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Taken by Force Rape and American GI's during World War II

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**Taken by Force
and American GI's during World War II**
*Robert Lilly
Palgrave Macmillan
Brough*

Rape
*By J.
Published By
Reviewed by Douglas
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When one offers a criticism of others' actions during war-time it is always mindful to consider the circumstances under which the critical actions were undertaken: Sometimes this puts things into their proper

perspective whilst on other occasions it offers more evidence of the critical action, thus making the criticisms justified as opposed to the normal moral panic of the media. *Taken by Force: Rape and American GI's in Europe during World War II* by J. Robert Lilly is one of those powerful literary documentaries to which these rules apply: Sociologist J. Robert Lilly, sets the scene and directs the actors, thus leaving the reader to make up their own mind about the validity and scope of the American GI during World War II.

Along with many other hardships and crimes of war many justifications have been offered in defence of the horrors inflicted upon civilians during time of war. “*War is a horrible thing and horrible things happen*” [1], things Lilly refers to as a “*substitute culture*” [2]. A former World War II Military Police Corporal confirms that,

“If they (the women) were between 14 and 40, they got raped by American troops” [3]

Taken by Force attempts to set the historical record straight and assert the sub-heading used by Lilly, that,

“Rapes are part of the “rules” of war – pay and pillage” [4]

is a demonstration of the inherent military control and organisation (or rather lack of it) of pillage and rape during World War II. Lilly suggests, using a supportive quote from Clifton D. Bryant in *Khaki-Collar Crime: Deviant Behaviour in the Military Context*, that pillage and rape were (not) unregulated [5] and that

“To allow uncontrolled pillage was, in effect, to lose control of the army” [6]

However much it is suggestive to consider that to a certain extent rape and pillage was an accepted part of warfare, even more in the German lands than in the UK and France, it is the inherent and institutionalised racism which forms the undercurrent of this book.

But tell that to three-year-old Ingrid C; tell her that her rapist was to escape the death sentence because of the institutionalised racism inherent in the US military; tell her that her ordeal at the hands of a brutal American GI was part of the rules of war; tell her that her ordeal didn't matter as much because her attacker was white. Ingrid's story, as sickening and heinous as it is, is repeated here in order to demonstrate the callousness of not only the American GI's in question but those of their peers who judge them and the depths of research the author has gone to in order to produce a well-balanced and thorough account of rape by American GI's during World War II.

I do urge the greatest caution in reading Ingrid's story as it may well have an emotional impact upon some readers and hope that the need to repeat this story is understood with the tears, sorrow and pain that Ingrid deserves.

“Three year old Ingrid C. was asleep at home in Auerbach, Germany, with her mother nearby. It was after midnight on August 21st, 1945 when an intruder broke into her home. Her mother Frau C. didn't investigate because she thought the noise was from the white-American GI, Private Gilbert Newburn, of the 46th Quartermaster Graves Registration Company, who was in the habit of visiting Frau H. who also lived in the house.

The next morning, at about 5 a.m., he was found lying beside Ingrid who was at the opposite end of the crib from where she had been placed by her mother the previous night. None of her outer clothes were removed, but she was naked from the waist down. Newburn was fully clothed except for his trousers which were on the

floor. There was blood in Ingrid's body, but no open wound. Blue marks were found on her back. A German and American physician examined the child and both concluded that "penetration of the vagina had occurred, possibly caused by a rigid penis."

Now sober, Newburn said he had no idea of what happened the previous night because he was very drunk and could not remember. After being told the child would need extensive medical treatment, he offered to give the family money, in effect attempting to buy their silence and circumnavigate military justice. However, he made two extra-judicial statements, one on the 26th and the other on 30th August, which were to become his undoing. In each he denied knowing anything about the incident, but admitted in the second that he had had an appointment with Frau H, which she did not keep. He said he went to the house and broke in: He also admitted that he entered the crib thinking that the mother and baby slept together and thinking that the baby was the mother....., thus contradicting himself over and over again

Tried in Heidelberg, Germany on 16th-17th October, 1945, his defence relied on the claim of extreme intoxication. This was successfully challenged by his pre-trial statement which evidenced his detailed recollection of the night in question. The court concluded that he had no defence of intoxication and was subsequently found guilty as charged, and sentenced to confinement at hard labour for life." [7]

This paraphrased account is not only distressing in the first instance, but also highlights the callous racism evidenced in the sentencing of offenders. In offering separate chapters for the UK, France and Germany, the author has allowed for not only scholarly accounts of the crimes committed in those countries, but of comparisons to be made. However, although these forms of racism have been highlighted as between nations, Lilly also considers the racism within, that of the segregation between black and whites within the American Armed Forces alongside the segregation of victims based on nationality.

Compare the aforementioned case of a white soldier, having been charged for the most sickening crime I have ever come across, receiving a sentence of confinement at hard labour for life with the case of Private Thomas Bell, a black soldier from Company C, 390th Engineer Regiment who was found guilty of rape and sentenced to be "hanged from the neck until dead." [8] His crime was a partial stranger rape in Burton-on-Trent, UK during which he had briefly socialised with his victim and, although I don't wish to imply that rape is insignificant, especially to the victim, he used minimum force needed to commit his horrendous act. This double disparity is evident upon looking at the defendant's colour and the location in which the offence occurred.

Another case worth mentioning is the case of Private Isiah Porter, a black soldier of the 434th Engineer Company (Dump Truck) who was found guilty of rape. Sentenced to life imprisonment at hard labour for this acquaintance rape, he was sent to Federal Reformatory, Chillicothe, Ohio where the army's Board of Review reduced his sentence to 10 years, perhaps because of public opinion in the United States. They commented that his;

"Crime was one of barbaric violence and...an exhibition of animalism in its most repugnant form,"

I would suggest that comments such as this would be much more apt in the case of Ingrid C of Auerbach, Germany who was raped at the age of three. The Porter case not only demonstrates disparity in sentencing but an incredible disparity in opinion, which Lilly argues as being the result of external forces and opinion.

In 1944, the leadership of the NAACP noted that black troops in England believed that they were punished

more quickly and severely than white soldiers. Lilly presents an argument concurring that they may be right especially noting the broader implications concerning the bringing to trial offenders in a war zone. He argues that the prevalent racism within the American armed forces and America at large are at least partially responsible for the disparity in sentencing.

Using material from the Judge Advocate General's Office in order to understand the racist prerogatives exerted by judges when sentencing offenders, Lilly has offered restricted research which leads the reader to conclude that given the variable context of the book, race and colour of skin, location of crime and of punishment and the inbred racism are differentials which amply demonstrate the fluidity of sentencing for what is, in effect, a uniformity of offence. However, his research still leaves scope for further discussion as he hasn't used a multitude of sources, thus making "Taken by Force" potentially inaccurate in terms of overall rape figures.

A prime example of this which Lilly does indicate is that in Germany women had no real legal protection. Lilly recalls that in 1961 Blumenson likened the Allied armies at the end of August (1944) to

"Knights of old who set out in quest of the Holy Grail but were not adverse to slaying dragons and rescuing damsels in distress along the way" [\[9\]](#)

"Everywhere the Allies looked in early September, 1944, they saw success" [\[10\]](#)

That may have been the case in military terms but for the civilian populations being swarmed by the Allied armies, the price of liberation/occupation, of the dragons being slayed and damsels in distress rescued, was to come at a terrible cost. Rape prevailed throughout the invading/liberating armies having moved from the rear support troops: Combat troops were now taking the spoils of war in the most brutal way possible. Lilly claims that;

"some of the sexual assaults were undoubtedly influenced by what some of the soldiers had witnessed at the hands of the metaphoric "bad Germans"

thus contributing to the area of historical research that continues to demonise the German people, because they were German. In Germany teenagers were raped more than any other age group, the youngest was 13[\[11\]](#) if we allow for the case of Ingrid C. Thereafter context, resistance and consent took on different meanings hence giving fuel to the supposition that it was a form of state-sanctioned cultural genocide. What was likely to have been rape in the United Kingdom and France often became "unlawful sexual intercourse with an unmarried woman"[\[12\]](#) Thus being held guilty of this or of attempting to fraternize with German citizens produced incorrect figures for the amount of rapes that took place in the German lands under American control and although Lilly does offer some reasoning to why this was the case and why rapes in general were not prosecuted as often as they should have been, the underlying reason appears to be politics, after all they were only Germans.

There were no executions for rape in Germany[\[13\]](#), as we have seen with the case of Ingrid C, which again Lilly offers some reasoning for, such as the rejection of racial ideology, morale problems, the spoils of war and the difficulty in prosecuting crimes such as these in a war zone. Again however, the underlying thesis appears to be politics and the lack of a division between military politics and the judicial system in place at the time. Even when GI's appeared in court charged with rape the image and objectification of witnesses and victims gave their defence the opportunity to question not only their integrity and character[\[14\]](#), but their collective Nazi connections.

Rape became part of military culture and indeed on many occasions it became strategic rape designed to intimidate the enemy's women. German women were doomed from the beginning, but if we bring in the men and the children then elements of Imperial Rights towards the rapes in question appear. If the reader also engages with the Expulsion of the East & Central European Germans, Eisenhower's so-called death camps, the death marches, the executions and torture of innocent civilians, the Carpet Bombing campaign of civilian targets, and the civilian internment camps then genocidal tendencies tend to appear: An argument which Lilly doesn't seem to accept, especially in terms of Imperial Right rape being part of a wider genocide.

Lilly defines rape as an "imperial right" in the following manner

"This form of rape is a type of sexual assault that occurs in social structures and communities that are not engaged in declared war. Succinctly described by the French phrase 'droit du seigneur', it refers to an alleged custom of medieval times by which the feudal lord might have sexual intercourse with the bride of a vassal on the wedding night."

Lilly has elsewhere used the collective guilt presumption in relation to the Germans, thus I feel myself able to use the same presumption with regards to the American (Allied) lords who were occupying Germany and creating conditions designed to intimidate, oppress and contain the penalised – a policy that was to last many years. This occupation extended the sphere of American influence, thus in some ways making it empirical thus allowing for the imperial right of its soldiers to rape, pillage and in some cases murder.

Not only has Lilly highlighted the sentencing disparity of the military courts in the ETO, he has also highlighted disparity based on location, i.e. in what country the offence was committed. Whilst I don't agree with some of the conclusions Lilly has reached, allowing for his restrictive source material Lilly has produced a fairly balanced book which should be used as a stepping stone for further, wider research on the crimes of Allied soldiers. Whilst I respect the discipline Lilly has shown in drawing conclusions from specific source materials, without straying onto other avenues, he has left the gate wide open for further much broader research into the cause and effect of violent crime within the Allied armies during a state of war.

Lilly uses figures that are sometimes far from exact. Where he does use figures that are more suggestive than mathematically sound he invites the reader to draw their own conclusions. However, given the limitations of his source material the whole book, whilst offering the beginning of the road to justice, should be seen as speculative, thus the reader needs to draw their own conclusions and possibly do some extra research of their own

Using an unprecedented use of military records and trial transcripts Lilly has thrown light on one of the unseen consequences of the Allied domination of Western Europe between their arrival in England to their resident oppression of the German lands, the rape of an estimated 14,000 civilian women. Contributing to our understanding of sexual violence and the civilian experience during a state of war, Lilly questions the double disparity in sentencing and execution, highlighting that most of those who were executed were black and that no-one was executed in Germany for rape, because they were after all the enemy's women and as such had an imperial dominance over their former enemy.

Taken by Force is a book of many messages for the contemporary reader, it is a book of rape or of "unlawful sexual intercourse with an unmarried woman", depending on who the victim was, it is a book of racism and it is a book of double disparity in sentencing and execution.

Whilst Stalin's soldiers raped from 8 to 80, Eisenhower's raped from 14 to 40, while the world rejoiced the

German people shed a tear: Taking into account the estimated rapes per country[15] many more tears were shed in Germany than in England and France. In England the estimated number of rapes was 2,420, France 3,620 and Germany 11,040 which demonstrates how the military concentrated on more pressing issues. Executing American soldiers under conditions chaos and catastrophe was a last lingering dirty detail, too insignificant to matter in the larger scheme of things[16].

For its limitations in source material it demonstrates that in every army there is good and bad, that in every army there are criminals and heroes, the morality of which is accepting that Americans fighting the good fight during World War II could, and did commit such actions. But its main failing, even though he does broach the subject, is to recognise the Germanophobia within the judicial system and the racism that existed within the ranks of the American Armed Forces. Much more could have been said about the disparity in sentences, executions and the prosecution of alleged rapes upon German women. Nevertheless Taken by Force is a testament to the unseen and forgotten victims of a war fought in morality between good and bad.

Nobody who hasn't been violated in this heinous manner can truly understand what goes through the mind of a rape victim. However, Taken by Force: Rape and American GI's in Europe during World War II, goes some way towards the road to justice for those thousands of victims of American rape, committed under cover of liberation.

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[1] Taken by Force: Rape and American GI's during World War II (2007) Lilly, J. Robert, English Edition, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke (UK) p. 18

[2] Ibid

[3] Ibid p. 103

[4] Ibid p. 26

[5] Ibid p. 27

[6] Ibid p.27,

[7] Ibid pp. 109-110. This is a paraphrased account of the story of Ingrid C. in the aforementioned pages

[8] Ibid p. 53

[9] Ibid p. 101

[10] Ibid

[11] Ibid p. 141

[12] Ibid p. 150

[13] Ibid p. 159

[14] Ibid pp.145-146

[15] Ibid p. 12

[16] Ibid p. 163

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Highams Park is situated next to Chingford, where I lived most of my early years, and was where the family moved to in 1972. Our house was situated next to Highams Park Lake. I used to walk quite often in the wood and around the lake. The boat house that you see in this picture was long gone and if memory serves me right a brick built one existed in 1972.

To see more old images of the area where I lived, please visit ...

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