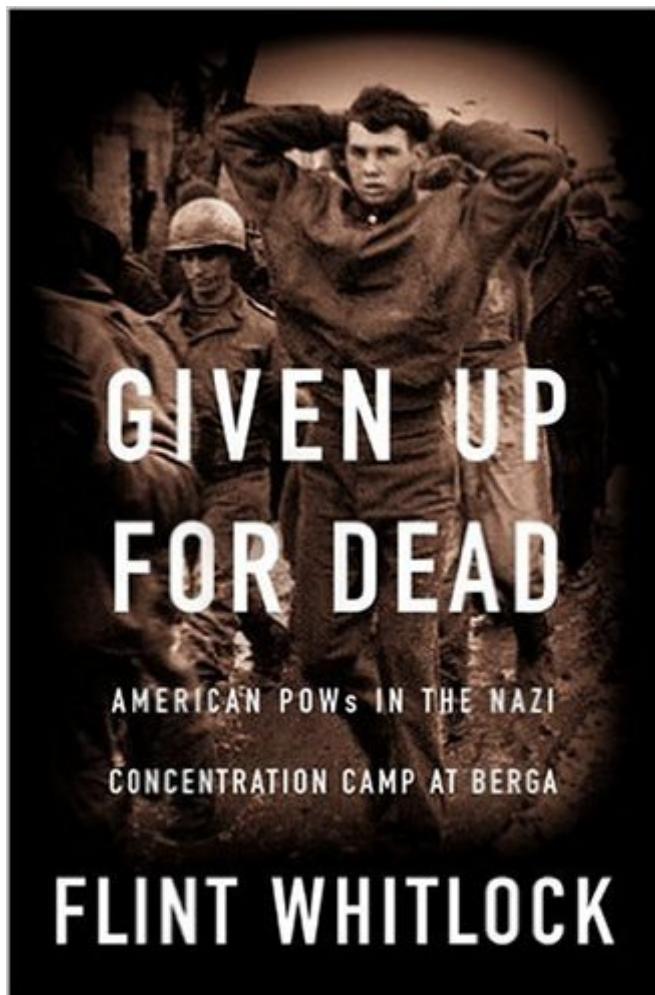


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# Given Up For Dead: American POWs In The Nazi Concentration Camp At Berga



## Synopsis

In December 1944, the Ardennes Forest on the German-Belgium border was considered a "quiet" zone where new American divisions, fresh from the States, came to get acclimated to "life at the front." No one in Allied headquarters knew that the Ardennes had been personally selected by Hitler to be the soft point through which over 250,000 men and hundreds of Panzers would plunge in the Third Reich's last-gasp attempt to split the Americans and British armies and perhaps win a negotiated peace in the West. When the Germans crashed through American lines during what became known as the "Battle of the Bulge," in December 1944, thousands of stunned American soldiers who had never before been in combat were taken prisoner. Most were sent to prisoner-of-war camps, where their treatment was dictated by the Geneva Convention and the rules of warfare. For an unfortunate few - mostly Jewish or other "ethnic" GIs - a different fate awaited them. Taken first to Stalag 9B at Bad Orb, Germany, 350 soldiers were singled out for "special treatment," segregated from their buddies, and transported by unheated railroad boxcars with no sanitary facilities on a week-long journey to Berga-an-der-Elster, a picturesque village 50 miles south of Leipzig. Awaiting them at Berga was a sinister slave-labor camp bulging with 1,000 inmates. The incarceration at Berga is the only known instance of captured American soldiers being turned into slave laborers at a Nazi concentration camp. Given Up for Dead is the story of their survival. For over three months, the American soldiers worked under brutal, inhuman conditions, building tunnels in a mountainside for the German munitions industry. The prisoners had no protective masks or clothing; were worked for 12 hours per shift with no food, water, or rest; were beaten regularly for the most minor infractions (or none at all); were fed only starvation rations; slept two to a bed in ghastly, lice-infested bunks; and were never allowed a bath or a change of clothing. Of the 350 GIs in the original contingent, 70 of them died within the first two months at Berga; the others struggled to survive in a living nightmare. As the Allies' front lines moved inexorably closer to Berga, the Nazi guards forced the inmates to endure a death march as a way of keeping them from being liberated; many died along the route. Only the timely arrival of an American armored division at war's end saved them all from certain death. Strangely, when the war was over, many of the Americans who had survived Berga were required to sign a "security certificate" which forbade them from ever disclosing the details of their imprisonment at Berga. Until recent years, what had happened to the American soldiers at Berga has been a closely guarded secret.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 304 pages

Publisher: Basic Books; 1st edition (March 29, 2005)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0813342880

ISBN-13: 978-0813342887

Product Dimensions: 9.5 x 6.2 x 1 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 starsÂ  See all reviewsÂ  (14 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #972,815 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #99 inÂ  Books > History > Military > Prisoners of War #9300 inÂ  Books > History > Military > World War II #10107 inÂ  Books > History > Military > United States

## **Customer Reviews**

Given Up For Dead, by Flint Whitlock, is the story of a group of American POW's, the majority of whom were Jewish, who were taken to a concentration camp after they were taken prisoner during the Battle of the Bulge. The author does a good job telling about these brave men who were used as slave laborers contrary to the Geneva Convention. Their treatment was a crime that, unfortunately for many reasons, went unpunished after the war. For many, survival was a miracle. A lot of the men interviewed for the book are still suffering both mentally and physically some sixty years later as a result of their experience at Berga, a sub camp of Buchenwald. Although this book isn't written in as interesting of a style as the other recently published book on this subject (Soldiers and Slaves by Roger Cohen) it is still a must read for all.

I was at Berga as a prisoner.. Most of his interviews were medics who didn't work nine hours a day in the mines. Berga was not listed as an American POW camp with the Red Cross. I personally was awarded \$83,000 From the German Government as a holocaust victim. Flint did a very good job. My buddy and I were on a grave digging detail burying our best friend and purposely made a wrong turn in a woods , when we were supposed to catch up with the rest of the group. We stayed with a German family for about 4 days. Until the Americans arrived. We were in a village near Marktedwitz. On Map Quest we had walked 114 miles in 2 weeks. I was never weighed upon liberation but was hospitalized for 2 1/2 months.

This story left me in tears and with a heartfelt thank you to "America's Greatest Generation." For you see, not only do I love my country and support our military men and women, but I am a child of an

American POW during World War II. I was born during the time my father was a POW in Oflag 64 in Poland. Growing up my father rarely mentioned his captivity in Oflag 64, but we all knew he had been a POW. My father came home and stayed in the Army and led a full and rich life until his death in 2013. "Given Up For Dead" author certainly had the worst of the worst; he and his fellow POWs are true American heroes and his story gave me an insight as to just what POWs endured to keep our Country free. I highly recommend this book .... it is a reminder that freedom is not free and a heavy and dear price is paid for the freedoms so many of us just take for granted. To all military men and women - past, present and future - our Country is great and free because of the brave. This story shadows so many things I know about my father's experiences ... even to the part of being marched out of Oflag 64 in advance of the arrival of Allied forces. Read this book and you will have an unwavering "thank you" and awe of our heroes.

A significant piece of history which is relatively unknown. Anyone interested in WWII should put this book on their reading list. Unbelievable experiences our GI's went through which proves war is hell but prisoners of war go through more hell in this case. A real testament to our soldiers who went through so much horror during that period, and still do.

Again we learn just how courageous and resilient ordinary young American boys who were swept into war can be. The boys depicted in the book were hardly off the farms or out of high school when they were forced to endure a life they could have never imagined. While they were trained for battle and even expected to be shot out and even be killed they were subjected to horrific status as prisoners of the Germans. Jewish soldiers were pulled out of the ordinary POW camps and had to know they might be executed but they stood up anyway. The author did extensive research, talking to many survivors or their families to get a first hand story of what really happened. Even with the documentation it's still hard to comprehend human beings can be so cruel to one another. Some of the first part of the book is a little tedious as Whitlock leads us through the battles setting up the ultimate fighting where these men were taken captive. Although probably necessary it's a little confusing (and boring) as you wait to get to the "stories." Other than that, the book is informative and well worth the time to read.

I had always imagined that German POW camps were like "Hogan's Hero's", so to read this well researched and written book about the most terrible treatment that visited upon these unfortunate servicemen was a real eye opener for me. Their survival is a miracle in itself.

Good account of events. My dad survived this camp.

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