

Naval War College Review

Volume 33
Number 2 *March-April*

Article 12

1980

Escape from Laos

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Recommended Citation

Crayton, R. (1980) "Escape from Laos," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 33 : No. 2 , Article 12.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol33/iss2/12>

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BOOK REVIEWS

Coffey, Kenneth J. *Strategic Implications of the All-Volunteer Force: The Conventional Defense of Central Europe*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979. 210pp.

This effort is excellent—comprehensive and accurate. The author provides another piece to the puzzling question of how a democratic republic provides itself the best and most credible defense at a cost, physically and spiritually, that the citizenry is willing to bear. Though the strategic situation and the American view regarding conscription has changed somewhat since publication, the study, which focuses on the AVF's capability to provide a conventional defense for Central Europe, is a valid benchmark for new assessments.

Coffey first traces early opposition to the war in Vietnam and the draft. The earliest American military traditions established by the Colonials were to fight only defensive wars with every able-bodied man obligated to serve. Until the citizen army became a professional standing army these traditions remained an integral aspect of the American way. The Vietnam era opposition was to a war unrelated to the nation's defense, and fought with forces that reflected the inequitable nature of the draft. The author devotes one chapter to draft reform and follows it with a chapter on the political realities that forced the abandonment of the Selective Service system.

The remainder of the book examines the formation and the early years of the All-Volunteer Force, and its effect on total force requirements for the conventional defense of Central Europe. The author treats thoroughly every important aspect of this problem. He is especially lucid in calling for reconciliation between America's strategic force capabilities and its commitments, but he did not know of the imminent formation of a Rapid Deployment Force.

This book inspires one now to explore new directions. NATO has contained the Soviet threat to the areas directed by its Charter. As the realities of international power realignments became evident, coincident reassessments of the Soviet threat did not occur. This fact and the perception of the United States diminished in power and desire to defend outside of the threat regions identified with NATO interests have emboldened the Soviet Union to threaten other areas of the world. The Soviet Union intends to exacerbate the West's and Japan's energy dependence on the Middle East, and encircle China to its southwest and southeast with regimes unfriendly to it. The Soviet Union perceives China to be its primary adversary, both as a potential military aggressor and ideological rival. Recent Soviet actions in the Middle East and Southwest Asia represent either a progressive step in spreading its influence and ideology or an initial stage in an effort to curb its failure to widen its influence and ideology.

These possibilities, tied closely to America's reduced military capability, return this nation to its tradition to fight only defensive wars. There is no reason not to return to another tradition. Kenneth Coffey explores the alternatives to the AVF, including some based not on compulsion as the author asserts, but on universal obligation. Chapter IX should be read with care.

FRANCIS P. BUTLER
Major, U.S. Army

Dengler, Dieter. *Escape from Laos*. San Rafael, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1979, 211pp.

Every war has its POWs, prison camps, and escape stories. Dieter Dengler's incredible story, *Escape from Laos*, will certainly take a prominent place in representing the Vietnam war.

A naturalized citizen of the United States, the effects of Dengler's boyhood days in Germany during which his father was killed in action, his home destroyed by bombs, and his family forced to scavenge for food were perhaps instrumental in his living through the ordeal he describes. A U.S. Navy A-1 pilot shot down over Laos in February 1966 and captured a short time afterwards, he survived a torturous forced march to a Laotian prison camp, escaping once for a short period en route. In the camp where he was incarcerated with two Americans and four Asians he was starved, humiliated, forced to live like an animal, and beaten, but never lost his determination to escape. Although some of his actions were admittedly impetuous, he brought all his imagination, instinct, escape and evasion training, and spirit into play in planning and in executing his final escape with the other prisoners.

After several aborted attempts and having been threatened to be killed by the guards (themselves close to starvation during the prolonged dry season), an escape was made. Splitting up, Dengler and an Air Force helicopter pilot struck out on their own hoping to find a river down which they could float to freedom. Leeches, mosquitos, monsoon rains, cold, disease, and hunger all took their toll on the pair. Disoriented by curved ridges and twisting streams, they traveled in giant circles: at one time crossing a ridge to find what was assumed to be a new river, floating around a mountain, then climbing over the mountain, only to come back to their starting point.

After approximately 3 weeks they were discovered by Laotian villagers, one of whom killed Dengler's partner with a machete. Scrambling away with new found energy, Dengler evaded for several more days. Hallucinating, but still determined to find freedom, he was spotted through sheer luck by an Air Force pilot who called in a rescue helicopter.

Dengler had wandered 23 days in midst of the Vietcong and Pathet Lao to be picked up only 5 miles from his detention camp. His photograph on the book jacket, taken shortly after his rescue and hardly recognizable as a human being, perhaps tells more than can words of the trials he endured. Sometimes truth is more exciting than fiction, and this book should be read by all in the business of preparing for combat.

R. CRAYTON
Captain, U.S. Navy.

Felger, Daniel G. *Engineering for the Officer of the Deck*. Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute Press, 1979. 203pp.

Although greater emphasis has been placed on engineering in recent years, it still remains a black art for many naval officers. Complexity, noise and heat have deterred many from gaining a working knowledge of systems whose reliable performance is fundamental to the success of any seagoing vessel. Part of the engineering awareness problem has been a dearth of readable publications that will allow an officer to bootstrap himself to the level of knowledge at which he can competently explore and educate himself on the unique features of his own plant. Commander Felger's book is a comprehensive, yet readable guide to engineering in general and specifically deals with those areas that should be part of a competent deck officer's ready store of information concerning his ship. Drawing on a rich background of operational and administrative engineering experience, Felger skillfully blends technical information with nontechnical explanations and underscores significant points with relevant and all too real sea stories.

Contrary to most engineering texts and course curricula, this book focuses on the 1200 PSIG four boiler plant and digresses to explain the unique features of the FF-1052, FF-1040/FFG-1 classes. This is indeed proper, for the DDG-2/DDG-37/CG16/CG-26 class plants are the most complex systems (not