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"Die Schwarzen waren unsere Freunde": Deutsche
Kriegsgefangene in der amerikanischen Gesellschaft 1942-1946
(review)

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The Journal of Military History, Volume 67, Number 1, January 2003,
pp. 276-278 (Review)

Published by Society for Military History
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jmh.2003.0044>



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France. This compares with 45,500 British Commonwealth and 35,400 American deaths during the advance to the Alps. Another 75–80,000 Italian soldiers died in German captivity rather than fight for Hitler. By war's end, 99,000 Italians had been incorporated into the British Eighth Army as combatants, 66,000 were performing security duties, and 196,000 working in ISU labor units. 100,000 more served as sailors and airmen. Over 40 percent of Allied troops in Italy at war's end were uniformed members of the Italian military. Including civilian partisan losses, over half of the Allied fatalities in Italy between September 1943 and April 1945 were Italian. *Forgotten Battles* tells this story, also providing chapters on the Italian Resistance and another episode largely unmentioned in English-language sources: the 500,000 to 750,000 Italians who served in Axis Italian or *Wehrmacht* units.

Yet serious flaws mar this work, a labor of love bereft of editorial and professional historical support. Errors, typos, and misspellings abound. Large sections present irate views of sources, better placed in endnotes or omitted. The book seems to be O'Reilly's repository for opinions on many irrelevancies, including civil-military relations under Mussolini, Allied code-breaking, Italian anti-Semitism, British policy toward Yugoslav partisans, punishment of Italian Fascists, American-British differences over Italian politicians, the Cold War's origins, and Polish forces in the Italian campaign. Worse, the author quotes misleadingly. In one egregious example, he states: "John Gooch . . . said 'the Italians can not and will not fight'" (p. 89). But the full quotation from an article by Christie Davies reads: "Andreski and Gooch are correct in saying that Italians can not, or will not, fight." Furthermore, Christie's statement not only distorts what Stanislav Andreski and Gooch wrote but reflects her poor translation of her article's title: "Itali Sunt Imbelles," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 2 (1982): 266–69, better rendered as "Italians are unwarlike" than her "Italians do not fight." Of all this, Gooch is innocent.

Even at one-quarter its excessive price, this book would be a poor investment.

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"Die Schwarzen waren unsere Freunde": Deutsche Kriegsgefangene in der amerikanischen Gesellschaft 1942–1946. By Matthias Reiss. *Krieg in der Geschichte*, ed. Förster, Kroener, Wegner, vol. 11. Paderborn, Germany: Schöningh, 2002. ISBN 3-506-74479-8. Maps. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. 371. DM 40,90.

Historians and World War II buffs have become increasingly aware of the presence, more than half a century ago, of more than 371,000 German (and 53,000 Italian and 5,000 Japanese) prisoners of war held in camps across wartime America. State and local studies are exploring the experiences of the prisoners who worked, lived, and escaped in their areas.

This volume, however, is altogether different and is, in many ways, a stinging indictment of American race relations. But it is more than that. It is an exploration of ethnicity and its effects on white and black Americans as seen through the relatively neutral lens of the outsider, the German POW. Author Matthias Reiss theorizes that white Americans identified with the white German POWs due to race as well as an admiration for crisp military tradition, while at the same time African Americans identified with the POWs based on shared work experiences and the status of outsider that was accorded them both. Rather than having an encapsulated experience in their host country the POWs were changed by their time there, and, in turn, altered those segments of American society which dealt with them. In short and with particular regard to race because of its importance in the workplace, the German POWs acted as an agent of change, albeit a small one, in America's struggle with racial equality. From the earliest appearance of the POWs in America the prisoners, whom Reiss refers to as a special case in immigration history ("travelling strangers"), served as a mirror which created a new awareness among blacks of the true extent of their inequality, especially amidst the patriotism of wartime. They were not the key element to be sure, but their presence brought into focus racial disparities in the workplace and within the same army.

Reiss's University of Hamburg dissertation, doubtless influenced by his former mentor's (Roger Daniels at the University of Cincinnati) path breaking work on ethnicity and immigration, is a bold step into the morass of America's inexplicable racial divisions. The official and unofficial treatment meted out to black American soldiers often to the benefit of white enemy prisoners, was senseless and heartbreaking, particularly in light of America's stated values of equality and fairness, and the enemy's history of institutional racism, anti-Semitism, and mass murder.

The author's first mission, which was to describe America's discrimination against its black troops during World War II, is achieved in full. Archival documents, newspapers, and personal interviews, amply prove in sad detail the humiliation and separation experienced by black American soldiers and laborers. Indeed Reiss has left no archival stone unturned. His detailed footnotes, maps, list of important people, and bibliography, are alone worth the price of this book.

Reiss' second mission of describing the gravitation of white Americans to the German POWs on the basis of race, is equally well-proven. Examples abound about black troops being denied access to the restaurants, truck stop restrooms, train cars, movies, and military base mess halls, frequented by German (and Italian) war prisoners.

That the German POWs in turn considered discriminated blacks to be allies or genuinely sympathised with their plight is not as clear. America's racial contradiction was regularly exploited by argumentative German soldiers who often used the issue to justify their treatment of Europe's Jews. It was also a major source of bewilderment among the democratic Germans selected for the re-education program. Reiss himself concedes that the

alliance between black Americans and German prisoners was somewhat abstract and superficial, evidenced by the postwar friendships and care packages exchanged almost exclusively between former prisoners and white Americans.

The long-term economic effects of the POWs on the future of Southern agriculture is solidly supported, however. The importation of war prisoners was America's last large source of unfree labor. They were placed in low-paying jobs that were traditionally held by blacks but left vacant by mass migration to the North and induction into the army. The fact that the War Department set a standard price for the use of POW labor kept wages and production stable despite wartime labor shortages. Consequently, any tendency by the blacks who remained in the South to agitate for improved wages or working conditions was dampened, since their jobs could easily be lost to the German prisoners. The sudden withdrawal of the prisoners in 1945–46 led to a labor vacuum whose end result was the rapid mechanization of Southern agriculture. Black workers could now look more critically at the environment around them and begin to imagine change.

Finally, the effect on the German prisoners. Because they were Outsiders by definition, they had no investment or connection with America's racial segregation. They knew that their situation was temporary, and they could satisfy their curiosity about a social structure that was novel to them. The Germans could tamper with this discrimination, highlighting the inequality and provoking either side at will. Lastly, America's racial segregation gave the German prisoners the opportunity to salvage a shred of moral righteousness, especially as stories about the liberated concentration camps began to spread.

Reiss's book, *Die Schwarzen waren unsere Freunde* (The blacks were our friends), succeeds in going beyond the anecdotal recollections of former POWs and has resulted in a very intelligent, analytical—and uncomfortable—study.

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World War II Pacific Island Guide: A Geo-Military Study. By Gordon L. Rottman. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2001. ISBN 0-313-31395-4. Maps. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xxii, 477. \$99.00.

This is a unique book in the literature of the Pacific War, providing in one place basic information about each island caught up in that conflagration, including geographic characteristics, prewar and postwar history, and World War II events as experienced by the Allied and Japanese sides alike. As such, the volume is a valuable reference work for Pacific War historians and buffs, including wargamers, as was intended by the author, who in encyclopedic fashion has compiled all the relevant data and information he could