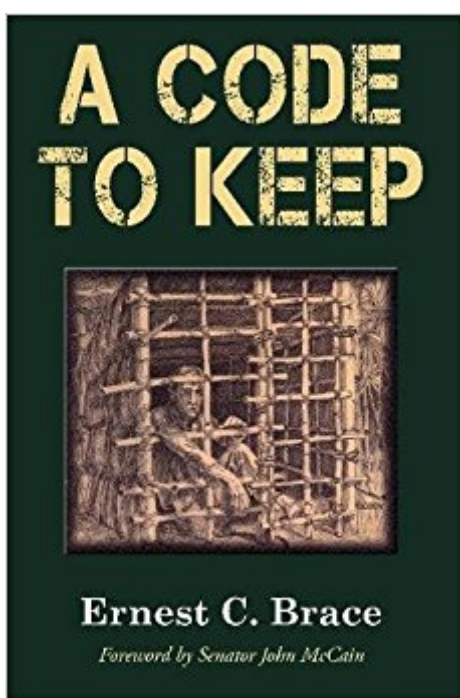


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# A Code To Keep: The True Story Of America's Longest-Held Civilian POW In The Vietnam War



## Synopsis

Ernest C. Brace was a former Marine hero, banished in disgrace from the Corps. In 1965, while working as a civilian pilot in Laos, he was captured and spent the next two years in a bamboo cage with his legs in stocks. His bravery did not diminish when transferred to Hanoi where he maintained the military code of conduct, refusing early release so that others might go free. This is the true, firsthand account of America's longest-held civilian POW in Vietnam, his eight years in captivity, and eventual return to honor.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The author holds the dubious distinction of being America's longest held civilian prisoner-of-war in Vietnam. A decorated U.S. Marine, he had been court-martialed out of the Corps in 1961; he was shot down and captured in Laos in 1965 while flying civilian supply missions. While his story is a fairly conventional, ex-POW memoir, there is a special twist: Brace upheld the military "Code of Conduct," which prescribes noncooperation with his captors, despite his civilian status. Thus he attempted several escapes, kept faith with his fellow prisoners, etc. The author narrates these events simply, and his actions appear all the more heroic for his lack of pretension. Highly recommended. Richard W. Grefrath, Univ. of Nevada Lib., Reno Copyright 1988 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Heroic... highly recommended -- Library Journal  
Incredible...descriptive...inspiring. -- Alexander Haig,

Secretary of State Wonderful, Thank God Ernie Brace's heroic story is finally in print -- Vice Admiral James B. Stockdale, USN (Ret.) --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The author has an excellent memory and has put together the kind of account that has you shaking your head at the strength of the human spirit. You will ask yourself if you could possibly have survived the same circumstances, (I know I couldn't have!). One of the things that stood out for me was how he really never had any ill will towards the Vietnamese. As a civilian he was not bound by a military code of conduct but chose to follow it anyway. I believe this was important to his survival, he and others like him had a deep sense of honor and gained self respect by being good soldiers, marines and airmen even under the most difficult circumstances. As an aside, James Stockdale was one of the iron willed leaders of the prisoners. You may remember him as Ross Perot's running mate. At the vice presidential debate much was said about his quip 'who am I, why am I here'. It was a self effacing question, not the ramblings of a senile old man as he was blasted by the press. Stockdale went on to say he had read the Lincoln Douglas debates prior to this one to get some perspective. The others there probably never heard of them! It still bothers me how this true hero was treated because some political hacks didn't understand a rhetorical question. If you read the book you may feel the same way.

Ernie Brace is a "Hero" in every sense of the word. I can't imagine ever having to endure the almost eight years of detention he experienced. I will forever be amazed by the courage and perseverance that he and the other POWs in Vietnam displayed. Faith in something bigger than you will always make you stronger. Ernie's faith in his country, other Americans and his belief in the Code should always be remembered and practiced by all of our soldiers if they find themselves in detention. Thank God for all of the lessons he and the other POWs were able to bring back and explain so that others can use as inspiration. Thank you Ernie for your service to our country through out all of your years. It makes me proud to be an American knowing there are people like you setting the example for others to follow.

This book was recommended to me by a friend because my husband and I have made plans to travel to Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand. She thought it would be a good read to familiarize me to the region. Her father had also met the author just before his capture. Her father has also written some books of his own on the region and in one of them even mentions knowing Ernest C. Brace and explains what a great pilot he thought he is. This was one of quite a few books she had

recommended. This isn't the type of book I would normally pick up for myself. However, the minute I did I could not put it down. It was fascinating to me how the author Ernest C. Brace survived such an awful ordeal. You knew he was going to make it as he obviously survived to write the book but it didn't keep me from rooting him on as I read along in the book as he would find himself in one horrible situation after the next but his will to survive remained strong! I would definitely recommend this book!

"A Code to Keep" is the story of Ernest C. Brace. Brace was a former Marine pilot, who left the Corps in the early 1960s under a cloud. His plane had crashed on a training mission in Maryland and Brace simply abandoned the aircraft. In May of 1965, he was flying for USAID in Laos when captured by the Pathet Lao. Any connection to the CIA is unmentioned. He was soon turned over to the North Vietnamese and went on to suffer nearly eight years captivity until the general release of the POWs in the Spring of 1973. Though a civilian, Brace comported himself as a military man. Though not mistreated as badly as many fellow POWs, Brace sought no special privileges his civilian status might have given him. Every POW tale tells its' own special story and CTK is no different: CTK relates the continuing struggle of senior POWs to maintain a command structure in prison and to minimize any cooperation with the North Vietnamese captors. Senior POWs as McCain, Risner, Stockdale are here, as are other brave high ranking Americans in Hanoi's captivity. So too is WO John Anton, author of the excellent "Why Didn't You Get Me Out?" Brace deals less with the aspect of torture and mistreatment than other POW tales. He even portrays an almost neutral attitude toward his captors. Brace is also somewhat benign to those Americans who cooperated with their captors. He labels them "The Peace Idiots" rather than "collaborators". Perhaps the author has come to terms with these folks. Moreso to his credit. What bothered and disturbed this reviewer about CTK is Brace's status as a Laos captee. Only 9 Americans, Brace included, were ever repatriated alive from that mysterious country. All were released through Hanoi. The remains of close to 200 more men were also returned. Some 450+ are still unaccounted for! The author makes it crystal clear that the Laotian captees in Hanoi were justifiably worried that they would never come home. NVA Officers only encouraged that fear. Neither side wanted to admit having troops there! The affected Americans dubbed themselves LULUS - The Legendary Union of Laotian Unfortunates. Only a last minute intervention by President Nixon had the Lulus repatriated on schedule in 1973. RN remains the only American President to seriously address the POW/MIA issue. As of January 1, 1808 remain missing in 5 Asian countries. The bottom line is that CTK is yet one more solid entry of POW epics. A star is deducted for that old and ongoing malfaction: no Maps!

Brace was so deep in the Laotian boonies that even a Rand McNally map does not help place him! Brace made a long trek to Hanoi; a decent map would have helped document his journey to ultimate freedom. As it says above, each tells its' own story. CTK yields yet another vantagepoint into that long Indochina War that affected so many of us. Fortunately for all, life does indeed go on after repatriation.

I cried a lot while reading this book. It should be required reading in every American High school civics class. The young people today know nothing of the sacrifice these and many other thousands made for our freedom and their right of protest. These men and women were treated the worst when they came home for doing what they were ordered to in War time. I will for as long as I live have the utmost respect for these Americans for what they did for our country. Those who betrayed their fellow countrymen will have to live with their actions forever. GOD BLESS AMERICA.

The author's detailed recall of his almost 8 years of Vietnamese captivity is astounding and his survival was miraculous. While his adventurous spirit no doubt caused him to be captured in the first place, he is to be admired for his resolve to survive and to maintain his allegiance instead of taking an easy way out. I think he's a hero.

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