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Christina Twomey, *The Battle Within. POWs in postwar Australia* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2018) ISBN 9781742235684

In the last 30 years there is no doubt that trauma and victimhood have assumed a central place in the memory of war in general, and the Second World War in particular. Prisoners of war are now widely regarded as objects of sympathy and the subjects of commemoration in their own right. Older memoirs of captivity are being rediscovered and new ones appearing as the subject matter takes on an increasing appeal for younger generations. In the same period there has been an efflorescence of scholarly works that examine the fate of prisoners of war but nearly all of this ends its analysis or its narrative strand at the point of liberation or soon thereafter. Very little attention has been paid to the post-war experiences of the many hundreds of thousands, indeed millions of men who spent time in enemy captivity either in the European or Far Eastern theatres of war. In that respect, Christina Twomey has opened a rich vein by looking in detail at the post-war careers of Australian former POWs and their attempts to reintegrate into civil society after their repatriation.

Her book begins by examining the meaning and impact of imprisonment for Australian prisoners of war. It looks at the public and state responses to POWs and how they were greeted with ambivalence and in some cases outright hostility because they were perceived to have given up almost without a fight and were therefore not worthy of state help or public sympathy. Secondly it details the attitudes of the civil government, the Australian military, and the repatriation authorities towards the men returning from Japanese and Axis captivity. It shows how the decisions on compensation and rehabilitation were framed according to contemporary views about war neuroses, and demonstrates how certain key medical specialists, who had themselves been prisoners of war, influenced that process. Thirdly it looks in-depth at three individual prisoners' post-war experiences in terms of their health employment social and indeed sexual relationships. These demonstrate very clearly the impact which captivity had on these men's ability to reintegrate into post war Australian society and in general paint a bleak picture of alienation and wrecked lives. While the book is careful to provide as much context as possible to these case studies and not to assume that all the misfortunes of its subjects can be placed at the door of their wartime experiences, the overriding conclusion is that for these men at least, this was the determining factor. The final sections of the book are devoted to the prisoners and their role in reconciliation with Japan and recognition of the Asian groups that had assisted them while in captivity. This took place at much the same time as the prisoners were, themselves, rediscovered and repositioned within the commemorative landscape.

As with all good social histories, wherever possible Professor Twomey has allowed the documents, and their subjects, to speak for themselves. The Prisoner of War Trust Fund is an important source from which she is able to draw much personal testimony and the individual case studies which form the central sections of the book. These show clearly the damage done by captivity to many of the former POWs, as well as the high-handed, unfeeling and sometimes irrationally prejudiced opinions voiced by the trustees of that fund. However, while the title explicitly states that it is about the 'battle within' and concerned with the victims of captivity, we should be wary of regarding these harrowing personal testimonies as typical of the post-war POW experience. We hear next-to-nothing of former prisoners who did make the successful

transition back to civilian life, simply because they never felt the need to apply for additional aid. As is evident from the book, some of them sat in judgement on their former comrades as members of the trust, and many others found productive lives and careers in post war Australia or elsewhere. Concentrating on the victims of this process does nevertheless demonstrate the ambivalent social and official attitudes in Australia to its captured servicemen as well as highlighting how this ambivalence translated into parsimony when it came to social welfare. While there is some passing comparison to the far more generous settlements made by the Canadian government, the analysis remains purely rooted in the Australian example. While this book breaks new ground in looking at the social history of prisoners of war after their return from captivity, its longer term value may well be in facilitating wider comparisons with the existing scholarship emanating from Britain and the other Dominions on this topic.

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