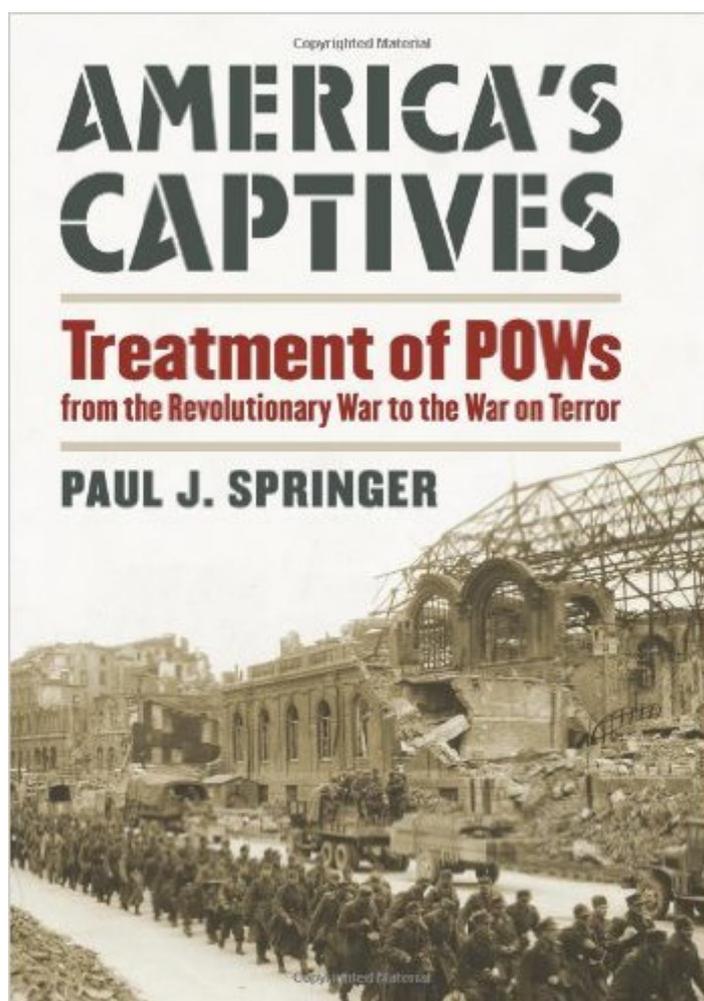


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America's Captives: Treatment Of POWs From The Revolutionary War To The War On Terror (Modern War Studies (Hardcover))



Synopsis

Notwithstanding the long shadows cast by Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo, the United States has been generally humane in the treatment of prisoners of war, reflecting a desire to both respect international law and provide the kind of treatment we would want for our own troops if captured. In this first comprehensive study of the subject in more than half a century, Paul Springer presents an in-depth look at American POW policy and practice from the Revolutionary War to the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Springer contends that our nation's creation and application of POW policy has been repeatedly improvised and haphazard, due in part to our military's understandable focus on defeating its enemies on the field of battle, rather than on making arrangements for their detention. That focus, however, has set the conditions for the military's chronic failure to record and learn from both successful and unsuccessful POW practices in previous wars. He also observes that American POW policy since World War II has largely sought to outsource POW operations to allied forces in order to retain American personnel for frontline service—outsourcing that has led to recent scandals. Focusing on each major war in turn, Springer examines the lessons learned and forgotten by American military and political leaders regarding our nation's experience in dealing with foreign POWs. He highlights the indignities of the Civil War, the efforts of the United States and its World War I allies to devise an effective POW policy, the unequal treatment of Japanese prisoners compared with that of German and Italian prisoners during World War II, and the impact of the Geneva Convention on the handling of Korean and Vietnamese captives. In bringing his coverage up to the so-called War on Terror, he also marks the nation's clear departure from previous practice—American treatment of POWs, once deemed exemplary by the Red Cross after Operation Desert Storm, has become controversial throughout the world. *America's Captives* provides a long-needed overarching framework for this important subject and makes a strong case that we should stop ignoring the lessons of the past and make the disposition of prisoners one of the standard components of our military education and training.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As I finish the last few pages on this book, I would give it my highest recommendation for any reader interested in this subject. This is a very thorough (yet entirely readable) look at American policy and practice for the handling of enemy POWs in each of our wars (including the Indian Wars and the Philippine Insurrection). I am fairly well read in military history and I did not find anything in the book that did not seem accurate based on my knowledge. In any case, there are extensive footnotes (many quite informative in and of themselves). The sad thing is that we have had, according to the book, a dramatically inconsistent record in our handling of enemy POWs. In the Mexican War, it was quite liberal and humane, as also was the case in the Spanish War. We did an excellent job in World War II, with millions of German POWs, about 50,000 Italian POWs, and relatively few Japanese POWs. On the other hand, in the Civil War, there was Andersonville in Georgia and the equivalents in the North which were unspeakably horrible and deeply shameful. After the 1991 Gulf War, the United States was certified by the International Red Cross/Red Crescent (the international protecting body for POWs) as having provided, for the Iraqi POWs in that brief war, the most humane care ever recorded in military history. Then, just a decade later, in the "Global War on Terrorism," we opened "Gitmo" and secret prisons around the world, and went in the opposite direction. While admittedly the campaign against terrorism--and the imprisonment of terrorists (not soldiers)--presents a whole different and challenging set of issues, this book really shows how far from our usual standards we have drifted, in my opinion. If you are interested in the history of a vital part of national military policy, I strongly suggest that you start with this book.

A different point of view.

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