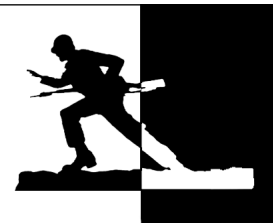


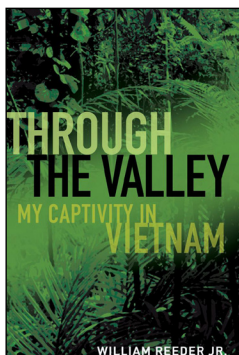
Book Reviews



Through the Valley: My Captivity in Vietnam

**By William Reeder Jr.
Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2016, 238 pages**

Reviewed by LTC (Retired)
Rick Baillergeon



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 copilot 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 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.

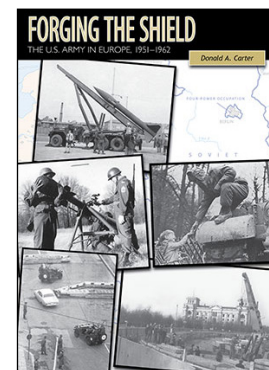
This is not just one of the best firsthand POW accounts I have read, but one of the best volumes I have read in many years. It unquestionably possesses the characteristics of a superb story and a story which is superbly told. *Through the Valley* is a book which will benefit and be remembered by readers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

Forging the Shield: The U.S. Army in Europe, 1951-1962

**By Donald A. Carter
Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 2015,
513 pages**

Reviewed by Maj Timothy Heck,
U.S. Marine Corps Reserve

Donald Carter's *Forging the Shield: The U.S. Army in Europe, 1951-1962* is the Center for Military History's official account of Army presence in Western Europe from the return of U.S. combat forces in 1951 through the Berlin Crisis of 1961-62. The book is a dense academic work focusing on the



institution's doctrine, logistics, and manpower as the United States sought to reinforce its presence in Europe after the initial shock of the Korean War. Given recent discussions regarding America's role in European regional security, *Forging the Shield* deepens our understanding of how the Army went from a relatively small post-war garrison and occupation authority to a combat-ready force that remains stationed in Europe today.

As a result of rising tensions between the Soviet Union and the West in the late 1940s, American policy makers and strategists revised America's force posture throughout the world. The surprise of the Korean War and its initial American setbacks prompted changes to the American presence in Europe, where overt Soviet action was most expected. The 1st Infantry Division and the U.S. Constabulary, which were garrisoning West Germany, lacked sufficient or significant combat power required a radical shift in manpower and training in order to become a combat-capable force. In September 1950, just three months after the start of the Korean War, President Harry Truman called for reinforcements to be sent to Europe, demonstrating a willingness to forward deploy American troops in anticipation of conflict. The reinvigorated Army, Carter remarks, was a "down payment" for security in Western Europe in the event of a Soviet attack.

Carter's focus on the sinews and mechanisms required to expand American presence in Europe reveals the struggles commanders faced. Post-war drawdowns left equipment and training readiness at abysmal levels. Furthermore, doctrinal changes, especially with regards to atomic weapons,

represented another significant challenge. Carter deftly portrays the frequent changes in American plans for tactical nuclear weapons and the resultant shifts in DOTMLPF (doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, and facilities) considerations. Throughout the 1950s, the U.S. Army in Europe conducted large-scale exercises and wargames in order to prepare for the atomic battlefield. These exercises helped American planners anticipate troop reactions, civilian concerns, and maturing NATO doctrine when preparing for World War III.

As Chief Historian Richard W. Stewart states in the book's foreword, the U.S. Army in Europe during this time was "a visible symbol to the world that America had placed its flag and its soldiers — its citizens-in-arms — in harm's way to reinforce its commitment to peace and freedom." Carter authoritatively tells that story from an organizational perspective. Drawing from official records and contemporary accounts in newspapers like *Stars & Stripes*, *Forging the Shield* is extensively researched and amply illustrated. That said, it is not for light or casual readers. The structural focus means the individual Soldiers and leaders who made up the Army are often lost in the narrative, leaving it somewhat sterile. While there are interesting asides on the birth of the Special Forces, intervention in Lebanon, post-war occupation politics, and simulated nuclear war in populated areas, the denseness of Carter's work limits its applicability to all but the dedicated student of history. Ultimately, *Forging the Shield* is a valuable work in the history of the Army and its organization though aimed at a niche audience.

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