



Clare Makepeace. *Captives Of War: British Prisoners of War in Europe on the Second World War.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

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This is a timely and interesting investigation into the lives of the men who found themselves as prisoners of war during the Second World War. What sets this book apart from so many others is that it doesn't focus on the sensational stories of escapes and defiance; instead it concentrates on the very ordinary, and often very dull, life of a prisoner. It is a deeply personal and idiosyncratic account of British prisoners of war. Partly inspired by the author's own grandfather's experiences, it uses cultural history

techniques to examine how prisoners of war coped and made sense of their predicament.

The book consists of an introduction, seven chapters and a conclusion. Each chapter is nicely introduced and explains the questions raised and answered in the chapter. The introduction serves as a guide to the historiography of prisoners of war literature and an explanation of cultural history as an approach for the investigation. It is Clare Makepeace's background as a cultural historian that makes this a particularly strong element of the book. The book deals with the emotions of the prisoners of war in a way that other books haven't. It does not focus purely on words alone, but also imagery, perception and feelings. This idea of getting into the skin of the men in captivity is brought alive by her extensive use of personal POW logbooks found in the Imperial War Museum archive. This is something I have not seen before and they provide a rich, often visually stunning account of the many aspects of life for prisoners of war.

Chapter one concentrates on the experience of being captured. It deals with themes of shame and guilt and how the men reconciled themselves to the transition from combatant to non-combatant. But here Makepeace makes an important point about how the men were neither one thing or the other. They had been emasculated and lost their identity and reason for being. But they were still in a military environment, with rank structures and order and rules, albeit out of the fighting. It is interesting to note that many prisoners of war did not consider that they would be held for long and many remained optimistic of imminent release. Thoughts of home are a central theme to this book and it is clear that it was something prisoners contemplated almost from the point of capture.

Chapter two examines the way prisoners behaved in captivity and the everyday routine of camp life. It is noted here that small acts of rebellion were commonplace as it helped give prisoners a sense of still being in control of their lives. Whilst touching on mass escapes, such as the famous 'Great Escape', the analysis is subtler than that, as it seeks to understand the perception of escaping from both the idea that it was 'a sport' and from prisoners' reactions to their captors trying to stamp out such activity. It is here that Makepeace makes one of her stronger arguments; prisoners developed an identity

that could only be understood by those that had been through the same experience, the so-called “Kriegie identity.”

Chapter three looks at the challenges prisoners faced in adjusting to life without women or the comforts of home but also at the bond between men and the different boundaries of heterosexual, homoerotic and homosexual life in camp. Attitudes towards soldiers in drag has always been an interesting element in military life and Makepeace deals with this and general attitudes towards sexuality in a sensitive and thought-provoking way. What is interesting is that the book challenges the idea that close bonds would automatically form because of shared experience. It was often found that, as in any society, there were still outsiders and men that did not get on well with others.

Chapter four looks at how prisoners connected with family and loved ones. It is a deeply personal chapter which draws heavily on private letters. Makepeace emphasizes the obvious value of this correspondence and the stresses experienced by prisoners when the mail was delayed or held up for any reason. The discussion about how prisoners used their imagination, such as fantasising about Sunday lunch as if they were home, is interesting and important. This type of mental escapism is not something that has been considered by previous histories.

Chapter five is one of the strongest chapters in this book. It looks at the psychological aspect of being a prisoner of war and considers the mental illness induced by being a prisoner. It provides an excellent overview of reports and investigations into the treatment of prisoners in the First World War and compares the findings to those of the Second World War. It is particularly interesting the way Makepeace weaves the medical evidence into the narrative alongside the deeply personal accounts of the prisoners. Whilst it stresses that there were a number of theories born out of both wars, in general it was unlikely that any prisoner could avoid suffering at least some psychological effects from captivity.

Chapters six and seven dovetail nicely together. Previous histories have dealt with liberation but have often neglected the re-integration of prisoners into both military and civilian life. After word got through to prisoners about the D-Day landings in 1944, their excitement and sense of relief was tempered by their lives becoming more

and more uncomfortable. As the allies pushed the German forces back across Europe, the German prison system descended into chaos and prisoners faced shortages of food and fuel. Sadly, many of the primary sources, like the logbooks that Makepeace draws heavily from, simply stop at the point of liberation. It is obviously apparent that many prisoners saw that as the end of their story. Thankfully there is detailed investigation into the way the prisoners were reintegrated back into the army, navy or air force, and subsequently civilian life.

Perhaps an avenue for further investigation would be the long term psychological and physical health implications of captivity, but that may well fall outside of the scope of this cultural history. It would also have been good to have found out what happened to some of the main contributors over the long term. The accounts consulted do tend to be somewhat officer-centric. Although this is a slight criticism, it is also apparent that there is a reason why officer accounts are more numerous, namely they were not obliged to work under the terms of the Geneva Convention, so it is conceivable that they simply had more time to put their thoughts to paper.

Clare Makepeace should be commended for producing an eminently readable book which deals with the issues in a sensitive manor, whilst maintaining a rigorous level of research. The breadth of sources consulted has ensured that this will remain a go-to book for social, cultural and military historians alike.

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