THE CHALLENGE AND PROMISE OF GIRL SCOUT INTERNATIONALISM: FROM PROGRESSIVE-ERA ROOTS TO COLD WAR FRUIT

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“Put your finger on the map. Wherever it rests in the free world, it is not too far from a Girl Scout troop. From Iceland to the jungle and back across the deserts to tiny mining camps and missionary settlements, there are Girl Scouts on foreign soil.”

“TOFS: Girl Scouts, USA on Foreign Soil,” 1963

By 1963, there were 35,000 American girls and women participating in U.S. Girl Scout activities overseas. Troops on Foreign Soil (TOFS), the overseas branch of the Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA), sponsored programs for American girls all over the world from the desert to the jungle, from mining camps to missionary settlements, and — as this article will make clear — on U.S. military bases. The internationalism espoused by the GSUSA by 1963, which touted a global American presence, would seem at first to represent an egregiously imperial assertion of American Cold War power, yet the GSUSA meant to promote a more thoughtful engagement with the world. In the same TOFS bulletin, the National President of the GSUSA was quoted as insisting, “Those in TOFS know that being a Girl Scout in a foreign land is a link with home and a bridge to making friends with sister Scouts in a new country.” How did Girl Scout internationalism come to reflect such seemingly oppositional impulses?

I argue that the version of Girl Scout internationalism that motivated the formation of and programming within TOFS in the early Cold War, particularly the North Atlantic Girl Scouts (NAGS), was the product of several intersecting threads and reflected the best efforts of the GSUSA to formulate a reciprocal internationalism within the rapid realignment of geopolitical resources in the early twentieth century. The GSUSA’s robust overseas program for girls was partly the result of growth in the world organization, in which the GSUSA was a driving factor, and partly the result of the way programming presented to girls in the field of international friendship emphasized cultural and consumer ties, as well as an imagined relationship with


2 "Girl Scout Registered Membership-USA Troops on Foreign Soil." 31 Dec 1963. Membership-TOFS-USA Girl Scouts Overseas: General, Box 2. NHPC.
the world. Tracing the development of Girl Scout internationalism asks us to re-examine our view of U.S. military power during the Cold War and to historicize the American view of the world during the Cold War within a broader history of world engagement. The history of Girl Scout internationalism thereby contributes to the growing scholarship on social and cultural aspects of U.S. foreign relations and the relationship of American youth with the world.3

From the beginning of the Girl Scout movement in the early twentieth century, it was one of the Girl Scout laws to “be a friend to all and a sister to every Scout.” The idea that the shared experience of scouting could form an entryway into an understanding of common humanity was one of the founding impulses of the global movement and formed the basis of Girl Scout internationalism. This belief in the possibility of a world sisterhood drew on tropes of universalized visions of childhood, in particular, that the innocence of childhood could bypass national biases and thus lay the ground for world friendship based on reciprocity. The idea of Girl Scout internationalism was also born in a moment when beliefs about women as naturally peaceful and peace-loving held sway, and these gendered ideas continued to influence notions that girls were interested in and naturally knew how to cultivate international friendships. As these ideas were translated into programming under the rubric of international or world friendship, however, the version of Girl Scout internationalism presented to girls emphasized the cultural and consumer ties present in girls’ communities and relied on an experience of world friendship that asked girls to imagine the world beyond U.S. borders.

In the period leading up to World War II, two prongs to GSUSA internationalism developed partially in relation to one another. First, there was the formal, organizational internationalism cultivated by the GSUSA membership in the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS), and following close on its heels came the internationalism cultivated in programming and literature directed at girls that encouraged them to imagine the world beyond U.S. borders. Throughout its early years, the GSUSA experienced steady growth in membership, and though World War II disrupted organizational ties, Girl Scout internationalist programming only increased, albeit with a rising emphasis on friendship as the charitable exchange of goods and a growing donor relationship with the rest of the world. After World War II, girls in the United States had expanded opportunities to engage with their “sister scouts” abroad, and the GSUSA

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underwent a profound shift as well, due to a suddenly expanded presence overseas and the sudden growth of its TOFS programs. During the early Cold War, these programs were concentrated in West Germany under the North Atlantic Girl Scouts (NAGS). The GSUSA seized upon the opportunity presented by the new presence of girls overseas to try and put into practice their ideal of world friendship that very few girls had been able to experience previously, but their efforts to create international ties between girls based on the shared experience of scouting more often than not revealed the limitations of a Girl Scout internationalism founded on an idealized version of childhood and friendship.

Born in a hopeful moment with an emphasis on tolerance and sympathy for those outside the United States, distilled through a world depression and war that translated expressions of world friendship into a language of goods, Girl Scout internationalism in the postwar period bore complicated fruit. The insistence on human commonality and universalism was often interpreted as an understanding that “the world is just like us,” so that girls in NAGS were unprepared to make sense of the national differences they encountered overseas. It is hard to imagine how any organization, not just the GSUSA, might have been able to cultivate a sense of internationalism that made ready room for difference. Yet, Girl Scout internationalism is useful for historicizing the development of American engagement with the world in the Cold War. An organization for girls run primarily by women, with robust world ties and a dedication to international friendship, the GSUSA is absent from most Cold War narratives. Yet the history of the organization shows that it was an important source of information for girls about the world beyond the United States and an organization that thought deeply about internationalism, even when it was unpopular. Tracing the evolution of Girl Scout internationalism from the early twentieth century to the beginning of the Cold War begins to tell this untold story.

I. Organizational Ties: The Girl Scouts of the USA and the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts

The Girl Scouts of the USA were founded in 1912 by Juliette Gordon Low, who was inspired by the Girl Guides in the UK, which in turn had been formed a few years earlier by Lord Robert Baden-Powell as an offshoot of the Boy Scouts. Scouting for girls and boys grew worldwide during the next few decades, often coinciding with native youth
movements, such as the German Jugendbewegung. In these early days of the GSUSA, its international contacts were primarily informal, arising from an international, predominantly transatlantic, network of social reformers and those interested in the future of youth. Baden-Powell, seen as the father of all scouting for boys and girls, described the movement in universal terms, united by their “one interest ‘the girl’...the essential spirit that should inspire us.” In the early 1920s, an International Committee was formed to further international cooperation between national movements, and adult representatives of national organizations held conferences and encampments in the U.K. and the U.S. throughout the decade. This increasing collaboration culminated in a conference held in Budapest, Hungary, in 1928, where the delegates officially voted to form the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS).

The GSUSA took advantage of the propitious occasion in Budapest to announce the creation of the Juliette Low Memorial Fund. “Daisy,” as the much beloved founder had been known, had died the year before. She had always been keenly interested in the international aspects of Girl Scouting, and the fund in her memory was intended “for the promotion of Girl Scouting and Girl Guiding throughout the world, as a contribution toward world peace and good will.” A Memorial Committee was charged with collecting donations from individuals and scout troops in the United States and then allocating them for appropriate expenditures. The committee hoped the fund might be used for “[h]elping the poorer countries to send delegates to international meetings or camps; helping countries get captains by sending a representative...to speak before their women’s colleges or other groups; financing the exchange of visiting trainers from one country to another, and any other projects which might help the spread and effectiveness of Girl Scouting and Girl Guiding throughout the world.”

Throughout the 1930s, the Low Memorial Fund was used to foster relationships with Girl Guides around the world, even as war broke out in Europe and Asia. One of the first uses of the fund was paying for transportation and a two-week stay at Our Chalet, the international home of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts in Adelboden, Switzerland. In 1934-1935, for example, the fund gave out 22 awards to girls from France, Latvia, Lithuania, Austria, Denmark, and Estonia, in addition to the United States and Canada. A trip to Our Chalet could be a transformative experience for adolescent girls, who formed their own


informal alumnae organization and memories that lasted. As three American girls wrote in a 1935 issue of American Girl, the GSUSA monthly magazine: “The thrill of hearing taps and grace in many languages, of being able to talk to girls from fourteen countries, and of the thought that we now have friends around the world, make us realize the wonderful opportunity and experiences we have had.”

The Low Memorial Fund also paid to help foreign girls visit the United States. In 1937, the GSUSA hosted a Silver Jubilee in honor of the organization’s twenty-fifth anniversary, held at Camp Andrée on the grounds of Camp Edith Macy, a donated home and estate outside of New York City that had been the site of one of the early international encampments. The Low Memorial Fund helped to bring 26 girls from around the world to camp with 74 American girls, where they spent time sharing songs and games, held a pageant of national costumes, and, generally, in the words of one of the organizers, “acquired something precious in the way of friendship which time and space are insufficient to destroy.”

But as war deepened in the rest of the world, the line between “the promotion of Girl Scouting and Girl Guiding” and actions of charity toward foreign children seemed to disappear. In late 1938, the chairman of the American Red Cross cabled the GSUSA national convention in Kansas City, Missouri. “There is tremendous need for assistance to thousands of suffering Chinese children who through no fault of their own have been driven from their homes and are in actual want for the common necessities of life,” he wrote, and added, “We would be delighted to transit any funds raised by Girl Scouts in this country to Girl Scout Headquarters in China.” The Juliette Low Memorial Committee voted to allocate $500 “to be used for the relief of sufferers in the Far East,” and an additional $300 was raised from individual contributions. The American Red Cross called the donation a “fine humanitarian action” and declared it to be “evidence of the international good will and fellowship so often expressed by the Girl Scouts in their activities,” and transferred the total of $800 through the American Red Cross Committee in Shanghai to the Girl Scouts of China. Similarly, in 1940 and 1941, money and goods were sent to Girl Guides in the U.K., including $1,500 to the Girl Guide Emergency Relief Fund, which was used to aid Girl Guides whose homes had been bombed, and thousands of dollars worth of material goods, including clothes for girls and boys, an ambulance, and bedding for air raid shelters (though this last was destroyed by bombers as it sat in the docks).
In these early instances, the transfers of goods and money remained ostensibly between Girl Scouts, but the line between the promotion of scouting and participation in broader humanitarian efforts became more blurred as the war effort intensified. Renamed the Juliette Low World Friendship Fund in 1942, its coffers were increasingly used for relief work. The preference remained to give money and goods to Guide and Scout organizations when possible, but it was not an unbreakable rule. For example, in 1943, $7,000 was given to a Chinese orphanage on the advice of Madame Chiang Kai-Shek. In the same year, $3,000 was used to purchase powdered milk for children in Russia, where there were no Girl Scouts or Guides. Printed on each can of milk was a message: “This milk is a gift from the Girl Scouts of America and expresses their friendship and best wishes to the young people of the Soviet Union.”

These humanitarian efforts increased at the end of the war, as the GSUSA worked with WAGGGS to reestablish scouting as part of efforts to rebuild and re-democratize Europe. Through UNRAA and similar aid organizations, they served huge populations of displaced persons, and through cooperation with the U.S. military government, they worked to reform German girl scouting, which had been coopted into the Bund Deutcher Mädel. As early as 1944, the Girl Scouts began cooperating with UNRRA and the Guide International Service (a wartime relief organization started by Girl Guides in Britain and Australia) to train groups of professional scouts to go overseas in order to aid with rebuilding. The first groups were sent to Greece and the Balkans, and in 1946, UNRRA approved the travel of the first Girl Scout group to Germany to assist in displaced persons camps. Like other volunteers, the volunteer scouts (all adults) worked to provide normalcy, as much as they were able, for children in displaced camps and war-torn communities. Scouts and guides participated in general relief work as well as setting up scout troops. American scouts primarily worked through UNRRA, but they considered themselves somewhat autonomous. For example, Gertrude Bruns, working in a camp for people from Poland and the Baltic region resisted organizing a “repatriation parade” for those in her care, considering it too political and outside the scope of her mission.

The GSUSA also worked to rebuild the scouting movement in Allied countries. In September of 1944, even before the war in Europe had ended, the Chairman of the International Committee of GSUSA wrote to the Director of the World Bureau in London, informing her that some $56,000 had been raised by Girl Scouts in a “Victory

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12 Letter from Gertrude Bruns, 10 October 1946. Defense Box 3. NHPC. See Proctor, Scouting for Girls for more information on the GIS.
“Fund,” which they had voted to use “to help re-establish Guiding and Scouting in the countries which have suffered so from the war,” and asked for help in ascertaining where this money might best be used. In addition, the International Committee of the GSUSA had also allocated thousands of dollars for use in France, North Africa, Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg, and the U.K.¹³

Though the GSUSA still perceived itself as working towards its goal of world friendship, its relationship to WAGGGS had changed from the younger sister who looked toward the UK and Baden-Powell and his wife for guidance to the generous, older sister who funded a significant portion of “world friendship” activities. This required a delicate balancing act. As a senior leader of the GSUSA warned scouts back home after traveling to Europe: “Obviously our resources are the greatest but do not always need to be identified” and “all . . . must be arranged tactfully in order to prevent the USA’s taking the position of donor and the other countries that of beneficiary.”¹⁴

II. Imagining World Friendship: Literature and Programming Aimed at Girl Scouts in the Domestic United States

At the same time that the GSUSA was developing organizational ties with WAGGGS, it also worked to develop an International Friendship field of activities for Girl Scouts in the United States. The literature and programming for Girl Scouts was intended to cultivate a reciprocal relationship based on seemingly universal values. It took as its starting point that “the interest of girls of Girl Scout age in the people and customs of other countries is a natural one, beginning with folk and fairy tales, and pictures of children dressed in picturesque costumes.” Due to changes in the world the girls lived in, however, this cursory interest was no longer enough. In announcing the expansion of the field in the magazine for Girl Scout troop leaders, the GSUSA explained:

Formerly the differences between ourselves and these other children tended, in this country, to be exaggerated and the “funny” customs of one nation were made as humorous as the “queer” way in which the people of another country dressed . . . . Now that the wonders of invention have made the world a very small unit, compared with twenty years ago, [we] are striving to substitute a more sympathetic point of view — one that is based on a respect for human personality and achievement.¹⁵

¹³ Mrs. E. Swift Newton to Mrs. Arethusa Leigh-White, 28 September 1944. Defense collection, Box 2, Folder Defense-General Postwar, 1946-1952. NHPC.

¹⁴ Memo from Ruth Henderson, Director of International Division to International Committee, July 12, 1949 re Trip to Europe — April-May, 1949. Defense Box 2. NHPC.

The GSUSA faced a difficulty in this field of programming, however, since the opportunities for direct engagement were limited. Our Chalet offered the opportunity of international friendship to a limited number of American girls, and the Low Fund offered a similarly limited number of girls the opportunity to interact with foreign Scouts and Guides in the United States. In addition WAGGGS operated an International Post Box division that matched Girl Scouts and Girl Guides with pen pals in foreign lands, but this service was in chronic over-demand. Because of this, Girl Scout literature and programming in International Friendship was designed to help girls in the domestic United States to imagine the world beyond their borders and to find traces of the outside world in their local communities and homes. In this way, the GSUSA sought to translate the idea of “world friendship” into gendered and age-specific programming for girls that sought to live up to the belief, as expressed in the 1940 Girl Scout Handbook, that “Internationalism, [was]...an ideal that must be experienced and lived.” As the world war raged in Europe and Asia, domestic Girl Scouts also began to engage with the world outside their borders through a proxy of goods, a relationship that was continued into the Cold War and mirrored the changes in the GSUSA’s relationship with WAGGGS.

Though the Girl Scout law had always included the tenet that girls be “a sister to every scout,” programming aimed at cultivating “International Friendship” in Girl Scouts became formalized and codified as the GSUSA’s organizational ties with WAGGGS strengthened during the 1920s and 1930s. “Thinking Day,” February 22, which commemorated the birthday of Lord and Lady Baden-Powell, was established in 1926, (before the official formation of WAGGGS), though Girl Scouts dubbed it “International Day” initially, and continued to celebrate “International Month” in March rather than February until 1934. By the mid-1930s, American girls could earn the World Knowledge Badge and World Interpreter Badge, and at the 1938 World Conference in Switzerland, the GSUSA also introduced tentative versions of three new International Friendship badges, which were well-received by the other international representatives at the World Conference. In addition, while WAGGGS members emphasized international programming primarily for older girls (generally older than 12), the GSUSA pioneered programming for younger girls, which their fellow members of WAGGGS responded to with interest.

By the late 1930s, the version of Girl Scout internationalism presented to girls through programming literature focused primarily on cultural
exchange and the ways the world was bound together by trade. The 1940 Handbook instructed girls, “If you listen to enough music from a certain country...you begin to understand something about the people who live there,” and pointed to the fact that technological advances in transportation and communication meant that girls now went “shopping” all over the world. An accompanying illustration showed a table set with the items from around the world: olive oil from Italy, tea from China, and china from England, as well as glass from Sweden, coffee from South America, and cheese from France. Activities under International Friendship that could lead to a badge achievement included corresponding with a foreign girl in her own language (World Interpreter Badge), asking a “foreign-born woman to demonstrate the making of a dish popular in her homeland” (World Gifts Badge), or making a “troop bulletin board” with clippings on current events in a chosen country, as well as learning a little bit about its “past and present history,” including “its chief writers, painters, musicians, sculptors, inventors, or other citizens whose work is of importance to the world” (World Knowledge Badge). Learning the political systems of other countries was not a requirement for any badges under International Friendship, although the Wide World Badge did suggest: “find out what you can about organizations such as...the League of Nations” and other international quasi-governmental bodies.17

In developing programs for younger girls, the 1939 Leader’s Guide for the Brownie Program stated that the ages between seven and ten offered “a real opportunity during a three-year period to create desirable attitudes and concepts in the Brownie’s mind toward far distant parts of the world.” It made clear that the program ought to emphasize both a Brownie’s attitude toward the outside world and a real engagement and understanding with the way things were in other lands. By cultivating an appreciation for lifestyles different from hers, “[the Brownie] begins to learn that no one can grow up surrounded only by friends who do, think, act just as she does. In small ways she is being prepared to be a tolerant and sympathetic citizen of the world.” The Guide suggested visiting local immigrant communities, where a Brownie might “[begin] to understand about people beyond the sea by becoming acquainted with representatives of each land living right in her own community. [Such a visit] is an exciting and concrete experience and makes realistic the facts that children in all countries play, read fairy tales, and sing; and that in Holland they tend tulips, watch the geese in Poland, and pasture goats in the Tirol.”18

17 Girl Scout Handbook (1940), 338-69.
With the establishment of the Low Fund, Girl Scouts were also given the opportunity to support the national organization’s efforts. Local Girl Scout troops sometimes hosted fundraising events organized by the girls, but troop donations were often derived from individual contributions by the girls who wanted to give “pennies to Daisy.” By the early 1940s, the Juliette Low contributions were annual events, usually accomplished with some fanfare. Girls might bring pennies to a troop birthday party (perhaps held on Low’s birthday, October 31), and drop a penny for each year of her age into a large cake, or perhaps they might hold an “International Night,” where girls dropped their pennies into a large globe. There were even “Self-Denial Parties,” where “each girl [brought] the pennies she saved by denying herself some simple pleasure — a package of chewing gum. . .a candy bar, soft drink, or moving picture.” Girls were also encouraged to earn pennies through performing chores for family or neighbors if they could not save pennies from an allowance. Presentation of the collections could sometimes be elaborate “Ceremonies of Pennies” and take the form of spelling out “Juliette Low” with pennies, sewing pennies into the skirts of dolls dressed in international costumes, or making penny banks in the shape of Our Chalet or “logs to add to the fire of friendship between America and other lands.”19

Participation by U.S girls in the Low Fund was also given precedence over individual contributions to the World Fund. In 1932, WAGGGS proposed an annual collection of donations from Girl Guides and Girl Scouts as part of the worldwide celebration of Thinking Day, but the GSUSA demurred. While acknowledging that February 22 was a day when U.S. Girl Scouts would “think of their sister Guides and Scouts in other lands and feel that messages of hope and friendship are coming back to them,” the GSUSA insisted that “International Day, or Thinking Day, has always seemed to the Girl Scout organization to be a day on which the spiritual side of the movement should be emphasized, and it would seem a pity to associate in the minds of the girls the collection of money with that day.”20

The GSUSA commitment to international friendship programming continued even as World War II deepened throughout the rest of the world. This was possible, in part, because of the type of internationalism that Girl Scouting cultivated. The 1940 Girl Scout Handbook, released when most of Europe and Asia was at war, sought to remind girls that “political boundaries change swiftly, but peoples do not,” and suggested instead “that the activities in this field be undertaken...
with peoples — not countries — in mind, reaffirming our belief as a member of a World Association in the possibility of peace and friendship among members of the world’s families.”

After the end of the war, the GSUSA enlisted girls’ help in the rebuilding of Girl Guide troops throughout Europe. American Girl Scouts were active in helping to reactivate guide troops, many of which had gone underground. Postwar scouting literature described these wartime guides in melodramatic language:

The Guide Associations of Europe, repressed but not destroyed during the dark years of war, never gave up hope. Although their book and uniforms were confiscated or burned and their meetings and camping expeditions strictly forbidden, still the Girl Guides carried on. They met secretly and banded together informally for relief of the needy, for encouragement and general helpfulness. They whispered their songs and wore their Guide pins under their lapels. They longed for the moment when they could meet openly and wear their uniforms.

To support the rejuvenation of European guides, the GSUSA organized the sending of “Friendship Bags”: These consisted of a “hand-made drawstring bag filled with little articles that are commonplace to us but precious to girls who have not had them for years,” which included soap, combs, toothbrushes, pencils, etc. Troops would assemble the bags and then ship them to international organizations, which would bundle them together with other donations and ship them overseas. The intended recipients were Girl Scouts and Girl Guides in Europe, who could either make use of the items themselves or distribute them “to girls in greater need.” Friendship Bags were not sent to Germany, because in 1945 there were no German scout troops, but bags were organized to be sent “to Russian girls, who suffered so much more than Americans in our common cause,” even though there were no scouts or guides there either. Adult Girl Scouts, who worked in DP camps across Europe under the auspices of UNRAA and similar bodies also distributed them.

This shift toward conducting relationships with girls in other countries through a proxy of goods continued into the 1950s, when the GSUSA launched “Schoolmates Overseas,” a program intended to anchor the “international friendship activity” of troops throughout
the United States. Similar to the “Friendship Bags,” the program asked Girl Scouts in the U.S. to make and fill bags with school supplies, as well as “some small surprise, perhaps a pair of mittens or a gay hair ribbon, a trinket, toy or game.” The bags and their contents were meant to “express the Girl Scout’s friendly interest in the welfare and happiness of children in other lands,” as well as the scouts’ belief “that by making education a little easier for the youth of all nations, they can help to safeguard the future of democracy in the world.”

The project succeeded in shipping tons of supplies overseas.

Like earlier scouting literature, the Friendship Bag and Schoolmates Overseas programs delineated an understanding of internationalism that was most fully expressed through consumer goods and cultural ties. But in contrast to the ideal that Girl Scout internationalism would cultivate an understanding of difference and tolerance, the postwar literature distributed to American Girl Scouts also subtly encouraged the idea that, although all scouts and guides could be friends, not all scouts and guides could be equal. The cartoon illustration from the leaflet distributed to Girl Scout troops in the U.S. shows this clearly. The tableau is divided in two — on the left, presumably the U.S. side of the Atlantic, girls in neat Girl Scout uniforms cheerfully tie up boxes and gleefully show one another the dresses that are included. Though the stated purpose of the program was to “[make] education a little easier,” only one box on the left, labeled “pencils,” is directly connected with education. On the right side of the illustration, presumably Europe, girls are shown unpacking the boxes. In contrast to the American girls, whose clothes and hair were neat and modern, the European girls have clothes that are patched, many with kerchiefs on their heads, and there is even one (likely supposed to represent the Dutch) wearing an oddly nineteenth-century-style bonnet and wooden shoes. As on the U.S. side of the Atlantic, the girls are gleeful and there is no representation of educational materials — only clothes: dresses, socks, and mittens. The imagined relationship, then, is one where U.S. Girl Scouts are donors and European scouts the recipients of charity. This is underscored by the accompanying text, aimed at U.S. Girl Scouts: “We, in this country, have all these things in comparative abundance. Wouldn’t you like to share what we have with the young people of other lands?”

Even though Girl Scout internationalism championed an international sisterhood of scouts, activities such as Schoolmates Overseas undermined such a rosy worldview. The Girl Scout leadership saw age and


25 “Schoolmates Overseas.” Defense Box 3. NHPC.
gender as universal categories that would foster a sense of commonality, yet these commonalities broke down over national disparities of wealth and power, and this reflected an ongoing contradiction within the Girl Scouts at home. Though the GSUSA had a strong national organization, with a clearly defined agenda and programming, the nature of the organization meant that these had to be enacted locally, so that troops in the South, for example, were often segregated, immigrants were invited into troops in order to “Americanize” them, and poorer girls might not have the opportunity to participate in scouting at all.26

III. The North Atlantic Girl Scouts and the Expansion of Troops on Foreign Soil

At the same time that girls in the domestic United States developed new ways of interacting with girls overseas, albeit through a proxy of goods, the postwar period also brought a broader shift in the GSUSA’s internationalist programs and organization. Though cooperation with WAGGGS and overseas giving by the Girl Scouts increased after World War II, by far the biggest shift in the GSUSA came in its new overseas presence. The postwar occupation of Germany and Japan brought an unprecedented number of American military families overseas, and their numbers only grew in Europe as the army of occupation shifted to become part of a NATO-backed presence of indeterminable duration. As might be expected, the GSUSA saw this new international presence as an opportunity to embody the internationalist ideals of Girl Scouting in new ways. But like the domestic programs, the postwar expansion of TOFS demonstrated that a Girl Scout internationalism born of progressive reform and nurtured during world depression and war might run into problems in the new postwar order. Organizationally, the GSUSA had to contend with the expanding and changing U.S. military, which valued international interaction between the members of military families and the surrounding Europeans, but which also sought to subsume the GSUSA organization into its sphere of military activities. In terms of programming, the rapid postwar expansion of TOFS, in particular, the establishment of the North Atlantic Girl Scouts (NAGS), offered the GSUSA opportunities to fully embrace and embody Girl Scout internationalism, but interaction between girls under the rubric of internationalism did not always lead to the common understanding that the GSUSA hoped for.

The original Troops on Foreign Soil (TOFS) had been created in 1927 to serve the children of ARAMCO personnel in Saudi Arabia. Until

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1947, TOFS had fewer than 200 members (frequently fewer than a hundred) and had existed only in five to six countries. TOFS grew in size exponentially after World War II, fueled almost entirely by overseas military personnel. By 1962, approximately two-thirds of TOFS members were daughters of military personnel, and the remaining third were overseas with personnel from the State Department, business firms, or other government missions. Although TOFS had been specifically set up as isolated, essentially temporary troops, the increase in the number of American girls accompanying the U.S. military overseas, especially in Europe, made it clear by the early 1950s that something more robust and long-term was needed.

Though TOFS troops were established nearly everywhere that the U.S. military had an overseas military presence, the greatest number were in West Germany, where the concentration of U.S. military communities was also the largest. The establishment of Girl Scout troops in Germany happened almost as soon as military families arrived and grew as the numbers of U.S. troops stationed overseas increased. As early as 1946, the first year families arrived in occupied Germany, GSUSA counted two troops with 35 girls, and by December 1961, after the construction of the Berlin Wall, there were more than 12,000 Americans, girls and adult volunteers, involved in American Girl Scouting in West Germany. The Girl Scout presence in occupied Germany and later West Germany overshadowed the Girl Scout presence in other countries where U.S. forces were stationed. In 1955, the number of American Girl Scouts in West Germany (5,517) was a good four times the number in second-ranking France (1,040 girls), and nearly nine times the number of Girl Scouts in the UK (643), the birthplace of Boy Scouting and Girl Guiding. Additionally, the scouting presence in West Germany, where the U.S. military had occupied only one quarter of the country, outstripped the scouting presence in Japan, where the U.S. was the sole Allied occupier. In 1953, there were 3,446 Girl Scouts in Germany and 2,225 Girl Scouts in Japan, and by the end of 1961, when there were more than 12,000 Girl Scout volunteers in West Germany, there were just under 6,000 girls and adult volunteers involved in U.S. Girl Scouting in Japan, Korea, the Ryukyu Islands, and Taiwan.

Early activities of the American Girl Scouts in Europe placed a special emphasis on international scouting, their activities mirroring the work done by professional scouts and American women’s clubs in Germany. By 1952, the international activities of the Girl Scouts
encompassed girls of all ages and Girl Guides of several countries. For example, in Karlsruhe, a troop of Girl Scouts and a troop of Pfadfinderinnen “planned and carried out an out-of-doors meeting together”; in Heidelberg, German scouts were the guests at a rally in honor of the visiting president of GSUSA; Brownies at Bad Godesburg were invited by British Brownies as guests during Girl Scout Week, and Salzburg Intermediate scouts joined Austrian scouts in a harvest festival, “learning each other’s customs, dances and games.”31

These activities were both initiated and received by American Girl Scouts and were perceived as a special opportunity for American scouts, since only a few girls normally had the ability or opportunity to travel internationally and mingle with international scouts. Thinking Day was an especially important opportunity for international involvement, and the activities on these days often included scouts “of the hostess countries” and in displaced persons camps. “Our Chalet,” designated “the international home of Girl Scouts and Girl Guides throughout the world,” provided a special opportunity for American girls in West Germany: they were given special permission to visit at the age of 11, instead of the usual 15.32

But while Girl Scouts on military bases in West Germany may have had new opportunities for international engagement, these came through increased cooperation with the U.S. military. In 1950, the U.S. Army made a request for an organization of American Girl Scouts for American children located in the European Command (EUCOM). This request was primarily concerned with the American girls living in Germany, where U.S. military forces were concentrated. The military requested the help of a “professional Girl Scout Director or Executive” to aid with the formation of “a Scouting Advisory Council” in the command.33 There were also parallel efforts at organizing Boy Scouts for boys in the overseas command. These efforts at organization received official sanction that entailed eligibility for “logistical support” by the military.34

The GSUSA responded to the military government’s request for assistance by sending a professional representative to Germany, who was paid by the military but maintained ties with the GSUSA. Along with a representative from Boy Scouts USA and military staff, the GSUSA representative joined the newly formed EUCOM Scouting Advisory Council (ESAC). The Girl Scout Council initially took the name EUCOM Girl Scouts but eventually settled on the moniker

32 Ibid.
33 LTC Curtis Williams to National Girl Scout Headquarters, 6 November 1950. Membership TOFS-NAGS-Box 4. NHPC.
North Atlantic Girl Scouts (NAGS) to better represent the geographic dispersal of troops — at various times they stretched from Iceland to Morocco, though the core of their members were always centered in West Germany. The council was quickly formed (it was official as of November 1950), yet negotiation over details of control continued for the next several years and were finally settled in the mid-1950s, though the military and the Girl Scouts revisited the agreements every few years. The accommodations were sparse at first: the first representative recalled that the Girl Scout office in Heidelberg at one point resided in the “ladies cloak room in the Stadthalle, overlooking the Neckar River.” But over time the scouts worked out a place for themselves within American military communities in West Germany and maintained their headquarters on the Heidelberg post, close to the location of headquarters for the United States Army in Europe (USAREUR, a slightly reorganized EUCOM).

The increased interaction with U.S. Girl Scouts in Europe intersected with a larger military policy, wherein the U.S. military sought to improve its community relations at home and abroad by cooperating more overtly with scouting. A 1952 directive produced by the Adjutant General of the Army and distributed to commanders of continental commands pointed out the Army’s “recogni[tion] that the training the American girl receives through the Girl Scout program better prepares her for a future role of constructive citizenship” and that the Army was committed to furthering good relations with the communities around bases through its support of Scouting, at home and abroad. It was also hoped that this cooperation might also alert young women to careers in the Women’s Army Corps and the Army Nurse Corps.

The U.S. military wanted to court the good will of American communities and American families, but it also saw youth programs more generally as a way to promote a “democratic” way of life to the West Germans. This began as part of the four “d’s” of the occupation — denazification, demilitarization, decartelization, and democratization — and was transformed into an ideological mission during the Cold War against the communist USSR. From the beginning of the occupation, the U.S. military had sponsored the GYA — German Youth Activities — and beginning in the mid-1950s, it sponsored “Operation Helping Hand” or *Helfende Hand*, which brought children out of German cities, primarily Berlin, to live with service families on American bases during the summer. As in the

35 Ibid.
36 See Public Information and Community Relations Reports. RG 319, Box 10. NARA.
37 MG E. Bergin (The Adjutant General) to Commanding Generals, Continental Armies, and MDW re Army Cooperation with Girl Scouts, 18 December 1952. Defense Box 2. NHPC.
1959 “Kitchen Debate” between Nixon and Khrushchev, the example of service families was in part supposed to expose visiting Berliners to the material abundance of the American lifestyle, which would in turn persuade them of the superiority of an American, democratic way of life. To the U.S. military, therefore, the international activities of the Girl Scouts held particular significance. When the Girl Scouts sent a copy of the 1955 report “Ambassadors in Pigtails” to the U.S. command, General McAuliffe, Commander-in-Chief of USAREUR, replied, “I had not previously appreciated the fine work they are doing in promoting friendly relations with the young ladies of the other nations of Europe. Thank you for sending it to me.”

From the point of view of the GSUSA, however, cooperation with the U.S. military came at a cost. The military provided key logistical support to U.S. scouting overseas. In Europe, the U.S. military arranged to have scouting uniforms and equipment available for sale through European Exchange System (EES), in PXs across the command. In addition, the military paid the salary of the GSUSA representative and provided an operating budget out of the military’s established Morale, Recreation and Welfare Fund (MWR). These were not appropriated funds, that is, they were not funds from the federal government; instead MWR monies came from profits from the PX and Class VI (alcohol) sales, an established method of funding community activities. Such funds were also used to pay for dependent schools, as well as recreation areas for the troops and their families, among other uses. But because scouting accepted MWR slush fund monies, the military wanted to absorb it into existing dependent activities and to bring it under military control. Some of this was necessary for the scouting organization in EUCOM to receive salary and benefits from the military. The Personnel and Administration Division at USAREUR Headquarters performed a “classification study” on Girl Scout advisers to establish their salaries and civil service grade, fitting them into the military rank structure. But the Girl Scout leaders also worried that such close cooperation would materially change the scouting experience. Campsites were shared with existing German Youth Association and American Youth Association (GYA and AYA) sites and were more militarized than in the States. As the Girl Scout Community Adviser wrote to GSUSA HQ in New York in 1952: “It’s a little difficult for me to visualize the camp operation itself with the require[d] military guards and other military personnel in addition to the regular camp staff — but I’m learning fast about these things.”

40 Eleanor Moniger to Frances Faeth, 11 April 1952. Membership TOFS-NAGS, Box 4. NHPC.
As much as the GSUSA staff worried about the effect of the U.S. military on their programming, the presence of U.S. Girl Scouts in West Germany did create new opportunities for U.S. Girl Scouts to put internationalist ideals into practice. After all, a key pillar of scouting internationalism was that the shared experience of scouting could lead to international exchange and help to build an international sisterhood. But the way Girl Scout internationalism idealized interactions between girls — an idealism that emerged from early twentieth-century ideals about the universalism of childhood and womanhood and gained traction in the early Cold War through humanitarian aid based on protecting the innocence of youth — was not always up to the task. Unlike Our Chalet, where select individuals were sent to camp with girls from many nations, the participation of European guides in American camps and attendance by Americans at international encampments did not lead to “something precious in the way of friendship which time and space are insufficient to destroy.”

In 1957 NAGS opened Camp Lachenwald, the first camp dedicated to GSUSA use in Europe. Crucially, camp organizers saw it as a way to foster relations with their “sister scouts,” since scouting’s international sisterhood hinged on the shared experience of scouting. During the inaugural summer of Camp Lachenwald, however, it became clear that American girls had been ill-prepared for the realities of a Girl Scout camp and often expected nothing but “resting and being entertained while at camp.” This inexperience dampened interactions with German “Pfadis” and French “Eclaireuses,” who had been invited to the American camp for the first time. Fewer than ten foreign girls had been able to come, but they were “extremely skilled in camping and very experienced in Scouting.” By comparison, the American girls seemed lacking, and coupled with a language barrier, the Girl Scout report on Camp Lachenwald concluded that “the conditions for developing mutual respect and understanding did not exist.”

These sorts of lopsided interactions with non-American girl guides continued for TOFS troops in Europe through the early 1960s. A Girl Scout staffer, reflecting on feedback received from all the American Girl Scouts in Europe who attended international camps in the summer of 1960, reported: “Almost all reportedly returned home with ideas that they appreciated their own country and customs even more, felt that USA Scouting was very good, vowed to make it better.” In the words of one camper, “After this experience, I began to think more about my own Scout Organization. I stand up for it and for my country. I seem to have a greater respect for both.”

41 Eleanor Moniger to Frances Faeth, 18 July 1957. Membership-TOFS-NAGS, Box 1. NHPC.

42 “NAGS: International Opportunities, 1960.” Membership-TOFS-USA GS Overseas, Box 1. NHPC.
Conclusion

Cooperation with the U.S. military overseas challenged the organization of Girl Scout internationalism, since they were no longer always able to autonomously coordinate interactions between girls. But the commitment of the GSUSA to a reciprocal internationalism remained steadfast, even in the face of strong pressure from the U.S. military to fit the organization into its own ideological mission. The U.S. military, reflecting the standard Cold War binary between democracy and communism, saw international interaction as the opportunity for one-way, outward sharing of American democracy and the American way of life. This is captured in the words of one GSUSA staff who complained in 1961 that the U.S. military only approved of international activities if “we teach them the American way rather than learning their way.” On the other side of the coin, the U.S. Girl Scouts believed strongly in promoting an American democratic way of life, but they also embraced the possibility of openness in international interactions. Their pursuit of “world friendship” drew criticism from the growing conservative movement in the United States. Throughout the early 1950s, there were isolated pockets of concern from local troops about being accused of promoting communist or un-American speakers and ideas. These stirrings culminated in 1954 when a gadfly broadcaster from Florida attacked recent edits in The Girl Scout Handbook and asserted that activities such as asking girls to learn about the United Nations as part of merit badges cultivated a “one-world,” un-American mentality in America’s youth. The bulk of the attack left the Girl Scouts behind in favor of a broad-handed attack on the UN Declaration of Human Rights, but the accusations meshed so neatly with the paranoid politics of the day that the Girl Scouts were officially censured by the Illinois department of the American Legion, which resulted in a national controversy that provoked comments in Congress and elicited a defense from Eleanor Roosevelt.

By 1963, when TOFS asserted, “look anywhere on the map, there are troops on foreign soil,” it represented a complex evolution in Girl Scout internationalist organization and programming. The epigraph that started this article was drawn from a bulletin about TOFS programs, which was distributed with a letter from the GSUSA Commissioner for TOFS to leaders of international organizations, such as the Red Cross and the Rotary, as well as to the wives of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. In both sets of letters, Katzenberg wrote, “We are all grateful to the Armed Services for the support and encouragement they give to Girl Scouting overseas,” and in the letters to the wives

43 American Legion Controversy. Box: General 1953-1946. NHPC.
44 Congressional Record, 8 July 1954, (A4941); 26 July 1954 (A5387-8); 27 July 1954 (A5454).
of the Joint Chiefs, she added, “We owe a special debt to the service wives.” Though Girl Scout internationalism, both organizationally and in programming, had changed dramatically since the birth of scouting in the early twentieth century, the TOFS bulletin reflected the GSUSA belief that U.S. girls participating in scouting overseas represented the fullest expression of a Girl Scout internationalism that sat at the heart of the movement. At the end of the bulletin, they quoted “our own Juliette Low,” saying she “would be pleased by the wealth of friendship and affection earned by U.S.A. Girl Scouts on Foreign Soil” in pursuit of her dream that scouting would be “the magic thread that will link the children of the world together.” Girl Scout internationalism was undoubtedly a thread linking girls together, but it was one of many intersecting threads of American power and engagement with the world.

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45 Margaret Katzenberg to various, April and May 1963. Membership-TOFS-NAGS, Box 3. NHPC.