

Trevor James. *Prisoners of War at Dartmoor: American and French Soldiers and Sailors in an English Prison during the Napoleonic Wars and the War of 1812.* Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc, 2013. 277 pp. \$45.00, paper, ISBN 978-1-4766-0342-1.

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

Trevor James's *Prisoners of War at Dartmoor* asks readers to remember a forgotten group of Americans in one of America's most forgotten wars. Released during the bicentennial of the Anglo-American War of 1812, James's study of the harrowing captivity of more than six thousand Americans in the British prison called Dartmoor is a significant contribution to our knowledge about the conflict and the treatment of prisoners of war more broadly.

Drawing on his experience as an employee of Dartmoor Prison, which now serves as a civilian correctional facility, James recreates life at the prison from its founding during the early days of the Napoleonic Wars through the conclusion of the War of 1812. He tackles the political process that brought the prison into existence, its construction, the experiences of its inmates and guards, and its postwar memorialization. Originally used to house French sailors and soldiers, Dartmoor became the principle confinement depot for Americans captured in European waters after 1812. It is these "Yankees" who most interest James, and he devotes over half of his narrative to their two years of captivity. Although he does not advance an argument as such, James repeatedly insists that the Americans were restive and truculent captives. Their independent spirit, which he

attributes to the lofty ideals of the American Revolution, led them to resist their confinement by rioting and attempting escape, eventually culminating in the so-called Princetown Massacre. James judiciously narrates the event, in which British militiamen fired on American prisoners, killing at last nine and wounding dozens more. Compounding the tragedy, the "massacre" occurred after the declaration of peace. This is a somber story and one that James tells with empathy.

Throughout the book, James carefully weighs the available evidence and presents the most plausible sequence of events, but the work suffers from a dearth of contextual analysis, frequent repetition, and a level of cultural insensitivity that is shocking to a twenty-first-century reader. Many of these problems result from the book's failure to engage with relevant historiography. A quick glance at the mere two-page bibliography confirms the reader's suspicion that James ignored recent works on prisoner treatment during the American War for Independence and Napoleonic Wars that would have allowed him to better contextualize the American prisoners' experience at Dartmoor. During the American War for Independence, thousands of Americans, and their French allies, endured a similar captivity at Mill Prison in Plymouth and Forton Prison at Portsmouth.

James's discussion of the politics surrounding provisioning the prisoners would have benefited from some comparison to the earlier conflict. James is rightly outraged by the prisoners' mortality rate (4 percent), but his statistical analysis might paint a different picture if placed alongside that of American prisoners on board British prison hulks in New York during the War for Independence (over 50 percent). Additionally, James tells us that prisoners suffered because of the American commissary's failure to provide them with adequate rations and clothing, but he does not investigate the reasons for this failure. We learn that prisoner exchanges occurred during the war, but nothing about how the process played out or why it was not more widespread. Confoundingly, the story unfolds without reference to the prevailing laws and customs of war for prisoner treatment during the period. Given the wealth of recent literature on the subject, these omissions are conspicuous.

James's prose is clean and brisk but in need of an editor's touch. Numerous repetitions, unnecessary asides, colloquialisms, and disorganization combine to seriously mar his authorial credibility. For instance, the book has a foreword, a preface, an introduction, and a prologue. Many of his images carry descriptions that repeat text verbatim from the body of the work. Most glaring for modern readers, James refers to prisoners of African descent as "Negros" or "colored men" and an Irishman as "Paddy" (pp. 108, 117). His disgust for homosexuals is palpable. Describing alleged homosexual activity, James suggests some prisoners "sought pathetic comfort from one another in embraces of an unnatural kind" (p. 10). Perhaps unintentionally, James succeeds at alienating the reader from the outset.

These defects aside, specialists will find much here of use. His depiction of the Princetown Massacre, and its ensuing investigations, is well handled. So too are his analyses of the prisoners' morbidity and mortality. His research into the admi-

ralty records at the British National Archives appears exhaustive. Careful editing and a more thorough historiographical foundation would have vastly improved what remains a solid monograph.

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