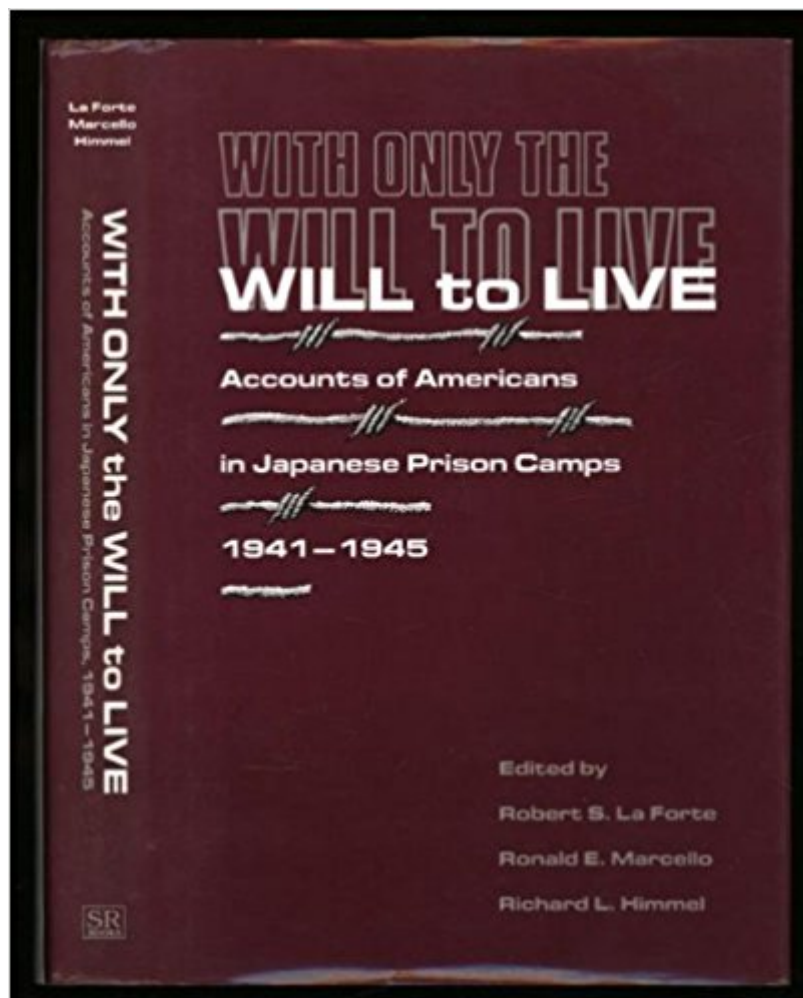




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With Only The Will To Live: Accounts Of Americans In Japanese Prison Camps 1941-1945



Synopsis

Of the 25,000 Americans held prisoner in the Pacific during World War II, over 40 percent died in captivity. Only those with luck and a tremendous will to live ever made it home. Surprisingly, however, no book has yet tried to convey, in the survivors' own words, the full range of what these servicemen went through. But now their astonishing stories are finally told in *With Only the Will to Live: Accounts of Americans in Japanese Prison Camps, 1941-1945*. Historians Robert S. La Forte, Ronald E. Marcello, and Richard L. Himmel have selected the accounts of 52 individuals from interviews with well over 150 survivors. Telling of their surprise at "losing" to the enemy, brutal treatment by guards, constant battles with hunger and disease, use as slave labor, and unflagging refusal to give in, the men who were there paint a vivid picture of every stage of their ordeal. And, unlike memoirs by single individuals, the numerous accounts in *With Only the Will to Live* together give a view of many different camps and kinds of treatment the thousands of POWs were subjected to. From the jungles of Burma to the coal mines of Nagasaki, from rice patties in the Philippines to air raids in Kawasaki, *With Only the Will to Live* conveys the wide variety of experiences the American prisoners endured. Their understated heroism, and the shocking conditions that tested it, is now fully recorded in a volume that will thrill history buffs with its immediacy and inspire all readers with its demonstration of what the human spirit can conquer.

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Customer Reviews

The editors (*Building the Death Railroad*, Scholarly Resources, 1993) present, in the survivors' own words, the story of American World War II prisoners in the Pacific. Over 25,000 Americans were

held prisoner in the Pacific and over 10,000 died. The lucky ones, blessed with an absolute will to live, tell their story. It is a numbing saga: hunger, disease, brutality, slave labor, and the constant humiliation of defeat and subjugation. Vivid descriptions of captivity with others who may or may not survive express the basic fears of every soldier: How will I behave as a prisoner of war? These POWs show how unrealistic rebellion is. They discuss endurance, escape, and sabotage and see death ships, American air attacks, and, finally, liberation. The book should be more inspirational, but it becomes bogged down in its sameness. It would have been better to zero in on a few POWs and follow their emotional stories to the end. This will be of greatest interest to readers with an interest in the psychology of war and captivity; for comprehensive collections only. Ralph DeLucia, Willoughby Wallace Lib., Branford, Ct. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc.

A harrowing compilation of accounts from survivors of Japanese POW camps in the eastern Pacific. The editors, who previously collaborated on *Building the Death Railway: The Ordeal of American POWs in Burma* (not reviewed), have selected material concerning the trauma of surrender and capture, the physical and psychological conditions suffered by POWs. Some of the oral histories are startling indeed. Desperate for food (it was Japanese policy to provide only daily rice, a spoonful of sugar a week, and virtually nothing else), POWs killed and ate anything they could get their hands on. One prisoner remembers a man riding the back of an enormous monitor lizard, trying desperately to cut its throat as it carried him through the camp. Another recalls throwing water buffaloes over the bridges they were constructing, because the guards would shoot the animals and give the carcasses to the prisoners. For some, though, the war was paradoxically kind. One prisoner at Kanthanaburi in Thailand (close to the infamous River Kwai bridge) remembers: "That was the land of milk and honey as far as I was concerned.... You could eat all the old fruit you wanted and all the duck eggs you could eat." But this is the exception. Most of the stories, in particular those about the Bataan Death March, are horrifying. Resistance and sabotage occurred as well. One man, in symbolic defiance, kept a Marine Corps ring hidden in his rectum for two and a half years. An electrician dropped a live cable into a truck full of Japanese soldiers in metal beds. Others caused minor explosions at the industrial plants where they were forced to work, or sabotaged military vehicles. A grim portrait of brutality, fanaticism, and the cheapness of human life in wartime, etched by people whose voices have been faithfully rendered. -- Copyright © 1994, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

Great and valuable, vivid, personal accounts. I was very glad to find this and read it. He includes

men who were captured from Wake and Guam to Singapore -- all over the place. These quotations are priceless. Highly recommended.

Excellent book .

The researchers who conducted the interviews for this project have done very critical work that may be better appreciated in the decades to come. Most of the men who survived the Japanese POW camps have since died, and the opportunity to obtain first-hand accounts diminishes greatly as time goes by. All aspects of POW life are presented in a carefully edited compilation of interviews with over 100 former prisoners. It is a tough, but necessary, read that overwhelms one with the senselessness of Japanese brutality. I don't think that a better account could possibly exist and I wish that this was required reading for any history curriculum covering the war. Since the 1980's it has become far more popular among some in America to criticize the internment of Japanese-Americans during the war rather than the true barbarity of the Japanese. A book such as this, relying on first-hand accounts as it does, may curb the revisionists for at least a few more years.

Excellent account to events after the Japanese invasion. One man quoted is my father's best friend. We have heard him recount many years of suffering while in captivity. Happily he is still alive today.

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