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Justice Behind the Lines: Prisoners of War, Military Justice and Reprisals in the First World War

Introduction

In November 1915, Non-Commissioned Officer (*Vizefeldwebel*) Fritz Pätzel of the German Schutztruppe fell into British hands following the Battle of Banyo in Cameroon.[1] According to his captors, Pätzel's African attendant was in possession of "dumdum" bullets with slit or otherwise altered lead tips designed to expand upon contact and significantly increase the damage inflicted upon the target. The 1899 Hague Convention expressly prohibited the use of dumdum bullets, and the British quickly assembled a military court in the field to try Pätzel. The court found Pätzel guilty and sentenced him to death. However, the commander of the Allied forces in Cameroon, British General F.G.H. Cunliffe, commuted Pätzel's sentence to twenty years penal servitude when it could not be determined if the captured German had actually used the prohibited ammunition in battle.[2] Pätzel proclaimed his innocence and protested his treatment as a war criminal, and German authorities demanded that his case be reconsidered. As a result, a judgment handed down on the battlefield in Cameroon rippled across the sea and set to motion reprisals that led to the imprisonment of eight additional prisoners of war, none of whom had any involvement with Pätzel's alleged crime.

This chapter analyses Fritz Pätzel's conviction in the field and the reprisals that followed. It demonstrates that during the First World War, military justice proceedings involving prisoners of war did not occur in a judicial vacuum. The standard of reciprocity governed the treatment of prisoners of war held around the globe.[3] Captors were aware that the treatment of their own soldiers in enemy

1 Pätzel is also referred to as Patzel, Betzel, and Petzel in British communications.

2 Abschrift zu M.1082/16.A.1, Nachtrichtenoffizier beim Stellv. Gkdo. X.A.K, "Aus einem Tagesbefehl des Brigade-Generals F.G.H Cunliffe. Kommandierender General der verbündeten Streitkräfte von Nordkamerun, datiert Banjo, 9 November 1915," Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde (hereafter BABL), R 901 85165.

3 Matthew Stibbe has made this point regarding civilian internees, and the same holds true for military prisoners of war. Mathew Stibbe, "Civilian Internment and Civilian Internees in Europe, 1914–1920," in *Captivity, Forced Labour and Forced Migration in Europe during the First World War*, ed. Matthew Stibbe (London: Routledge, 2009), 49–81.

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prison camps would be shaped by their handling of the prisoners in their possession. If the German military systematically mistreated prisoners of war, German soldiers in enemy hands would accordingly suffer. This understanding served as a buffer against the widespread exploitation of enemy prisoners. The standard of reciprocity impacted legal proceedings involving prisoners of war as well. Any seemingly unjust verdict handed down in an enemy military court would influence a captor's approach to legal proceedings against prisoners of war in their charge. Although prisoners were subject to their captors' codes of military justice, reprisals carried out by a prisoner's home army could alter or nullify verdicts handed down in enemy territory.

Reprisals have been used throughout history to limit the enemy's authority, including its ability to prosecute and punish prisoners of war. When the British, for example, attempted to try 23 naturalised Americans of Irish descent for treason following their capture at sea in 1813, American authorities imprisoned in close confinement an equal number of British captives. The move initiated a series of counter reprisals that ended with the captured Irish-Americans facing no charges and being classified as prisoners of war.[4] Reprisals continued throughout the nineteenth century and, although delegates at the 1907 Hague Conventions recognised the dangers posed by the practice, they "clearly viewed reprisals as an essential deterrent against the violations of the laws of war . . ."[5] In her work on international law in the First World War, historian Isabel V. Hull has argued that reprisals "hit the innocent, rather than the guilty; they used methods otherwise held to be illegal; they were hard to distinguish from mere revenge; and they could lead to vicious spirals of counter-reprisal."[6] Pätzel's conviction and the subsequent reprisals resoundingly confirm Hull's observation. The attempt to alter a judgement handed down in Africa led to the imprisonment of innocent British and German prisoners of war, and their confinement took a significant toll on their mental and physical health. Reprisals created cycles of mistreatment that were both physically and psychologically abusive to prisoners. In one case, reprisals intended to rectify a perceived injustice had lethal consequences.

Reprisals were effective, but officials and the public found it difficult to accept measures that adversely affected innocent prisoners. Reprisals are often de-

4 Graham Bower, "The Laws of War: Prisoners of War and Reprisals," *Problems of the War*, Vol. 1, Papers Read before the Society in the Year 1915 (2015): 29.

5 Neville Wylie and Lindsey Cameron, "The Impact of World War I on the Law Governing the Treatment of Prisoners of War and the Making of a Humanitarian Subject," *The European Journal of International Law* 29.4 (2019): 1338.

6 Isabel V. Hull, *A Scrap of Paper: Breaking and Making International Law during the Great War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 277.

signed to "provoke a public backlash."[7] The court of public opinion significantly impacted the fates of prisoners caught in the reprisal actions discussed here, as the fear of public criticism prompted officials to bring the situation that began with Pätzel's capture to a conclusion as quickly as possible. In the eyes of the British public, Pätzel's guilt or innocence was of little concern if his continued imprisonment placed innocent prisoners of war in danger. Focusing primarily on the British use of and response to reprisals against prisoners of war, this chapter shows that military justice systems of the First World War were often shaped by external factors, and sentences could be revised by reprisals, public opinion, and pressure from the international community.

1 Fritz Pätzel and the Origins of Reprisals

Non-Commissioned Officer Fritz Pätzel was stationed in the German colony of Cameroon when the First World War began in August 1914. With a wealth of ivory and cocoa, Cameroon was Germany's most economically significant colony.[8] The responsibility for protecting German economic interests and white settlers in the German colonies fell to the Schutztruppe. The Schutztruppe was designed to perform policing duties, but by 1913 German authorities realised that it may be necessary for the organisation's soldiers to defend Cameroon from external forces. Cameroon, after all, was largely surrounded by territory occupied by either the British or French. Despite efforts to better equip the Schutztruppe, the forces remained inadequately supplied and lacked experienced European officers. Pätzel and his fellow German officers, as well as their African recruits, were therefore ill-prepared for an extended conflict when war came to Cameroon in 1914.[9]

The British, French, and Belgians experienced setbacks, many of which stemmed from their lack of coordination, following their initial military operations in Cameroon. By the autumn of 1915, they had nonetheless pushed Schutztruppe forces into several entrenched mountainous positions, including Banyo. German forces at Banyo doggedly defended themselves from behind stone fortifications high on the mountain. The British forces led by Frederick H. Cunliffe faced considerable obstacles while fighting their way up the slope, including the scarcity of drinking water, heavy rainfall, and boulders rolled down the mountain

7 Wylie and Cameron, "The Impact of World War I," 1339.

8 Sebastian Conrad, *German Colonialism: A Short History*, trans. Sorcha O'Hagan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 42–45.

9 Strachan, *The First World War in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 20–25.

by Schutztruppe.[10] The British had nonetheless made significant gains by 6 November 1915, and with German supplies running critically low, Pätzel and his comrades prepared to leave those unable to travel behind, abandon their positions, and retreat into the bush. According to a British account, "the enemy, completely demoralised, had broken up into small parties, and aided by darkness and the din of the tempest, had wormed their way down the mountain only to be taken by our mounted infantry patrols on the plain below."[11] It was during this attempt to flee the mountain that Pätzel fell into British hands.

At the time of Pätzel's capture, his African attendant was carrying the noncommissioned officer's sporting weapon and dumdum bullets for hunting game. The use of such bullets in war violated international law and the British sentenced Pätzel to death at a field court martial on 7 November 1915. According to official prisoner lists, Pätzel was convicted of "having in his possession, while on active service against British troops, a bandolier filled with ammunition . . . of a nature to cause grievous and unnecessary wounds & suffering to the enemy, contrary to the Hague Convention."[12] Since it could not be proved that the illegal ammunition was used against British troops, General Cunliffe commuted the sentence to 20 years penal servitude. The other prisoners from the group were transported to the coast where they boarded the *S.S. Appam* for transport to prisoner of war camps in the UK, but Pätzel was initially imprisoned in Lagos in West Africa.[13]

Pätzel's comrades insisted that his use of dumdums was "out of the question" and the German government claimed that troops were under strict orders to only use such ammunition for the purpose of taking down wild game.[14] A half dozen of Pätzel's fellow soldiers attested that the dumdums were used only for hunting. As one of the men captured with him testified, "we were dependent on the game

10 Strachan, *First World War*, 51–52; E. Howard Gorges, *The Great War in West Africa* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1916), 239.

11 Gorges, *The Great War in West Africa*, 239–40. Gorges erroneously claims that the Germans surrendered on 6 December 1915 rather than 6 November 1915.

12 "Seventy-Seventh List of German Prisoners of War: Prisoners of War Interned Outside Europe and Egypt," ICRC Digital Archives, accessed 20 June 2025, https://grandeguerre.icrc.org/en/List/4530423/935/1376/. See Pätzel's prisoner identification card, accessed 20 June 2025, https://grandeguerre.icrc.org/en/File/Search/#/1/1/245/4530423/German/Civilian/Patzel. Note that Pätzel is incorrectly classified as a civilian rather than a combatant.

13 Testimony of Vize-Wachtmeister Wellensiek, Bünde, Germany, 16 March 1916, Abschrift zu No. M 497/16 A 1., BABL R 901/85165.

14 Kriegsministerium, Unterkunfts-Departement, Berlin, 3 September 1917, to the Königliche Bayerische Kriegsministerium, Munich, Nr. 3988/8.17.U5/3/. Bayerisches Kriegsarchiv, MKr 1688; War Cabinet Minutes No. 63. Appendix III.

that we shot for food."[15] German authorities believed that Pätzel's sentence was handed down by judges in Cameroon "who may have acted under the influence of the moment."[16] Schutztruppe soldiers taken prisoner with Pätzel alleged that he was not allowed to speak during his trial nor given the benefit of defence counsel. From the outset, the British willingness to reconsider the case was clouded by external factors. Pätzel's comrades reported having been told that his punishment was a response to a harsh sentence handed down to a British prisoner of war who had struck a German officer at the Döberitz camp in Brandenburg.[17] This oft repeated but unsubstantiated claim was incorporated into the official German narrative.[18] From the German perspective, the harsh sentence handed down to Pätzel was in itself an act of reprisal.

German representatives requested that Pätzel be given a new trial away from the battlefield. The British transferred Pätzel to Maidstone Prison in Kent, England to serve the remainder of his sentence, but the British Foreign Office believed that Pätzel's field court martial had been legitimate and based on "conclusive" evidence.[19] In August 1916, Viscount Edward Grey's office informed American officials, who served as neutral intermediaries in prisoner of war affairs, that the British were unwilling to conduct new legal proceedings for Pätzel.[20] With Pätzel serving out his time at Maidstone, the British Foreign Office's decision represented a significant obstacle to his transition from criminal to a prisoner of war. German authorities, however, remained capable of pressuring the British to reconsider the judgment against Pätzel.

In January 1916, the German merchant raider *SMS Möwe* captured the British steamship *SS Appam*—the same vessel carrying Pätzel's captured comrades to England. Along with its German prisoners, the *Appam* carried both military and civilian passengers. British Lieutenant A.E.B. Lamble of the Royal Naval Reserve

15 Testimony of Tönies Wellensiek, Detmold, Germany, 24 March 1916, Abschrift zu No. M 497/16 A1, BABL R 901/85165.

16 Van Vredenburch, Netherland Legation, British Section, Berlin, to Walter Townley, British Legation, The Hague (Copy), 12 April 1917, The National Archives, London (hereafter TNA), FO 383/295.

17 See the testimonies of German prisoners taken with Pätzel. "Gegenwärtig Vice Konsul Dr. Kraske, zur Vernehmung von Zeugen und Abnahme von Eiden ein fúr allemal ermächtigt," 31 May 1916, BABL R 901 85165.

18 Der Staatssekretär des Reichs-Kolonialamts, Berlin, to the Staatssekretär des Auswärtigen Amts, Berlin, 15 March 1916, Nr. M.435/16 A.1/5353, BABL, R 901/85165.

19 War Cabinet Minutes No. 63, Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W., on Monday, February 12, 1917 at 5 P.M., Appendix III, 7. TNA CAB/23/1/.

20 The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, London, to the United States Charge d' Affaires, London, 5 August 1915 (Copy), 0.150399/121S/P., BABL R 901/85165.

had boarded the vessel in Douala, Cameroon in order to return to England after suffering from sunstroke. When the *Möwe* closed in on the *Appam*, Lamble reportedly sought to take on the German raider despite being outgunned. Only the presence of civilians onboard his ship convinced him to surrender without a fight. The Germans claimed the *Appam* as a prize and sailed the vessel, along with its civilian passengers, to the United States. Most of the German prisoners taken in Cameroon served as occupying crew on the *Appam* during its voyage to North America. One of the liberated prisoners, T. Wellensiek, joined the *Möwe*'s crew and returned to Germany, where he provided an eyewitness account of Pätzel's ordeal.[21] The British Lieutenant Lamble was given the opportunity to offer his parole not to take up arms against Germany and travel along with the *Appam*'s civilian passengers to the U.S. He declined the offer, insisting that "he wouldn't for anything forfeit the right to have another knock at the Germans when the chance came . . ."[22] The British public lauded Lamble as a defiant hero for his exploits on the *Appam*, but the fallout from Pätzel's conviction would cause Lamble to question the wisdom of having refused to offer his parole.

The Germans took the military personnel on the *Appam* aboard the *Möwe* and later interned them in prisoner of war camps in Germany, with the officers being sent to the Clausthal camp in the Harz mountains. In the months that followed, German military authorities were informed that Lieutenant Lamble and Captain W.T. McGuire Bate of the Duke of Wellington's Regiment were carrying dumdum bullets in their baggage when taken from the *Appam*.[23] In view of the sentence handed down to Pätzel, German military authorities felt "obliged to institute judicial proceedings against" Bate and Lamble. They transferred the two men from Clausthal to the fortress prison at Spandau in December 1916.[24] At Spandau, Bate and Lamble were to be denied the privileges afforded to captive officers and be treated as common criminals while awaiting trial. The German military was aware that retaliatory actions could impact prisoner treatment. In May 1915, First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill had labelled captured German submariners as war criminals and confined them to military detention barracks rather than prisoner of war camps. When Churchill refused to transfer

21 Testimony of Vize-Wachtmeister Wellensiek, Bünde, Germany, 16 March 1916, Abschrift zu No. M 497/16 A 1., BABL R 901/85165.

22 "A Moewe Victim: Lieutenant's Experience-Man who was life of Appam," *Belfast Telegraph*, 16 March 1916, pg.3.

23 War Cabinet Minutes No. 63. Appendix III.

24 Memorandum re. Sergeant Major Petzel, Captain Bate, Lieutenant Lamble, TNA, FO 383/295; Quote in Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, to the Königliche Niederländische Gesandschaft (Abteilung für Britische Angelegenheiten), 29 March 1917, Nr. IIIb 12069/46914, TNA F) 383/295.

the submariners to camps, German authorities placed multiple British prisoners under "officers arrest." A series of reprisals ensued, but by June 1915, the Admiralty determined that its detention policy could not be justified in light of the damage done to the affected British officers. Germany's methods had achieved the desired effect. From that point forward, the British held submariners as prisoners of war.[25]

From the German perspective, the imprisonment of Bate and Lamble paralleled Pätzel's treatment and was therefore just. Neutral representatives from the United States and the Netherlands regularly transmitted information regarding the cases against Pätzel, Bate, and Lamble. Jonkheer van Vredenburch of the British section of the Netherland Legation in Berlin echoed the Germans' position, writing "the measures adopted by the German Government against Captain Bate and Lieutenant Lamble in transferring them to Spandau were absolutely in keeping with the procedure adopted by the British in the case of sergeant major Petzel [sic]."[26] In both cases, prisoners accused of violating the same article of the Hague Conventions were confined under similar circumstances. The charges against Bate and Lamble were driven by Pätzel's conviction, though, and should be seen as a retaliatory action. German authorities never contradicted the British claim that Pätzel was in possession of dumdum cartridges, but they maintained that the bullets were intended for hunting. The British Foreign Office flatly denied that Bate or Lamble were carrying illegal ammunition and stated that "there was never a single soft-nosed bullet in the possession of any British soldier of policeman."[27] Lamble claimed that he had no weapons or ammunition on his person at the time of his capture. Yet he confessed that he had a "12 bore sporting gun and some shot for it" in his cabin aboard the *Appam*.[28] Captain Bate's wife recalled that her husband had taken a sporting rifle to West Africa, and she concluded that if dumdums were found among his belongings, they would have been intended for hunting.[29] The British War Office privately made a similar point. While stressing that the Germans had provided no proof that illegal ammunition

25 Brian K. Feltman, *The Stigma of Surrender: German Prisoners, British Captors, and Manhood in the Great War and Beyond* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 57–59; Heather Jones, *Violence against Prisoners of War in the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 83–87.

26 Memorandum re. Sergeant Major Petzel, Captain Bate, Lieutenant Lamble, TNA, FO 383/295.

27 The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, London, to the United States Charge d'Affaires, London, 5 August 1915 (Copy), 0.150399/121S/P., BABL R 901/85165.

28 Lieutenant A. Lamble, Spandau, to his mother, 23 December 1916, (Copy), in Elias Lamble, North Shields, to W.J. Evans, London, 23 February 1917, TNA FO 383/295.

29 War Office, London, S.W., to the Secretary of the Prisoners of War Department, Downing Street, S.W., 19 Feb. 1917, 0103/9776 (D.P.W.), TNA FO 383/295.

was found in Bate's and Lamble's luggage, its representative reasoned that "[in] any case, they had been serving in West Africa, and if these bullets were in their possession, the chances are that they had them for sporting purposes."[30]

2 Reprisals Against the Innocent

The guilt of Bate and Lamble was unproven, but British authorities privately admitted that it was possible for the men to have possessed dumdum bullets for hunting. The British reaction to their imprisonment represented an escalation in the use of reprisals by exposing innocent prisoners to physical and psychological hardship. In response to what transpired with Bate and Lamble, the War Office determined to select two German prisoners of similar rank, neither of whom had been accused of using dumdum ammunition, and treat them in the same manner as Lamble and Bate.[31] The selected prisoners were to be dressed in prison clothing, denied the right to smoke or receive packages, given limited correspondence rights, receive standard prison food, and not "excused from degrading work."[32] In an internal memorandum, the adjutant-general recommended that the Germans be informed that if Bate and Lamble were to be found guilty and executed, two German officers would be executed as well.[33]

In February 1917, the British selected two prisoners of "good social standing," Captain Hans von Rauchhaupt of the Prussian 1st Reserve Infantry and Naval Lieutenant Kurt Gebeschus, by lot. The men were removed from their prison camp and transferred to the Bodmin Naval Prison on 6 March.[34] Von Rauchhaupt had been captured on 14 July 1916 at Bazentin Ridge during the Battle of the Somme. By the time of his capture on the Western Front, von Rauchhaupt had been awarded the Iron Cross on two occasions.[35] Lieutenant Gebeschus was taken prisoner with a shell wound to his left arm following the sinking of the SMS Blü-

30 War Cabinet Minutes No. 63. Appendix III.

31 "Extracts from Minutes of War Cabinet, No. 53. Feb. 13, 1917," TNA F 383/295.

32 R.H. Brade, War Office, Department of Prisoners of War, to the Under Secretary of State, Home Office, 16 February 1917, 0103/9776, TNA FO 383/295.

33 War Cabinet Minutes No. 63. Appendix III.

34 War Office, London, S.W., to The Secretary of the Prisoners of War Department, London, S.W., 13 March 1917, 0103/9776. (P.W.1), TNA FO 383/295.

35 See von Rauchhaupt's prisoner identification card in the International Committee of the Red Cross' Digital Archives, accessed June 20, 2025, https://grandeguerre.icrc.org/en/File/Details/67865/1/2/; on being awarded the Iron Cross, "Eiserne Kreuz," *Leipziger Tageblatt*, 1 March 1915, 2.

cher at Dogger Bank on 23 January 1915.[36] Both men had been previously held at Donington Hall, a former aristocratic estate that was widely considered one of the most luxurious prison camps in the United Kingdom.[37] Neither von Rauchhaupt nor Gebeschus had been accused of any crime. Although they appear to have served honourably in heavy combat, neither had any connection to Cameroon. Their selection was entirely random.

The response to von Rauchhaupt's and Gebeschus' imprisonment was predictable. By April 1916, the German military had transferred two additional British prisoners from standard prisoner of war camps to Spandau prison. The first prisoner, Major G.S. Higginson of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, was a career officer and veteran of the South African War who had fallen into German hands in August 1914 during the retreat from Mons.[38] The second, Major Bell, is only referred to by his surname in British and German documents, but the files of the International Committee of the Red Cross reveal that the imprisoned Major Bell was almost certainly Major Joseph Bell of the Army Service Corps. The Germans captured Bell on 1 September 1914, and, like Higginson, he was one of the earliest Britons to enter German captivity.[39]

In communications with Dutch intermediaries, the Germans stressed that Lamble and Bate awaited trial and were being held in Spandau under the same charges for which the British had imprisoned Pätzel. The two most recently incarcerated British prisoners, Higginson and Bell, would be released as soon as von Rauchhaupt and Gebeschus were returned to their former prisoner of war camp.[40] Unsurprisingly, the British quickly responded to news of Higginson's and Bell's transfers to Spandau. In an internal memo, Walter Townley of the British

36 Gebeschus' ICRC Identification cards: accessed 20 June 2025, https://grandeguerre.icrc.org/en/File/Search/#/1/2/147/4058422/German/Military/gebeschus; see also "Twenty-Third List of German Prisoners of War—Prisoners of War Interned in the United Kingdom, Naval Combatants," ICRC Digital Archives, accessed 20 June 2025, https://grandeguerre.icrc.org/en/List/4058422/902/543/.

37 Feltman, *Stigma of Surrender*, 55–59.

38 Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, to the Königliche Niederländische Gesandschaft, Abteilung für Britische Angelegenheiten, Berlin, 16 April 1917, TNA FO 383/295; Kriegsministerium, Berlin, to the Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, 28 April 1917, Nr. 14945/17.U5/3, BABL R 901 85165. See the prisoner cards for Higginson at the ICRC digital database, accessed June 20, 2025, https://grandeguerre.icrc.org/en/File/Details/286094/3/2/; on Higginson's service in the South African War, see *The Sphinx*, vol 17, no. 244, 30 January 1909, 10.

39 See Major Joseph Bell's prisoner index card in the ICRC digital database: accessed June 20, 2025, https://grandeguerre.icrc.org/en/File/Details/647265/3/2/; on his transfer to Spandau, see "Gefangenenliste des Lagers Clausthal, Liste No. 37, 17 July 1917," ICRC Digital Archive, accessed June 20, 2025, https://grandeguerre.icrc.org/en/List/647265/698/13257/.

40 Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, to the Königliche Niederländische Gesandschaft, Abteilung für Britische Angelegenheiten, Berlin, 16 April 1917, TNA FO 383/295.

Delegation at the Hague insisted that the British "cannot lie down under this sort of thing. We have the whip hand and it is high time we showed it." In regard to the support for the German position by van Vredenburch of the Netherlands, Townley insisted that "we cannot be weak-kneed about this case to please him."[41] The official British response reflected Townley's stance. The War Office sent two additional German officers, Majors Rudolf Lorenz Bauer and Ludwig Schrott, to Bodmin prison.[42] Bauer was captured by the British at the Somme in October 1916,[43] and having been taken at Arras in April 1917, Schrott was a newcomer to the British prison camps when selected for solitary confinement.[44]

As Townley understood, the British government held the upper hand in at least one respect – the quantity of German prisoners in British hands was greater than the number of British prisoners in Germany. At the same time, the head of the Prisoner of War Department in London, Lord Newton, was open to any reasonable solution suggested by neutral representatives from the Netherlands.[45] There was good reason for Lord Newton's willingness to consider negotiated solutions. As early as December 1916, the families of Lamble and Bate had been receiving letters from their loved ones imprisoned at Spandau, many of which outlined the oppressive conditions of their confinement.[46] In numerous letters, Lamble informed his family that he was in prison as a reprisal for the British refusal to retry to a German soldier found guilty of possessing dumdum bullets in Cameroon. In December 1916, he wrote "[the] German Government want him [Pätzel] to be retried and up to date the British Government has refused. Conse-

41 Walter Townley to Lord Hardinge, 18 April 1917, No. 84604, "Reprisals for Imprisonment of Capt. Bate and Lieut. Lamble," TNA, FO 383/295.

42 Schweizerische Gesandschaft, Berlin, to the Auswärtige Amt des Deutschen Reiches, Berlin, 9 July 1917, BABL R 901/85165; Kriegsministerium, Unterkunfts-Departement, Berlin, 3 September 1917, to the Königliche Bayerische Kriegsministerium, Munich, Nr. 3988/8.17.U5/3/. Bayerisches Kriegsarchiv, MKr 1688.

43 "Rudolf Lorenz Bauer," Kriegsstammrollen, 1914–1918, vol. 03320, *Kriegsrangliste: Ers- Truppenteil: Ers- Batl-/21- Infanterie-Regiment (Fürth), Bd-1.* Bayerisches Kriegsarchiv.

44 "Ludwig Schrott," Kriegstammrollen, 1914–1918; Volume: 13361. Kriegsrangliste: Bd. 1, Bayerisches Kriegsarchiv.

45 G.R. Warner, Prisoners of War Department, London, to the Army Council, London, 28 April 1917, TNA FO 383/295.

46 See extracts form the letters of Lt. Lamble, in "Government Committee on the Treatment by the Enemy of Prisoners of War, Storey's Gate, S.W., to the Secretary, Prisoners of War Department, Foreign Office, London, S.W., 2 April 1917, TNA FO 383/295. See also, Mrs. McGuire Bate, Granville Park, S.E., to the Prisoners of War Department, London S.W., 9 March 1917, TNA FO 383/295.

quently I am here and will stay here until our Government agrees to retry the case."[47]

Perhaps remembering the ultimate outcome of the ill-conceived submariner reprisals of 1915, British representatives understood that the cycle of retribution could not continue indefinitely. Aside from the pressure that could come from the British public, the international community was eager to stop the use of reprisals. Already in April 1917, the Dutch representative at the Hague, van Vredenburch, contacted his British colleague Walter Townley directly to stop the spiral that had started with Pätzel's capture. Van Vredenburch acknowledged that reprisals had been employed by both sides and lamented that "nobody can see an end to this sad business." Van Vredenburch understood that the handling of Pätzel's case would have significant implications for future military justice proceedings and the use of reprisals. He reminded the British that the Germans' only request was a new trial for Pätzel, away from the battlefield, and assured Townley that "if the British Court should condemn Petzel [sic] once more, the German government will accept the sentence, having full confidence in the English judges." Van Vredenburch also acknowledged that his own status as a person of influence would be impacted by his ability to secure a new trial, closing his letter with the following: "[l]et me remind you that my success here will greatly depend on the celerity and despatch with which matters are decided upon by your government."[48]

The families of the British prisoners being held at Spandau were aware of the Dutch efforts to stop reprisals, and their sense of urgency to find a solution was driven by the conditions under which their loved ones were serving time. Even for prisoners of war held in standard prison camps, where officers could not be made to work, the mental strain of captivity was immense. For military personnel of the First World War, being captured by the enemy could be a shameful experience that invoked accusations of cowardice. Many prisoners therefore entered captivity with a damaged self-image, and their sense in failure compounded the strains of life in enemy hands.[49] Lieutenant Lamble, for example, had been praised for his defiance and keeping up the spirits of his fellow prisoners aboard the *Möwe* by letting out a "war whoop" in moments of desperation.[50] On the German side, von Rauchhaupt had twice been awarded one of the army's highest

47 Excerpt from 29.12.16, in Government Committee on the Treatment by the Enemy of Prisoners of War, 2 April 1917, TNA FO 383/295.

48 Van Vredenburch, Netherland Legation, British Section, Berlin, to Walter Townley, British Legation, The Hague (Copy), 12 April 1917, TNA, FO 383/295.

49 Feltman, *Stigma of Surrender*; Oliver Wilkinson, *British Prisoners of War in First World War Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

50 "A Moewe Victim," *Belfast Telegraph*, 16 March 1916, 3.

commendations for battlefield bravery. For these men, the sudden disempowerment of life in enemy captivity could be crippling.

Swiss physician A.L. Vischer served as a neutral camp inspector in Germany and England after American entry into the war in 1917. While touring the camps, he noticed that prisoners often suffered from what he referred to as "barbed wire disease." Prisoners became irritable, anxious, and sank into depression.[51] Barbed wire disease was more than just a side effect of boredom. The seriousness of the condition was recognised by belligerents on both sides. In 1916, prisoners suffering from the condition were eligible for transfer to internment in a neutral country, usually the Netherlands or Switzerland.[52] Neutral internment was statistically rare, though, and prisoners battled barbed wire disease through organised activities, including athletics, camp schools, theatrical shows, and musical concerts. These activities allowed prisoners to express their nationalism, dedication to the war effort, and masculinity.[53] The confinement of the officers imprisoned as reprisals stemming from the Pätzel case both heightened their sense of shame, as they were treated like common criminals, and removed them from the social groups that helped them maintain their mental health. Both the prisoners' correspondence with their families and the reports of neutral camp inspectors reveal that the men suffered tremendously from their imprisonment.

As an officer, Lieutenant Lamble was accustomed to being treated as a man of honour. Being handled as a criminal added insult to injury. Officers continued to receive pay in captivity and could not be made to work, but the terms of Lamble's confinement stripped him of his pay and removed the protections against employment. In a December 1916 letter, Lamble informed the American ambassador that he was now expected to work and had "spent [the] morning mending old socks."[54] In correspondence with his family, Lamble complained about the difficulty of experiencing solitary confinement while being prohibited from smoking for the first time in a decade. He likewise resented having his uniform taken and being forced to dress as a convict. His insecurity became evident when he acknowledged "I am sure all of you at home must think I am an awful coward for

51 A.L. Vischer, *Barbed Wire Disease: A Psychological Study of the Prisoner of War* (London: John Bales, Sons and Danielsson, 1919).

52 Feltman, *Stigma of Surrender*, 66–68.

53 Feltman, *Stigma of Surrender*, 106–135.

54 Lieut. Lamble, Spandau, to the American Ambassador, Berlin, 16 December 1916, BABL R 901/85165.

yelling so hard about my treatment. I admit I am not sticking it well, but it is hitting me darned hard, especially the solitary confinement and non-smoking."[55]

In a lengthy letter written to his mother from Spandau just before Christmas 1916, Lamble expressed that his only desire was to return home to Tynemouth and spend the remainder of his life with his family. He confessed that confinement had been sobering and claimed that when the war began, he had "great ambitions but they are all knocked on the head now. There can be no ambitions for a man who has spent half the war in prison or at least as a prisoner of war."[56] In a note drafted on Christmas morning, he reassured his father that he was not "particularly downhearted," but his later words belied his assurances. The weight of being separated from the community of prisoners at Clausthal, the camp from which he was removed, was significant. Lamble wrote "I have tramped diagonally my six-foot square until I am tired . . . I have been here ten days and it seems an eternity. You will be thinking I am at Clausthal still, and amongst friends. We had made some fine arrangements for today too . . . but all I can do is sit and imagine them."[57]

Major G.S. Higginson tried to be humorous about his transfer to Spandau. He informed his sister that he had been sent to a military prison and promised her that she would "laugh if [she] could see [him] in German prison livery." He referred to his treatment as "derogatory" but assured her that she should not worry. His treatment, he continued, was "no bed of roses, in fact my bed is d——d hard!" Higginson asked his sister to let everyone at home know about the new restrictions he faced so that they would not mistake his inability to send letters for "laziness." He also encouraged his sister to contact the families of Lamble and Bate, demonstrating that he was fully aware of the reason for his imprisonment. He stressed that his sister should not worry, and after telling her that he was able to bath occasionally, he asked that she send him some soap from Harrods.[58] Higginson chose to expose the dreariness of his situation through humour, but he was nonetheless offended to be held as a convict in a military prison.

The German officers imprisoned at Bodmin fared no better than their British counterparts. Following his relocation to Bodmin, Kurt Gebeschus wrote his father and explained the reason for his change of address. He was aware that his

55 Excerpt from 21.12.16, in Government Committee on the Treatment by the Enemy of Prisoners of War, 2 April 1917, TNA FO 383/295.

56 Lieutenant A. Lamble, Spandau, to his mother, December 23 1916 (copy), in Elias Lamble, North Shields, to W.J. Evans, London, 23 February 1917, TNA FO 383/295.

57 Excerpt from Christmas morning letter, in Government Committee on the Treatment by the Enemy of Prisoners of War, 2 April 1917, TNA FO 383/295.

58 G.H. Higginson, Spandau, to Nesta Skrine, Oxford, 7 March 1917 (copy), TNA 383/295.

selection for transfer had been random and was a reprisal for the imprisonment of Lamble and Bate, but he lacked knowledge of the particulars. He reported that he was dressed as a convict, required to work, denied tobacco, and "locked up all the time" in a 5 x 2.5-metre cell with the exception of limited exercise time. Aside from being required to work, he was also forced to clean his own cell. As an officer and therefore a man of honour, Gebeschus found his confinement to be "deeply humiliating." He apologised for writing "so plainly and outspoken" and asked that his mother remain calm. He assured his family that he was "all right and in good spirits," but he did not want names mentioned in the press and requested that Leni, presumably a love interest or wife, not be told about his situation.[59]

Gebeschus' despair was evident to outside observers. When Fritz Schwyzer of the Swiss Legation visited Gebeschus and von Rauchhaupt at Bodmin Prison in May 1917, he noted that both men "were rather dejected and seemed somewhat shamefaced at being seen numbered and dressed like criminals." Schwyzer went on to report that both men "showed signs of having been affected by prison life, especially von Rauchhaupt, whose face had drawn and rather nervous expression." The Swiss representative lamented von Rauchhaupt's selection for imprisonment, as the aristocratic officer had already suffered from the strains of long captivity and "was really not in a fit condition to stand the additional strain." Schwyzer asked the prison governor to keep him informed of von Rauchhaupt's condition and pledged to use his influence to try and have another German officer take von Rauchhaupt's place in prison.[60]

The imprisonments emanating from Fritz Pätzel's court martial in Cameroon exposed innocent men to hardship and shame, and prisoners' families had little patience for such acts of retribution. Kurt Gebeschus' father, the lord mayor of Hanau, wrote a sharply worded letter to the German War Ministry in May 1917 requesting information on his son's correspondence privileges and the circumstances leading to his confinement. Lord Mayor Gebeschus made clear that he had been in contact with von Rauchhaupt's family and stressed the uncertainty surrounding their imprisonment was taking a toll on the prisoners. Gebeschus questioned why the War Ministry had not taken advantage of the "German friendly" leanings of the Swiss ambassador in London, claiming that "German officers interned in Switzerland are said to frequent his house." Concerned with his

59 "Letter written by Naval Lieutenant Gebeschus to his father," Naval Prison Bodmin, 7 March 1917, TNA FO 383/295.

60 Fritz Schwyzer, Special Attaché, Swiss Legation in London, Report titled "A Visit to the Bodmin Naval Prison on May 24th 1917," 29 May 1917, BABL R 901/85165.

son's wellbeing, Gebeschus did not shrink from using his position of influence to demand that action be taken to free his son.[61]

When letters from Spandau reached the families of Higginson and Bell, the demand for action was immediate. Higginson's sister, Mrs. Walter Skrine, wrote directly to the Prisoners of War Department's Lord Newton. She "beg[ged] and pray[ed]" that Lord Newton do what he could "to protect him, to make enquiry, [and] to protest against this treatment." Mrs. Skrine feared that her brother's selection for solitary confinement was deliberate rather than random. She had been informed by a medical doctor who was with Higginson at the Burg prison camp that her brother's role in having the commandant of that camp removed had placed him in danger to the extent that "the other officers at Burg expected that my brother would be shot." She closed by imploring Lord Newton to take action to "preserve the life of a brave man."[62] By January 1917, Lamble's parents had already printed one of his Spandau letters in the *Shields Daily News.* The published letter noted that Lamble was being held in a military prison "as a reprisal for a German who has received a long sentence or something in England."[63] Bate's family was also in contact with British authorities and fully aware of the hardships he faced through inspection reports filed by the American Embassy.[64] When his wife wrote to complain that he was not receiving parcels from abroad, the Prisoner of War Department opted to delay responding but conceded "we must in due course inform Mrs. Bate of the action taken."[65]

At this point, the British were receiving pressure from the incarcerated prisoners' families and neutral representatives. German officials maintained that the entire affair could be resolved with a simple retrial for Pätzel. Representatives of the British Prisoners of War Department believed that the intentions of the Dutch representative van Vredenburch were sincere, and they shared his belief that it was not in Britain's interest to continue with reprisals.[66] Lord Newton began inquiring about the possibility of providing Pätzel with a new hearing, as the German government claimed it would respect the outcome of any such trial. By

61 Oberbürgermeister Gebeschus, Hanau, to the Königliche Kriegsministerium, Abteilung Gefangenenschutz, Berlin, 18 May 1917, Abschrift zu IIIb 21951, BABL R 901 85165.

62 Mrs. Walter Skrine, Oxford, to Lord Newton, London, 26 May 1917, TNA FO 383/295.

63 "Letter from a Tynemouth Lieutenant now in Germany," *Shields Daily News*, 3 January 1917, 3.

64 Mrs. G. McGuire Bate, to the Prisoners of War Department, London, 9 March 1917, TNA FO 383/295.

65 Minutes, "Imprisonment of Captain Bate at Spandau," No. 51815, Notes made on 12 March 1917, TNA FO 383/295.

66 Walter Townley, British Delegation, the Hague, to Lord Hardinge, 18 April 1917, TNA FO 383/295.

May 1917, van Vredenburch was reportedly "very anxious" about finding a solution to the Pätzel situation and he advised the British that the problems stemming from the conviction could "be put right if Petzel [sic] were granted a fresh hearing."[67] Van Vredenburch warned that time was of the essence. He advised the British that the prisoners involved would be better served if traditional diplomatic channels were avoided and the matter was instead taken up with "some person of influence in London."[68]

The British War Cabinet decided in early May 1917 that it was "inadvisable to take any further reprisals at present."[69] In doing so, it seriously limited its options for gaining the release of the four imprisoned British officers. Lord Newton's office declared that if reprisals were to no longer be employed, "the only alternative is to accede to the German demand for the re-trial of the Non-commissioned officer Petzel . . ."[70] General H.E. Belfield of the War Office's Directorate of Prisoners of War insisted that a decision would take time and sought to speak with the judge, who had since been stationed in France, that had sentenced Pätzel in Cameroon.[71] Time was of the essence, though, and public perceptions of the reprisals were at the forefront of the Prisoners of War Department's thinking. The Department went on to remind the Army Council that it was "expected that the German counter-reprisals will be shortly known in this country and become a matter of public comment." Accordingly, it would "be highly advisable that a decision . . . be reached and action taken with little delay as possible."[72]

When British and German delegates met at the Hague to discuss prisoner of war affairs in June 1917, the Pätzel case was addressed by representatives of both countries. The case's presence on the agenda demonstrates its significance. Despite the British decision to abandon reprisals, Pätzel's retrial never occurred. Instead, German and British delegates at the Hague determined that the imprisoned officers involved in the case should be returned to prisoner of war camps.[73] Brit-

67 Walter Townley, the Hague, to Lord Hardinge, London, 1 May 1917 (Decypher), TNA FO 383/295.

68 Van Vredenburch, Netherland Legation, British Section, Berlin, to Walter Townley, British Legation, The Hague (copy), 12 April 1917, TNA, FO 383/295.

69 "Reprisals for Imprisonment of Capt. Bate and Lieut. Lamble," 5 May 1917, No. 92318, TNA 383/295.

70 G.R. Warner, Prisoners of War Department, London, to The Army Council, 10 May 1917, TNA FO 383/295.

71 "Minutes," Lord Newton, 11 May 1917, TNA FO 383/295.

72 G.R. Warner, Prisoners of War Department, London, to The Army Council, 10 May 1917, TNA FO 383/295.

73 Kriegsministerium, Unterkunfts-Departement, Berlin, 3 September 1917, to the Königliche Bayerische Kriegsministerium, Munich, Nr. 3988/8.17.U5/3/. Bayerisches Kriegsarchiv, MKr 1688.

ish authorities ultimately came to realise that enforcing Pätzel's sentence would lead to similar sentences, or worse, for Higginson, Bell, Lamble, and Bate. In a July 1917 internal memo, the Prisoners of War Department noted that the remainder of Fritz Pätzel's twenty-year sentence had been remitted. At the bottom of the page, a hand-written note pointed out that the Germans "would have had very little difficulty in convicting [Bate and Lamble] on false evidence had they desired to do so."[74] The British Army Council was responsible for remitting Pätzel's sentence, but their communications with the Prisoner of War Department did not acknowledge his innocence or provide an explanation for its actions.[75]

Following his release from Maidstone, the British transferred Pätzel to the prisoner of war camp at Pattishall in Northamptonshire. It is unclear exactly when each of the other German officers were released from prison, but a German document confirms that Major Ludwig Schrott had been transferred to the Holyport officers' camp on 30 June 1917.[76] A September 1917 communication from the Swiss Embassy in Berlin refers to von Rauchhaupt, Gebeschus, Bauer, and Schrott as formerly imprisoned. By 6 October 1917 the British asked for assurances that the four British officers had been released and acknowledged that four German officers had been transferred to Holyport.[77] In early November, the German War Ministry confirmed to their colleagues in the foreign office that the four British officers had been released from Spandau on 30 June and transferred to the officers' camp at Clausthal.[78]

The original sentence handed down in the field against Pätzel had led to the penal imprisonment of eight additional prisoners of war, but the release of Pätzel and the other officers was not the end of the ordeal. Upon visiting von Rauchhaupt at Bodmin in May 1917, Swiss Attaché Fritz Schwyzer clearly believed that the German officer was unable to psychologically cope with the increased strains of life in solitary confinement and expressed his concerns with the prison governor. The governor was sympathetic, and Schwyzer contended that officials at the

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On the Anglo-German prisoner of war conference in June 1917, see Feltman, *Stigma of Surrender*, 67–70.

74 "Prisoners, &c. Germany, No. 141376, 7 July 1917, 'Sentence of Imprisonment Passed on Fritz Pätzel,'" TNA FO 383/295.

75 War Office, London, to the Secretary of the Prisoners of War Department, London, 17 July 1917, TNA FO 383/295.

76 Kriegsministerium, Unterkunfts-Departement, Berlin, 3 September 1917, to the Königliche Bayerische Kriegsministerium, Munich, Nr. 3988/8.17.U5/3/. Bayerisches Kriegsarchiv, MKr 1688.

77 Schweizerische Gesandschaft in Berlin to the Auswärtige Amt des Deutschen Reiches, Berlin, 24 September 1917, Nr. E XV 9/10099, BABL R 901/85165; British Foreign Office, No. 187131/1218/P (copy), 6 October 1917, BABL R 901/85165.

78 Kriegsministerium Nr. 4513/10.17.U5/3, 5 November 1917, BABL R 901/85165.

prison "seemed to regret being obliged to treat [von Rauchhaupt and Gebeschus] as though they had been condemned for some unlawful act."[79] Nonetheless, the governor does not appear to have pursued von Rauchhaupt's exchange, and the tormented officer was released no earlier than the other reprisal prisoners. Following his transfer from Bodmin, von Rauchhaupt was sent to a military hospital, most likely Netley in Southampton.[80] On 13 October 1917, he made his way out of the ward, climbed a fire escape, and jumped form a height sufficient to fracture his skull upon impact. The coroner's report listed the cause of death as "suicide, while in an unsound state of mind."[81] The International Committee of the Red Cross similarly listed von Rauchhaupt's cause of death as "melancholia."[82]

For "unknown reasons," British authorities initially buried von Rauchhaupt in a mass grave at the Streatham Park Cemetery in London. Von Rauchhaupt's comrades from Donington Hall petitioned to have his body relocated to a private grave and offered to pay all associated costs as a first step towards honouring his mother's wish that he be returned home following the war's conclusion.[83] Despite these efforts, von Rauchhaupt's body remains in England to this day. In accordance with a 1959 agreement between the United Kingdom and Federal Republic of Germany, a large number of German servicemen buried in the UK, including von Rauchhaupt, were disinterred and reburied in the newly established Cannock Chase German Military Cemetery in Staffordshire.[84] Based on Schwyzer's report and concerns, it is reasonable to conclude that von Rauchhaupt's imprisonment at Bodmin contributed to his mental decline and ultimate death. In this regard, he was a victim of the military justice system of the First World War – even though he had committed no crime.

It is not possible to trace the movements of every prisoner involved in the Pätzel reprisals, but it appears that many were selected for internment in either

79 Schwyzer, Report titled "A Visit to the Bodmin Naval Prison on May 24th 1917," 29 May 1917, BABL R 901/85165.

80 Schweizerische Gesandtschaft, Berlin, to the Auswärtige Amt, Berlin, 17 June 1918, BABL R 901/85165. Von Rauchhaupt's place of death is also identified as Lewisham Military Hospital, but Netely Hospital occurs in documents on more than one occasion.

81 J.L. Isler, to the Monsieur le Conseiller Federal, 25 October 1917, No. 1782, BABL R 901/85165.

82 See von Rauchhaupt's ICRC cards, accessed 20 June 2025, https://grandeguerre.icrc.org/en/File/Details/67865/1/2/; Gebeschus, accessed 20 June 2025, https://grandeguerre.icrc.org/en/File/Details/5125404/1/2/.

83 Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, to the Schweizerische Gesandschaft, Vertretung deutscher Interessen, 6 March 1918, BABL R 901/85165.

84 "HANS-CHRISTOPH VON RAUCHHAUPT", Commonwealth War Graves commission, accessed 20 June 2025, https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/casualty-details/6009895/hans-christoph-von-rauchhaupt/.

Switzerland or the Netherlands before war's end. Pätzel appears on a list of Schutztruppe prisoners taken in Cameroon who had been interned in Rotterdam in the Netherlands by 1 July 1918.[85] Kurt Gebeschus reached the Netherlands in early 1918 and was exchanged into Germany in August of that year.[86] Rudolf Lorenz Bauer arrived in Switzerland in November 1917 and returned to his home in Germany shortly after war's end.[87] Major Joseph Bell was interned in the Netherlands in February 1918 after having spent more than three years in German captivity.[88] By October 1918, he was back in London en route to Prince of Wales Hospital. The reason for Bell's hospitalisation was not noted, but a number of the other repatriated prisoners on the list were suffering from "nerves."[89] Major Higginson was interned in Switzerland in November 1917 and, in March 1918, he was repatriated to London.[90] Only two months after his repatriation, Higginson was appointed Inspector of Prisoner of War Camps for the Southern Command.[91] His appointment to the post could not have been coincidental.

Conclusion

During the First World War, the British War Cabinet faced a deluge of requests to act on cases of reprisals involving prisoners of war.[92] In a post-war report, H.E. Belfield of the Directorate of Prisoners of War recalled that "no question has

85 "Liste Nr. 1 der in Kriegsgefangenschaft befindlichen und jetzt in Holland untergebrachten Angehörigen der Kaiserlichen Schutztruppen usw.," *Deutsche Verlustlisten* Nr. 1981, 1 July 1918, 24701.

86 Reimar von Bonin, et al. (eds.), *Chronik des Seeoffizier-Jahrgangs 1908*, vol. 2 (Göttingen: Hubert & Co. 1958), 27.

87 "Rudolf Lorenz Bauer," Kriegsstammrollen, 1914–1918, vol. 03320, *Kriegsrangliste: Ers- Truppenteil: Ers- Batl-/21- Infanterie-Regiment (Fürth), Bd-1.* Bayerisches Kriegsarchiv.

88 "British Prisoners of War—Interned Military," ICRC Digital Archives, accessed 20 June 2025, https://grandeguerre.icrc.org/en/List/647265/699/51098/.

89 "Nominal Roll of British Officers, Repatriated Prisoners of War, who arrived in London, Via Boston, 24th October, 1918". ICRC Digital Archives, accessed June 20, 2025, https://grandeguerre.icrc.org/en/List/647265/699/51098/; "List of British Officers Repatriated from Switzerland arrived in London 24th March 1918," No. X. 72037, ICRC Digital Archives, accessed 20 June 2025, https://grandeguerre.icrc.org/en/List/4054711/699/51216/.

90 "Internes en Suisse, Anglais, Liste du Novembre 1917, 27 November 1917," ICRC Digital Archives, accessed 20 June 2025, https://grandeguerre.icrc.org/en/List/286094/699/50951/.

91 "From the London Gazette," *Belfast News-Letter*, 21 August 1918, 3; "Military Notes," *Warwick and Warwickshire Advertiser*, 16 September 1922, 5.

92 Hull, "*A Scrap of Paper*" 300–301.

received fuller consideration than that of reprisals." He concluded that in most cases, reprisals led to worsening conditions for British prisoners in enemy hands and it was impossible "to compete with the Germans or Turks in brutality." Belfield continued by noting that British "national characteristics are opposed to the ill-treatment of a man who has no power to resist, and this is especially in the case of one who is not personally responsible for the acts complained of."[93] He may not have known of von Rauchhaupt's death, but Belfield was unquestionably familiar with the particulars of Pätzel's case. The British sense of morality may have been inflated, as the inaction on von Rauchhaupt demonstrates that they were not above keeping an innocent and mentally strained prisoner in solitary confinement. Nonetheless, British officials halted the cycle of reprisals despite their apparent belief in Pätzel's guilt.

Reprisals against prisoners of war were effective, but they were part of an unsympathetic system that indiscriminately exposed prisoners to psychological trauma. In her work on prisoner labour battalions in the First World War, historian Heather Jones has argued that reprisals led to brutal "cycles of violence." Prisoners were employed close to the firing line and forced to work under gruelling conditions, and their treatment reveals that the war eroded the protections that prisoners of war enjoyed under international law.[94] This chapter has sought to compliment Jones' research by suggesting that reprisals also created cycles of psychological violence that had serious consequences for the prisoners who became pawns in the military justice system.

Fritz Pätzel was one of at least 3,842 prisoners of war tried by the British during the First World War. Of all the civilian internees and military prisoners prosecuted in British military courts, twenty-two were sentenced to death, six received life sentences, and ten were handed prison terms of more than ten years.[95] Prison terms similar to Pätzel's were rare, but the events that unfolded in the months and years following his conviction in Cameroon demonstrate that when prisoners of war were involved, the ruling of a court martial was not necessarily final. Reprisals gave belligerents the opportunity to challenge rulings perceived to be unjust, and they could overturn punishments handed down by the enemy. Military justice was influenced by outside forces. In Pätzel's case, negotiations over his release involved several branches of the British War and Foreign Offices, the German War Ministries and Foreign Office, and neutral representatives from the United States, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. The reprisals discussed in this

93 Report on the Directorate of Prisoners of War, TNA, WO 106/1451, 57–58.

94 Jones, *Violence against Prisoners of War*, especially 127–166.

95 War Office, *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War, 1914–1920* (London: H.M. Stationary Office, 1922), 643, 672.

chapter never created a general public outcry, but the fear of public opinion motivated the British to find a solution that would allow their officers to return to prisoner of war camps. Proceedings against prisoners of war were not insulated affairs. Due to judicial reciprocity, the decision to convict a captured enemy might be only beginning of the military justice process.

Even as the First World War raged, the International Committee of the Red Cross appealed to belligerents in 1916 to halt the use of reprisals against prisoners of war on humanitarian grounds. Although reprisals continued throughout the conflict, post-war debates led to reprisals against prisoners of war being forbidden by Article II of the 1929 Geneva Convention on Prisoners of War. The abuses experienced by prisoners of the Second World War represented a step in the wrong direction, yet Neville Wylie and Lindsay Cameron have convincingly argued that the advances in international humanitarian law that produced the 1949 Geneva Conventions had as much to do with the events of 1914–1918 as those of the Second World War.[96] In this respect, the reprisals implemented in the wake of Pätzel's battlefield conviction, along with their traumatic and even lethal consequences, may have at least contributed to the construction of a more effective and humanitarian standard of international law.

96 Wylie and Cameron, "The Impact of World War I," 1342–1343, 1349–1350.