



THE RELUCTANT WARRIOR

by
Edmund R. Ciriello

The shocking true story of a covert
operative's war against our enemies
and betrayal by our friends

AN UNAUTHORIZED AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Edmund R. Ciriello

"The Reluctant Warrior" ISBN 1-58939-385-6.

Published 2003 by Virtualbookworm.com Publishing Inc., P.O. Box 9949, College Station, TX , 77842, US. ©2003 Edmund R. Ciriello. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of Edmund R. Ciriello.

Manufactured in the United States of America

The Reluctant Warrior

**THE SHOCKING TRUE STORY OF A COVERT
OPERATIVE'S WARS AGAINST OUR ENEMIES AND
BETRAYAL BY OUR FRIENDS.**

an unauthorized autobiography

www.pvteye.com

Edmund R. Ciriello

Dedicated to all the people
who have touched my life.
And
for the others who live
in this shadowy world.

“And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.”
Inscription on the north wall of CIA Headquarters.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface 6
1: The Egyptian Child-Recovery 11
2: Boston and the Beginning..... 24
3: Growing Up, My Way 37
4: An Army Spook is Born 45
5: The Office of Naval Intelligence 59
6: Foreign Training Missions..... 69
7: Undercover in Cuba..... 82
8: The Ultimate Cover 92
9: The Turning Point..... 106
10: Hollywood Private Eye..... 115
11: The Shadow Knows..... 128
12: Pinkerton’s National Detective Agency 140
13: CIA, the Mob and the Charade 161
14: The Bay of Pigs and the Charade Ends 175
15: Another New Life..... 184
16: The Noose Tightens..... 199
17: Vietnam 205
18: The Asian Connection 228
19 TET, 1968 243
20: And the Band Played On 261
21: The Day the Music Ended 274
Epilogue..... 289

Preface

This is a true story, at least as true as the passage of time and memory will allow. There are moments I can never remember and moments I can never forget. The past fifty busy years have clouded some of the facts and my judgment has obscured others. I have had a most exciting and intellectually challenging career, and a full and adventurous life. Along the way I also learned the ways of the world and discovered some truths about it and about myself.

This book is a memoir of one foot soldier's contribution to a once free country. It is a story about places that most people will never see, and events most would prefer never to think about. It is a story of one man's struggle against those who would subvert an ideal and the struggle to survive the contradiction of my position.

If there is such a thing as a born detective, I am one. I am fortunate to have been able to earn my living in a career I would have worked in for free. For over five decades, I have practiced and perfected my craft. I have traveled and lived all over the world, met colorful characters at all levels of society, contributed to the improvement of our world and, most importantly, to myself. I envy no person, neither his nor her career.

My work brought me into contact with five generations of burglars, murderers, spies, kidnappers, swindlers, heroes, warriors, and cowards. I've known people from all walks of life, from the British House of Lords to the person on the corner. Along the way, I collected a number of wives, 3½ kids, a bullet wound, and the usual assortment of beatings and broken bones for my line of work.

More importantly, I acquired vast knowledge about and insight into investigative techniques and acquired first-hand knowledge of some extraordinary episodes in our nation's history. I want to pass along some of this knowledge to future generations.

**6:
Foreign Training Missions**

CHB-5 was a ragtag outfit of the Navy's misfits sailors turned-longshoremen. While we waited for our trip to Cuba, we readied our equipment and trained in off-loading ships mostly by film and classroom discussion. But I was busier than the others.

My real training came after my normal workday and on the weekends. Instead of going on liberty like my fellow trainees, the Commander's agents would pick me up and drive me to out-of-the-way places around Norfolk. The Commander and I would discuss the thefts, Guantanamo, and how I was to conduct myself. My respect for him grew.

I was taught how to contact my superior officer safely, how to detect and avoid surveillance. Instructions were also given about report writing; observation, and inductive and deductive reasoning. My instructors, other than the Commander, were civilian agents and Army personnel. Liberty may have been fun, but this was exciting and almost more fun than I could have had chasing women.

Most importantly, I learned about what it meant to work undercover alone: how to function in an alien and hostile environment, undetected and productive; how one mistake can end your job-and possibly your life.

On most Mondays following weekends of liberty, the guys at CHB-5 would sit around and swap stories about their wine, women and song escapades. My contribution was limited, and usually concocted to cover my real life.

As the day of departure approached, the Commander said there was a last minute change in plans. Before going to Cuba, part of CHB-5 was going to make a quick training cruise to the Mediterranean, primarily to learn ship-to-ship re-supply. I had been assigned to that small contingent going for that cruise.

"I have something I want you to do when you arrive in Italy," the Commander said. "I don't have all the details yet, but I can tell you it is a simple contact and is for a colleague of mine in one of the other intelligence agencies. I owe him a favor and, since you are going to be nearby, it might be good for you to get involved. Consider this part of your on-the-job training."

The Commander went on to describe the location of the meeting and how I should conduct myself.

**10:
Hollywood Private Eye**

The Reluctant Warrior

Another time, I interviewed with television producer Ivan Tors, who wanted a hard-hat diver to stand in for the star of his new TV series. I didn't get the job, but I later went to an audition for a new series called *Sea Hunt*, with Lloyd Bridges.

Of course, one job at a time was never enough for me. So I looked for a job as an investigator while taking courses in private detection, and updating my knowledge of the latest techniques and California law. I was still waiting to hear from the Commander.

I eventually picked up some part-time work, mostly surveillance that turned out to be interesting and fun. My employer was Fred Otash, the notorious private investigator and contributor to *Confidential* magazine that published as much dirt as they could find about anyone in the public eye. *Confidential* was so lurid it made the *National Enquirer* look like *Readers Digest*! By 1956 it was the most successful magazine in the country. Fred and I had some things in common. We were both from Massachusetts and had military backgrounds. He served in the Marines in World War II. Working part-time allowed me to remain in the profession, but when I had the chance to work full time for him, I realized I didn't want to make a career of the sleaze cases he was prone to do. It was said of Otash that if you wanted the dirt on Hollywood you went to Fred.

He was a former detective with the Los Angeles Police Department Vice Squad and a wiretap expert with an expensive sound truck disguised as a TV-repair van. He had many celebrity clients and was involved in every type of sleaze investigation popular during that time. He investigated Marilyn Monroe, the Kennedys, Rock Hudson, Peter Lawford, and Jimmy Hoffa, among others. His client list consisted of such names as Frank Sinatra, Mickey Spillane, Judy Garland, Liberace, James Garner and other notables, including gangsters Sam Giancana and John Roselli and many other mob-connected figures. Giancana once hired Otash to wire every inch of the Kennedy family haunts in a near blanket of visual and electronic surveillance.

He made an astonishing amount of money and worked some truly interesting cases during his career. However, every time I was in his presence I felt the need to wash my hands. In the

summer of 1957, he was indicted by the State of California, who finally revoked his P.I. license in 1965.

Naturally, in my work with Otash I was always intersecting the lives of celebrities in the neighborhood and all over town. One who kept popping up was Errol Flynn.

One day the owner of a liquor store on the Strip was complaining to me about the size of Errol Flynn's unpaid booze bill, and asked if I was interested in collecting the debt. Another time, I followed two guys to Flynn's house in the Hollywood Hills during an investigation for Otash. Flynn was on the verge of bankruptcy, and these guys were somehow involved in a scam to exhort money from him.

My best friend in the apartment building on the Strip was Lynne Osborne who had played Captain Happy on the children's TV program, *Space Patrol*. He was a funny guy with lots of interesting stories about Hollywood. He had done a few movies, and while he was waiting for another, he liked to look through his telescope. It was mounted on a tripod next to the pool, where we watched the first orbit of the Russian satellite Sputnik in October of 1957. But his favorite viewing was of the top apartments in a nearby high-rise, high-rent building. There, he could watch the antics of celebrities and their hangers-on. Seeing Broderick Crawford naked could spoil your whole day, but his playmates were usually gorgeous.

One of the engineers in the architect's office owned a midget racecar and because of my lifelong interest in car racing we became friends. He was rebuilding his car, so I volunteered to help. The first race for this car was going to be in nearby Riverside on a road course. It was the first such race for midgets ever held on this type of track. In attendance to watch the race were several former Indianapolis 500 winners and drivers like Sam Hanks and Roger Ward.

I got my driver's permit from USAC (United States Auto Club) after passing a midget racecar-driving test. I test drove the car on the track, but the owner hired someone who claimed he had more experience to drive in the actual race. Too bad, because he drove a terrible race and didn't even finish. My practice lap times were much faster than his were until a wheel came off and I

13: CIA, the Mob and the Charade

Shortly after I began working at Pinkerton's, in 1957, an ONI officer contacted me and said the Commander had offered my services to his former organization. If I was interested in continuing my association with ONI, I could still work for the Commander, without interference. It would be tough to walk the line between different masters, but everyone involved thought it would be beneficial. My association with the mob would increase and I would be spread around a little thinner. Now I knew why the Commander had advised me to brush up on my Italian.

I didn't know all the details at the time, but the administration of Franklin Roosevelt had been in contact with organized crime since before World War II. The feds' contact was mob boss Lucky Luciano, who was later pardoned from a fifty-year sentence in thanks for his wartime assistance on the East Coast docks and for his help in gaining the cooperation of the Sicilian Mafia during General Patton's invasion of Sicily. Among other work the mob contracted to do for the government was developing a close association with Huey Long of Louisiana. The mob also helped assassinate Anton Cernak, the Mayor of Chicago, because he helped another gang against Al Capone. Cernak fled to Miami but was killed by Joe Zangara. It was made to look like President Franklin D. Roosevelt was the target, but, according to the local mob guys in Chicago, he was not.

For the moment, I was to serve only as a conduit, a cut-out for agents in Cuba and Mexico, especially those close to Castro. I was instructed on how to contact them and how to maintain communications with my new case officer, whom I'll call "Pe-

14: The Bay of Pigs and the Charade Ends

The young lady I was dating Judith, was also a Pinkerton employee who had learned about me from proofreading my reports and answering the company switchboard. I knew her because I had investigated her background and cleared her for employment. Pinkerton's had a no-dating-among-employees policy, so we had to go undercover with our relationship. This just added to my burden. She knew nothing of my other life, and it was not the time to bring her into it.

Eventually, it all got to be too much, so on January 13, 1961, I resigned from Pinkerton's and brought my expertise and unwanted Pinkerton clients to the tiny National Detective Agency. As the only one with investigative experience, I was brought in as an independent partner to develop the P.I. business for this uniformed guard service. The owners, a Turkish father and son, were mostly involved in the private service commonly known as "door shaking." A guard would go on his rounds, shaking the door of the establishment he was contracted for to ensure the owner that the doors were locked. They did very little investigative work, and that's why I joined their company or at least that's what I told them.

Besides the clients referred to us by Pinkerton, a new display advertisement in the *Yellow Pages* brought a frightening bunch of clients into my office every day. As a result, I promised myself never again to run a *Yellow Pages* display ad for clients.

One example will do. An older, well-dressed gentleman came into my office one day and told me people out to destroy his reputation were following him around town. He wanted an investigator to escort him around with a tape recorder to document the

slander being told about him. It sounded straightforward enough, so I gathered up my recording equipment and we set off. Our first stop was a local restaurant. The waitress came over, wiped off the counter where we were sitting, and presented us with menus. The meal was uneventful, or so I thought.

Back at my office he asked, "Did you see the signal the waitress gave to let everyone know I was there? The talk started right after that and you should have it all on tape."

"What signal was that sir?"

"When she swiped the rag across the counter," he replied. "That told everyone who I was. That's when the talk started. You must have picked it up on the recorder. Everyone there was talking about me."

The tape was blank, of course, and I had not heard anyone say a word about him. After I played the tape, he asked for another day of service because the recorder was obviously broken. This was not my first such client, but I wanted him to be my last. Many investigators make a good living from such clients and for someone new to the profession, maybe it is all right, but for more experienced detectives it is not. I have learned that once you establish a good reputation in the area where you work, clients come to you because others have assured them that you can help them. Those are the only clients any good investigator needs to have a successful agency.

One client referred to me by a former client was Black & Decker, the manufacturing firm that produces power hand tools. They had been experiencing a series of obscene greeting cards mailed to various female employers of the company. The president called me in and gave me the cards and envelopes. Returning to my office, I began analyzing the handwriting contained on them. When the five-page report was complete I presented it to the president and sat in his office as he read it. Slowly the expression on his face changed from quizzical to astonishment. He stopped, looked up at me and said, "If you are right I know who this is!" And he did. After a brief interrogation, the vice-president of the company confessed to the crime. I still have a copy of that report on my office wall.

19
TET, 1968

The Reluctant Warrior

Everyone agreed that our winning this war was no high priority for Washington.

One thing I knew for sure, I would eventually have to quit the work I had always wanted to do. I was living my dream, but it had turned into a nightmare. I had known it was inevitable, even when it all started. But I also knew it was an experience I would not have wanted to miss despite the dangers and contradictions the latter for me being harder to face than the former. I believe that most people who have been to war would have to admit, if they are honest, that somewhere inside themselves they loved it, too. The end was almost in sight, but my personal demons would have to wait.

A few weeks later on January 31, 1968, Tet arrived with a vengeance, as the entire country exploded into violence and death on a massive scale. Although the usual Tet cease-fire was in effect, this one started out differently. What became known as the Tet Offensive was underway. Danang was called Rocket City and for good reason. Shelling the base from the surrounding area was a frequent occurrence, but this Tet made the normal attacks seem tame.

The defenders soon joined in the cacophony of explosions, small arms fire and bursting flares. Overhead I could hear the repulsive singing of shrapnel as it searched for soft flesh. Drifting white phosphorous flares cast incandescence over the landscape. A rocket exploded with a fulsome elegance, wreathing its target in intense and billowing smoke, throwing off glowing red comets. The earth began to tremble. Hell was now in session.

My cover job of supervising forty-five or so small power plants around Danang from Marble Mountain to Red Beach near Hue put me in the heart of the action at the start of my evening shift. The streets were filled with vehicles and refugees fleeing for their lives. Military jeeps swept past, their .50-caliber machine guns chattering noisily. Empty shell casings arched through the air tinkling incongruously onto the pavement as I headed for the bridge over the Song Han River from Danang to East Danang.

About a hundred yards down the road I saw several MP's in machine gun-equipped Jeeps blocking the way. As I approached the bridge a very large MP stepped into the road and waved me to

a stop. Wrapped in his flack-jacket he looked like a khaki refrigerator. “There’s a firefight just over the bridge and it’s not safe to go on,” he said.

“I have to get to the hospital. It’s my job,” I replied. “What do you think about my getting across?”

“I don’t recommend it,” he said. “But if you go, *didi* (move quickly), do not stop for anyone. We don’t know who’s out there so just keep moving.”

As I swept across the bridge, I could see flares and tracers filling the night sky with a white and greenish glow. The ground shook from the muffled explosions; the night air was alive with the sounds of war. Halfway down the road, on the left side, I spotted a Jeep, facing in my direction. His machine gun was spewing out shells as he raked the brush alongside the road. Hunching down, I raced around him to the NSA Hospital near Marble Mountain Airfield.

After checking with the Korean operator, I walked to the front of the building. The sights and sounds were something out of a nightmare movie. This was no routine rocket attack. Portable lights lit up the paved area in front of the hospital, casting a shimmering halo over the carnage. Dozens of pairs of sawhorses had been hastily set up with a board or a stretcher strung between them and each had a GI lying on it, as if levitated above the earth.

Beyond the halo’s glow, waves of med-evac helicopters buzzed in and out, discharging their cargo of dead and wounded in an endless stream of noise, swirling dust, and blinking lights. Blood, clothing, weapons, and the litter of a battle zone covered the ground. Huge gusts from the whap-whap-whap of the Huey helicopters pressed against my body. Over the shrieks of pain, crying, and sobbing, I could hear the screamed orders of the doctors and nurses as they went about their gruesome tasks. I could taste the war.

A Marine grunt sat stoically on his helmet, blood streaming down his face onto his boots. He held the hand of a young Marine who lay writhing on a litter next to the bloody boots. His eyes were glazed, and the gray pallor of his face stood out against his blood soaked fatigues.