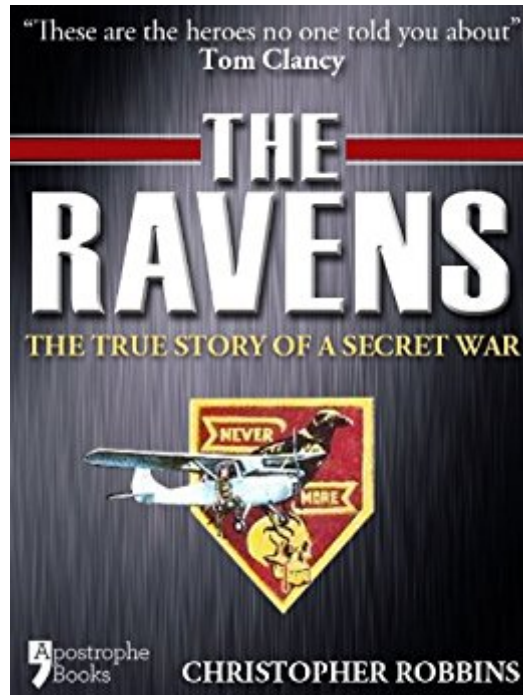


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The Ravens: The True Story Of A Secret War In Laos, Vietnam



Synopsis

"These are the heroes no one told you about" - Tom Clancy. Officially the war in Laos did not exist - both North Vietnam and the USA denied they had troops there. In fact, thousands of North Vietnamese were invading the country and pouring down the Ho Chi Minh Trail on their way to the south, and the Americans were fighting a vigorous war against them from the air. The Ravens were the pilots, all volunteers, who flew through heavy groundfire to identify targets and call in air-strikes. Their mission was so secret that they were 'sold' their prop-driven planes for a dollar apiece so they could be struck from US Air Force records. They wore no uniform and carried no identification. Refugees from the bureaucracy of the war in Vietnam, they accepted the murderous casualty rates of what was known as the Steve Canyon Program in return for a life of unrestricted flying and fighting. Devoted to the hill tribesmen they fought alongside, the Ravens did their job with extraordinary skill and crazy courage and with a humour that was all of its own. This is the story, brilliantly told for the first time, of these extraordinary men. Based on extensive interviews with the survivors, it is a tale of undeniable heroism, blending real-life romance, adventure and tragedy.

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Customer Reviews

Hard to put this book down. Who were these mysterious folks who wore cut-off jeans, cowboy hats, and sunglasses? A very interesting documentary about this secret operation. If a pilot was shot down they were to take shellfish poison and commit suicide, because officially, they didn't exist. What country is the most-bombed per capita in history of the world? Vietnam? No, Laos. There are frequent insights and descriptions into the personalities of this small group of daring people who took part in this widely unknown conflict and series of secret missions. It lasted 10 years. Military terminology, procedures, strategies, and informalities (the way things got done), are explained well in this book. The personalities, internal politics and military strategies within Laos of the U.S. military and political bureaucracy, and Viet Minh, are broken down in an easy-to-read and free-flowing way, that makes it interesting and enjoyable for the reader. Some battles were examined that most of the American public is still not aware of today. There is a lot of information and real-life examples about endless catch-22-like SOPs and regulations that bound those who served in the Vietnam and the "other theater," (Laos). Common expressions explained throughout the book explain what it meant when someone "went bamboo," or took a hit from the "golden BB." What is a "FAC" or a "REMF." Vets will be impressed when a civilian mentions these acronyms. Like in Vietnam, the American military bureaucrats (suits) in downtown Vientiane offices were unaware and out-of-touch, yet, they were the ones creating and enforcing the rules and regulations, but not participating in the conflict.

Actually, I would rate this book at about a 3.5 but the system doesn't allow for that. Having served, off and on, in the war in Southeast Asia (it was never just about Vietnam) from about March 1966 to July 1972, I was interested in learning more about the Raven FACs. I was aware of their activity and some generalized information about them, but I never knew any of the details. In addition, one of my cousins flew for Air America and a brother was a Marine helo pilot in South Vietnam. All of us flew in Laotian air space a lot. The book is historically accurate, as best as my memory serves me. I certainly remember some of the various battles for Muong Soui, among other things. I remember supporting B-52 strikes in the PDJ in late December 1971 and again in early 1972. I also learned the fate of a classmate from flying training: he was a Raven FAC who was shot down over Xieng Khouang in April 1969. Consistent with the author's rendition of the times, it was officially reported that he was killed in action in Vietnam. I recall seeing some Raven FACs eating in the Udorn Officers Club in civilian attire with gold chains around their necks and heavy gold bracelets on their wrists. I have seen the unmarked gray T-28s sitting at the Udorn runway hold line with 750 pound bombs hanging under their wings awaiting takeoff clearance. So. The author's narrative is a detailed rendition of what my fading memory still holds. What I didn't like was the

author's style in relating a story that needed to be told. Unfortunately, unlike Ed Rasimus, author of "When Thunder Rolled," Robbins is telling the stories of the Raven FACs, but, unlike Rasimus, he wasn't there and can't tell the tale like someone who had been there.

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