

Review of: "The soft power of neutrality Dutch humanitarianism in World War I, 1914-1918"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

CHILDREN'S HOLIDAYS

I would like to see some excerpts, more quotes from the referenced articles in Dutch newspapers about German children visiting, etc.

It seems quite a bit of this was connected with the Catholic Church, to what extent should it be understood as primarily a religious effort? Can more be said about Catholicism and how it lent itself to this? Or are there examples of children receiving similar care through Catholic organizations in other countries?

How were these actions viewed in countries other than Germany?

AMBULANCES

More needs to be said about how they were used. Were they allowed access to the front? Did they transport only one country's wounded, etc? Private organizations from the US also sent ambulances to assist with the war effort. Those that fell under the purview of the Red Cross were used in very different ways—with policies to make clear neutrality. Some others were used in very direct ways by the French and did not seem to be especially neutral in how they were used. At one point, American ambulances were the only ambulances for a portion of the French sector. Looking into the US case may also be helpful, because there is some scholarship on American ambulances and how they were perceived to relate to neutrality.

INTERMENT

It seems like this section could be developed into a standalone article. It has some of the most to say about relations between the Netherlands and other countries. It also brings in this interesting parallel with Switzerland and the ways that the Netherlands resembled or sought to resemble Switzerland in its neutrality. An article on the influence of the Swiss model on Dutch WWI neutrality could be really interesting.

DESERTERS AND REFUGEES

Here, too, this could be its own article. More information on how the categories of "alien" and "refugee" were defined in practice would be helpful. Are there archival examples of cases where officials were divided on how to define an individual?

What kind of cultural impact did all these foreigners have in the Netherlands? How many stayed after the war ended?

Were these aliens and refugees perceived as welcome by the Dutch public or a threat, etc? Were people worried about the possibility of foreign men fathering children with Dutch women? Those types of concerns were common in other countries when there were occupied territories or colonial troops, were they common in the Netherlands with refugees and aliens?

Specific examples of situations and cases would help.

OVERALL

Small thing: Introduction, “wounded foreign seamen” (probably plural is intended). There are a few spelling and grammatical makes throughout. The article could use another revision to address those issues.

Bigger things:

It seems like this article is trying to bring together many things, all of them interesting. But it might be stronger focusing on fewer things and going into more depth, or trying to bring all of the sections up to the same length/depth. In the background is the constant that the Dutch are concerned about how their neutrality will be perceived, but there is not much quoting of foreign press commentary. Throughout, I’d like to see some quotes—direct examples of how people at the time spoke and wrote about these issues. There are certainly many good references already in this piece, but a few quotes would strengthen it. Let the reader see exactly how concern and opposition was phrased.

I think this is a good topic and there is also room for looking at how other countries handled their neutrality (and how historians have written about it) to make it stronger.