

The British Empire at War Research Group

Research Papers

No. 2 (2012)

**‘The Role of Red Cross Aid in the
Prisoners of War Camps on the
Siam-Burma Railway’**

Elena Bosch, University of St Gallen

The *British Empire at War Research Papers* series publishes original research online, including seminar and conference presentations, theses, and synoptical essays.

British Empire at War Research Group

Defence Studies Department, King's College London

Email: britishempireatwar@gmail.com

Website: <http://britishempireatwar.org>

Background and abstract

During the Second World War the Japanese forced Allied Prisoners of War (POWs) to build a railway from Thailand to Burma under dreadful conditions. In attempting to fulfil its humanitarian function, the delegation of the International Red Cross Committee (ICRC) in Thailand was confronted with numerous obstacles by the Japanese occupiers. Nevertheless, the ICRC delegate Mr Werner Salzmänn managed to send relief both officially and secretly to the POWs and informed the concerned governments about the shortcomings of their treatment. This paper examines the impact these activities had on the camps of the Siam–Burma Railway. It is based on original research conducted in the IHRC archives in Geneva by a descendant of one of the IHRC delegates.

About the author

Elena Bosch is a Master's student in International Affairs and Governance at the University of St.Gallen in Switzerland. In 2012 she completed the Oxford University Postgraduate Certificate in Historical Studies, which requires the completion of a thesis based on original archival research. This paper is the product of that research, for which the author received a Distinction.

1.) Introduction

The delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Thailand achieved remarkable results in assisting the unfortunate Allied Prisoners of War (POWs) of the Japanese that had to build a 260 miles long railway from Thailand to Burma through extremely rough terrain, in a murderous climate and without sufficient food and medical supplies.¹ This assistance was delivered even though the Japanese refused to recognise a delegation in Thailand.² The ICRC's achievements started with successful negotiations with the local Japanese authorities resulting in permission to send relief to the POWs, though for distribution they were forced to depend on the Japanese military authorities.³ Furthermore, clandestine contact permitted the ICRC delegate Mr Werner Salzmann to send in urgently needed medicines before official shipments were possible.⁴ Based on these contacts the concerned governments could be informed about the mistreatment of POWs and build international pressure to improve conditions.⁵

As impressive as the performance of the delegation in Thailand was, the actual impact these activities had on the camps of the Siam–Burma Railway have never been researched, and form the subject of this paper.⁶ Although the fate of the forced Asiatic labourers on the railroad deserves more scholarly attention, this paper focuses

¹ Hardie, R. (1983) *The Burma – Siam Railway: The secret diary of Dr Robert Hardie 1942-45*, London, p.8.

² Bugnion, F. (1994) *Le Comité International de la Croix-Rouge et la protection des victimes de la guerre*, Geneva, p.220.

³ Salzmann, W. (15.09.1943) *Telegram from Mr Salzmann to the ICRC*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-141, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

⁴ Salzmann, W. (21.02.1946) *Confidential Letter from Mr Salzmann to the ICRC*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-142, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva, p.1-2.

⁵ ICRC (05.12.1996) *Entretien avec M. Werner Salzmann, delegue du CICR en Thaïlande de 1943 a 1946, delegue honoraire de 1946 a 1960*, Geneva, p.27.

⁶ Thailand was called Siam until 1949, but the Railway is still known today as the Siam – Burma Railway.

on POWs under Japanese control, because Red Cross work for these forced Asiatic labourers could only start after the war.⁷ While there exists substantial material from ex POWs narrating their experiences in the Siam–Burma Railway camps, few major works on the whole history of the railway can be found. This makes Kinvig’s *River Kwai Railway: The story of the Burma–Siam Railroad*⁸ even more useful. Flower argues convincingly that the role played by the POW officers was of crucial importance for the life in the railway camps and that this aspect has been neglected, even distorted, in the historiography of the railway.⁹ Her chapter is important for understanding the organisation of the camps accurately. Furthermore, Waterford’s *Prisoners of the Japanese in World War II* gives a good overview of what being a POW of the Japanese entailed.¹⁰ Unfortunately, not only the language barriers make it difficult to incorporate the Japanese side into the railway history, but also the fact that the Japanese destroyed the official records of the construction and operation of the railroad when the war turned against them. Tamayama’s *Railwaymen in the War* is still helpful in learning more about the background of the construction, but is biased when it comes to the treatment of POWs.¹¹ The narratives of ex-POWs can be divided into two rough categories, those written contemporarily and those written years later. The first category was more helpful in the preparation of this paper, especially *The War diaries of Weary Dunlop*¹² and *The Secret Diary of Dr Robert Hardie*.¹³

⁷ Salzmann, W. (10. August 1995) *Letter to Mrs Caroline Moorehead*. Taken from the personal inheritance of Werner Salzmann.

⁸ Kinvig, C. (2005) *River Kwai Railway: The story of the Burma – Siam Railroad*, London

⁹ Flower, S. J. (1996) ‘Captors and Captives on The Burma – Thailand Railway’ in B. Moore & K. Fedorowich *Prisoners of War and their Captors in World War II*, Oxford.

¹⁰ Waterford, V. (1994) *Prisoners of the Japanese in World War II*, North Carolina.

¹¹ Tamayama, K. (2005) *Railwaymen in the War: Tales by Japanese Railway Soldiers in Burma and Thailand, 1941 – 47*, New York.

¹² Dunlop, E. E. (2010) *The War Diaries of Weary Dunlop*, Victoria.

¹³ Hardie, *The Burma – Siam Railway*.

In the process of researching this paper the ICRC Archives at its headquarters in Geneva were indispensable. Also, Forsythe's *The Humanitarians*¹⁴ was valuable in interpreting the policies and developments of the ICRC. However, the body of source material is in many aspects problematic, as can be expected when the research objects are POW camps. Firstly, only a few journals were written during captivity and survived, resulting from a strict interdiction of all forms of record keeping at the end of 1944 from the Japanese under harsh penalty.¹⁵ Secondly, the conditions of the camps on the Siam–Burma Railway were different, depending on the size¹⁶, area, and location of the camps and the attitudes of the Japanese camp commandants and their relationship to the POW officers in charge. Accordingly, the experiences of the POWs vary so heavily that universal conclusions are impossible to make.¹⁷ This is worsened by the fact that some POW accounts do not distinguish between the camps they were in and are not as precise in their narratives as the historian may wish. Thirdly, as the totality of experiences is unobtainable, all findings can only be evaluations of the researched sources.

This paper will start with an introduction to the subject of Prisoners of War of the Japanese during the Second World War. It will then examine the activities of the ICRC during the war and finally discuss the impact of the ICRC activities on the Siam–Burma Railway in three categories: Official Help, Clandestine Help, and International Pressure.

¹⁴ Forsythe, D. (2005) *The Humanitarians: The International Committee of the Red Cross*, Cambridge.

¹⁵ Flower, *Captors and Captives on The Burma – Thailand Railway*, p.229.

¹⁶ Hardie, *The Burma – Siam Railway*, p.9.

¹⁷ Flower, *Captors and Captives on The Burma – Thailand Railway*, p.227.

It can be concluded that on the general conditions of the Siam–Burma Railroad camps, ICRC aid had an insignificant impact. However, in some camps ICRC relief was received with regularity and rescued many lives.¹⁸ The secret dispatch of medicine also made a considerable difference to the recipients.¹⁹ Furthermore, international pressure caused the Japanese to be cautious in their actions towards the POWs as their war luck ran out.²⁰ Overall, the ICRC delegate achieved more than could have been expected given the hostile attitude of the Japanese towards the ICRC.

2.) Prisoners of War of the Japanese

2.1) Japan in the Second World War

The first Japanese aggression towards China in 1931 resulted from an internal coup from the Kwantung Army and led to the invasion of the Manchuria and finally to its independence under Japanese control.²¹ The international system built after the First World War with the League of Nations finally condemned Japanese aggression in 1932. Japan's reaction was to leave the League of Nations.²² In 1937 war between Japan and China erupted again.²³ When Germany attacked the Soviet Union in 1941 Japan took the opportunity of a secure northern front to focus on the war with China and invaded bases in French Indo-China. In response the US, Britain and the Netherlands established an economic embargo on Japan withholding assets Japan

¹⁸ See chapter 3.1.) Official Help

¹⁹ See chapter 3.2.) Clandestine Help

²⁰ See chapter 3.3.) International Pressure

²¹ Kinvig, *River Kwai Railway*, p.6.

²² Irye, A. (1987) *The Origins of the Second World War in Asia and the Pacific*, New York, p.18.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.44.

needed to continue the war.²⁴ Japan decided to forcibly seize the resources it needed. This was in line with the vision of Japan bringing the Asian nations to independence and then prosperity as part of a Japanese Empire. However, the Japanese refrained from calling it a Japanese Empire and instead promoted it as ‘The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere’, although it clearly was a plan to build an Empire under the political, economic and cultural leadership of Japan. The belief in Japanese superiority formed part of this ideology.²⁵

On the 7 December 1941 it attacked Pearl Harbour and landed in East Malaya whereupon the US, Great Britain and the Netherlands declared war on Japan.²⁶ On the 8 December 1941 Japan invaded Thailand because of its strategic importance for a further planned advance into British Malaya, Burma and ultimately India. With little resistance Thailand signed an agreement allowing the transit and deployment of Japanese forces in Thailand. Thereby, Thailand received the status of an ‘allied occupation force’ and was able to formally keep its political independence and autonomy in government.²⁷ In the following months Japan succeeded in rapidly expanding its Empire.

2.2.) Prisoners of War in the Far East

During Japan's conquest of more than 300 million square miles in East Asia in only six months,²⁸ the Japanese captured around 202,500 POWs.²⁹ Composed of British

²⁴ Kinvig, *River Kwai Railway*, p.7.

²⁵ Kinvig, *River Kwai Railway*, p.7-8.

²⁶ Waterford, *Prisoners of the Japanese in World War II*, p.7.

²⁷ ICRC, *Entretien avec M. Werner Salzmann*, p.14-5.

²⁸ Waterford, *Prisoners of the Japanese in World War II*, p.31.

²⁹ Kinvig, *River Kwai Railway*, p.27-29.

Commonwealth, American and Dutch prisoners.³⁰ In contrast, the allied forces held about 6,400 Japanese POWs by the end of 1944 and only at the end of the war this number started to increase.³¹ This remarkable difference was connected to the attitude of the Japanese that being captured alive was disgraceful and would bring dishonour and shame to the Japanese soldier and his family.³² Therefore, they felt deep contempt for the Allied POWs under their control.³³ Although, the Allied POW also felt shame in being captured, he was not dishonoured socially. Certainly, there was also humiliation felt in being captured by Asians after having been taught white supremacy and their right to rule for years.³⁴ Equally the Japanese recognised from early on the propaganda value of using and humiliating white POWs in public to promote their vision of ‘Asia for Asians’ under Japanese rule.³⁵

The attitude towards captivity was not the only difference of mentality between the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) and the Allied forces. Collectivism was more important than individualism in Japanese society as well as in the IJA and as a result group responsibility and the duty for society were valued higher than individual liberty. A system of brutality and violence instilled self-discipline and the control of willpower into the soldiers. Although hierarchy was very important in the IJA there was some scope for independent operations of middle-ranking officers far away from headquarters, and as long as ‘sincerity in motivation’ was given they would not be

³⁰ Waterford, *Prisoners of the Japanese in World War II*, p.31.

³¹ ICRC (02. February 2005) *ICRC in WWII: Activities in the Far East* viewed on 15.05.2012 under <http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/misc/57jnwq.htm>.

³² Bugnion, F. (1994) *Le Comité International de la Croix-Rouge et la protection des victimes de la guerre*, Geneva, p.218.

³³ Velmans, L. (2003) *Long Way Back to the River Kwai: Memories of World War II*, New York, p.85.

³⁴ Kinvig, *River Kwai Railway*, p.31-2.

³⁵ Flower, *Captors and Captives on The Burma – Thailand Railway*, p.235 & Kinvig, *River Kwai Railway*, p.33.

held guilty. This would have been unimaginable in the Allied armies. At the bottom of the hierarchy of the IJA were Korean soldiers, who also played their role in the bad treatment of POWs.³⁶

At the beginning the Japanese were surprised by the high number of POWs they had captured and did not know what to do with them. They had signed the Geneva Convention of 27 July 1929 about the Treatment of Prisoners of War but had not ratified it. They agreed early in 1942 to apply the Convention ‘mutatis mutandis’ under the principle of ‘reciprocity’.³⁷ Nevertheless, the Japanese government emphasised in their declaration of intention that the Geneva Convention did not bind them.³⁸ Still, the War Ministry of Japan established the POW Information Bureau to function as a register and clearing office³⁹ as envisaged in Article 77 of the Geneva Convention⁴⁰ and the POW Control Bureau for administration tasks in Tokyo, both run by the same personnel. However, at the Conference at the Imperial General Headquarters in Tokyo on 7 and 8 July 1942 the training of officers later to be in charge of POWs did not include the Geneva Convention.⁴¹ Instead other rules and regulations were instructed that could be modified if necessary.⁴² In general, the military personnel in charge did not adhere to them.⁴³

³⁶ Kinvig, *River Kwai Railway*, p.10-12.

³⁷ Flower, *Captors and Captives on The Burma – Thailand Railway*, p.235.

³⁸ Bugnion, *Le CICR et la protection des victimes de la guerre*, p.219.

³⁹ Waterford, *Prisoners of the Japanese in World War II*, p.35.

⁴⁰ ICRC (27 July 1929) *Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War* viewed on 12.05.2012 under <http://www.icrc.org/ihl.nsf/full/305?opendocument>.

⁴¹ Flower, *Captors and Captives on The Burma – Thailand Railway*, p.234.

⁴² These rules and regulations were based on the Army Instruction No.22 from February 1904. In the Russo-Japanese war the Japanese Army had gained respect from the international community for its good treatment of Russian POWs (see Kinvig, *River Kwai Railway*, p.5). The revised regulations can be found in Appendix B of Waterford, *Prisoners of the Japanese in World War II*, p.353-8.

⁴³ Waterford, *Prisoners of the Japanese in World War II*, p.36-7.

The experiences of the POWs in Japanese hands varied greatly even in the same region, depending on the Japanese in charge. Besides the POWs, allied civilians in occupied regions were also interned. The civilian camps also varied in quality but normally the conditions were better than in POW camps. In general, the POWs were treated brutally and were insufficiently nourished for ICRC standards. However, there were also some camps where the conditions were better.⁴⁴ As POW Hugh Clarke explained:

Being a POW of the Japanese was to become an involuntary subscriber to an extraordinary lottery. ‘You could remain hungry and bored in Changi [Singapore] but relatively undisturbed by the Japanese captors; you could work on the wharves and food dumps and grow fat, if prepared to risk the inevitable lashings or worse if caught scrounging; you could journey to Japan in the early years of the war and live in conditions not much worse than a Japanese miner or factory worker; or you could crack the bad-luck jackpot and end up on the Burma-Siam railway.’⁴⁵

2.3.) The Siam–Burma Railway camps

In June 1942 the Imperial General Headquarters in Tokyo gave the orders to build a Railway connection between Thailand and Burma⁴⁶ with the objective to secure transportation of supplies and soldiers to the IJA in Burma to prepare for a counter-charge from the Allied forces. Hence, the dangerous seaway from Singapore to Burma via the Bay of Bengal prone to Allied attacks could be avoided. In addition,

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.31-32.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.32.

⁴⁶ Flower, *Captors and Captives on The Burma – Thailand Railway*, p.234.

for a campaign to win India this line would be of crucial importance.⁴⁷ For the construction the Japanese used around 50,000 allied POWs and over 200,000 forced Asiatic labourers.⁴⁸ In consequence of the extreme climate, excessive labour, malnutrition, widespread tropical diseases and the lack of sufficient medical supplies more than 16,000 POWs⁴⁹ and over 50 per cent of the Asiatic labourers lost their lives.⁵⁰ For that reason the Siam-Burma Railway became infamous as the ‘Death Railway’.⁵¹

The construction of the railway was started from both sides in June 1942 to be completed in one year.⁵² The technical responsibility lay with the 5th Railway Regiment in Burma and the 9th Railway Regiment in Thailand, two separate authorities.⁵³ The path of the railroad led through extremely rough terrain⁵⁴ linking Ban Pong in Thailand with Thanbyuzayat in Burma.⁵⁵ From Ban Pong the railway would be linked to Nong Pla Duk from where a direct connection to Bangkok existed, on the other side Thanbyuzayat was linked with Moulmein.⁵⁶ Many parts lay deep in the jungle, rivers had to be crossed, ravines overcome and rocks penetrated without proper equipment.⁵⁷ In addition the monsoon seasons aggravated the working and living conditions greatly.⁵⁸

⁴⁷ Tamayama, *Railwaymen in the War*, p.7.

⁴⁸ ICRC (October 1946) *Revue Internationale de la Croix Rouge*, No. 334, Genève, p.828.

⁴⁹ Hardie, *The Burma – Siam Railway*, p.8.

⁵⁰ ICRC (October 1946) *Revue Internationale de la Croix Rouge*, No. 334, p.828.

⁵¹ Velmans, *Long Way Back to the River Kwai*, p.1.

⁵² Kinvig, *River Kwai Railway*, p.45.

⁵³ Tamayama, *Railwaymen in the War*, p.8.

⁵⁴ Buravass, S. (30.06.1946) *The Burma-Siam Railways*, *Thai News Magazine*, p.5.

⁵⁵ Hardie, *The Burma – Siam Railway*, p.8.

⁵⁶ Tamayama, *Railwaymen in the War*, p.17.

⁵⁷ Kinvig, *River Kwai Railway*, p.48-50.

⁵⁸ Waterford, *Prisoners of the Japanese in World War II*, p.236.

At the beginning the large number of POWs and forced Asiatic workers were controlled by only forty officers, eighty-five non-commissioned officers (NCO) and 1,280 Korean guards. Therefore, the officers had to delegate substantial responsibility.⁵⁹ The Korean guards had an especially bad reputation for their brutal treatment and physical abuses of POWs. Furthermore, the medical unit was insignificant.⁶⁰

At the peak of construction there were about forty camps each composed of at least 1,000 POWs located along the route.⁶¹ The base camps at both ends of the line offered better conditions than the camps along the line. Some camps operated as hospitals, to which the very sick and dying were sent.⁶² The POWs were able to preserve their military order in the camps; compared to the unorganised Asiatic Labourers this was a huge advantage.⁶³ In Changi, Singapore, the Allied officers had to compose labour units consisting of 500 to 600 POWs and a limited number of officers to be sent to Thailand or Burma. The Australians did not have to divide their contingents because they were fewer than the British who made up more than half of all POWs. As a result the British POWs were accompanied by a much higher number of officers than the Australians.⁶⁴

At the beginning, all the officers were not used for physical labour; instead they administered the camps and supervised labour parties. By the beginning of 1943, due to the large number of British officers on the railway, they were forced to form work

⁵⁹ Flower, *Captors and Captives on The Burma – Thailand Railway*, p.236.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.238-9.

⁶¹ Waterford, *Prisoners of the Japanese in World War II*, p.237.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.238.

⁶³ Kinvig, *River Kwai Railway*, p.64.

⁶⁴ Flower, *Captors and Captives on The Burma – Thailand Railway*, p.241-2.

parties too. Only a few were to remain for the administration of the camps, including the medical officers.⁶⁵ The high number of British officers on the railway proved to be a significant advantage. First of all, the officers were able to use funds they had taken into captivity to purchase extra medical and food supplies. At the end of 1942 the Japanese started to pay the POWs according to their rank, in theory the same amount they received, in local currency. This was in line with Article 23 of the Geneva Convention. However, in practice they only paid out a marginal part of that sum after deducting maintenance costs and an amount for repayment after the war. Nevertheless, these payments made a huge difference to the life of the POWs. The officers could collect part of their payment and spend it for the benefit of the camp, which most of them did. In addition, the officers were also paid when they were sick and could not work, a privilege not enjoyed by the other ranks.⁶⁶ Most camps set up a canteen, which sold food and cigarettes purchased locally and with the small profit medical supplies or additional food was bought for the camp. The Japanese allowed this with some restrictions varying from camp to camp.⁶⁷

Secondly, the POW officers in charge had a chance to improve the conditions of the camps depending on their negotiating skills and the attitude of the Japanese Commandants. The relationship between the POW officer in charge and the Japanese officer could be crucial for the everyday life of the POWs. Most POW officers managed to establish a 'limited co-operation' relationship with the Japanese but some officers regarded this as 'collaboration' with the enemy and refused to do the same.⁶⁸ In general, the task of the POW officers in charge was very difficult. For instance, if

⁶⁵ Ibid., p.242.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.241-3.

⁶⁷ Kinvig, *River Kwai Railway*, p.94.

⁶⁸ Flower, *Captors and Captives on The Burma – Thailand Railway*, p.245.

the officer in charge did not manage to provide the number of POWs required because of their poor health, the Japanese would not only punish him but also force the sick to work.⁶⁹

In January 1943 the railway regiments received orders from General Headquarters in Tokyo to complete the railway earlier than planned - by May rather than October of that year. After protests, the deadline was extended to August. However, by that time the regiments were already afraid that they would be unable to finish the project on time.⁷⁰ This led to the introduction of the so-called 'Speedo' Phase, in which the construction was driven recklessly and as a result the death toll rose drastically.⁷¹

The morale of the POWs was very low at that stage, the men confronted constantly with death, exhaustion, malnourishment, and isolation.⁷² The Japanese forbade the possession of paper and pens under harsh punishment.⁷³ Some POWs still managed to keep secret diaries, paintings and lists of friends that had died. Most of them buried these documents and exhumed them after liberation.⁷⁴ Also, some POW camps were able to hide a secret radio, which they transported with them when they had to move to another camp, risking their lives in the event of detection.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Kinvig, *River Kwai Railway*, p.65.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.100.

⁷¹ Reed, B. & Peeke, M. (2004) *Lost Souls of the River Kwai: Experiences of a British Soldier on the Railway of Death*, South Yorkshire, p.63.

⁷² Kinvig, *River Kwai Railway*, p.149.

⁷³ Flower, *Captors and Captives on The Burma – Thailand Railway*, p.229.

⁷⁴ Salzmänn, W. (29. December 1962) *Speech by Mr Salzmänn for the Rotary Club of Thalwil (with comments by Mr Schweizer, Manager of Diethelm&Co. and delegate of the ICRC in Singapore)*. Taken from the personal inheritance of Werner Salzmänn, p.9.

⁷⁵ Kinvig, *River Kwai Railway*, p.93.

The railway was finally finished on 17 October 1943.⁷⁶ Allied forces repeatedly bombed it after its completion, unfortunately causing casualties among the POWs because many had to stay in the railway camps.⁷⁷ Their new work included chopping wood for the steam engines of the locomotives and repairing the line. The other POWs were mainly transported to Japan.⁷⁸

Despite all of these efforts, the railway was never able to fulfil its envisaged strategic role.⁷⁹ It was only a link in a bigger supply chain and dependent on the other parts of it. Also, the speedy completion meant that the quality of construction decreased in the final stages and therefore the locomotives had to be operated carefully and slowly. In addition, the line never managed to carry the amount of supplies planned and needed by the IJA. At the beginning of 1944 it was under constant bombardment from Allied forces and repair work delayed the transport of supplies severely.⁸⁰ After the war the Japanese and Koreans involved in the Siam–Burma Railway were held accountable for their actions in a war crimes trial in Singapore.⁸¹

3.) The ICRC during the Second World War

3.1.) Structure and Operations

The International Red Cross Committee was founded in 1863 as a private society consisting of Swiss members only with headquarters in Geneva.⁸² Barnett defined the

⁷⁶ Waterford, *Prisoners of the Japanese in World War II*, p.238.

⁷⁷ ICRC, *Entretien avec M. Werner Salzmann*, p.17.

⁷⁸ Waterford, *Prisoners of the Japanese in World War II*, p.238.

⁷⁹ Kinvig, *River Kwai Railway*, p.183.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.174-6.

⁸¹ Salzmann, W. (29. December 1962) *Speech by Mr Salzmann for the Rotary Club of Thalwil*. Taken from the personal inheritance of Werner Salzmann, p.11.

⁸² Favez, J. (2001) 'Das Internationale Rote Kreuz und die Todeslager des Dritten Reichs' in H. Enzensberger (ed.) *Krieger ohne Waffen: Das Internationale Komitee vom Roten Kreuz*, Frankfurt am Main, p.115.

ICRC as an organisation providing ‘emergency humanitarianism’⁸³ because its concern was directed towards those who were in immediate danger. Its main principles were neutrality, impartiality, independence and a strict policy to stay out of politics.⁸⁴ The League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies was established by the American Red Cross in 1919, causing confusion over the delimitation of competences between it and the ICRC. However, the statutes of 1928 brought clarity and unity with the foundation of a treaty community of the International Red Cross (IRC) consisting of the separate National Red Cross Societies, the ICRC, and League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Within this framework Red Cross Conferences have the highest authority. The ICRC is the guardian of the principles of the IRC and among other responsibilities it can grant or refuse recognition to the National Red Cross Societies⁸⁵, which are independent and approved by their state.⁸⁶

The ICRC was better prepared for the Second World War than it had been for the First World War. First of all, it already had a reliable and tested operational model. Secondly, it had started its preparation for the possibility of war as early as September 1938 with the establishment of a special commission that had the task to plan the engagement of the ICRC in the case of an extensive conflict. Part of its action plan was to contact and re-employ old collaborators for its cause.⁸⁷ Thirdly, and most importantly this time the ICRC had a legal framework for its activities for POWs, namely the Geneva Convention about the Treatment of Prisoners of War. The Convention permits each of the warring parties to select a neutral country as a

⁸³ The ICRC field of activity has expanded since and does no longer confine itself to emergency humanitarianism today.

⁸⁴ Barnett, M. (2011) *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism*, New York, p.37.

⁸⁵ Riesenberger, D. (1992) *Für Humanität in Krieg und Frieden: Das Internationale Rote Kreuz 1863-1977*, Göttingen, p.93-5.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.84.

⁸⁷ Bugnion, *Le CICR et la protection des victimes de la guerre*, p.191-2.

‘protecting power’ to defend its interests in the territory of the other party. The protecting power is allowed to visit all localities of POWs and have private conversations with them.⁸⁸ Article 87 assures that this arrangement does not hinder the ICRC in its ‘humanitarian work’ that it may undertake for the POWs.⁸⁹ The ICRC argued that the visits of delegates of the ICRC of POW camps are not redundant because the ICRC unlike the protecting power undertakes them in its own mandate. Furthermore, because it has information on the treatment of POWs from both parties it can negotiate better.⁹⁰ However, the treaty only defined the ICRCs work for POWs and not for the civilian population in hostile territories, leaving them unprotected.⁹¹

The early preparations of the ICRC enabled the organisation to send telegrams with its action plan to all involved governments after Germany’s attack on Poland and before the war declarations of France and Britain.⁹² It reminded the powers of the Geneva Convention about the Treatment of Prisoners of War and the regulations concerning medical staff. Furthermore, it offered to establish a central agency working together with nationally formed agencies as an information service, and for the transmission of correspondence between the POWs and their families and the coordination of private supporting measures. Furthermore the ICRC volunteered its services as a neutral mediator and suggested the establishment of security zones for the civil population. Confronted with its powerlessness to act on behalf of civilians in enemy territory, the ICRC persuaded the belligerents to give the civilian internees at

⁸⁸ ICRC, *Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War* viewed on 12.05.2012 under <http://www.icrc.org/ihl.nsf/full/305?opendocument>, Art. 86.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, Art. 87.

⁹⁰ Bugnion, *Le CICR et la protection des victimes de la guerre*, p.203.

⁹¹ ICRC (02. February 2005) *ICRC in WWII: Overview of Activities* viewed on 15.05.2012 under <http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/misc/history-world-war-2-overview-020205.htm>.

⁹² Riesenberger, *Für Humanität in Krieg und Frieden*, p.168.

least the status of POWs.⁹³ After the outbreak of war the ICRC dispatched delegates to France, Germany, Poland and Britain. Unfortunately, the delegate heading for Poland was not permitted to enter. As the conflict evolved the number and size of ICRC delegations increased in almost all warring countries (excluding the USSR which prohibited the entry of a delegation).⁹⁴

In addition to the realisation of the central agency with its proposed services, the ICRC organised relief shipments throughout the world. For that reason, it had to establish an enormous logistical operation.⁹⁵ Despite its numerous attempts, the ICRC failed to establish security zones to protect the civilian population from bombardment. It assisted the civilians in organising relief against famine together with the League of Red Cross Societies in Europe. In consequence of an insufficient financial basis, the ICRC was unsuccessful in supporting the civilians in the Far East, where especially in China help was desperately needed.⁹⁶

The failure of the ICRC to react to the Holocaust has been criticised after the war.⁹⁷

The ICRC had ignored the gradual transformation of the German Red Cross⁹⁸ into an

⁹³ Ibid., p.168-9.

⁹⁴ ICRC (02. February 2005) *ICRC in WWII: ICRC delegates during the Second World War* viewed on 15.05.2012 under <http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/misc/history-world-war-2-overview-020205.htm>.

⁹⁵ ICRC (02. February 2005) *ICRC in WWII: Prisoners of war during the Second World War* viewed on 15.05.2012 under <http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/misc/history-world-war-2-overview-020205.htm>.

⁹⁶ ICRC (02. February 2005) *ICRC in WWII: The ICRC's work to help the civilian population during the Second World War* viewed on 15.05.2012 under <http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/misc/history-world-war-2-overview-020205.htm>.

⁹⁷ Forsythe, *The Humanitarians*, p.44.

⁹⁸ Soon enough it became obvious that the German Red Cross was an active part of the Nazi state, at least when the SS-Doctor Ernst Grawitz (after the war one of the main persons made responsible for the conduct of medical experiments on concentration camp detainees) took charge of the society it was no longer deniable.

active part of the Nazi state.⁹⁹ However, the ICRC placed thirty delegates in Germany, the maximum the German state was willing to accept.¹⁰⁰ Some of them assisted the Jews as well as they could but through personal engagement. The general instruction from the ICRC to its delegates was ‘to treat the Jew problem with the greatest caution’.¹⁰¹ Even though the ICRC regarded concentration camp detainees, political prisoners and those persecuted for racial reasons in Germany as victims that deserved help, they never established a separate category for them. They did not fit into the category of civilians in enemy territory, or into the category of POWs.¹⁰² Besides this gap in international law, the ICRC was also afraid to lose its permission for its delegation in Germany.¹⁰³ Yet, as the first messages reporting the systematic mass murder of Jews arrived in Geneva in the summer of 1942 and steadily increased until the end of the year, the ICRC discussed publicly protesting against these violations of human rights and humanitarian law, but decided against it.¹⁰⁴ In 1943 it sent aid packages to the concentration camps but the results were insignificant, especially in regard to the situation of the Jews.¹⁰⁵ The most important reason why the ICRC decided against making the information on the mass murder public was its relationship to the Swiss state.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁹ Favez, *Krieger ohne Waffen*, p.120.

¹⁰⁰ ICRC (02. February 2005) *ICRC in WWII: ICRC delegates during the Second World War* viewed on 15.05.2012 under <http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/misc/history-world-war-2-overview-020205.htm>.

¹⁰¹ Favez, *Krieger ohne Waffen*, p.130-1.

¹⁰² This was also true for the Asiatic forced labourers on the Siam – Burma Railway. Although the delegate did not know the extent of the terrible circumstances on the railroad construction during the war, he was not responsible for them under his ICRC mandate. However, after the Japanese capitulation he made a public appeal on their behalf together with the Thai Red Cross, which was well responded to (ICRC, *Entretien avec M. Werner Salzmann*, p.30-3).

¹⁰³ Favez, *Krieger ohne Waffen*, p.121.

¹⁰⁴ Riesenberger, *Für Humanität in Krieg und Frieden*, p.163.

¹⁰⁵ Favez, *Krieger ohne Waffen*, p.128.

¹⁰⁶ Riesenberger, *Für Humanität in Krieg und Frieden*, p.164.

In fact the ICRC significantly compromised its principle of independence in agreeing to supervision by the Swiss government during the Second World War. Edouard de Haller was appointed by Berne to observe the ICRC and became honorary member of the Assembly without voting rights. The president of the Swiss Federal council at the time, Philippe Etter, was also a voting member of the Assembly. Forsythe found three different relationships between the Swiss Government and the ICRC in his research, namely one of Berne occasionally controlling the ICRC, one of conflict and one of collaboration blending the separateness of the two actors.¹⁰⁷ Overall, the reason for the ICRC's apathy and reluctance to oppose the German regime was that it collided with Swiss interests and in this case Berne managed to impose its interest on the ICRC above its own.¹⁰⁸

In the Far East the work of the ICRC was impeded severely by the Japanese authorities.¹⁰⁹ Japan refused to recognise delegates of the ICRC in Thailand, Singapore, Java, Sumatra, the Philippines and Borneo.¹¹⁰ However, Japan recognised the delegations in Japan, Shanghai and Hong Kong.¹¹¹ Overall, the negotiating power of the ICRC was limited, partly because of the lack of a legal basis¹¹² for its activities in Japanese territories and partly because only a small number of Japanese prisoners were in Allied hands, together with the indifferent official attitude¹¹³ towards

¹⁰⁷ Forsythe, *The Humanitarians*, p.184-5.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.186.

¹⁰⁹ ICRC (August 1944) *Revue Internationale de la Croix Rouge*, No. 308, Genève, p.635.

¹¹⁰ Bugnion, *Le CICR et la protection des victimes de la guerre*, p.220.

¹¹¹ Durand, A. (1978) *Histoire du Comité International de la Croix-Rouge: De Sarajevo à Hiroshima*, Genève, p.461.

¹¹² As mentioned above Japan had not ratified the Geneva Convention about the Treatment of POWs.

¹¹³ Orders of the Japanese Army to its soldiers were not to be captured alive, rather die in combat with honour. Otherwise not only the captured soldier lost his dignity but his whole family was socially disgraced (see Bugnion, *Le CICR et la protection des victimes de la guerre*, p.218).

them.¹¹⁴ As a result the delegates were left with a difficult and dangerous task; just how dangerous became apparent in Borneo where the Japanese authorities executed the delegate Visher and his wife after they were caught delivering relief to POWs. They were accused of espionage and sentenced to death in a show trial.¹¹⁵

Even though Japan had set up the necessary institutions to pass on information about POWs in their control, they only delivered incomplete lists with huge delays.¹¹⁶ Vice versa, the Japanese POWs refused to give their names or invented false ones for transmission to the Japanese government to protect their honour.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, the existence of some camps was only discovered after the capitulation of the Japanese.¹¹⁸ Only a fraction of the Allied POWs in Japanese hands had the opportunity to send and receive letters from their families, and only then with great delays.¹¹⁹ Also the ICRC's communication with its delegates was very slow and aggravated by the fact that all correspondence was diverted via Tokyo¹²⁰ and checked by the Japanese authorities.¹²¹

In general, the visits that could be made by delegates in the Far East were strongly compromised. The delegates were shown around by the Japanese commandant in charge and were under no circumstances allowed to have private conversations with

¹¹⁴ Bugnion, *Le CICR et la protection des victimes de la guerre*, p.218.

¹¹⁵ ICRC (1948) *Revue internationale de la Croix-rouge: Bulletin international des sociétés de la Croix-rouge*, Vol. 30, Geneva, p.52.

¹¹⁶ See Chapter 2.2.) Prisoners of War in the Far East

¹¹⁷ Bugnion, *Le CICR et la protection des victimes de la guerre*, p.220.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.220.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.220.

¹²⁰ This was also the case in Bangkok, the ICRC talks in a letter about an average delay of about two to three months because of the mandatory redirection over Tokyo (Mouravieff, M. (23.07.1945) *Letter from the ICRC to Ms Warner*. BG 017 07-141, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva).

¹²¹ Laurent, C. (2003) *Les obstacles rencontrés par le C.I.C.R. dans son activité en Extrême-Orient (1941-1945)*, Master thesis of the University of Lausanne, p.110.

the POWs.¹²² Besides the difficulties in obtaining an accurate image of the treatment of the POWs this way, every visit had to be authorised by the Japanese often taking very long to receive and preventing the desired regularity of visits.¹²³

The ICRC could transport limited supplies on chartered vessels reserved for the transportation of diplomatic personnel, its efforts to obtain a regular sea connection to deliver relief to the main POW locations failed.¹²⁴ Therefore, the delegates had to buy the supplies for the POWs locally depending on what was available¹²⁵ and with an unfavourable exchange rate imposed by the Japanese occupiers.¹²⁶ Overall the impact of the ICRC in the Far East was only fragmentary, despite the ceaseless efforts of the delegates, due to the unwillingness of the Japanese authorities.¹²⁷

The work of the ICRC in the Second World War illustrated how dependent it was on the cooperation of governments for its efforts to be successful. Based on its orientation towards governments for the legitimacy of its work from the very start of its operations, this is not surprising.¹²⁸ On the other hand, the Second World War also showed that the pragmatic approach of the ICRC towards its delegations in giving them a high degree of freedom in their tasks was very effective in most cases.¹²⁹ For

¹²² Forsythe, *The Humanitarians*, p.43-4.

¹²³ Bugnion, *Le CICR et la protection des victimes de la guerre*, p.220-1.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.221.

¹²⁵ ICRC (August 1944) *Revue Internationale de la Croix Rouge*, No. 308, Genève, p.636.

¹²⁶ Bugnion, *Le CICR et la protection des victimes de la guerre*, p.221.

¹²⁷ ICRC (02. February 2005) *ICRC in WWII: Activities in the Far East* viewed on 15.05.2012 under <http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/misc/57jnwq.htm>.

¹²⁸ Laurent, *Les obstacles rencontrés par le C.I.R.C.*, p.111-2.

¹²⁹ Forsyth, *The Humanitarians*, p.193.

its achievements during the Second World War the ICRC received the Nobel Peace Prize.¹³⁰

3.2.) The ICRC Delegation in Thailand

The ICRC established its delegation in Thailand through appointing Mr Salzmann, a Swiss national already stationed in Bangkok, in May 1943.¹³¹ While the Thai government recognised the ICRC delegate immediately, the Japanese authorities refused recognition.¹³² As Mr Laupper, an employee of Diethelm & Company, was very involved in the duties of the delegation from the beginning, he was nominated as assistant delegate several months later.¹³³ Due to the fact that the government of Thailand had kept its independence, it was responsible for the civilian internees on its territory and for a small number of POWs.¹³⁴ The POWs of the Siam–Burma Railway stood under Japanese military administration.¹³⁵

Switzerland was the protecting power of British, Australian and American POWs and civilian internees represented through the Swiss honorary consul Mr Siegenthaler in Bangkok. The protecting power for Dutch POWs and civilian internees was Sweden represented by the consul general of Sweden Mr Enstedt.¹³⁶ The Japanese authorities also refused to recognise the protecting powers and both consuls could only act as

¹³⁰ Ibid., 2-3: The ICRC received the Nobel Peace Prize three times: 1917, 1944 and 1963 (together with the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies). Additionally, the founder of the ICRC, Henry Dunant, received it in 1901.

¹³¹ Salzmann, W. (30. October 1952) *Speech by Mr Salzmann for the Rotary Club of Bangkok*. Taken from the personal inheritance of Werner Salzmann, p.1.

¹³² ICRC (May 1948) 'Report of the ICRC on its activities during the Second World War (September 1, 1939 – June 30, 1947)' in *General Activities Vol.I*, Geneva, p.486-7.

¹³³ ICRC (September 1945) *Revue Internationale de la Croix Rouge*, No. 321, Genève, p.635.

¹³⁴ Salzmann, W. (27.07.1943) *Telegram from Mr Salzmann to the ICRC*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-141, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

¹³⁵ ICRC (02. February 2005) *ICRC in WWII: Activities in the Far East* viewed on 15.05.2012 under <http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/misc/57jnwq.htm>.

¹³⁶ ICRC, *Entretien avec M. Werner Salzmann*, p.9-10.

private individuals.¹³⁷ The Thai Red Cross Society had to deny the request for close collaboration with the ICRC delegate, because they were under Japanese military jurisdiction.¹³⁸ However, they donated a supply of medicines through the consulate of Switzerland for the first despatch to the POWs in 1943.¹³⁹

Until the delegate of the ICRC was appointed, the protecting powers had already obtained the right from the Thai government to visit the civilian internees. Mr Salzmänn and his wife had visited the internment camps several times before as private persons to visit interned friends. Therefore, Salzmänn was well informed about their treatment.¹⁴⁰ After his official visits in his function as delegate, he informed the ICRC that the conditions were satisfactory.¹⁴¹ However, neither Mr Salzmänn nor the representatives of the protecting powers received the permission to visit the POW camps under Japanese authority. Mr Salzmänn saw POWs as he passed through Nong Pla Duk on personal business several times between 1943 and 1944 and remarked: ‘I will always remember hundreds of Prisoners of War working near the station with desperate looks on their faces and hardly anything to wear’.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ Salzmänn, W. (without date) *Remarks to the ICRC*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-141, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva, p.1.

¹³⁸ Salzmänn, W. (07.05.1946) *Report on the Activity of the International Red Cross Delegation for Siam during the Period 1/5/1943 – 15/8/1945 from Mr Salzmänn to the ICRC*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-142, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva, P.1.

¹³⁹ Salzmänn, W. (27.01.1944) *Letter from Mr Salzmänn to Dr. Paravicini*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-141, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva, p.4.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.16.

¹⁴¹ Salzmänn, W. (14.12.1943) *Telegram from Mr Salzmänn to the ICRC*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-141, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva & Salzmänn, W. (29.11.1944) *Telegram from Mr Salzmänn to the ICRC*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-141, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

¹⁴² Salzmänn, W. (without date) *Extracts from reports on the Siam-Burma Railway: Report No. 9, 29.-30.May 1946 and Report No. 12, 6.-9. June 1946*. Taken from the personal inheritance of Werner Salzmänn, p.1.

Besides these glimpses, he received secret messages from POWs¹⁴³ informing him of the appalling conditions in the camps.¹⁴⁴

Despite several approaches from Mr Salzmänn to the Japanese Embassy in Bangkok it refused to render a list of POWs in Thailand because it was handled as a military secret, not even the number of POWs was disclosed. Mr Salzmänn estimated that about 30,000 POWs were held in Thailand by the Japanese on the basis of a remark from the Embassy on sending pocket-money. An estimate was important to decide what quantities of relief were needed.¹⁴⁵

Although the Japanese did not accept a delegate of the ICRC in Bangkok, Mr Salzmänn obtained the permission to buy and send relief and pocket money to the POWs as a private person with ICRC funds that had to be transmitted via Tokyo. However, the delegate had to hand over the consignments in Bangkok for delivery by the Japanese Military administration.¹⁴⁶ This meant the ICRC was dependent on their cooperation for the dispatch. At the beginning Mr Salzmänn was several times rebuffed by the Japanese Military authorities with the reply: ‘... en temps de guerre, avaient certainement d’autres choses à faire que de s’occuper de la Croix-Rouge’.¹⁴⁷ This was a standard attitude that other delegations in the Far East also encountered in their dealings with Japan.¹⁴⁸ However, Mr Salzmänn managed to receive railway

¹⁴³ See chapter 3.2.) Clandestine Help.

¹⁴⁴ Salzmänn, W. (27.01.1944) *Letter from Mr Salzmänn to Dr. Paravicini*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-141, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva, p.1.

¹⁴⁵ Salzmänn, W. (07.05.1946) *Report on the Activity of the International Red Cross Delegation for Siam during the Period 1/5/1943 – 15/8/1945 from Mr Salzmänn to the ICRC*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-142, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva, p.2.

¹⁴⁶ Salzmänn, W. (15.09.1943) *Telegram from Mr Salzmänn to the ICRC*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-141, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

¹⁴⁷ ICRC, *Entretien avec M. Werner Salzmänn*, p.18.

¹⁴⁸ Laurent, *Les obstacles rencontrés par le C.I.R.C.*, p.67.

wagons from the Japanese Military authorities for the delivery after several months of rejections, because of the mediation of the Japanese Embassy in Bangkok on his behalf. Through a coincidence the delegate was able to help the Japanese Ambassador and to reciprocate he enabled the dispatch. The delegate had sent a list with goods planned for the POWs to the Japanese Embassy. At that time the Ambassador was sick with dysentery and on the list his secretary saw the remedy 'Emetine' that was hard to find in Bangkok. Mr Salzmänn promptly mailed two boxes of medicine with get-well wishes. Only a few weeks later the same secretary came to the office of Mr Salzmänn to ask if he could obtain a special tyre, again hard to come by, because the Ambassador was having car-troubles. Again the delegate was effective in assisting the Ambassador through the connections of his company, Diethelm & Company, this time on account. The impact these incidents had on the successful transportation of relief is apparent, when compared to the fruitless attempts of the Swedish consul Mr Enstedt to send relief through the military authorities since the beginning of Japanese occupation of Thailand.¹⁴⁹ The delegate worked closely together with the Swiss consul Mr Siegenthaler as proposed by the ICRC¹⁵⁰ and was on friendly terms with the Swedish consul. He could accommodate the goods of Mr Enstedt in his dispatch.¹⁵¹ This illustrates that the military authorities on site had some scope in deciding over Red Cross relief and that arbitrariness played its part in the refusal to permit ICRC to supply parcels. However, the ban of visits to the POW camps was doubtlessly because of the terrible conditions in the camps.

¹⁴⁹ ICRC, *Entretien avec M. Werner Salzmänn*, p.20-1.

¹⁵⁰ Salzmänn, W. (07.05.1946) *Report on the Activity of the International Red Cross Delegation for Siam during the Period 1/5/1943 – 15/8/1945 from Mr Salzmänn to the ICRC*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-142, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva, p.3.

¹⁵¹ Salzmänn, W. (27.01.1944) *Letter from Mr Salzmänn to Dr. Paravicini*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-141, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva, p.3.

Over the whole period, the delegate handed over six consignments to the military administration and three directly to the camp authorities. These were for British, Australian and American POWs financed by Switzerland, the protecting power. For the Dutch POWs Switzerland provided few funds, and the delegate was only able to send two relief dispatches¹⁵² with supplementary money from the Dutch Red Cross Society.¹⁵³

On 18 August 1945 the Japanese authorities finally recognised the delegations in Thailand, Singapore, Indo-China and the Dutch East Indies, in anticipation of the need of ICRC activities in liberating and repatriating the numerous POWs scattered all over the occupied territories.¹⁵⁴ Five days later Mr Salzmann visited some camps of the Siam–Burma Railway for the first time. The organisation of supplies began immediately, additionally several Red Cross flags were set up at the camps allowing Allied planes to drop desperately needed relief.¹⁵⁵ Then the transportation to Bangkok for medical care of the POWs began, assisted by the Thai Red Cross, no longer under Japanese restrictions, and the protecting powers.¹⁵⁶ A new task among others of the delegate from the end of 1945 onwards was to observe the conditions of the Japanese surrendered military personnel now held in Allied camps.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵² ICRC (1948) *Revue internationale de la Croix-rouge: Bulletin international des sociétés de la Croix-rouge*, Vol. 30, Geneva, p.488-9.

¹⁵³ Salzmann, W. (07.05.1946) *Report on the Activity of the International Red Cross Delegation for Siam during the Period 1/5/1943 – 15/8/1945 from Mr Salzmann to the ICRC*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-142, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva, p.10.

¹⁵⁴ ICRC (October 1945) *Revue Internationale de la Croix Rouge*, No. 322, Genève, p.687.

¹⁵⁵ Salzmann, W. (10.05.1946) *Report No. 4 – Siam from Mr Salzmann to the ICRC*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-142, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

¹⁵⁶ ICRC (October 1945) *Revue Internationale de la Croix Rouge*, No. 322, Genève, p.773-4.

¹⁵⁷ ICRC (02. February 2005) *ICRC in WWII: Activities in the Far East* viewed on 15.05.2012 under <http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/misc/57jnwq.htm>.

3.3.) The Role of Diethelm & Company

At the time of the Second World War the ICRC often searched for new delegates through the Swiss government, who recommended Swiss citizens working for branches of Swiss companies in other countries. This meant that many of its delegates had received no training from the ICRC and often had to manage with little or occasionally no instructions from Geneva.¹⁵⁸ The Bangkok delegate was appointed in the same way. At the time he was vice-manager of Diethelm & Co., while Mr Siegenthaler, the Swiss honorary consul, was the manager. Diethelm supported the ICRC mission of Mr Salzmann in various ways.¹⁵⁹ First of all, as an export/import company they had a huge stock of goods that were otherwise difficult to find after the break out of war. They sold these products for a very cheap price to the Red Cross for relief packages for the POWs. At the time, the import division was incapacitated because of the war. In addition, the staff of Diethelm assisted in all duties in connection with the preparation and delivery of the relief dispatches and with typing and bookkeeping. The company could also provide storage room. More importantly, Diethelm granted the delegate cash advances, when the protecting power had to wait for remittances from Switzerland. This allowed the delegate to act immediately and save money as market prices increased rapidly over time.¹⁶⁰

4.) Impact of the ICRC work on the Siam–Burma Railway camps

4.1.) Official Help

¹⁵⁸ Forsythe, *The Humanitarians*, p.41.

¹⁵⁹ At the Headquarters of the ICRC numerous letters from the ICRC to employees of Diethelm showing its appreciation for their help can be viewed (ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-142).

¹⁶⁰ Salzmann, W. (07.05.1946) *Report on the Activity of the International Red Cross Delegation for Siam during the Period 1/5/1943 – 15/8/1945 from Mr Salzmann to the ICRC*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-142, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva, p.3.

Since the start of activities in Bangkok from the ICRC in May 1943 six consignments were handed over to the military authorities on the railway station in Bangkok for British POWs. The first one was ready on 15 October 1943 but it was only taken over by the Japanese on the 12 and 13 November.¹⁶¹ The delegate received a receipt for the goods¹⁶² from the Japanese commandant and from the British POW officer in charge of the camp.¹⁶³ Hence, since the construction of the line had already started in June 1942¹⁶⁴, the POWs had not received official help for seventeen months. The next five consignments were transferred by the Japanese administration on the following dates: 28 December 1943, 6 May 1944, 10&17 July 1944 and 29 October 1944. All shipments consisted of foodstuffs, toilet articles, smoking articles, medicines and clothing. Altogether valued at 1,336,599 Baht and made up into 6,600 packages.¹⁶⁵ Additionally seven shipments of pocket money were transferred to the Japanese Embassy for them to pass on to the military authorities between the 23 November 1943 and 19 June 1945¹⁶⁶ in the amount of 340,000 Baht.¹⁶⁷

After the first bombardments of the railway, the Japanese declared furiously that they would no longer provide railway wagons for the transport of relief for the POWs. The delegate turned to the Japanese Ambassador for a date, time and place where the

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p.4

¹⁶² Unfortunately, due to a mess in the documents at the Headquarters of the ICRC in Geneva it is not possible to distinguish official receipts from clandestine ones.

¹⁶³ Salzmann, W. (27.01.1944) *Letter from Mr Salzmann to Dr. Paravicini*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-141, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva, p.4.

¹⁶⁴ Flower, *Captors and Captives on The Burma – Thailand Railway*, p.227.

¹⁶⁵ Salzmann, W. (07.05.1946) *Report on the Activity of the International Red Cross Delegation for Siam during the Period 1/5/1943 – 15/8/1945 from Mr Salzmann to the ICRC*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-142, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva, p.4-5.

¹⁶⁶ Other dates for the transmission of pocket money: 28.12.1943, 04.07.1944, 06.09.1944, 13.12.1944, 20.02.1945 and 19.06.1945.

¹⁶⁷ Salzmann, W. (07.05.1946) *Report on the Activity of the International Red Cross Delegation for Siam during the Period 1/5/1943 – 15/8/1945 from Mr Salzmann to the ICRC*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-142, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva, p.5-6.

ICRC could bring the already prepared relief packages. Mr Salzmänn guessed that the Ambassador complied with the request to save his face and allowed the delegate to deliver the goods to Ban Pong, which was accessible by boat.¹⁶⁸ In this way three more consignments were shipped directly by the delegation to the camp Ban Pong on 20 February 1945, 13 May 1945 and 30 July 1945. POWs unloaded the ships but they were forbidden to speak to the delegation and the Japanese supervised them the whole time.¹⁶⁹ These consignments to the value of 1,331,957 Baht were split in 5,174 packages and since many POWs had been shipped to other places after the completion of the railway¹⁷⁰ there should have been more per POW than in the first six dispatches. In addition the delegate sent two dispatches for Dutch POWs on 17 October 1944 and on 5 June 1945 together with goods for the British POWs to the value of 175,503 and pocket money to the amount of 55,179 Baht.¹⁷¹ The delegation had no knowledge of American POWs in the camps. However, the Japanese made no difference between the nationalities in the distribution of the Red Cross relief.¹⁷²

The delegation was forced to rely on the Japanese military authorities for the distribution of the relief. In fact, Mr Salzmänn did not know how many camps and POWs there were and where they were located.¹⁷³ This makes an assessment of what was obtained by the POWs from these shipments even more difficult. Furthermore,

¹⁶⁸ ICRC, *Entretien avec M. Werner Salzmänn*, p.22.

¹⁶⁹ Laupper, K. (18.03.1945) *Report from Dr. Karl Laupper to the ICRC*. BG 017 07-141, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva, p.5.

¹⁷⁰ Waterford, *Prisoners of the Japanese in World War II*, p.238.

¹⁷¹ Salzmänn, W. (07.05.1946) *Report on the Activity of the International Red Cross Delegation for Siam during the Period 1/5/1943 – 15/8/1945 from Mr Salzmänn to the ICRC*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-142, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva, p.10.

¹⁷² This arises from the different accounts written from different nationalities that received the same issues of Red Cross supplies.

¹⁷³ Salzmänn, W. (07.05.1946) *Report on the Activity of the International Red Cross Delegation for Siam during the Period 1/5/1943 – 15/8/1945 from Mr Salzmänn to the ICRC*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-142, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva, p.3.

the British and Japanese governments agreed to an exchange of interned diplomats in mid 1942. Additionally, on the ships for that purpose, the British and American governments had the opportunity to send supplies for Allied POWs provided by their Red Cross Societies. A second and last shipment could be sent in 1943.¹⁷⁴

Unfortunately, in the sources the difference between these shipments and ICRC supplies is not always made, therefore this discussion will include both. It becomes apparent that part of the Red Cross supplies was used by the Japanese themselves.

The POWs had witnessed this and many recorded it in their accounts.¹⁷⁵ The Japanese seemed to retain part of the Red Cross packages with no evident reason. This was discovered when shortly before and after capitulation the Japanese commandants handed-out withheld Red Cross parcels which had arrived long before.¹⁷⁶ The reasons for keeping Red Cross supplies stored away is not known, but after the war many unused Red Cross storages were found in the Pacific region.¹⁷⁷ Therefore, this was in tune with Japanese behaviour in other POW locations.

¹⁷⁴ Kinvig, *River Kwai Railway*, p.90-1.

¹⁷⁵ Evidence of this comes variously from Coast, J. (1958) *Railroad of Death*, London, p.186, 200, 297; Rivett, R. (1947) *Behind Bamboo: An Inside Story of the Japanese Prison Camps*, Sydney, p.293, 319 & Baume, L. (18. May 1944) Extract from the Diary of Louis Baume, Lieutenant, 137th Field Reg., Royal Artillery taken from a *letter from Mrs Sibylla Jane Flower to Mr Salzmann* on the 29. November 1996. Taken from the personal inheritance of Werner Salzmann.

¹⁷⁶ Evidence of this comes variously from Gordon, E. (1963) *Miracle on the River Kwai: The true story behind the book and the film, The Bridge on the River Kwai*, London, p.207; Wader, S. (without date) *Wader's diary: Thai Burma Railway known to us as the Death Railway* viewed on 02.06.2012 under http://www.far-eastern-heroes.org.uk/Reg_Rainer_Returns/html/death_railway.htm; Percival, F. (without date) *Returned Prisoner's Vivid Story* viewed on 02.06.2012 under http://www.far-eastern-heroes.org.uk/Your_Gods_Stronger_Than_Ours/; Hardie, *The Burma – Siam Railway*, p.162, 175-6; Rivett, *Behind Bamboo*, p.207; McGowran, T. (2000) *Beyond the Bamboo Screen: Scottish Prisoners of War under the Japanese*, Glasgow, p.58; Dunlop, *The War Diaries of Weary Dunlop*, p.433; Thompson, T. (without date) *The White Flag: Chapter XII Kinsayo* viewed on 01.06.2012 under http://www.far-eastern-heroes.org.uk/the_white_flag/html/chapter_xii.htm & James, J. (1989) *Memoirs of a P.O.W. 1942-1945* viewed on 2.06.2012 under http://www.britain-at-war.org.uk/WW2/Death_Railway/html/major_jimmie_james.htm.

¹⁷⁷ Waterford, *Prisoners of the Japanese in World War II*, p.43.

There are also valid reasons to believe that pocket money sent by the Red Cross was never handed out to the POWs at all. For instance, Hardie writes on the 27 December 1944: ‘...for we think that they [the Japanese] are holding quite a sum of Red Cross money...our people working in the HQ office have picked up hints which suggest it.’¹⁷⁸ In August 1945 after capitulation he reports further that the Japanese have ‘handed over 35,000 ticals of Red Cross money which they had been holding (we wonder for how long)’.¹⁷⁹ Furthermore, in other narratives pocket money is not mentioned, as reports on Red Cross parcels can be found in the same descriptions, it can be assumed that they would have written about the reception of pocket money from the Red Cross too.

Nevertheless, part of the Red Cross consignments reached the POWs on the Siam–Burma Railway. For instance, Nong Pla Duk¹⁸⁰, Nakom Patom¹⁸¹, Takanun¹⁸² and Chungkai¹⁸³ received regularly small supplies. Other camps that received Red Cross packages at least once were Tamuang¹⁸⁴, Konyu¹⁸⁵ and Aunganaung¹⁸⁶ (also called camp 105). Except Aunganaung all camps mentioned above are on Thai

¹⁷⁸ Hardie, *The Burma – Siam Railway*, p.154.

¹⁷⁹ Hardie, *The Burma – Siam Railway*, p.176.

¹⁸⁰ Evidence of this comes variously from Sluyter, L. (without date) *The most cost-effective genocide: Japanese Forced Labour Camps on the Burma – Thailand; based on a manuscript of Adrian Kannegieter* viewed on 01.06.2012 under http://www.britain-at-war.org.uk/WW2/Forced_Labour_Camps & Baume, Extract from the Diary of Louis Baume taken from a *letter from Mrs Sibylla Jane Flower to Mr Salzmann* on the 29. November 1996. Taken from the personal inheritance of Werner Salzmann.

¹⁸¹ Evidence of this comes variously from Dunlop (2003), *Appendix: Medical Experiences in Japanese Captivity* in R. Parkin *Ray Parkin’s War Trilogy; Into the Smother*, Victoria, p.643-4, 648; Rivett, *Behind Bamboo*, p.291 & Dunlop, *The War Diaries of Weary Dunlop*, p.405, 419, 432 & 434.

¹⁸² Coast, *Railroad of Death*, p.177, 200.

¹⁸³ Evidence of this comes variously from Hardie, *The Burma – Siam Railway*, p.141, 144, 170 & Dunlop, *The War Diaries of Weary Dunlop*, p.400.

¹⁸⁴ Hardie, *The Burma – Siam Railway*, p.174-5.

¹⁸⁵ Parkins, R. (2003) ‘Into the Smother’ in R. Parkin, *Ray Parkin’s War Trilogy*, Victoria, p.605.

¹⁸⁶ Rivett, *Behind Bamboo*, p.294.

ground. Compared to the Burma side of the railway, the conditions were better in Thailand. On the Burma side no Red Cross supplies purchased locally could be sent into the camps.¹⁸⁷ This meant that only the American or British Red Cross parcels already in Japanese hands could have been distributed. As demonstrated above, in the Thailand camps there were additional packages sent from Bangkok from the ICRC delegate. However, it needs to be remembered that this is not a final assessment. Other accounts do not specify to which camp they refer to and many more remain to be researched. Furthermore, on the one hand many accounts do not mention the Red Cross at all, therefore they either did not receive any supplies at all or they were not important enough for them to write it down. On the other hand some mention the Red Cross but not in the camps of the Siam–Burma Railway or not in context with relief, so it can be assumed that they really did not receive goods from the Red Cross as they were sensitized to its function.

When POWs received parcels, the quantity was always very limited. Sometimes up to six men had to share one already tampered parcel.¹⁸⁸ Beyond question, in some cases the supplies saved lives. They were important in improving at least slightly the inadequate medical provisions.¹⁸⁹ Any amount of supplementary nourishment made a difference in the starved state of the POWs.¹⁹⁰ Moreover the Red Cross parcels were invaluable to the moral condition of the POWs. It connected them with the outside world; they were not forgotten and somebody cared.¹⁹¹ Lieutenant Colonel Swinton

¹⁸⁷ Kinvig, *River Kwai Railway*, p.92.

¹⁸⁸ Percival (without date) *Returned Prisoner's Vivid Story* viewed on 02.06.2012 under http://www.far-eastern-heroes.org.uk/Your_Gods_Stronger_Than_Ours/.

¹⁸⁹ Swinton, G. E. (03.10.1945) *Letter from G. E. Swinton, Lt. Colonel, The East Surrey Regiment (Commanding United Kingdom ex POWs in Siam) to Karl Laupper*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-142, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

¹⁹⁰ Waterford, *Prisoners of the Japanese in World War II*, p.41.

¹⁹¹ Kinvig, *River Kwai Railway*, p.91.

of the East Surrey Regiment commanding British ex-POWs in Siam writes in his letter of appreciation to Mr Salzmann¹⁹²: ‘We realise before the Japanese surrender that you were endeavouring to assist us, in spite innumerable difficulties, and the very opportune relief goods which you forwarded made a great difference to our health, comfort and morale on many occasions’.¹⁹³

However, the relief shipments had only a small impact on the quotidian conditions of the Siam-Burma railway in its entirety. Only a small proportion of POWs received mostly small quantities of Red Cross supplies and even fewer got them regularly, while many POWs were not reached at all. That applies increasingly the nearer the camps are located to the Thai – Burma border and to those in Burma. Nevertheless, in the camps nearest to Bangkok, the relief that got through to the POWs had a positive impact on the everyday conditions of these camps. The fault behind the limited effect of Red Cross aid in the railway camps as a whole lies without doubt with the Japanese authorities. The situation would have been considerably better if the Japanese in charge had distributed all the Red Cross supplies and communicated with the ICRC delegations. Furthermore, in Burma the unrecognised ICRC delegation never managed to help either the POWs or the civilian internees.¹⁹⁴ This puts the achievements of the delegate in Thailand into perspective.

¹⁹² At the ICRC Headquarters in Geneva many more thank-you letters from ex POWs to the ICRC, Mr Salzmann or Mr Laupper can be viewed.

¹⁹³ Swinton, G. E. (03.10.1945) *Letter from G. E. Swinton, Lt. Colonel, The East Surrey Regiment (Commanding United Kingdom ex POWs in Siam) to Mr Salzmann*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-142, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

¹⁹⁴ Kinvig, *River Kwai Railway*, p.92.

4.2.) Clandestine Help

Information about the appalling conditions in the POW camps under Japanese authority reached the delegate secretly early on in his appointment for the ICRC through his friend Albert Tanner.¹⁹⁵ Mr Tanner moved to the Ban Pong area to establish contact with the POWs. Through this secret contact Mr Salzmänn sent desperately needed medical supplies to the POWs, purchased with 1,997 Baht of an advance of Diethelm. Additionally, the delegate raised provisions of medicine of the protecting power Switzerland and from the manager of the company Scherer Ltd. and included these in the secret dispatches. This was at a time when official help was not possible. The Japanese authorities had not yet agreed to take over relief from Mr Salzmänn.¹⁹⁶

Several organisations undertook secret efforts to support the POWs. The civilian internees in Bangkok managed to send secret medicine and money loans into the camps through Asiatic canteen operators. In the same way, Mr Tanner managed to stay in contact with the POWs and also sent in similar assistance. The money loans were obtained from companies and friends for prisoners they knew personally.¹⁹⁷ Diethelm was also involved in some cases.¹⁹⁸ Another organisation, called 'V' did exactly the same. Mr Boonphong¹⁹⁹ worked for the last two organisations and was

¹⁹⁵ Mr Tanner had been employed by the Borneo Ltd. company in Thailand before the Japanese occupation. The Japanese authorities has confiscated all assets of the British company. Therefore it was inoperative during the war.

¹⁹⁶ Salzmänn, W. (21.02.1946) *Confidential Letter from Mr Salzmänn to the ICRC*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-142, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva, p.1-2.

¹⁹⁷ Mr Tanner had valuable contacts from his former occupation for the Borneo Ltd. company, for instance former colleagues of him provided many loans for the POWs.

¹⁹⁸ Tanner, A. (10.09.1945) 'Notes on Underground Organisation for giving Assistance to Allied Prisoners of War in Japanese Camps on the Siam – Burma Railway', attached to W.Salzmänn (21.02.1946) *Confidential Letter from Mr Salzmänn to the ICRC*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-142, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva, p.1-3.

¹⁹⁹ Mostly referred to Bonpong in accounts of the POWs.

very prominent under the POWs.²⁰⁰ The people involved in clandestine organisations for the benefit of the POWs continuously risked their lives. Mr Tanner had to cope for many years after the war with the anxiety this caused him.²⁰¹

Even after official help became possible Mr Salzmänn maintained the secret contact to the POWs through Mr Tanner.²⁰² Besides this regular contact other secret messages reached the delegate from time to time through Asiatic canteen operators coming into Bangkok to buy goods for the canteens.²⁰³ These letters were sent to Salzmänn in his capacity as the ICRC representative.²⁰⁴ Since the ICRC was officially neutral,²⁰⁵ the deliverers of the messages could turn to it without putting themselves in danger. These contacts were especially valuable in adjusting the purchases for the official dispatches through the Japanese to the most urgent needs of the POWs.²⁰⁶ Moreover, on the basis of these messages, the delegate informed the ICRC and the British government of the terrible situation of the POWs.²⁰⁷ This was possible through an encoded message sent from the consulate of Switzerland.²⁰⁸ As mentioned above, all communications with Geneva were very difficult,²⁰⁹ therefore the delegate had to make decisions not always knowing if he would exceed his

²⁰⁰ For instance, Hardie, *The Burma – Siam Railway*, p.81.

²⁰¹ Salzmänn, W. (29. November 1996) *Letter to Ms Flower*. Taken from the personal inheritance of Werner Salzmänn.

²⁰² Salzmänn, W. (21.02.1946) *Confidential Letter from Mr Salzmänn to the ICRC*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-142, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva, p.2.

²⁰³ ICRC, *Entretien avec M. Werner Salzmänn*, p.27.

²⁰⁴ Anonymous (23.07.1943) *Secret Letter from a British Medical Officer in a POW camp on the Railway to the Red Cross*. & Author illegible (09.06.1943) *Secret Letter to Mr Salzmänn from a POW*. Both in ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-141, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva. Additional letters of this kind can be viewed in the same folder.

²⁰⁵ Barnett, *Empire of Humanity*, p.37.

²⁰⁶ Salzmänn, W. (21.02.1946) *Confidential Letter from Mr Salzmänn to the ICRC*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-142, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva, p.2.

²⁰⁷ ICRC, *Entretien avec M. Werner Salzmänn*, p.27

²⁰⁸ Laurent, *Les obstacles rencontrés par le C.I.R.C.*, p.110.

²⁰⁹ Salzmänn, W. (21.09.1944) *Telegram from Mr Salzmänn to Mr Mouravieff from the ICRC*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-141, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

competences for the ICRC. Only after the war could he inform Geneva of his clandestine activities and explain: ‘I do not know whether you approve of any clandestine help given to seriously suffering POWs by a member of your Organisation. I had no choice’.²¹⁰ Since the official policy of the ICRC was to comply strictly with the guidelines of the Japanese authorities,²¹¹ this clandestine help clearly overstepped the limits of the ICRC delegation. However, the ICRC refunded the delegate for the expenses of these activities²¹² and honoured him with the silver medal of appreciation after his return to Switzerland.²¹³ This demonstrates their approval of his work.

4.3.) International Pressure

The privileged information prompted the British government to make several protests to the Japanese government over the treatment of British POWs. Furthermore, the government appealed to the Vatican and broadcasted a Japanese message to secure that the highest authorities in Japan were informed about the poor treatment. Moreover, the Swiss Foreign Minister Golaz in consultation with the British government tried to influence Japan ‘as a civilized nation’ to remedy the shortcomings and adhere to the Geneva Convention.²¹⁴

However, the protests only produced undiscerning and ‘cynical’ replies from the Japanese government. This caused a discussion in the British War Cabinet in October

²¹⁰ Salzmänn, W. (21.02.1946) *Confidential Letter from Mr Salzmänn to the ICRC*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-142, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva, p.1.

²¹¹ Laurent, *Les obstacles rencontrés par le C.I.R.C.*, p.93.

²¹² ICRC (14.06.1946) *Letter from the ICRC to the War Organisation of the Red Cross Society and Order of St. John of Jerusalem*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-142, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

²¹³ ICRC, *Entretien avec M. Werner Salzmänn*, p.3.

²¹⁴ War Cabinet of the British Empire (21.10.1943) *Conditions of British Prisoners of War in Siam*, The National Archives online: cab/66/42/21, p.1-2.

1943 about whether the information should be made public. Besides the recognized propaganda value of this news in the war efforts of the British Empire against Japan, it hoped to influence Japan's behaviour through the world opinion. Although concerns were raised that the POWs may have to suffer the retribution for this action, it was decided to make the information public.²¹⁵ One argument produced in the context of that discussion was that the situation in the Far East was turning perceptibly against Japan, hence causing Japan to consider that the bad treatment of POWs could have dire consequences for it.²¹⁶

Although at the end of 1943 the Japanese government was not ready to accept that the war was turning against them, some changes can be observed in the treatment of POWs in the course of 1944. For instance, Nakom Patom was built as a hospital camp in 1944 because of rising international pressure, albeit not equipped with medical supplies. Also a change of attitude towards the POWs of the Japanese and the Korean guards was noted.²¹⁷ The change becomes undeniable, when the capitulation of Japan was imminent. As demonstrated above, the Japanese commandants in the camps suddenly distributed withheld Red Cross parcels.²¹⁸ After capitulation Rivett noted in Kanchanaburi: 'Neguchi handed over the keys of the Red Cross hut to

²¹⁵ War Cabinet of the British Empire (27.10.1943) *Publicity concerning Japanese Treatment of British Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees*, The National Archives online: cab/66/42/34, p.1-2.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.2.

²¹⁷ Flower, *Captors and Captives on The Burma – Thailand Railway*, p.246.

²¹⁸ Evidence of this comes variously from Gordon, *Miracle on the River Kwai*, p.207; Wader, *Wader's diary* viewed on 02.06.2012 under http://www.far-eastern-heroes.org.uk/Reg_Rainer_Returns/html/death_railway.htm; Percival, *Returned Prisoner's Vivid Story* viewed on 02.06.2012 under http://www.far-eastern-heroes.org.uk/Your_Gods_Stronger_Than_Ours/; Hardie, *The Burma – Siam Railway*, p.162, 175-6; Rivett, *Behind Bamboo*, p.207; McGowran, *Beyond the Bamboo Screen*, p.58; Dunlop, *The War Diaries of Weary Dunlop*, p.433; Thompson, T. (without date) *The White Flag: Chapter XII Kinsayo* viewed on 01.06.2012 under http://www.far-eastern-heroes.org.uk/the_white_flag/html/chapter_xii.htm & James, *Memoirs of a P.O.W. 1942-1945* viewed on 2.06.2012 under http://www.britain-at-war.org.uk/WW2/Death_Railway/html/major_jimmie_james.htm.

Colonel Toosey ... Two days later the Japanese tried to persuade Colonel Toosey to back-date the receipts for the Red Cross goods to show that they had given them to us before capitulation. But we were not playing'.²¹⁹ This illustrates the abrupt changes of the Japanese in their treatment of the POWs hoping to improve their situation directly before and after capitulation. The sudden recognition of the ICRC delegations in Thailand, Singapore, Indo-China and the Dutch East Indies of Japan on 18 August 1945²²⁰ is also indicative of the policy change on all levels. However, how exactly international pressure effectuated Japanese behaviour cannot be found out definitely.

5.) Conclusion

This paper has shown that the Red Cross supplies, where received, were partially withheld or used by the Japanese themselves. The ICRC delegate had to rely on the Japanese authorities for the distribution of the Red Cross consignments and did not even know the number of POWs or camps, or their exact locations. It turned out that the closer the camps were located to the Burma border, the fewer Red Cross parcels reached the POWs. In contrast, the delegation in Burma was never able to send in supplies at all. In addition, the delegate could secretly send desperately needed medical supplies to the POWs before official help was possible and thus mitigated emergencies. The forwarding of information about the terrible treatment of the POWs enabled the British Empire to incite international pressure, which began to have an effect as the war turned against Japan. Unfortunately, the delegation in Thailand

²¹⁹ Rivett, *River Kwai Railway*, p.376.

²²⁰ ICRC (October 1945) *Revue Internationale de la Croix Rouge*, No. 322, Genève, p.687.

could not prevent the numerous deaths on the Siam–Burma Railway. The Japanese authorities are entirely to blame for this.

Only a few camps regularly received Red Cross dispatches. In these camps they had a positive influence on the physical and moral state of the POWs. However, the closer the camps were located to the Burma border, the fewer Red Cross supplies reached the POWs. On the Burma side the unrecognised delegation responsible there did not manage to provide any assistance to the POWs. Clandestine help could only be given to the POWs in limited scope but saved many lives. Also, in informing the concerned governments, international pressure could be exerted and at least as the war turned against Japan, a slight change was observable in the treatment of POWs.

There is no tangible measure of the impact the work of the ICRC had on the Siam–Burma Railway camps, but it can be concluded that it managed to mitigate the suffering of the POWs it reached and achieved more than could have been expected in the hostile attitude it encountered from the Japanese. The ICRCs pragmatic approach towards its delegations achieved much in Thailand that may not have been possible under a strictly determined official path. This was mainly due to its dedicated delegate. Unfortunately, the ICRC could not prevent the appalling conditions in the Siam-Burma Railway camps and as a result of them the numerous deaths of POWs. However, the limited reach of the ICRC in Thailand was the sole responsibility of the Japanese authorities and demonstrates how dependent the ICRC is on the cooperation of governments to fulfil the whole potential of its work. In conclusion, the ICRC work had only a negligible if any impact at all on the general

conditions of the railroad camps, but for many individual POWs it meant the difference between death and survival.

Bibliography

I) Manuscript Sources

From the ICRC Headquarters:

(i) Primary Sources:

Anonymous (23.07.1943) *Secret Letter from a British Medical Officer in a POW camp on the Railway to the Red Cross*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-141, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

Alexander, C.C. (31.08.1945) *Letter from C.C. Alexander, Commandant Kanchanaburi POW Camp to Karl Laupper*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-141, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

Author illegible (09.06.1943) *Secret Letter to Mr Salzmann from a POW*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-141, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

Cellerier, J. (08.11.1945) *Letter from Mr Jean Cellerier to the ICRC*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-142, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

ICRC (14.06.1946) *Letter from the ICRC to the War Organisation of the Red Cross Society and Order of St. John of Jerusalem*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-142, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

ICRC (without date) *General Report: Ex POW Emergency Expenditure in Siam – 16.8.45/17.9.45*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-141, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

Laupper, K. (18.03.1945) *Report from Karl Laupper to the ICRC*. BG 017 07-141, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

Mouravieff, M. (23.07.1945) *Letter from the ICRC to Ms Warner*. BG 017 07-141, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

Prins, W. F. (16.12.1945) *Letter from Prof. Mr W. F. Prins, President of the Union of ex-Mobilised and ex-Internees inhabitants of the Netherlands East Indies, to Mr Salzmänn*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-142, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

Tanner, A. (10.09.1945) 'Notes on Underground Organisation for giving Assistance to Allied Prisoners of War in Japanese Camps on the Siam – Burma Railway', attached to W.Salzmänn (21.02.1946) *Confidential Letter from Mr Salzmänn to the ICRC*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-142, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

Salzmann, W. (10.05.1946) *Report No. 4 – Siam from Mr Salzmann to the ICRC.*

ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-142, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

Salzmann, W. (07.05.1946) *Report on the Activity of the International Red Cross Delegation for Siam during the Period 1/5/1943 – 15/8/1945 from Mr*

Salzmann to the ICRC. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-142, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

Salzmann, W. (21.02.1946) *Confidential Letter from Mr Salzmann to the ICRC.*

ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-142, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

Salzmann, W. (12.09.1945) *Telegram from Mr Salzmann to the ICRC.* ICRC

Archives: BG 017 07-142, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

Salzmann, W. (27.08.1945) *Telegram from Mr Salzmann to the ICRC.* ICRC

Archives: BG 017 07-141, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

Salzmann, W. (23.08.1945) *Telegram from Mr Salzmann to the ICRC.* ICRC

Archives: BG 017 07-141, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

Salzmann, W. (08.03.1945) *Telegram from Mr Salzmann to the ICRC.* ICRC

Archives: BG 017 07-141, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

Salzmann, W. (29.11.1944) *Telegram from Mr Salzmann to the ICRC*. ICRC

Archives: BG 017 07-141, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

Salzmann, W. (07.11.1944) *Telegram from Mr Salzmann to the ICRC*. ICRC

Archives: BG 017 07-141, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

Salzmann, W. (23.10.1944) *Telegram from Mr Salzmann to the ICRC*. ICRC

Archives: BG 017 07-141, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

Salzmann, W. (26.09.1944) *Telegram from Mr Salzmann to the ICRC*. ICRC

Archives: BG 017 07-141, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

Salzmann, W. (21.09.1944) *Telegram from Mr Salzmann to Mr Mouravieff from the*

ICRC. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-141, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

Salzmann, W. (19.09.1944) *Telegram from Mr Salzmann to the ICRC*. ICRC

Archives: BG 017 07-141, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

Salzmann, W. (04.07.1944) *Telegram from Mr Salzmann to the ICRC*. ICRC

Archives: BG 017 07-141, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

Salzmann, W. (27.01.1944) *Letter from Mr Salzmann to Dr Paravicini*. ICRC

Archives: BG 017 07-141, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

Salzmann, W. (14.12.1943) *Telegram from Mr Salzmann to the ICRC*. ICRC

Archives: BG 017 07-141, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

Salzmann, W. (15.09.1943) *Telegram from Mr Salzmann to the ICRC*. ICRC

Archives: BG 017 07-141, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

Salzmann, W. (27.07.1943) *Telegram from Mr Salzmann to the ICRC*. ICRC

Archives: BG 017 07-141, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

Salzmann, W. (without date) *Remarks to the ICRC*. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-141,

ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

Simpson, M. (08.11.1945) *Letter from Captain M. Simpson to the ICRC*. ICRC

Archives: BG 017 07-142, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.

Swinton, G. E. (03.10.1945) *Letter from G. E. Swinton, Lt. Colonel, The East Surrey*

Regiment (Commanding United Kingdom ex POWs in Siam) to Karl

Laupper. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-142, ICRC Headquarters in

Geneva.

Swinton, G. E. (03.10.1945) *Letter from G. E. Swinton, Lt. Colonel, The East Surrey*

Regiment (Commanding United Kingdom ex POWs in Siam) to Mr

Salzmann. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-142, ICRC Headquarters in

Geneva.

War Organisation of the British Red Cross Society and Order of St. John of

Jerusalem (05.10.1945) *Letter from the War Organisation of the British Red Cross Society and Order of St. John of Jerusalem to Mr Schweizer from Diethelm & Co. Singapore. ICRC Archives: BG 017 07-142, ICRC Headquarters in Geneva.*

(ii) Secondary Sources:

Laurent, C. (2003) *Les obstacles rencontrés par le C.I.C.R. dans son activité en Extrême-Orient (1941-1945)*, Master thesis of the University of Lausanne.

From the personal inheritance of Werner Salzmann:

(i) Primary Sources:

Baume, L. (18. May 1944) Extract from the Diary of Louis Baume, Lieutenant, 137th Field Reg., Royal Artillery taken from a *letter from Mrs Sibylla Jane Flower to Mr Salzmann* on the 29. November 1996. Taken from the personal inheritance of Werner Salzmann.

Salzmann, W. (without date) *Extracts from reports on the Siam-Burma Railway: Report No. 9, 29. – 30. May 1946 and Report No. 12, 6. – 9. June 1946.* Taken from the personal inheritance of Werner Salzmann.

Salzmann, W. (05. May 1944) *Letter to Mrs Hildegard Salzmann*. Taken from the personal inheritance of Werner Salzmann.

Salzmann, W. (24. March 1944) *Letter to Mrs Hildegard Salzmann*. Taken from the personal inheritance of Werner Salzmann.

(ii) Secondary Sources:

Chumbhot (28. January 1957) *Speech by his Royal Highness, Prince Chumbhot of Nakorn Sawan, Vice President of the Thai Red Cross Society in Bangkok*. Taken from the personal inheritance of Werner Salzmann.

Flower, S. J. (26. December 1996) *Letter to Mr Salzmann*. Taken from the personal inheritance of Werner Salzmann.

ICRC (05.12.1996) *Entretien avec M. Werner Salzmann, delegue du CICR en Thaïlande de 1943 a 1946, delegue honoraire de 1946 a 1960*, Geneva.

Salzmann, W. (29. November 1996) *Letter to Ms Flower*. Taken from the personal inheritance of Werner Salzmann.

Salzmann, W. (10. August 1995) *Letter to Mrs Caroline Moorehead*. Taken from the personal inheritance of Werner Salzmann.

Salzmann, W. (29. December 1962) *Speech by Mr Salzmann for the Rotary Club of Thalwil (with comments by Mr Schweizer, Manager of Diethelm&Co. in Singapore and delegate of the ICRC in Singapore)*. Taken from the personal inheritance of Werner Salzmann.

Salzmann, W. (30. October 1952) *Speech by Mr Salzmann for the Rotary Club of Bangkok*. Taken from the personal inheritance of Werner Salzmann.

National Archives Online:

(i) Primary Sources:

War Cabinet of the British Empire (16.11.1944) *Conclusions of a Meeting of the War Cabinet*, The National Archives online: cab/65/44/22.

War Cabinet of the British Empire (15.11.1944) *Prisoners of War in Siam*, The National Archives online: cab/66/57/46.

War Cabinet of the British Empire (24.01.1944) *Publicity concerning Japanese Treatment of British Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees*, The National Archives online: cab/66/46/1.

War Cabinet of the British Empire (27.10.1943) *Publicity concerning Japanese Treatment of British Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees*, The National Archives online: cab/66/42/34.

War Cabinet of the British Empire (21.10.1943) *Conditions of British Prisoners of War in Siam*, The National Archives online: cab/66/42/21.

II) Printed Sources:

(i) Primary Sources:

Buravass, S. (30.06.1946) *The Burma-Siam Railways*, *Thai News Magazine*.

Dunlop, E. E. (2010) *The War Diaries of Weary Dunlop*, Victoria.

Dunlop (2003), *Appendix: Medical Experiences in Japanese Captivity* in R. Parkin *Ray Parkin's War Trilogy; Into the Smother*, Victoria.

Hardie, R. (1983) *The Burma – Siam Railway: The secret diary of Dr Robert Hardie 1942-45*, London.

ICRC (October 1946) *Revue International de la Croix Rouge*, No. 334, Genève.

ICRC (May 1946) *Revue International de la Croix Rouge*, No. 329, Genève.

ICRC (December 1945) *Revue International de la Croix Rouge*, No. 324, Genève.

ICRC (October 1945) *Revue International de la Croix Rouge*, No. 322, Genève.

ICRC (September 1945) *Revue International de la Croix Rouge*, No. 321, Genève.

ICRC (November 1944) *Revue International de la Croix Rouge*, No. 311, Genève.

ICRC (August 1944) *Revue International de la Croix Rouge*, No. 308, Genève.

Secondary Sources:

Barnett, M. (2011) *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism*, New York.

Blair, J. & Blair, C. (1980) *Return from the River Kwai*, London.

Bugnion, F. (1994) *Le Comité International de la Croix-Rouge et la protection des victimes de la guerre*, Geneva.

Coast, J. (1958) *Railroad of Death*, London.

Durand, A. (1978) *Histoire du Comité International de la Croix-Rouge: De Sarajevo à Hiroshima*, Genève.

- Favez, J. (2001) 'Das Internationale Rote Kreuz und die Todeslager des Dritten Reichs' in H. Enzensberger (ed.) *Krieger ohne Waffen: Das Internationale Komitee vom Roten Kreuz*, Frankfurt am Main.
- Flower, S. J. (1996) 'Captors and Captives on The Burma – Thailand Railway' in B. Moore & K. Fedorowich *Prisoners of War and their Captors in World War II*, Oxford.
- Forsythe, D. (2005) *The Humanitarians: The International Committee of the Red Cross*, Cambridge.
- Gordon, E. (1963) *Miracle on the River Kwai: The true story behind the book and the film, The Bridge on the River Kwai*, London.
- ICRC (1948) *Revue internationale de la Croix-rouge: Bulletin international des sociétés de la Croix-rouge*, Vol. 30, Geneva.
- ICRC (May 1948) 'Report of the ICRC on its activities during the Second World War (September 1, 1939 – June 30, 1947)' in *General Activities Vol. I*, Geneva.
- Iriye, A. (1987) *The Origins of the Second World War in Asia and the Pacific*, New York.

- Kinvig, C. (2005) *River Kwai Railway: The story of the Burma – Siam Railroad*, London.
- Lomax, E. (1995) *The Railway Man*, London.
- McGowran, T. (2000) *Beyond the Bamboo Screen: Scottish Prisoners of War under the Japanese*, Glasgow.
- Parkins, R. (2003) 'Into the Smother' in R. Parkin, *Ray Parkin's War Trilogy*, Victoria.
- Rawlings, L. (1972) *And the Dawn came up like Thunder*, London.
- Reed, B. & Peeke, M. (2004) *Lost Souls of the River Kwai: Experiences of a British Soldier on the Railway of Death*, South Yorkshire.
- Riesenberger, D. (1992) *Für Humanität in Krieg und Frieden: Das Internationale Rote Kreuz 1863 – 1977*, Göttingen.
- Rivett, R. (1947) *Behind Bamboo: An Inside Story of the Japanese Prison Camps*, Sydney.
- Tamayama, K. (2005) *Railwaymen in the War: Tales by Japanese Railway Soldiers in Burma and Thailand, 1941 – 47*, New York.

Velmans, L. (2003) *Long Way Back to the River Kwai: Memories of World War II*,
New York.

Waterford, V. (1994) *Prisoners of the Japanese in World War II*, North Carolina.

III) Online Sources:

(i) Primary Sources:

ICRC (27 July 1929) *Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War* viewed on 12.05.2012 under
<http://www.icrc.org/ihl.nsf/full/305?opendocument>.

(ii) Secondary Sources:

ICRC (02. February 2005) *ICRC in WWII: Activities in the Far East* viewed on
15.05.2012 under
<http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/misc/57jnwq.htm>

ICRC (02. February 2005) *ICRC in WWII: Overview of Activities* viewed on
15.05.2012 under
<http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/misc/history-world-war-2-overview-020205.htm>.

ICRC (02. February 2005) *ICRC in WWII: ICRC delegates during the Second World*

War viewed on 15.05.2012 under

<http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/misc/history-world-war-2-overview-020205.htm>.

ICRC (02. February 2005) *ICRC in WWII: Prisoners of war during the Second World*

War viewed on 15.05.2012 under

<http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/misc/history-world-war-2-overview-020205.htm>.

ICRC (02. February 2005) *ICRC in WWII: The ICRC's work to help the civilian*

population during the Second World War viewed on 15.05.2012 under

<http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/misc/history-world-war-2-overview-020205.htm>.

James, J. (1989) *Memoirs of a P.O.W. 1942-1945* viewed on 2.06.2012 under

[http://www.britain-at-](http://www.britain-at-war.org.uk/WW2/Death_Railway/html/major_jimmie_james.htm)

[war.org.uk/WW2/Death_Railway/html/major_jimmie_james.htm](http://www.britain-at-war.org.uk/WW2/Death_Railway/html/major_jimmie_james.htm).

Percival, F. (without date) *Returned Prisoner's Vivid Story* viewed on 02.06.2012

under [http://www.far-eastern-](http://www.far-eastern-heroes.org.uk/Your_Gods_Stronger_Than_Ours/)

[heroes.org.uk/Your_Gods_Stronger_Than_Ours/](http://www.far-eastern-heroes.org.uk/Your_Gods_Stronger_Than_Ours/)

Sluyter, L. (without date) *The most cost-effective genocide: Japanese Forced Labour*

Camps on the Burma – Thailand; based on a manuscript of Adrian

Kannegieter viewed on 01.06.2012 under http://www.britain-at-war.org.uk/WW2/Forced_Labour_Camps.

Thompson, T. (without date) *The White Flag: Chapter XII Kinsayo* viewed on 01.06.2012 under http://www.far-eastern-heroes.org.uk/the_white_flag/html/chapter_xii.htm.

Wader, S. (without date) *Wader's diary: Thai Burma Railway known to us as the Death Railway* viewed on 02.06.2012 under http://www.far-eastern-heroes.org.uk/Reg_Rainer_Returns/html/death_railway.htm.

Wild, C. (February 1944) *Report of Condition of P.O. Ws in Thailand: May to December 1943* viewed on 01.06.2012 under http://www.britain-at-war.org.uk/WW2/Death_Railway/html/major_cyril_wild.htm.