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Review of *British Prisoners of War in First World War Germany* by Oliver Wilkinson

Harry Sanderson

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that Britain, France, Germany, Russia, and the United States would be included, in this order. Yet, the order in which the nations are actually presented in the book are: British Empire (185 pages in length), India (190 pages in length), French Empire (76 pages in length), Russia (170 pages in length), German Empire (189 pages in length), and American Empire (25 pages in length). India, with its completely separate section, warranted inclusion in the title of this book as India represents the largest section at 190 pages. The American Empire section at 25 pages in length demanded more data and critical analyses, as does the French Empire section at 76 pages.

This book is a cursory survey of a vast amount of information, and for what it is, it succeeds. In a perfect world, though, it would have been ideal to split apart the research to create six separately published books that would have enabled more robust expansion into each geographical region. The author has delivered an excellent overview of military uniforms in these disparate regions, but the reader is left wanting more. As a reference book, the reader would have appreciated footnotes instead of endnotes, more reliance on primary sources instead of secondary sources, more colour images, and a comprehensive glossary. These minor criticisms aside, Schollander's *The Glory of the Empires, 1880-1914*, is an engaging book that demonstrates the importance of military uniforms as equipment that distinguishes geographical loyalty and national traditions. This book is essential to any library that values a unique perspective of military history and clothing design.

JENNIFER DALEY
King's College London, UK

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Oliver Wilkinson, *British Prisoners of War in First World War Germany*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. xiv + 308pp. ISBN 978-1316648872 (hardcover). Price £71.00.

The British prisoner of war (POW) in the Second World War is a prominent figure in the cultural history of Britain. Names like Colditz and Stalag Luft have been immortalised by the attempted breakouts of British prisoners and their subsequent portrayal in popular media, most famously with *The Great Escape* (1963). Yet despite more British POWs being captured in the First World War (185,329, compared to the Second World War, 172,592), they have no such prominence. Building on an expanding catalogue of works by Gerald H. Davis and Heather Jones among others, which have examined the POW experience in the First World War, this superlative work marks the first dedicated study on the British military POW camps under

BOOK REVIEWS

German control. Oliver Wilkinson attempts to 'write the British POWs back into the history of the First World War' by examining their experiences in captivity.

This is an important area of study not just for the experiences of the soldiers, but also for our understanding of masculinity, gender, and social roles. It is well acknowledged that the British soldier in the First World War was idealised as a bastion of masculinity. But capture by the enemy is a process of disempowerment, signified by the giving up of arms to the enemy and raising hands in submission. This could mean failure as a soldier and, consequently, failure as a man. Nor did this perception only affect the soldier, but their families and communities also. Wilkinson's work is therefore able to enhance our understanding of a defining experience for many British servicemen, but also our understanding of British society, and the interaction between gender and the soldier.

To do this Wilkinson deploys an extensive source base, split into two different methodological approaches labelled parts one and two. Part one sets out the landscape of captivity and examines how authority and control functioned within the POW camps. This begins with the process of capture, examines the camp structures, the routine, work and discipline systems within camp, and the provision of necessities. To achieve this, official documents are utilised to construct a framework of captivity and life as POW. These include reports on camps by neutral inspectors, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Young Men's Christian Association, formal investigation into camp conditions, formal complaints about POW treatment, records of political negotiations, and published accounts by officials involved in POW work. The framework is then filled in by prisoners' diaries, letters, debrief reports, personal testimonies, POW magazines, memoirs and more. Wilkinson blends these two differing source bases together in exemplary fashion and provides a highly convincing picture of life as a POW. Of particular interest was the experience of capture, and the disempowerment and psychological shock faced by soldiers who underwent it, the moral quandary faced by many prisoners of being made to work for the Germans, and whether this constituted aiding the enemy, and how camp life and the discipline within it marked a continuation of army life for many.

Part two then acts as a compliment to this by redirecting its focus onto the prisoners within the camps and letting the voices from below carry the analysis. This section is reliant on the 3,000 reports taken during the war with exchanged, repatriated, and escaped POWs by the Committee on the Treatment of British Prisoners of War in Enemy Hands of which 300 were sampled. Alongside these are the diaries, letters, paraphernalia and personal testimony of POWs. This section provides a much more grounded view of life as a POW. One particular strength is Wilkinson's illumination of how resistance and attempts to escape, whilst not being official policy, were a way for soldiers to re-conceptualise themselves as still being active in the war. Whilst there

were too many important findings for all to be identified, that the function of military hierarchies was continued as a response to psychological and physical challenges, how prisoner communities developed and went on to become a lasting legacy of captivity for many former POWs, and how letters and parcels from home became the most important element of captive life in the view of the majority of POWs all have important consequences for our understanding of the soldier and his identity during the war.

Identifying areas for improvement with this work is difficult and is open to accusations of reviewer bias. However, greater levels of comparison with how other nations treated German POWs would have provided a useful context for evaluating the experience of British POWs. Whilst there are occasional references, especially to how Germany treated Russian POWs, it remains inconsistent. Due to the cultural currency of POWs in the Second World War, an element of comparison between experiences in the two wars may have benefited by highlighting certain differences and continuities, though Wilkinson does note he understandably wishes to avoid 'back shadowing'.

In summary an excellent work on an underexplored topic which poses critical questions as to our understanding of gender, society, and the British soldiers experience of war. As such it should appeal to any historian examining the junction of the above subjects and how they interacted.

HARRY SANDERSON
University of Leeds, UK

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Susan R. Grayzel & Tammy M. Proctor (ed.), *Gender and the Great War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. Notes. Index. 283pp. ISBN 978-0190271084 (paperback). Price £20.00.

This beautifully-presented edited volume offers an introduction to the major themes of gender scholarship on the First World War, treading a balance between established and emerging scholarship and pointing forwards to new approaches and areas of enquiry. The contributions are ordered thematically, each chapter drawing together and expanding current thinking on the topic under consideration. Taken together, the 12 chapters show the range of wartime experiences and the ways in which gender intersects with age, class and race as well as cultural and geographic contexts to shape both the war experience itself and the ways in which it is remembered and