

CHAPTER 1 – VIETNAMESE JAIL, AUGUST 1961

I have just learned that I am going to die in 14 days! Surprisingly, that does not scare me as I deserve to die. Actually, it is good news, as now I finally know when, and the damn anxious waiting to know is over.

This is my 35th day of imprisonment in a small, dank cell in an old French prison in Hanoi. There is no window, and the only illumination is a caged light bulb in the ceiling that is never turned off. The only way I can tell if it is day or night is by observing the light at the end of a hallway I can just barely see through the barred window in my cell door. I was brought here hooded, but I think I am all alone, and no one else is imprisoned nearby as the only sounds I have been able to hear occasionally are the guards talking.

Early this morning a guard officer came into my cell, made me get up and stand at attention and announced that my execution will be in 14 days, on September 2nd which is “National Day,” a holiday celebrating when Vietnam announced their independence from France. He also said they had decided it (probably by Ho Chi Minh himself) that the only fitting way to end my life is a public military firing squad and considering what I did while I was in North Vietnam, I am not surprised. I am sure Uncle Ho is seriously pissed off at me for trying to kill him and for my killing his only son!

When I first arrived here in shackles from Russia, I was sure I would end up being beaten to death by my interrogators, however, after seven long days of their pummeling style of questioning while kneeling on the floor, with no food and almost no sleep they finally gave up on me. I had no problem confessing to all the killings they said I had committed. The KGB had already shown me all the damning proof of that. Not only was there physical evidence, but there also were pictures and movies of my team and me at what they insist on calling crime scenes. They also had information on almost all the Marine missions into North Vietnam during that time and a roster of all the Marines personnel so denying it would have been futile. What they wanted to know and that I could not tell them no matter how much they beat me was where the CIA was getting all the information on the targets? And even more importantly, how did they find out about the gathering at Hoa Binh? I didn't know, but they kept insisting I must have heard a name or something? When I told them, I thought it might be General Giap they beat me until I was unconscious. When I finally regained consciousness, I realized that they broke a few of my front teeth, and I had, at least, one broken rib. It didn't seem possible for a body to hurt so bad in so many places. They must have kicked the crap out of me while I was down.

I know I should be terrified of dying, but I am not. I resigned myself a long time ago to the fact that what I did here was wrong and would eventually come back to bite me in the ass, I just didn't know when, where or how. If we were at war with Vietnam, it might be different, I might have had at least a legitimate legal excuse, but the numerous killings of unarmed civilians and noncombatants during peacetime just doesn't go over well. I know I was only following orders, but that excuse did not even work for the Nazis who committed crimes during wartime. The only

excuse I have is I was young and naïve. Did I think then to question these orders, of course not, I was a Marine and did what I was told to do as orders are orders.

The lone visitor I have received from the American Legation, yes they found out somehow that I was here, keeps trying to assure me that my execution is not a done deal. He said there are negotiations ongoing to convince North Vietnam to spare my life in return for a full American apology and financial reparation payments. I have little expectations of that happening, and if it means spending the rest of my life in a Vietnamese jail like this, I would rather be executed.

I have had one regular Vietnamese visitor, besides the interrogators. He introduced himself as Professor Nguyen Van Hung and told me to call him Mr. Nguyen (pronounced Win). He said he is a history professor at the University of Hanoi. He speaks excellent English and has asked me to totally document my experiences in the Marine Corps, especially as it has to do with my current situation. He has convinced the Vietnamese government officials of the importance of thoroughly documenting America's criminal actions and promised to get me better food and treatment if I would comply. That was 21 days ago and true to his promise the food has gotten markedly better (my once a day soup and rice now sometimes has meat of some sort in it), and I have since not been harshly beaten. I even finally got a blanket. Mr. Nguyen provided me with a pad of paper and a few short pencils (didn't want to leave me with a weapon) and told me to start writing, and he would provide me with more paper and pencils when I needed them. He said for me to write everything leading up to my joining the Marine Corps and all of my activities while in the Corps. So that is what I have been doing almost continuously since. Fortunately, the only thing besides gymnastics I was good at in high school and enjoyed was writing. I also got one other concession, thanks to Mr. Nguyen, and that was to be also able to write a goodbye letter to my parents telling them about what I had done and my fate. Luckily, I remembered their address in Sacramento, California.

First, I wrote the letter to my parents, and Mr. Nguyen promised they would mail it. I then started writing about my time in the Corps, and I figured I might as well start at the beginning and write my whole life story as what else do I have to do. Also, I am afraid if I ever stop writing they might take away my blanket and my mystery meat. So here it goes – who knows, maybe it will even get published after I am dead?