

The Third Geneva Convention: Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War

Emily Kinne  
Senior Division  
Individual Website  
Word Count: 498

After learning about this year's History Day theme, Rights and Responsibilities, I immediately knew I wanted to do something that related to war. I have always been interested in foreign relationships throughout history, and thought I could incorporate how countries resolved past conflicts responsibly. In my search, I discovered the Geneva Conventions and was interested in how they provided rights for soldiers, civilians, and prisoners. My teacher suggested I narrow down my topic, and after additional research, I chose the Third Geneva Convention of 1949: Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War.

I researched the basic history of the different Geneva Conventions on the Internet. Then, I searched through databases and found articles, primary photographs, and a few videos. It was especially difficult to find the impacts of the Third Convention, but with help from my teacher I researched the Korean and Vietnam Wars following 1949. Next, I visited a few libraries including the Wilson Library at the University of Minnesota, where librarians helped me find primary sources like newspapers. I also wrote a letter to Senator John McCain, a former POW. Lastly, I conducted two interviews. One with Lieutenant Colonel James Fischer, PhD in Military History, to hear his professional opinion and knowledge about the impacts of the Geneva Conventions, and Ex-POW Robert Hanley, who was taken captive by Japan for three and a half years during WWII.

Throughout the research process, my understanding of the topic changed and I saw how people are affected when these laws are abused. The Geneva Conventions only apply to the signatory countries, and agreed to follow the statements. Therefore, controversies have risen about whose right and responsibility it is to protect POWs.

I am presenting my topic as a website. First, I made an outline and broke my information into different categories. Then, I focused on finding primary sources, pictures, and videos. I

received advice from the library staff at my school and feedback from a NHD official to improve both visual and written content of my website.

My topic relates to the History Day theme, because all human beings have the right to be treated justly if held prisoner. They must not be tortured or used for medical experimentation; they must receive adequate food, shelter, and clothing; and seriously ill or wounded soldiers should be repatriated. These rights also connect to responsibility, because each nation is responsible for ensuring its soldiers are treated with respect. The importance of the Third Geneva Convention of 1949 has been seen throughout history. With the advancement of warfare, it provides military standards to lessen the brutality of war. Another impact is the creation of the International Criminal Court, where people are being brought to justice and prosecuted for war crimes. The Third Geneva Convention changed the rules of war, and its legacy continues to ensure that all soldiers are brought home.