



Voices from Captivity: Interpreteting the American POW Narrative (Modern War Studies (Hardcover))

Robert C. Doyle

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Popularized by books and films like *Andersonville*, *The Great Escape*, and *The Hanoi Hilton*, and recounted in innumerable postwar memoirs, the POW story holds a special place in American culture. Robert Doyle's remarkable study shows why it has retained such enormous power to move and instruct us.

Long after wartime, memories of captivity haunt former wartime prisoners, their families, and their society-witness the continuing Vietnam MIA-POW controversies-and raise fundamental questions about human nature and survival under inhumane conditions. The prison landscapes have varied dramatically: Indian villages during the Forest Wars; floating hulks during the Revolution and War of 1812; slave bagnios in Algeria and Tripoli; hotels and haciendas during the Mexican War; large rural camps like Andersonville in the South or converted federal armories like Elmira in the North; stalags in Germany and death-ridden tropical camps in the Philippines; frozen jails in North Korea; and the "Hanoi Hilton" and bamboo prisons of Vietnam. But, as Doyle demonstrates, the story remains the same.

Doyle shows that, though setting and circumstance may change, POW stories share a common structure and are driven by similar themes. Capture, incarceration, isolation, propaganda, torture, capitulation or resistance, death, spiritual quest, escape, liberation, and repatriation are recurrent key motifs in these narratives. It is precisely these elements, Doyle contends, that have made this genre such a fascinating and enduring literary form.

Drawing from a wide array of sources, including official documents, first-person accounts, histories, and personal letters, in addition to folklore and fiction, Doyle illustrates the timelessness of the POW story and shows why it has become central to our understanding of the American experience of war.

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