

WAR DEPARTMENT PAMPHLET NO. 21-7

If you should be  
**CAPTURED**  
these are your rights

WAR DEPARTMENT • 16 MAY 1944



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The purpose of this booklet is to point out some of your rights as a prisoner of war. Knowing them may help to make the going a little less tough and humiliating if you are ever unlucky enough to be captured by the enemy.

And remember this: The United States is treating enemy prisoners of war in accordance with the rules. You have a right to demand that your captor do the same to you.

WAR DEPARTMENT,  
Washington 25, D. C., 16 May 1944

War Department Pamphlet No. 21-7. *If You Should Be Captured, These Are Your Rights*, is published for the information and guidance of all concerned.

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By order of the Secretary of War:

G. C. MARSHALL,  
*Chief of Staff.*

OFFICIAL:

J. A. ULIO,  
*Major General,  
The Adjutant General.*

Being a prisoner of war is a grim business.

You live behind barbed wire, under constant guard.

You are not going anywhere, because there is no rotation of prisoners of war. You are there for the duration. No furloughs, no leaves, not even a three day pass.

The monotony is deadly.

The whole thing is like an indeterminate sentence in the guardhouse. And the work details work harder and longer than the prisoners you used to watch when you were on prisoner guard back in the United States.

But even the guardhouse prisoners back there were in a rich, friendly country. As a prisoner of war you are in enemy country, living with the enemy. You live no better than the enemy does, and hardly ever as well — never as well as a G.I. At best your captor is bound to treat you no better than he does his own soldiers stationed back in the rear. In Axis countries, the pick of such food as they have goes to the front-line troops. Farther back, the population makes out with what is left. As a prisoner of war you won't get first call on that either.

Nevertheless, there are certain rules about being a prisoner of war. "The Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War" contains rules which state what you must do and what you may not do. It also tells what the enemy may and may not do about you.



From the moment you are captured you have certain rights. Even before you are taken to a prisoner-of-war camp, these rights are in effect.

Stand up for your rights, but do it with military courtesy and firmness at all times. The enemy will respect you for it.

You must be humanely treated at all times.

Reprisals against you are not permitted. You cannot be punished for what somebody else has done.

You must be protected against insult or acts of violence by enemy military or civilians.

If you are wounded or sick, you are entitled to the same medical care as a member of the enemy's Army.

The enemy must clothe, feed, and shelter you.

You are a prisoner of war, not a criminal.



When you are questioned, by no matter what enemy authority, you must give only your name, rank, and serial number. Beyond that, there is no information which the enemy can legally force from you.

Do not discuss military matters of any sort with anyone.

An "Allied" soldier may be an enemy intelligence agent.

Forget all you ever knew about your own Army. If anyone wants to discuss it with you, even its insignificant details, say nothing.



You must surrender to the enemy who captured you all military equipment except your helmet and gas mask. However, the enemy must not take from you your personal belongings, such as your identification, insignia of rank, personal papers, wallet or photographs (unless of military value).

Money in your possession can be taken away from you only upon the order of an officer and after the amount has been determined. For this, you must be given a receipt. Demand a receipt. It is your right.

Any money taken from you must be entered to your account and returned to you when you are freed.



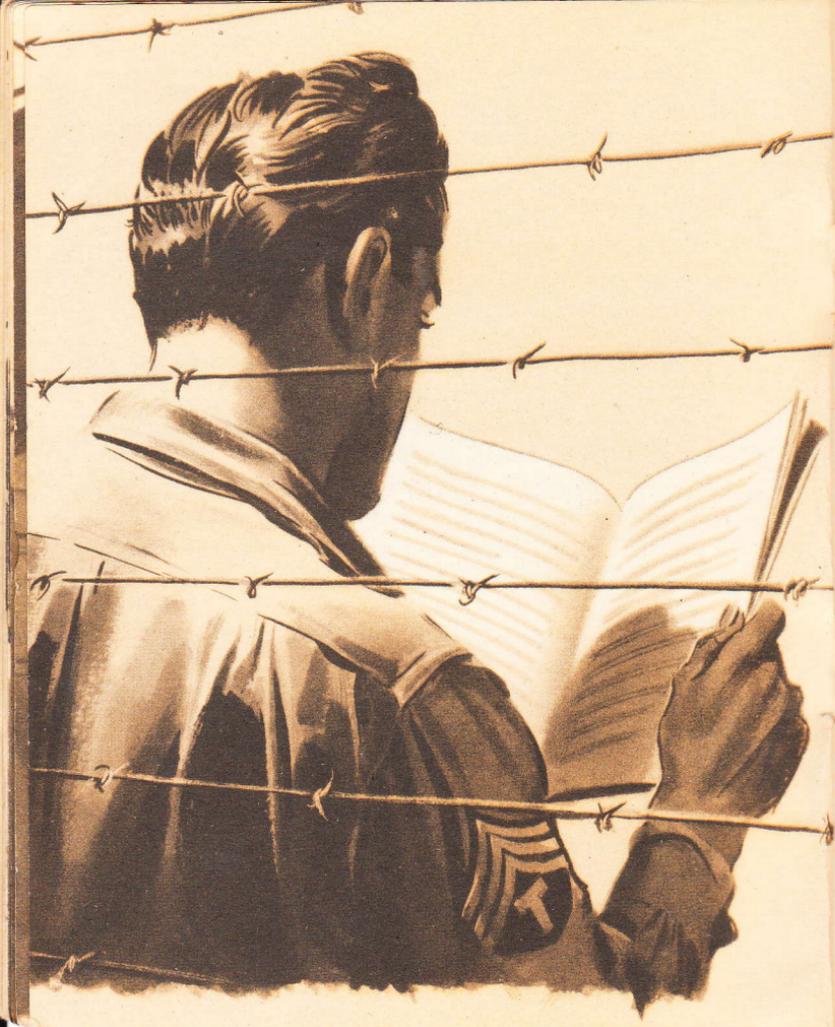
If you are an enlisted prisoner of war, you must salute all enemy officers. If you are an officer prisoner of war, you salute only enemy officers of equal or higher rank. You render your own salute, not the salute as executed by the enemy.

Where other matters of military courtesy and discipline are concerned, you have the same rights and duties as your opposite number in the enemy army.

You are subject to all laws, regulations and orders enforced in the enemy army. You may be tried and if found guilty, punished for infractions of enemy regulations. However, no form of cruelty may be used in your punishment. Generally speaking, arrest, confinement and disciplinary punishment may be imposed upon you in the same manner as upon the enemy's own personnel of equivalent rank.

If you attempt to escape and are recaptured, you are liable only to disciplinary confinement not to exceed 30 days. But if you use violence, you may be punished for that violence quite apart from the 30 days imposed for the attempt to escape. If you commit any civilian crime, you become subject to punishments under enemy law and by enemy courts.

Having been punished for an attempted escape, that attempt may not be held against you if you try to escape again and are recaptured.



One of your most important rights is to request that a copy of the Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War be shown to you. It should be in English.

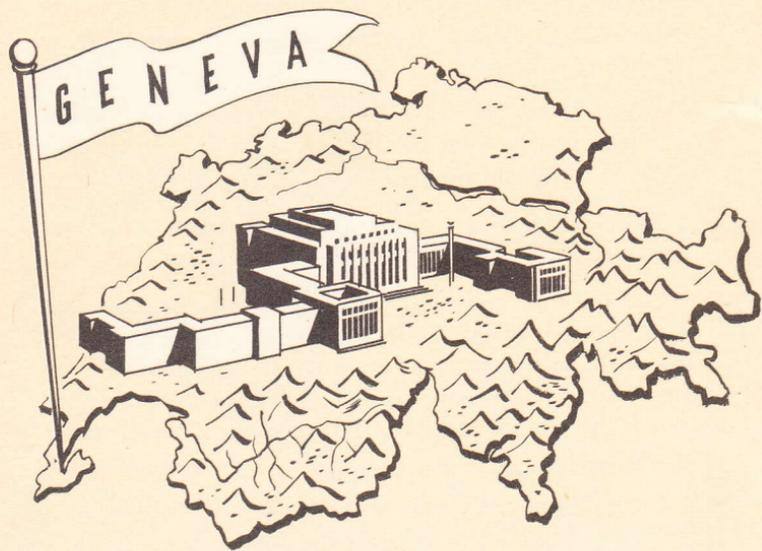
If you do not ask for a copy of the Geneva Convention and read it, it is your own tough luck if certain of your rights are withheld from you.

All the rules of war under which you live as a prisoner are contained in the text of the Geneva Convention.

Don't let the formality of the title fool you. The text itself, which contains the information that is so important to you, is clearly and simply written. If, however, there are any points which are not clear to you, you have the right to ask the camp authorities, through your spokesman, for an explanation.

Let the Geneva Convention be your Basic Field Manual while you are in captivity.

Read it!

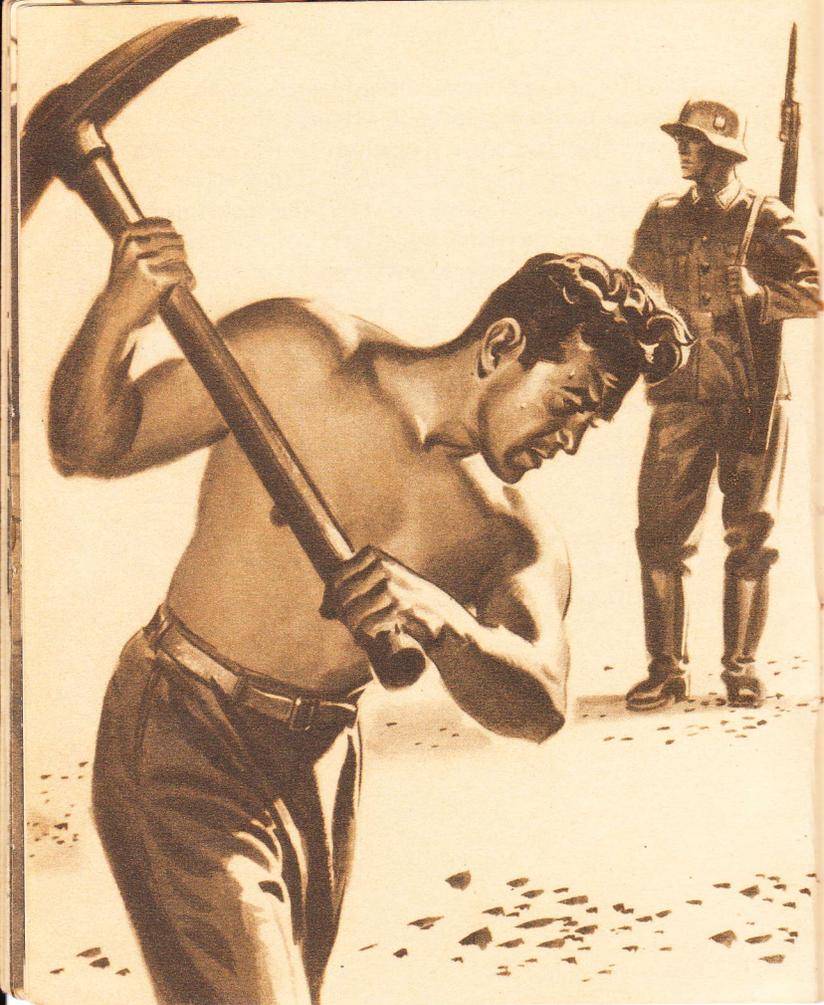


One of the most important guarantees in the Geneva Convention is that prisoners of war have the right to elect a fellow-prisoner as their spokesman to represent them in any dealings with the prisoner-of-war camp authorities or with the Protecting Power. However, the spokesman must be approved by the camp authorities. All protests or complaints which you have to make must be made through your camp spokesman.

The Protecting Power is a neutral country which acts as a go-between for settling complaints and grievances between you and the enemy.

The Protecting Power for the United States is Switzerland.

When a representative of the Swiss Government visits the camp where you are held, you have a right to talk to him in private if you wish.



You must work in a labor party as ordered, if you are a private or private first class.

If you are a noncom, you may be used only in a supervisory capacity.

If you are an officer, you may not be assigned to any work, except at your own request.

You must not be required to do work that is either dangerous or unhealthful.

You must not be employed in any job which has a direct relationship to war operations. For example — you must not be used in manufacturing and transporting arms or munitions of any kind, or for transporting any material intended for fighting units. If you are ordered to do this kind of work, you are entitled to protest through your spokesman, but in the meantime must continue to do the work.

*Here are a few of the rights guaranteed to you under the Geneva Convention:*

1. You may receive letters and packages from home.
2. You may write a stipulated number of letters monthly.
3. You may advise your family of your capture.
4. You may receive books.
5. You may worship in your own way.

*As a prisoner of war you are in a tough spot, but—*

The Army hasn't forgotten you —

The Red Cross and the Protecting Power do all that they can for you —

Your family and friends know where you are and will keep in touch with you —

Your own pride as a soldier will see you through.