

THE AGENCY'S GAZETTE

1870-2020

150 YEARS FIGHTING FOR MORE HUMANITY IN WAR

22 May 1942, the first time in...

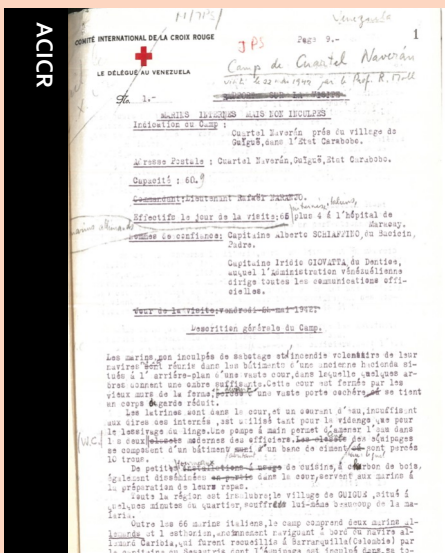
...Venezuela

Chick it out | When, in May 1942, the ICRC delegate in Venezuela, Robert Moll, visited Italian and German sailors being held on an old farm near the village of Gülgüe, Carabobo State, he found that things were not black and white. On the one hand, living conditions were hard, the building dilapidated and unsanitary, and the area infested by malaria; and the sailors felt abandoned – they had had no letters from



Robert Moll (left) during a visit to civilian internees © ICRC

their families for months and no aid from anybody in the outside world. On the other hand, the internees practically had the run of the farm and spent all their free time breeding hens. It had become a passionate pastime of theirs, at which, said the delegate, they excelled. The number of chicks born had even “broken records”. One hen had laid 21 eggs in one sitting!



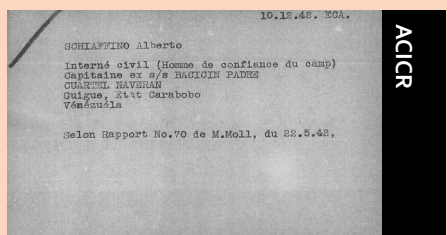
First report on the visit to Venezuela



Fangs a lot | In Valencia, the Carabobo

State capital, Mr Moll visited the captains of German and Italian

ships being held in the municipal prison as saboteurs. Although Venezuela was not at war with anybody, the captains had set fire to their vessels to ensure that they could not be requisitioned. By so doing, they had broken the laws of hospitality and endangered the infrastructure of the country's harbours. A little further north, in Puerto Cabello, Mr Moll spoke with the crews of these burnt-out ships, who had all been placed under house arrest. The man chosen by the Italian sailors to act as their spokesman (man of confidence) told the ICRC delegate about their problems. One stood out: there were poisonous snakes under their beds. This alarmed the prison governor. To “console” him, Mr Moll told him that he had killed a snake once that had come into his kitchen and got within ten centimetres of his wife's foot. The Italians also complained about the poor dental care they were receiving. This triggered a memory in Mr Moll's mind that brought forth a number of personal confidences about his own ventures and the dentist who had made them for him 21 years earlier, concluding with a lively hurrah for Swiss dentistry. These personal stories did not, alas, make it into the final report. The expansive and voluble Mr Moll remained the ICRC's delegate in Venezuela and the Guyanas until the duration of the Second World War. ■ IME, DPM & DGON



Individual card of the man of confidence at Cuartel Naverán camp.