

# PRISONERS OF WAR, PRISONERS OF PEACE

Edited by Bob Moore and Barbara Hatelly-Broad



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# **Prisoners of War, Prisoners of Peace**

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International Committee for the History of the Second World War

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**Captivity, Homecoming and  
Memory in World War II**

**Edited by  
Bob Moore & Barbara Hatley-Broad**



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# Glossary

AAN	Archiwum Akt Noywch w Warszawie (Archive of Contemporary Documents, Warsaw)
ANZAC	Australian and New Zealand Army Corps
APKat	Archiwum Państwowe w Katowicach (Katowice State Archives)
ARMIR	Armata Italiana in Russia (Italian Army in Russia)
AUSSME	Archivio Ufficio Storico Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito (Archive of the General Staff of the Italian Army)
AVP RF	Arkhir vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii (Archive for Foreign Policy, Moscow)
BA-MA	Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (German State Military Archives)
BDO	Bund Deutscher Offiziere (German Officers' Association)
BRC	British Red Cross
CAMO	See TsAMO (Central Archive for the Ministry of Defence, Moscow)
CAW	Centralne Achiwum Wojskowe (Polish Central Military Archive)
CGPGR	Commisariat general aux prisonniers de guerre rapatriés etaux familles de prisonniers de guerre (General Commission of Repatriated Prisoners of War and their Families)
CIS	Confederation of Independent States
CoS	Chief(s) of Staff
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CSIR	Expeditionary Army Corps
CZPW	Centralny Zarzad Przemyslu Weglowego (Polish Central Coal Board)
DCSfSvC	(US) Deputy Chief of Staff for Service Commands
DVA	(Australian) Department of Veterans' Affairs
DWO	Więziennictwa I Obozów (Polish Department of Prisons and Camps)
FAFP	Fédération des associations de femmes de prisonniers (Federation of Associations of POW Wives)
FDJ	Freie Deutsche Jugend (Free German Youth: SED-guided youth movement)

GARF	Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (State Archives of the Russian Federation)
GAS	German Attitude Scale
GKA	Genf Kriegsgefangenen Abkommen (Geneva Convention)
GKO	Gosudarstvennyi Komitet Oboroney (State Committee for Defence)
(Glav)PURKKA	Glavnoye politicheskoye upravleniye Raboche-Krestjanskoy Armii (Political Administration of the Red Army)
GUKR	Glavnoe Upravlenie Kontrarazvedki (USSR Head Office of Counterespionage)
GULAG	Glavnoe upravlenie Ispravitel'no-Trudovyykh Lagerei (Main Directorate for Correctional Labour Camps)
GUPVI	Glavnoe upravlenie po delam voennoplennyykh I internirovannykh (Central Administration for POW and Internee Affairs)
HBA	Hauptarchiv der von Bodelschwingschen Anstalten Bethel
HD(S)E	Home Defence (Security) Executive
IKKI	Executive Committee of the Communist International
ITL	Ispavitel'no-Trudovye Lageria
KNIL	Koninklijke Nederlandse Indische Leger (Royal Netherlands East Indies Army)
KITLV	Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal- Land- en Volkenkunde (Royal Netherlands Institute for South East Asian and Caribbean Studies)
KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (German Communist Party)
LNIDS	Library of the National Institute for Defense Studies, Defense Agency, Tokyo
MAP	Ministerstwo Administracji Publicznej (Polish Ministry of Public Administration)
MGB	Ministerstvo Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti (USSR Ministry for State Security)
MPS	Minister for Public Security
MVD	Ministerstvo Vnutrennykh Del SSSR (Deputy Minister of the Interior)
NARA	(United States) National Archives and Records Administration
NIBEG	Nederlands Indische Bond van Ex-Kriegsgefangenen en Geïnterneerden (Dutch East Indian Association for former POWs and Internees)
NIOD	Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie (Netherlands State Institute for War Documentation)

NKID	Narodnyi Komissariat Inostrannykh Del (People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs)
NKFD	Nationalkomitee 'Freies Deutschland' (National Committee for a Free Germany)
NKGB	Narodnyi Komissariat Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnost (People's Commissariat for State Security)
NKO	Narkomat Oborony SSSR (USSR Ministry of Defence)
NKVD	Narodnyj Komisariat Vnutrennykh Del (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs)
NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (National Socialist German Workers' Party)
OMGUS	Office of Military Government (US)
OSOpriMGB	Osoboje sobeschanije pri Ministerstva gosudarstvennoj (Special Board of Soviet Ministry for State Security)
PCI	Partito Comunista Italiano (Italian Communist Party)
PFL	Proverochno Filtratsionnye Lageria (Screening Camps)
PMGO	Office of the Provost Marshal General
POWRA	Prisoner of War Relatives Association
PRO	Public Record Office, London
PVS	Prezidium Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR (Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR)
PWE	Political Warfare Executive (GB)
RAPWI	Recovery of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees
RGANI	Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyj arkhiv noveishei istorii (Russian State Archive for Contemporary History)
RGASPI	Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sozial'no-politicheskoi istorii (Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History)
RGVA	Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Voennyi Arkhiv (Russian State Military Archive)
RSFSR	Rossiiskaia Sovetskaia Federatsionnaia Socialisticheskaya Respublika (Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic)
SSAFA	Soldiers, Sailors and Air Force Association
SBZ	Sowjetische Besatzungszone (Soviet Zone of Occupation, Germany)
SEAC	South East Asia Command
SED	Sozialistische Einheitspartei (Socialist Unity Party of Germany)
SMAD	Sowjetische Militäradministration in Deutschland (Soviet Military Administration in Germany)
SMERSh	Smert' shpionam (Death to the Spies)
SMGI	Stichting Mondelinge Geschiedenis Indonesië (Foundation for the Oral History of Indonesia)

SNK SSSR	Sovet Narodnykh Komissarov (USSR Council of People's Commissars)
SPD	(US) Special Projects Division
SPP	Sborno Peresylnye Punkty (Collecting Transit Points)
SWPA	South West Pacific Area Command
TsAMO	Tsentral'nyi arkhiv ministerstva oborony (Russian Federation Ministry of Defence Central Archive)
TsIK	Tsentral'nyi Iсполnitel'nyi Komitet (Central Executive Committee)
TsK KPSS	Tsentral'nogo Komiteta Rossiiskoi Kommunisticheskoi Partii (Proceedings of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR)
TsUPLENBEZL	Tsentralnoje upravlenije po delam plennykh i bezhenzev (Central Managing Department of Captives and Refugees)
UNIRR	Unione Nazionale Italiana Reduci di Russia (National Union of Former Prisoners of War in Russia)
UPVI	Upravlenie po delam voennoplennykh i internirovannykh (Administration for POW and Internee Affairs)
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

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Bob Moore  
Barbara Hatcly-Broad  
*Sheffield*



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## Foreword

This book is the outcome of a conference organized by the International Committee for the History of the Second World War in Hamburg in July 2002. The Committee was created in the 1960s to promote historical research on all aspects of this period and encourages intellectual exchanges between historians across the world. One of its primary activities is the organization of a conference as part of the quinquennial International Congress of Historical Sciences, to which the Committee is officially affiliated. During the last Congress, held in Oslo in 2000, the Committee decided to intensify its activity by organizing an intermediate conference before the next Congress in Sydney in 2005 and to improve the circulation of its publications. Instead of the *Bulletin* or *Blue Book* previously published by the Committee, all its organizational information is now accessible on a website.<sup>1</sup> As for the scientific content of the Committee's activities, it has been agreed that a collective volume edited by a major publisher would have a more lasting impact than previous publications, and this book is the first-fruit of this new policy.

With the Hamburg conference on the homecoming of prisoners of war after World War II, the Committee pursued three goals. The first was to counter the prevalent tendency to treat the European and Pacific theatres of war as completely separate from each other by involving historians from Australia, Japan and the United States, together with historians from most European countries, in an intensive exchange on defined areas of research relevant to all belligerent societies. The second goal was to encourage new approaches to the topic, crossing the barriers between social and military history, between political, cultural and gender history and widening the chronological horizon by investigating the longer-term consequences of war-related experiences, such as captivity. The third goal was to encourage the participation of younger researchers, as they stand to benefit most from international exchange, and to initiate a new phase of historical research based on the principles of a transnational approach. With nineteen contributors from eleven countries, the conference covered a great diversity of geographical areas, but the outcome showed a high degree of convergence between the participants on questions of methodology and interpretation and there is no doubt that the conference itself was a great success. Revised and expanded versions of fourteen papers presented to the conference form the chapters in this book. Gerhard Hirschfeld, Peter Romijn and Pieter Lagrou took charge of the conceptual and

scientific organization of this conference, with the help of Gabrielle Muc. Bernd Wegner, the president of the German Committee, hosted the event at the Universität der Bundeswehr in Hamburg, while Bob Moore and Barbara Hately-Broad acted as editors.

On behalf of the International Committee for the History of the Second World War, we would like to thank our national committees who encouraged their members to participate. We especially thank all the participants for their stimulating contributions and for the open and collegial debates that took place. We are particularly indebted to our Australian and Japanese colleagues, who travelled across the globe to participate in this event. Bernd Wegner, the German Committee and his colleagues and assistants at the Universität der Bundeswehr, were exceptional hosts who created a congenial atmosphere, of which all participants have fond recollections. Bob Moore and Barbara Hately-Broad cannot be thanked enough for turning the utilitarian English prevalent in these kinds of meetings into elegant prose and for undertaking the thankless task of insisting on deadlines and presenting the finished manuscript to the publishers. Without their efforts, this book could not have been produced.

In an age of increased communications, mobility of researchers and the internet, one can, and should, ask the question whether structures like the International Committee for the History of the Second World War, created in a very different age, still serve a useful purpose. We hope that this book will convince its readers of the fertility of our efforts to bring together historians from different continents and different historical traditions. More than ever, World War II calls for a historiography capable of integrating the global dimension of the event. It is, in our opinion, the only way to contribute to a better understanding of the world today.

Gerhard Hirschfeld, *President*  
Peter Romijn, *Treasurer*  
Pieter Lagrou, *Secretary General*

# **Part I**

## **Introduction**

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## Overview

*Pieter Lagrou*

Prisoners of war (POWs) are a universal phenomenon of warfare. From antiquity until the most recent times, military prisoners have been a product of armed conflict and benefited from a particular status. Legal protection for POWs is among the oldest forms of modern international law, codifying norms of honourable warfare that are even older. However, the dramatic increase in the mobility of armies that characterized World War II also led to an enormous rise in the numbers of POWs. Captivity is an experience shared by belligerents in all theatres of war: the war in the Pacific, North Africa, and both Eastern and Western Fronts of the European war. In the age of total war, POWs are most often mobilized citizens, drafted by military conscription. Their experiences are thus not solely those of the professional soldier, but affect the societies to which they belong as a whole. The mass experience of captivity also spans the war years and the immediate post-war period, as a result of the length of the detention and the often belated liberation and repatriation. By focusing on the homecoming of prisoners of war after 1945, this book aims to contribute to a genuinely international history of the social, political and cultural consequences of World War II. More than ever before, the history of the fate of prisoners of war during this conflict markedly transcends the boundaries of military history. The authors of the chapters of this book revisit the subject of captivity by highlighting three innovative aspects of the topic: ideology and re-education; homecoming and family; post-war narrative.

First of all, the most distinguishing feature of World War II is the role of ideology in the conflict: more than a clash of nations, it was a clash of ideologies. Ideological warfare sets priorities other than classical military conflict, since the aim is not only to conquer the enemy, but also to transform conquered societies. This applies particularly to the treatment of the millions of captured soldiers. While codes of honourable warfare and international agreements such as the 1929 Geneva Convention offered protection to some in a context of generalized arbitrary violence, none of these provisions applied to others. In particular in Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, where military aristocracies prided themselves on an image of chivalric warriors, more often than not racism gained the upper hand over

any form of protection for POWs. Forced labour carried out in murderous circumstances by Allied soldiers and civilians in Japanese hands and the death by execution and starvation of over 3 million Soviet POWs in German hands are among the most infamous crimes of the Second World War. Yet all belligerents utilized the masses of POWs for ideological purposes, though some in less obvious ways. Nazi Germany discriminated between Western European POWs of 'Germanic' and 'non-Germanic' descent and carried out New Order propaganda among French POWs. Japan organized the forced recruitment of POWs of Asian descent for the war against 'Western imperialism'. The Western allies and the Soviet Union all organized denazification and re-education programmes (the so-called *Antifa* work) for their German and Italian captives, hoping to train a future German and Italian elite for the reconstruction of democratic nations. How successful were these various efforts at ideological conversion in the longer run? How did POWs behave collectively after their return: as a pressure group for material interests? as a recruitment reserve for political parties? The military captives constitute a particularly rewarding test case for the larger debate on the ideological consequences of World War II, the claimed moral bankruptcy of authoritarianism and the triumph of democratic values.

Second, it is important to reflect on the scale of the conflict and its tremendous social impact, involving more countries and more individuals than ever before. The absence of hundreds of thousands and, in some cases, millions of men as POWs left the home front bereft of fathers and sons. The resulting feminization profoundly affected wartime societies, in the family, at the workplace and in politics. The subsequent remasculinization that accompanied the return of the POWs was nowhere a foregone conclusion. Many countries witnessed upsurges in divorce rates, denials of paternity, or juvenile crime attributed to an uprooted and fatherless upbringing. In the post-war years, societies lived through successive phases of acute anxiety over a crisis of the family, a crisis of male identity, plunging birth rates and physical degeneration and later, after a forced return to 'normality', a restoration of gender roles, family values and moral conservatism.<sup>1</sup> The disruption of family life demographically multiplied the effects of military captivity and as such affected the whole of society.

Third, the experience of captivity was central to both the individual and collective narratives of war. The condition of the POW consists of his combat experience before his capture; the shame of being taken prisoner, rather than escaping or dying in battle; the inactivity and deprivations suffered during military internment; and the hostile or welcoming reception on his return. Depending on the weight given to any part of this experience, the POW was portrayed either as a victim of a senseless war, or as a national martyr, a captured hero or a war criminal. In personal narratives, captivity often figures as a watershed between active participation in the violence of war, or the shame of defeat, and reintegration into civilian life.

Captivity can figure as a form of regeneration through asceticism and celibacy, introspection or religious conversion. It is a formative experience of male bonding and solidarity and allows for the collective elaboration of narratives and personal defence strategies against accusations of collective guilt. Finally, captivity was perhaps also a form of *Bildungsreise* for millions of ordinary soldiers unaccustomed to travel. The integration of individual experiences into collective narratives depends on the political battles on the interpretation of war: were the captives a 'lost generation' of men who lost their honour; a suspect group of indoctrinated subversives; or collective champions of national victimization, whose extended captivity served to suppress the memories of their prior participation in a war of attrition?

In his opening chapter, Rüdiger Overmans draws a complete panorama of the very different modalities under which POWs returned 'home'. Release, exchange, escape, transformation into civilian workers and, even more controversially, changing allegiance and joining the army of the captor were all part of the contrasting itineraries of military prisoners during World War II. Crucially, World War II formed an important exception to the general rule of an immediate release and automatic return of captives at the end of the hostilities. The Western allies, but especially the Soviet Union, considered large numbers of German captives as war criminals awaiting their trial or purging their sentences and thus not eligible for the treatment specified for POWs in the Geneva Convention. Another unprecedented feature was that of the forced repatriation of Soviet POWs who refused the return to the USSR, fearing harsh treatment or even summary execution after their return to Soviet soil.

The first part of the book deals with the treatment of POWs by their captors. Bob Moore studies British perceptions of Italian captives. Often captured after mass surrenders, rather than after unremitting combat as would later be the case with the German soldiers, the Italians were the object of a mixture of British contempt and sympathy, rather than open hostility. Economic arguments in favour of their labour mobilization for the war effort and later reconstruction rapidly gained the upper hand over tepid efforts at ideological re-education. Jerzy Kochanowski uncovers the little known fate of the 40,000–50,000 German POWs in Poland between 1945 and 1950. No other country had suffered more under German occupation than Poland and nowhere else would revenge have seemed more understandable. Yet German POWs suffered relatively little physical abuse and in general terms enjoyed living conditions in accordance with accepted conventions. The first attempts at re-education dated from 1948 and coincided with the first repatriations. Put to work mainly in the mining industry, their relationship with the Polish population depended mostly on regional factors: from relatively friendly in western Poland to hostile in the central region of the country. In his chapter on surrender and desertion during the Battle of Okinawa, Hirofumi Hayashi draws a picture that



contrasts with the widely held belief that Japanese soldiers preferred death to surrender. The refusal to surrender was not only rooted in the code of honour of the Japanese warrior. It was also motivated by the fear of being killed after surrender by their American enemy, instead of being made prisoner.<sup>2</sup> The overwhelming ratio of enemy soldiers killed in action, compared to those captured in the Pacific theatre of war shows these fears were perfectly justified. In the murderous Battle of Okinawa, the local population and local troops were trapped between the American assault and the unconditional resistance of a Japanese army that was ready to sacrifice the island. The fact that Okinawa was the first battle on Japanese territory, offering the possibility for soldiers to desert and disappear into the local population in great numbers, leads Hirofumi Hayashi to suggest that the casualty/captivity ratio would have been very different had mainland Japan been conquered, rather than forced to surrender by the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In Okinawa, the ensuing long American occupation until 1972 contributed to the emergence of a local memory of the war that diverges from the main Japanese narrative, notably in relation to the desertion and surrender of local troops.

The second part of this book analyses the policies of re-education of captives by their captors. Three case studies tackle the efforts to neutralize the effects of years of Fascist and Nazi propaganda to which Axis soldiers had been exposed: German captives in Soviet and American hands and Italian captives in Soviet hands. Andreas Hilger takes a very critical look at the Soviet *Antifa Schule* for German POWs. Their impact was very limited, due to the strong anti-communist attitude of the vast majority of German soldiers and the simplistic recipes applied by the Soviet instructors, but even more so because of the dismal living conditions that created rancour and hostility. Upon their return, German POWs received a widely contrasting welcome in the Soviet and Western zones of occupation and later the GDR and the GFR: pioneers of German-Soviet friendship in the former, they were embraced as victims of totalitarian terror in the latter.<sup>3</sup> Matthias Reiss is hardly less sceptical on the effectiveness of American re-education programmes for *Wehrmacht* soldiers. Ideological training was definitely not a priority for the American army and it did not enjoy unanimous support. It was dispensed selectively to those captives deemed to be the most indoctrinated by the Nazi ideology, who, not surprisingly, also turned out to be the least receptive audience. However, the standard of living of ordinary Americans deeply impressed the German POWs as a model to emulate for the German reconstruction. Maria Teresa Giusti analyses the anti-fascist programme for Italian captives in the Soviet Union and the controversial role of Italian communists in them. Giusti underlines the political polarization among Italian POWs as a source of permanent conflict. For some captives, communism did provide a new ideological anchor after the collapse of fascism and at the same time a strategy of survival in a very hostile environment. For many

others, though, any form of understanding with the Soviet captor equalled high treason. Accusations of ‘collaboration’ led to violent incidents during repatriation and to highly politicized lawsuits in Italian courts.

The third part of the book is concerned with the homecoming of the prisoners of war and their reception by their home countries and by their families. Yokushini Igarashi examines the place awarded to Japanese prisoners returning from Soviet captivity. Unlike the American Army, the Soviet Authorities did capture over half a million Japanese citizens, mainly after the Japanese surrender. Most were subsequently transported to labour camps dispersed over Siberia. There they faced extremely harsh living conditions, suffered tens of thousands of casualties and the last of them – those accused of war crimes – were only released eleven years after the end of the war. Unlike their German counterparts, they did not receive a heroes’ welcome upon their return home. Their experience did not suit the political agenda of the nationalist camp, embarrassed by the humiliating reminder of Japan’s past that the former prisoners represented, but it likewise disturbed the communist opposition, who denounced their testimonies as anti-communist propaganda. More generally, in the Japanese narrative of the war, the suffering of the nation is symbolized by the women and children who died under the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, indirect victims of a criminal and imperialist government and military. In such a narrative, there is no place for the ambiguous memories of Japanese soldiers, least of all those who had been captured. In his chapter on the treatment of the almost 2 million surviving Soviet POWs after their, sometimes forced, repatriation, Pavel Polian substantially nuances the dominant idea that they collectively ‘disappeared’ into the Gulag. Upon their arrival from foreign detention, all soldiers were remobilized in the Red Army or in so-called ‘working battalions’. Some, notably all the officers, were assigned to ‘*spetscontingent*’, and became the objects of political enquiry into their possible treasonable behaviour and condemned to six years of forced residence in remote regions like Kolyma. Even after this period, they were prevented from living in major cities or border regions and they were subject to regular control. Those who had been demobilized in the months and years after their repatriation also continued to suffer discrimination, not least because their years spent in captivity were not recognized as active service for welfare or other state benefits. A commission was created in 1956, as part of the de-Stalinization drive, to remedy these discriminations, but the prisoners’ situation only effectively started to change in 1990 and even today they are not eligible for compensation payments.

In her chapter, Barbara Hatley-Broad compares government policies and, more importantly, the way families of POWs tried to cope with the absence and subsequent return of a father and husband in Britain and France. In both countries, the government organized a system of allowances to replace the lost family revenue, accompanied by tax incentives and rent controls, with all the administrative

hurdles this implied. While in France families were relatively rapidly informed of the whereabouts of soldiers captured during or immediately after the battles of May-June 1940 and allowed to establish a regulated correspondence, many British families faced excruciatingly long periods of uncertainty about their husbands or sons 'missing in action', before death or captivity were confirmed, especially in the Pacific theatre of war. In both countries, marital infidelity by spouses of POWs was a central concern for both the moral and political authorities, not least because of the demoralizing effect this could have on the army. On the same issue, the prisoners themselves benefited from decidedly double standards. The profound reorganization of family life during the long years of absence turned the reintegration of a returning husband and father into a difficult and ultimately not always successful challenge. Mariska Heijmans-van Bruggen presents the complex case of the approximately 18,000 soldiers of the Dutch colonial army in Indonesia captured by the Japanese army in March 1942 and put to work on the construction of the Burma-Thailand railway. Only 11,000 of them survived the brutal and murderous conditions of their forced labour, but even after the Japanese surrender, their ordeal was far from over. The Indonesian independence struggle implied that for most of them there would never be a homecoming in the proper sense. Lingering for long months in the same detention centres where they had been liberated, they were later remobilized into the army and sent to reconquer the colony. Their homes were often destroyed in the war and their families imprisoned in internment camps for civilians and cut off from all means of communication. For most of them, family reunion only took place in the course of 1948, and in the Netherlands, which for the vast majority of them was a foreign country.

The fourth and last part of the book deals with narratives of the war. Svenja Goltermann analyses the case studies of German POWs faced with mental breakdown after their return. Manifestly, the psychiatric disorders did not only result from the suffering and deprivations of captivity, but also from the traumatic episodes of engagement in brutality and violence that had preceded captivity. Whereas German society at large and the German psychiatric profession in particular was most willing to diagnose the returning POWs as victims and symbols of German suffering, both were unreceptive to the utterances of perpetrators re-experiencing their fits of violence and the acute anxiety for revenge these induced. The selective public memories put into place in post-war West Germany deprived these patients of a language with which to express their traumatic experiences. The return to 'normality' of most patients in the course of the first post-war years and the amelioration of their symptoms contributed to the stylized narratives of the late 1950s when popular film and novels reverted to a unilinear presentation of heroic soldiers and abandoned some of the more disturbing portrayals of the earlier period. Christina Twomey focuses on the popular memory of the captivity of British, Dutch and, particularly, Australian women by Japanese troops. Countless

novels, films and TV series have portrayed their ordeal, usually in an ambiguous way. At the heart of the – at times voyeuristic – fascination stands the confrontation of white women and their Asian captors, a sexually charged confrontation of race and gender. As such, this episode is a continuation of the colonial imagination, taking on the form of a morality play, where the complex intercourse between captives and captors is reduced to two equally despicable alternatives: brutal rape by savage guards or consenting prostitution by ‘weak’ captives tempted by an ‘easy life’. The latter reading is confirmed, for example, in the heroic accounts of Australian army nurses; the former by recent attention to forced prostitution by ‘comfort women’ and their claims for compensation payments from Japan. In the final chapter, Joan Beaumont reflects on the place of Japanese captivity in Australian memories of both World Wars. In a general way, in Australia World War II has always remained in the shadow of the first, when the feats of arms of the ANZAC (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) volunteers became synonymous with a national spirit of combat and comradeship, a defining experience for an Australian national identity. The odyssey of the 21,000 Australians captured by the Japanese and their heroic survival of forced labour on the Burma-Thailand railway renewed this founding experience and provided it with a new generation of standard bearers.

Taken together, the chapters of this book all attest to the durable consequences of military captivity during World War II on post-war societies. From Siberia to Southern Australia and from Tokyo to Texas, the experiences of millions of soldiers captured and abducted by the enemy profoundly influenced the political agenda of the societies they were to return to, the family life and gender relations, the narratives of the war and the way in which nations came to terms in very concrete ways with the legacy of this catastrophic event of a continental magnitude. As such it is an invitation for further research to continue to break down the barriers between military and social history, between political history and gender history, between diplomatic history and cultural history. A total war can only be captured in a history that attempts to integrate as many facets of human experience as possible. More importantly, taking into account the central aims of the conference organizers, this war – the first to span all continents and affect almost all countries on earth – calls for a genuinely international approach. By focusing on the itineraries of military soldiers, taking German and Japanese soldiers to the United States and the Russian steppe, Dutch and Australian soldiers to Thailand and Burma, Italian soldiers to Siberia and Wales, we hope to have illustrated how, regardless of the fundamental differences of language, ideology, political regime, cultural traditions and social organization, millions of participants in this war, belonging to all major belligerent nations, did share common experiences. No ‘total history’ will ever capture this total war, but we hope this book shows on a modest scale how these experiences can mutually illuminate each other through

collective research and intense intellectual exchange and thus contribute to a better understanding of the nature of this major cataclysm of the twentieth century history.