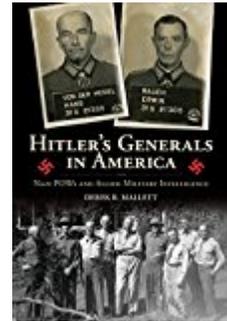


Derek R. Mallett. *Hitler's Generals in America: Nazi POWs and Allied Military Intelligence*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013. 264 pp. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8131-4251-7.



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Derek Mallett's *Hitler's Generals in America* presents an interesting argument about a small group of prisoners, fifty-five in number, sent to the United States during World War II. There has been a lot of attention devoted to prisoners of war (POWs) in the past two decades, particularly to the captivity experience of POWs held during World War II. One of the foremost authors of this genre, Arnold P. Krammer, served as Mallett's dissertation advisor, and his influence is clearly felt throughout the entire work. This work has first-rate examinations of many aspects of German general POWs, including a comparative examination of the British and American approaches to interrogating generals, a contrasting study of the behavior patterns of generals taken prisoner in North Africa and France, and a special study of how high-ranking German prisoners contributed to American military intelligence gathering in the aftermath of the war.

Mallett argues that the British had a much better understanding of the value derived from interrogating German generals, although they remained almost entirely focused on collecting material that might contribute to victory during the war. The Americans had little interest in extensive interrogations, holding a few selected generals for a few weeks of interrogations, but largely treating these high-value prisoners the same as any other cap-

tured enemies. As the war closed, however, the United States developed a sudden interest in the information held by these officers, particularly those who served on the eastern front. Mallett has correctly deduced that as the Cold War began, American intelligence officers realized the enormous value of Germans who had faced the Soviet Red Army firsthand. In fact, American intelligence operatives continued to question Germans throughout the 1950s and soon began to focus on German troops who had been held as prisoners within the Soviet Union. Many of those troops had been used to rebuild the Soviet industrial system and thus had personal knowledge of the locations and capabilities of Soviet industry.

Mallett also finds that there was a marked difference between POWs taken in North Africa and Europe. Among the Afrika Korps prisoners, many retained a reputation for fanatical adherence to the Nazi Party and refused to believe the reports of later arrivals regarding setbacks in the war. Captives taken after the Normandy invasion, on the other hand, tended to have a much more pessimistic view of the likely outcome of the war and the position that would be held by Germany after the war's termination. These differences influenced the American treatment of POWs, with those who expressed doubt about Germany's prospects in the war, or those who of-

ferred opposition to Adolf Hitler, more likely to receive preferential treatment in the hopes of gaining their trust and assistance.

As the war in Europe drew to a close, there were a number of efforts to “reeducate” German POWs, in the hope of creating a motivated class of returning professionals who could assume leadership and bureaucratic roles in the postwar German society. Generals represented an obvious asset in this case, if they could be trusted to adopt pro-Western attitudes and accept the necessary changes to German society. Mallett’s investigation of this program, and of the effort to use high-ranking POWs to comb through captured documents and provide studies on military efficiency and effectiveness, is well written but does miss a major point. Part of the reason these programs were kept top secret is that they explicitly violated the Geneva Convention Relative to Prisoners of War, the fundamental guiding document for the treatment of POWs in World War II. While the Geneva Convention gets a couple of passing mentions in the narrative, it did not merit inclusion in the index, despite its importance to the program as a whole.

This book is one of the more frustrating works that I have read in the past few years. Mallett’s approach is methodical and yet entertaining, interspersing solid analysis with just the right mix of anecdotal examples to back up his main points. However, there are two points of irritation about this book that should have been addressed, one probably due to the publisher and the other due to the author. The title of the book is somewhat misleading and comes across as a transparent attempt to increase sales through a tantalizing cover. After all, merely putting the words “Hitler” and “Nazi” into a title is a surefire way to draw attention to the work. Unfortunately, a substantial portion of this work has little to do with the experience of flag officers held in the United States and is more focused on a comparative treatment of British and American practices, an examination of intelligence-gathering efforts using German officer POWs, and an analysis of the political leanings of German POWs in the United States. While the author cannot really be blamed for decisions that are made by the publisher, the work will always be most closely associated with Mallett, who will

hold some responsibility for a bit of a bait-and-switch operation.

The second issue that I hold with this work stems from the author’s rather cursory use of secondary sources. His primary source examinations, which included archives in three countries, are first-rate and show that he is an excellent researcher capable of consolidating an enormous volume of data and presenting it in a concise, coherent fashion. Regrettably, though, the resulting work is somewhat unbalanced, with only seventy-one sources reaching the bibliography, and perhaps more unforgivably, only thirteen items produced since the year 2000. This might seem like a minor point, until one considers that three major studies on the breadth of US POW operations were published in 2010 alone, and a host of recent research has examined virtually every aspect of the World War II captivity experience. By not using some of these key resources, Mallett sets himself up for a recurring problem within his narrative, namely, the unfounded assumption that decision makers in Washington DC had any real interest in the POW program as a whole, or the experiences of German general POWs. In fact, the entire American POW program was a hastily assembled, poorly conceived nightmare of improvisational solutions to major problems. There was no firm hand guiding the attempt to incarcerate over four hundred thousand German POWs in America, with the result that many excellent opportunities for intelligence gathering, as well as use of prisoner labor, went unfulfilled for most of the war.

In the end, this is an interesting study that raises a lot of good points, even if it does have some inherent flaws. Readers should not be deterred from picking up a copy and using it as a good entry point to the subject of high-ranking prisoners in World War II. Modern POW planners might also find it useful to consider the notion that not all prisoners offer the same utility, and that it might be useful to separate out certain classes of prisoners for further examination and interrogation. Given that the United States still continues to follow a rather haphazard approach to POW operations, and to the detention of high-ranking enemies, perhaps this book will exert some influence on political and military leaders to pay greater attention to their most prized captives.

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