

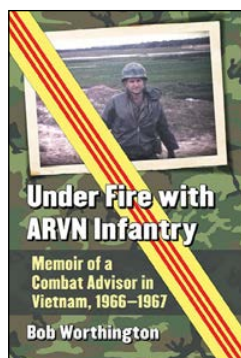
Book Reviews



Under Fire with ARVN Infantry: Memoir of a Combat Advisor in Vietnam, 1966-1967

By Bob Worthington
Jefferson, NC: McFarland,
2018, 240 pages

Reviewed by Maj Timothy Heck,
U.S. Marine Corps Reserve



Bob Worthington's *Under Fire with ARVN Infantry: Memoir of a Combat Advisor in Vietnam 1966-1967* is a must-read memoir for those seeking to understand America's involvement with the Army of the Republic of Vietnam at the tactical level during the early years. Written with humility, honesty, and keen self-reflection, Worthington's writing is absent much of the bravado or exaggeration found in many military memoirs. Instead, readers will find an honest assessment of American and South Vietnamese soldiers as Worthington saw them at the company and battalion level, along with his own role and performance. His later life as a psychologist and journalism professor is evident in the writing and analysis present.

In 1968, David Halberstam released *One Very Hot Day*, a short novel which followed a group of American advisors awaiting an ambush in South Vietnam, early in the American engagement there. The book captures the essence of the advisor mission: confusion, isolation, and the ever-present sense of "otherness" when living and working with foreign forces. The advisors in *One Very Hot Day* would not look out of place in Worthington's memoirs nor he in theirs. Indeed, many advisor veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan will find common ground between Worthington's experience and theirs.

Chronologically organized, the book tells the training, deployment, and personal growth of its author in a meaningful and thought-provoking way. In 1966, America's involvement in Vietnam was growing, causing an increased need for liaison and advisors forces to support the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). Worthington, after lengthy training, was assigned to support ARVN units operating in northern South Vietnam, including the ARVN garrison at DaNang. Initially disappointed by the lack of frontline combat opportunities, Worthington was reassigned to an ARVN infantry battalion conducting operations near Hoi An. His unit, the 3rd Battalion of the 51st ARVN Regiment, was one of the better South Vietnamese units and led by largely competent officers and senior NCOs.

Direct action operations, followed by training and more

operations, continued with Worthington gaining increased proficiency and familiarity with the ARVN troops. The book's narrative high point is the eight-day battle between ARVN and North Vietnamese Army troops near Nong Son, South Vietnam's only working coal mine. The 320-man ARVN battalion engaged the significantly larger 1,200-man NVA regiment in a battle whose outcome was by no means certain. Here, again, Worthington's writing is reflective and self-aware. He openly admits to the mistakes he made when interacting with the Vietnamese.

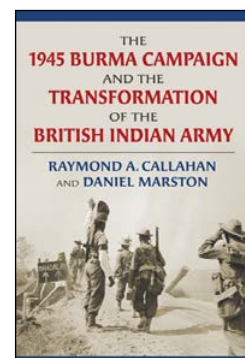
Overall, the author's experiences as a combat advisor during the early American buildup in Vietnam are clear and lack much of the self-aggrandizement seen in other autobiographical works. Worthington does not portray himself as a particularly heroic nor valorous Soldier. He was, as he comments in the end, "a competent infantry leader." *Under Fire with ARVN Infantry* is recommended for Soldiers assigned to advisor teams, security force assistance brigades, and those looking to better understand this crucial aspect of irregular warfare.

(As a civilian, Timothy Heck is the deputy directing editor of the *Modern War Institute* at West Point. While on active duty, he served as an advisor in Afghanistan to the Afghan National Security Forces.)

The 1945 Burma Campaign and the Transformation of the British Indian Army

By Raymond Callahan and Daniel Marston
Lawrence, KS: University Press
of Kansas, 2020, 369 pages

Reviewed by LTC (Retired)
Rick Baillergeon



There was a time not so long ago when World War II's China-Burma-India (C-B-I) Theater received scant discussion by military historians. Just as it was during the conduct of the war, it was clearly the "forgotten theater" for decades following the war. However, in recent years, we have seen a significant increase in interest and books published on subjects related to the C-B-I Theater. One of the newest volumes released in this genre is Raymond Callahan and Daniel Marston's outstanding volume, *The 1945 Burma Campaign and the Transformation of the British Indian Army*.

As the title suggests, this is not a general overview of the 1942-1945 Burma Campaign. Instead the authors have narrowed down their focus dramatically. They specifically, as the title suggests again, key on two areas. The first area is to discuss and analyze the Indian British XIV Army's reconquest of Burma from the Japanese in 1945 after a demoralizing retreat just a few years earlier. The other focus is on detailing the changes the British Indian Army went through following the retreat and how these changes set the conditions for future success. Let me address the treatment of both next.

I believe the volume does an excellent job of concisely providing readers an understanding of the 1945 Burma Campaign. In order to fully appreciate the campaign, readers must fully grasp what the British Indian Army overcame to get to that point. The authors do an excellent job of doing this for readers. With those conditions set, they highlight the key battles, leaders, and turning points which were a part of the campaign. This discussion is outstanding and will be especially beneficial to readers who may possess limited knowledge and understanding of the campaign.

For those who do own a solid background, the discussion on the transformation of the British Indian Army is the clear highlight. I found this conversation to be incredibly valuable. The authors address the significant changes and reforms which took place in the organization following the 1942 retreat. They stress the criticality of these actions in this passage: "Without these reforms, including recruiting enough volunteers from South Asia to create the largest all-volunteer army in history, and the need and desire for Indian officers to fill command and leadership positions, the outcome in 1945 could have been very different."

Any book focused on the Burma Campaign will undoubtedly feature Field Marshal William Slim. Callahan and Marston have not strayed from this. Throughout the entire book, the authors emphasize Slim's influence and the incredible leadership he displayed throughout the overall Burma Campaign. They summarize Slim's entire performance in the following segment: "After leading Burcorps out of Burma in 1942, he played a crucial role in the remarkable military renaissance that transformed the Indian Army and then, with that reborn army, won two defensive battles in 1944 that fatally damaged the Imperial Japanese Army in Burma. In his campaign of 1945, the most brilliant feat of operational maneuver by any British general in World War II, he reconquered Burma, shredding his Japanese opponents."

To craft a focused book such as this, it is imperative that it is written by authors with subject matter expertise, and Callahan and Marston clearly possess these credentials. Both of these authors have firmly established themselves as experts in particular areas of the Burma Campaign. In regards to Callahan, he has crafted several highly regarded volumes on aspects of the overall Burma Campaign. In the case of Marston's catalog, he has been much more focused on the British Indian Army itself. Each of their niches is displayed prominently within the book.

I believe there are three significant strengths which contribute to the superb quality of the volume. The first is the exhaustive research conducted by the authors. Obviously, the authors make outstanding use of the previous sources they have utilized in their past books. However, they have significantly augmented this by delving into newly discovered personal accounts and archival holdings. In total, it is one of the most thoroughly researched books I have read tied to the C-B-I Theater.

The outstanding readability of this volume is the second impressive strength of the book. When a book is crafted by two authors, you wonder about the flow of the volume and if the authors' writing styles will conflict. In both cases, this is not an issue. This is a volume which is very well-organized and extremely conversant. These attributes enable the authors to seamlessly tie-in their discussion on the transformation of the British Indian Army within the context of the 1945 Burma Campaign. Having read previous Callahan books, I anticipated a well-crafted book and this did not disappoint.

The final strength of the book I would like to highlight is the superb notes section the authors have inserted. The authors have dedicated 50 pages to creating a section which is incredibly beneficial to readers. It includes providing them with the rest of the story, expounding on points made in the main section of the volume, and offering recommendations for further reading on areas and subjects. This is clearly not one of those standard fare notes sections which you simply gloss over.

The 1942-1945 Burma Campaign highlights one of the most remarkable turnarounds of a unit in history. It is an incredible story which fortunately in recent years is now being told by more historians. Raymond Callahan and Daniel Marston have superbly focused on a portion of this campaign. In doing so, they have crafted a volume which will greatly benefit all who read it.

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