

Book Reviews

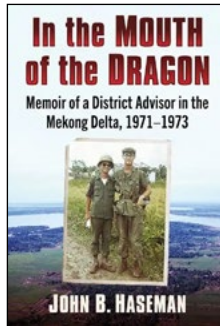


In the Mouth of the Dragon: Memoir of a District Advisor in the Mekong Delta, 1971-1973

By John B. Haseman

**Jefferson, NC: McFarland &
Company, Inc., 277 pages, 2022**

Reviewed by LTC (Retired)
Rick Baillergeon



All authors have their own personal reasons on why they decide to begin the challenge of writing a book. For John Haseman, the spark was ignited during his induction into the Defense Attache Service Hall of Fame in 2011. During the ceremony, there was much discussion on Haseman's achievements which contributed to this honor. At the reception, family members in attendance began needling Haseman. Specifically, they wanted to know why he hadn't shared any details with them regarding his service.

Elaborating on this occasion, Haseman states, "My family surrounded me at the reception afterwards and claimed forcefully, 'You never told us about any of this.' That morphed into, 'Start writing before you forget everything, and by the way, you can start with Vietnam because you never told us anything about that either.'" Family members can be incredibly persuasive, and clearly the seed had been planted.

The final push to begin the book occurred later while Haseman was back home. He states, "My personal library of books about Vietnam War history and memoirs reached more than 500 volumes. I was struck by the fact that, in all my bookcases, there were fewer than a dozen books written by advisors who had lived and fought out in the districts with the Vietnamese RF/PF [Regional Forces/Popular Forces] soldier. That's why I sat down and wrote this book."

Haseman began crafting his experiences as an advisor during the end of the Vietnam War and the result is *In the Mouth of the Dragon*. Within this outstanding volume, Haseman describes his experience as a district advisor in Vietnam from July 1971 to February 1973. During that period, he served in two districts in the Mekong Delta (Ham Long and Mo Cay). These districts were in Kien Hoa Province, and each had their own unique characteristics and operational environment.

I believe Haseman achieves several things in his memoir. First, he provides readers with an excellent overview of the roles of an advisor during the final years of the Vietnam War. He summarizes these roles and duties in the following: "But I can recall no time in which I actually advised any

of the Vietnamese officers on tactical operations. We were there to support them with air support and sometimes financial support for development projects (we had Assistance In Kind — AIK — funds for that) and — perhaps most valuable — to be a buckser-upper, morale-boosting friend."

Haseman's discussion of the above friendship is another area he emphasizes throughout the volume. The author goes into significant detail on the relationship between advisor and counterpart. He includes the many ways he strived to gain his counterparts' confidence and trust. These actions, along with Haseman sharing the day-to-day hardships with his counterparts, forged an incredible bond. It is truly a bond only Soldiers can share with each other.

Memoirs always contain their fair share of "war stories," and Haseman certainly provides readers with many. These run the gamut of emotions and touch on a wide array of topics. He clearly has a knack for telling these stories in a written form. Many can tell a story verbally but then often have challenges putting it in written form with the same clarity. Haseman can undoubtedly articulate these stories to readers and not lose anything in translation.

There are several strengths displayed within Haseman's volume which greatly contribute to one's reading experience. First, this is a superbly written book. It is crafted in a highly conversant style and in military speak. He states the reason for this style in his introduction: "I write in military-ese because the story flows better using military terminology and acronyms, considering that is how I thought of those events or experiences at the time, and it is more natural to tell the story that way." The author's prior writing experience assists in this readability as he has four additional books and more than 250 published articles in his body of work.

Another strength of the volume are the "extras" Haseman has provided readers to assist in telling his story. This includes more than 50 photographs and five maps which are inserted throughout the book to tie-in with the related text. Additionally, he has included sections which provide definitions for military terminology and one in which he details the post-1973 life experiences of those he served with as an advisor. In total, these additions add clarity and truly personalize the volume.

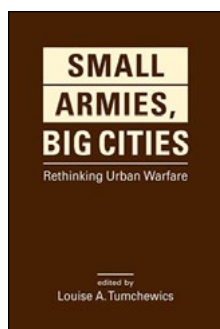
The last strength I would like to address is another Haseman addition. Throughout the book, he begins many discussion topics with a bold, italicized partial sentence beginning "Happiness Is..." I found this to be an outstanding transition technique and relates to many subjects which perhaps only a Soldier would find happiness in. Examples include: "Happiness Is Going on an Operation and Not Getting Shot," "Happiness Is a Drink of Fresh Coconut Water After a Tromp through the Jungle," "Happiness Is Payday on

Pay Day;" "Happiness Is the Generator Starting on the First Crank;" and "Happiness Is Translating the Monopoly Game into Vietnamese and Not Losing Your Shirt in Vietnamese Poker Games."

In conclusion, *In the Mouth of the Dragon* is a valuable addition to the Vietnam War body of knowledge. The role of advisors, especially at the end of the war has not seen a great deal of scholarship, and Haseman has assisted in filling the void. This is a volume which is superbly written and organized, containing several valuable features. I have no question readers will be thankful for the publishing of this outstanding volume... however, perhaps not as thankful as Haseman's family members!

**Small Armies, Big Cities:
Rethinking Urban Warfare**
Edited by Louise A. Tumchewics
**Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner
 Publishers, 329 pages, 2022**

Reviewed by LTC (Retired)
 Jesse McIntyre III



Urban warfare is today and tomorrow's war. Recent events in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine War, Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, and now in Gaza following the Hamas-led 7 October attack on Israel are occurring in urban settings. Since the Industrial Revolution, trends in urban demographics indicate urbanization is rapidly expanding. The population living in cities has more than doubled over the past 40 years and is projected to reach 55 percent of the world's population by 2050. Future conflicts — whether counterinsurgencies, peer confrontations, or near-peer confrontations — will likely incorporate urban warfare.

Louise Tumchewics and 12 other authors — who are all recognized researchers in the field of strategic studies, intelligence, defense, and urban conflicts research — produced a timely study that aims to inform and stimulate thinking on how small armies have fought in cities, reflecting on the enduring nature and changing character of urban warfare through a number of case studies. *Small Armies, Big Cities* is broken into three key themes: urban warfare, operational art, and conclusion.

Among the authors' many significant observations and reflections, four stand out. First, the perils and pitfalls for urban warfare have been recognized for millennia. Military theorists from Sun Tzu onwards have warned against operating in urban areas. Urban fighting favors the defender while leveling the playing field against a superior military force. In "The Totemic Value of Cities," Alex Neads informs readers that urban warfare doctrine requires a concentration of eight attackers for every one defender in urban

environments. This environment impedes movement, command and control, and communication; channels attacking forces into kill zones; constrains employment of weapons; and places the safety and welfare of non-combatants on attacking forces.

Second, understanding and training for urban environments are paramount for militaries today and in the future. Steve Tatham notes that taking a simplistic view of the population is a precursor to failure. Urban areas are usually not homogeneous in nature but may be dissimilar in regards to socio-economic status, language, ethnicity, and religion. There are formal and informal leaders within urban areas who can assist with intelligence, force protection, humanitarian, and post-military operations planning. Furthermore, there is a need to understand how even distant locations can be socially connected and how security force action in one area can have consequences elsewhere. Training for urban operations will assist in protecting the force, reducing civilian interference and promoting legitimacy of security forces.

Third, Tatham also underscores the role and importance of influence operations in urban warfare. Both sides are engaged in influencing and persuading the legitimacy of their cause. Tatham describes how influence operations are more than tailoring messages for an intended audience; they are about nudging, shoving, and shaping behaviors through a variety of means. These operations require a detailed and quantifiable understanding of behavior, psychology, and social environment. Commanders and their staffs must know the physical and social urban environments if they expect to dominate the information battle for the urban environment.

Fourth, Andrew Graham's "Conducting Urban Warfare in the Twenty-First Century" is the centerpiece of this excellent work. It builds on previous chapters and lays out the potential future directions of hostile intent and counterterrorism research. Graham provides four framework principles:

- 1) Strategic direction, alignment, and integration of effort;
- 2) Winning in the cities;
- 3) An unconventional, polydimensional, and multiagency mindset; and
- 4) Understanding along with strategic and operational considerations for military commanders and their staffs in planning future urban military operations.

Small Armies, Big Cities illustrates the challenges and unique reality that future armies will face during urban warfare. This work is highly readable and provides a comprehensive discussion on the topic. This work is a must read for policymakers, strategists, and others in planning for future conflicts. In addition, it will provide a valuable resource to security stakeholders at policy and practitioner levels.