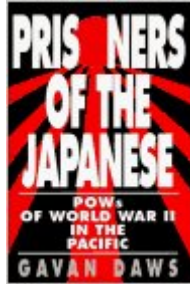


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Prisoners Of The Japanese: Pows Of World War II In The Pacific



Synopsis

Survivors of the notorious Bataan death march, members of slave labor teams, soldiers in Douglas MacArthur's army in the Philippines, and other prisoners of war tell the stories of their capture, stories often ignored in official accounts. 25,000 first printing.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The author, Gavan Daws, never served in the Second World War, but obviously took to writing this book as a labor of love and appreciation for what the Allied prisoners of war (American, British and Dutch) went through during nearly four years of captivity. His undertaking is an incredible hair-raising account of what the circumstances were behind the prisoners' incarceration, ill-treatment, and in too few cases, repatriation. For those whose view of prisoners of Imperial Japan mirrors what they have seen in historically inaccurate movies like "The Bridge on the River Kwai," this book will shock them to the core. In truth, the Japanese camp commanders and guards were brutal and unmerciful. Some Allied soldiers, sailors and airmen were likely to take their own lives, if they had only known what being held captive by the Japanese would mean. The numerous stories of starvation, forced labor, bloody executions and unending barbarity will force sobriety on anyone who thinks that "River Kwai..." is the way it really was. The book centers on a number of real-life captives who probably only grudgingly spilled their guts to Daws, if only to get the truth out. For instance, the odyssey of American serviceman, Frank Fujita, who is partly Japanese in ethnicity, was really intriguing. Daws recounts that when Fujita was brought by barge to Japan after being so long a prisoner in the Phillipine Islands, a guard noticed (at a roll call for forced factory labor) that he

had an American captive with a Japanese surname! At this, Mr. Fujita was cajoled by the Japanese military into trying to denounce his country; bravely, Fujita fought off all attempts at this farce. Daws goes into gross detail, sparing the reader nothing regarding the dispiriting treatment of Allied POW's.

While the number of books exploring the depths of Nazi depravity and mistreatment of Allied prisoners of war number in the hundreds, fewer books have given similar coverage to Japanese mistreatment of both combatant and noncombatant Allied war prisoners during World War Two. This book remedies that situation by carefully documenting and describing, quite often in the testimony of eyewitnesses and survivors, both the scope and breath of this absolutely unconscionable mistreatment, which included systematic denial of medical treatment, widespread starvation, overwork, torture, and subjection to medical experimentation. Yet fifty years later the government and people of Japan still refuse to acknowledge responsibility or offer compensation for a stream of atrocities committed against Allied prisoners. Indeed, they seem more concerned and centered on seeking formal apologies from the United States for having used the atomic bomb to end the war than with atoning with their own trail of misdeed and atrocities. This book also raises profound and provocative questions about the way that Allied prisoners were viewed by their own supreme commanders, who by some estimates are complicit in the deaths (primarily through shelling and bombing) of as many as 25 percent of all such prisoner casualties. This is a well-written book, full not only of the horror stories of war as an Allied prisoner subjected to atrocious mistreatment, but of individual courage, selflessness, & compassion among prisoners & other non-combatants, as well. His narrative style is compelling, eloquent, and moving, with a well-honed eye for details, a good ear for idioms, and a sense for the truly ironic.

Many people have heard of the Bataan Death March and are aware that the Japanese treated their WWII prisoners inhumanely. An additional few stories here and a movie or two there probably compile as much as most of us know on the subject. For anyone who would like to know more, I highly recommend "Prisoners of the Japanese". It is a well documented and well told story that uses certain units as a focus on what it was like to be a prisoner of the Japanese. Through the eyes of these survivors, Daws recreates a living hell that no one should ever have to go through and, more importantly, one that no one should ever administer or tolerate. Daws looks at all of the different groups of prisoners including the British, Australians, and the Dutch. The war was over so early for the Dutch that it was somewhat of a surprise to realize that they were participants as well. Many

images remain from this book and most are inappropriate to toss out in a review like this. This book is not for those with weak stomachs. In fact, I loaned this book to a friend after I finished it. He finally gave it back to me a year later saying it was just too difficult for him to finish reading. The author takes us through hell and back. There is a summation of what happened afterwards and that was a helpful aspect of the book although we are still left a bit short of empty. This was a major event in 20th Century history and persons unfamiliar ought to become more aware of the depth of the brutality that has emerged in times of war. As I write this review, there is a lot of hand wringing, soul searching, and congressional investigations going on in the US over abuses American soldiers inflicted on Iraqi prisoners. What we are finding out is wrong and upsetting.

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