

THE KOREAN WAR 1950-53: A 50 YEAR RETROSPECTIVE

OTHER FRONTS: RESISTANCE, COLLABORATION AND SURVIVAL AMONG UNITED NATIONS PRISONERS DURING THE KOREAN WAR

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The POWs of the Korean War were the subject of enormous controversy during the fighting and remained so for a decade or more after the end of hostilities. Their fate was the major stumbling block to the successful conclusion of the long drawn-out cease-fire negotiations at Panmunjom; on both sides they provided grist to the propaganda mills; and in the West at least their repatriation at the war's end was followed by a campaign of innuendo and vilification which one authoritative commentator has dubbed a 'march to calumny'. As Albert Biderman observed of this process:

Almost immediately [after capture], these prisoners became the subject of intensive Communist propaganda; they have remained subjects of intensive propaganda ever since.¹

In the postwar period, however, that propaganda was generated almost entirely in the United States itself.

This essay has several aims. First, it recalls some of the experiences of UN prisoners for an age which has almost entirely forgotten them; it examines the postwar debate about brain-washing, collaboration and survival which raged for a decade after the cease-fire, and highlights some problems in the comparisons which were drawn between American POWs and those of other combatant UN forces; finally, it looks at where the Korean POW experience led in terms of the preparation of soldiers in Western armies for possible capture in future conflicts, and poses some questions about its implications for the present. To begin with, however, we need to look briefly at UN administration of Chinese and North Korean prisoners captured by forces of the United Nations Command in order to appreciate something of the enemy's approach to the treatment of UN prisoners in Chinese and North Korean custody.

UNC Prisoner of War Administration

By early 1951 there were 140,000 North Koreans and 20,000 Chinese Communist prisoners in UN hands. Such large numbers of captured enemy personnel posed a potential security problem and were concentrated well to the rear of the UN lines, ultimately on the small island of Koje-do. The compounds built to house them were inadequate for the numbers held while the calibre of the South Korean guards was poor, that of the Americans not much better. The Communists regarded the prison camps—ours and theirs—as extensions of the battlefield, and organised accordingly. A vicious struggle between pro- and anti-Communist factions ensued within the UN camps as the two warred with each other, encouraged by forces outside. When the Americans attempted to screen and count enemy POWs in early 1952 in response to developments in the truce talks, they were met with an armed response and seventy-seven prisoners were killed. The camp and its inmates then became the focus for a propaganda campaign over forced versus voluntary repatriation, with the UN claiming that only 70,000 of some 160,000 POWs wished to return north. There was further violence in April 1952 during which the American commandant of the camp was captured by the militant prisoners in one compound, and was only released after a show of force in which more prisoners were killed. Thereafter, the Communist-controlled compounds were broken up and their inmates placed in smaller, more manageable units while all the prisoners were dispersed across a series of camps on the islands and mainland. There were further demonstrations among those prisoners who had elected to be repatriated, but nothing on the scale of the earlier Koje-do disturbances. At the end of the war, thousands of Chinese and North Korean soldiers opted to stay where they were.

There are three things to say about the experience of Communist POWs in UN hands. In the first nine months of hostilities captured enemy personnel were generally docile. Thereafter organised rival factions began a year-long struggle within the prison camps during which hundreds of POWs were killed. The preconditions for this violence were unfortunately exacerbated by administrative and organisational shortcomings in UN policies which governed POWs. It is clear that initially at least the Americans regarded the task in traditional custodial terms, and as former belligerents the POWs were to be treated humanely until repatriated. When repatriation became an issue at the truce talks, approximately two-thirds of Chinese and one-third of North Korean prisoners indicated that they would resist repatriation; this delayed the signing of the armistice by eighteen months. There is no question that the demonstrations by enemy POWs embarrassed and hampered the UN Command, while they diverted resources from the front in order to contain them.²

The US announced at the beginning of the war that it would apply the rules of the Geneva Convention, although neither China nor North Korea were signatories and the US itself had not ratified the 1949 protocols (it did not do so until 1955). In terms of the day-to-day conduct of POW administration the US mostly followed the Convention, at least until the violent incidents of 1952; in fact, the US Army had assumed responsibility for POW administration in September 1950 in order to ensure that all UN contingents abided by the Convention since it was known that the South Koreans often mistreated and even killed captured enemy personnel (the Korean People's Army behaved in a similar manner).³ The refusal to insist on the automatic or 'forced' repatriation of prisoners was the clear exception to this general proposition: Article 118 of the 1949 protocols specified that all prisoners were to be returned at the end of hostilities, something which was politically impossible and probably morally repugnant to the Truman administration, not least after the experience of repatriating former Soviet citizens in central Europe in 1945. The counter-proposal of voluntary repatriation had both humanitarian and obvious political attractions.

In another area, however, US authorities acted in a manner contrary to the strict provisions of the convention as set out in Article 38.⁴ After a pilot project in the autumn of 1950, a program of Civilian Information and Education was introduced into the UN camps in the summer of 1951 aimed at developing 'an understanding and appreciation of the political, social and economic objectives of the United Nations and to assist in various other ways so that they [the POWs] may become better citizens in their own country'. Much of the program was recreational, but there was a core of frankly political material aimed at promoting 'a comprehension of, faith in, and adoption of the concepts, institutions and practices of democracy'.⁵ Unfortunately, the instructors were usually drawn from anti-Communist prisoners (some 2500 were so employed), 'qualified Korean civilians' and ROK Army personnel and, when large numbers of Chinese prisoners arrived, by Nationalist Chinese personnel recruited in Taiwan. This latter group in particular appear to have played a significant role in fomenting anti-Communist violence within the compounds and propagandising in favour of repatriation to Taiwan rather than the mainland. In several senses, then, some of the problems in POW administration which the UNC encountered were of its own making. Other factors which contributed to the sum of its difficulties were the linguistic and cultural differences which forced the Americans to rely on ROK and Nationalist Chinese personnel, the tradition of nonintervention in internal POW affairs which was enshrined in the Geneva Convention, and a failure to appreciate, at least initially, the extent to which the Chinese and Koreans would contest control of the POWs themselves.

Communist Prisoner of War Administration

UN personnel who were captured were initially in the custody of the North Koreans. The North Korean POW Command was supervised by officers of the Soviet MVD and POW administration followed Soviet principles whose essential features were forced labour, intelligence extraction and political indoctrination. The North Koreans routinely used torture and violence against prisoners and there are a number of well-documented cases of American and South Korean soldiers being executed en masse after capture. Many of those who were captured in the early months of the war were already sick or wounded and the treatment they received resulted in the deaths of large numbers, although most died of

disease or neglect: the deaths of only two British prisoners, for example, can be ascribed definitely to torture. For propaganda purposes the North Koreans set up the Peace Fighters School and recruited for it by offering the alternative of death by neglect in the Bean Camp or Kangdong Caves complex. In fact the Peace Fighters School proved a relative failure: only about sixty prisoners took an active part, and although they were used in the spring of 1951 to stage a 'mass' rally denouncing the UN and demanding peace on Communist terms the Chinese closed the school down after assuming responsibility for all POW affairs on their side by November 1951.⁶

The majority of United Nations POWs, some 63 per cent, were captured in the first six months of the war, the vast majority, or 92 per cent, in the first twelve months.⁷ The enemy camp system along the Yalu was only set up between March-June 1951, and most prisoners were gradually moved to these camps at the cost of many lives. As a British report on the subject noted, 'this transit period, during which the PW were evacuated on foot, was undoubtedly the worst period of captivity, and the march to the Yalu River was a struggle for survival. A significant number of PW perished from neglect and lack of medical attention during this time'.⁸ In the process of evacuating prisoners northwards the Chinese left stragglers, the sick and wounded in transit camps run by the North Koreans, thus increasing the death rate among the prisoners.

Chinese behaviour towards POWs was based on the so-called 'Lenient Policy', which had worked well with captured Nationalist soldiers during the Civil War and with some Japanese captured at the end of hostilities in 1945. Upon capture, prisoners were informed that they were war criminals because they had taken part in an unjust war of aggression against Korea. As such they could be executed, but their captors regarded them as misguided rather than merely criminal, and they would be shown leniency and given an opportunity to learn the truth. If they did so they were regarded as 'progressive', which implied cooperation with Chinese propaganda efforts and brought with it an amelioration of conditions. If they did not they were 'reactionary', putting themselves outside the provisions of the Lenient Policy with whatever consequences might then befall them.

The majority of prisoners were neither heroes nor villains; neither 'progressives' cooperating with the enemy nor 'reactionaries' actively resisting them at the potential cost of their lives. One American study claimed, on the basis of analysing 579 US repatriates, that despite the untenable position in which they were often placed only about 15 per cent of prisoners collaborated with the enemy.⁹ Biderman's careful study notes that the US Department of Defense itself regarded only 13 per cent of repatriates as deserving further investigation of their behaviour upon their return to the United States.¹⁰ A British report on their own repatriates concluded likewise that approximately 12 per cent of British prisoners 'cooperated actively with the Chinese, both militarily and politically', although it noted another 17 per cent who 'cooperated to a minor degree in the production of propaganda'.¹¹ Attempts at mass compulsory indoctrination failed, and were met with sufficient resistance on the part of prisoners that they were abandoned, while the officers, NCOs and other 'reactionaries' were screened and held in separate camps from the other ranks. There was a clear hierarchy of camps: Camp 5, essentially a training centre for 'progressives', had the best amenities while parts of Camp 2, which in March 1953 held 371 officers and NCOs, was little better than a penal camp.¹²

This screening process was a mark of the failure of the Lenient Policy, whose leniency was relative in any case. Basically, the Chinese worked on those who had shown themselves in some way amenable to persuasion or threats, or who they felt had particular military knowledge to impart. Aviators especially fell into this latter category. The Chinese required newly-captured prisoners to fill in questionnaires or write an autobiography which they then used to select likely targets for further interrogation and which also provided information, however inadvertent, for use against other prisoners. A network of informers, either 'progressives' or the self-interested who merely looked to better their lot through low-level cooperation with their captors, helped to break down group cohesion amongst the prisoners. Continued non-cooperation, characterised as the maintenance of a 'hostile attitude', could lead to physical duress, often of an extremely unpleasant kind. As a recent study of

psychological warfare in Korea has concluded, 'a tough but non-confrontational attitude was the most successful course. [The former prisoners interviewed] agreed that this took a lot of guts'.¹³ The circumstances of captivity in the far north of Korea in the middle of a non-Caucasian nation explains as well why, despite quite a number of attempts, there were no successful escapes from Chinese or North Korean camps, a fact of which much was to be made after the cease-fire. (Generally overlooked in this 'debate' were the 647 Army personnel who were listed as 'returned to military control—escaper', or the air force personnel who successfully evaded capture, as they had been trained to do.¹⁴)

Postwar responses to UNC Prisoners of War

Well before the end of hostilities the British and American governments expressed concern over the fate of men known or believed to have been taken prisoner, and over their alleged behaviour while in captivity. As early as August 1951 the British chiefs of staff stipulated that in handling returning personnel 'the intelligence requirement of interrogation should be given priority over repatriation to the United Kingdom'.¹⁵ Although they were forced to give way,¹⁶ preparations were made nonetheless to interview all returning POWs with a view to gathering details of conduct while imprisoned, evidence for use in possible war crimes procedures against individual North Korean and Chinese personnel, and information of intelligence value. There was some suggestion in 1952, in response to various Chinese-inspired 'peace offensives' utilising POWs, that counter-indoctrination would be required. In a display of balanced good sense the Adjutant General, General Sir John Crocker, noted instead that it would be 'not only thoroughly objectionable but unnecessary to treat them in the bulk as suspects. There must be no prolonged segregation or blatant attempts at "counter-indoctrination" or application of psycho-analyst processes'.¹⁷ Tabs were kept on those men who lent their names to petitions or made broadcasts on behalf of their captors, and whilst military intelligence recognised that a large proportion of men—as high as 40 per cent—'may have been penetrated in some degree or other by Communism', the number of truly hardcore collaborators was consistently very much lower, reckoned in March 1953 at less than 7 per cent.¹⁸ Returning prisoners suspected of misconduct were not charged, since most had already been discharged, and the intelligence debriefers devoted most of their efforts to accounting for men known to have been captured but who had not been repatriated.

Initially, the response within the United States military was focussed on exploiting the sufferings of American POWs in the propaganda war which accompanied and followed the ceasefire. The US Army was concerned to explain to the American public why the number of those returned by the enemy was well below the number listed as missing in action, and to nullify the impact of the twenty-one who had refused repatriation and opted to stay with their Chinese captors.¹⁹ Few concerns were expressed over susceptibility to Communist indoctrination: 'few US prisoners of war ... returned as Communists or Communist sympathisers', asserted the Army.²⁰

Any illusions about any justification for the Communist cause resulting from defection, acceptance of Communist ideology, or collaboration with their captors on the part of a few US prisoners of war must be destroyed ... The American public ... must be accurately informed about the brutal, cold blooded character of their enemy.

The concern over missing personnel was real. The Chinese media had announced that at least one group of aviators would be held back and tried for 'war crimes', and a group of a dozen who had allegedly been shot down over Manchuria were detained for over a year after the ceasefire; one of them, a Canadian airman accompanying a US Air Force mission as an observer, was only identified by name by the Chinese when the delegation at the Geneva conference was asked directly by a Canadian diplomat.²¹ In the chaotic fighting of the early weeks of the war, thousands of US soldiers had become casualties and many of these were unaccounted for: on 1 July 1953 US authorities still carried 11,706 personnel as missing in action. Through the return of men in enemy captivity and the careful piecing together of evidence this number was progressively reduced, but at the exchange of lists of missing personnel in May 1954 the Americans still listed 944 men as missing in action, the South Koreans sought details on a further 2410, with an additional fifty-one other UN personnel also unaccounted for.²²

With the report of the US Secretary of Defense's Advisory Committee on Prisoners of War in 1955, a certain ambivalence had crept in to official views. In one breath the report judged the performance of Korean War POWs as 'fine indeed ... they cannot be found wanting'; in another, it concluded that 'the Korean story must never be permitted to happen again'. A US Army pamphlet on POW conduct, issued the following year, warned that the Lenient Policy had resulted in almost no active resistance to enemy indoctrination, but several pages later declared that the large majority of American prisoners 'resisted the enemy in the highest tradition of the service and our country'.²³

The widespread view that large numbers of US personnel had collaborated with the enemy, giving rise to the notion of the 'Manchurian candidate', was propagated in the second half of the 1950s principally through the writings of two Americans: an Army psychiatrist, Lieutenant Colonel William C Meyer, and a journalist, Eugene Kinkead.²⁴ Their writings need to be seen in the context of post-McCarthyite American domestic politics and Cold War concerns, but they had an impact on writers as diverse as Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), and Edgar Friedenberg, the child psychologist, in *The Vanishing Adolescent* (1963), as well as on a number of the still widely-cited general histories of the war by Robert Leckie, TR Fehrenbach, and Harry Middleton. Their claims were refuted in devastating fashion by careful clinical and historical work, often funded by the services themselves, of which Biderman's is the best. But Biderman's book sold only 6000 copies and is hardly known outside a research audience, while most of the rest of the careful studies of Korean POWs were published as government reports or, in the British case, remain classified. The detractors have therefore largely had the field to themselves.

The accusatory case maintained that Korea marked a frightening change in the effectiveness of the American armed forces and, by extension, in American society generally. Here, Kinkead claimed, was 'something new in history' (American history anyway); thousands of American soldiers had collaborated with the enemy against their own country and had abandoned their comrades in such a manner that the death rate among POWs allegedly stood at 38 per cent. There had been no escapes. 'Sinister and regrettable things happened in the prison camps of North Korea',²⁵ but these could not be ascribed to widespread maltreatment or 'brainwashing', whatever that might be understood to mean. The explanation must therefore be more complex, and more sinister. Kinkead's indictment was levelled especially at the Army, and unfavourable comparisons were drawn with both the US Marine Corps and with certain foreign contingents, especially the Turks and the British Commonwealth forces.

The case mounted against the POWs can be refuted on three grounds: it is bad history; its methodology when dealing with the American experience is sloppy; and the comparison with the other contingents is poorly grounded in evidence. Let us look at each in turn.

The notion that American soldiers in the Korean War lacked something possessed by all earlier generations—the 'something new in history'—will not stand even cursory scrutiny. Washington regularly complained of the 'want of virtue' in many of his command, while Tom Paine coined the famous phrase about 'sunshine patriots' in the process. During the Civil War, 6000 'galvanised Yankees', former Confederate soldiers, switched sides and enlisted in the Union Army, while US soldiers died routinely in the appalling conditions at Andersonville from lack of the will to continue. While POW behaviour in the Second World War was generally excellent in the face of extreme circumstances such as those during the Bataan death march or in some of the worst Japanese prison camps, some US servicemen acted selfishly, occasionally criminally (the central theme of James Clavell's novel *King Rat* [1964]). And very few escaped (less than a dozen of the 25-30,000 held in the Pacific theatre).²⁶ What American POWs faced in Korea which was new, at least for Americans in the twentieth century, was a concerted attempt by their captors to influence them on ideological grounds.

Kinkead's ability to deal properly with the data on the Korean POWs inspires no more confidence than does his treatment of American military history. Two issues deserve comment: death rates among prisoners, and charges of collaboration and misbehaviour.

Kinhead asserted that '38 per cent of [prisoners]—2730 out of a total of 7190—died in captivity', a higher prisoner death rate than in any other American war.²⁷ The inference, furthermore, is that it was the fault of the prisoners themselves that the death rate was so high, as if the actions of their North Korean and Chinese captors had no influence on the outcome. There are several things to be said about this. The first is Kinhead's presumption that all men who were declared missing presumed dead had at one stage been prisoners. He asserts the total for US personnel captured as 7190. Only 3326 Army personnel were repatriated. The Army was able to document 1036 deaths due directly to enemy atrocities and a further 2481 whose fate was never clearly determined; on top that is the 2634 who were known with certainty to have died while POWs and a further 244 who were known to have been prisoners but whose death was presumed rather than established. For all the American services the presumption of death was made for 4735 individuals under the Missing Persons Act. The point of all this is that precise figures on numbers captured and missing, causes of death and proportions thereof are difficult to arrive at, and certainly lack the air of precision with which Kinhead treated them.

The emphasis on death rates obscured the timing of deaths among prisoners, which is important to understanding the factors leading to high mortality rates. As noted already, the great majority of UN POWs were captured in the early months of the war. It should come as no surprise to find that the majority of deaths among prisoners occurred in the same period, nor that in the majority of cases these were the result of enemy action or enemy neglect. Between June and October 1950, 575 died of 1037 captured; between November 1950 and February 1951, 1896 out of 4139; from March to June, 165 out of 975. For the whole of the rest of the war, only twenty-four prisoners died of the 503 taken prisoner. In other words, of 5176 US soldiers taken prisoner in the first eight months 2471 did not survive their initial period of incarceration, something close to half the total.

Again, far from being a new phenomenon, high mortality rates among American POWs had occurred as recently as the Pacific War, although once again extreme precision on the figures eludes us. One source suggests that of 24,943 Americans captured by the Japanese, 8634, or 34.5 per cent, died in captivity. Another gives figures of 26943 and 10031 respectively, or 35.2 per cent. The point is of course that in the face of brutality and neglect on the part of their captors large numbers of prisoners will inevitably die. In the only mass prisoner experience confronting Australians, again as prisoners of the Japanese, 14345 were recovered at the end of the war while 8031 died in captivity, once again more than a third of the total. And however disgracefully some individuals behaved, and several repatriated US POWs were prosecuted for murder on their return, nothing in the Korean experience came close to the depravity which attended the Bataan death march.

Three groups were singled out for praise by Kinhead, as a contrast to the alleged behaviour of Army and Air Force prisoners: the US Marines, the Turks, and the British. As with so much else, Kinhead's use of Marine Corps statistics is sloppy. He fails to note the differing proportion of Marines captured in relatively more benign periods of the war compared to Army POWs; he fails to note the differences between the all volunteer Corps and the less elite Army units; and he entirely misses the fact that whereas the Army conducted post-release investigations of 11 per cent of repatriates, the Marine Corps felt that investigations were warranted in 26 per cent of cases. Furthermore, only fourteen cases went to trial, all Army, from which just eleven convictions resulted.²⁸

The Turks, again, were volunteers, while half of those captured were taken during or after April 1951, when the worst conditions of incarceration had largely passed. Contrary to myth, some did collaborate to the extent that they were associated with Chinese propaganda materials, but the language barrier made Chinese attempts to influence the Turks considerably more difficult. The Turks were good soldiers and they performed well in general when taken prisoner, but they are scarcely a good comparison with the mass of US POWs.

Which brings us to the British, about whom Kinhead, curiously, has virtually nothing to say. In some respects they provide a much better comparative group than either of his other 'controls': they were not an elite group (although containing some members of elite units and

some, especially officers, with above average training and experience), they numbered amongst them conscripts and recalled reservists, and the pattern of capture conformed in some respects to that of the US Army.

Although internally the British authorities expressed some concern over the implications of prisoner behaviour, as we have seen, in the final analysis they regarded the performance of British POWs as neither especially good nor especially bad overall. The official public report released in 1955 concluded that in the circumstances the majority of prisoners behaved well, and that many of the 'lapses' were entirely understandable given the alternatives. The officers and NCOs, who made up about 12 per cent of the total, were entirely unaffected by Chinese attempts at indoctrination, and many of them were singled out by the Chinese for special treatment because of their 'reactionary' attitudes; that some of them survived their ordeal is little short of remarkable.

The British experience mirrored the American in various ways. Groups of men were captured early in the war, with predictable results. An officer of the 8th Hussars later wrote of one group of soldiers taken prisoner from his regiment that of those 'who were captured in January 1951 no officers survived ... Conditions were extremely poor at this time and the POWs were living under extremely hard conditions'.²⁹ Most of those British POWs who died in captivity died in this early period. The largest single group of British prisoners were those members of the 1st Battalion, the Gloucestershire Regiment, taken at the Battle of the Imjin in April 1951, when the unit was practically wiped out. Like the Americans, the British were a varied group; in particular, among the early POWs there were quite a number of reservists recalled to the Army in mid-late 1950 to fill units hurriedly despatched for active service. On the one hand, this meant that infantry battalions were able to function in the field with a minimum of retraining, since they contained many old soldiers. On the other, some at least of these men had cause to resent their return to service. The interrogation briefing compiled on one collaborator noted that he was 'a perfect target for indoctrination being very dissatisfied with his lot. As a reservist he was taken away from his civilian job, and yet he had completed his two years and two months before he was captured'.³⁰ Other testimony points to the steadying influence of these older men, and in one case especially, that of a British soldier who had been a prisoner of the Japanese and had been held in the same area during the Pacific War, of their practical utility in helping their fellows to adapt to their changed circumstances. In the first, small-scale exchange of prisoners, dubbed LITTLE SWITCH, eleven British soldiers received adverse gradings: all but two were recalled reservists, and all but three had been captured in January 1951, during the period of highest death rates among prisoners.³¹

One factor in the British group, absent among the Americans, which might have predisposed men to collaboration was peacetime leftist political affiliation. Unbeknown to the British Army, a small proportion of those serving in Korea, and of those captured, were members of the Communist Party or associated groupings in civil life. At least six of those who received the most adverse security reports upon release turned out to have been pre-Korean War members of the Communist Party of Great Britain; several of the younger men were members of the Communist Youth League while another, a lance corporal in the 8th Hussars, had a mother who was a Party member. For others still, raised in the industrial Midlands, or the Clyde, or on the coalfields, peacetime politics, while not necessarily Communist, was frequently left-wing Labour. Several of those who were or had been Communists collaborated most blatantly with the enemy, and a couple even assisted the Chinese in interrogating their fellow prisoners. But it was not invariably so. One veteran of the International Brigades in Spain developed a marked antipathy towards the Chinese because of their treatment of Korean civilians, and refused to cooperate. Another, a member of the Party of long-standing and compromised by his actions, was nonetheless described by his debriefing officer (who can have had no sympathy at all with him) as being 'respected as a man by many PW who are opposed to his views. There is no suggestion that he has acted as an informer and there is good evidence that he has saved lives'.³² There is no distinct pattern of collaboration or resistance among British other ranks when analysed by regiment, or by age, or by occupation.

Behaviour and mortality among POWs then had everything to do with the environment in which they were held and the treatment which they received, and nothing to do with an alleged 'softness' in postwar American society. The allegations levelled against them were a product of Cold War stresses in American domestic politics. Britain, where such pressures were much less pronounced and with a quite different political culture, felt no requirement to indulge in witch hunts among repatriated POWs. The dangers, and injustices, of doing so are well demonstrated by the case of Colonel Frank H Schwable.

Schwable was a Marine aviator, the senior Marine Corps officer captured during the war and the second highest ranking American taken prisoner. Shot down in July 1952, he spent almost the whole of his imprisonment in solitary confinement where he was given special attention by his captors, who knew of his rank and responsibilities as chief of staff of the 1st Marine Air Wing. What his captors did not know was that on an earlier assignment he had been a nuclear war planner and possessed detailed knowledge of American plans in the eventuality of nuclear war with the Soviet Union, something which he was concerned the Chinese should not divine during interrogation. He therefore 'confessed' to participation in germ warfare, at that stage the main item on the Chinese propaganda agenda, believing, rightly as it turned out, that having given the Chinese what they wanted they would ease the pressure on him. He returned to the United States to find himself under investigation for criminal collaboration with the enemy, and although no prosecution was attempted (the Uniform Code of Military Justice did not consider giving false information to the enemy to be an offence), he was shuffled off to meaningless jobs thereafter, his career ended by a Marine Corps hierarchy concerned with its image.³³ Schwable's entirely bogus confession is still used by apologists for North Korea as 'evidence' that the United States waged germ warfare in Korea.³⁴

Aftermath

One consequence of the Korean War experience was the promulgation of Codes of Conduct within the US and other Western militaries, designed to make it explicitly clear to soldiers what their responsibilities were in the event of their being captured. Name, rank, number and date of birth were to be given, and nothing else, and men were enjoined to escape at the earliest opportunity: 'It is the duty of every soldier to attempt to escape', stated a US Army pamphlet, and he was 'never relieved of this responsibility'.³⁵ At the same time there was a recognition that many soldiers had been unprepared for captivity and had received no training in evasion and escape techniques, and these were instituted on a wider basis than before. In an attempt to counteract some of the effects of Chinese propaganda in Korea, US servicemen were reminded that 'even as a prisoner of war he continues to remain of special concern to the United States; he will not be forgotten'. The Troop Information program was revived and shaped specifically to reinforce what Eisenhower described in September 1953 as 'the fundamental values of America and why they are fighting'.³⁶ This was followed in 1956 by the 'Militant Liberty' program, originating in the office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Arthur W Radford. Not everyone was sold on these programs. One senior Marine Corps officer who had debriefed returning Marine POWs in 1953 thought that what was needed was 'professional competence'.³⁷ Vietnam was to provide a test of these measures.

The use and abuse of prisoners of war for ideological purposes exposed some of the shortcomings of the Geneva Convention in that its enforcement relied, as it had always done, on the compliance of belligerents if its protection was to be extended to POWs. In the circumstances of the early Cold War period there was clearly some ambivalence in Western capitals over the appropriateness of some of the Convention's provisions—involuntary repatriation being a case in point. In February 1953 the president of the International Committee of the Red Cross, M Paul Ruegger, wrote to the British government suggesting that the 1949 Convention be revised to prohibit propagandising by the detaining power among prisoners in its hands, a direct response to events in Korea. The Foreign Office thought it 'too difficult' so close to the events concerned, and in any case believed it desirable to be able to 'instruct' prisoners along lines used successfully with German POWs during the Second World War. 'What is objectionable', minuted RH Scott of the Foreign Office,

is that prisoners should be forced to attend political lectures and the like, and of course it is still more objectionable that (for example) their rations or amenities should be made to depend on proficiency in the subjects taught. The safeguard lies not so much in international conventions forbidding 'indoctrination' but in establishing the right of access for impartial bodies like the International Red Cross.³⁸

The State Department had first suggested exactly this in July 1950, and the ICRC made a number of unsuccessful attempts to get a representative into North Korea in 1950- 51.³⁹ The failure of those attempts and, let it be said clearly, the refusal of the Chinese and North Koreans to abide by declarations which they themselves had issued, made the fate of those men held in the enemy POW compounds a doubly tragic one.

Endnotes

1. Albert D Biderman, *March To Calumny: The Story of American POWs in the Korean War* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 1.
2. There are several analyses of UNC POW administration and Communist POW behaviour. The most thorough is William C Bradbury, Samuel M Meyers and Albert D Biderman, *Mass Behavior in Battle and Captivity: The Communist Soldier in the Korean War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 209-340. See also Callum MacDonald, *Korea: The War Before Vietnam* (London: Macmillan, 1986), 249-64.
3. The Americans were also under some pressure from their allies, especially Britain, to see that the provisions of the Geneva Convention were extended to captured enemy personnel. Army Council memorandum PWCC/P(50)3, 25 August 1950, WO32/14118, Public Record Office, London (hereinafter PRO).
4. Bradbury et al, *Mass Behavior*, 218.
5. A draft JCS directive to MacArthur made it clear that 'the treatment of POWs shall be directed towards their exploitation, training and use for psychological warfare purposes, [and] you should set up on a pilot-plant scale interrogation, indoctrination and training centers for those POWs now in your hands in Korea'. The directive was based on the contents of NSC 81/1 of 9 September 1950: *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1950*, vol VII: Korea (Washington, DC: USGPO, 1976), 782.
6. Ministry of Defence, *Treatment of British Prisoners of War in Korea* (London: HMSO, 1955), 11-15.
7. Biderman, *March to Calumny*, 113.
8. 'Communist treatment of British prisoners of war in Korea'. Paper prepared by AI9, Air Ministry, nd [1954], CRS A816, 54/301/357, National Archives of Australia (hereinafter NAA).
9. Julius Segal, 'Correlations of Collaboration and Resistance Behavior Among US Army POWs in Korea', *Journal of Social Issues* 13:3 (1957), 31-40.
10. Biderman, *March to Calumny*, 30.
11. 'Communist treatment of British prisoners of war in Korea', 10.
12. Minute, British Repatriated PW Interrogation Unit, Tokyo to Under Secretary of State for Air, 20 November 1952; minute. BRPWIU to Air Ministry, 10 March 1953, CRS A2152, KB1073-6G, NAA.
13. Stephen E Pease, *Psywar: Psychological Warfare in Korea 1950-1953* (Hamburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1992), 154.
14. Biderman, *March to Calumny*, 88-89.
15. Army Council letter 0103/8697 (MI1), 28 December 1951, WO32/14555, PRO.
16. Army Council letter 0103/8697 (MI1), 18 June 1953, WO32/14555, PRO.
17. Letter, Crocker to Brigadier RH Batten, HQ, BCFK, 8 January 1952, WO32/14555, PRO.
18. Minute, MI1 to AG3(B), 24 March 1953, WO32/1455; minute. Cunningham, A19 to Newling, Ministry of Defence, 10 March 1955, DEFE7/1807, PRO.
19. This group was the subject of a number of accounts and analyses after the war. See Virginia Pasley, *22 Stayed* (London: WH Allen, 1955); Harold Lavine, *21 GIs Who Chose Tyranny: Why They Left Us For Communism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969); Adam J Zweiback, 'The 21 "Turncoat GIs": The Political Culture of the Korean War', *The Historian* 60 (Winter 1998).
20. United States Department of the Army, 'Plan for Exploiting Communist Mistreatment of US Prisoners of War', nd [late 1953], National Archives and Record Service, copy in the author's possession.
21. See correspondence concerning Squadron Leader AR Mackenzie, RCAF, shot down 5 December 1952, F0371/110629, PRO.
22. F0371/110629, PRO.
23. Cited in HH Wubben, 'American Prisoners of War in Korea: A Second Look at the "Something New in History" Theme', *American Quarterly* XXII:1 (Spring 1970), 2.
24. Eugene Kinkead, *In Every War But One* (New York: Norton, 1959), published in Britain under the even more damning title, *Why They Collaborated* (London: Longmans, 1960); Mayer's writings and speeches are more diverse, but one scholar notes that over 500,000 copies of his speeches and 100,000 copies of his taped speeches had been disseminated by the late 1960s. Wubben, 'American Prisoners of War in Korea', n 5.
25. Kinkead, *In Every War But One*, 17. The synopsis of his case is set out in the first chapter of his book, 15-25.
26. Peter Karsten, 'The American Democratic Citizen Soldier: Triumph or Disaster', *Military Affairs* XXX:1 (Spring 1966), 34-40, summarises the arguments well.
27. Kinkead, *In Every War But One*, 17.
28. Wubben, 'American Prisoners of War in Korea', 14.
29. Personal account, Meade papers, NAM 8009-79, part 2, 5, National Army Museum, London.
30. Interrogation report on Rifleman M, Royal Ulster Rifles, CRS A2152, KB1073-11G, NAA.
31. Analysis based on interrogation reports of LITTLE SWITCH repatriates, CRS A2151, K B 1073-11G, part 1, NAA.
32. Interrogation report on Trooper C, 8th Hussars, CRS A2151, 1073-11G, part 1, NAA.
33. This episode is discussed in Allen R Millett, *In Many A Strife: General Gerald C Thomas and the US Marine Corps 1917-1956* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1993), 325-26.
34. Gavan McCormack, *Cold War Hot War: An Australian Perspective on the Korean War* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1983), 148-49.

35. Department of the Army, *FM21-77: Evasion and Escape*, November 1965, 64. See also 'Conduct of Prisoners of War', statement by the Minister for Defence tabled in the House of Representatives, 16 February 1956, CRS A1945/T1, 48/2/3, NAA.
36. Thomas A Palmer, 'Why We Fight: A Study of Indoctrination Activities in the Armed Forces', in Peter Karsten, ed, *The Military in America: From the Colonial Era to the Present* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), 381-94.
37. Robert B Asprey, 'The Soldier and the Prisoner', *Marine Corps Gazette* 49:5 (May 1965), 41. The officer quoted was Lieutenant Colonel J Angus MacDonald, who wrote an important study of Marine Corps POWs, 'The Problems of US Prisoners of War in Korea', MA thesis, University of Maryland, 1961.
38. Minute, RH Scott, 8 April 1953, FO371/105585, PRO.
39. Cable, Gascoigne, Tokyo, to Younger, Foreign Office, 26 July 1950, in HJ Yasamee and KA Hamilton, eds, *Documents on British Policy Overseas*, Series II, Vol IV: *Korea 1950-1951* (London: HMSO, 1991), 83; 'Prisoner of War Conduct after Capture', Chiefs of Staff Committee minute Misc/M(55)118, 28 October 1955, DEFE7/1808, PRO.