



Through the Valley: My Captivity in Vietnam

By William Reeder Jr.

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There are those rare books which engross you from the very beginning. For me personally, these volumes share two key characteristics. First, they center on subject material which I clearly have a great interest in. Second, the author articulates the subject in a highly conversant style which is extremely engaging and demands that you continue to read the next page. It is these two characteristics which clearly make William Reeder's *Through the Valley: My Captivity in Vietnam* one of those select books.

Within the pages, Reeder superbly details his harrowing experience in the waning months of the Vietnam War. It began on 9 May 1972 when then CPT Reeder was flying his Cobra gunship in support of South Vietnamese troops. During the mission, Reeder's helicopter was shot down in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. The crash killed his co-pilot and left Reeder with severe injuries which included a broken back. Despite his debilitating condition, he evaded capture from the North Vietnamese for three days.

Following his capture, Reeder was moved to a small jungle prison comprised almost entirely with South Vietnamese prisoners. Here we underwent his first of countless interrogations. After several weeks, Reeder and 25 other POWs were forced to travel by foot more than 200 miles along the Ho Chi Minh Trail into North Vietnam. Following this incredible ordeal in which seven POWs died, the group would eventually find imprisonment at the Hoa Lo Prison (better known as The Hanoi Hilton). Reeder spent months there until his eventual release on 27 March 1973. When released he was the last U.S. Army prisoner taken who survived. All others captured after him died.

Reeder superbly tells this story within the pages of *Through the Valley*. He achieves this in several ways. First, he writes in the aforementioned extremely conversant style. Second, the author does a superb job of articulating the vast emotional spectrum which highlighted his 10-month ordeal. Reeder does not shy away from addressing his thoughts and emotions with readers. His decision to share this makes this a very impactful book.

Within this discussion, one clear theme resonates throughout the volume. That is the power of faith and hope in assisting a person in meeting or simply surviving the challenges of life. Throughout the volume, Reeder reflects on the seemingly desperate situation he was in. Yet, you always sense that he felt he would ultimately make it through the ordeal. His optimism and ability to supplant the negativity of the environment he was placed in is clearly inspirational. In fact, this is one of those volumes which can truly influence your way of thinking and the way you approach problems.

What makes this unique amongst other Vietnam POW books is that Reeder skillfully blends the interactions and relationships he had with others while a POW. This not only includes fellow U.S. POWs, but South Vietnamese

POWs, guards and prison staff, and North Vietnamese soldiers. In particular, Reeder details his experiences with South Vietnamese POWs and the bond he developed with many. Reeder further expounds on many of these individuals in the volume's epilogue. In it, he further elaborates on his relationship with each and provides a synopsis on what happened to them after the war.

This is not just one of the best firsthand POW accounts I have read, but one of the best volumes I have read in many years. It unquestionably possesses the characteristics of a superb story and a story which is superbly told. *Through the Valley* is a book which will benefit and be remembered by readers of a wide variety of interests. William Reeder has a special story which must be read.