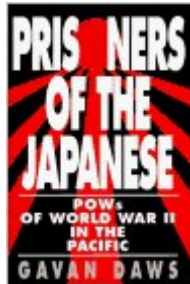




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Prisoners Of The Japanese: Pows Of World War II In The Pacific



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

Daws (Shoal of Time) eloquently tells the story of 140,000 Allied military prisoners whom history has almost forgotten. He convincingly describes Japanese POW camps not as homogenizing institutions but as tribal societies of Americans, British, Australians, Dutch-and Japanese. The Japanese showed no mercy to those who fell into their hands, the author stresses: Thousands were worked to death; as many more died of disease and starvation; others were beaten to death or beheaded, often so clumsily that two or three strokes were required to finish the job. Daws combines archival research and personal interviews to describe inmates who did what they had to do to survive and afterward tried to live with their guilt. Their experiences highlight the scale of human pain inflicted by Japan. Illustrations not seen by PW. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc.

The Japanese held more than 140,000 POWs from the Western Allies and India during World War II. One-third of them did not survive captivity that was always onerous and often abominably brutal. The literature on these prisoners' experiences has been growing rapidly during the past few years, which is just as well, for the number of living survivors is diminishing rapidly. Daws offers a

well-written, thoroughly researched account of these POWs that, along with more familiar material, covers such rarely discussed topics as the Dutch POWs in Asia and the conflicts among different nationalities over personal hygiene. He does not bash the Japanese beyond their deserts, but in this respect as in many others, it is impossible to whitewash Japanese conduct, which was nothing less than barbarous in far too many cases. An exceptionally worthwhile addition to the literature on the war in the Pacific. Roland Green

Outstanding book--possibly the best on this subject. It makes for powerful and sober reading. Good details and sourcing so it's a fine resource for other research or publications. Lots of anecdotal examples and snippets of stories so there is a continual human interest connection. And what I think is the strength of the book--Daws does a great job tying together details to identify a theme (examples: what increased your chances of survival? what camps seemed to be the worst and why? what country's POWs seemed to adapt the best?). This is very good writing and research on a very tough subject. I bought this for a father-in-law who served in the Pacific in WW-II. He had heard many of the stories but was still shaken by the accounts and details he read here. After he finished the book, I read it and you can see my recommendation. I gave this book 5 stars and feel that anyone with a strong stomach and enough maturity to stay focused with a book of this size would find this to be valuable. That said, there are a couple of reactions I had to the book that I should mention. 1. I found the continual reference to "tribes" to be irritating. It's a very "anthropological" approach to studying groups of POWs, has some values but as a continual reference, it was bothersome to me. Maybe others won't find this an issue but to me it was something about the writing style/focus that was grating at times. 2. I wish the book took more of a strategic/macro look with details than it does. Don't get me wrong, there are plenty of "big picture" details (such as survival rates by area or numbers of POW per country). But too often I'd read an anecdote or a claim by Daws and wonder if that was true for most of the POWs or how he reached that conclusion. 3. Given the number of POWs, the length of the war, the geographic dispersion, the range of countries involved, this is an immense subject. That said, I felt there were some gaps (or areas that were covered but lightly). For instance, most of the initial POWs occurred in mass surrenders (such as Corregidor or Singapore). What was the experience of soldiers captured in combat by the Japanese? The anecdotal accounts I read (all in other books) of soldiers captured by Japanese soldiers at Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Kohima, and Iwo Jima involved torture and then killing. Other than captured fliers, there is very little mention in this book of how the Japanese dealt with prisoners who weren't part of a larger surrender. Even at Wake Island, you had the surrender of a

garrison rather than 2 or 3 individuals caught up in intense fighting who are captured while it's still going on.⁴ While Daws does cover the experience of captured airmen (especially later in the war with B-29 crew shot down over Japan), this seems to me to be very skimpily addressed. From everything I've read, the Japanese reserved a special place in hell for bomber crews shot down over Japan, especially any with red hair (I know, hard to believe after having read how bad POWs were treated, especially some of the "Hell Ships").⁵ Not really a flaw of the book, more the nature of the war in the Pacific—but you'll find this book easier to digest and make sense of if you have a very good/detailed map of the Pacific and you alternate reading chapters of this book with another account of the war with Japan (doesn't have to be about POWs). So for instance, reading something like "With the Old Breed" or "Ghost Soldiers" or "One Square Mile of Hell" or "The Ghost Mountain Boys" or "Pacific Alamo" or "Singapore Burning" you'll gain a very valuable context by understanding more about the nature of the fighting, or how totally unprepared most of the Allied troops were (not only for the fighting but especially what followed in captivity) or why some POWs rotted away for years after their islands were bypassed. This book is such a thick, detailed focus on this issue that your understanding of it will benefit from reading something else about the Pacific war simultaneously and just alternate--go back and forth between the two books. But even given these caveats, I have no hesitation in rating this book 5 stars.

This book was recommended to me by a woman whose husband had survived the Bataan Death March and Death Camp. Her husband received the Congressional Medal of Honor and this book tells part of the true account of what he and countless others endured. Throughout my life I have read about and seen documentaries about the atrocities and war crimes committed by the Nazi regime. For some reason Hollywood and various news agencies have chosen to ignore the horrors inflicted by the Imperial Japanese soldiers upon the American and Allied prisoners. For example, some of our American soldiers were filleted alive by the Japanese soldiers as their brothers in arms were forced to watch. I read this book to honor my friend's husband who fought and suffered unimaginable agony, for America's freedom. This should be required reading for every college student in America. The freedom we enjoy on a daily basis was won at a very dear price. This book is not about hating the people of Japan anymore than a book about those who suffered in a Nazi death camp would be about hating Germany. This book is about a true account few Americans have studied and that Hollywood has all but ignored.

I always wished my grandfather would tell stories of his time in a Japanese prison camp growing up,

nobody really knew or knows what he endured but him. I could never understand why he wouldn't speak a word of it if just a little. Of course you hear about how terrible the Japanese treated their prisoners, of physical and mental torture, and obviously knew it was too difficult for him to even think about that time in his life, and I find it too hard to try and ask. He was captured after the battle of Wake Island and was in a prison camp from start to finish of the war, that is all I know. I had bought this book about a year ago but for whatever reason didn't read it until after one day I had to take my grandfather to the doctor for some sort of checkup, they removed his shirt and I couldn't help but notice several different scars on his back, sides, and chest. The nurse asked about a particular scar, I could tell that the memory hit him, as he paused, and then simply replied "I was a prisoner of war". Remembering I had this book, that night I started to read it. Every American should read this book. Well written and researched. The things the Japanese did to their prisoners should not have been swept under the carpet. I found myself nearly in tears at times from their treatment, sometimes in laughter from the stories of the prisoners how they kept their head. Sometimes I wanted to just put the book down and stop reading it because I couldn't believe how terrible their life was. I'm glad I read this book, and now completely understand why my grandfather won't speak of those few but long years of his life. Has my Grandfather forgiven the Japanese soldiers? I don't know, he never speaks hatefully of any Japanese, but I know he has never forgotten what those soldiers did to him and his fellow POW's. I am proud of my grandpa, that he somehow survived, and to not tell about it. And thanks to Gavin Daws for writing this book and shedding light on a shadowed subject. I can live without knowing, and now understand what he went through.

This is the second best book I have ever read on the topic and has a lot of unique info and stories in it that you will find nowhere else. I have read 25 books on this general topic so this puts Gavin Daws about up there with John Toland. After reading this book I wrote him. I was very surprised to get a phone call from him (from Hawaii) about ten years ago, he is not just a great writer he is a nice guy. Great stories and a great tribute to the men who became "captives" (Japanese do not recognize the concept of POWs as we do) of the brutal Japanese in the Gulag of their dreaded camps. I have interviewed four POWs of the Japanese myself and I can see that Daws has interviewed scores and scores of them after first doing his homework so his oral histories are superb and highly informative.

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