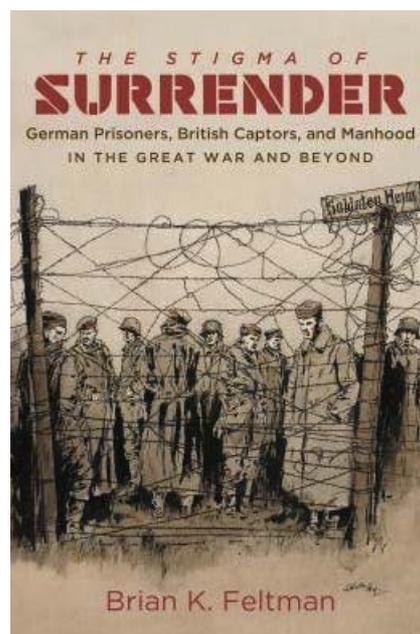


Brian K. FELTMAN: *The Stigma of Surrender: German Prisoners, British Captors, and Manhood in the Great War and Beyond*, Chapel Hill, North Carolina University Press, 2015, 280 pp., ISBN: 9781469619934.

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Surrender: the key to an Allied victory and the creation of an enduring stigma.

It was apparently possible to die ‘like’ a man/hero, but was it also possible to surrender like a man? [p. 24] Surrender and defeat in war come with an attached stigma that cannot only colour an army’s reputation but also a whole nation. A derogatory nickname for France; ‘cheese eating surrender monkeys’, coined by the Simpsons in 1995, has gained some parlance and refers to their apparently less than gallant performance during the Second World War. It appears that those who appear to surrender too quickly are shorn of their masculinity and in French case even their humanity. However, on the reverse, a steadfast refusal to surrender has also been seen as inhuman. Japanese forces during the Second World War were often more likely to fight to the last man rather than surrender. The stigma of surrender among the Japanese army was so strong that in the wake of the Imperial broadcast announcing Japan’s defeat in the Second World War, British and American forces for fear of mass suicides avoided using the term POW to describe surrendering Japanese force and coined the less tainted SEP (Surrendered Enemy Personnel).¹



Of course not all surrenders are dishonourable. The tactics of siege warfare operated on recognised grounds. When faced with overwhelming forces those within a castle or citadel rather than surrender immediately to the stronger force, could wait until the walls were breeched allowing them to surrender while at the same time saving face. However, this notion of an honourable surrender was challenged by nineteenth century ideas on militarism and its increasing connection to nationalism, and would famously be refused to General Paulus and his overwhelmed army in Stalingrad in 1942. By the time of the Second World War, by choosing surrender over death a soldier according to Adolf Hitler had ‘fallen short of the threshold of im-

¹ Andrew E. BARSHAY: *The Gods Left First: The Captivity and Repatriation of Japanese POWs in North-east Asia, 1945-1956*, California University Press, Berkeley 2013, p.11.

mortality.' [p. 196]. In dealing with the psychological impact of surrender on soldiers and the stigma attached to it, the First World War seems like the ideal testing ground.

Internment during the First World War has received an increasing amount of attention in the years leading up to and after the centenary of 1914. Heather Jones's groundbreaking analysis of violence against prisoners of war in France, Britain and Germany has forced historians to rethink the First World War and place captivity at the heart of the conflict. Captivity, she argues, can no longer be seen as a marginalized side-show set apart from the overall violence of the Great War and violence against prisoners of war was not simply reserved to the immediate capture on the battlefield. Violence during captivity was significant and helps to explain to a certain extent the radicalizing tendencies which the war unleashed within European societies.²

Brian Feltman's new book *The Stigma of Surrender* traces the internment of German prisoners of war in Britain during the First World War and develops on the historiography of masculinity and interment as pioneered by Iris Rachamimov.³ Feltman follows both Jones's and Rachamimov's narratives but focuses in on the moment of capture as being pivotal to our understanding of the prisoners' lives behind barbed wire. This is an approach which is somewhat similar to Richard Speed III's seminal early 1990's book on captivity during the First World War.⁴ While Speed's account relates more to the humanitarian and diplomatic aspects of captivity, Feltman looks at the emasculating experience of capture and its repercussions for prisoners throughout their captivity. Placing the emphasis on surrender rather than capture, Feltman somewhat overlooks the violence attached to capture but hones in on military values of masculinity and loyalty to the nation.

How can soldiers who chose surrender over death on the battlefield be honoured as martyrs to the nation? Removal from the front lines challenged a soldier's identity as a warrior and called his manhood and loyalty into question [p. 195]. A soldier's battlefield performance would immediately be called into question upon surrender and post war memoirs of former POWs often spend a great deal of the narrative on the moment of capture, often through injury, overwhelming odds or having become isolated from their comrades. This narrative was increasingly important in post war Germany where one had to justify one's wartime performance. The lines between prisoner, deserter, traitor and Bolshevik became increasingly blurred during the 1920s.

Escape attempts provided the most effective means of reconnecting with the war effort and regaining one's sense of manhood and honour [p. 105]. Most escapes, especially from Britain were doomed to failure but were seen, especially among the officer corps as part of one's

² Heather JONES: *Violence Against Prisoners in the First World War, Britain, France and Germany 1914-1918*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011, p. 371.

³ Iris RACHAMIMOV: 'The Disruptive Comforts of Drag: (Trans)Gender Performances among Prisoners of War in Russia, 1914-1920', *The American Historical Review*, 11:2 (2006), pp. 362-382.

⁴ Richard SPEED: *Prisoners, Diplomats and the Great War: A study of Diplomacy in Captivity* (Greenwood, New York, 1990).

soldierly duty. Feltman offers a balanced look at escape attempts and successfully shows that while they expressed a continued devotion to the Fatherland and the war effort they also provided a relief from the monotony of camp life. The ‘sport’ of escape pitted the wits of the prisoner against those of the guards and the plotting of an escape attempt not only provided prisoners with an activity to engage in on daily basis but also a long term goal to relieve the boredom of captivity.

Whether one agrees with Feltman’s claim that surrender and captivity were some of the most commonly shared experiences for German and European men in general during the twentieth century, captivity is certainly an important lens through which view the narrative of twentieth century warfare. The implications of surrender reached far beyond the battlefield or POW camp and as Feltman maintains we have only scratched the surface of what remains to be learned about the Great War through the examination of men who served as both soldiers and prisoners. *The Stigma of Surrender* provides useful signposts on the path for further research.