The new military history: General Jonathan M. Wainwright and his experiences as a prisoner of the Japanese during World War II

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The New Military History: General Jonathan M. Wainwright and His Experiences as a Prisoner of the Japanese during World War II

by

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GENERAL JONATHAN M. WAINWRIGHT, Commanding United States Army Forces in the Philippines from 12 March to 7 May 1942, distinguished himself by intrepid and determined leadership against greatly superior enemy forces. At the repeated risk of life above and beyond the call of duty in his position, he frequented the firing line of his troops where his presence provided the example and incentive that helped make the gallant efforts of these men possible. The final stand on beleaguered Corregidor, for which he was in an important measure personally responsible, commanded the admiration of the Nation's allies. It reflected the high morale of American arms in the face of overwhelming odds. His courage and resolution were a vitally needed inspiration to the then sorely pressed freedom-loving peoples of the world.

- Harry S. Truman
(Citation read in presenting the Medal of Honor to General Wainwright on 10 September 1945)

INTRODUCTION

This thesis applies the principles of the “new military history” to the experiences of General Jonathan Wainwright from his surrender to the Japanese on Corregidor on May 6, 1942, until his liberation by the Russian Red Army three years, three months, and eighteen days later. At its core, the basics of this “new” historical methodology are seductively simple and direct. It is an effort to capture in research and writing the multiple layers of events, people, places and cultures to present a greatly enhanced, and more genuine, interpretation of the past.

Using this approach, a study of Wainwright will prove to be both provocative and fruitful because he was the highest-ranking American prisoner of war during the Second World War. In addition to the available scholarship, it will draw from Wainwright's diary he kept for the duration of his captivity, and his post-war memoirs. Wainwright's
accounts are compared with, and largely corroborated by, other prisoner of war diaries and memoirs.

The “new” military history, or the history of warfare, as Peter Paret suggests in his essay “The History of War and the New Military History,” should not be a paradigm defined and confined by a strict set of orthodoxies and rules. Rather, the new multifaceted methodology recounts war as something relevant to, for example, society, culture, or politics. Paret argues for a distancing from the operational histories that are too “utilitarian” and overly focused on numbers and tactics. Therefore, military history transcends descriptions, statistics of battles and chronological analysis. It incorporates the human element by investigating themes such as the social and cultural effects of war, or the interactions of soldiers among themselves or with a citizenry. The past is often viewed as a “foreign country;” thus the mechanical translations of operational history do not suffice. Moreover, this emerging model for historical writing is stylistically and substantively flexible, and open to shades of military history, with all its variety and nuance. In other words, military history takes on many different meanings and perspectives so as to avoid rigidity and superficial limitations. Form no longer dictates substance and both the author and reader benefit from greater historical depth than previously contemplated by conventional “rules.”

2 Ibid, 220.
This fresh and flexible approach to historical research and analysis seems especially appropriate for the subject of prisoners of war. As this study reflects, the experiences of prisoners cannot be readily generalized. Although international law prescribed proper treatment of POWs, major breaches by signatories, especially Japan in World War II, abounded.

Jeremy Black contends that today’s military history provides a forum for the study of “war and society,” and the “face of battle.” This modern theme, applied to the treatment of Allied prisoners of the Japanese, resonates clearly today. He adds, “An emphasis on culture offers a more relativist mode of explanation in military history – by comparing the strategic and organizational cultures of competing states and their militaries, rather than by measuring them against an absolute or universal scale of technological capacity or proficiency.”

These shifts in the current of military history open new dimensions, and attribute to the expansion of and added interest in the study of the history of warfare.

Black acknowledges that the “norms” of war are ever changing, and the reactions to these changes “are culturally constructed, both in terms of societies as a whole and with regard to particular militaries or, indeed, even units.” One such norm that can be applied to Black’s definition is that of prisoners of war. The status of a prisoner of war is hardly novel. Throughout history, victorious armies have laid claim to the vanquished as

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spoils of battle. However, expanding the American Civil War beginnings of the Lieber Code (1863) with the Hague Conventions (1907) and the Geneva Conventions (1929), nations came to codify certain basic rights of the prisoner of war, and his subsequent treatment was to be guaranteed by specific provisions of international law. The four post-World War II Geneva Conventions of 1949 provided even more detailed protections to prisoners of war and other protected categories of persons. Thus, that body of international law protecting the victims of war can be characterized as an "institution," codified by international law. As Paret writes, "The New Military History stands for an effort to integrate the study of military institutions and their actions more closely with other kinds of history." 5

While not explicit, Black’s theory of the reaction to changing norms is very much akin to the central theme of this thesis: that the experiences of American prisoners of war during World War II reflect the cultures of both captor and captive, even more than either side’s perception of what international law and customs required. By isolating prisoner of war experiences as a laboratory for study, a much better understanding of a certain state’s culture emerges. A country’s adherence to, or its defiance of, international laws in war can mirror cultural attitudes. Furthermore, a careful examination of prisoner of war experiences can also reveal the cultural tendencies of the captives.

5 Paret, 220.
At the same time, a study of prisoners of war reflects both Paret and Black's propositions that new military history is somewhat distant in time and perspective from the battlefield. It injects the narrative with a human element so as to establish new connections with the audience. Therefore the "faces" of war, or the soldiers themselves, become the unit of analysis as opposed to methodical recounting of the tactics and statistics that comprised the "old" military histories.

A scholarly investigation that focuses on an historical figure like Wainwright would perhaps be unsettling to Paret, as he advocates a distancing from the "great" military figures of history. However, much would be lost if historical inquiry completely neglects those responsible for making the important strategic decisions, and those who, by their leadership status, influence the action and people around them. Wainwright, for example, first led an intrepid and beleaguered defending force against an insurmountable enemy, and then presided over the largest surrender ever of United States forces. Additionally, for the larger purpose of this thesis, the interactions and attitudes of General Wainwright and his Japanese captors will provide greater understanding of each side, and ultimately, World War II.

My thesis will begin with a discussion of the "culture of leadership" in the prewar United States Army. Professor Michael Norman describes the Army's pre-war leaders as "weak and unprofessional. [They] prized manners more than training, class more than

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6 *Ibid*, 220.
performance. And on Bataan, these failures led to the single worst defeat in American military history. Norman adds, "There is nothing like the experience of war to teach the lessons of preparedness." By 1928, most of the junior officers of World War I had left the service, and with their departure the Army’s institutional memory, the "first-hand" lessons of war, was lost. The thesis will then follow with a brief recount of the battle for Corregidor and Bataan, for which Wainwright received a Congressional Medal of Honor.

The following section will constitute the majority of my investigation. Drawing heavily from Wainwright's diary and memoirs, the thesis will answer and discuss the following questions: What liberties was Wainwright allowed? Did his Japanese captors honor the protections for prisoners of war, as set forth in the Geneva Convention of 1929? If given free time, how did he spend it? Were holidays and other religious rites celebrated? How? In addition to the actual time spent as prisoner, the thesis will expand the discussion into the postwar period. How did being a prominent prisoner of war affect his career (and life) afterwards? And, more importantly, how was Wainwright able to return to a life of relative normalcy when so many of his fellow prisoners went jobless, became depressed, or succumbed to alcoholism?

8 Ibid.
Additionally, the thesis will examine the correlation between Wainwright’s captivity experiences and the war itself. In other words, do the diary entries indicate what is happening beyond the walls of the prison? In order to determine this, I will have to make “imbedded interpretations” from perceived changes in his captors’ attitudes and behaviors.

A final section will briefly contrast the Wainwright experience and that of Japanese captives generally with the overall experience of Americans captured by German forces in the European Theater of Operations. By its very nature, applicable international law was the same in both theaters. Yet, the overall POW experiences were startlingly and horrifically different.

The experiences of Wainwright and the thousands of imprisoned American and Allied soldiers alike were indeed unimaginably violent and brutal in the Far East. In fact, twenty-seven percent of the captured perished under Japanese guard—seven times greater than the rate of Allied prisoners held by Germany.\(^9\) Had the war continued beyond August of 1945, it is more than likely that all or nearly all of the remaining prisoners would have died. Despite his rank, Wainwright was not immune to “privations and beatings and constant, gnawing hunger.”\(^10\) Through his experiences on Bataan and

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\(^9\) Brian MacArthur, *Surviving the Sword: Prisoners of the Japanese in the Far East, 1942-45* (New York: Random House, 2005), xxvi. This figure can be compared to the four percent death rate of the prisoners under the Germans.

Corregidor, and as a prisoner of the Japanese, Wainwright left behind an inspirational legacy. Moreover, perhaps it is due to the tales of bravery of leaders like Wainwright that today’s Army officers are trained to be professionals, who have a job to do, and use modern methods to measure their outcomes and effectiveness.

The comparison with American and Allied prisoners in Europe is instructive given the much lower mortality rate during captivity. The captivity was hardly luxurious, but there was a substantial effort to comply with Geneva standards. For example, as a young serviceman, Nicholas D.B. Katzenbach, studied law in a German POW camp, and later became Attorney General of the United States. No such similar experience, to my knowledge, exists among former prisoners of the Japanese. This special and unique anecdote can help serve to interpret and distinguish the overall experiences in both theaters of operation.
I.

General Wainwright’s career was fashioned in World War I and during the years leading to World War II. At that time, especially in the 1930s and before Pearl Harbor, there existed in the United States Army “a culture of leadership” that isolated itself from the ultimate mission of warriors and wars. Professor Michael Norman summarizes the problem: “The pre-war Army officers corps conducted themselves and their business like a caste, a privileged caste of overseers. They were big on manners, protocol, deportment, and social courtesy, and very short on training and study, what we think of today as the duties and responsibilities of officers: to wit, the modern officer puts his men first.” 11

Brian McAllister Linn’s Guardians of the Empire: the U.S. Army and the Pacific, 1902-1940 reveals a “not-on-my-shift careerism” that permeated Army leadership. 12 In sum, the “old” Army lived by the bromide, “Rank has its privileges.”

The aftermath of the war in the Philippines between 1899 and 1902 required the development and continued presence of a Pacific-based force whose mission was the preservation of the imperial conquests. Linn writes, “Some officers rose to the challenge, but many a grizzled veteran of the ‘Old Army,’ already weakened by the ravages of Cuba, proved incapable of adjusting to the demands of war.” 13 Lieutenant George W. Van Deusen perhaps best characterized the belief of the Old Army in one sentence: “It is

11 Michael Norman, email message to author, January 22, 2009.


13 Ibid, 15.
contrary to all the principles of our government to engage in foreign wars.”

The varying, and often contrasting, understandings of the Army’s purpose fostered “strains and animosities among officers created by service in the Philippines [that] would contribute greatly to factionalism and divisions within the new imperial army.”

Additionally, Linn addresses the importance of social convention within the class of Army officers: “The Pacific Army was a spit-and-polish outfit whose officers and men prided themselves on their snappy appearance.” Linn thus provides a contextual understanding of the culture of Army leadership that persisted through the attacks on Pearl Harbor in December 1941.

In *Hero of Bataan: the Story of General Jonathan M. Wainwright*, Duane Schultz describes Wainwright as a “hero in America’s last age of heroes. A genuine, old-fashioned, flag-waving, gun-toting American hero.” John Jacob Beck, in *MacArthur and Wainwright: Sacrifice of the Philippines*, describes Wainwright as a “flamboyant cavalryman, a great corps commander. In the mold of those officers of chivalry who fought for the South during the Civil War, Wainwright was a field soldier who enjoyed being with his officers, soldiers, and horses.” “Skinny,” as he was affectionately

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14 Ibid, 5.
15 Ibid, 15.
16 Ibid, 73.
17 Schultz, 2.
known while at West Point, was revered by the men who served under him. A staff officer declared, "We loved the guy."19

The effects of officer comportment are evident. The enlisted, especially those serving under Wainwright in the Philippines, "were upset, resentful of the great difference in appearance between Wainwright and the Bataan officers, and [General Douglass] MacArthur's entourage. The visitors from Corregidor seemed 'overdressed' in immaculate, out-of-place uniforms with neckties and smartly pressed pants... In contrast, Wainwright and his officers looked like they had just come from the front line—which they had—in wrinkled khakis, stained with dirt and sweat."20 Thus MacArthur perpetuated the pre-war image of the Army officer, carrying with him an aura of entitlement and superiority. It can be argued therefore, that Wainwright was ahead of his time because he adopted the philosophy of prioritizing the security and condition of his men rather than his own. Schultz writes, "Wainwright’s style of leadership—personal, intense, informal—was so dramatically different" from MacArthur’s, adding that his "presence provided an immediate improvement in morale." Conversely, "MacArthur had remained aloof and mingled only with his closest staff members."21

The loss suffered in the Philippines in early 1942 was monumental. Part of the failure can be attributed to the lack of preparedness of the Army’s leadership. Even

19 Schultz, 4.
20 Ibid, 137.
21 Ibid, 219.
Wainwright conceded the "appalling error" that the United States was not "militarily prepared" to wage war against Japan in the Philippines.\textsuperscript{22} It is ironic and unfortunate that Wainwright, who personified leadership traits uncommon among his colleagues, had to issue "the most heartrending order of his long military career":\textsuperscript{23} surrender to the Japanese. Beck asserts that despite Wainwright's affability, he lacked the necessary "generalship in the sense of strategy."\textsuperscript{24} Therefore, according to Beck, the transfer of command to Wainwright "was one of the greatest errors that the War Department committed in its handling of the war in the Philippines."\textsuperscript{25} Had MacArthur retained his command post, "it is doubtful that he would ever have surrendered to the Japanese. Death would have been preferable to surrender."\textsuperscript{26}

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  \item \textsuperscript{22} General Jonathan M. Wainwright, \textit{General Wainwright's Story}. Edited by Robert Considine (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1946), 133.
  \item \textsuperscript{23} \textit{Ibid}, 293.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Beck, 240.
  \item \textsuperscript{25} \textit{Ibid}, 239.
  \item \textsuperscript{26} \textit{Ibid}, 240.
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II.

When General Douglas MacArthur departed the Philippines for Australia on March 10, 1942, Wainwright assumed command of the Allies on Bataan and Corregidor, a force numbering approximately 85,000. However, ammunition and food were scarce to say the least, and malaria and dysentery were rampant. Re-supply, by then, was impossible. "Fortunes," wrote Wainwright, were "worse even than we now had." He keenly understood, and rightly predicted, that the "promise" he made MacArthur—no surrender under any circumstances—was one he could not keep.27

One month after MacArthur's departure, General Edward King, commander of the 75,000 American and Filipino troops on Bataan, unconditionally surrendered to the Japanese. At no other point in American history has so large a force transferred to the control of an enemy. Wainwright remained on Corregidor with the 10,000 or so troops for an additional month. He cogently described his predicament on Corregidor in his postwar memoirs: "The shelling never really stopped during the entire twenty-seven-day Battle of Corregidor. Night brought no surcease. That is a simple sentence which in no way can convey the terror and the morale-rotting the Jap artillery batteries visited upon us. No place on the Rock was a suitable haven..."29 Wainwright's accounts reveal the harshest and most terrifying realities of war. Wainwright's experiences, including his

27 Wainwright, 5.
28 Ibid, 6.
29 Ibid, 79.
first-hand depictions, permit a much deeper and more “human” understanding of wartime leadership than the sterile reviews of complex operations. However, even though his troops were severely outnumbered and underfed, and lacked the necessary resources to properly defend Corregidor, Wainwright aimed to carry out his orders. MacArthur, on April 1, messaged Wainwright, “Under no conditions should this command be surrendered.”

On April 2, 1942, he wrote in his diary, “On this date I hereby pledge myself that, unless ordered by higher authority to do so, I will not move my headquarters to the south in the event that the fall of Corregidor is imminent, but will, if necessary, surrender myself with my troops. No other course of action would be honorable.”

However, Wainwright wrote in reflection, “I then began to realize the desperate situation that the garrison of Corregidor would be in if hostilities were continued... Completely disavowed and with every infantry in control of the island, with air bombardment from low altitudes... and with heavy [artillery] bombardment from Bataan surely a massacre of about 12,000 or 13,000 people would have occurred.”

On the home front, Wainwright’s forces’ efforts were not unnoticed. On May 5, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued the General the following statement:

During recent weeks, we have been following with growing admiration the day by day account of your heroic stand against the mounting intensity

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30 Beck, 186.

31 Jonathan Wainwright Diaries, April 2, 1942, Holt Collection, United States Military History Institute, Carlisle, Pennsylvania. (Hereafter cited as Wainwright Diaries.)

32 Ibid. He notes in his diary that the figure he came up with, in addition to his troops, included approximately 2,000 civilians and 120 women nurses.
of bombardment by enemy planes and heavy siege guns. In spite of all the handicaps of complete isolation, lack of food and ammunition, you have given the world a shining example of patriotic fortitude and self-sacrifice. The American people ask no finer example of tenacity, resourcefulness, and steadfast courage. The calm determination of your personal leadership in a desperate situation sets a standard of duty for our soldiers throughout the world. In every camp and on every Naval vessel soldiers, sailors, and marines are inspired by the gallant struggle of their comrades in the Philippines. The workmen in our shipyards and munitions plants redouble their efforts because of your example. You and your devoted followers have become the living symbols of our war aims and the guarantee of victory.  

Wainwright officially surrendered on May 6, 1942. He personally claimed responsibility for the well-being of the troops, civilians, and nurses on Corregidor. To refuse surrender would inevitably lead to “the annihilation” of those men and women under his command “whose blood,” admitted Wainwright, “would be on my hands.”  

Wainwright exposes the very real dilemma of surrender. While on the one hand he had a duty to his country and the mission, on the other, he needed to consider the safety of everyone under his command on Corregidor. Understanding the limits of his forces and that the defense of Corregidor was lost, he understood his new “mission” was no unnecessary sacrifice of human life. He admitted to MacArthur that he felt “it is my duty to the nation and my troops to end this useless slaughter. There is apparently no relief in sight...We have done our full duty for you and for our country. We are sad but

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34 Wainwright Diaries, sometime after April 9, 1942.
unashamed." Wainwright wrote to Roosevelt, "It is with broken heart and head bowed in sadness, but not in shame, that I report to Your Excellency that I must go today to arrange terms for the surrender of the fortified islands of Manila Bay...If you agree, Mr. President, please say to the nation that my troops and I have accomplished all that is humanly possible..."
This section of the thesis will investigate Wainwright’s experiences as a prisoner of the Japanese. However, it is also instructive to incorporate experiences of some lower ranked officers and the enlisted men as a part of this discussion.

On June 9, 1942, a Japanese lieutenant informed Wainwright, “Your high command ceases immediately. You are now a prisoner of war. You and your staff officers will be transported today to a prison camp for senior officers at Tarlac.”

Thus the prisoner of war experience of Wainwright and his fellow senior officers was institutionally different than junior officers and enlisted servicemen. However, this segregation did not entail major differences with regards to prisoner treatment.

Wainwright wrote, “We soon were told that we were not to consider ourselves the equal of any of our captors.” Similarly, Captain Manny Lawton wrote in Some Survived: an Eyewitness Account of the Bataan Death Match and the Men Who Lived Through It, “The Japanese soldier had been taught that all Americans were enemies forever and that prisoners of war were due absolutely no consideration.”

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37 Wainwright, 129.
38 Ibid, 131.
Wainwright was subsequently instructed on prisoner conduct that he labeled the “evil word.” Whenever a Japanese soldier passed, the American officers had to bow or salute. Wainwright recalled, “I got my first lesson in bowing from a Jap sergeant. I can still feel the wish to retch that I felt when I first was forced to do it.”

The imprisonment at Tarlac spanned most of the summer of 1942. Towards the end of his stay there, Wainwright began to envision when his possible liberation would be. He deduced that it would take General MacArthur approximately fifteen months to redeploy troops in the Philippines and begin the process of liberating the prison camps. He thus wrote December 31, 1943 in his diary as the target date of emancipation. What is most important about Wainwright’s prediction, however, is the power that hope provided during such an ominous experience. He recalled, “It was a date and I made myself believe in it, though I had no word from the outside world as to the progress of the war either in Europe or in the Pacific. But, as I say, it was a date...flimsy, but something to hold to, something to pin my faith to. One grasps at such straws.” By the middle of August, Wainwright and the rest of the officers were transferred from Tarlac to Karenko, on the island of Formosa.

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40 Wainwright, 131.
41 Ibid, 131.
42 Ibid, 137-138.
Much of what Wainwright had endured at Tarlac continued during his stay in Karenko. Food rations remained meager, and the prisoners grew weaker. The “systematic starvation” consisted mainly of rice and a “watery vegetable soup”; meat and other protein-rich foods were scarce. It was Wainwright’s conclusion, therefore, that the Japanese did not intend to provide enough food for the prisoners to remain reasonably healthy. He described that their appearances were becoming more “skeletonized.”

Perhaps imbedded in the dietary conditions of the prisoners is not necessarily an institutional scheme to slowly starve them to death, but reflective of Japan’s financial

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44 Ibid, 149.
inability to provide substantial food. Indeed, there was an overt disdain and indifference towards prisoners displayed by many of the Japanese guards as evidenced by countless testimonies. However, the Imperial Army exploited the prisoners for labor, so there was a semblance of value placed on the lives of prisoners, albeit implicitly expressed.

In Wainwright’s memoirs, he perceived that the Japanese made no attempt to adhere to the Geneva Conventions. His and other prisoners’ objections to the physical abuse were met with rage, and further protest, Wainwright remembered, would result in only more severe punishment. The Geneva Conventions also stipulate that no prisoner shall be required to perform labor in any capacity. The Japanese at Karenko offered work on a “volunteer” basis, but the prisoners refused. As a result, the guards “immediately cut down on our food. Our rice, barely enough to keep us going, was cut and the soup became more watery, if possible” and, Wainwright continued, “if a man received a bean in his soup, and another did not, it made for hard feeling.” At this point, food rationing became a vehicle for division.

Similarly, in *Surviving the Sword: Prisoners of the Japanese in the Far East, 1942-45* Brian MacArthur details that in many instances, food was used as a bargaining tool amongst the prisoners themselves and helped create prisoner of war “black markets.”

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46 *Ibid, 153.*

47 *Ibid, 155.*
However, MacArthur contends that “[w]ithout the black market, more men would have starved to death.”

Prisoner of war black markets, an interesting topic that demands more research in its own right, were often maintained in cooperation with Japanese guards who redeemed financial benefits from the selling of food and other products to the prisoners. Gavan Daws writes that one of the sayings at a Cabanatuan camp was “if you could pay for it you could get absolutely anything—you could order a Cadillac and it would be delivered, smuggled in pieces.” It is perhaps ironic, even paradoxical, that even in situations as dire and life threatening as these prisoners experienced, including Wainwright, they were able to forge a certain level of control: that as prisoners of the Japanese, afforded minimal food and exposed to numerous methods of physical abuse and torture, they, to an extent, possessed some power, albeit minimal. The notion of prisoner “freedoms” will be expanded upon in the section comparing prisoners of the Japanese to those of Europe.

By Christmas of 1942, the morale of the prisoners at Karenko had all but diminished as Wainwright acknowledges: “Our spirits were so low at that time of the year that we knew we must find some kind of spiritual lift or abandon all hope.

Christmas of 1942 thus became more than a holiday; it became a hook on which to hang

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48 MacArthur, 31.
our very lives." Thus, the celebration of Christmas itself became a symbol of hope and, at the same time, encouraged remembrances "of the Christmases we had known..." For many prisoners, it was fond memories of home, friends, and family that provided them the ability to continue, to persist in the "deep-dyed hell." Others, however, detailed that seething anger for their captors gave them solace in their wretchedness. Former prisoner John Emerick noted, "I survived, I think, because I built up such a hatred." It is my contention that the contempt that many prisoners had for the Japanese, in some instances, fostered feelings of unity and camaraderie; such emotions are not unfamiliar to those serving in the various branches of the military.

Efforts from the home front to send imprisoned soldiers and civilians much needed goods were revealed to Wainwright during his waning days at Karenko. He wrote that the "seventeen thousand pounds of Red Cross supplies" was a "miracle," even a "goodsend." However, none of the "avalanche of canned corned beef, biscuits, cheese, jam, sugar, cocoa, tea and a host of other blessings" reached prisoner hands, at least not immediately. Wainwright's account of the relationship between the Red Cross and the Japanese military in fact represented a pattern of policy at many internment camps. The

50 Wainwright, 162.
51 Ibid, 163
53 Wainwright, 168.
54 Wainwright does indicate that some of the Red Cross goods reached them later on, but the boxes had obviously been tampered with and the Japanese had stolen many items and foodstuffs.
guards often “looted the shipments,” taking “as much as a third, even a half” of the boxed goods. Interestingly, in its monthly publication, “Prisoners of War Bulletin,” the Red Cross in February of 1945 asserted that all supplies reached the beleaguered prisoners. It states, “From the evidence of repatriated and escaped prisoners, however, we have been able to establish that the goods which we have put into Japanese hands have thus far actually been delivered to our prisoners.”

Clearly, as evidenced by Wainwright’s testimony, and corroborative accounts, this was not the case. As Daws notes, “The Japanese would not let observers from neutral powers or the International Red Cross into camps in the war zone” and continues, “It was not unknown for local Red Cross people to be thrown in jail for being conscientious about their work, or even...killed...So, out of prudence, official Red Cross reports were light on discouraging words.” Additionally, the Bulletin’s intended audience was the families of those men and women, both military servicemen and civilians, imprisoned by the Japanese and German forces. Here, the Red Cross manifested itself not only as functioning to aid the prisoners abroad, but also to engender feelings of patriotism and strong morale within American society. The boxes that did manage to get into prisoner hands made a difference, “body and soul”; to a much lesser degree, perhaps the same could be said about civilian donors, that their contributions were sources of encouragement in a time of war.

55 Daws, 146.
57 Daws, 273-274.
58 Ibid, 146.
Moreover, Wainwright indicates that the Japanese were implicit in supplying the International Red Cross with false information. Prisoners were briefed and “told exactly what [they] could and could not say.”\(^\text{59}\) Japanese representatives from the Red Cross occasionally visited camps and simply “accepted” the “optimistic sounding reports and left.” Wainwright adds, “We could say nothing about the food...nor could we mention our living and sanitary conditions.”\(^\text{60}\) While the “information” on which the bulletins were derived came from prisoner testimony, it is apparent that the Japanese prohibited the transmission of truth, which would have revealed the atrocities being committed.

On April 2, 1943, Wainwright and one hundred-seventeen fellow prisoners were transferred to a Japanese military camp near the small village of Tamazato. The beatings, for the time being, stopped, giving them “all a chance to lick [their] wounds.” However, the rations remained the same: “rice and hot water with a few vegetable tops for every meal.”\(^\text{61}\)

While at Tamazato, Wainwright and other prisoners were permitted to write an occasional letter home, only after detailed scrutiny and censorship by the Japanese guards. However, through “careful wording,” they attempted to indicate to the letters’ recipients the actualities of their experiences. Wainwright recalls a letter from an imprisoned officer to his wife: “I cannot mention my treatment. I cannot mention very

\(^{59}\) *Ibid*, 170.

\(^{60}\) *Ibid*, 170-171

much about conditions. I cannot mention the sanitary arrangements in the camp. The food is unmentionable.  

Similarly, in a letter to his wife, Adele, he was permitted to write before Tamazato, Wainwright disclosed, cryptically, how much weight he had lost: “Don’t worry about me—I am still all right and will be home to you someday, about the size and weight I was when we were married.”  

Ironically, by remaining “silent,” the prisoners could manifest the unbearable conditions they endured. The Japanese also prohibited the prisoners of war from receiving mail from home. Wainwright discovered after the war his Adele wrote him on over three hundred occasions, and he only received six letters. The Japanese, therefore, intended to keep their prisoners ill informed.

Letters from loved ones and friends would perhaps discuss the direction of the war, which, at least in the Pacific, had begun to turn in the Allies’ favor in the summer of 1942 after the crucial and pivotal Battle of Midway. By distancing the prisoners from the reports of the front lines, the Japanese could maintain their authoritative and dominant image within the enclosed camps. In fact, Wainwright believed the de facto “isolation” created by the Japanese, the withholding of correspondence from home, was not “the least” of the various hardships he was forced to endure as a prisoner of war.

However, the Japanese at Tamazato, through their own volition, implicitly informed the prisoners that Allied forces were at least within striking distance. In the

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62 Ibid, 171.
63 “Wainwright letters to wife,” October 13, 1942.
64 Wainwright, 171.
65 Ibid, 172.
spring of 1943, the camp commanders organized air raid drills. Wainwright recalled, “It was our first unexpurgated news that United States forces, land, sea, and air, were approaching us. I have never been prouder of being an American than I was that day.”

Therefore, the prisoners, as isolated and removed from the battlefield as they were, became cognizant of the war’s progression. It is evident, then, why the Japanese endeavored to keep the prisoners ignorant because good tidings from the battlefield fostered high spirits, and as Wainwright reflected, pride.

In late-June, 1943, Wainwright and the remaining prisoners at Tamazato were instructed to board a train destined for a camp near Muksaq, a small village on Formosa. While there, the prisoners were inundated with Japanese propaganda and misinformation. Even though “there was no way to check the assertions they presented as facts,” the interned Allies remained incredulous. Wainwright remembered, “The junior officers who spouted statistics at us did so with such enthusiasm that we were convinced that—right or wrong and probably wrong—they believed every word they said.”

At Muksaq, the treatment of the enlisted was markedly different and worse than that of the senior officers. The enlisted were forced to labor, while the officers, Wainwright recalled, “sat by and waited, wondering what the catch was.” In fact, the absence of manual labor that had defined the prisoner of war lifestyle in the previous

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66 Ibid, 172.
67 Ibid, 179.
camps, aroused feelings of restlessness and boredom. 68 Wainwright even grew ashamed that his treatment was far superior to the enlisted. He slept in a small, private room whereas the "enlisted men's quarters consisted of a single room with a cement floor. On each side of the room was a long bench extending about seven feet out from the walls. This was their bed place." 69

The treatment of the senior officers, Wainwright realized, was part of a Japanese scheme to assuage them into informing their respective war departments that they were being treated humanely. A Japanese colonel, Sasawa, on two occasions, invited Wainwright and the other senior officers on picnics. The reasons behind the benevolent offerings to the officers were apparent, according to Wainwright: "His tacit appeals to us to end the war—as if we could!—were comforting in the extreme. We knew the Japs were beginning to worry." 70

By the fall of 1944, Wainwright left Muksaq for Manchuria—the ultimate "milepost" of his "long travail." 71 The first camp Wainwright experienced, located in the "bleak" village of Sheng Tai Tun near the Gobi Desert, presented weather conditions entirely different from the tropical climate in the Philippines and Formosa. The malnutrition of the prisoners left them poorly equipped to deal with the much colder

68 Ibid, 176.
69 Ibid, 179-180.
70 Ibid, 181.
71 Ibid, 188.
temperatures, which dropped as low as forty-five degrees below zero. Wainwright exaggerated that their blood had thinned "to the consistency of water."\textsuperscript{72}

Meanwhile, the American military command maintained attempts to communicate to the families of prisoners of war, as the following letter from General George Marshall to Adele Wainwright, on December 12, 1944, indicates:

Dear Adele:

We have received some further information on the Japanese prisoner of war camps in Formosa, and since General Wainwright is being held in one of these camps, I know you will be interested in the following summary, taken from the report. Please consider this as confidential, for your private information only.

Conditions in these camps are reported to be better than average, with the food "adequate," medical attention generally available, and morale high. The bulk of the diet is rice, but the prisoners get some meat and vegetables, and are allowed to purchase sweets at their canteens. Many prisoners of war have gained weight. In some of these camps the officers have a choice of pastimes such as tennis, swimming, volley ball and hiking. Camp entertainments are allowed. General officers in Camp V (Taihoku) are afforded a small private room, with bed, table, and chair.

All officers, including Generals, are required to work for part of the day, usually on farms, and are paid according to their rank. Enlisted men work chiefly in coal and copper mines for which they receive little pay. Treatment and morale, in the words of General Wainwright, are "as good as can be reasonably expected." No reports of brutality have been received, though this should not be construed as conclusive. Unlike so many camps in the Pacific Area, mail and parcels from the Gripsholm\textsuperscript{73} were delivered in good condition.\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid, 194.
\textsuperscript{73} The Gripsholm was the vessel the International Red Cross used to ship and transport the goods intended for the prisoners of war in the Pacific.
\textsuperscript{74} George C. Marshal to Adele Wainwright, December 12, 1944, George C. Marshall Papers, box 89, folder 35, George C. Marshall Library, Lexington, Virginia.
Marshall’s letter, full of generalizations and vague descriptions, is not corroborated by, to a certain extent, by Wainwright’s testimony. Moreover, reports that the United States military were receiving were delayed, exhibited by the date of Marshall’s letter and Wainwright’s departure from Formosa two months earlier. There was, therefore, an obvious disconnect between the prisoners and home, not only in terms of elapsed time, but also in terms of truth and reality. The Japanese, as discussed earlier, made effective and truthful communication excruciatingly difficult. Marshall probably, at least to a degree, had more knowledge of the specific treatments Allied prisoners of war were experiencing than the aforementioned letter revealed. Knowing that Adele Wainwright was painfully worried about her husband’s condition, he may have intentionally left out information that would have otherwise provided a more correct, yet intensely horrific account. However, what remains clear, is that the facts of prisoner of war treatment in the Pacific was somewhat of a mystery to the rest of the world, at least until the post-war Tokyo tribunals.

Wainwright’s stay at Sheng Tai Tun was short lived, as he and a group of senior officers were shipped on December 1, 1944 to a camp in the Manchurian village of Sian. His third and final Christmas as a prisoner of the Japanese, Wainwright remembered, was nearly as insufferable as his first in Karenko. The Japanese withheld the Red Cross
packages, "which would have meant a bit of meat, milk, cigarettes and candy." On Christmas day, Wainwright wrote, "What a travesty on the day. Christmas, hell! I only hope my dear ones at home are happier than I am."

Similar to the experiences at the other camps, the prisoners of Sian remained in a state of oblivion with respect to news of the war. Wainwright recalled, "We repeatedly made efforts to get newspapers or radio news, but to no avail. We wrote the Jap colonel in charge of all prison camps in Manchuria and to the International Red Cross. The British and Dutch wrote to their respective Protective Powers in Tokyo. But the lid was on tight." The isolation of Sian, Wainwright declared, cemented feelings of abandonment for the prisoners, what he labeled as their "bleak exile."

Air raid drills occurred with more frequency in Sian, leading the prisoners to infer that an Allied attack was increasingly imminent. In fact, with every drill they hoped to hear the sounds of planes and bombs, the "harbinger" that the end was finally approaching.

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75 Wainwright, 203.
76 Wainwright Diaries, December 25, 1944.
77 Wainwright, 205.
78 Ibid, 206.
79 Ibid, 206.
The oppressively cold weather persisted through the winter and into the spring months. In his diary, Wainwright recorded the temperature on April 3, 1945 as sixteen degrees Fahrenheit.\textsuperscript{80}

Based on Wainwright's diary entries and post-war memoir, the prisoners seemed to experience less physical abuse, which had been a staple of the previous internment camps. In actuality, Wainwright devoted a lot of his time in the spring and summer prior to his liberation pondering: about the war, about home, about Adele. He also approximated that the war would last until the end of 1946, but obviously he was without knowledge of neither Russia's invasion plans, nor the development of the atom bomb.\textsuperscript{81}

The August 5, 1945 entry in Wainwright's diary is extremely revealing of a complete change in mindset and outlook: "I have about come to the conclusion that I want to live in Skaneateles when I retire rather than in Washington—This, of course all depends on what Kitty (Adele) wants."\textsuperscript{82} Wainwright's preoccupations were no longer defined by the uncertainties that accompanied being a prisoner of war. Rather, he worried himself about post-war life, an attitude that could only be associated with the belief he would live. Ironically, his thoughts on life after the Army, not just the war, preceded his liberation by only nineteen days.

\textsuperscript{80} Wainwright Diaries, April 3, 1945.
\textsuperscript{81} Wainwright, 207-208.
\textsuperscript{82} Wainwright Diaries, August 5, 1945.
When Wainwright and the other officers, enlisted men, and civilians were told of the war’s end on August 19, he recounted,

We roared suddenly with laughter...roared until the rest of [the interpreter’s] words were blotted out. There was no stopping the laughter. It came up in me, and in the others, with an irresistible force: something born of a combination of our relief, the look on [the interpreter’s] face, the blind preposterousness of his beginning, the release from years of tension, the utter, utter joy over having survived to see this blessed day.  

However, the prisoners still had to wait for the arrival of the Russian Red Army on August 24 in order to move out. The Japanese, noted Wainwright, left the prisoners the remaining Red Cross packages and they “began having fine, well-cooked meals, the first sufficient food we had since the outbreak of the war. We smoked American cigarettes like chimneys.” With the “prospect of getting home soon,” Wainwright celebrated “the happiest birthday in many years” on August 23, one day before he was “officially released from captivity as P.O.W. and now under Russian military escort.”

The most horrific chapter of Wainwright’s life had finally come to an end. In reflection of his experiences, he offered advice for his contemporaries that has lasting significance and resonates very clearly today:

My men and I were the victims of shortsightedness at home, of blind trust in the respectability of scheming aggressors. Terrible as was the ordeal of captivity, I often feel that we were spared chiefly to warn against an infinitely more terrible fate. The price of our unpreparedness for World War II was staggering to the imagination. The price of our unpreparedness for a World War III would be

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83 Wainwright, 208-209.
84 Ibid, 211.
85 Wainwright Diaries, August 23, 1945.
86 Ibid, August 24, 1945.
death to millions of us and the disappearance from the earth of its greatest nation.  

IV.

This section of the thesis will briefly discuss prisoner of war experiences under the guard of Nazi Germany, specifically in the prison camp Stalag Luft III, in comparison to those in the Pacific. As the historical record proves, despite the existence of international laws—laws that both Japan and Germany formally recognized as signatories of the 1929 Geneva Conventions—that specifically outlined how prisoners of war were to be treated, the experiences of Allied prisoners in Europe, for the most part, were extremely different. This, however, does not intend to argue that prisoners of Nazi Germany did not endure brutally violent treatment. However, the statistical data and prisoner testimony yield a general trend on the part of the German captors that there was an institutional effort to adhere to the prescribed laws of war.

S.P. MacKenzie contends, “Still, in overall numerical terms, even in Germany ideological consideration tended to support rather than undermine humanitarian behavior

87 Wainwright, 247.
in the West: the enemy was to a greater or lesser extent a comrade." 88 In the Pacific, both the Japanese and the Allies, especially the Americans, viewed each other as racially inferior and barbaric. Moreover, General Tojo Hideki, in an address to prisoner of war camp commandants in June 1942, stated, "In Japan we have our own ideology concerning prisoners-of-war, which should naturally make their treatment more or less different from that in Europe and America." 89 As MacKenzie argues, Tojo believed that the "philosophical basis of the Geneva Convention did not apply." Thus, a combination of "ideological and utilitarian" concepts directed the treatment of prisoners. 90 General Wainwright, for example, was not to consider himself the equal of any Japanese soldier. However, in the European theater, the adversaries boasted similar philosophical heritages; they tended to, even in wartime, view each other as fellow human beings, and developed mutual respect.

Arthur A. Durand's Stalag Luft III: the Secret Story traces the experiences of prisoners of the Third Reich at perhaps the most well known (thanks to Steve McQueen) prison camp in all of World War II. Much of Durand's discussion involves the prisoners' capacity to exert a certain level of control. Undoubtedly, the most obvious manifestation of this power, and what really brands Stalag Luft III with uniqueness,

89 Ibid, 514.
90 Ibid, 514.
and why it has become the focus of much historical inquiry was the prisoners' propensity to attempt escapes, and the sheer complexity of some of the escape plans. As Durand notes, Stalag Luft III has become "synonymous with escape."\textsuperscript{91} He describes escape as the "binding thread" that permeated the camp's culture. Escape, or the efforts to escape, Durand argues, grew to such significance because first, it helped those "individuals who wanted to escape," and second, it helped "hinder the German war effort" because resources, men, and time were used in order to curb the escape efforts. Stalag Luft III became a metaphorical "battlefield."\textsuperscript{92}

For example, on the night of March 24, 1944, eighty prisoners attempted a massive escape. Four prisoners were caught at the tunnel mouth, while seventy-six made it beyond the camp walls. Fifty of the seventy-six escapers were caught and subsequently ordered executed. The search for the escaped resulted in a waste of man-hours, and the ordeal was a huge embarrassment for Hitler.\textsuperscript{93}

Comparatively, the Japanese, too, reacted swiftly and decisively against those who attempted escape. In fact, the Japanese, in violation of the Geneva Conventions, forced prisoners to sign a "non-escape oath." Daws adds, "The Japanese were quick to torture and kill men caught trying to escape. They made an example of them in


\textsuperscript{92} Ibid, 286.

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid, 301.
front of the other prisoners, tying them to a stake and bayoneting them, or hanging them from a wire and beating them to death." 94 Moreover, Japanese prisoners were grouped into "death squads" of ten and the rules dictated should one member attempt to escape, the other nine faced execution. Daws continues, "There were times when they did this, times when they did not, but very few times either way, because there were very few escape attempts." 95 Thus, "escape" does not become a major part of the narrative of Japanese prisoners of war.

Meanwhile, Durand devotes relatively minimal attention to what is undoubtedly the most famous and well-known episode from Stalag Luft III. He is not concluding that the "great escape" was not monumental nor should it be forgotten. Rather, he argues that the other achievements of the prisoners of Stalag Luft III, the cultural aspects of the camp deserve equal study and examination.

After providing background, Durand moves his story inside the walls of Stalag Luft III. Durand describes the camp as the "Kriegie's Domain," Kriegie is short for Kriegsgefangenen, German for prisoner of war. 96 Embedded within this nomenclature lies the interpretation that the prisoners of war, while not free, did indeed have some autonomy. In fact, Durand goes so far as to argue the prisoners

94 Daws, 99.
95 Ibid, 99.
96 Ibid, 103.
were one of the three “masters” the Germans had to serve in a prison camp.\textsuperscript{97} With this sense of control, the prisoners were able to create what resembled a “society” in Stalag Luft III.

The camp offered church services, classroom education, sports and recreation, musical and theatrical performances, and even gambling.\textsuperscript{98} Nicholas Katzenbach, who would become attorney general, “was among those who studied law while in Stalag Luft III.”\textsuperscript{99} Obviously, prisoners established an intricate community in the prison. Consequently, Durand’s study, to a certain extent, can be qualified as a cultural examination in conjunction with a military overtone.

In addition to the establishment of these cultural diversions, the men assembled a military hierarchy inside the compound in order to, as Colonel Delmar Spivey remarked, “run the camp in a military manner, giving orders and demanding they be carried out. Our approach was firm but geared to an understanding of the situation. We determined to lead, guide, direct, and encourage instead of being arbitrary and unreasonable.”\textsuperscript{100} The perfect irony of this kind of prisoner hierarchy is that inside a prisoner of war camp, seemingly the epitome of authority and dominance, where the prisoners were reduced to subjugation, they also retained their internal relations of rank to preserve order. Thus Durand exposes the necessity of

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid, 306.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid, 247.
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid, 226.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid, 148.
preserving the culture of military. The Germans understood the importance of having their prisoners retain their military organization. In fact, they recognized the Senior Allied Officer, the title given to the highest-ranking officer, as an official rank within the camp. However, there were prisoners who chose to disrupt this aspect of the camp’s culture, claiming the internal hierarchy as contrived and “fictitious.”

To better understand and appreciate the motives of the Germans, Durand asserts, “one must view the prisoners’ world through the thoughts and actions of those who were outside the barbed wire, looking in.” Thus Durand believes that to fully grasp what it really meant to be a prisoner of war under Nazi Germany, a change in perspective is crucial. In other words, the study of prisoners of war is not a one-way street. The biased accounts of the prisoner would tend to characterize his captors in a much harsher and brutal light. With specific regard to Stalag Luft III, Durand says, the Germans had to “adjust their thinking and ways of doing business” because of the numerous cultures and countries represented just in that camp. A camp guard, for example, could not approach a New Zealander the same way he could a Russian. Durand credits camp Commandant Colonel Friedrich-Wilhelm Von Lindeiner-Wildau for closely observing behavioral patterns among the groups of people that were represented in Stalag Luft III. Moreover, Durand claims that it was Von Lindeiner,

102 Ibid, 303.
103 Ibid, 303.
who, for the most part, made sure the practices inside the camp adhered to the regulations of the Geneva Convention.

While some prisoners from Stalag Luft III have lamented about their time as a prisoner of war, others have highlighted those years as the “most productive and spiritually enriching” of their lives. But, Durand says, that the “prevailing sentiment” of former prisoners of Stalag Luft III “reflects a renewed appreciation for the country to which they returned.” ¹⁰⁴ The American prisoners, especially, returned home with a reinvigorated pride and appreciation of the liberties and freedoms they could not enjoy as prisoners of the Third Reich.

Wainwright’s account and other corroborative sources do not indicate, at least not to the extremes of Stalag Luft III, that Allied prisoners in the Pacific, in any internment camp, possessed near the amount determinism that became a definitive feature of Stalag Luft III.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 356.
CONCLUSION

Whitney R. Harris, a member of the Allied prosecution during the trials in Nuremberg, Germany, from November 14, 1945, until October 1, 1946, declared, "This is as it should be, provided that in shunning the evil of yesterday we do not forget the wrongs to which it led—and having forgotten them believe them never to have happened." In both theatres of the Second World War, Europe and the Far East, captured Allied troops experienced brutal and horrific treatment as evidenced by postwar trials and tribunals and by first-hand accounts of prisoners and captors alike. The militaristic regimes of Germany and Japan, in their worst moments, were defined by unimaginable crimes against humanity.

Those responsible for the mistreatment of prisoners like General Wainwright were brought to justice before two international tribunals (Nuremberg and Tokyo), and in hundreds of single-nation trials, and subsequently punished for their war crimes—for many, this meant execution.

This thesis has attempted to, through the experiences of Wainwright and others analyze and discuss Allied prisoners of war by way of the lens of a new military historiography that combines aspects of culture, society, and politics. Using prisoners of war as a mode of study, the complexities that warfare brings to the fore are ever

apparent, and are not sufficiently explained by the presentation of statistics and tactics.

Specifically, prisoners of war, and especially those in the Pacific during World War II, remain understudied and far too often neglected in scholarship. With a methodology that is conducive to the study of prisoners of war in general, new ideas and concepts will emerge, allowing for a better understanding of wartime prisoners and, more importantly, warfare itself.
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