

### Living By Inches: The Smells, Sounds, Tastes, and Feeling of Captivity in Civil War Prisons

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## Review

Holly A. Pinheiro, Jr.

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**Kutzler, Evan A.** *Living By Inches: The Smells, Sounds, Tastes, and Feeling of Captivity in Civil War Prisons*. University of North Carolina, 2020. Paperback \$29.99 ISBN 9781463653785 pp. 195

Contrary to popular opinion, Civil War battles were not always formal military engagements or guerilla skirmishes between Confederate and U.S. forces. Hundreds of thousands of prisoners of war (POWs) knew that their battles were starkly different from armed conflicts. POWs understood that fights in captivity occurred against their enemies, themselves, elements, animals, insects, and diseases. We know an extensive amount of information about infamous prison camps, including Andersonville and Elmira. Recent scholarship has brought to light the complexity of pardoning and surrendering processes and the "black flag" policy's racial politics. However, the day-to-day lived experiences of imprisoned soldiers and their struggles for survival are regularly portrayed in cliché terms. In *Living By Inches: The Smells, Sounds, Tastes, and Feeling of Captivity in Civil War Prisons*, Evan A. Kutzler argues that rather than view POWs through a stereotypical lens, we must understand the complicated lives of captives in more concrete ways. (4-8)

Kutzler is currently an Assistant Professor of History at Georgia Southern State University. He previously co-edited prison memoirs with the University of Georgia Press. Kutzler has also published numerous articles in the *Journal of Southern History* and *Civil War History*. Throughout the study, Kutzler details how POWs' senses continually came under attack, in various ways, during their imprisonment and their persistence to survive against impossible odds. His focus on the suffocating air due to limited sanitation, decaying bodies, and various prison camps creatures detail the horrors of POWs' lives to readers' awareness in new ways. His discussion of POWs viewing their exposure and conflicts with lice as a contest of one's manhood provides another avenue to learn how gender and military service intersected. Meanwhile, as Kutzler demonstrates, the night presented POWs with both a potential respite from their reality in their dreams and a battleground amongst fellow prisoners (often packed together tightly) who

occasionally stole from each other. Collectively, these topics denote that life in captivity was often dangerous and frequently filled with life-threatening possibilities.

Even amid hardships, some POWs attempted to establish communal bonds amongst each other to survive. Singing songs provided some POWs with a coping mechanism that could unify captives. Songs also became a way to display agency while directly challenging their captors' authority as POWs sang patriotic songs from their opposing nation. And while there were no official church services, some POWs frequently held their informal religious services. Both defiant actions highlight that POWs may have been captives, but they could still assert individualism and directly challenge their captors, even if it meant their lives. Simultaneously, these actions gave POWs the ability to unite and create relationships that might give them glimpses of how in their quest to survive or maybe even some respite in the afterlife.

Kutzler shows that it is long overdue to humanize their hardships of POWs. He also demonstrates that it is possible to provide a more detailed investigation of POWs' varied experiences. He accomplishes this by examining various sources composed by ex-POWs, including their illustrations and memoirs, to bring the trials and tribulations from the captives themselves rather than societal interpretations of their wartime experiences. Doing so allows Kutzler to uncover the various battles for survival that many POWs experienced. Since Kutzler composed a concise study, it will be valuable for a broad audience, including undergraduates and history buffs, due to a jargon-free prose. *Living By Inches* is a welcomed contribution to the growing scholarship on Civil War POWs. Furthermore, Kutzler shows that there is still more to learn about the wartime captivity of prisoners. The monograph's one notable limitation is the limited focus on USCT POWs, including those stationed at Andersonville. Still, *Living By Inches* is a critical study that reveals a more intimate story about a non-traditional battlefield.

**Holly A. Pinheiro, Jr.**, is an Assistant Professor of History at Augusta University. His book, *The Families' Civil War!*, is under contract with The University of Georgia Press in the UnCivil Wars Series.