

Book Reviews



LZ Bingo

By Reid F. Tillery
Melrose, FL: Collingwood
Publications LLC, 2019,
293 pages

Reviewed by George Crone

L*Z Bingo* sees the world through the eyes of Army enlistee Bill Boe and follows his journey from arrival at basic training through the completion of his one-year tour in Vietnam. Assigned to the 4th Infantry Division's Delta Company, 1st Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment, the day-to-day details follow Boe and his fellow 2nd Platoon Soldiers from their arrival in Vietnam in the summer of 1967 through his actual DEROS (date of estimated return from overseas) in the summer of 1968. This window of time included the February 1968 Tet Offensive by the North Vietnamese Army (NVA). The Army formed Delta Company at Duc Pho, and the author traces Boe's progression in rank from new recruit through sergeant and his ascension within the platoon from an M60 machine-gun ammo bearer up to platoon sergeant. The author successfully describes the multiple separate and distinct operations conducted by the platoon and does so by also providing an adequate historical context for both those familiar and not so familiar with the Army and the Vietnam War. This is a must read for anyone who wants to better understand the highs and lows of a one-year tour in Vietnam. Also, it is for those curious about or who only have hazy recollections of what American Soldiers did in Vietnam.

Upon arrival in Vietnam, the platoon formed at Duc Pho to conduct initial in-country training and began completing tasks such as zeroing weapons and conducting platoon patrols. Departure from Duc Pho to Chu Lai brought additional training and introduction to patrolling in hostile territory where the primary threat consisted of "Viet Cong" (VC) small ambushes and sniper and harassing fires. VC essentially blended with other Vietnamese citizens and were able to keep their identities private by threatening violence and by hurting and killing those who informed against them. Over time the nature of the platoon's threat changed from VC to NVA soldiers who were part of a more top-down structured organization and distinguishable by the uniforms they wore. Both the VC and the NVA presented dangerous enemies to defeat; however, actions taken against the NVA proved more fatal to Delta Company. Delta's most intense fighting in 1967-68 occurred on landing zones (LZs) Hardcore, Mile High, Brillo Pad, and Bingo where many of the 34 Soldiers Delta lost from 1967 to 1970 were killed in action.



Throughout the year, the platoon's missions varied from several days long search-and-destroy missions with constant exposure to potential ambushes and harassing fire, to protecting and patrolling around several LZs with constant exposure to enemy attack and mortar fire, in addition to potential ambushes and harassing fire. In contrast, the platoon also conducted relatively much safer missions such as bridge protection and overwatch to guard the inlet surrounding the island supply and cargo base at Sa Huynh (Sah Winn). Sometimes Soldiers needed to dig their fighting positions, while at other times the Soldiers occupied existing fighting positions. Consider this description of LZ Mile High: "LZ Mile High was a nasty, desolate, grim hill. The bunkers were low and smelled of mildew, with no ventilation. They were only about 100 feet from the perimeter's wire, right along the edge of where the mountain dropped off directly into the thick jungle below... No one felt secure. They knew they were in the guts of NVA territory."

My combat experience includes no small unit fighting such as that described in *LZ Bingo*; nevertheless, many elements described in the book ring true to what I know as a retiree who spent 23 years in the Army. The most important thing to a Soldier in distress is the knowledge that he can trust his buddies — and they can trust him. Boe experienced both, and the details provided describing his closest buddies bring the reader to a better understanding of that trust. Letters from home served as morale boosters whether the recipient knew the people or not. The sisters of Alpha Omicron Pi Sorority at Florida State University (FSU) adopted Boe and others in his platoon as pen pals. Letters they received were highly anticipated and, at least in Boe's case, responded to with regularity. People caring and observing traditions can make a huge difference in the day-to-day lives for deployed Soldiers. Boe's Thanksgiving and Christmas experiences in Vietnam included not only a memorable meal but also contact with a chaplain, who consistently worked his way to wherever Delta happened to be. Finally, as a Ranger School student who attended some 15 years later, it is easy to see where many of the actions taught and trained at Ranger School had been implemented in a much less forgiving environment — and why.

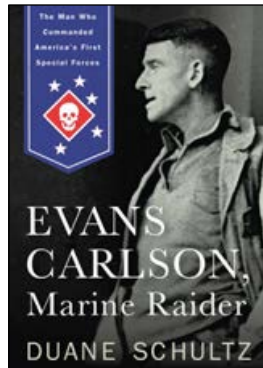
The author explains that he has known Boe for a long time, and the book grew from multiple discussions about Boe's Vietnam experience. The narrative is complemented with multiple photographs of Soldiers and places that Boe was able to capture (and keep) with his Kodak Instamatic camera. For me, the book was extremely effective at tying together actions in Vietnam that I had been exposed to through books such as *Street Without Joy* by Bernard Fall, *One Very Hot Day* by David Halberstam, and even college

texts concerning the war. Bill Boe and those like him who went to war are the real heroes of the 1960s. While many were drafted, Boe left the University of Georgia and enlisted. Similarly, the decision to support Soldiers in Vietnam by the sisters of the AOPi sorority at FSU merits special attention. The conventional wisdom at the time was for students to condemn the war effort. These young women provided time and effort to support a group of Soldiers who were doing the nation's military work. This is a quick read of a well-written story that covers a lot of ground concerning Vietnam, just like SGT Boe and his 2nd Platoon Soldiers did in 1967-68.

Evans Carlson, Marine Raider

**By Duane Schultz
Yardley, PA: Westholme
Publishing LLC, 2017, 265
pages**

Reviewed by
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Few Marine leaders have engendered as much historical scholarship and debate as Marine Corps Brigadier General Evans Carlson. Duane Schultz, a prolific military history author, retells the story of Carlson, focusing on the Makin Island Raid and the Long Patrol on Guadalcanal. The work is easy to read and relatively short but it is far from complete, lacking crucial placement of Carlson's achievements in the wider context of Marine Corps operations during World War II, and is avowedly pro-Carlson. It is this personalization that, unfortunately, reduces the value of the book for scholars and practitioners alike.

The book's 19 chapters cover Carlson's early life and military career, quickly working towards the climactic operations at Makin and the Long Patrol, concluding with a brief epilogue covering Carlson's life after 1943 until his death in 1947. Using a variety of secondary sources, Schultz pulls together a portrait of Carlson as a willful, unorthodox thinker, commander, and leader who impacted how selected groups of Marines brought the fight to the Japanese during the early days of World War II.

The bulk of the work focuses on the famed Makin Island Raid (17-18 August 1942). Carlson led approximately 200 Marine Raiders on an attack on the Japanese garrison at Makin Island, debarking from submarines to raid the island in an attempt to distract Japanese forces from American landings at Tulagi and Guadalcanal. After initial encounters with the small Japanese garrison, Carlson and the majority of the Raiders were able to return to the waiting submarines and return to a jubilant reception in Pearl Harbor. Ultimately,

though the raid was a successful test of Raider tactics, it accomplished little despite being feted in honors and press upon the Raiders' return.

The second largest section, covering the Long Patrol on Guadalcanal (6 November - 4 December 1942), is the book's best written section and most valuable to modern tacticians. Schultz clearly writes the story of the 2nd Raider Battalion's month-long patrol in the Japanese rear areas, focusing on the unpredictability of jungle warfare and the fortitude of the Marines. While combat with the Japanese was fierce, the jungle with its inherent diseases and hardships took a higher toll on the Raiders. At the end of the patrol, the Raiders were unofficially declared unfit for combat and given a rest for almost a year, during which time Carlson was relieved of command and transferred stateside.

Schultz is openly pro-Carlson in his writing. The result is an unbalanced assessment of Carlson as a commander or the impact of the Raiders on the Marine Corps or the war as a whole. This bias is particularly evident in the analysis of Makin, specifically with regards to Carlson's command presence and decision making. Two key issues on Makin arose. The first was Carlson's indecisiveness when confronting the Japanese. The second comes from the revelations of Major General Oscar F. Peatross in his 1992 article in *Leatherneck* Magazine, where it was revealed that a surrender proposal was prepared on 18 August 1942 by Carlson and other Raider leaders. While Schultz addresses the surrender proposal in about 10 pages, he glosses over the larger allegations that Carlson froze in command.

Overall, *Evans Carlson, Marine Raider* is an easy-to-read biography of limited scope of a complex and divisive Marine leader often seen as one of the fathers of American special operations forces. The chapters on the Long Patrol are of value to those looking to understand jungle warfare, operations behind enemy lines, and leadership in austere combat conditions. They serve useful as primers or survey texts leading to other, deeper narratives and analyses. Unfortunately, the lack of balance when presenting Carlson as a leader on Makin or in the larger scope of the Marine Corps during World War II limit the book's value.

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