



# Hero Found: The Greatest POW Escape of the Vietnam War

*Bruce Henderson*

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## Hero Found: The Greatest POW Escape of the Vietnam War Bruce Henderson

From the #1 *New York Times* bestselling coauthor of *And the Sea Will Tell* comes *Hero Found*: the incredible but true story of Dieter Dengler, the only pilot to escape captivity from a POW camp in the Laotian jungle during the Vietnam War. This amazing story of triumph over seemingly insurmountable odds has been filmed by Werner Herzog as both a documentary (*Little Dieter Needs to Fly*) and a motion picture (*Rescue Dawn*, starring Christian Bale), and now receives its book treatment from Bruce Henderson, who served with Dengler in Vietnam.

## Hero Found: The Greatest POW Escape of the Vietnam War Details

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## From Reader Review Hero Found: The Greatest POW Escape of the Vietnam War for online ebook

### Tom Schulte says

I have been wanting to read this movie since seeing the Herzog films *Rescue Dawn* and *Little Dieter Needs to Fly*. The comparison to the films, which seems to always bring up differences with the real story, prompts me to defend Herzog; he had the dramatist's inclination to entertain a movie theater audience. For the interested who have more than a couple of hours to spend, here is the researched and detailed tale of Dieter Dengler superhuman and serendipitous escaped from a Pathet Lao prison camp in Laos. He was rescued after 23 days on the run following six months of torture and imprisonment and was the first captured U.S. airman to escape enemy captivity during the Vietnam war. This book covers from his WW II inspiration in spying a fighter pilot to fly to move to American from Germany to the entire ordeal to his later life as a food-hording restaurateur.

This is an illuminating footnote to the U.S. war in Laos and the history of the CIA front Air America. Dengler was a soldier in Laos operations and most of his fellow POWs were Air America agents and contractors.

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### Ralph Anderson says

Outstanding book....!

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### Dave says

First, the story of Dieter Dengler is without question a very good one. Dengler, while flying a bombing run over Laos in 1966 in an Navy A-1 Skyraider, was shot down. He was captured by the communist Pathet Lao, spent about 6 months as a POW, escaped, and was miraculously rescued. I don't know the statistics, but I do know there were very few POW escapes during the Vietnam War. Dieter Dengler's story was well captured in the recent film "Rescue Dawn" with Christian Bale as Dengler. Author Bruce Henderson served with Dengler aboard the carrier USS Ranger, so this is especially poignant to him. The reader not only learns about the escape, but also a lot about carrier operations in the 1960's, navy pilot training, the air campaign over North Vietnam, and much of Dengler's life story. A whole lot of information. So far, so good - I give it about 4.5 stars.

For me, the minuses of the book are first - the quality of the writing. While by no means bad, the writing is surprisingly rote and did not grab me at all. I was also puzzled at what all Henderson included in the book. There's a lot that just doesn't pertain to the thrust of the story. Interesting, yes, but also distracting. Also at times, the book goes over the top with hero worship. I've seen it before in war stories where the author is very vested or actually took part in the story.

So although I found the book a quick and mostly enjoyable read, overall, I give it round 3.5 stars.

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## David says

A very exciting book, read by me in its audiobook form (CDs). I expected a book about prisoners of war, escape, and evasion, acts of horror and acts of courage and honor approaching martyrdom, and that's what I got, but I got even more. I got a lot of details about our involvement in Vietnam, of which I already had significant knowledge, since I was in college during the Vietnam War and have served in the armed forces for 26+ years. I got a lot of background information about what it takes to be a Navy pilot who flies off aircraft carriers, about the planes those pilots flew, and the details of the dangers they faced. Most of all, I got a story about one man, a German-American patriot, who survived the perilous life of a World War II German civilian to eventually become an American citizen, a Naval aviator, and who was shot down over Laos during the Vietnam War and how he faced life, death, and his dreams. This is a great story about an exceptional person.

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## John Podlaski says

Dieter's story of survival in the jungles of Laos was a gripping tale to say the least. As a former Army Vietnam veteran myself, I was intrigued by all the goings-on of an aircraft carrier and have to admit that while reading Bruce Henderson's story of Dieter Dengler, I found the book to be an enjoyable learning experience for me. I was especially taken back when there was mention about a fellow pilot of Dieter's, Donald Woloczak, from Alpena, Michigan and how he became MIA during the war. You see, I have been wearing a bronze POW bracelet of Donald Woloczak for the last thirty years, and the information shared by the author was new and seemed to fill in the gaps.

I, too, was born in Germany, but six years after the end of WWII. However, I've seen the destruction of war and have heard similar war survival stories from my family in the old country - the experience matures you quickly.

As for the living conditions and treatment of Dieter and others during their captivity is beyond anything human. But one must do whatever is necessary in order to survive. The chase left me on the edge of my seat, wondering what would happen next. The scene of Dieter and his fellow POW running into the villager took my breath away. It was great that his escape from Laos was successful, but it appears that he could not escape from the tormenting in his head. Great job Bruce, and thank you for the education! Five Stars for Hero Found.

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## Shandra says

Loved this book, what a story. I listened to it on audio, the reader had an interesting way of reading that I wasn't too wild about. Particularly helps me experience the history that surrounds me every day.

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## **Diana H. says**

Dieter Dengler came to the US from Germany following WWII. All he wanted to do was fly. He managed that by joining the military. Unfortunately for him, war had a way of finding its way into his life once again - only this time, he was a combatant, not a civilian.

Dieter was shot down in the jungle of Laos and was captured as a POW.

Unwilling to be held in captivity, Dieter came up with an escape plan that worked. He was rescued following his escape.

Read this story. It speaks to the spirit of a man determined to live as, "a free man."

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## **Gary Null says**

Whenever any of you couch-potato civilians get to feeling sorry for yourself and how bad your lot in life is, you need to sit down and read a book like "Hero Found" to be reminded what suffering and survival are really like, and how American servicemen and servicewomen put themselves in harm's way for your freedoms.

This is the story of a Vietnam-era Navy pilot who became a hero. Dieter Dengler survived beatings and starvation at the hands of the enemy, but was still able to lead a daring escape from a jungle prison camp. Finding his way through the dense jungle to freedom proved to be extremely difficult, almost more daunting than the escape itself.

His plane crippled during a secret bombing mission over Laos, Dengler was forced to crash-land in hostile territory.

The brutal Pathet Lao, who captured him, beat him severely and imprisoned him in a jungle prison along with several other American, Thai and Chinese prisoners. They were starved and beaten so severely that during the six months of captivity, Dengler had lost about 90 pounds. He weighed 98 pounds when rescued.

When the prisoners did get to eat, their meals were atrocious – usually moldy rice infested with insects. Once, when the captors killed a deer, they ate most of it themselves and shared it with the villagers; the scraps they gave to the prisoners. The prisoners got to chow-down on the have-digested contents of the deer's stomach.

Dengler began preparing for his ordeal when he was a young boy growing up in war-torn Germany. His fascination with airplanes was sparked when American bombers would fly low over his village to attack targets at nearby factories. Later, they bombed his village, too. His father had been killed fighting the Russians and his mother had vowed to teach her sons to survive on their own.

Dengler became a scavenger and survivor. He learned to make what he needed from discarded scraps and he learned how to survive in the forest for hours or days when necessary.

After the war, Dengler emigrated to the United States and worked hard to get an education and become a pilot. He first enlisted in the Air Force, but with no advanced degree was not eligible for flight training. After his Air Force enlistment, he earned a degree and joined the Navy to become a pilot.

Dengler became a legend during SERE (survival, evasion, resistance and escape) training, when he escaped three times in twelve hours from the simulated prison camp.

Intertwined within Dengler's story are many interesting sub-stories about life on a carrier and the interaction between the pilots, commanders and crew. For instance, there was speculation that the search for Dengler and his downed plane was called off early because of a confrontation he had had days earlier with his squadron leader.

Dengler almost didn't get rescued, because the pilot who spotted him, waving his arms standing near the bank of a stream, at first thought the disheveled, gaunt, raggedly-dressed individual could have been a native fisherman.

A compelling read.

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### **Stephen says**

Great second book about Dengler, the first book *Escape From Laos*, written by Dengler gives more personal accounts of his captivity, but this book goes into much more detail about his full life, early, and late until his death, both are a must read, but if could only read one, this is it.

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### **Dave Smith says**

terrific story of the will to survive. excellent read.

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### **Sean Froehlich says**

### **Must read, absolutely amazing**

You here about POWS and their treatment, but to read what happened, what was endured, and how one mans will to be free was absolutely amazing. I couldn't put the book down!

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### **Alexandria Irwin says**

This was overall really good! The story is super interesting, especially because it's true! Although it's not super interesting all throughout. There's a lot of detailed military talk that can get boring especially for a female, but getting past all that is worth it.

This book was basically a cross between "Catch Me If You Can" (Frank Abagnale) and "Unbroken" (Laura Hilenbrand). In fact, if Frank in "Catch Me" somehow became a POW, this is exactly how he would act. "Unbroken" is just similar because of the storyline.

It's definitely gory at times. The worst part was any mention of leeches- and some of the descriptions are pretty grotesque. I'm still thinking about them- ugh!

The best part was when he didn't sign the agreement the Vietnamese chief gave him. That had to take amazing strength, and it made me wonder if I could ever be that strong. It was awesome when he could come home and say that he didn't give in to any of that pressure. He was clear. Definitely has spiritual parallels.

Yeah, so inspirational! He went through so much and kept hope despite insurmountable odds. That's why these types of books are always so inspiring. The saddest part after he comes back though, is a) how long is marriage lasts to the girl who waited all that time for him to return and b) how he dies (it's appropriate, but a little disappointing).

What's the one thing I'm going to apply after reading this book? That my bad days are literally nothing. That I can keep a positive attitude even when I have like 7 deadly diseases and I'm subsisting on maggot infested meat (which is hopefully never). That my will to keep going, not my ability, can sustain me no matter what. And that no one, no matter what they do, can touch that will unless I let them.

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### **Russ says**

I started reading this book while attending SERE training. It really brought to life what I was learning in an academic (though truly physically and mentally challenging) setting. Henderson's account of Dengler's life emphasizes the importance of life experience, training, and a never quit attitude to surviving life's most challenging times.

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### **Matt says**

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. A departure from traditional POW stories that focus on the gritty details of torture, this focuses on the man primarily. The author clearly conveys the likability of Dieter, his enthusiasm for life. Sometimes funny, sometimes edge of your seat gritty, and sometimes gut wrenching, this is a truly wonderful story of not one but may American heroes.

## Tim Jin says

After reading one of the greatest war survival books of all time, Unbroken, it is very hard to not to compare both books and try not to be bias because they were two different wars, different era in our history and two way different endings. Hero Found is well written, but not superb. It is not a must read like Unbroken, but it is also not a waste of time or credit. The book has a high points and its lows, but overall, it is well put together. If you are reading this book and haven't read Unbroken yet, you must read Unbroken. If you already read Unbroken and thinking about reading Hero Found, this is not a must read nor a bad listen. I am being bias because I'm comparing the two books. Hero Found is a good story, but I wished he had more of his boyhood. Hero Found is like Band of Brothers with many central characters and tend to loose focus of its center.

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