

Hospital Ships and German Infamy

February 1918



Wounded soldiers in stretchers being transferred to a hospital ship. Nevill, G T (Mrs), fl 1976 :Photographs collected by Sister Edith Jane Austen during World War I. Ref: PA1-o-026-34-9. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. /records/22340768

The International Committee of the Red Cross, the headquarters of which is at Geneva, has issued to all the world the following indictment against German “culture”:

In attacking hospital ships one is attacking, not combatants, but defenceless people—wounded, mutilated or incapacitated by bullets, women devoting themselves to a work of help and charity, and men whose equipment is intended not to take the lives of their adversaries, but, on the contrary, is capable of saving those lives and relieving

to some extent their sufferings. Every hospital ship which is furnished with the exterior marks laid down by the international conventions and the employment of which has been regularly notified to the belligerents, has the benefit of a legal presumption and ought to be respected by the belligerents. The *Asturias* seems to have been torpedoed without anyone troubling about either its character or its destination. Even admitting the correctness of the facts on which Germany bases the justification of her declaration, the International Committee holds that nothing can excuse

the torpedoing of a hospital ship. Hence, considering the declaration of January 29 (in which Germany announced her intention of treating hospital ships bearing the marks of the Red Cross as vessels of war and attacking and sinking them as such, both in the North Sea and in a defined area of the Channel) “as being in disagreement with the international conventions, it expresses the desire that this declaration be not enforced in the future.”

It is noteworthy, also, that in November, 1916, the Federal Council of Switzerland expressed the opinion that “neutrality is not indifference,” and instructed the Swiss Minister in Berlin to call the attention of the German Chancellor to the fact that Swiss Public opinion is being unfavourably impressed by the wholesale deportation of Belgians.

URL:

<http://www.nzma.org.nz/journal/read-the-journal/all-issues/2010-2019/2018/vol-131-no-1470-23-february-2018/7507>
