

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF
↔ PRISONERS OF WAR ↔
AND INTERNMENT

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From 1948 onwards, another group of prisoners dominated the population of the camps: those people who had been charged with crimes against the regime of occupation and who had been convicted by Soviet Military Tribunals (SMT). Among them were numerous members of democratic parties who defied the oppressive policy of Communism. When the German Democratic Republic was coming into being in the autumn of 1949, Soviet leaders decided to dissolve the camps. The majority of the internees were released at the beginning of 1950, while the majority of the SMT convicts were handed over to East German prisons to serve their sentences.

The prisoners of the Soviet special camps were entirely isolated from the outside world. They were not allowed to write or to receive letters, so their relatives had no knowledge of their whereabouts. As the special camps were not labor camps, the prisoners were condemned to agonizing inactivity. Notwithstanding that in fact numerous Nazis and war criminals were interned in the camps, the majority of the inmates had been arbitrarily arrested, among them a large number of adolescents and even children.

As two of the Soviet special camps—Sachsenhausen and Buchenwald—were established on the sites of former Nazi concentration camps, a comparison with the Nazi camps seems obvious. There were, however, significant differences. Physical abuses in the camps by Soviet guards have only rarely been reported, although maltreatment and torture usually occurred immediately after arrest. Furthermore, the special camps were not labor camps. Finally, documented evidence that the Soviets deliberately aimed at exterminating the internees has not been detected. There is, however, little doubt that Stalin knowingly condoned the deaths of more than 60,000 individuals as result of his arrest and internment policy in postwar Germany.

See also Buchenwald

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—Wolfram von Scheliha

SOYINKA, WOLE (1934–)

Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian playwright, poet, novelist, and Nobel laureate (1986), was imprisoned for almost two years by the Nigerian military authorities in 1967 at the outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War for allegedly attempting to secure a fighter-bomber for the rebels. Although not a combatant and never formally charged or tried, Soyinka was seen as a dangerous provocateur by the military government that had seized power in 1966.

Soyinka chronicles his imprisonment in two volumes: a book of poems, *A Shuttle in the Crypt*, written secretly while in prison, and a memoir, *The Man Died*, composed after his release in 1969 but based on notes written in the margins of the few books he was permitted to have in prison. *The Man Died* is a mix of history, political analysis, and personal testimony to the horrors of prison. Focused on the gross injustice of what he views as a questionable war carried on by a thoroughly corrupt and illegitimate regime, the most compelling and beautifully composed portions of the book relate how he slowly began to lose his sanity during the 15 months he spent in solitary confinement: his tortured imagination and paranoia periodically overcoming his rational mind, it also unleashed a torrent of hallucinations and imagery that give artistic shape to the book.

Soyinka was quietly released in 1969. He writes, "It was sad no longer to be considered a dangerous man." Through his subsequent writings (both creative and otherwise), speeches and political action, Soyinka has worked for political and social reform in a Nigeria ruled almost exclusively by the military. In 1995, having fled Nigeria a year earlier, he was sentenced to death in absentia, a sentence since annulled.

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—Mark L. Lilleleht

SPANISH ARMADA

When the Spanish Armada came to grief during an abortive invasion of England in May 1588, over 500 Spanish sailors and soldiers fell into English hands. They included 397 men from the *Rosario*, which was captured after it was crippled by a collision with another Spanish ship, 17 from the *San Salvador*, which was captured after it was badly damaged by an explosion, and 158 from the *San Pedro Mayor*, which wrecked on the English coast. When the prisoners reached Devon, local authorities sorted them into "those of name and quality," who were to be transferred to "safe prisons", and "the rest of baser sort," who were to be held wherever accommodations could be found. Accordingly, some 200 men of this first group were sent to the prison at Exeter, while the rest were confined locally (in a building still known as the Spanish Barn) until their ship was repaired enough to serve as a floating prison. Members of this latter group were also put to work as agricultural laborers on local estates. A small group of prisoners of a higher rank, who were likely to command a good ransom, were sent to London for safekeeping. Those officers who remained in Devon had considerable freedom; one was given parole to work as a doctor in the area, and three others took advantage of their relative liberty to escape to Spain in February 1589.

Negotiations to ransom the prisoners began shortly after their arrival in England. Spanish authorities were willing to pay the equivalent of one month's pay (plus a small allowance for expenses) for the return of ordinary soldiers and seamen, and other amounts, ranging from 100 crowns for captains to 15 crowns for other officers, for officers. But English demands for a greater ransom meant that the prisoners remained in custody until 24 November 1589, when the

majority of them were officially freed. Another group of 15 prisoners were freed at a later date; their captors had demanded as much as 20,000 crowns in ransom, but they were forced to relent when the Spanish arrested some English merchants on the continent as hostages. Don Pedro de Valdés, the commander of the *Rosario*, was freed in February 1593 upon payment of a ransom of £3550. The last Spanish captive in custody appears to have been an apothecary, who remained in England until 1597.

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—Jonathan F. Vance

SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR (1898)

During the Spanish-American War of 1898, the United States held over 39,000 Spanish prisoners of war in America, the Philippines, Cuba, and outlying Spanish possessions. Spain, in contrast, held only a very few Americans, all of whom were exchanged during the conflict. The United States based its POW policy on the Geneva Convention of 1864, which it had signed in 1882, and so it faced several issues surrounding repatriation and the protection of Spanish prisoners from America's Cuban and Filipino allies.

In Cuba and surrounding Spanish territories, the U.S. military captured over 26,000 prisoners. Held with minimal restrictions after they surrendered their weapons and awaited transportation back to Spain, the Spanish prisoners openly fraternized with their American captors, much to the Cubans' dismay. Of the 1,774 naval prisoners—the entire surviving Spanish fleet after the Battle of Santiago Bay of 3 June 1898—nearly 360 of the sick and injured (half of whom died) went to Norfolk, Virginia, 79 officers and 14 enlisted men were held at the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland, and 20 were imprisoned at Fort McPherson, Georgia. The remaining POWs were secured at Seavey Island off of Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

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