

The Forgotten Story of Montreat: The Special War Problems Division's Detention of Axis Citizens During World War II

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Abstract

With the onset of the Second World War, the United States and her allies in Latin America faced the problem of Axis citizens living abroad. The Special War Problems Division of the State Department detained Axis nationals in luxury hotels and resorts and gave special attention to ensure they were treated fairly. Evidence of this treatment is seen in the Assembly Inn camp in Montreat, North Carolina by the SWPD and the Assembly Inn's leadership. Bound by the Geneva Convention, above-average living conditions were provided to detainees due to their status as prominent businessmen, diplomats, or consulate staff and their families. Over 1,000 people, often the families of these individuals, were held until they could be exchanged for American citizens in Axis countries. The purpose of this project is to provide scholarship about the SWPD and the camp in Montreat, both of which are largely forgotten in history.

1. Introduction

For six months in the midst of World War II, 265 Japanese and German citizens living in Hawaii and Latin America were detained in a Special War Problems Division (SWPD) camp operated out of the Assembly Inn in Montreat, North Carolina. These 265 individuals were part of a larger group of approximately 1,000 who found themselves caught in the turmoil of the war. The Special War Problems Division of the State Department detained Axis nationals in luxury hotels and resorts and special attention was given to ensure they were treated fairly. Evidence of this treatment is seen in the Assembly Inn camp in Montreat, North Carolina by the SWPD and the Assembly Inn's leadership. The reasoning behind using hotels and resorts was likely the notion that if the American government treated detainees well, Axis governments would show the same level of care for detained American civilians.

After Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt directed the American government to begin a campaign to intern people of Japanese ancestry living in the United States, and ultimately between 100,000 and 120,000 individuals were interned or otherwise removed from the West Coast.¹ Government officials defended this forced relocation as a wartime necessity, but in the 1980s the federal government "conceded that the relocation was based on racial bias rather than on any true threat to national security."²

2. Historiography

Since the Japanese-American internment was such a scar on American history, numerous books, journal articles, television shows, and movies have been produced covering the four-year period. Fitting into this large group is *Confinement and Ethnicity: An Overview of World War II Japanese American Relocation Sites*, written by a team of historians and published in conjunction with the National Park Service. The book offers a neutral and detailed investigation into the internment camps.³ The authors discuss the current reception of Japanese-American internment

and the archaeological condition of the camps today. They compare the current reception to that of Eleanor Roosevelt, who wrote an essay discussing a trip to the Gila River Relocation Center in Arizona. The remainder of the book is dedicated to the history of Japanese-American relocation during World War II and specific information related to each internment camp. Additionally, the NPS team investigated smaller facilities, such as Citizen Isolation Centers and Federal prisons. While this source is rich with data and detailed descriptions of internment camps, it fails to mention the State Department, Special War Problems Division, or the Axis citizens detained by the division. Other literature tells personal stories from internment camps. Jan Jarboe Russell's *The Train to Crystal City: FDR's Secret Prisoner Exchange Program and America's Only Family Internment Camp During World War II* or Ivey and Kaatz's *Citizen Internees: A Second Look at Race and Citizenship in Japanese American Internment Camps* cover the internment of Japanese-Americans, but like *Confinement and Ethnicity* they neglect to address the role played by the State Department or the SWPD.⁴

Due to the wide scope of the division's duties, there is some literature that mentions it without going into any depth. Both *America's Invisible Gulag: A Biography of German American Internment & Exclusion in World War II* by Stephen Fox and "German Prisoners of War in the United States" by John Brown Mason address the SWPD at a surface level.⁵ Mason's work gives an overview of German POW camps during the war, only mentioning their role in returning German POWs to Germany. Fox's work details individual German-Americans affected by the American policy of internment and exclusion during the war, using their perspectives to communicate information like that found in *Confinement and Ethnicity*. Fox acknowledges the existence of the division with a brief discussion of their involvement in returning German-Americans to Germany in exchange for imprisoned Americans. While he does recognize the complexity of the agency by pointing out that, "...the SWPD also made elaborate preparations for the exchanges with Germany," he does not discuss those operations in greater detail.⁶ This is likely due to the relatively minor role the division played in German-American internment. Since the SWPD was involved in civilian exchanges, Fox and Mason's work can be used to show the scope of these exchanges.

Historian Max Paul Friedman contributed much of the scholarly research into the detention of Axis citizens in his book *Nazis and Good Neighbors: The United States Campaign Against Germans of Latin America in World War II* and an article published in an Italian journal dealing with humanitarian issues, titled "The U. S. Internment of Families from Latin America in World War II."⁷ Both works delve into the larger, internment-style camps operated to detain "foreigners seized abroad who were suspected of undermining American security."⁸ They discuss the legal issues surrounding the camps, how individuals were chosen and taken to the United States, and how they were sent back to their country of origin.⁹ While both sources are excellent regarding detaining Axis citizens, neither of them spend any time addressing the smaller hotels used to detain Axis citizens like the Greenbrier Hotel in West Virginia or the Assembly Inn in North Carolina. Friedman's work is important because it addresses the situation in which many Germans found themselves in during the war, even if it focuses on larger internment-style camps.

Instead of ignoring or glossing over the impact of the SWPD during the war, *Quiet Passages: The Exchange of Civilians between the United States and Japan during the Second World War, and Japanese-American Civilian Prisoner Exchanges and Detention Camps, 1941-45* by P. Scott Corbett and Bruce Elleman instead focus on the exchanges led by the division.¹⁰ Both authors give succinct descriptions of the necessity of the organization and go on to discuss the division's beginnings. They describe the SWPD's involvement in exchanges of German, Japanese, and American citizens among the three powers during the war. Corbett's book relies on lengthy descriptions of the exchanges while Elleman uses a multitude of graphs, charts, and other data to present his research. While both deal with the SWPD, neither goes into enough detail to fully educate readers about the detention camps present in Appalachia.

Erika Dreifus, in "A 'Golden Prison' in Pennsylvania: The Hotel Hershey, 1942-43," provides the earliest in-depth description of one of the SWPD's several hotels.¹¹ In a short essay, Dreifus explored the Hotel Hershey and its prisoners. While the overall work and background of the SWPD is largely ignored, it offers a description of what life was like for those held in the hotel. Unfortunately, the essay lacks any significant information beyond the basics of the establishment and operation of the camp. While it does offer more information on detention camps than almost any other published work, it still leaves many questions unanswered.

Focusing on not just the SWPD's detention of Axis citizens but also the facility in Montreat, comes "The World at our Gate: Wartime Sanctuary and Foreign Detention at Montreat College" in *Denominational Higher Education During World War II* by Montreat College Professor Benjamin Brandenburg.¹² Contributing more research regarding the camps than any scholars preceding him, Brandenburg intertwines background information of the SWPD into the story of the detainees at the Assembly Inn. Brandenburg's sources are sparse, and most of his primary sources were created by the leadership associated with Montreat and the Assembly Inn. Only three were created by State Department employees, limiting his analysis to the viewpoint of Montreat and not the government of the people detained. This

imbalance could lead to his work being biased in favor of the leadership at Montreat, rather than providing a neutral perspective on the events that transpired there.

Overall, the most exhaustive scholarly work on the division is a book co-authored by two non-historians, attorney Landon Alfried Dunn and retired accountant Timothy J. Ryan. *Axis Diplomats in American Custody: The Housing of Enemy Representatives and their Exchange for American Counterparts, 1941-1945* covers the entire history of the SWPD's detention hotels in Appalachia, using primary sources extensively.¹³ While many of their primary documents are created by the government, the authors maintain a balance of sources from other perspectives, like local newspapers and the leadership of various hotels used by the SWPD. The book offers little analysis, rather it consists mostly of block quotes from various government documents, newspapers, and correspondence. Thus, the book is more a collection of primary source excerpts than a new argument or angle on history.

Missing from this collection of work is a full story of the detention camps run by the SWPD and of the people that were detained in their camps. At best, these sources cover Japanese-American internment, prisoner exchanges, and at most offer a shallow or single angle view into the detention camps and the camp held in Montreat, North Carolina. This work intends to fill that gap by focusing on the Assembly Inn camp in Montreat through the lens of social history using perspectives from both SWPD and Montreat leadership.

3. The Special War Problems Division

The Special War Problems Division was established on the 1st of September 1939, sharing the day with Hitler's invasion of Poland.¹⁴ As a part of the State Department, the division had ten responsibilities most pertaining to the wellness of Americans abroad and efforts to return them to the US. They ran exchanges of American and Axis citizens and operated detention camps for Axis citizens, usually diplomats. Strangely, they were also responsible for "the coordination of policy and action in respect to... [the] use of asphyxiating, poisonous, or other similar gases, or of bacteriological methods of warfare."¹⁵ It is unclear why they were assigned this task, and how much policy the division made surrounding these weapons. A small group of ships made voyages across the Atlantic, ferrying hundreds of people back to their home countries in exchange for citizens of the other country. Most scholarship related to the SWPD focuses on these exchanges, like *Quiet Passages* or sections of work by Max Paul Friedman. The Internee Branch of the SWPD followed the Geneva Convention's guidelines related to POWs and held "civilian internees" until they could be exchanged for American citizens.¹⁶ Agents selected hotels to keep detainees, cared for them while they were at each hotel, and coordinated their relocation to the next hotel or to the port from which they would leave the United States.

It is important to note the difference between internment camps, prisoner of war camps, and detention camps. Each type of camp was established for a reason and held specific types of people. Internment camps are the most well-known and dealt with American citizens of Japanese descent living within the United States. Internment camps were usually very large, housed internees together, and were generally run by the War Relocation Authority. Prisoner of war camps, or POW camps, were built for captured military personnel of a foreign nation. Most POW camps in the United States during WWII were for captured German soldiers, and they were usually kept in better conditions than the interned Japanese-Americans. POW camps were generally run by the War Department. Detention camps were usually for Axis citizens who were not military members and were living outside of their home countries. They were small, and run in pre-existing structures, almost always hotels and resorts. These camps were almost always operated by the SWPD.

The process of opening a new SWPD detention camp began with agents scouting the Eastern Seaboard for suitable hotels given a set of criteria. Outlined in a 1943 memo, SWPD agents were directed to look for three things at each hotel. First, the physical condition of the hotels, such as the general appearance, the condition of the rooms and furniture, availability of heating, and capacity was considered. Next, the quality of life for detainees was analyzed, in particular the food services and recreational activities available. The location of hotels was also considered, in relation to towns, roadways, medical facilities, and "stores for shopping opportunities."¹⁷ Cost was a consideration and although it is not listed in the 1943 memo, other correspondence between SWPD agents make it clear that they were willing to sacrifice some amenities, like a golf course, to get a cheaper rate for detainees.

Despite searching across the Eastern Seaboard, many of the hotels considered and ultimately used by the SWPD were in North Carolina, Virginia, or West Virginia.¹⁸ It is likely that the detainees were kept in such a small geographic area because it was easier and cheaper to move them to the next hotel when the time came. In the end, only five were selected for use during the first round of detention: The Homestead Resort in Hot Springs, VA, The Greenbrier in White Sulphur Springs, WV, The Grove Park Inn in Asheville, NC, The Assembly Inn in Montreat, NC, and the

Triangle T Ranch in Dragoon, AZ.¹⁹ Of the five detention camps, the Assembly Inn in Montreat, North Carolina is the focus of this work.

4. The Assembly Inn Detention Camp

On the 20th of October 1942, Mountain Retreat Association (MRA) President Rev. Dr. R. C. Anderson met with State Department officials concerning the department's use of the Assembly Inn for detainees. The government was quick to jump on this offer, as the Grove Park Inn eventually chose to cater to the Navy rather than the SWPD, so the detainees held there had to be moved. The Grove Park Inn was close to the Assembly Inn, making transportation of the detainees and their belongings easy. The Assembly Inn was easier to guard than other options like the Lake Lure Inn, cheaper than the current lodging, and offered ample recreational activities for detainees. The biggest deciding factor, however, was cost - the Assembly Inn was the least luxurious out of all the SWPD camps, but still far from the conditions found in internment camps, and moving detainees there did not require hiring a train.²⁰ On the 22nd of October, Anderson accepted the SWPD's proposed contract, and detainees were set to move in the next week.²¹

4.1 Public Perception of the Detention Camp

At about 10:30 AM on the 29th of October 1942, four buses from the Grove Park Inn arrived at Montreat carrying 265 detainees.²² After their arrival, Japanese and German detainees were separated by nationality as they gathered in the lobby. The Montreat College student newspaper reporter P. Miller caught this division, remarking that "the Japs all crowded into the left side of the lobby and the Germans kept to the right."²³ The division of nationalities remained a part of life for detainees throughout their stay at Montreat, where they were housed on separate floors. Elizabeth Barr Bowers, an employee of the Assembly Inn at the time of its use as a detention camp, took photos of the detainees and collected them in a photo album donated to the Presbyterian Heritage Center in 1966. Her photographs shed light on the division of Germans and Japanese imposed by the State Department— not a single photo exists of both Japanese and German individuals. Even in her photos of the group departing Montreat by bus on the morning of April 30th, people of both nationalities are separate.²⁴ Just as detainees were divided by nationality, the reception of Anderson's decision to open the Assembly Inn to detainees was split.

Despite a lack of coverage by local newspapers, the detention camp at Montreat was well known within the Presbyterian Church. The Church's reception of this camp was far from uniform. Instead, a sharp division emerged. One side supported and praised Anderson for courageously allowing such a camp to operate, and the other was driven by the widespread hate and discrimination prominent during the Second World War.

J. Fred Johnson, a longtime friend of Anderson and financial supporter of the Presbyterian Church, wrote a letter in support of the Assembly Inn being used for detaining the Japanese and German prisoners.²⁵ He expressed his hope that the Inn would be available for normal use after the first of April of the following year but recognized that the detention camp took precedence. Johnson said this is all important in order to "maintain our Christian civilization."²⁶ The October 1942 letter concluded by giving Anderson his respect and admiration.

Two letters from the Executive Secretary of the Committee of Home Missions addressed rumors concerning happenings at Montreat.²⁷ In the first letter, the author hoped the rumors were false and claimed that "there is no financial consideration that would justify the Association to make the arrangement, and I do not believe any group in the church would approve."²⁸ The tone of the second letter is one of quiet disapproval rather than one of rage, and the author regretted that word spread about the detention camp through gossip instead of formal sources. They had hoped the decision would have been made by "the board" rather than Anderson alone and expressed their doubt of support from the Church, citing the difficult conditions Japan was imposing on American detainees.²⁹ The Executive Secretary was eventually disproven by a South Carolina church that supported Anderson's decision by contributing to the quality of life given to the detainees at Christmas.

4.2 Detainee Quality of Life

While the conditions at the Assembly Inn were not as luxurious as the Grove Park Inn, the quality of life for detainees was seemingly excellent. From the day of their arrival to their last meal before departure, both the SWPD and Assembly Inn worked to keep the detainees comfortable. This ranged from an impromptu missionary program, to the quality of food, obtaining proper clothing for Japanese detainees, and Christmas festivities.

Because the Assembly Inn and larger MRA were part of the Presbyterian Church, it seemed fitting that Anderson and his staff exposed the detainees to “the working of a Christian life,” as a sort of impromptu missionary program. Anderson mentions this idea in his two-page newsletter addressed to “Montreat friends,” in which he tries to explain what recent newspapers said about the detention camp set to open in Montreat. He wishes that everyone shows the detainees “the meaning of the Christian life and [that] they will receive at the hands of all who serve them an example of the Christian way of living.”³⁰ With this goal in mind, the American Bible Society in Richmond, Virginia, provided German- and Japanese-language Bibles for each family. Anderson also wrote that books of hymns were placed throughout the lobby, which he reported were “constantly used.”³¹ Anderson’s mission work seemed to have some degree of success. However, the reports cannot be confirmed as the only evidence comes from his personal writing. In his own narrative, Anderson talks of two examples, both related to Japanese-language Bibles that were distributed to the Japanese detainees. While packing to leave Montreat, a Japanese woman took her new Bible, saying “I wanted it so *much* I had already packed it,” after learning that she could take the Testament with her.³² The second example he gives shows the success of the mission work: the daughters of a Buddhist priest were able to convince their father to take their copies of the Japanese language Bible.³³ As discussed later in this narrative, the impromptu mission work seemed to have some success since Christmas of 1942 was celebrated by all.

Food for the detainees was, as Montreat College student newspaper author P. Miller put it, “splendid.” By request of the State Department, three full meals were provided every day, plus dessert. Food was to be “substantial but not elaborate.”³⁴ Meals were served by Montreat College professors cafeteria style, and bus boys were hired to clean up. The State Department provided a sample day’s worth of food in their contract summary. A suggested breakfast consisted of tomato juice, both hot and cold cereal, scrapple,³⁵ liver, or egg, toast or rolls, and coffee, tea, or milk. Lunch and dinner was suggested to be fish, pot roast, chicken, turkey, or whatever was available, with the requirement that rice be served at both lunch and dinner for the Japanese detainees; potatoes, greens, carrots, coleslaw, or whatever vegetable was available; soup or fruit juice; bread or rolls; and coffee, tea, or milk. The recommendation for dessert was far simpler, only stating “pastry or jello or whatever may be provided.”³⁶ Given the high bar set by the State Department, all surviving evidence points to the Assembly Inn fulfilling that request to the best of their ability.

After dinner was served on the 14th of November, 138 German and Japanese people became ill. The German and Japanese representatives reported this food poisoning to Miles Briggs, the State Department Agent assigned to both Montreat and the Grove Park Inn Detention Camps. On the 15th, Briggs sent a letter to Anderson informing him of the incident, recognizing it is entirely possible to have occurred “without any negligence,” and requesting that food be inspected immediately prior to serving to avoid future problems.³⁷ The next day, Anderson responded by apologizing for the mishap and explaining the source of the contaminated food. He worked to prevent a recurrence by directing the Assembly Inn’s “dietitian and chef to give the most careful attention to the inspection of all food served.” Anderson’s response proves his concern for the high quality of food served to the detainees. He explains that the water source is “analyzed monthly by the North Carolina state authorities,” and “all of our milk [comes] from the Biltmore and Southern Dairies which are first class.”³⁸ While there are no surviving records to show the complete source, this letter suggests a high quality inventory, and detainee food was likely held to the same standard as food served at the Inn during normal operation.

In a further attempt to ensure that the detainees were fed quality food, Special Agent Huskey of the State Department sent a memo to the management of the Assembly Inn shortly after Christmas of 1942. He advised that “a weekly inspection of the food stuffs and kitchen facilities be made by a Health Inspector...”³⁹ Anderson replied two days later with a detail of his plans to implement Huskey’s recommendation by working with the town health officer, Dr. I. J. Archer.⁴⁰ Paired with the correspondence in mid-November that same year, the Assembly Inn made every effort to provide the best quality food possible to the detainees and staff.

The attention to detail into the quality of life provided for detainees was not limited only to food. On the day the detainees arrived, the temperature was in the mid-fifties, normal for the end of October. An early snowstorm in December, reportedly 4.4 inches with temperatures ranging from a high of 32°F to a low of 16°F in neighboring Asheville, brought in cold weather that many Japanese families were not accustomed to.⁴¹ This is likely what led to concerns about the lack of proper clothing for the Japanese detainees. An internal letter to Mr. Fitch, a special agent with the State Department, begins with a complaint filed with the State Department by both the “Spanish Embassy and the National Board of the YWCA, about the lack of clothing allowed the Japanese at Montreat.”⁴² The YWCA helped Japanese-Americans held in internment camps and Spain supported the Axis powers, which explains why these two entities filed a complaint on the detainees’ behalf. Fitch was directed to use his subordinate, Mr. Briggs, to “report immediately as to approximately how much additional clothing the Japanese at Montreat desire...,” and determine if the Japanese detainees wanted to purchase additional clothing or have it “shipped to them from Hawaii from their effects stored there.”⁴³ The letter’s author notes that the Japanese detainees had no ability to purchase additional clothing as they have no financial means to do so. This suggests the purpose of the letter was to get Mr. Briggs to

formally request that the Japanese detainees' clothing be shipped from Hawaii. No mention is made of the German detainees. It is assumed they had more suitable clothing with them to endure the winter months. In Elizabeth Barr Bowers' photo album, most Japanese women are seen wearing kimonos while the German population is in warmer clothing, supporting this assumption. The significant cost of locating and shipping such clothing across the Pacific showed the commitment of the State Department to provide the detainees with a good quality of life despite their status as enemies of the state.

As a chilly December continued and Christmas grew near, Anderson and his associates noticed that the detainees were singing Christmas Carols. Songs like "Holy Night, O Holy Night," and "Joy to the World, The Lord is Come" were popular.⁴⁴ On Christmas Eve of 1942, students from Montreat College and some Black Mountain residents gathered on a bridge across Montreat's Lake Susan to sing Carols. Soon thereafter, the Germans opened their windows and began singing Christmas Carols as well. Not wanting to be left out of the festivities, the Japanese opened their windows and joined in the singing. All three groups' voices sang in, as the *Citizen-Times* put it, "the language of Christianity."⁴⁵ For that brief moment, everyone at Montreat sang "in one indistinguishable strain of [va]riety from which the martial note was absent."⁴⁶ Despite their cultural differences, everyone at Montreat was able to set them aside and come together as one on Christmas Eve.

In keeping with the Christian mission work being carried out by Anderson and his associates, two Christmas trees were brought in, decorated and lit, one on the first floor and the other on the third floor of the Assembly Inn.⁴⁷ When asked if they wanted Christmas gifts for the children, the Japanese representative, Dr. Sakaki, replied "very freely, accepting the offer." The German spokesman, Mr. Marggraff, initially turned down the offer, saying, "'Thanks, but you know we are enemies.' He was told that Christians love their enemies. He replied, 'Thank you. We will appreciate it.'"⁴⁸ Anderson described a generous \$40 donation from the First Presbyterian Church of Spartanburg's Sunday School to buy presents for the detained children. The Christmas festivities of 1942 were the most beautiful Anderson had ever seen, as he wrote in his book. Reflecting on Christmas several months later, Anderson was quoted in the same *Citizen-Times* article, "...is [this] the only basis upon which international understanding and friendship can be built, for Christ is the only hope of this world?"⁴⁹ The Christmas festivities that occurred at Montreat certainly qualified as evidence of cross-cultural unification, perhaps answering Anderson's question. The SWPD and Montreat leadership went to great lengths to provide the detainees with a good quality of life and did not let the potential danger to the United States many of the detainees posed deter them.

4.3 Individuals Held at the Assembly Inn Detention Camp

Only some of the detainees at Montreat were ardent Nazis, yet this fact did not change the efforts of Anderson and the SWPD to give the Japanese and German detainees a high quality of life. Though lacking, records do provide insight regarding who some of the German individuals were. It must be noted that there were no records on the Japanese individuals detained at Montreat, nor any indication that possible records were transferred to another government agency. It is unclear if they were only sent to SWPD camps because they were not American citizens and would have been sent to traditional internment camps otherwise, or if the government saw them as less of a threat and thus expended less effort to keep information about them. It is possible that records for the Japanese families were transferred to the War Relocation Authority, the government agency handling Japanese-American internment, which would explain the lack of information in the SWPD collections.

4.3.1 *diplomat myth*

Despite being a widely believed myth at Montreat today, there is no evidence that German or Japanese diplomats were detained at the Assembly Inn. Anderson was likely made aware of the SWPD's detention of diplomats in other camps while in contract negotiations with the government over the use of the Assembly Inn. The myth seems to have begun with an honest mistake in Anderson's memo to the Montreat community, notifying students, teachers, and residents that the "Assembly Inn is to be occupied by some of the families of German and Japanese diplomats..."⁵⁰ From this line, the myth spread years later to the Presbyterian Heritage Center's website, "...State Department officials requested that Montreat house businessmen, diplomats and families for a short period of time," later, "264 businessmen, diplomats, wives and children were transported to Montreat," and in several other places on their webpage.⁵¹

Benjamin Brandenberg echoes the diplomats at Montreat myth in "The World at Our Gate," closing the chapter by referring to the detainees as diplomats. "Special Agent Briggs coordinated the transfer of all diplomats, businessmen, wives, and children. Some diplomats were transferred..."⁵² While it is true that Briggs coordinated the closing of the detention camp at Montreat, he did not handle any diplomats.

The error may have been perpetuated from the treatment and the diplomatic status granted to some or all of the German detainees at Montreat: in a letter to the Secretary of State, Swiss Minister Bruggmann references the names of some Germans held at Montreat, stating “the Colombian and the United States Governments have granted a status of a diplomatic character but who are, now as before, being held in the United States in spite of numerous representations by the German Government.”⁵³ It is not known why some individuals were given this “status of diplomatic character,” but using descriptions of their occupations while living in Colombia and other Latin American countries, it is clear they were not working on behalf of the German government for an embassy. Some were spies, but spies are not diplomats.⁵⁴ Bruggmann’s letter was calling for the release of these individuals at Montreat given their ‘diplomatic’ status, since diplomats held at other SWPD camps were released and returned to Germany quickly. However the diplomats at Montreat myth was started, there is no evidence that supports the claim that any persons held at Montreat were diplomats, and this myth must be dispelled.

4.3.2 detainee overview

The German-backed airline Sociedad Colombo Alemana de Transportes Aéreos (SCADTA) dominated air transport in South America prior to the outbreak of the war.⁵⁵ In a memoir written by an American pilot about his life during the dawn of the aviation industry, Ernest K. Gann recalls his time spent in South America and his knowledge of the German-backed aviation industry. “They hired every [German] national they could to aid their own pilots and technicians, and then they hired relatives of those already employed.”⁵⁶ These hiring practices, paired with Germany’s strong support, raised suspicion within the State department that SCADTA was full of Nazis and Nazi sympathizers.⁵⁷ This was true to an extent and may have been the driving force in the arrests and detention of so many Germans living in cities where SCADTA was present. Out of the forty five German men detained at Montreat, thirteen likely worked for SCADTA in some capacity, or just under thirty percent.⁵⁸ Other occupations of Germans living in Latin America included several merchants, a reporter, a mining engineer, a doctor, and a farmer.⁵⁹

All but one of the Japanese families held at Montreat were previously living in Hawaii, most for years or decades before their arrest. The overwhelming majority of the families had some connection to private schools and churches. The husband was often a Buddhist priest or a teacher at a private school, and his wife was either unemployed or a teacher at the same school. In many cases wives were born in Hawaii along with all their children and were married to men born in Japan. The families do not appear to have been living in any one concentrated place, instead their locations assume a proportional spread across the Hawaiian Islands based on population.⁶⁰ Unlike the German families who were kept together, Japanese families were torn apart based upon divisions of age and gender. Husbands and any children older than 18 at the time they were arrested were separated from wives and children who were minors. It is assumed that they were sent to larger internment camps, although the reason for this is not known. This lack of knowledge and resources on the Japanese detainees within the SWPD is indicative of a larger picture than solely SWPD detention camps, and further research on this subject will be completed in the future.

4.3.3 specific German detainees

Among the German detainees at Montreat were four men that the division considered to be among the most dangerous individuals in the Western Hemisphere. Wilheim Krueger, Ernst Oscar Langer, Henry Loeschner and George Werner Nicolaus each supported the Nazi cause, although some were more ardent supporters of the party than others.

Although he was a self-proclaimed “pure German and a Nazi,” Wilheim Krueger was not considered as dangerous to the allies as Langer, Loeschner, or Nicholaus.⁶¹ Krueger was a Nazi and pledged his loyalty to the Third Reich “in return for a handout from the Swiss,” though it is not known what this handout was.⁶² Strangely, Krueger was either released from detention or escaped into the US sometime before Germany was defeated. While free of custody Krueger proved his dangerousness by “molest[ing] waitresses in a drug store” and was known to “[punctuate] his remarks with a number of ‘Heil Hitlers.’”⁶³ He was reinterned in August of 1945 after an unknown series of events related to his “tendency to get drunk.”⁶⁴ On February 19th, 1946, Krueger was authorized for release, and a June 1946 telegraph confirmed Krueger left the United States for Colombia aboard the SS Barnard Victory.⁶⁵

Ernst Oscar Langer, presenting himself as an electrical and mechanical engineer, was a Nazi saboteur in Peru. Langer was accused of “connecting the link between the Nazis in Argentina and Bolivia, as well as in Arequipa [Peru].”⁶⁶ Using profits from his family’s mine, Langer and his brother Franz led several Germans to commit espionage on behalf of Germany.⁶⁷ He was voluntarily repatriated to Germany in December 1945 on the SS Daniele H. Lounsdale.⁶⁸

Henry Loeschner, as described by the US government, was a “potential danger to the security and welfare of the Western Hemisphere.”⁶⁹ Loeschner was believed to be a German spy known to the FBI as Lorenz, for his work as a

secret radio operator in Peru and Chile. One such instance of his radio work was in March 1942, when he notified Germany about “the arrival of two United States destroyers at Guayaquil,” most likely the USS Hambleton and USS Emmons.⁷⁰ He was an active Nazi Party member starting in 1933, eventually making his way to lead all Nazi espionage in Ecuador.⁷¹ Records indicate Loeschner was a founder of the foreign branch of the Nazi Party, although the source for that claim is missing.⁷²

If Krueger, Langer, and Loeschner were considered dangerous, George Werner Nicolaus was treacherous. He was “considered to have been the best informed and most active enemy agent in [the Western Hemisphere].”⁷³ As head of Nazi sabotage in Mexico, his activities included sabotage of captured Axis ships in Mexican ports and transmitting information to Germany via secret radio. After Nicolaus was arrested and deported to the US, American immigration inspectors discovered he was attempting to smuggle microfilm reels of detailed submarine plans stolen from the Portsmouth Navy Yard in his shoe.⁷⁴ His actions caught the attention of Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox, who addressed them in a letter on exchanging prisoners with the Axis powers.

Nicolaus was the head of the German espionage organization south of the Rio Grande. He is a thoroughly trained operative and dangerous to the welfare of the United States... [If] returned to Germany, Nicholaus could easily organize and direct the activities of several echelons of espionage agents and operatives in the Western Hemisphere. In addition, because of his training and experience, he would be dangerous to the welfare of the United States as an evaluator of information transmitted by espionage operatives to Germany. His value is attested by the repeated efforts of the Nazi Government to obtain his repatriation.⁷⁵

Secretary Knox’s attention to this matter showed that Nicolaus was a high value target and had to be detained throughout the duration of the war. His letter also indicated that Nicolaus was known to more than just the SWPD but to the entire government and helps to solidify the allegations against him.

Nicolaus wrote to the Swiss and Mexican governments several times, submitting complaints about the “deprivation of personal liberty” and unfair situation he was placed in.⁷⁶ He claimed that he was arrested upon his entry to the United States for “motives which I do not know,” and had been imprisoned since.⁷⁷ Nicolaus was repatriated to Germany on the Liberty Ship SS John Lawson on the 22nd of December 1945, three and a half years after his arrest.⁷⁸

Though some of the detainees at Montreat posed a real threat to the United States when they were free, several were suspected to be dangerous by the Allies, only to be disproven after the US investigated them. This did not lead to a change in their status, however. These individuals who were initially thought to be dangerous were still detained until the end of the war.

While living in Germany, Rudolf Waldemar Bethke was a pilot for the Luftwaffe and believed “that Hitler was doing good for the country.”⁷⁹ Early in 1938, however, he visited the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, and his support for Hitler faded. Later that year Bethke was discharged from the Luftwaffe and moved to Colombia to become an airline pilot with SCADTA. He later made a career of his hobby: photography. The combination of his knowledge as a pilot and photography skills - including aerial photography - was the main factor that authorities used to claim that Bethke was “[adhering] to the Nazi cause” and a “strong Nazi.”⁸⁰

During interrogations while in American custody, it was revealed that Bethke never was a Nazi or Nazi sympathizer, instead going so far as to ask for him and his family to become American citizens and live in the US. After the interrogation, the board commented that Bethke “has had an outstanding internment record and authorities at the Camps have spoken of him with the highest esteem.”⁸¹ Bethke and his family were released from detention and left the US for Colombia in the fall of 1946.⁸²

Despite being described by the US government as showing “insufficient evidence of dangerousness,” William and Julia Stenzel found themselves caught in the turmoil of the war.⁸³ The Peruvian government believed that William’s friendships with American sailors and German heritage posed a threat to the Allies. Julia’s apparent transgression was that, while working as a showgirl she “had been too friendly at the night club with William Koepf and Count von Matschuska, both notorious Nazis.”⁸⁴ Questioning by American authorities revealed that both William and Julia were far from dangerous, discovering that William begged to “be interned in the United States and not sent to Germany.”⁸⁵ Further investigations revealed that William wanted nothing to do with Germans, renounced his German citizenship for a Peruvian one, and never planned to return to Germany.⁸⁶ The Stenzels were so far removed from Germany that the German government themselves were curious who these people were being deported from Peru on the SS Acadia. Despite being no credible threat to the United States or any nation in the Western Hemisphere, the Stenzels were held until April 16 1946. Julia, possibly joined by William, departed the United States by airplane on August 27 1946.⁸⁷ One record indicates that the couple was separated and preparing for divorce, so it is possible she left on her own.⁸⁸ If this was the case, is it unclear where William Stenzel went after his release.⁸⁹

Hans Alfred von Heymann informally joined the Nazi party before coming to Costa Rica in 1935 and was an informal member until 1939 when the local party was dissolved. Despite being an informal member “there was no clear difference between [informal members] and full-fledged members.”⁹⁰ Due to this, von Heymann was considered a party member in the eyes of the government. The Costa Rican government suspected von Heymann ran a secret radio network like Henry Loeschner or George Nicolaus, but during interrogations by the United States it was revealed that von Heymann was unlikely to be a danger to the Allies. The second charge against him was his “ability to obtain equipment from Mexico and Argentina in spite of the blockades and restrictions on commerce...”⁹¹ The equipment in reference was X-ray supplies, as he was an X-ray salesman and technician. At least one hospital desperately wanted him returned to Costa Rica, as he was the only person who could keep their X-ray machine operative.⁹² von Heymann was repatriated to Germany through Ellis Island sometime on or after the first of September 1945, four months after the end of the war in Europe.⁹³

4.3.4 the lone Swiss detainee

Hildemaria Scotoni was an outlier for Montreat and the SWPD. Scotoni does not appear on any of the rosters published by the government, and only appears in a handful of medical records. Scotoni was a Swiss citizen held at Montreat for approximately two and a half months, before which she was at the Grove Park Inn.⁹⁴ She likely lived in Quito, Ecuador, prior to her arrest, with her husband and his brother.⁹⁵ While detained at Montreat, Scotoni claimed to SWPD and INS staff that she “urgently need[ed]” “various medicines.” Dr. R. A. White, an obstetrician from Asheville, treated her for a short time until “there was nothing he could do for her and that he did not wish to see her again.” In a letter sent to T. F. Fitch, White was convinced Scotoni had “menopausal psychosis” and reported that she thinks “she is being discriminated against unjustly, that she is definitely of a superior class, and all these are definite signs of a mental derangement.” His professional recommendation was that she be placed in a mental institution for her own and the public’s safety.⁹⁶ The SWPD obtained a second opinion from Black Mountain physician F. H. Richardson who diagnosed her with severe depression and recommended she be given the medications she asked for. Like White, Richardson also recommended placing Scotoni in a mental institution with proper staff to treat and diagnose her.⁹⁷ Special Agent Miles E. Briggs believed that Scotoni was simply acting out in order to be repatriated to Switzerland sooner, and that both doctors consulted were not psychiatrists. He sent a letter including the two doctor’s opinions and his own to Washington, asking for advice on how to move forward. It is not clear if it was this letter or another factor that secured Scotoni’s release from detention, but this likely played a role in influencing that decision.⁹⁸

The Swiss government was actively involved in obtaining her release, which was finally secured on the 13th of December 1942.⁹⁹ She departed from New Orleans and given the departure point and destinations of other detainees from Montreat, it is likely she left for Latin America rather than Switzerland.¹⁰⁰

Not all the individuals detained at Montreat were truly dangerous to the United States and her allies. Some of the detainees were dangerous and committed acts of espionage in support of Germany, others were simply members of the Nazi party, but most posed no real or credible threat to the Western Hemisphere. Most of the people held were children, sucked up into the turmoil of the war.

5. Financing the Assembly Inn

While close attention was paid to the quality of life given to detainees and the potential threat each detainee posed to the Western Hemisphere, the financial aspect of operating the Assembly Inn was not neglected. The SWPD entered the Montreat Contract assuming it would be cheaper and easier to deal with than some other hotels, this would not turn out to be the case.

Compensation was provided to the Assembly Inn by the State Department for each room occupied by a detainee, guard, or State Department representative. The agreed-upon rate was \$2.80 per night per detainee and \$3.80 per night per US official. This rate was not modified for any reason; the charge for infants was the same rate as adults. Families staying in the same room were not billed differently. The Assembly Inn charged a day rate for those staff who did not spend the night on their property, using fractions of a day to determine the rates.¹⁰¹

Shortly after the arrival of the detainees, the rooms of the Assembly Inn were inspected and appraised by the Sam P. Burton & Son Furniture Company in neighboring Asheville, North Carolina. Everything was catalogued, from the single \$40 mirror in the lobby to the 791 single bed sheets valued at \$1 each. In total, the Assembly Inn had an inventory worth \$41,724.13 at the beginning of the operation of the detention camp.¹⁰² This appraisal would become

more important after the detainees left the Assembly Inn and Anderson requested anything broken or damaged be replaced.

After the detainees departed the Assembly Inn, the MRA compiled a list of lost, broken, or damaged items during the time period. Anderson remarks in his book about how careful the detainees were with the Inn, stating "...not a single glass in the hotel was broken during the six months, nor did I see any evidence anywhere of willful damage done to the hotel and furnishings."¹⁰³ Despite this observation, the MRA found \$6,794.93¹⁰⁴ worth of damaged property and requested payment from the State Department.¹⁰⁵ Almost half of this sum, \$3000, was requested for "all walls and halls to be kalsomined¹⁰⁶ and all floors and doors varnished or painted." This claim was partially denied by the State Department, as explained in a June 25 letter to Anderson. "... the alleged damages were only such as might be presumed to result from reasonable use for the purpose for which leased, there is no legal obligation on the United States to pay for the damages claimed." In the same letter, \$1,500 was offered for damages instead of the original \$6,794.93.¹⁰⁷ After several back-and-forth messages, Anderson accepted the smaller sum in a 17 July 1943 letter to the SWPD.¹⁰⁸

As early as November of 1942, only a few days after the detainees arrived in Montreat, Special Agent Briggs of the SWPD made note of Anderson and the MRA's perceived greed. He pointed out that teachers from the college were brought to help serve food rather than hiring extra cafeteria staff, rooms were cold and dirty, there were dirty dishes, and that the "waiter was a bus boy who also tended the furnace between meals and served us with very sooty hands."¹⁰⁹ Briggs is clear that this is only a small selection of his complaints about the Assembly Inn, and they stem from the MRA being "out to get every dime they can make."¹¹⁰

In addition to Briggs' allegations, financial records show that the Assembly Inn made a handsome profit from the State Department. Weekly invoices, encompassing room and board, totaled approximately \$6,200 each, or \$160,000 over the six months the camp was in operation.¹¹¹ After accounting for expenses, \$25,000 was used to construct Spence Hall with another \$65,000 was placed into the MRA's treasury, although this sum included some money from sources other than the detention camp.¹¹² With all the detainees gone, bills paid, and repairs complete, the story of the SWPD detention camp at the Assembly Inn in Montreat, North Carolina came to a close, quickly becoming the *forgotten story of Montreat*.

6. Conclusion

Around 10:00 a.m. on the morning of the 30th of April 1943, the Japanese and German detainees got up for an earlier-than-usual breakfast. The families were bussed into Black Mountain, where they boarded a special train headed to Texas.¹¹³ Both Japanese and German detainees were sent to internment camps in the Western United States.¹¹⁴ A majority of the detained families were sent to the massive Crystal City Internment Camp. Some families went to an internment camp in Seagoville, Texas, while individuals without families went to Kennedy, Texas.¹¹⁵ A few lucky families skipped internment camps and were repatriated aboard neutral ships.¹¹⁶ Over time, they would be repatriated, sent back to where they were previously living, or became American citizens.

Despite Anderson's history of Montreat being called *The Story of Montreat*, the story of the Special War Problems Division detention camp at the Assembly Inn is cut short and oversimplified. Unfortunately, the same applies to the rest of the SWPD camps and the division as a whole - it has been largely forgotten in history and is in desperate need of being remembered. These hotels and resorts were used by the government to ensure that fair treatment was given to Axis nationals in hopes that their home countries would give equal care to American citizens. Some of the people held at Montreat were dangerous to the Allies, but the vast majority were caught in the wrong place at the wrong time, picked up in a battle of *us* versus *them*. These people cannot be forgotten, nor should the efforts of the Special War Problems Division.

7. Acknowledgements

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15. Special War Problems Division memo, Nov. 18, 1944; Historical Folder; Subject Files, 1939-1955 [Box 14]; SWPD; RG 59; NACP. The inclusion of biological warfare questions brings up a recurring theme with the SWPD: It is quite difficult to say anything exactly. There is almost always an exception to the rule, or something so completely unexpected it wouldn't be taken seriously if there were no documents to back it up.
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89. Additional information about the Stenzels, from Julia Stenzel's great-granddaughter, is available upon request.

90. Case of HANNS ALFRED VON HEYMANN, n. d.; von Heymann, Hanns Alfred; Name Files of Interned Enemy Aliens from Latin America, 1942-48 [Box 15 of 16] [Lot File No. 58 D 8]; SWPD; RG 59; NACP.

91..HANNS ALFRED VON HEYMANN (Costa Rica), Jan. 29, 1946; von Heymann, Hanns Alfred; Name Files of Interned Enemy Aliens from Latin America, 1942-48 [Box 15 of 16] [Lot File No. 58 D 8]; SWPD; RG 59; NACP.

92. Notes from Costa Rican Foreign Office, July 3, 1942; von Heymann, Hanns Alfred; Name Files of Interned Enemy Aliens from Latin America, 1942-48 [Box 15 of 16] [Lot File No. 58 D 8]; SWPD; RG 59; NACP.

93. Report of Alien Enemy, Sep. 15 1944, May 21 1945, Aug. 3 1945, and Oct. 4 1945; von Heymann, Hanns Alfred; Name Files of Interned Enemy Aliens from Latin America, 1942-48 [Box 15 of 16] [Lot File No. 58 D 8]; SWPD; RG 59; NACP.; Report of enemy alien in custody, Apr. 25, 1944; von Heymann, Hanns Alfred; Name Files

of Interned Enemy Aliens from Latin America, 1942-48 [Box 15 of 16] [Lot File No. 58 D 8]; SWPD; RG 59; NACP.

94. M. E. Briggs, Special Agent, to T. F. Fitch, Chief Special Agent, Department of State, Nov. 15, 1942; Assembly Inn, Montreat, NC (Lake Lure Papers Included) Folder 2 of 2; Special War Problems Division Subject Files, 1939-1955 [Box 89] Marine Marlin to Tally Sheets - Assembly Inn; SWPD; RG 59; NACP.

95. Hildemaria Scotoni, Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at New Orleans, Louisiana, 1903-1945, May 17, 1942; INS; RG 85; NARA. Accessed 12 September 2019. search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=7484&h=1098391; Hildemaria Scotoni, Passenger and Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, New York, 1897-1957, Feb 22, 1932; Microfilm Publication T715, 8892 rolls; RG 85; NARA. Accessed 12 September 2019. search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=7488&h=25624776.

96. M. E. Briggs, Special Agent, to T. F. Fitch, Chief Special Agent, Department of State, Nov. 15, 1942; Assembly Inn, Montreat, NC (Lake Lure Papers Included) Folder 2 of 2; Special War Problems Division Subject Files, 1939-1955 [Box 89] Marine Marlin to Tally Sheets - Assembly Inn; SWPD; RG 59; NACP.

97. M. E. Briggs, Special Agent, to T. F. Fitch, Chief Special Agent, Department of State, Nov. 15, 1942; Assembly Inn, Montreat, NC (Lake Lure Papers Included) Folder 2 of 2; Special War Problems Division Subject Files, 1939-1955 [Box 89] Marine Marlin to Tally Sheets - Assembly Inn; SWPD; RG 59; NACP.

98. M. E. Briggs, Special Agent, to T. F. Fitch, Chief Special Agent, Department of State, Nov. 15, 1942; Assembly Inn, Montreat, NC (Lake Lure Papers Included) Folder 2 of 2; Special War Problems Division Subject Files, 1939-1955 [Box 89] Marine Marlin to Tally Sheets - Assembly Inn; SWPD; RG 59; NACP.

99. Daily Tally Sheet, Dec. 14, 1942; Tally Sheets Assembly Inn Folder 2 of 2, Special War Problems Division Subject Files, 1939-1955 [Box 89] Marine Marlin to Tally Sheets - Assembly Inn; SWPD; RG 59; NACP.

100. R. L. Bannerman, Special Agent, to Fitch, Dec. 28, 1942; Assembly Inn, Montreat, NC (Lake Lure Papers Included) Folder 2 of 2; Special War Problems Division Subject Files, 1939-1955 [Box 89] Marine Marlin to Tally Sheets - Assembly Inn; SWPD; RG 59; NACP.

101. Mountain Retreat Association, April 22D - April 30B Invoice, 30 April 1943, PHC.

102. Sam P. Burton & Son Furniture, Appraisal of Assembly Inn, 20 November 1942, PHC.

103. Anderson, *The Story of Montreat*, 119.

104. Approximately \$100,000 when adjusted for inflation in September 2019 dollars. data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl.

105. Mountain Retreat Association, Estimated Cost to Restore Damages, 1943, PHC.

106. Kalsomine is also spelled as calcimine. From the Oxford English Dictionary: "A trade name given to a kind of white or coloured wash for walls."

107. G. Howland Shaw, Assistant Secretary, to R. C. Anderson, President, Mountain Retreat Association, 25 June 1943, PHC.

108. Anderson, President, to G. Howland Shaw, Assistant Secretary, 17 July 1943, PHC.

109. Miles E. Briggs, Special Agent, to T. F. Fitch, Chief Special Agent, Department of State, Nov. 3, 1942; Assembly Inn, Montreat, N. C. (Lake Lure Papers Included); Subject Files, 1939-1955 [Box 89]; SWPD; RG 59; NACP.

110. Miles E. Briggs, Special Agent, to T. F. Fitch, Chief Special Agent, Department of State, Nov. 3, 1942; Assembly Inn, Montreat, N. C. (Lake Lure Papers Included); Subject Files, 1939-1955 [Box 89]; SWPD; RG 59; NACP.

111. Mountain Retreat Association, April 22D - April 30B Invoice, 30 April 1943, PHC. \$160,000 is \$2.36 million in September 2019 dollars.

112. Anderson, *The Story of Montreat*, 120.

113. "264 Japs And Germans Leave Montreat For Texas Detention Camps," *Asheville Citizen Times*, May 1, 1943.

114. Hildegard Maria Mantel Gordon, *The Mantel Family Story*, German American Internee Coalition, 2012, Accessed 4 October 2018. gaic.info/mantel-family/; Yoichi Kiyohara, Interview by Presbyterian Heritage Center.

115. "264 Japs And Germans Leave Montreat For Texas Detention Camps," *Asheville Citizen Times*.

116. Brandenburg, "The World at our Gate," 338.