British Prisoners of War in First World War Germany by Oliver Wilkinson.

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This book is the first comprehensive assessment of its subject. Inspired by the experiences of his great-grandfather, author Oliver Wilkinson (Univ. of Wolverhampton) spent a decade researching British captivity experiences in World War I in order to write "the forgotten British captive back into the history of the First World War" (274). His sources include autobiographical writings and oral histories, camp magazines, War Office documents, and reports by neutral camp inspectors. He describes in detail how the camps were organized, the work carried out by their inmates, and the relationships the prisoners formed. The author focuses particularly on how systems of power operated in the camps. His discerning use of the theoretical concepts of, for instance, Erving Goffman[1] and Michel Foucault[2] makes his study distinctive within the growing scholarship on captivity.

The book has a two-part, generally chronological structure. Part I concerns the challenges that captivity presented to British servicemen, the organization and structure of the camps, the routines of work and discipline, and the provision of food, clothing, and medical treatment. There are many perceptive observations on the techniques the Germans used to control their charges. Part II investigates the "dialectic of control," a concept Wilkinson borrows from Anthony Giddens,[3] to show how POWs were able to re-empower themselves through acts of resistance, the leadership and organization in the camps, relationships prisoners formed with each other, and their links with home. The book concludes with a helpful summary of its main points, plus a brief description of POWs' repatriation and their representations in the interwar period.

Wilkinson identifies several strategies British POWs adopted in response to the difficulties they faced. These included their strenuous efforts to retain their identities as both *British* and *military* men. Another was their ability to remobilize the captors' controlling strategies for their own re-empowerment. A third was their reliance on their pre-captivity experiences and behavior to endure and resist their conditions of imprisonment.

The author convincingly reveals "many parallels between British experiences on the Western Front and those in captivity…. The reactions and responses of British servicemen to captivity were bound up with the war and with men's understandings of their roles within it" (274). Crucially, he shows that the captivity experience was not only an important facet of the First World War story that historians need to record, but that it was intrinsic to the whole wartime, and even prewar, experience.

Wilkinson writes for an academic audience, citing historians but also sociologists and cultural theorists to interpret what he calls the "captivity landscape." On that note, however, the author

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1. Esp. *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (London: Penguin, 1961).

2. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1977, rpt. 1995).

3. Viz., *Central Problems in Social Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1979) and *The Constitution of Society* (Cambridge: Polity Pr, 1984).

has a tendency to refer to many theorists and concepts like (Giorgio Agamben's) "theoretical insights" (7) and (Giddens's) "structuration theory" (11), without precisely clarifying their meaning or relevance to his approach.[4]

Such minor annoyances aside, *British Prisoners of War in First World War Germany* is an instructive and innovative study of a long-neglected subject. I recommend it to scholars interested in the POW experience and the First World War.

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4. Less serious problems are his penchant throughout the book for unexplained quotation marks enclosing sentence parts and an addiction to transition words like "moreover" and "therein."