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Murder and Martial Justice: Spying and Retribution in WWII America. By Meredith Lentz Adams (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 2011)



***Murder and Martial Justice: Spying and Retribution in WWII America.* By Meredith Lentz Adams. Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 2011. ISBN 978-1-60635-075-1. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. 310. \$45.00.**

Murder and Martial Justice is the first book written by Meredith Lentz Adams. The author is professor emeritus of history at Missouri State University, where she taught German and Russian History and conducted graduate seminars on the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials. The book jacket indicates Adams spent thirty-seven years in this career and has presented papers at many local, national, and international conferences.

In her introduction to this work, Adams makes it very clear that she does not see the responsibility of an author or historical researcher as including posing as a "moral eunuch." She indicates she has made every effort to be honest and evenhanded, as well as thorough in researching and writing the account of the crimes, trials, and executions explored in this work. Adams' views on the historical events are obvious from the very introduction to the work and throughout the historical account of these little-known events in the history of WWII. For today's professional interested in reading *Murder and Martial Justice*, a reminder that this work is an historical account is in order. Many individuals read history and apply today's values and standards to events that occurred under very different circumstances. For example, in today's society no responsible person would defend slavery, even though the practice exists even in today's world. Nonetheless, when our U.S. Constitution was written and our founding fathers established this nation, which stands today as the leader of the free world, slavery was accepted by most citizens as a necessity. The Supreme Court of the United States of America upheld the legality and rights of slave owners until our country was divided by war and then reunited with a different moral position resulting in amendments to our original Constitution.

In her work, Adams has credited a retired U.S. Army soldier, Sgt. Kenneth Knox, who was assigned as a corrections officer at Ft. Leavenworth, with developing an initial interest in the tale of the executed POWs after he discovered their graves in a neglected area on the post. She details her review of less-documented books as well as the use of the Freedom of Information Act to provide the required basis for her conclusions in her own work.

In expressing her views Adams has stated that these actions in WWII are comparable to actions today in the Global War on Terror.

The author has documented information regarding the process by which German POWs were tried and convicted under the rules of Military Justice in effect at the time of those proceedings. She makes a convincing argument that the rights of the defendants were not observed at all times and argues that they were tortured and tricked into giving confessions to murder. In the civilian justice system, defendants were convicted and sentenced without benefit of legal representation in non-capital cases until the decision in *Gideon v. Wainwright* (1961). Suspects were not required to be advised of their rights against self-incrimination and the right to consult an attorney until the case of *Miranda v. Arizona* (1966). These observations should not be construed as justification for official acts that were wrong and/or unlawful. However, the mindset of many people during WWII was different from that which one might expect today.

The basic historical facts of the murders of German POWs by other POWs in the cases cited are fairly clear. Adams offers no evidence suggesting that the convicted prisoners were not guilty, but instead concentrates on her expressed belief that the killers were abused into admitting their guilt. They were then executed for what should be considered justifiable homicide in eliminating traitors who had spied on fellow soldiers for the Americans. Her research indicates that the efforts to obtain information were centered in two classified camps where prisoners were "set-up" by cooperating POWs to provide information to American intelligence officers. It is a little unclear what information the informers were supposed to obtain from their fellow prisoners. The author seems to dismiss the concerns of the War Department about ardent Nazis controlling the POW camps while providing a source of labor to indirectly sustain the war effort. For example, prisoners worked in agriculture and helped provide for America's ability to feed our population and our troops.

In spite of Adams' conclusion that there was no organized Nazi effort by true believers to disrupt the labor force and cause as much difficulty on the home front as possible, other historians of the period disagree. More importantly, it would seem to be clear that at the time of the events many officials believed this to be true. In fact, in post-war Europe efforts went forward after hostilities were over to separate any identifiable Nazis from German people who had obeyed a call to serve their country. Even in Adams' work she refers to visitations of "the Holy Ghost" to discipline prisoners who failed to adhere to the expectations of their fellows.

The POWs who killed other POWs for cooperating and informing on other prisoners were hanged after the surrender of Germany. Executions were delayed to prevent retaliation against American POWs in German camps. Even without the information Adams provides—asserting multiple violations of the Geneva Convention and the legal standards we as the American people profess to uphold—there is an argument that mercy should have been extended to the condemned men. The war had ended, the threat to our war effort was no longer a consideration, and the most important argument was that these men were soldiers who acted against traitors in their own ranks.

These men may have been hanged because of a mindset concerning Nazi atrocities and a general mistrust of any German military members who continued their allegiance to a regime which had allowed the Holocaust and brought about the most costly war in history in terms of lives and property. The reason may have been due to the grinding of a relentless bureaucracy which, once set in motion, was incapable of recognizing that there was no longer a need to prove that Nazis or die-hard German military personnel could not terrorize or run our POW camps.

Other than as a study of history, what significance do these events hold for the professional in the intelligence or counter-intelligence field today? The first lesson is the most obvious. There is no possible excuse for placing cooperating prisoners in harms' way by a failure to keep them totally separate from the other prisoners. Had the military intelligence officers followed this precept, the POWs would not have been murdered and there would have been no enemy soldiers hanged as killers.

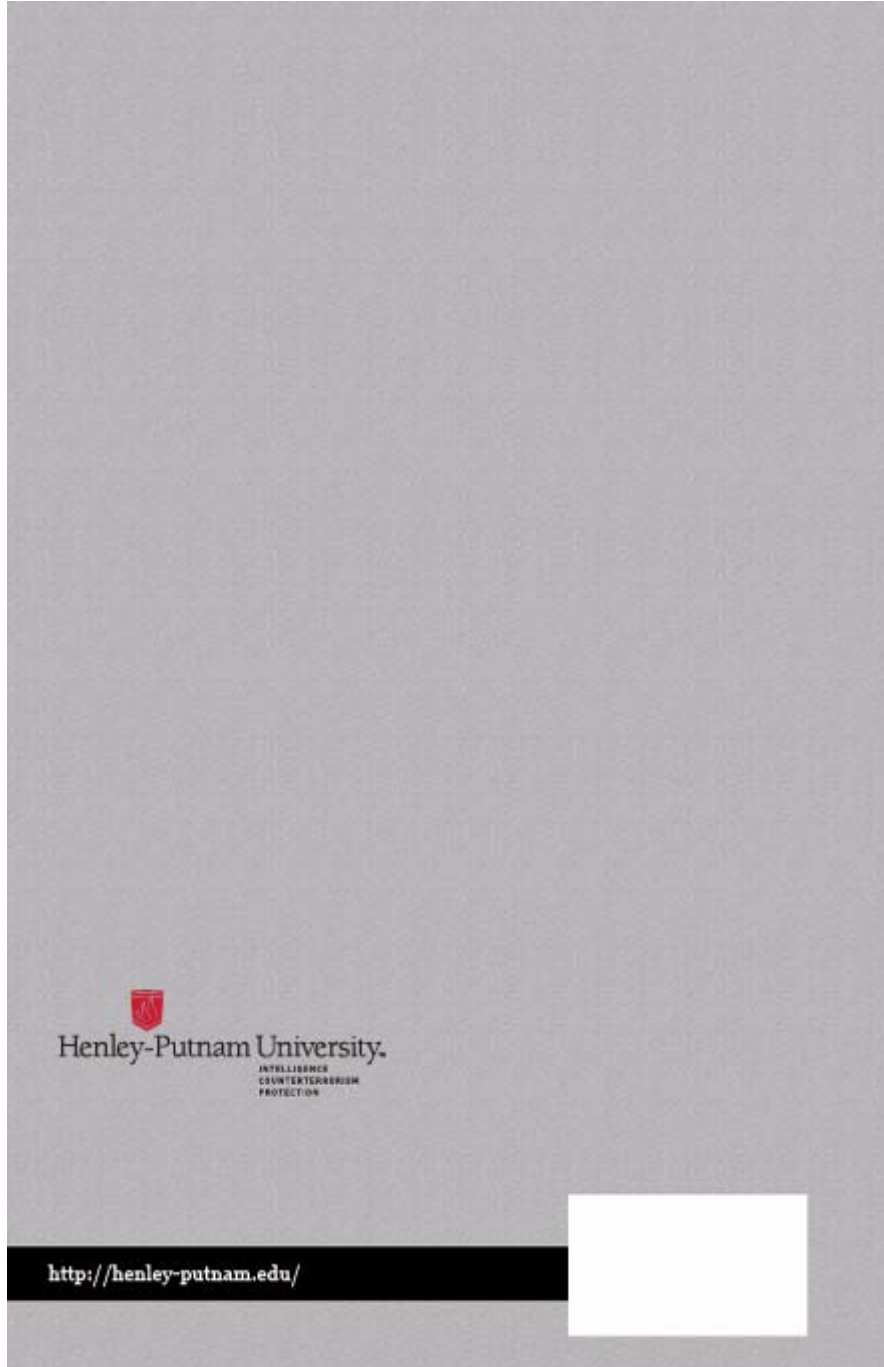
Adams also states there is a lesson for today in her work. It becomes obvious to the reader that she has little or no regard for former President George W. Bush or for the Central Intelligence Agency in their respective attitudes toward our enemy in the War on Terror. The question must be asked, are the criminal investigations of POW murders the same as the interrogations of suspected terrorists? In Washington, D.C. there are those who want to use our criminal justice system to try terrorists and those who support a different approach. Should the United States adhere to a higher moral standard, regardless of risk to our nation and our citizens? The true value of this book is that *Murder and Martial Justice* is a thought-provoking work, whether one agrees with the author's opinions and conclusions or not. Most objective historians will agree that all nations, including the United States, have from time to time reacted to external threats in ways less than ideal. Even Abraham Lincoln took steps considered questionable from a Constitutional viewpoint to preserve the Union during the Civil War. In recent years, most Americans have felt

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that President Roosevelt and our government acted in violation of our principles when Japanese citizens were deprived of homes and other property and interned during WWII.

None of these observations should be considered as an argument to justify wrongful behavior on the part of our government or any individual. They are, however, intended to suggest that for those who read Adams' book, the most important value may be the thought-provoking consideration of what a professional can condone to protect our national interest or defend against a possible threat. How does your personal perception of threats and mission requirements impact you as an intelligence or counter-intelligence agent?

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