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Raffael Scheck, *French Colonial Soldiers in German Captivity during World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) ISBN 978-1-107-05681-7, pp.xvi+307.

Building on his earlier work that examined the specific causations of German atrocities against black French soldiers in the campaign of 1940, Professor Scheck has now broadened the scope of his researches to include the treatment of all French colonial troops taken prisoner during the Second World War. In so doing he has provided the first comprehensive and accessible survey of this important, but much neglected aspect of prisoner-of-war history. Whereas his first monograph was confined to the *tirailleurs sénégalais* recruited from West Africa, this volume also includes a detailed investigation into the treatment of the North African *maghrebi* troops who were also captured or interned in the disastrous campaign of May-June 1940.

The argument of the book is very clearly laid out in four pages of the introduction (8-12). Here Scheck posits that although the French colonial prisoners were subjected to massive abuses and several cases of mass murder, their subsequent treatment was largely in accordance with the terms of the Geneva Convention and did not deteriorate over time. This is seen as surprising given the racial doctrines of the Third Reich and the fact that the French themselves regarded their colonial soldiers as second class members of their armed forces. In order to explain this apparent anomaly, Scheck looks to the micro level of relationships between prisoners and their guards. His second major conclusion is that, in spite of the second class status afforded colonial soldiers in French eyes, the Vichy government nonetheless expended a great deal of diplomatic effort to protect its non-white soldiers – primarily through the so-called Scapini Mission that had replaced the role of the protecting power from December 1940. While this was motivated in part by a desire to protect all prisoners in German hands, it was also driven by Vichy fears of lost imperial prestige and how this might affect the thinking of colonial troops when they were allowed to return home.

The third contention in the book is that the experiences of French colonial soldiers were 'different, but not necessarily worse' (10) than their white counterparts. The Germans made an early decision

to keep the colonial prisoners in occupied France, and even removed some who had already been transported to Germany. Although guarded by German, and latterly even by French forces, these men enjoyed a more welcoming environment than their white counterparts held prisoner in Germany. Abuses and ill-treatment were still in evidence and mortality among the colonial soldiers overall was higher (5-6%) than for French prisoners in general, but this has to be seen against a background where *tirailleurs* and North Africans were far more susceptible to disease and much less tolerant of an alien European climate. Against this, the proximity of colonial soldiers meant that aid agencies could reach them more easily and diplomatic pressure did prompt the Germans to move some of them to warmer climes further South. The line of demarcation before November 1942 allowed for the possibility of escape, and many colonial troops were discharged on medical grounds and allowed to move into the unoccupied zone. Thus by July 1944, only 30% of all colonial prisoners were still in captivity.

The final element of the book argues that the experiences of fighting alongside metropolitan French forces and enduring captivity did serve to radicalise some elements within the colonial army – exactly the outcome that Vichy feared might happen, and which the postwar French government inherited. Scheck argues that although many of the inequalities suffered by the colonial troops were imposed by German decisions and policies, it was the French authorities who were blamed in spite of the work done by the Scapini Mission. This was also contrasted with the generally welcoming and sympathetic attitude evident from French civilians throughout the occupation. However, it was contrast between this and demands for greater equality on the one hand, and the unity of interest between Vichy and the post-liberation Gaullist administration to re-create a colonial empire based on traditional inequalities that provided an explosive mix which led to disorders in the repatriation camps and when the men were finally returned home.

This is a nuanced and carefully researched work that makes extensive use of the official records and the limited testimonies of the colonial soldiers themselves to provide a welcome correction to the

generalised and in many cases erroneous understanding which historians have of the treatment of this important group of German prisoners-of-war. An essential read.