

Prisoner of War:
The Story of White Boy
Rick and the War on
Drugs

Vince Wade

Copyright © 2018 by Vince Wade

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system without permission in writing from the author.

Cover design: Kevin Martzloff

Published by Wade Multimedia, LLC

ISBN 978-0-692-99570-9

Introduction

Many of the war stories in this book are based on interviews with individuals with first-hand knowledge. Even so, most of these events happened three decades ago. Memories fade. Key figures passed away or were killed. Records have been purged. Some of the people in this story cannot be located.

A lot of statements of fact are based on documents obtained through federal and state Freedom of Information Acts and on a review of court transcripts, records and media archives.

Numerous battles this country has lost in the War on Drugs are a matter of public record.

Prisoner of War: The Story of White Boy Rick and the War on Drugs proves Mark Twain was right. Sometimes the truth is stranger than fiction.

Table of Contents

Introduction	iii
Table of Contents	v
Acknowledgements	vii
Chapter 1—Happy Days and not so Happy Days	1
Chapter 2 – Yellow Brown and Black: The Colors of the War on Drugs	20
Chapter 3 – Prohibition: the Racketeering Enabler.....	31
Chapter 4 – Nixon starts a Hamster Wheel War	43
Chapter 5—Coming of Age in a Fading City.....	63
Chapter 6 – A Coast to Coast Snowstorm	85
Chapter 7 – A Kid goes to War	105
Chapter 8—A Child is Slain; A Cop is Bribe.....	127
Chapter 9—Rick gets Washington’s attention	151
Chapter 10—CIA Justice in Detroit	171
Chapter 11—Business as usual, until one day.....	189
Chapter 12—Killing the Competition	201
Chapter 13—Playing with Fire.....	215
Chapter 14—The Journalism Herd Stampedes	235
Chapter 15—Life without Parole	255
Chapter 16—Another War Deployment.....	277
Chapter 17—Snitching on a Mafia Snitch	297
Chapter 18—Rick’s Kangaroo Court.....	311
Chapter 19— Retribution, a Bit of Justice and No Justice at All.....	333

Chapter 20—Exit ramps off the Road to Futility	353
About the Author	373
Index	375

Acknowledgements

A book of this scope wouldn't be possible without the help of a lot of people.

Rick Wershe, Jr.'s adventures and misadventures made this book possible. One day he may have a normal life. He deserves it.

Ralph Musilli, Wershe's attorney, and Theresa Mangold, his capable office manager and legal secretary provided endless access to old files with endless patience, answering endless questions.

Patrick McQueeney, Wershe's appellate attorney deserves a nod for taking a drive with me to rummage around in a dusty storage unit for old files he was convinced had been destroyed, only to find the complete transcript of Rick's cocaine possession trial.

Gregg Schwarz, retired FBI agent, gets credit for starting me down the road of the Rick Wershe saga. Schwarz convinced me there was a bigger story to be told. He was right.

Herman Groman and Michael Castro, both retired FBI agents, helped fill in important parts of this tale.

Dan Harris provided great help as a beta reader.

My gratitude is extended to the many individuals who were willing to go on the record and tell it like it is regarding the Wershe story and the War on Drugs.

Finally, my wife Cindy gets big thanks for putting up with this adventure.

Chapter 1—Happy Days and not so Happy Days

"You dirty yellow-bellied rat"
—James Cagney in "Taxi" 1932

At the worldly age of 14, Richard John Wershe, Jr., a street-savvy kid who didn't sell or use dope, was recruited by FBI agents to become America's youngest soldier in the War on Drugs. His secret paid mission was to go behind enemy lines to gather intelligence. He wasn't an ordinary teen and he wasn't an ordinary snitch. Wershe was "arguably the most productive drug informant of the Detroit FBI during that era," according to John Anthony who was the legal adviser-agent of that office at the time.

By the time he was 17, Wershe, who is white, had been consorting with Detroit's biggest drug dealers and baddest hitmen, jetting to Las Vegas and Miami, sleeping with the mayor's hot, married, 20-something niece and telling the FBI about top-level police corruption. His reward, in a strange episode of law enforcement intrigue, was to be abandoned by the federal government. He became Rick Who? Wershe, who was eventually labeled by the media as White Boy Rick, was now a broke school dropout from a dysfunctional family. He turned to the only trade he knew—the one the narcs had taught him. He tried to become a wholesale-level drug dealer, got caught, and was sentenced by local authorities to life in prison without parole. Wershe became a Prisoner of War—the War on Drugs.



Vince Wade

During his life in prison Wershe came to know Salvatore “Sammy the Bull” Gravano, an admitted Mafia killer who helped the government put Mob boss John Gotti in prison for life. He met a world-class drug smuggler named Steve Kalish who lavishly bribed Panama leader Manuel Noriega. On numerous occasions, Wershe discussed the finances of illegal drugs with Carlos Lehder, one of the founders of the notorious Medellín cocaine cartel.

Wershe (pronounced Wur-shee) joined the national battle against the never-ending flow of illegal drugs in June, 1984. That same month, 13 years earlier, President Richard M. Nixon declared the United States of America had to go to battle against the nation’s drug habit.

"America's public enemy number one in the United States is drug abuse," President Nixon told reporters after sending a message to Congress on the issue. "In order to fight and defeat this enemy, it is necessary to wage a new, all-out offensive."

Over a decade later, when the federal government pressed a young Detroit kid in to service in the War on Drugs, the country was losing the struggle. In truth, it never started winning. The story of Richard J. Wershe, Jr is a down-in-the-trenches view of why the War on Drugs is a trillion-dollar failure and will never be won.



Whatever Wershe’s dreams and fantasies may have been as a lower middle-class white boy growing up on Detroit’s east side, becoming an FBI snitch, a rat, a fink, a canary, a stool pigeon and eventually spending his life in prison was certainly not his life’s ambition.

Wershe, known to his family and friends and on the streets as Ricky or Rick, became a paid Confidential

Prisoner of War:
The Story of White Boy Rick and The War on Drugs

Informant for the FBI, apparently the youngest in the agency's history, without any real say in the matter or time to think it over.

It wasn't a recruitment, really. It was more like being drafted. The FBI, for its part, was willing to pay and pay regularly for what the kid could find out. For the boy's fast-buck, business-hustler father, the FBI's informant cash was the motivation to agree to this dangerous scheme. The stress of sustained undercover deception on an adolescent mind and the very real physical danger inherent in informing on men who regard murder as a cost of doing business don't seem to have troubled Wershe's father or the FBI agents.

On the other hand, working as an FBI informant didn't seem to have any negative effect on some famous Americans from Wershe's childhood. Growing up, Rick Wershe, Jr. watched Walt Disney movies not knowing that Uncle Walt had been an FBI stool pigeon for over a quarter of a century, keeping the Bureau informed about suspected Communist agitators and Leftist subversives in Hollywood. Most of Walt Disney's informing involved labor unions. He didn't like them.

At the time Rick Wershe was lured in to working as an FBI informant, the man occupying the White House had been a long-time snitch for the Bureau. President Ronald W. Reagan was known as FBI Informant T-10 during the Communist-hunting Red Scare that profoundly impacted the Hollywood film community in the early days of the Cold War.

But Walt Disney and Ronald Reagan were adults when they became police informers. Rick Wershe was a juvenile and a young one at that. To understand how he got in this situation, it is important to examine his childhood and the changing city where he grew up.



Rick Wershe, Jr. was a rambunctious, mischievous kid prone to stunts like shooting at rats in alleys and setting off illegal firecrackers. In his early teens he participated in a few home break-ins as a way to raise easy cash. He was tutored in the art of burglary by a small-time black criminal who was dating his older sister, Dawn. Drugs were plentiful but Rick Wershe was not a drug user.

Dawn had tumbled down the rabbit hole of drug addiction. She has fought her drug habit all of her life. Rick's Aunt Carolyn, his father's sister, was also a drug addict who turned to prostitution to support her habit. Young Rick saw what drugs were doing to his family and he chose not to use them. He was, however, impressed by the lavish, free-spending lifestyle of the city's rapidly growing cadre of drug-dealing entrepreneurs. Over the course of three years, federal agents and local police narcs from a drug task force taught the young boy the ways of the drug underworld. They had a willing student. What thrill-seeking, hormone-fueled teenage boy wouldn't relish the chance to go undercover for-real in a sleazy and dangerous world awash in fast cars, fast women, "bling" and so much cash that machines were needed to count it?

By the time guys his age were prepping for their SAT exams, Rick Wershe had been shot once and targeted for a hit murder another time. When other boys his age were learning to drive, Rick Wershe had been jet-setting to Las Vegas prize fights, flying to Miami to meet cocaine importers, hobnobbing at nightclubs favored by black gangsters and buying himself jet skis, hot cars and flashy jewelry. He also began to give the FBI insights regarding drug-related police bribery.

Yet, by the time he reached his 17th birthday, the feds had abandoned their star snitch. He wasn't just another

Prisoner of War:
The Story of White Boy Rick and The War on Drugs

criminal working off a beef by turning informant against his friends. Rick Wershe had been recruited by government agents.

Suddenly, he was too hot. Too many people knew or had guessed what he was doing. As we shall see, his informant work caused crisis meetings at the very top levels of the Justice Department. He was in danger of being exposed as an under-age FBI informant in the War on Drugs. What's more, FBI investigative files had been falsified to make it appear the information was coming from his father. Falsifying federal files is a felony.

Over time, city officials in positions of power became deeply afraid of what the kid might know about public corruption and what he might expose about them. The feds, having committed file falsification crimes in order to use him as an informant, feared what he might expose about them.

Young Wershe was suddenly adrift. He had worked night after night in his paid role as a Confidential Informant. Now it was over. The cash had dried up. The only trade he knew was the dark art of slinging dope. With all the immaturity and bad judgment he could muster, Rick Wershe set out to become a "weight" man, a wholesaler of cocaine. His adventure as a drug dealer lasted less than a year. He was busted and sentenced to prison for life.

Before all of this, there was a discipline-free and largely love-free childhood that was starved for the right-from-wrong rules that accompany true parental concern for a child.

