

First World War volunteers



Module two: Protections in war

International humanitarian law (or rules of war) sets out how civilians, the sick, wounded and captured soldiers should be treated during conflict, which included WWI. When a soldier was captured during WWI, they became a prisoner of war (POW), and one of the tasks the VADs carried out was to help the POWs. After WWI, the Geneva conventions (which became the building blocks of modern international humanitarian law in 1949) added extra protections for POWs, which are still used in conflict today.

- In **part one** learners will explore the rules of war and will find out about the food parcels that the British Red Cross helped to deliver to POWs. They will consider what the parcels contained, how these helped the POWs and what they would include in a modern-day parcel.
- In **part two**, learners will think about the meaning of the red cross emblem, and its role in protecting people during conflict. They will also research how people are supported to cope in times of conflict around the world today.

Learning objectives

In this module, learners will:

- Consider why we need rules and how they are connected to rights and responsibilities.
- Find out about the rules that protected prisoners of war during WWI.
- Learn about the rules of war that are used to protect people during conflict today.
- Explore food parcels and how they helped the POWs.
- Learn about how the red cross emblem helps protect people during conflict.
- Discover how the Red Cross helps people in current conflicts around the world.



**The power
of kindness**

Activities summary

Part	Activity number	Activity title	Summary
1 Protections in war	<u>1.1</u>	<u>Why do we have rules?</u>	Learners consider how rules can protect us, and how this also applies to armed conflict.
	<u>1.2</u>	<u>Feeding prisoners of war</u>	What were food parcels, what did they contain and how did the VADs help?
	<u>1.3</u>	<u>Making it matter – how did food parcels help?</u>	Think about how food parcels helped the prisoners of war.
	<u>1.4</u>	<u>Packing a food parcel</u>	Learners design a modern food parcel.
	<u>1.5</u>	<u>Treating prisoners humanely</u>	Explore the meaning of “humanity” and the basics of international humanitarian law.
	<u>1.6</u>	<u>Exploring rules of war further</u>	Learners look at the Geneva Conventions added after WWI.
2 The Red Cross emblem and helping people affected by conflict	<u>2.1</u>	<u>The Story of an Idea</u>	Watch two short videos about the Red Cross and the emblem, and discuss the role of the red cross emblem during conflict.
	<u>2.2</u>	<u>Helping in modern-day conflict</u>	Using a map, learners look at places around the world where the Red Cross provides help today.
	<u>2.3</u>	<u>Protecting the helpers</u>	Explore how the red cross emblem protects different people during conflict.
	<u>2.4</u>	<u>Reflecting</u>	The opportunity for learners to review what they have learned about protections in war, and the different values they have.

*Please note that core activities are in **red** and extension activities in **grey**.

Part 1:

Protections

in war



1.1 Why do we have rules?

Core

Begin by discussing as a group:

- Why do we have rules? Ask learners to consider what rules are for, encouraging them to consider how they protect us.
- What rules offer protection? Ask learners to think about the rules that protect us; for example, not speeding in a car through built-up areas.

Ask learners to consider how they understand “armed conflict”.

Definition from British Red Cross teaching resources glossary: *Armed conflict is another term used to describe “war”. “Armed” refers to the use of weapons in conflict or war – the word “arms” is used to refer to guns and other munitions. Armed conflicts can be international (between two or more countries), or non-international (taking place within one country), e.g. a “civil war”.*

If the learners were to draw up rules for armed conflict, what might they be?

Now think about different people affected by conflict and the parties involved in a conflict. Encourage learners to consider:

- civilians
- the sick and injured
- medical personnel
- reporters
- prisoners of war

Finally, discuss what kinds of rules should protect soldiers during a conflict. What if they are captured by the enemy? What if they are wounded?

Before WWI, some basic rules had been agreed about how the different sides in a war should treat civilians and the sick and wounded (display in the PowerPoint).

- People caring for the sick and wounded should be protected (as they are not engaged in combat).
- The Red Cross is legally recognised as an emblem displayed by officially authorised humanitarian workers caring for the sick and wounded. Those wearing it should be protected, as they are clearly marked as medical personnel.
- Hospitals and other buildings treating the sick and wounded are not allowed to be attacked.
- All people (including humanitarian workers and army medical staff) caring for the sick and wounded should do so impartially – they should treat those in most need first, no matter who they are fighting for.

Do any of these rules surprise the learners?

These rules are the building blocks for modern International Humanitarian Law (known as IHL or rules of war).

(If learners have further questions about IHL and would like to explore this topic, please see our **Rules of war** resource.)

Rules and regulations are necessary in whatever formation you join. Comply with them without grumble or criticism and try to believe that there is reason at the back of them though at the time you may not understand the necessity. Sacrifices may be asked of you.



1.2 Feeding prisoners of war

Core

In WWI, prisoners of war were protected from being killed, injured or tortured by the first Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1906. The conventions also said they should be treated “humanely” but despite this many prisoners were close to starvation. The VADs started a food parcel service to address this.

Ask learners to read through the information about food parcels for prisoners of war [here](#) (or [print out](#)). Ask learners to find out the following:

- What was in a typical emergency food parcel for prisoners of war?
- How long did an emergency food parcel last?
- How many food parcels were the Red Cross allowed to keep at any one time in German prisoner of war camps?
- Were all food parcels the same?
- What else might prisoners find in their parcels and why was that important?

1.3 Making it matter – how did food parcels help?

Core

Look again at the contents of a typical food parcel with learners and encourage them to think about how the food was chosen to last. Invite them to imagine they were designing a food parcel to send to prisoners of war today.

- What things would they include and why? Are there things that were in the WWI parcels that they would not include today? Why is that?
- Would all of the foods they have chosen survive a journey of several weeks and being stored until they were needed?
- Think about the non-food items that were included in WWI parcels, such as games, to help soldiers pass the time in the camps. What might they include to keep spirits up today?

Prisoners of war might have been far away from home for months or even years, not knowing when they’d be able to leave or what would happen to them. How do learners think that receiving a parcel might have made them feel? How might it have helped them?

They could write an acrostic poem, choosing a word from what they have learned so far and writing it vertically down the side of a page, for example:

P (for example: *Perhaps if I had known what lay ahead before I stepped from the door...*)

A (for example: *An unknown land*)

R (for example: *Red for danger*)

C (for example: *Cold nights*)

E (for example: *End – when will it end?*)

L (for example: *Lost friends*)

They can then write a word or sentence starting with each letter about the feelings POWs may have had while they were in the camps.

1.4 Packing a food parcel

Extension

Ask learners to imagine they are a prisoner of war being kept away from their friends and family. If they were allowed to request just one parcel to be sent to them to help them pass their time as a POW, what would they ask for? Remind them to think about whether the prison guards would let the items in or not.

Learners can sketch their parcel and draw the items inside or make a list of the items they would include and why. They can share this in pairs or as a class.

Alternatively, they could bring in items from home, creating their own food parcel to present to the class.



1.5 Treating prisoners humanely

Core

The parcels sent by VADs to prisoners of war were designed to respect the humanity of those who had been captured during war.

Mind-map the meaning of the word “humanity”. What do learners think is the meaning of treating someone humanely?

The principle of Humanity expresses what the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement places beyond anything else: the need to act in order to “prevent and alleviating human suffering wherever it may be found”. Moreover, the Movement exists to promote mutual understanding, friendship, co-operation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

What evidence can learners find in the **information** about the parcels to show how prisoners’ humanity was respected?

The content of parcels was agreed by the Central Prisoners of War Committee in the United Kingdom. Display this extract from their meeting talking about what they would allow in personal parcels from relatives to prisoners:

Extract 1: Personal Parcels.

“...If a small parcel of personal requisites weighing not more than three or four lbs., and bearing a distinctive mark could be sent, say, once a month by the relations of prisoners through an authorised Association, this would go a long way to allay the dissatisfaction then existing among relatives without any serious risk of assisting the enemy.

The following articles might be included:-

Pipes, sponge, pencils, tooth powder, pomade, cap badge, badges of rank, numerals and shoulder titles, shaving brush, safety razor, bootlaces (mohair), pipe lights, medal ribbons, brass polish, housewife (sewing kit), handkerchiefs (one a quarter), shaving soap (one stick a quarter), health salts, insecticide powder, braces and belts (provided they are made of webbing and include no rubber or leather), combs, hair brushes, toothbrushes, buttons, chess, draughts, dominoes, dubbin, hobnails,

sweets or chocolate (8 oz only), one pair mittens every quarter, one muffler every quarter, one pair of socks instead of mittens or muffler.”

Ask learners to discuss with a partner whether they think these things improved the humane treatment of prisoners of war and to give reasons for their thinking.

In small groups invite learners to imagine they were sitting on a Central Prisoners of War Committee today. As a group ask them to consider how they would make sure that prisoners were treated humanely with dignity and respect? What would they suggest was included in a parcel? Groups can then share their discussions with the wider class and notice any similarities or differences.

Show the video **“Rules of War (in a nutshell)”** (04.43 mins). Afterwards, hand out or display the Basic Rules of IHL document available **here**. (Educators can find further information **here**.) *Note that these rules are the modern rules of war, and were not necessarily applicable during WWI.*

How are these rules similar or different to the learners’ rules from part one? What would they add to or take away from their charter?



**HUMANITY
IN WAR**

1.6 Exploring rules of war further

Extension

Invite learners to imagine they are addressing an international meeting and have been asked to make an argument for why prisoners of war should be treated humanely. They can use what they have learned in these activities to write a short (no more than 3-minute) speech as to why they would make this argument. Ask for some members of the class to give their speeches.

Since WWI there have been additional Geneva Conventions to protect prisoners of war. Learners can read a summary of these [here](#). Ask them to consider the following:

- What was included in the new Geneva Convention?
- Why do they think new Conventions were added after WWI?



(If they wish to compare the current law with the law in place during WWI, they can view the 1907 Hague Convention on Land Warfare (Articles 4–20) [here](#).)

Learners may have noticed in the information about food parcels that there was a mention of “Indian parcels”. During WWI Indian soldiers who were then part of the British Empire were also fighting for Britain. Some of these soldiers were captured as prisoners of war. Read interesting letters by Indian soldiers about being a prisoner of war [here](#). They can click on the image to view and read the letters on screen. Was there anything that surprised them about their experience as a POW?

Sepoy Sarbajit Gurung 1/1 Gurkha.

I was wounded in France at La Basse on the 20th of December 1914, at about 8 in the morning. I was entrenched with my regiment. The Germans made an attack on our trenches, killing most of my comrades and forcing others to retreat. I was left with another sepoy, Kaman Singh, in my trench. The Germans then appeared on the scene and killed Kaman Singh. Two of them approached me and spoke to me something in German of which I could catch only the word "Englishman". I made the sound "Huun" (In Hindustani this word means "Beg your pardon") and then the German soldier fired at me and the bullet hit me in the right jaw, and I fell to the ground. After some three hours about three Germans came near me and uttered the word "Lus" which I comprehended to mean "Follow me". I then walked up to the collecting point which was about 300 yards from my trench. My wounds were dressed here and I was put on a stretcher and carried by two bearers, who used to help me with draughts and used to demand water. I

Part 2: The Red Cross emblem and helping people affected by conflict



Image © Jorge Pérez (ICRC).

2.1 The Story of an Idea

Core

This activity looks at the importance of the red cross emblem that was worn and displayed by those in the Voluntary Aid Detachments, and the meaning behind the emblem.

Show the video **The Story of an Idea** (03:30mins), which explains how the Red Cross was founded and the meaning behind it.

After watching the video, display the image of the Red Cross and mind-map what learners think the Red Cross emblem stands for. Ask them to think of any words they associate with the emblem, including where they might have seen it.

Show the short video **The Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Crystal: What Do They Mean?** (01:44 mins), which explores how the emblems are symbols of protection.

Ask learners to think about and discuss:

- a. Why do they think medical teams need a special symbol or emblem? (To show that they are neutral and not involved in the conflict and so should not be attacked.)
- b. Who do people displaying the emblem help? (Anyone who needs help, prioritising the most urgent cases of distress first.)
- c. Why do people need to respect and protect the emblem? (So that people wearing it are understood to be neutral during a conflict and are not attacked, and those not involved in the conflict are aware of its protections.)

Watch the video again and ask learners to think about the Red Crescent and Red Crystal, which are used in different countries by different national societies who are part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. They may also find the ICRC page on **emblems** and the British Red Cross pages on the **emblem** useful places to go for information.

- When were they introduced?
- Why were they introduced?
- Where are they used?
- How do they continue and extend the humanitarian principles that the Red Cross was founded on?
- How do they provide help to those in need?



2.2 Helping in modern-day conflict

Core

The Red Cross works in many areas around the world, providing support to those affected by conflict, natural disasters and those forced to migrate.

Display the **map** and ask learners to think about where there is conflict around the world today.

This page outlines where the Red Cross helps people around the world. Ask learners to use this information to shade in the countries (if they have a **print-out**) or mark on the board where the Red Cross helps people affected by conflict. (Learners will have to read the individual country information, as not all of the countries listed are affected by conflict.)

As a group, think about and mind-map what learners think people affected by conflict might need.

What examples can learners find of help that the Red Cross provides? Which of these do they think help people with their immediate needs, and which can help people in the long-term?



2.3 Protecting the helpers

Extension

Treating all victims of conflict impartially is a basic humanitarian principle that the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement continues to follow today. The impartial and humane treatment of war victims (civilians and soldiers) is part of International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

Ask the learners to form small groups and hand out some large paper and marker pens to each group. Ask them to divide the paper into four by drawing a cross in the centre of the page. In each corner ask them to write the headings below (this can also be displayed on the PowerPoint). Ask them to think again about the emblems of the International RCRC Movement and, working in groups, to write under each heading what the emblems and the rules of war might mean to the following groups, and how they might help to protect them.

Learners can think about WWI as well as modern-day conflicts.

Medical personnel	Civilians
Soldiers	Volunteers



2.4 Reflecting

Core

Hand out some paper to young people and ask them individually to draw a head, a heart and a hand on the page. Reflecting on what they have learned about protections in war, ask them now to think about:

- How did POWs cope with their situations?
- How did the Red Cross start? What principles is it based on?
- What protections are there in place for those affected by conflict?
- (If you have watched the [Story of an Idea](#) video) How might Henry Dunant have felt when he decided to help the wounded soldiers? What moved him to help?

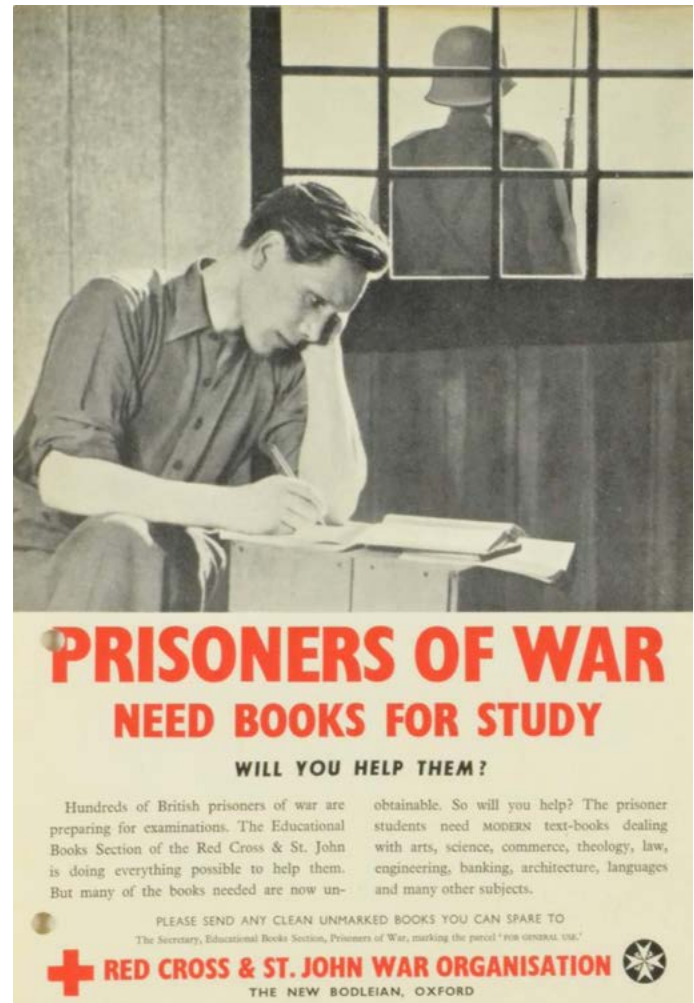
This could be a class discussion, or the questions can be displayed in the PowerPoint for learners to reflect on.

Now ask them to think about their reactions to what they have learned. Now on their page, ask them to write or draw in the:

- head – what is the most important piece of knowledge or learning they will take away
- heart – how it made them feel and what they will tell others about what they have learned
- hand – what they will do differently as a result of what they have learned; what actions or behaviours might they now have

Finally, ask them to write the values that are important to them about what they have learned around the edge (this could be compassion or helping others).

Learners can then discuss in pairs or small groups what they put in each symbol (head, heart, hand) and how they will use the values they have learned in their own lives. For example, they might decide to volunteer for a cause that is important to them.



Module two: Supporting resources

1.2: Feeding prisoners of war (factsheet for learners)

British prisoners of war (POWs) were in dire need of food and clothing during the First World War. They were also desperate for entertainment.

Many wrote letters home to tell family and friends that they were starving. Although their loved ones sent them supplies, many packages did not reach their destination or were poorly packed. Others had secret messages hidden in the food, so they were destroyed by the German forces.

During the war the British Red Cross and the Order of St John worked together. Through the Central Prisoners of War Committee they co-ordinated relief for British prisoners of war.

Every prisoner would receive an adequate supply of food and clothing. Parcels of food, each weighing about 10 pounds, were delivered fortnightly to every prisoner who had been registered.

The food parcels

The standard emergency parcel contained:

- three tins of beef
- 1/4 pound of tea
- 1/4 pound of cocoa
- two pounds of biscuits
- two tins of cheese or loaf goods
- one tin of dripping
- two tins of milk
- 50 cigarettes

Each parcel contained enough food to keep two men going for approximately one week. The Red Cross was permitted to keep a total of 12,000 of these emergency parcels at any one time in the various German prisoner-of-war camps.

There were also some special parcels:

- Turkish and Bulgarian parcels
- Invalid parcels
- Vegetarian parcels
- "No tins" parcels (due to the rules implemented in certain camps by the Germans)
- Indian parcels
- Enclosures from relatives

Games

Packages of games and entertainment were also sent to prisoners of war to alleviate their boredom. The Red Cross received a request for these entertainments from a prisoner of war at Doebritz Camp:

"British prisoners of war in Doebritz Camp, Germany are sorely in need of indoor and outdoor games. Cricket and tennis are not allowed, but gifts of rope and rubber quoits would be welcomed, also books for the library and music for the string orchestra which the prisoners have started."

Letters from prisoners

The Central Prisoners of War Committee tried to keep the prisoners in touch with their families. They received many requests for help from men who did not hear regularly from home.

They also received numerous letters expressing thanks for the food parcels and other comforts.

One prisoner wrote: "So you can see that the men have to rely entirely on the parcels sent from England. I regret to state that the bread which we received during last summer was in such a state that we could not eat it, but it was on account of the hot weather; but during autumn and up to the time I left Germany, it arrived regular and in very good condition.

"I must say that the parcels that I received were very good and to my knowledge I don't think they need any alteration, as I was quite satisfied with the parcels, although many of the parcels which I received there was some item or other missing, but where it is gone we cannot say, only it is somewhere in Germany."

2.5 million parcels

By the end of the First World War, over 2.5 million parcels had been organised, packaged, wrapped and despatched to prisoners of war in camps abroad.

1.5: Basic rules of IHL*

IHL is a set of rules that aim to preserve human dignity in armed conflict by **protecting** the most vulnerable persons and by **limiting** the way in which war is conducted.

IHL strikes a balance between the principle of **humanity** and **military necessity**.

	Prohibitions	Obligations
Protecting the most vulnerable persons <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - civilians - wounded and sick - detainees - health-care workers 	<p>It is forbidden to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - target civilians and civilian objects (houses, schools, places of worship, cultural or historic monuments, etc.); - murder and torture; - commit acts of sexual violence; - forcibly displace and starve civilians; - attack hospitals, ambulances and health-care workers; - use human shields; - destroy stocks of food, farming areas, and the water supply; - recruit or use children under the age of 15 in armed conflict; - misuse the red cross / red crescent / red crystal emblem; - interfere with the delivery of humanitarian relief; - damage the environment. 	<p>Captured civilians and enemy combatants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - must be given adequate food, water, clothing, shelter and medical care; - must be allowed to have contact with their families; <p>Children and women must be detained separately from men, to the extent feasible.</p> <p>Enemy combatants who are wounded, sick, shipwrecked, or surrendering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - must be searched for, collected and cared for; - must not receive preferential treatment, except on medical grounds. <p>A surrendering enemy must not be wounded or killed.</p> <p>The specific protection, health and assistance needs of women affected by armed conflict must be respected.</p> <p>Everyone is entitled to a fair trial.</p>
Limiting the way in which war is conducted <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - weapons - use of force 	<p>It is forbidden to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - use weapons that cause unnecessary suffering (such as poison, blinding laser weapons or antipersonnel landmines); - use weapons that cannot distinguish between civilians and military targets (such as landmines); - take hostages; - pretend to be a civilian while fighting; - order or threaten that there shall be no survivors. 	<p>Those who are fighting must make an effort to figure out who is a combatant and who is not in the fight.</p> <p>Attacks must be limited to military objectives.</p> <p>During an attack, every precaution must be taken to minimize the potential harm to civilians and civilian objects.</p>

1.5: Basic rules of IHL* continued

Definitions

Civilian: Any person who is not a combatant. When civilians take a direct part in fighting, they lose their protection from attack. (Should there be any doubt about a person's status, he or she shall be considered to be a civilian.)

Combatant: Member of armed forces, member of any armed group under the orders of a party to the conflict.

Hors de combat: Literally means "out of fight" and describes combatants who have been captured or wounded or who are sick or shipwrecked and thus no longer in a position to fight.

Civilian object: Any object that is not a military objective. When a civilian object is used in support of military action it becomes a legitimate military target and loses its protection. (When there is any doubt about its status it shall be considered to be a civilian object.)

Military object: Object that by its nature, location, purpose or use makes an effective contribution to military action and whose destruction offers a definite military advantage.

*Reproduced from Mini EHL: Exploring Humanitarian Law – education for young people

2.2 Helping in modern-day conflict



MAP SHOWING WHERE RED CROSS HELP HAS BEEN GIVEN ABROAD.