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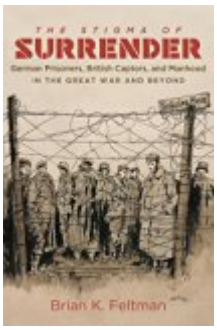

Brian K. Feltman. *The Stigma of Surrender: German Prisoners, British Captors, and Manhood in the Great War and Beyond.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015. 280 pp. $34.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4696-1993-4.

Reviewed by Bradley Cesario

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

The centenary of the First World War has led to scholarly reexaminations of nearly every aspect of the war's progress on both the home and fighting fronts. Brian K. Feltman blurs the lines between the two with *The Stigma of Surrender*, which provides a new perspective on the German concept of *Heldentod* (the hero's death) by exploring those who avoided such a fate through surrender. In doing so, Feltman demonstrates that surrender, though a life-saving and necessary choice in many cases, carried with it psychological burdens that resonated with former prisoners "from capture through their attempts at social reintegration following their return to Germany" (p. 2). Feltman situates his work in relation to Panikos Panayi's *Prisoners of Britain: German Civilian and Combatant Internees during the First World War* (2013), but focuses solely on combat prisoners of war (POWs) as opposed to a broader look at both prisoners and civilian internees.

The Stigma of Surrender begins with a thematic chapter on masculinity in Germany and the German armed forces before and during the Great War, including a concise explanation of the concept of *Heldentod* and a discussion of how surrender on the battlefield could fit into—or be unable to come to terms with—more traditional national ideas on death and dishonor. The second chapter traces the history of British POW camps located in the British Isles and the prisoners who inhabited them. Feltman describes a British governmental effort that was generally successful in following all prescribed prewar international laws and that treated its German POWs as well as could be expected—though he does note Britain had the benefit of a relatively small number of prisoners in its camp system, around 325,000 (p. 72).

Chapter 3 delves further into the psychological strain of captivity with an examination of German POWs in the United Kingdom, focusing on their escape attempts. Portions of this chapter are somewhat less convincing. Feltman brings up throughout the work, and particularly in this third chapter, the idea that many German prisoners felt it a moral duty to attempt escape, but the

examples he provides are almost entirely those of officers, especially the even more select group of naval and air officers. It is difficult to draw conclusions about the entire German military from a small portion of the whole (it should, however, be noted that Feltman does an admirable job of differentiating the unique position of captured naval officers and sailors from army prisoners). The related fourth chapter examines the prisoners who stayed in the camps throughout the conflict and how they dealt with confinement, from disobeying their British guards to putting on nationalistic plays and running gymnastic clubs. Chapter 5 wraps up the story of German POWs in the United Kingdom with a study of those who remained after the war, as the various treaties and agreements were hammered out in France; there were nearly 100,000 German prisoners in Britain in early 1919, and with Germany defeated the majority of these men gave up their clubs and plays and merely waited to go home (pp. 137, 141). Feltman also examines the first postwar German POW assistance groups. The sixth and final chapter investigates how successfully former prisoners were able to reintegrate back into German society when they were able to return. Feltman clearly and concisely describes a complex web of various POW and veterans' groups on all points of the political spectrum that vied for prisoners' attention during the chaotic 1920s, and demonstrates that the largest of these groups (the ostensibly apolitical Reich Association of Former Prisoners of War, or ReK) had become associated with the Nazi regime by 1933.

The Stigma of Surrender is an impressive work of research; the author consulted a multitude of archives in the United States, United Kingdom, and Germany, particularly German military archives. The secondary scholarship is extremely broad and as current as possible, although a wider historiographical focus in the introduction (particularly on the subject of masculinity in war, where George Mosse is the only author mentioned by name despite a wealth of sources in the bibliography) would be appreciated. The chapters are well organized, with helpful brief summaries at the conclusion of each. Feltman certainly demonstrates the degree to which German POWs in the United Kingdom went to maintain some feeling of home and some semblance of honor (according to their masculine conception of the term) during the First World War. Yet the most intriguing research is contained in the final two chapters on postwar former prisoners. During the course of Feltman's investigation into the "stigma of surrender," actual instances of a POW's family or fellow soldiers shunning them are rarely found—and considering the depth of the author's archival research, it stands to reason such events may have been rare in general. (The evidence for returning POWs being denigrated by senior military commanders is much stronger, as the author ably demonstrates.) But as the 1920s progressed, many of the prisoners' advocacy groups, such as the ReK, certainly believed there was a widespread stigma attached to former prisoners, and this ideological response to the postwar world played a part in their later conspicuous patriotism and eventual cooperation with Nazism. German POWs in the United Kingdom maintained their psychological strength by sustaining as many connections to their homeland and their fighting comrades as possible, but when they returned home to a new Germany (many during the tumultuous years of 1919-20), many eventually created a new version of their past in which they had not only upheld the martial spirit of the German Empire in the POW camps but were continuing it into a new era. By the 1920s, the stigma of surrender could be begrudgingly accepted as a badge of honor.

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