



Surviving Hell: A POW'S Journey

Leo Thorsness

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On April 19, 1967, Air Force Colonel Leo Thorsness was on a mission over North Vietnam when his wingman was shot down by an enemy MiG, which then lined up for a gunnery pass on the two American pilots who had bailed out. Although his F 105 was not designed for aerial combat, Thorsness engaged the MiG and destroyed it. Spotting four more MiGs, he fought his way through a barrage of North Vietnamese SAMs to engage them too, shooting down one and driving off the others. For this action, Thorsness was awarded the Medal of Honor. But he didn't learn about it until years later—by a “tap code” coming through prison walls—because on April 30, Thorsness was shot down, captured, and transported to the Hanoi Hilton. *Surviving Hell* recounts a six-year captivity marked by hours of brutal torture and days of agonizing boredom. With a novelist's eye for character and detail, Thorsness describes how he and other American POWs strove to keep their humanity. Thrown into solitary confinement for refusing to bow down to his captors, for instance, he disciplined his mind by memorizing long passages of poetry that other prisoners sent him by tap code. Filled with hope and humor, *Surviving Hell* is an eloquent story of resistance and survival. No other book about American POWs has described so well the strategies these remarkable men used in their daily effort to maintain their dignity. With resilience and resourcefulness, they waged war by other means in the darkest days of a long captivity.

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