 Profiles in Survival
The Experiences of American POWs in the Philippines during World War II
By John C. Shively

The life of a prisoner of war is never easy, but when captors fail to adhere to reasonable standards of human decency, a prisoner's existence quickly transcends mere monotony and enters the realm of sheer misery. John Shively's Profiles in Survival recounts the experiences of eight Americans who survived the brutality of Japanese captivity during World War II. Besides hailing from Indiana, these seven men and one woman are linked by their common service in the Philippines—the site of the largest surrenders in American history in April and May 1942. Using memoirs, interviews, archival sources, and secondary literature, Shively traces the stories of their captivity and various paths to eventual freedom. His book is a grim reminder of the horrors of war and the depth of humankind's depravity, but it also contains examples of what Abraham Lincoln memorably termed "the better angels of our nature."

The Americans whose stories Shively recounts represent a cross-section of the U.S. military that fought the Japanese in the immediate aftermath of the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. They include Irvin Alexander, an infantry officer wounded in Bataan who endured the Death March into Japanese captivity; Harry Brown, a U.S. Medical Corps surgeon who, while a prisoner, devised a novel medical device; William Clark, also wounded in Bataan, who survived the Death March and subsequent transfer to Japan; James Duckworth, a U.S. Medical Corps colonel whose leadership of hospitals on Bataan and in prison camps saved countless American lives; Eleanor Garen, a U.S. Medical Corps nurse who spent the war at the Santo Tomas Internment Camp in Manila; Melvin McCoy, a naval officer who was one of the few to escape captivity and find his way to Australia aboard an American submarine to share his stories of Japanese brutality with General Douglas MacArthur; Hugh Sims, a U.S. Navy seaman who fought with the Marines on
Corregidor and survived captivity and transfer to Formosa on a “hell ship”; and Edgar Whitcomb, whose story is so incredible that Hollywood would be accused of gross exaggeration if it developed it on its own. (Whitcomb escaped from Corregidor by swimming across Manila Bay, befriended Filipino natives, was eventually betrayed to the Japanese, survived interrogation and torture by claiming to be a civilian mining engineer, talked his way onto a ship bound for Shanghai with other war refugees, and was repatriated to the United States in a diplomatic personnel exchange. He ended the war back in Luzon as a navigator on a B-25 bomber, exacting some measure of revenge against the Japanese in the final months of the war.)

More than one in three Americans died in Japanese captivity. Japanese captors routinely shot, beheaded, bayoneted, and tortured prisoners. Malnutrition and disease weakened prisoners’ conditions, and the Japanese made matters worse through sadistic treatment and failure to provide basic medical care. Perhaps the worst experience was transport to Korea, Formosa, or Japan aboard the unmarked hell ships. Packed in cargo holds with little access to water, food, or sanitary facilities, prisoners died or went insane from thirst. U.S. submarines sank a number of these ships, unwittingly sending thousands of their own countrymen to a watery grave. Shively concludes that those who survived did so because of their indomitable spirit, unflagging determination, faith in their fellow countrymen, and luck.

Profiles in Survival is a fitting tribute to those Americans who endured the unendurable in captivity and who lived to tell their stories. Although its prose is somewhat mechanical and lackluster, this book is highly recommended for the general reading public, especially those interested in World War II history.

There is no ethnic group subjected to more stereotyping, myths, and distortions than the indigenous people of this hemisphere. Europeans built their nation states on the dehumanization of indigenous people through the use of deceptive, simplistic, or just plain wrong, images. Virtually nothing taught about Native people in western schools is untainted; nor is contemporary reporting about aboriginal issues free from the bias of reporters assigned to cover stories and events for which they have little or no formal training.

Most media consign Natives to the distant horizons of their concerns, citing them only in social events such as powwows, or as opponents to environmental development who share a near superhuman connection with the natural world. In recent years, however, this perception of Natives as earth caretakers has been eclipsed by a rival image: the rise of a casino gambling culture has, according to its critics, exposed Natives as little more than opportunists willing to make any compromise to enrich themselves and carry on the tradition of substance abuse and associated violence. In the public’s perception, the casino culture overwhelms everything else in Native life, and most non-Native journalists are far too apathetic to see it otherwise.

Government policy is largely influenced by the media, hence the direct relation between raw and racist stories that have come to characterize U.S. news about Natives and the federal and state policies directed at indigenous people. Fortunately, Native writers and political leaders have created their own means of communicating news using contemporary technologies. In *American Indians and the Mass Media*, editors Meta Carstarphen and John P. Sanchez reveal the stories of the intrepid Natives who have, with various levels of success, entered this profession.

The book’s contributors include some of the most respected Native journalists—Paul DeMain, Mark Trahanant, Patty Leow, Selene Phillips, and Juan Hernandez—as well as academics from universities ranging from Syracuse to Washington. Their essays mix historical analysis, contemporary viewpoints, mediated images, and distinctly Native perspectives; their subjects include mascots, pejorative terms like “squaw,” the use of Native images in the marketplace, and the relation of law and the media. The volume’s fifteen chapters conclude with suggestions for discussion and notes for further research, as well as an ample index and bibliography. However, the book would have been greatly enhanced by a guide to current Native print, online, and broadcast news outlets.

Two other additions would have fittingly rounded out this volume.
First, a chapter on the exceptional success of Canada’s Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN), the only indigenous broadcast network in the hemisphere, would have supplemented the other stories by showing that Native people can, and do, operate a complex cable television unit with exceptional competence. Second, the editors could have included a chapter on how Native media shaped the international indigenous rights movement. Akwesasne Notes, created by the highly conservative Mohawk Nation Council in 1968 and expanded over the years to become the most important breeding ground for Native journalists was, for a generation, the primary advocate for aboriginal peoples. Traditional Native government sponsorship of a news journal that both the U.S. and Canadian officials labeled subversive and radical is a fantastic story and would make a logical addition to future editions.

American Indians and the Mass Media is an important book that summarizes what we have long known—the non-Native media must apply the same levels of credibility and professionalism to aboriginal stories as they do to any other. By providing the public with a summation of outside media portrayals of indigenous peoples, the editors have added to this ongoing discourse. The book should be required reading for all journalists and is essential for students of this discipline.

Doug George-Kanentiio, Akwesasne Mohawk, is the former editor of Akwesasne Notes, was a member of the board of trustees for the National Museum of the American Indian and is vice president of the Hiawatha Institute for Indigenous Knowledge. He is the author of Iroquois on Fire (2006) among other books.