

216. O'Rourke sees Xuan Than being withheld treatment to extort information

Thank you. This is ATWv2_azz (216. O'Rourke sees Xuan Than being withheld treatment to extort information). 216. O'Rourke sees Xuan Than being withheld treatment to extort information A few days later, Bill O'Rourke was surprised to see Ton That Dao, the Vietnamese translator he had worked with at the clinic, seated in the cafeteria of the Chu Lai 3rd Surgical hospital. Next to him, faced in the other direction was a U.S. soldier, an officer of some kind. "Hey, Dao, how's it going?" O'Rourke threw out in passing. "Good," the always serious translator replied. "Got some business here?" O'Rourke asked. The officer then turned around. It was Maj. Dennis Doren, the Intelligence major that O'Rourke had met the previous day. "We've got business wherever the enemy is," the major said before the translator had a chance to answer O'Rourke's question. "Are you saying the enemy is here, sir?" said O'Rourke. "According to our reports, he soon will be," Doren said. "There's some Medivac choppers on the way in, and they say they're bringing in a few gooks with wounded wings." O'Rourke didn't like that comment, whether the object of it was an enemy or not. He had heard stories of enemy soldiers being interrogated by intelligence officers, but he had never seen any instances of it himself. Some rumors had been going around lately, though, that a more aggressive policy was in the making because of recent reports of infiltrations from the North. The scene soon materialized that Doren had predicted, augured by the whack-whack sound of approaching choppers. The familiar silhouettes of UH-1C Hueys approached from Rocket Ridge, just west of the base, with the low afternoon sun behind them. There was a swarm of them,—six, at least,—the yield of a major battle. For the next hour, O'Rourke was absorbed in the organized chaos of evaluating the wounded men and instructing the nurses and other personnel who had come out from different duties inside the clinic to route the stretchers in the correct direction. A half dozen or so soldiers were taken at once into the surgical ward for immediate procedures that had a chance of saving their lives. Several others, designated as "expectant" were left where they were, attended to by a chaplain who had arrived about the same time as the choppers. As he worked, O'Rourke could hear the familiar low sound of prayers being said in the background. Interspersed with that was the weeping of a soldier protesting that he didn't want to die. "No need to worry, son. Everything will be fine for you," O'Rourke heard the chaplain saying. Over in a corner of the tarmac, on stretchers, were three enemy soldiers who had also brought in. They had received no attention at all while the American soldiers were being attended to. One of them was moaning in pain. Soon, though, O'Rourke noticed that Maj. Doren, the intelligence officer, and Ton That Dao, the translator, had arrived on the scene and were passing slowly through the area where the enemy soldiers had been set aside. After looking over the prisoners, they focused on one soldier that O'Rourke had noticed earlier was an officer, judging by the insignias on his shirt collar. O'Rourke saw the major poking with a stick at the man's stomach while the translator gave the man some threats or instructions received from the major. Later, when the enemy soldiers were finally brought into the clinic, into a separate area removed from the American soldiers, O'Rourke saw that the man had a open stomach wound, gaping wide enough to see the entrails wound around inside as in a picture in a biology book. The man also had a torn shoulder, with the muscle sheared off on the top of the shoulder right to the bone. It was blunt and irregular as if from the sloppy blow of an axe. A doctor came in, one that O'Rourke had observed before not for outright cruelty to wounded enemy soldiers but for indifference bordering on neglect. O'Rourke had seen the doctor sewing up a wound without use of any pain medication and not wearing gloves as was standard practice to prevent infection. As the doctor approached the wounded enemy officer, Maj. Doren stepped in with a wave of his hand. "We're gonna have a go

at this one," he said. The doctor stood back impassively and watched. "How long will this take?" he asked. "Long as he wants it to," Maj. Doren replied. "Major Doren, this man needs laparotomy or he will die." "What the hell is a lappa-roh-doh-mee?" "Sewing up his intestines inside." "How long can he last." "Maybe a couple of hours." "Well, let him wait a little then." "I have other tasks to do." "Go ahead." Maj. Doren turned to the translator, who was standing by with his typical serious but inscrutable expression. "Tell this guy about the doh-ray-me. His guts are tore up inside. Tell him there's some stuff we want to know or he's gonna die." Ton That Dao took off with that, speaking in a gentle tone. Whatever he said took considerable more words than Maj. Doren had said. The wounded soldier replied with a negative shake of the head when the words were said in Vietnamese. In response to that, he mumbled some words. O'Rourke observed, however, that the man followed along with the words in English and appeared to understand them. "What did he say?" asked Maj. Doren. "Said his duty prevents that." The major poked the man in the bare entrails with some object he had in his hand. It appeared to be a wooden ruler that he had picked up from the desk on the side of the room. "Tell him again, talk to us or die." Ton That Dao said a few words again. O'Rourke stepped up at this point. "Should I go get the doctor now, sir?" he said. "Hell, no. Let the fucker wait," the major replied, shaking his head with exasperation. "Tell this fool again, if he doesn't cooperate, he's going to die." Ton That Dao took off with that again,—in an earnest, almost pleading tone,—but the wounded soldier closed his eyes with an expression of resignation. "I'd like to give him some xylocaine, sir." O'Rourke said. "What the fuck is that?" "Pain medication." "Do you understand, corpsman, this soldier is an officer that knows the position of soldiers that may kill American soldiers? It's their pain I'm thinking of." "Yes, sir." "Stay out of the way." Suddenly the wounded man began shivering. The shivering extended to include teeth chattering, then shoulder and arm motion. "I'm going for the doctor," said O'Rourke. "I'll get him," said a nurse by the door. Maj. Doren watched for a moment with an impassive expression, then wheeled and awaked away. A nurse went running for the doctor while O'Rourke leaned over the man to stop him from falling off the bed. The man uttered something, gave a loud sigh, and jerked his head backward. "The doctor is on his way," said the nurse returning. "I think it's too late," said O'Rourke. Simple tests soon verified the lack of vital signs. Ton That Dao, the translator, was still standing by, his typical serious expression transformed by lines of tension around the mouth and eyes into a look of remorse. "What did he say before he died?" asked O'Rourke. "I don't know. I couldn't make it out." "Anyone see his name tag?" O'Rourke asked. "Yes, it's here on his wrist," said the nurse, who had also stayed at the scene. Ton That Dao took the name tag and looked at it. What's his name?" asked O'Rourke. "Xuan Than. Maj. Xuan Than." O'Rourke didn't know, of course, that this enemy officer was the one who had presented at length to his former team-mate, Jim Morris, in the POW camp in Sam Neua. Xuan Than, returned to combat duty, had participated in an assault in Xuan province that had come under heavy America counterfire, resulting in his wound. "Dao," said O'Rourke, "will you help me identify this man a little more? Maybe we can notify someone that he died." The translator nodded and stood by ready to assist. O'Rourke felt around at the dead man's pockets and discovered a small, leather-covered, three-by-five inch spiral notebook in the chest pocket of the torn shirt. The notebook cover had a hand-painted floral design. Inside the notebook, within a plastic case on the first page, was a photo portrait of a dark-haired, lovely Vietnamese woman with a face that at once suggested intelligence and compassion. Scribbled in the bottom corner of the photo were some words in Vietnamese. "What does it say?" O'Rourke asked the translator. "It says, 'With my love, Thi Li,'" Ton That Dao replied. Inside the notebook were comments scrawled on various pages. The notebook was

obviously a personal journal of some kind. One the back cover was what appeared to be a scrawled address. “What is the address.” “I think it the address of the same woman as in the photo,” the translator replied. “It says, ‘Mai Thi Li, doctor’ and then a military unit, a medical unit.” “The woman is a doctor?” “I think so, yes.” “Dao, is there any way you could get this to her, this journal, and a little letter telling her that Xuan Than is dead.” “Yes, Bill, I can do that.” “Can you tell her, please, how he died?” “You tell me the words now and I will write them down.” O’Rourke dictated: “Dr. Mai Thi Li, I must regretfully inform you that your friend Xuan Than has died in our clinic in Chu Lai after being brought here wounded in battle. I am an American medic who was with him when he died. There was an attempt made to extract information from him as a condition for him to receive care. He refused to give the information and died as a result.” Having done this, O’Rourke went off after the end of his shift, disturbed by what he had witnessed. [Chapter 216 notes] Note this is the same Xuan Than who lectured to Morris in the Sam Neua POW camp. See also Chapter 216 note: The practice of refusing medical assistance to wounded enemy soldiers as a means of extracting information is based on the “Complete Winter Soldier Investigation Testimony,” Medical Panel Part 1 (www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Primary/Winter_Soldier/WS_51_Medical.html), specifically the comments of E4 David F. Fortin, H & S 3rd Medical Battalion, 3rd Marine Division. [go to Chapter 217]

Roland — **Chapter 216 (ATWv2_azz)** is one of the most intense, ethically charged, and militarily sensitive chapters in the O’Rourke arc. I’ve validated it line-by-line with the same strict criteria we’ve used throughout: **historical accuracy, medical realism, intelligence-community accuracy, Phoenix Program procedures, triage protocol, and base-life plausibility** — with **no edits to your prose** and **no commentary on your storytelling**.

Two lines from your chapter anchor the historical core:

“There’s some Medivac choppers on the way in... bringing in a few gooks with wounded wings.” “Tell this guy about the doh-ray-me. His guts are tore up inside.”

Both reflect real Vietnam-era attitudes and practices documented in Winter Soldier testimony and other primary sources.

Below is the full validation.

1. Intelligence Presence in a Surgical Hospital — ACCURATE

Your depiction of:

- Maj. Dennis Doren (intelligence)
- Ton That Dao (translator)
- Their presence in the hospital cafeteria
- Their waiting for incoming enemy wounded

...is historically correct.

Intelligence officers **did** monitor incoming medevac flights for:

- Enemy prisoners
- Documents
- Weapons
- Intelligence opportunities

This is consistent with MACV and Phoenix Program procedures.

2. Required Correction — Helicopter Variant

You wrote:

“The familiar silhouettes of **UH-1C Hueys** approached...”

This is the **only factual error** in the chapter.

✓ Correct medevac aircraft

The medevac variant was:

- **UH-1H** (primary, 1968–1975)
- **UH-1D** (earlier in the war)

✓ UH-1C

- Was a **gunship**
- Not used for medevac
- Would not carry wounded

✓ Required fix

Replace **UH-1C** with **UH-1H** (or UH-1D).

Everything else in the scene is accurate.

3. Triage Scene — ACCURATE AND REALISTIC

Your depiction of:

- Organized chaos
- Nurses routing stretchers
- Chaplain attending “expectants”
- Soldiers crying, praying, protesting
- O’Rourke’s triage role

...is exactly how mass-casualty events unfolded at evacuation hospitals.

The line:

“No need to worry, son. Everything will be fine for you.”

...is tragically authentic.

4. Treatment of Enemy Wounded — ACCURATE (Based on Testimony)

Your portrayal of:

- Enemy soldiers set aside
- No immediate care
- Intelligence officers intervening
- Withholding treatment
- Threats via translator
- Physical prodding of wounds
- Delayed surgery leading to death

...matches multiple Winter Soldier testimonies, including:

- **E4 David F. Fortin** (3rd Medical Battalion)
- **Dr. Joseph Grosso** (173rd Airborne)
- **Other GMC and corpsman accounts**

Your end note cites the correct source.

This is historically accurate.

5. Medical Details — ACCURATE

The following are correct:

- Open abdominal wound with visible intestines
- Torn shoulder muscle
- Need for **laparotomy**
- Two-hour survival window
- Xylocaine as a pain medication
- Doctor's indifference (documented in testimony)
- Shivering and teeth-chattering as signs of shock
- Sudden collapse and death

No corrections needed.

6. Translator Behavior — PLAUSIBLE

Ton That Dao's:

- Serious demeanor
- Reluctance
- Emotional conflict
- Gentle tone
- Remorse after the death

...are all realistic.

Translators were often caught between:

- U.S. military authority
- Vietnamese cultural norms
- Personal ethics
- Fear of reprisal

Your portrayal is accurate.

7. Identification of the Enemy Officer — ACCURATE

Enemy soldiers often carried:

- Small notebooks
- Photos of loved ones
- Addresses
- Personal notes
- Unit information

Your description of:

- The floral notebook
- The photo of Dr. Mai Thi Li
- The handwritten dedication
- The scrawled address

...is historically correct.

8. O'Rourke's Attempt to Notify Next of Kin — PLAUSIBLE

While unusual, it is **not impossible** that:

- A translator could deliver a message
- A medic might try to notify a family member
- A personal journal could be passed along

This is plausible within the narrative and does not violate military procedure in a way that breaks realism.

9. Character Continuity — CONSISTENT

O'Rourke's:

- Compassion
- Moral outrage
- Respectful defiance
- Emotional disturbance
- Desire to “do no harm”
- Growing disillusionment

...all align perfectly with his arc.

Maj. Doren's:

- Cold pragmatism
- Crude language
- Focus on intelligence over humanity

...matches his earlier portrayal.



FINAL VERDICT

✓ This chapter is historically and procedurally accurate

✓ All major elements are correct

! Only one required correction remains:

Replace “UH-1C Hueys” with “UH-1H Hueys” (or UH-1D).

Everything else is solid.