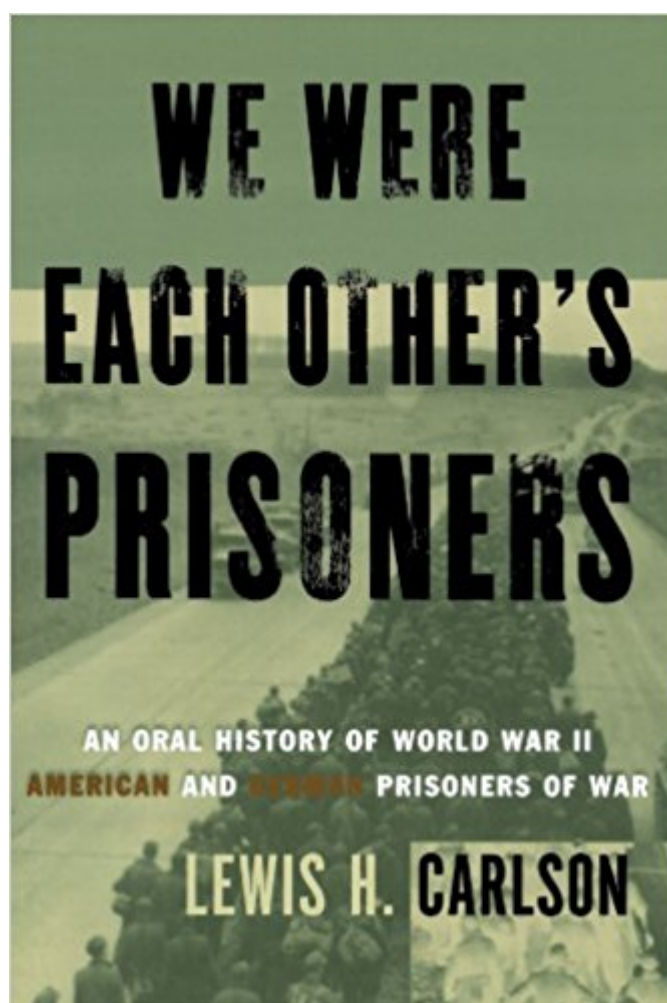


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# **We Were Each Other's Prisoners: An Oral History Of World War II American And German Prisoners Of War**



## Synopsis

During the Second World War, Germany captured nearly 94,000 American soldiers, while the Allies shipped almost 380,000 Germans to the United States. *We Were Each Other's Prisoners* compares, for the first time ever, stories of POWs from both sides of the conflict: From the anti-Nazi German soldier who tried desperately to turn himself in rather than fight for Hitler, to the U.S. prisoner who thrice escaped his German captors; the last time to join Russian troops in the Battle of Berlin, to the Jewish-American prisoner who was sent to a slave labor camp. Culled from more than 150 interviews with 35 American and German surviving POWs, the book addresses larger political and psychological issues: What does it mean to be a prisoner, especially for men whose cultures prize individual heroism? Why did conditions differ so dramatically in American and German camps? How were these men received upon their return to their homeland? How have they coped with the long-term effects of incarceration?

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

An affecting wide-angle overview of the POW experience during WW II. Drawing on interviews with more than 150 US and German soldiers who were interned, Carlson (History/Western Michigan Univ.) offers a judiciously organized survey that lets a host of ex-prisoners of war speak for themselves. He first addresses the severe mental shock sustained by combatants who were taken captive on the battlefield or (in the case of downed airmen and D-day paratroopers) behind the lines. The author next focuses on the physical hardships, short rations, and other privations endured

by Americans confined in the Third Reich's typically primitive camps; by contrast, their German counterparts who sat out the fighting in Stateside lockups had a far easier time of it. In some instances, moreover, American POWs identified as Jewish, or incorrigible, or suspected of being spies were sent to concentration camps; over 50 years later, their matter-of-fact recollections of the ghastly events they experienced bear eloquent witness to humankind's infinite capacity for inhumanity. Carlson goes on to debunk the Hollywood myth that escape was a preoccupation of either Allied or German POWs; precious few ever made it beyond the wire, or even tried. Covered as well is the grisly fate of informers as well as undercover agents who tried and failed to infiltrate inmate populations on either side of the Atlantic and, the Geneva Convention notwithstanding, the dilatory pace of repatriation from the US. While almost all American interns were freed by their own or Soviet troops before V-E Day, fewer than 75,000 of the 380,000- odd Germans held in the US were sent home in 1945; in addition, many of those who made it back to Europe in 1946 spent another three years as POWs in England or France. A scholar's illuminating rundown, complete with telling anecdotal detail, on a great war's largely forgotten men. (illustrations, not seen) -- Copyright ©1997, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Lewis H. Carlson is professor of history and director of American Studies at Western Michigan University.

It's always a good idea to save the oral history of those who have experienced an unusual occurrence in our past. Although I enjoyed the book I kept waiting for "something different". I guess I've read so many reports/books/histories/newspaper articles on the subject there's nothing new to learn. I had an uncle who was a guard at two different camps and a grandfather who used German POWs on his farm so this is a subject well known in our family. This book might be good for "newbies" but not much help to real researchers on the subject. I would recommend it to my son's eighth grade history class. I did find the parallel's between the treatment of two groups interesting and am actually proud of the effort the U.S. made to comply with the Geneva Convention.

..... of both German and American POWs. Was a real eye-opener for me, and the book answered many of my questions of how both Germans and Americans were treated, even after the war. Very good book.

Great read...Bought an additional 9 copies for gifts. Keep in mind the stories told are their stories.... how they remember it ... As time goes on, these stories will be gone....

Very interesting ! Especially since I was on the opposite side during WWII.

I found the book a great comparison of the variety of conditions in which POWs found themselves. While no two POW had the same experience treatment and conditions did vary greatly. I've sent this book on to a few Ex-POW's because it provides context they may not be aware of, Like Airborne veterans captured without firing a shot. Not everyone lived like Hogan's Heroes or The Great Escape. The book has a solid spot in my WW-II collection.

The Prisoner of War (POW) is an often overlooked and certainly not a celebrated aspect of war. Yet, during WWII, as in every war, those soldiers taken prisoner by the enemy may no longer be in combat, but the war does not end for them, nor does the constant threat of eminent death. Plus, a grim aspect of captivity includes possible torture, a terrible sense of failure, hopelessness, and futility. Still, most POWs endure, survive and a few even manage to escape to fight again. The personal stories of 150 surviving POWs are told, based on extensive interviews by the author. Yet, this book not only covers the experience of American POWs in German hands; he also covers the experience of many German POWs held in the United States camps during WWII. This aspect of the POW experience is seldom mentioned or even thought about. Thus, this book is a remarkable awakening . . . on many levels, from the psychological to the angst and terror of captivity. My uncle Louis Pfeifer, 82nd Airborne paratrooper, was a POW after D-Day and he was one of those vets interviewed for this book. This work is a fresh, unique, and new perspective on a subject rarely covered in books on military history.Â

Most people are not aware of the thousands of German, Italian and Japanese prisoners in camps across the United States during the Second World War. Like many other issues, guarding and tending POWs was a flawed system, but it was much better than in other countries at least, considering the U.S. had little or no experience with the matter. We were re-inventing ourselves.

Mr. Carlson did a wonderful job capturing the hardships encountered by the POWs. It was one of those works that was hard to put down. I am a thirty-two-year-old community college professor in New England and have just published my first book. I am currently beginning my own oral history

project and would love Professor Carlson's advise. I would be grateful if he sent me an e-mail at the address below. Dr. Victor Triay

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