

ACCOUNTS OF THE TREATMENT OF PRISONERS OF WAR DURING THE FIRST AND SECOND WORLD WARS

- ***The trials and tribulations of Romanian prisoners of war in Alsace-Lorraine, 1917-1918****

The author, a colonel in the French Army, took part in campaigns in Indochina and Algeria. A Doctor of Literature and member of the French Military History Commission, he is an assistant lecturer at the University of Strasbourg.

His work describes the inhuman conditions in which Romanian prisoners of war lived after having been captured by the German Army and interned in Alsace and Lorraine during the First World War.

Assigned to work in potash and iron mines in the combat zone, near the French/German front, these prisoners suffered from hunger, cold, exhaustion, and ill-treatment, and some were even summarily executed. The detaining authorities never allowed the Spanish Embassy in Berlin — the Romanian prisoners' Protecting Power — or the ICRC to visit the detainees in this strategic region.

The archives concerning the prisoners of war interned and employed in Alsace-Lorraine by the German Army were taken to Germany and reportedly disappeared during the Second World War. The author consequently had to carry out meticulous research at town halls, municipal archives and cemeteries in Alsace and Lorraine at places where the Romanian prisoners had been housed. Since no record published by former Romanian prisoners exists, the author had also to draw on the recollections of elderly people. Thanks to them he was able to compile a list of Romanian detainees who had lived in each department and district and had been buried there.

At the same time, the book cites examples of the sympathy shown by the people of Alsace and Lorraine for these unfortunate prisoners, and of the assistance they gave to them.

Jean Nouzille's book deals with a subject for which there are few sources of information and only scant documentation; it is a valuable contribution towards knowledge of a particular chapter of history and of the suffering endured by prisoners during the First World War.

* Jean Nouzille, *Le calvaire des prisonniers de guerre roumains en Alsace-Lorraine, 1917-1918*, Editions militaires, Bucharest, 199 pp.

● *My war without a rifle (1942-1945) — A law-court chronicle of captivity*

The author of this book,* a prisoner of war in Stalag V A in Ludwigsburg and a legal expert, between 1942 and 1945 defended prisoners appearing before German military courts of justice. He pleaded 250 cases before Stuttgart's Vth Military Region Tribunal, with jurisdiction for Stalags V A, V B and V C and sitting in Ludwigsburg; he obtained some 40 acquittals, plus lighter sentences in almost half the cases. So successful was he that this prompted the German Army Staff Headquarters in November 1944 to rebuke the Ludwigsburg Tribunal because it was being surprisingly lenient towards prisoners.

During the time he spent defending prisoners of war, the author constantly based his work on the 1929 Geneva Convention. He was unstinting in his efforts to have it applied.

My war without a rifle contains countless, valuable details on everyday life in the prison camps and illustrates a particular aspect of captivity which has been studied very little to date. Thus in a succession of typical scenes the author evokes daily life as reflected in all the cases which he defended before the German war tribunal, giving an account of the numerous offences committed by the prisoners of war:

- common-law offences: poaching, petty theft, manslaughter;
- military offences: unruly behaviour, rebellion, untidiness, refusing to obey orders;
- political offences: listening to foreign radio broadcasts, undermining army morale or that of the German people;
- “amorous offences”: having affairs with German women.

Whether minor offences or not, those who committed them were likely to end up doing forced labour at the fortified town of Graudenz on the banks of the Vistula.

This book is a lively, instructive and very humorous description of an era which is still the subject of research by historians, academic staff, students and ex-servicemen's associations.

Florianne Truninger

* Stéphane Delattre, *Ma guerre sans fusil (décembre 1942-avril 1945) — Une chronique judiciaire de la captivité*, Edition Rumeur des Ages, La Rochelle, 1991, 159 pp.