germans took more than 20,000 French civilians from Lille and nearby towns and made them work on military projects in the French countryside. Many of these people, who were unfamiliar with agricultural labor, proved poor choices for such work. The policy prompted a CRB intervention that helped to end the deportations from Lille. Ambassador Gerard petitioned the German government after he met with CRB delegates, and the German government relented.⁹ The situation the Germans faced in the fall and winter of 1916 and 1917 was different. The German government decided that there was a greater need for new labor, and Belgium was going to be the place to get it. This put the American CRB in the difficult position of standing by and allowing this action to go on, or intervening and potentially harming the relief effort as Whitlock feared. They decided to not use their power to stop the German policy, but to maintain their larger relief effort. It was a cost-benefit decision that resulted in hardship for the thousands of deportees, but continued aid for millions of Belgians.

The New German Policy

From the early months of their occupation, German authorities in Belgium sought to “solve” the employment problem there. The invasion and occupation, combined with the subsequent British blockade greatly disrupted the Belgian economy, leaving many people without adequate work. Though it has been difficult to quantify the extent of the crisis, the

⁹ George H. Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover: The Humanitarian, 1914-1917* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988), 197. See also, Hoover to Lansing, 10 October 1916, in George I. Gay and H. H. Fisher, ed., *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium: Documents Volume II*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1929), 81. (*PR CRB II*)

generally accepted number is around 600,000 unemployed Belgians by October 1916.¹⁰ This was about eight percent of the total prewar population of nearly 8,000,000.¹¹

The Germans dealt with the labor situation by issuing various degrees and orders. On 19 November 1914, Field Marshal Colmar von der Goltz, the first Governor General of Occupied Belgium, ordered that any Belgian who wanted to work for the German authorities or for firms contracted with German authorities should be able to do so, and that anyone who stood in the way of freedom of employment would be “punished by imprisonment.”¹² Many Belgians refused to work, often out of patriotic feelings.¹³ Ordinary Belgian workers, or at least many Belgians who advocated for them, knew that what the Germans were doing was illegal.¹⁴ The Belgian

¹⁰ See Fernand Passelecq, *Employment in Belgium During the Occupation and Its General Causes* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1917). Passelecq was the Director of the Belgian government’s Bureau Documentaire at Le Havre, the temporary seat of the Belgian Government during the war. This edition was an English translation of a larger work by Passelecq (*Les Déportation Belges à la Lumière des Documents Allemandes* [n.d.]) that argued that the Germans deliberately fostered unemployment in Belgium for their own purposes. The pro-Belgian slant is evident, but Passelecq did quote figures from Dutch and German sources that place unemployment around 600,000 men. Passelecq stated, “No official statistics of present unemployment in the occupied parts of Belgium have been published; and nothing is more difficult to arrive at (especially during a critical period resulting from the war and the German occupation) owing to the essentially shifting character of the population affected by unemployment and to the number of relief organizations. Moreover, unemployment must not be confused with the giving of relief, as relieved persons are not unemployed workmen in all cases.” p. 1.

¹¹ For Belgian population, see Nash, *Herbert Hoover*, 17.

¹² German Decree by Governor-General von der Glotz, 19 November 1914, *PR CRB II*, 33.

¹³ Zimmerman quotes from Passelecq’s larger work, *Déportation et travail force des ouvriers et de la population civile de la Belgique occupée (1916-1918)* from 1927 that during the deportation period Belgians would shout, “We haven’t signed! We won’t sign.” Zimmerman, *The Rape of Belgium*, 157. See also Francis C. Wickes, interview with John Niven and Enid Douglass, 1 March 1967, Claremont Graduate University Oral History Program, Claremont Graduate University Library, 34, for more on the patriotic feelings of Belgians.

¹⁴ For instance, see an official translation of a letter by the Syndicate Commission of the [Belgian] Labor Party and Independent Syndicates, 30 October 1916, enclosed by Brand

Labor Party, in a letter to von Bissing on 14 November 1916, pleaded with him in both emotional and legal terms to stop the deportations: “Listen, Excellency, to these tears and these sobs. Do not permit our free and intact past to go to ruin! Do not permit human rights to be violated in its holy of holies....We make appeal to the law and humanity solemnly and with the hope of being heard.”¹⁵ Even if the intricacies of the Hague Conventions were unknown to ordinary Belgians, they did understand that they should not have to rely on German offers of work to survive. They had the CRB and their own CNSA to provide *secours* [charitable relief for those unable to pay for their food] if and when they were not working or not working enough. Many even found employment with the CNSA or the CRB. In fact, the CRB was dependent on Belgians to do the food aid distribution around the country.

This organized relief relieved the Germans of the burden of providing for the Belgians, as they were technically required to do, and helped maintain a relatively pacific population. German authorities were unable to use food to compel Belgians to behave or work according to German interests. These authorities also feared the idle masses and the potential for a recurrence of (presumed) guerilla attacks that plagued them during the Franco-Prussian War and could distract from the German strategy on the Western Front.¹⁶

Because the military stalemate on the Western Front prevented the Germans from diverting resources from elsewhere, the German government could not provide direct relief if the American-led relief work stopped. Von Bissing’s assistant, Baron von der Lancken, the head of

Whitlock to Robert Lansing, National Archives and Records Administration Microcopy No. 367, Roll 349, File No. 763.72115/2657. (NARA Microcopy)

¹⁵ Syndicate Commission of the [Belgian] Labor Party and Independent Syndicates, 14 November 1916. NARA Microcopy No. 367, Roll, 349, File No. 763.72115/2657.

¹⁶ See John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities: A History of Denial, 1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

the German occupation government's Political Department, pledged to Whitlock that the German authorities recognized that the CRB and the CNSA could work unimpeded by the Germans, pledging that "the Governor-General shall never make use of the Comité National [or the CRB] to force the Belgian population to employ itself in the service of the German Army contrary to the stipulations of the Hague Conventions."¹⁷ By the end of July 1915 the CRB and the CNSA were firmly in control of how relief was distributed to the Belgian people.¹⁸

British foreign secretary Grey made it clear to both the patron ministers of the CRB and to von Bissing that there was an "absolute minimum on which His Majesty's Government can allow [the] work to continue." One such requirement was that "there shall be no interference of any kind whatever by the German authorities either in the sale of these foodstuffs or in their free distribution in the way of relief to those whom the Commission and the Comité National shall consider deserving of such relief."¹⁹ This was the condition to which Lancken was responding. Britain controlled the CRB's blockade access. If the British closed what little access there was, the Germans would have on their hands a population that was not only idle, but also starving. This would not have been a recipe for a peaceful or productive occupation.

Von Bissing, however, still faced the problem of those who declined to labor for the Germans, as well as pressure from home to resolve the situation. Later that same summer he moved trials for "refusal to work" into military courts instead of channeling them through the

¹⁷ Letter, Lancken to Whitlock, 29 July 1915 in George I. Gay and H. H. Fisher, eds., *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium: Documents* Volume I, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1929), 64. (*PR CRB I*). Lancken also conveyed the same message to the Spanish Minister in Belgium, the Marquis Villalobar. See Letter, Lancken to Villalobar, 29 July 1915 in *PR CRB II*, 35.

¹⁸ Nash, *Herbert Hoover*, 129.

¹⁹ Letter, Grey to Page, 17 June 1915 in *PR CRB I*, 61.

civil courts as before. On 14 August 1915, von Bissing informed the Belgian public that he was reinforcing the November 1914 order: “Anyone who without adequate reason refused to undertake or continue to labor in the interests of the public, for which he is called upon by German authorities and which is in the line of his professional activity, shall be punished by detention or imprisonment for not more than one year.”²⁰ This criminalization of idle workers was technically based on an 1891 Belgian anti-vagrancy law and became the basis for the future deportation policy.

Von Bissing reluctantly implemented the policy under orders from Berlin.²¹ It was rarely enforced until the demands of the German High Command necessitated a more aggressive labor policy in the spring and fall of 1916 after the casualties resulting from major battles on the Somme and at Verdun.²² As the war intensified, German industry’s need for more workers occurred at the same time as the increased need for replacements at the front. Because the Imperial German government and the nation’s industrial sector had expected a short war, there were few “plans for a transformation of the peacetime economy to a war economy.”²³ Hence the growing need for non-German workers.

²⁰ German Decree, 14 August 1915 in *PR CRB II*, 36.

²¹ David M. Watts, ““Just Like Free Laborers But Under Police Supervision: German Forced Labor Policy in Belgium, 1916-1917 and 1942-1944”” (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 2002), 32.

²² Jens Thiel, “Forced Labour, Deportation and Recruitment: The German Reich and Belgian Labourers During the First World War,” trans. Natalie Gravenor, in *Une Guerre Totale? La Belgique dans la Première Guerre Mondiale Nouvelles Tendances de la Recherche Historique*, eds. Serge Jaumain, Michaël Amara, Benoît Majerus, and Antoon Vrints (Bruxelles: Archives Générales du Royaume, 2005), 239.”

²³ Kai Rawe, “Working in the Coal Mine: Belgians in the German War Industry of the Ruhr Area During World War I,” in Jaumain, et al., *Une Guerre Totale*, 221.

Even before the war, the German economy had utilized a sizable number of foreign workers. According to the scholar Jens Thiel, “there were approximately 500,000 seasonal workers and about 700,000 foreign industrial laborers and miners in Germany.”²⁴ German industrialists in the west and agriculturalists in the east relied on workers from Russia’s Polish possessions, Italy, and even the Netherlands. There were few Belgians, but those who obtained jobs in Germany before the war were often used in highly specialized trades like glass and mirror production.²⁵

Before looking to Belgium to fill open spots in the Reich’s workforce, the Imperial Government altered existing law in an attempt to maintain the national domestic industrial economy. In August 1914, the government suspended a series of regulations originally related to workplace safety, including prohibitions against the employment of youths between ages 16 and 19 in mines. As an example, Krupp Works provides some scope for the dilemma of the German military and German industry. Krupp employed about 35,400 workers at the start of the war, 27,000 of whom were eligible for military service.²⁶ During the time between the passage of new regulations in 1914 and 1918, the participation of adolescents in the industrial workforce increased from 15.5% to 40.5%. An additional consideration—the employment of women in

²⁴ Thiel, “Forced Labour,” in Jaumain et al., *Un Guerre Totale*, 237. Thiel’s essay in this volume is based on his 2003 dissertation for Humboldt Universität zu Berlin. See also, Ulrich Herbert, *A History of Foreign Labor in German, 1880-1980: Seasonal Workers/Forced Laborers/Guest Workers* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990).

²⁵ Ibid., 237. The number of Belgian workers in the 1910s that Thiel quotes numbers about 8,000.

²⁶ Watts, ““Just Like Free Laborers,”” 19-20.

mines—was never instituted.²⁷ The German “home front” was militarized by this time, and labor in occupied Belgium for the gain of Germany therefore became a logical extension.

The establishment of the Deutsche Industriebüro (DIB) in June 1915 was an early attempt to get Belgians to work for and in Germany. This bureau was private, but worked closely with German government officials in Belgium to acquire labor for industries located in what was then the Rhine-Westphalian area of Germany. The German War Ministry asked von Bissing in March 1915 to find volunteers for the labor effort back in Germany. The DIB, however, proved inadequate.²⁸ By October 1916—when the deportation policy went into effect—the DIB averaged 500 recruits a week for a total of “only” 30,000 over the life of the bureau—a significant number, but far fewer than the Germans required.²⁹

The situation in Germany grew dire, and casualties mounted on the Western Front; as a result in March 1916 the War Ministry in Berlin asked von Bissing to transport 400,000 laborers to Germany to work in factories, which would in turn free up able-bodied military-age men for the army. Von Bissing thought this request was unworkable because of international political and legal ramifications. Further, because he did not think deportees would make good workers, he believed the effort would, in fact, be counterproductive. Von Bissing, however, was beginning to lose support from Berlin for his more moderate measures as the military’s need for bodies began to make concern for international opinion and law seem to be luxury rather than essential policy.³⁰

²⁷ Rawe, “Working in the Coal Mine,” in Jaumain, et al., *Une Guerre Totale*, 223, note 8.

²⁸ Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 235.

²⁹ Thiel, “Forced Labour” in Jaumain, et al., *Une Guerre Totale*, 239.

³⁰ Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 235.

The Kaiser sided with his military officials and accepted the more aggressive labor policy. As a loyal subject, von Bissing obediently changed the rules for the unemployed and his occupation regime's responsibility to them. In May 1916 he ended German funding of public works in Belgian cities and towns, effectively creating more unemployed Belgians (who might, in turn, become sufficiently needy to make German employment seem more acceptable). He enforced the August 1915 decree and used his military authority to order Belgians who were unemployed and/or refused work into situations and places where they would have no choice but to work. The policy turned idle citizens into victims of international crimes as defined by the Hague Convention.³¹

By summer 1916, Germany not only had an increased need for workers, but also new leaders with a new plan: the Hindenburg Program.³² With the rise of Ludendorff and Hindenburg to the top of the military and Government, the need for labor in Germany followed directly from the new plan to “triple munitions productions by spring and to increase Germany's troop levels.”³³ Von Bissing could act against the new military leadership, especially in combination with the demands of German industrialists like Karl Duisberg of the Bayer Company who, in September 1916 wanted to take advantage of “the great human reservoir of Belgium.”³⁴ Duisberg and other industrialists hoped to tap the Belgian labor reservoir, using extreme force if necessary.

³¹ See, Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 235 and Watts, ““Just Like Free Laborers,”” 34-35. All this happened in the course of two orders by Bissing—the first on 2 May 1916 and the second on 13 May 1916.

³² The Hindenburg Program called for the militarization of German industry, and the massive increase in armaments and recruitment of men for the front.

³³ Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 236.

³⁴ Quoted in Rawe, “Working in the Coal Mine,” in Jaumain, et al., *Une Guerre Totale*, 229.

Opening Belgium to German industrial exploitation would, men like Duisberg assumed, solve two wartime problems at the same time: the need for workers in Germany and the unemployment that Von Bissing's recent embargo on public works in Belgium had exacerbated would both be ameliorated. Walter Rathenau, a government minister and chairman of AEG, a German electrical engineering firm, said that "[t]he solution to the Belgian worker problem can only be achieved by ignoring international prestige questions, so that the seven hundred thousand workers in Belgium are made available to the home market, even if it means American [relief] aid will end."³⁵ This late in the war, "international prestige" may have been of little concern to some in the German elite, but at the start of the war, one of the reasons the Germans allowed the CRB to operate was to avoid a situation where they could be blamed for letting Belgium starve by not providing the necessary relief. Most civilian and military leadership were of one mind: the need for Belgian workers outweighed all other considerations. Von Bissing, however, still demurred. Uneasy about both the implications of a forced deportation policy on morale in Belgium and its potential effectiveness, he even offered his resignation, but was refused.³⁶ Von Bissing's consistent opposition to forced labor and deportation was not necessarily either altruistic or economic, but also ideological. Von Bissing may have been a strong proponent not only of *Flamenpolitik*, but the of the eventual formal annexation of Belgium by Germany.³⁷

³⁵ Quoted in Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 236. Hull cites a note or letter from Rathenau to Ludendorff on 16 September 1916. See note 48.

³⁶ Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 236.

³⁷ *General von Bissing's Testament: A Study in German Ideals* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, Ltd., n.d. [1917/1918]). *Bissing's Testament* has a decidedly pro-Allied/Associated power bent. It reproduces a "testament" written by Bissing shortly before he died on 18 April 1917, where he discussed his ideas for Belgium and the importance the country held for Germany during and, he argued, after the war. Total control of Belgium would, Bissing argued, keep that corner of Europe away from the influence of the British and the French. As Bissing wrote on page 19, "[j]ust as was the case before the war, a neutral Belgium, or an independent Belgium based upon

Forcibly taking tens of thousands of Belgians and making them work for German firms engaged directly or indirectly with the war effort, he thought, was hardly an effective strategy to persuade the Belgian people that a post-war relationship with Germany was in their own interest. The short-term goal of labor supply, in von Bissing's mind, did not outweigh the long-term costs to a potential postwar Germany. In the end, von Bissing lost.

By September 1916, the German government tried to legally justify the deportation policy. In a meeting on 28 September, the Imperial Government rationalized any probable deportations by arguing that the mass unemployment in Belgium was a "military danger," and thus, under Article 43 of the 1907 Hague Convention, the Germans could act to "restore, and ensure, as far as possible, public order and safety." The fact that von Bissing had earlier used a Belgian anti-vagrancy law to provide justification for the criminalization of idleness covered the fact that the occupier also had to respect "the laws in force in the country."³⁸ This legal reasoning convinced the Imperial Chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, that the previous orders from May and August 1915 were sufficient to criminalize idle workers. Von Bissing, having lost both the economic and legal argument, ordered the deportations on 11 October 1916.

Implementation of the German Policy

treaties of a different kind, will succumb to the disastrous influence of England and France, and to the effort of America to exploit Belgian resources. Against all this our only weapon is the policy of power, and this policy must see to it that the Belgian population, now still hostile to us, shall adapt itself and subordinate itself, if only gradually, to the German domination."

³⁸ Article 43 of the 1907 Hague Convention (Hague IV) stated "[t]he authority of the legitimate power having in fact passed into the hands of the occupant, the latter shall take all the measures in his power to restore, and ensure, as far as possible, public order and safety, while respecting, unless absolutely prevented, the laws in force in the country." This, in addition, with the orders set forth by Bissing in previous months legalized, according to German officials, a deportation program.

Germany's new policy on Belgian labor proceeded in two overlapping stages. The first began on 3 October 1916 with the organization of *Zivil-Arbeiter-Bataillone* (Civil Worker Battalions or ZAB). According to Jens Thiel, some 62,000 Belgians were "drafted" into this domestic Belgian labor force. Though workers, the Germans saw them as civilian prisoners. They wore insignias on their clothes to mark them as such, and military guards supervised them.³⁹ The second stage, the deportation scheme, began a few days later and ended in February 1917 after some 60,000 Belgians had been forcibly taken to Germany.⁴⁰

Statistics bear out von Bissing's concerns about the ineffectiveness of forced labor. Historian Kai Rawe has demonstrated that of the 56,000 taken to Germany between October and December 1916 (the most active period of the deportations) only about 8,000 men were actually forced to work. An additional 8,000 agreed to work on a voluntary basis. Rawe cited German records stating that nearly 40,000 Belgians were not actually working; these were mostly professionals who were taken out of carelessness by the German officials back in Belgium who often made little effort to match potential laborers with the work they would be expected to do.⁴¹ The Germans needed laborers, not clerks, to work in factories. Ironically, part of their initial justification to the CRB when the policy was carried out was that they were taking specific types of workers for specific types of work. Further, German officials had hoped to leave the professional and elite class out of the deportation policy so as not to antagonize the elites of Belgian society in anticipation of the possible need for postwar cooperation. It was not supposed

³⁹ Thiel, "Forced Labour," in Jaumain, et al., *Une Guerre Totale*, 240.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 241.

⁴¹ Rawe, "Working in the Coal Mine," in Jaumain, et al., *Une Guerre Totale*, 230. (Rawe quotes the 40,000 figure from a German source cited in his work as BA; R 901/84024.)

to be a punitive policy across all classes.⁴² Rawe's study, however, demonstrates the failure of these policies.

Flemings were also treated differently from Walloons—a result of von Bissing's and other German high commanders' belief in *Flamenpolitik*, that is the effort to cater to the Germanic Flemings who were often poorer and marginalized by the Francophone-dominated elite in Belgium before the war. More Walloons than Flemings were deported, but the Flemings often endured *worse* treatment when deported, which runs counter to the logical assumptions that the more Germanic ethnicity would be treated better. Many Flemings were taken directly to the Front to build fortifications, where they often fell victim to artillery fire and gas attacks while building defenses for their occupiers.⁴³

The policy failed miserably both economically and from a public relations perspective. It tested the nerve of the Americans in the CRB and did not endear the Germans to the Belgian elites, whether Flemish or Walloon. The Americans had to confront what many in the international press termed a new “slavery,” but their options to counteract the German policy were limited.⁴⁴ This campaign for workers also harmed German relations with the United States by pushing the Wilson Administration to make a formal protest against the German Government at the same time that Wilson was seeking a way to bring about a negotiated peace.

⁴² Watts, ““Just Like Free Laborers,”” 50.

⁴³ Ibid., 70.

⁴⁴ For example, the *New York Times* published an article on 10 November 1916 recounting the Belgian government's position on the deportations, titled “Belgium Denounces Labor Deportation, Its Foreign Minister Protests Against Germany's ‘Organized Slave Trade.’” In a more comprehensive unsigned piece on 8 December 1916, *New York Times* published an article titled “Slavery Again” tying Bissing and Germany to historical precedents of slavery in the United States and elsewhere.

The deportations also took a toll on the health of the workers. Recent studies have established that 1,298 Belgians placed into ZABs died, and 1,316 Belgians deported to Germany proper perished during the deportation period—about two percent of each group.⁴⁵ Belgians who went to Germany were placed in *Verteilungsstellen* (distribution centers) or *Unterkunftsstätten für Industriearbeiter* (lodgings for industrial workers) for the duration of their stay in Germany. Some deportees also suffered malnutrition from living off of less than the official ration of 1,745 calories a day.⁴⁶ Failing to stop the deportations had a great cost, but the Americans in the CRB had limited options. They could have made a formal protest, but that would have risked the whole relief effort and put millions of lives at stake. There was no easy decision; all many Americans could do was use what little clout they had to act as witnesses to the German policy and save those Belgians most directly related to the CRB's work.

The CRB Confronts the Deportations

On 30 October 1916, Hoover, two of his senior CRB officials, Warren Gregory and Prentiss Gray, as well as Dr. Reith, an assistant to Lancken, of the *Vermittlungstelle* (German Communications Center) met to discuss the requisition of the Belgian unemployed. After four

⁴⁵ Mark Spoerer, "The Mortality of Allied Prisoners of War and Belgian Civilian Deportees in German Custody During the First World War: A Reappraisal of the Effects of Forced Labor," *Population Studies* 20, no. 2 (2006): 129. Spoerer cited figures from Fernand Passelecq, *Déportation et travail force des ouvriers et de la population civile de la Belgique occupée (1916-1918)* (New Haven: Dotation Carnegie pour la paix internationale, 1927), 398-9. Jens Thiel cited "about 900" in "Forced Labour," in Jaumain et al., *Une Guerre Total?*, 241. Hull cites official Belgian and German statistics that, understandably, differ. The Belgian statistics see between 3-4% while the official German statistics see 1.8%. See Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 240.

⁴⁶ It should be noted that the current daily requirements for an active, adult male between the ages of 19 and 50 range between 2,800 and 3,000 calories a day. See "Food Intake Pattern Calorie Levels" from the United States Department of Agriculture, http://www.mypyramid.gov/professionals/pdf_calorie_levels.html (Last accessed 27 October 2010)

hours Hoover declared, “Hell, logic is useless. Let’s go,” and they left the meeting.⁴⁷ Reith, representing the German headquarters in Belgium, had described the requisition of labor as a “paternal act,” according to Gray, a senior official in the CRB. Reith argued that the Belgians working in Germany would be better off than those who stayed in Belgium, even those employed by the CRB or the CNSA. “We had come,” wrote Gray in his diary, “not to argue the moral or political side of this question, but only to insist that the 55,000 [Belgian] employees of the Commission for Relief should receive some card from the German government which would exempt them from this service.”⁴⁸ Reith, however, did not believe having those Belgians do relief work in Belgium was the most effective use of their labor. They “could work much more efficiently at their former trades,” he argued, “and, consequently, should be forced to employ their hands or minds to the highest point of efficiency by working for the German Government at the trade which they knew best.”⁴⁹ The two parties had mutually exclusive positions that could not be resolved.

Though the morality and even the politics of requisitions were not lost on Gray, Hoover, or other American CRB officials. It was often at the forefront of their mind. Gray pointed out in his diary that the primary concern of this group of elite CRB officials was the practical issue of protecting 55,000 Belgians and not the 600,000 or so unemployed. Saving those 55,000 would allow the relief to continue for the rest of Belgium. This was a telling indication of the difficult choices this group of humanitarians faced when confronted with this new German policy. These deportations were a serious threat to the Belgian relief program: the British threatened to reduce

⁴⁷ Prentiss Gray, 30 October 1916, “Fifteen Months in Belgium: A CRB Diary,” Gray Family Papers, 192.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

or stop food shipments, and numerous pleas to the Wilson Administration by Belgians, the British, and even vocal American citizens (including former President Theodore Roosevelt and the powerful Cabots of Massachusetts), brought the U.S. government even closer to the brink of hostility with the Germans.⁵⁰

Hoover sought Whitlock's help: "I fear it is the beginning of the end," he wrote, and "this is a great[er] issue to the Belgian people than anything since the invasion and they look to you as to America for some strong action."⁵¹ Once again, the American underwritten status of the CRB was in play. In order for the CRB to continue operating, they needed to look at themselves as Americans and to American representatives to secure their work. They saw their work as being contingent on their connection to the United States and their identity as Americans. A few days later, on 11 November, Hoover rebuffed a German request for help in setting up the regulations, stating that "[t]he matter is now in discussion between the American Legation in Brussels and the American Embassy in Berlin and, in consequence, it would be entirely wrong of me to intervene in any way."⁵² Here Hoover sought to distance himself from whatever formal policies his government was extolling. Hoover had a different project in mind: maintain the CRB's independence and agency in Belgium. Though he was personally horrified at the Germans actions, it was not his place to intervene in the larger political fight. Whitlock, too, was uneasy about making a "ringing protest" and noted in his diary on 9 November that he knew "there would be plenty of blaze, if I were to do such a thing [as to make an official protest], but little

⁵⁰ See, for instance, Percy [UK Foreign Office] to Hoover, 20 October 1916; *PR CRB II*, 47. Percy outlined what the CRB could and could not do, mainly reinforcing the requirement that no Germans have access to food meant for the civil population of Belgium.

⁵¹ Hoover to Whitlock, 8 November 1916, in *PR CRB II*, 49. See also Nash, *Herbert Hoover*, 198.

⁵² Hoover to Bruhn, 11 November 1916, in *PR CRB II*, 50.

glory.” “No,” Whitlock continued, “it is not the time for hysterics, or for plays to the forgetful gallery.”⁵³ While Whitlock did not fully approve of the German tactics, in October he wrote that he had opposed the original policy of providing unlimited relief to the idle men of Belgium, concluding that while the German policy was “harsh,” it was “not surprising.” Given this pessimistic assessment, Whitlock chose not to push the issue over the deportations. He was nonetheless sufficiently concerned to keep up a steady stream of correspondence with Washington regarding the Belgian predicament.⁵⁴

Hoover knew that he and the Commission had limited options. Even if he chose to not publically challenge the Germans, he still chose to report on them to the State Department.⁵⁵ He asked, however, that his name and the role of the CRB as a de facto sort-of listening post be kept quiet and hoped to leave the political condemnations to prominent politicians in the United States and other neutral nations.⁵⁶ The CRB, however, had to find a way to navigate these new political dynamics even if Hoover and his officials refused to partake in the general condemnation. NGOs are often in this position. They serve as witnesses of not only the humanitarian catastrophe they are seeking to alleviate, but also to any human rights violations that may occur while they are

⁵³ Brand Whitlock Diary Entry, 9 November 1916, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock: The Journal*, ed. Alan Nevins (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1936), 318. See also Nash, *Herbert Hoover*, 198.

⁵⁴ Whitlock Diary Entry, 21 October 1916, *Journal of Brand Whitlock*, 306.

⁵⁵ Hoover to Lansing, 10 October 1916, *PR CRB II*, 60. Hoover wrote a letter to Lansing reporting on the earlier Lille Deportations as well as subsequent notes and letters to Whitlock and other official U.S. officials whom he hoped would make a more formal protest.

⁵⁶ See Nash, *Herbert Hoover*, 198-199 and Hoover to CRB New York, 20 November 1916; *PR CRB II*, 59 and Hoover to CRB New York, 24 November 1916; *PR CRB II*, 60. In these telegrams, Hoover made it clear that he found the policy reprehensible, but that “open action from us as such would jeopardize other protection which we can give the Belgian people through the Relief,” *PR CRB II*, 60.

there. Whether or not they should maintain their distance or act as de facto reporters is an important decision.⁵⁷

By the last week of December—after the requisition policy had been in effect for about two months— a restrained CRB policy had become as codified as it could be. A report prepared for the CRB’s Department of Inspection and Control noted that “[i]t is not within the realm of the duties of the CRB to protest against the general seizure of Belgians, but when it finds that the Ravitaillement of Belgium is endangered, by the fact of the requisition of its own personnel, it then feels that it should make vigorous protestation.”⁵⁸ Here the official policy of the CRB was being set down. There was a role for CRB delegates to protest, but not just at the sight of any Belgian being taken. The protest had to be connected to the relief effort in some way. This policy required a good deal of individual initiative and restraint on the part of the American CRB delegates. If challenged by the Germans, they would have to have a very good reason and explanation for why a particular Belgian was necessary for the relief effort.

In his history of the CRB, Tracy Kittredge described the actions of the Germans as well as the CRB’s reaction accordingly: “These deportations had the gravest influence on the work of the Commission in Belgium, and had it not been for the position which the Commission had come to enjoy, as a result of two years’ activity, the whole of the Belgian relief work would probably have been instantly stopped by the allied governments.”⁵⁹ That a card with the imprint

⁵⁷ The ICRC is sometimes put into this position. It is an investigative organization, but often does not publicize its findings. Rather, it works confidentially with national governments to seek remedy to any adjudged violations.

⁵⁸ [N. A.], “General Report on the Requisition of Men to Date,” 30 December 1916, CRB Collection, Box 85, Folder 1, Hoover Institution Archives, Palo Alto, CA. Also published in *PR CRB II*, 63.

⁵⁹ Tracy B. Kittredge, *The History of the Commission for Relief in Belgium, 1914-1917* (London: Crowther and Goodwin, [n.d.]), 344. This is from a “Proof Copy” found at “The Internet

of the CRB's name and the signature of the American delegate could, in some cases, stop the requisition of individual Belgians bore testament to the status and power of the humanitarian mission. That power, however, was not always respected, and many delegates had to intervene personally to bring back a man taken wrongfully. Sometimes, even with intervention, the deportation would occur anyway. In the end, the Germans deported about 1,000 Belgian CRB and CNSA workers.⁶⁰

In striking terms, Kittredge described how, in some instances, Germans showed disdain for CRB efforts to protect relief-employed men. "But the Germans in the provinces who carried out the deportations paid little heed to these cards or to the assurances given to the Commission, he wrote; "In some places they openly showed their contempt for the Commission by tearing up the cards and deporting practically all men who bore such cards. This happened at Arlon and other places in the Luxembourg [Province], and also in certain places in Namur and in other provinces."⁶¹ Kittredge painted a damning picture, and in some cases he was right, but in others—particularly in the key port city of Antwerp—the Germans did respect the cards and the intervention of the Americans. It remains to be understood why some Germans respected the cards and some did not.

Kittredge regarded the deportations as illegal and as a darker moment of the German occupation and his time in relief work. As he wrote,

The Americans, who sometimes were allowed to be present at these requisitions of men, probably never witnessed more pathetic spectacles than those that occurred at the times

Archive" of the University of California at
<http://www.archive.org/details/historyofcommiss00kittrich>. Last accessed 2 November 2010.

⁶⁰ Herbert Hoover, *An American Epic: Introduction, The Relief of Belgium and Northern France, 1914-1930*, Volume I. (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1959), 282.

⁶¹ Kittredge, *History of the CRB*, 355.

of these deportations. They never realized so fully the impersonal cruelty of the German military regime and their helplessness to render effective service to the Belgian people in this hour of great need. Certainly the memory of those scenes in which husbands were torn from their wives, fathers from their children, at the point of the bayonet, and shoved on to a train for an unknown destination will not soon fade from their minds.⁶²

The impression made by these deportations did indeed remain with many of the delegates and may have turned them even more anti-German than they were before. The Americans' neutrality in Belgium was sometimes at risk of fading or ending when confronted with what they deemed unacceptable behavior by the Germans. Francis Wickes, who was serving in Namur at the time of the deportations, retrospectively looked back over 50 years of German history and deemed them "atrocities."⁶³ "I was present," Wickes remembered, "for the purpose of protesting against some of these transactions where the young men were brought in by the soldiers and put into confined areas and then loaded like cattle into freight cars and carried off to Germany for forced labor;" the references to standard descriptions of deportations from the Second World War are inescapable.⁶⁴

While the outrage then and later on the part of CRB officials was clear and often expressed in letters and reports, the day-to-day policy of the CRB worked itself out through trial and error. Hoover's delegates faced a situation that they never planned for or expected.

The CRB could not avoid being front-and-center in this new situation in Belgium. The clout earned by the Americans through their work and experiences in Belgium made them, in the grandiloquent words of Maurice Pate, "the headquarters of the Ministerial Protectorate of the

⁶² Kittredge, *History of the CRB*, 355.

⁶³ For more on the parallels between the World War I and World War II deportations in Belgium, see Watts, "Just Like Free Laborers."

⁶⁴ Francis C. Wickes, interview by John Niven and Enid Douglass, 1 March 1967, Claremont Graduate University Oral History Project, Claremont Graduate University Library, 34.

United States and Spain; the arbiter for the enforcement of the International laws of the Hague; and a general cure for all evils.”⁶⁵ Pate made this remark in early October 1916 because a Belgian relief official told him about “a working man who has been forced to assist in some work (such as the making of an aviation field) for the military authorities and seeks intervention.”⁶⁶ Pate was a man of influence and power in Belgium. He was accorded this power and influence by his American citizenship and work with the CRB. The Belgians saw this and, from time to time, sought help from the Americans beyond what their mandate was. Little did Pate realize at the time that he and his fellow CRB delegates were at a crossroads. They were about to construct a new set of relationships and take on a new humanitarian effort just before their work in Belgium would end.

A few days later, on 11 October, Pate recorded that “30 men from Tournai and Templeuve, who had refused to work on the aviation field, together with Mr. Wilbaut (échevin [city councilor] of the town) were conducted as prisoners to the station and started on their way to Germany. A new poster placed today announces more serious penalties unless the necessary workmen are forthcoming.”⁶⁷ Even though the actual procurement, transport, reception, and distribution of food—the CRB’s *raison d’être*—was at this point well-founded and efficiently run, for men like Pate the “biggest question now [was] the wholesale requisition of civilians for forced military work.” While it is unknown if Pate was able to help the Belgian worker from the previous week, he insisted that he “successfully intervened in the case of a very devoted worker for the CRB and his commune.” Pate also described how trucks, already loaded up with men

⁶⁵ Pate, “Diary,” 5 October 1916, 34.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 36.

from the small villages outside Tournai proper, had passed through the city. The Belgians rarely volunteered to work for the Germans. When asked, they usually refused, as Pate wrote was “always the case,” and then were forced to work by the German authorities.⁶⁸ The Belgians considered it their patriotic duty to refuse to work for the Germans even if it meant contributing to the unemployment rate that in turn pushed the hand of the Germans to deport more and more people for forced labor.⁶⁹

If a Belgian town or commune refused to aid the Germans in their policy, the army often fined the town, while still requesting worker lists. Part of the German policy involved requesting a list of the unemployed from the town elders and town councils. Often, however towns did not have accurate lists. In other cases the lists were held by the CNSA, and the local leaders either refused to ask the CNSA for the lists or the CNSA refused to hand them over. The city of Tournai near the French border was fined 200,000 marks on 23 October and given six days to pay the fine and hand over the list of the unemployed. Pate noted in his diary that, “[it] is generally believed that the town will refuse to pay, and suffer the consequences no matter how severe.”⁷⁰

Tournai did pay its fine, but continued to refuse to provide a list of unemployed men, so the Germans assessed additional fines of 25,000 francs a day. The Germans then threatened to take all men between the ages of 17 and 30. The standoff between the desperate Germans and the proud Belgians continued. Tournai saw many of its town elders deported, and others with whom Pate worked closely kept clothes packed lest they be called to present themselves to German

⁶⁸ Ibid., 40.

⁶⁹ On the patriotic duty, see Wickes’ interview, Claremont Graduate University, 34. See also Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium*.

⁷⁰ Pate, “Diary,” 23 October 1916, 42.

officials.⁷¹ Pate and his colleagues could do nothing to stop the process, but they could try to intervene when possible, distribute identity cards to Belgians signifying that they were indeed necessary to the relief work, and act as a witness.

Many CRB delegates became arbiters of who was “employed”—and therefore eligible for protection—and who was not. They elevated one set of Belgian citizens above others in a simultaneous effort to save as many people from being deported to work in Germany as they could, while also continuing to secure the broader relief work. Indeed, the danger to the relief effort was palpable. Work in some places in the Province of Luxembourg had to be curtailed because too many Belgians were taken, and relief work could not go on effectively.⁷² As important as the Americans were, the Belgians themselves were important to the work. It was in the Americans’ interest to save as many Belgians who worked on relief programs not only for human rights concerns, but also for the practical work of the relief effort. When the delegates could not stop a deportation it also impacted the Belgians’ view of the Americans. Whitlock recorded in his journal that “the Belgians now detest the Americans as much as anybody, because the United States does not go to war over the deportations!”⁷³ While the United States would not go to war over the deportations, the CRB did try their level best to keep some Belgians from being forcibly taken to Germany.

Who Got Cards

⁷¹ Ibid., 45.

⁷² “Extract of Report for the Department for Dec. 16th to 30th 1916; Memorandum Destined for Baron Von Der Lancken on the Requisition and Deportation of Persons Connected with the Work of the CRB and the CN,” [n.d. ca. December 1916], Joseph C. Green Collection, Box 6, Folder Deportation of Men Document #3, Hoover Institution Archives.

⁷³ Whitlock, 20 January 1917, *Journal of Brand Whitlock*, 345.

While the Americans could not stop every deportation, they came up with a plan to try to stop the deportation of those Belgians who worked for the relief effort. In early November 1916, Hoover wrote to the German Headquarters detailing the instructions from his office to the delegates regarding the CRB-issued cards to indicate who should not be considered unemployed and, thus, subject to deportation. The cards were given to “members of provincial, regional, and local committees; regular employees of the magasins, oeuvres, and soup-kitchens; employees in mills and factories who work exclusively for the committee; [and] employees on the docks who are continually and exclusively in the service of the CRB or CN[SA].”⁷⁴ It was Hoover’s hope that these would be enough to keep the Germans from taking some Belgians.

Hoover sought permission to distribute additional cards—possibly of a different color and wording—to bakers and carters who were “still vital to the ravitaillement” even though they did not work directly for the CRB or CNSA.⁷⁵ His argument was based on the fact that the flour the bakers and others used was one way or another controlled by the CRB. Since “[t]here is no other flour in the country,” he wrote, those workers had to be protected too.⁷⁶ The rationing of cards that provided some protection from deportation was outlined from the top, but was implemented by individual CRB delegates. For the most part, delegates witnessed the same German actions across the country, but it is useful to look at how the system of deportation and protection played out in different provinces. Looking at how the deportations and protections played out in the different provinces underscores how CRB delegates, while working for one

⁷⁴ Herbert Hoover to Deutsche VERMITTLUNGSSTELLE, 11 November 1916, Green Collection, Box 6, Folder Deportation of Men Document #3 Correspondence with the Vermittlungsstelle, etc., Hoover Institution Archive.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

organization and in one country, had to often work independently and adjust to unique situations in their area of activity without oversight from Brussels. The CRB recruitment strategy of men with practical minds and a spirit of adventure was put to the test in these final few months of the Americans' service in Belgium.

Antwerp Province

The experience of Gardner Richardson in Antwerp Province in the Flemish north of Belgium helps illustrate the power of the CRB. In the midst of the German deportations, Richardson reported to his superiors in Brussels that “[t]he CRB employment cards that have been issued have been uniformly respected and as yet we have no cases to report of CRB employees having been taken to Germany.”⁷⁷ A few days later, however, Richardson reported that the Germans seemed ready to take some skilled Belgians who had CRB cards. Through direct intervention, Richardson was able to have one of two men released.⁷⁸ A personal visit from the CRB delegate made the difference. Over time, many delegates made sure that they were present and ready to intervene when the Germans entered a town for deportations.

⁷⁷ Gardner Richardson to CRB Office (Brussels), 15 November 1916, Green Collection, Box 6, Folder Deportation of Men, Document #1, Hoover Institution Archives. In Box 6 there are three separate files each noted as “Deportation of Men” with “Document #1,” “Document #2,” and “Document #3” found within. These files contain reports by the Department of Inspection and Control regarding the deportations and, especially in the case of folder “Document #1” dated and individually signed reports by individual delegates. Some of these reports from folder “Document #1” can be found in *PR CRB II*, 51-57. Some of these reports found in the Green Collection were incorporated into a memorandum by Warren Gregory dated 20 November 1916 while others were ongoing updates on the situation in the provinces.

⁷⁸ Richardson to CRB Office (Brussels), 22 November 1916, Green Collection, Box 6, Folder Deportation of Men, Document #1, Hoover Institution Archive.

The German policy seemed uneven and often random. Richardson reported that the Germans were “taking men they wish, without regard to the status of employment.”⁷⁹ In this way, the policy was punitive against Belgium. For instance, the Germans did not take a man earning 1.50 francs a day, but did take a man who was earning 24 francs a week. Germans took men who presented the same or similar certificates of employment, leaving many families in great hardship.⁸⁰ This happened less in Antwerp, however, than it did elsewhere.

The CRB feared that giving out too many CRB cards would result in problems for the CRB, CNSA, and the Belgians in general. As of 29 November, Richardson reported, his office had issued about 1,130 CRB cards. They were given out only to those who had “actually been asked to present themselves for control [by the Germans].”⁸¹ This was one attempt to control how many cards were in circulation. These cards, backed by the power of the American-run CRB, were valuable and too many would have diluted that power, hampering not only the Americans’ clout, but also their actual work if too many necessary Belgian workers were taken to Germany.

In early December, the head office of the CRB asked Richardson to inform them of Belgian CRB or CNSA workers whom the Germans had taken. Richardson had happy news to share: “We can report that we have only two cases in the Province of Antwerp.”⁸² The two men, Joseph Ludovicus’t Servranckx and Gustave Van der Linden, had already left for Germany when their cases were presented to Richardson. Servranckx, a 17-year-old brewer boy who had worked

⁷⁹ Richardson to CRB Office (Brussels), 30 November 1916, Green Collection, Box 6, Folder Deportation of Men Document #1, Hoover Institution Archive.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Richardson to CRB Office (Brussels), 8 December 1916, Green Collection, Box 6, Folder Deportation of Men Document #1, Hoover Institution Archive.

with the CNSA since March 1915 was taken on 16 November. Richardson did not fight for this young man; “He had already departed when his case was taken up,” the CRB delegate reported, and “in view of the others being released, we agreed with the German Authorities, to let the matter stand.”⁸³ Seventeen other men with CRB cards had up to this point been commandeered by the Germans and released after the intervention by Richardson. The Germans took the other man, Van der Linden, a 31-year-old workman, on 30 November. His case came to the attention of Richardson only after he had already left for Germany.⁸⁴ If the delegates were not quick in making their interventions, they would likely “lose” a Belgian to the Germans who should not have been taken.

As the deportations continued, the Germans became stricter about whom they would release. In late November the Germans informed the CRB and the Belgian population that anyone who could not prove that they were employed *before* 15 October 1916 would be considered a *chômeur* (an unemployed person) for the purposes of the deportations. This was an attempt on the part of the Germans to decrease the number of exemptions and increase the pool of potential laborers for deportation and to make sure the CRB were not now distributing the cards just for the protection of other Belgians, rather than for their “real” employees. It also illustrated the shifting playing field CRB delegates had to work on. The rules of the game kept changing.

Richardson soon encountered the newly strict guidelines. The 17th, 18th, and 19th of December were singled out for an inspection by the Germans of the unemployed citizens in the Antwerp Province town of Malines (Mechelen, in Dutch, and the seat of the Catholic Church in

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Belgium). Richardson reported back to Brussels that he was allowed to be at the station to give a kilogram of bread to each workman sent off to Germany. The Germans, Richardson reported, asked that the CRB provide “2,000 breads for the three days.”⁸⁵ Instead of preventing the deportation, he was being asked to facilitate the situation. The Germans were taking advantage of the CRB’s mandate—keep the Belgians fed—for their own political purposes.

For this round of deportations, Richardson issued 143 CRB cards. On the first inspection the Germans accepted 110 cards. The cards were not accepted for the 33 men who had only begun to work for the CRB or the CNSA after 15 October or who had switched their employment from the Belgian government to the CRB or CNSA. Richardson went directly to the German authorities and was able to convince them to “accept all of our cards.”⁸⁶ The Germans, however, were scarcely pleased to let 33 potential workers go. (They were under quota orders from their high command.) The Germans “considered the list excessively large and asked that it be reduced for the next control...in January.”⁸⁷ Richardson indicated in his report that he would discuss this matter with the Malines CNSA Committee “to see if the number of cards cannot be reduced, and only cases of absolute genuiness [sic] and continuous service, be accepted by the CRB for protection.”⁸⁸ Here, Richardson gave in to the pressure of the Germans. Richardson made a difficult choice, but one that was in line with CRB policy: save those who could be saved for the greater good of the relief work.

⁸⁵ Richardson to CRB Office (Brussels), 17 December 1916, Green Collection, Box 6, Folder Deportation of Men Document #1, Hoover Institution Archive.

⁸⁶ Ibid. Emphasis in the original.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

Richardson's willingness to limit the number of cards and impose restrictions on who could get them exemplified the protective approach to the CRB's authority. It made sense for the Belgian-run CNSA in Antwerp's cities and towns to want to stretch the pool of exempt workers, but Richardson—in an area of Belgium that was relatively well ordered—sought to provide protection, albeit at a minimal cost to the larger authority of the CRB. Using the CRB, it seems, as a holding pen for the unemployed to dodge the deportations ran counter to the aboveboard mission of the relief organization, even if it meant losing a number of Belgians to the German war machine in violation of international law.

Brabant Province

While there seemed to be some coordination and respect in the Antwerp Province, such was not the case elsewhere. From the American and Belgian perspective, the Brabant Province saw more violation of standards. By mid-November about 59 CRB workers had been taken. The local CRB official informed Brussels that twenty men working for the CRB or CNSA had been deported and an additional 39 were taken before CRB cards could be distributed.⁸⁹

Robert A. Jackson, a CRB delegate in the Brabant Province, reported what had happened in Court-Saint-Étienne. Jackson spent most of the day in the town observing the Germans and the Belgians. He noted that the men were brought in without any women and children. Those who claimed illnesses were examined and either released or moved down the line closer to deportation. The Belgian men presented themselves to the Germans. They presented their papers

⁸⁹ List Nr. 1, Undated, Green Collection, Box 6, Folder Deportation of Men Document #1, Hoover Institution Archive.

and were “on the whole very decently treated by the Germans.”⁹⁰ The workers, however, “were usually too frightened or confused or embarrassed to be very intelligent.”⁹¹ Within occupied Belgium the Germans held the most power and the Belgians understood that. So did the Americans who were constantly trying (and not always succeeding) to negotiate the best possible outcome for the often frightened, confused, or embarrassed Belgian workers.

Jackson attested that “[t]he Germans certainly really tried to take the young and unmarried men without employment rather than others.”⁹² This good faith effort, however, did not always last because “toward the end of the list, when perhaps they [the Germans] were afraid they would not get as many men as required, they took a number of factory workers, for whom their employer Mr. Henricot, gave assurance that they were regularly employed.”⁹³ In Jackson’s opinion, the Germans rationalized that men like this were taken because the local town officials did not provide lists of the unemployed like the Germans asked.⁹⁴ In that case Jackson viewed the Germans as trying to blame the Belgians for their own deportations.

In the case of Brabant, those who were wrongly taken by the Germans did not necessarily fare as well as others had elsewhere. Jackson reported that two workmen who were employed with the CRB and had CRB-issued cards were taken by the Germans anyway. He protested to the German officials, but he elicited little sympathy: “[the German officer] said we were lucky that so few were taken, that no one is irreplaceable, and that he had no instructions concerning our

⁹⁰ Robert A. Jackson to CRB Office (Brussels), 15 November 1916, Green Collection, Box 6, Folder Deportation of Men Document #1, Hoover Institution Archive.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

cards.”⁹⁵ This was in stark contrast to Richardson’s experience in Antwerp where the local German authorities explicitly told him that the CRB cards would be respected.⁹⁶ It is clear that the instructions regarding protections for CRB- or CNSA-employed Belgians were inconsistent at best or neglected by individual Germans at worst, and there was no real coordinated policy that everyone followed. Jackson went on to further describe the confusion in Court-Saint-Étienne on 15 November:

It appears that in the town, where the men collected before being marched to the filature, there was a bureau [...] where the cards we had given were taken away, and a stamp ‘Kreis Nivelles’ put on the carte d’identité of those who had had our cards. I am told that certain men, having obtained this stamp, went away without presenting themselves at the filature. The others came along with the crowd, and thanks to the stamp, were allowed to go free.

A few, however, whose attention was not drawn to the bureau in the town, failed to obtain the ‘cachet,’ arrived without it, but were still provided with their cards given by us. The officers seem to have been somewhat at a loss as to the proper procedure in such cases. My belief is—tho [sic], I have no proof as I did not see them taken—that the two men taken by the Germans were of this class. (Cf. the civil commissar’s statement that he had no instructions concerning these cards.) Of these two men, one was later released....⁹⁷

Jackson’s report posited a conclusion. He reported back to his headquarters that there had been orders to respect the CRB cards “but they had not been communicated to the officers making the actual selection of men.”⁹⁸ Beyond the dubious justifications and need for the policy, the disorganization on the part of the German officers indicated the desperate nature of the regime. It

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Richardson To CRB Office (Brussels), 12 November 1916, Green Collection, Box 6, Folder Deportation of Men Document #1, Hoover Institution Archive.

⁹⁷ Jackson to CRB Office (Brussels), 15 November 1916, Green Collection, Box 6, Folder Deportation of Men Document #1, Hoover Institution Archive.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

also demonstrated the difficulty the CRB faced by having to adapt to not only new policies, but also new interpretations of orders and laws adapted by the Germans for their own purposes.

Jackson concluded that while some German officers made an attempt to mark only young men who were unemployed and without families, others did not. “These decisions in these matters seemed more or less arbitrary,” reported Jackson.⁹⁹ His impression of the whole project was that “the officers had orders to take so many—1,000 I believe—men, and that when they thought too many were being let off, they felt obliged to take a larger proportion of those who presented themselves, workers or not.”¹⁰⁰ This need for a quota demonstrates the pressure subordinate German officers felt to meet specific goals set by the German high command in Belgium and back in Berlin. The local conditions and the relationship with the CRB, in this instance anyway, took a backseat to the needs of the industrial military machine fighting for the fatherland a few miles to the west of where Jackson and other CRB delegates were witnessing the taking of Belgian men of all employment statuses.

A few days later, on 29 November 1916, Jackson found himself taking a personal interest in the case of two employees of the Belgian Cantine. He reported back to Brussels that these two men were called to the Kommandantur told and that unless they wanted to be sent to Germany they needed cards from Jackson and they must have “on the back a statement of the date on which these men entered the service of the Comité, signed by [Jackson], and with [his] ‘cachet’ added.”¹⁰¹ Here again a date became critical to indicate when the potentially employed Belgian began to work for the CRB. This reference to specific dates was certainly used by the Germans

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Jackson to CRB Office (Brussels), 29 November 1916, Green Collection, Box 6, Folder Deportation of Men Document #1, Hoover Institution Archive.

to seem less arbitrary in their selection and to attempt to prevent the CNSA or the CRB from providing “cover” for unemployed Belgians and keeping them from being deported. The fact that the Germans indicated that they would be abiding by the protection the CRB cards offered—at least on the surface—indicates that the CRB still carried some weight in these matters and that the Germans needed to find semi-legitimate ways around the protection offered by the CRB and its American staff.

Tournai Region (in Hainaut Province)

Unlike in other provinces, Maurice Pate in Tournai did not issue official CRB cards, but left it up to the local committees to provide proof of employment. As he reported on 23 November 1916, “I have decided, in accord with the Regional Committee....not to issue cards of protection.”¹⁰² Pate worried that by accommodating the many requests for cards he would “flood the region with a large number of protection cards.”¹⁰³ If too many cards went into circulation the possibilities for forgeries or even a black market would increase, and thus dilute the CRB’s protection and its power more generally. Instead, Pate had each local committee issue certificates. These were Belgian-produced and Belgian-backed documents that indicated the status of the potential deportee. To Pate, these certificates would “make sufficiently clear the essential fact, namely, that the men are occupied and not chômeurs.”¹⁰⁴

“In event of non-recognition of the certificate in the case of a man who had devotedly served the ravitaillement or who is indispensable to the service, we reserve for ourselves the right

¹⁰² Pate to CRB Office (Brussels), 23 November 1916, Green Collection, Box 6, Folder Deportation of Men Document #1, Hoover Institution Archive.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

to intervene at the final moment to ask the release of the person in question.”¹⁰⁵ In Pate’s articulation of policy, the CRB would be the defender of last resort, and CRB intervention would come in the form of a personal visit by the American delegate. He was not going to give blanket protection to everyone. “The plan of making a collective arrangement,” wrote Pate, “to exempt from requisition all the members of the ravitaillement system, appears to me to be unfair and not exactly judicious.”¹⁰⁶

This narrow conception of fairness raised an interesting question of who exactly was necessary to the work of the relief. Pate asked in his report whether or not employees of yeast factories, for example, should be accorded protection since yeast is necessary for the bakers who bake CRB-regulated bread.¹⁰⁷ Pate even gave an example of some corruption among the local committees: “In every Comité Local of 6 or 8 men, one or two carry the responsibility of all the work. In this way a large number of men who render no service to the ravitaillement are protected. We have the case of a certain CL in which, since 1 October, fathers have allowed themselves to be replaced by their sons, so that the latter might cover themselves.”¹⁰⁸ Pate did not want people cheating the system. That could possibly do more to harm the relief effort. The easy granting and assumption of CRB protection could very easily diminish its real power, especially when it became truly necessary to free a man who was wrongly deported. He also seemed to see this method as a way to protect the primary work of the relief effort.

Pate continued in his report, “To preserve the integrity of the ravitaillement force, which is our real object, is best done by exerting all influence at the necessary time for this smaller

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

number of men. In the meantime, every employee has his certificate of employment from the President of his CL: if, in spite of this, he is requisitioned he does no more than stand on the same basis as employees engaged in other work.”¹⁰⁹ He also took a pessimistic view of how faithful the Germans would be to any system of protection: “We know further that when requisitions begin on such a whole scale as to cripple the ravitaillement service, they would undoubtedly be made in spite of any protective system in force.”¹¹⁰ Pate seemed to want as much flexibility as possible to counter any new actions by the Germans. Case-by-case intervention was, for him, the most effective way to deal with questions of fairness and protection for those Belgians associated with the work he was overseeing, and it seems he had great independence in implementing CRB policy.

Hainaut Province

All over Belgium the delegates deepened their roles as protectors of Belgians associated with the relief work. In a report by John A. Gade, he and other CRB representatives in the province of Hainaut, “Messrs. Tuck, Carstairs, [and] Donald Gregory,” were “whenever possible” present at any deportation activity and they did “our utmost to protect our men.”¹¹¹ Gade also described what he and others in his group saw. He wrote that in Mons, in particular, men were taken regardless of their work status; trains stood ready to deport the men immediately; women were prohibited from seeing their husbands, fathers, and sons during the process.¹¹² It seems that

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ John A. Gade to Joseph C. Green, 28 November 1916, Green Collection, Box 6, Folder Deportation of Men Document #1, Hoover Institution Archive.

¹¹² Ibid.

these deportations had the effect of “killing” small, local industries. Gade reported that “[f]rom the glass works at Jemappes which are the only works of their kind in the arrondissement more than ½ of the best workers were taken....In the instance of this Glassworks, the industry has practically been killed.”¹¹³ The German deportations were, in effect, self-perpetuating. If the Germans were deporting Belgians because they were not working, then taking them from industry that was in fact still operating meant that those industries came to a halt, thus, creating more unemployed Belgians to be deported.

Luxembourg Province

On 4 December 1916, Joseph C. Green, the head of Inspection and Control for the CRB, went with a colleague to the College of St. Joseph in the town of Virton in the southwest corner of Belgium. They arrived around 7:30 in the morning and proceeded to the inspection spot. The Germans running the process told Green and his companion that they could “intervene each time a man presented himself with a CRB card.”¹¹⁴

Green reported that he was “very politely received.”¹¹⁵ In his recounting, the Germans had a very limited understanding of the relief work. Green explained why they were there and the Germans responded by saying, “[w]e have no need of bookkeepers.”¹¹⁶ Of course, the relief work involved more than just bookkeeping, especially for the Belgians who did most of the

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Joseph C. Green, “Memorandum for the Director, Requisition of Men at Virton, Dec. 4th 1916,” 6 December 1916, Green Collection, Box 6, Folder Deportation of Men Document #2, Hoover Institution Archive. [The document is initialed by a JCG. On other documents JCG clearly represented Green.]

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

actual work of distribution. The Germans did tell Gade that “[s]ome of your laborers may be taken but these you will be easily able to replace.”¹¹⁷ Some Germans evidently did not think very highly of the Belgians or their association with the CRB.

Green also stressed the personalized nature of these deportations. In the town of Arlon so many relief workers were taken that it completely disrupted the work of the CRB—something that he, Green, was trying to avoid by his presence in Virton. The German in charge said that the event was a “special case.”¹¹⁸ The officer stated that the local relief committee “refused milch [sic] to a woman” under the assumption that she was German.¹¹⁹ The German in charge was then “treated rudely” when he inquired about the situation and “naturally [he] had the men sent to Germany when the opportunity presented itself.” “Nothing of the kind,” he stressed, “will happen in Virton.”¹²⁰ This personal and emotional investment in the deportation was striking. While the policy was ostensibly to keep order and to provide labor resources back in Germany, it cannot be ignored that in some cases, punishment was meted out not only in the form of financial retribution, as in Tournai and elsewhere, but in the targeting of individuals to be deported. Indeed, this incident amounted to the unintended punishment of a local relief committee’s work. Whether the woman denied milk was a German remains unknown, but the German official who insisted on this harsh deportation was perfectly at peace in explaining his decision to a CRB official. Even though the German occupation was one of relative peace and the CRB provided a modicum of protection, life in Belgium was a tense affair. In this way, Green was acting as a humanitarian

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

witness of German actions and their impact on the Belgian population, an important role for a humanitarian, especially if one's ability to directly help is limited.

Later, another German officer approached the Americans and demanded that they move down the line of tables set up. As Gade and his companion complied, they were told to keep moving until, finally, they were told to “[c]lear outside the gate!!! Go home!!! Go home!!!”¹²¹ Once ousted, Gade could not be sure how many exempt men were taken. He guessed 14.¹²² The Germans were very much in command during the deportations. Gade appended an addition to his official report that details an even more desperate scene: “The requisition was carried out with a brutality surpassing all description. The men were herded like cattle and were roughly handled by the soldiery.”¹²³ He even depicted German soldiers hitting some of the women who managed to witness the deportation.¹²⁴ When the Americans could not serve as protectors, they served as witnesses to the actions of the Germans just as humanitarians continue to do to this day.

While some deportations were troubling, others were less so. For instance, Oscar T. Crosby reported to Warren Gregory on 7 December 1916 that when he informed the Germans that four men with CRB cards had been taken, the Germans “expressed surprise but agreed to look for the men among those taken. Having found them they were liberated.”¹²⁵ This marked another example of the varied experiences that the deportations engendered and the disparity in

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Oscar T. Crosby to Warren Gregory, 7 December 1916, Green Collection, Box 6, Folder Deportation of Men Document #2, Hoover Institution Archive.

how the Americans observed the Germans and Belgians at this time and, when possible, intervened to save those they could.

Conclusion

The Germans finally ended the deportation policy in February 1917 after it became apparent that it was not working. But before its termination, the German policy challenged the CRB's conception of its mission. The American delegates not only witnessed violations of human rights and international law, but a challenge to their very real effectiveness when the Germans took people who were supposed to be under the CRB's care.

For the CRB delegates, they confronted a new situation with some direction from their headquarters in Brussels, but with inconsistency on the part of the Germans. For the most part, each delegate defined the boundary of his humanitarianism in line with the policy from Brussels and Hoover, but also retained a significant amount of independence when it came to individual cases, though protective actions still sometimes proved ineffective. In making the choices they did, CRB delegates tried to ensure that they could maintain some power for the CRB, even though it meant letting Germans deport great numbers of Belgians.

While Maurice Pate's quip about being a "minister protector" carried a great deal of weight, it only went so far when new political necessity overtook old political requirements of allowing the CRB to work unimpeded. While the CRB was still respected by at least some of the Germans it had lost some of its power in that it could not intervene as it had at the start of the war to prohibit German interference. Soon, however, with the entry of the United States into the war as a belligerent, the Americans would have to withdraw and it would be up to American military power to help end the war and, thus, end the German occupation.

Conclusion

Relations between the United States and Germany continued to worsen in January and February 1917 over the Germans' resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare and the disclosure of the Zimmermann Telegram to the Wilson Administration by the British government. While this was going on, Herbert Hoover and his colleagues began to make plans on how to wind down the CRB. Hoover had already thought about this in the spring of 1915 after the sinking of the *Lusitania*. He decided then that he would turn over the internal Belgian relief work that the Americans were doing to the Dutch, but that he would maintain control over the shipping and financial effort outside Belgium.¹ He knew that once relations between the United States and German governments were severed, the Americans would have to withdraw. Their citizenship would have become a liability rather than the asset it had been at the start of the relief mission. As hard as Hoover and the delegates worked to create and maintain a non-state and independent organization, the political realities of national citizenship remained. Though the Americans drew on both their legal recognition as American citizens and the subjective cultural values of their American-ness to make their work with the CRB possible, the period of 1914-1917 was still state-centric and, thus, citizenship would trump cultural power and even a deeply held and proved humanitarian impulse.

While the CRB would continue under Spanish and Dutch protection in Belgium, its original staff had to leave. A person's relationship to his state still mattered in whether or not they could participate fully in a humanitarian mission once their state of origin became a political or military actor in the larger disaster at hand. Their background, too, as members of that state

¹ George Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover: The Humanitarian, 1914-1917* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988), 315.

and national culture—in the case of the CRB, American-ness—impacted how and why they did the humanitarian work that they chose to do. In addition to providing humanitarian relief, the humanitarians of the CRB and, indeed, humanitarians of any stripe acted as agents of national power—in this case American power. With its entry into World War I, Americans began to exercise their country’s power in a more traditional manner, through the military.

The men of the CRB, however, helped to present an alternative form of American intervention during the First World War era, that of humanitarian relief. They changed from being “just” adventurous young men with a desire for service, to being well-trained humanitarians, associated with a man, Hoover, who would be able to call upon them to serve in other relief-oriented activities in the decades to come. Even as Americans would lead other relief endeavors around the world in their private or semi-private capacity, the U.S. government would eventually adopt food relief as a tool of direct American foreign policy later in the century. But before any such alternatives could make their way into the American foreign relations tool kit, American work in Belgium had to be wound down.

In February 1917 Hoover and some of his senior staff members, notably William B. Poland, debated whether or not it should only be the Dutch to take over the CRB’s responsibilities in Belgium or whether the Dutch, Spanish, and, in Poland’s original proposal, Danish nationals, should take on the work. Hoover now wanted the American relationship with the CRB to end completely because he thought the Americans would want to fight for the United States and he wanted to be free to serve in a new capacity.² In the end, however, Hoover decided to maintain his relationship with the CRB and its American connection outside of Belgium so

² Ibid., 316.

that it could have some influence in Belgium after the war ended.³ He also allowed for both Dutch and Spanish officials to take on the responsibility of supervising the relief effort in Belgium. Hoover returned to the United States in the spring and took up his position as head of the newly formed Food Administration. In this role, Hoover was responsible for maintaining a constant food supply from the United States to Europe for American, British, and French troops. With the slogan, “Food Will Win The War,” Hoover marshaled the American people to conserve food with “Meatless Mondays” and “Wheatless Wednesdays.” He would continue his efforts with food policy and famine relief for many more decades.⁴

The American delegates who had to leave Belgium in April and May 1917 traveled out of the country to Switzerland for a brief quarantine before traveling to London and then back to the United States, where many would join the American Expeditionary Force and serve once again in Europe with the U.S. military. Their work, however, with Hoover and other humanitarian efforts did not end with the war. They formed a group of “Hoovermen” who engaged in other American-led food relief endeavors in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s.⁵

American involvement in World War I changed the United States’ relationship with the rest of the world. The United States ended its long-standing policy of leaving European politics alone, and because of American involvement with Belgian relief and then fighting in the trenches, the United States established itself as a necessary actor on the world stage, even if its citizens and politicians wanted to avoid too much international political or military involvement in the 1920s

³ Ibid., 325.

⁴ For more on Hoover’s work with the Food Administration, see Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover: Master of Emergencies, 1917-1918* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996).

⁵ Hal Wert, “Hoovermen: Working with ‘The Chief’ for Polish and Finnish Relief, 1939-1941,” unpublished manuscript, in author’s possession.

and 1930s. That did not stop Hoover and his former CRB colleagues from working around the world to bring American food and relief to problem spots. Immediately after the war, Hoover served as Director General of Relief in Europe and led the American Relief Administration (ARA), a congressionally sanctioned relief agency that helped central Europe and especially Poland recover from the war. Maurice Pate and others served in Poland for the ARA, and beginning in 1921, Hoover's ARA provided relief services in Soviet Russia.⁶ Here, again, Hoover and a relief agency he organized transcended dicey political problems such as the United States' non-recognition of the Soviet Union.

When war broke out in Europe for a second time, men who worked with Hoover like Pate, Hugh Gibson, and other former CRB delegates like F. Dorsey Stephens and William H. Tuck joined relief efforts in Finland and Poland.⁷ Their work would have made the influential American publisher Henry Luce very happy as he called for more direct United States intervention in the world, especially in his 1941 "The American Century" essay.⁸ Though Luce was an advocate for military intervention, he indicated that a humanitarian component would go a long way to maintaining an "American Century."

Not only was the CRB successful in its mission to feed Belgians, it cultivated a group of men who would further an image of America as a nation of humanitarians and humanitarian

⁶ Bertrand M. Patenaude, *Big Show in Bololand: The American Relief Expedition to Soviet Russia in the Famine of 1921* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002). Jennifer Polk, "Constructive Efforts: The American Red Cross and YMCA in Revolutionary and Civil War Russia, 1917-1924," Ph.D. diss. (University of Toronto, 2012).

⁷ Wert, "Hoovermen"; Wert, "Hoover, Roosevelt and the Politics of Aid to Finland during the Winter War, 1939-1940" in *World War II: A Fifty Year Perspective on 1939*. Robert W. Hoeffner, ed. (Albany, NY: Siena College, 1992): 89-112; and Wert, "U.S. Aid to Poles under nazi Domination," *The Historian* 57, no. 3 (Spring 1995): 511-524.

⁸ Henry Luce, "The American Century," *Diplomatic History* 22, no. 3 (Spring 1999): 170. Originally published in *Life Magazine* on 17 February 1941.

action. After World War II, President Truman asked Hoover to undertake a fact-finding mission in Germany to assess the food needs there. The best example is, again, Pate. His career in international humanitarianism peaked when he became director of UNICEF in 1947, serving until his death in 1965. Soon the United States government would adopt food aid as an explicit part of its Cold War foreign policy with PL 480, named the Food for Peace Program by President Kennedy. Even today, TV advertisements often present the use of the American military as a “global force for good” and highlight the Navy’s humanitarian missions around the world.⁹

By the time the Americans left the CRB’s service, those who served went from being adventurous “good” American men to seasoned humanitarians ready for action if and when called upon by U.S. policy makers to act on America’s behalf for humanitarian ends. Their work with the CRB helped establish the United States and its citizens as leaders in humanitarian service. While the Old World powers fought, this group of Americans found a way to interject American power by using their official neutrality as citizens and their American-ness for a constructive humanitarian purposes in Belgium. This history of the American delegates of the CRB evinces a history of American action in the world that drew upon the country’s power, culture, and people to provide aid in a time and place when the history of the world looked bleak and nation-states were focused on destruction. The CRB and its work was, to quote the historian Garry Clifford, “a Hoover alternative” and an example of how individual Americans offered a path for the exercise of American power that was new and different, just as the United States was emerging on the world stage.

⁹ “America’s Navy: A Global Force for Good (Version 1), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h3wtUCPWmeI> Last accessed, 3 July 2014.

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