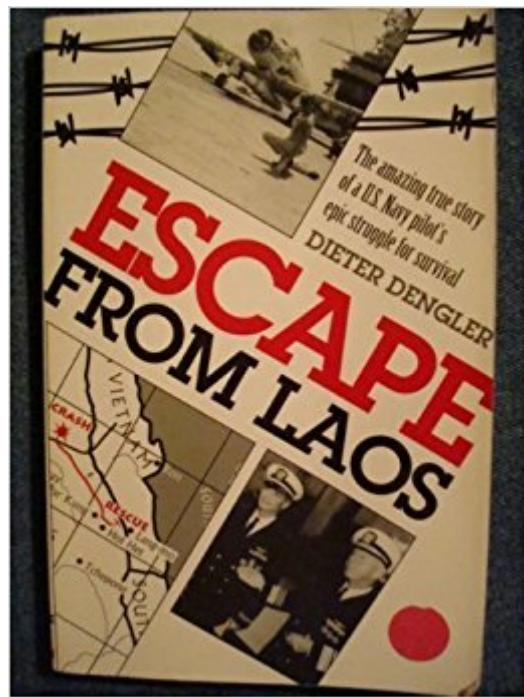


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Escape From Laos



Synopsis

Dengler's story is a valuable contribution to the literature of survival as well as to the literature of the war.

Book Information

Paperback: 228 pages

Publisher: Presidio Press (January 14, 1997)

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Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 starsÂ See all reviewsÂ (33 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

This reviewer has read several P.O.W. tales. Each is disturbing yet stirring. Each paints a picture of physical and mental courage in face of overwhelming physical, military, personal odds. What sets "Escape from Laos" apart is the sheer mystery surrounding the Indochina war in that mysterious landlocked country. Even those of us who served in Vietnam (but were spared combat) can at least relate geographically to many stories. We could locate Cu Chi, An Khe and Khe Sanh on a map. But Laos? To orientate ourselves, EFL is the tale of a Navy Pilot, Dieter Dengler and his escape from a Pathet Lao POW camp in eastern Laos. My edition's one map shed no further geographical light on the situation. Inferior maps no longer surprise this reviewer. Dengler escapes his surprisingly undisciplined guards easily enough. But what amazes the reader, almost boggles the mind, is the sheer geographical challenge he faced. Could remotest and wildest Vietnam be so brutal? And how did the guy feed himself in the bush and deal with the "animal creatures" encountered along the way. I wasn't aware-but surprised! - That the PL and VC tried to lure rescue choppers to their doom with phony escapees signaling for rescue. I also wasn't aware -but was surprised -that POWs ATE the rats they captured! We gave them to our mamasan to dump. Dengler (obviously) made it to freedom but his good news opens up another unpleasant subject. Over 500 men went missing in Laos. We know that our sniveling Ambassador to Vientiane, one William Sullivan, actively

discouraged rescue operations. But only 10 men emerged alive from the 500! One was Dengler. 9 more were released but via HANOI! Where are the others? At the time of this review, 377 men remain unaccounted for in Laos.

On February 1, 1966 the American pilot Dieter Dengler (1938-2001) took enemy fire and crash-landed his plane in Laos while on a secret mission. After surviving in the jungle on his own he was captured, tortured (hung upside down with an ant nest around his neck, submerged in a well, dragged by an ox through a village), then taken on a three-week jungle trek to a Pathet Lao prison camp called Par Kung. Dengler recalls that it was nothing like he imagined a prison camp might be, but instead a tiny enclave of a few huts exactly twenty-one by twenty-two steps in size. There he met six other POWS, two American and four Asian (which later became a source of tension), who had been imprisoned as long as two and a half years. Later they were transferred to the very similar Hoi Het camp. When starvation threatened both the prisoners and the guards, and the prisoners overheard the guards saying that they planned to shoot them, they made an elaborate plan and escaped. The fellow POWS were separated after the escape, and Dengler and his buddy Duane Martin teamed up. Lice, leeches, ticks, ants ("the true torment of the jungle"), sweltering days and cold nights, torrential rain, dumb mistakes and incredibly good luck, and the human will to survive--these are only part of Dengler's first person narrative. Incredibly, after soldiering on for so long, Dengler and Martin stumbled onto some villagers, scared them, and in the space of a minute they had beheaded Duane. After surviving twenty-three days in the jungle after his escape, hallucinations, wandering in a circle, tumbling over water falls, and eating things you never should eat, Dengler was rescued in an improbable stroke of luck. He lost sixty pounds in the six-month ordeal.

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