

# BOOK REVIEWS



**WE WERE SOLDIERS ONCE... AND YOUNG**, by Lieutenant General Harold G. Moore, USA (Retired) and Joseph L. Galloway. Random House, 1992. 464 Pages. \$25.00. Reviewed by Lieutenant General Barry R. McCaffrey, Assistant to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Washington, D.C.

Retired Lieutenant General Hal Moore and correspondent Joe Galloway have written a gripping history of the savage Battle of the Ia Drang, which took place in November 1965. In my judgment, it is one of the most powerful and accurate accounts of U.S. infantry small-unit combat ever written. It is clearly the best piece of writing to come out of our tragic experience in Vietnam.

The authors bring to their moving tale the perspective they gained from being among the survivors of one of the bloodiest actions ever fought by the U.S. Army. Lieutenant Colonel Moore led the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry into the killing ground of landing zone (LZ) X-ray. Joe Galloway accompanied the assault forces as a young reporter for *United Press International*.

Moore and Galloway chronicle the ferocious combat involved in the air assault by a brigade of the newly arrived 1st Cavalry Division into the Ia Drang Valley along the Cambodian border. The battalion was first into the meat grinder with 450 troops landing at LZ X-ray. Only 250 survivors would come out. The subsequent piecemeal commitment of the 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry into a tactical disaster at LZ Albany and the ground move of the 2d Battalion into LZ Columbus resulted in the death of more U.S. soldiers than were lost in any Union or Confederate regiment at the Battle of Gettysburg. The disciplined North Vietnamese troops of the PAVN (People's Army of North Vietnam) 320th, 33d, and 66th Regiments lost an estimated 2,000 killed as they aggressively pressed home their attacks from the looming high ground of the Chu Pong Massif.

There are a lot of reasons for a U.S. soldier to read this analysis of battle in the mire of the Ia Drang jungles. First, it brings home the central importance of leadership. The principal factor in the survival of the 1st

Battalion, 7th Cavalry was the ability of its sergeants and lieutenants, its company commanders, and most important Lieutenant Colonel Moore and Sergeant Major Basil L. Plumley, to sort out the enormous confusion of small-unit combat and act decisively—even while wrapped in the crushing fatigue and brutality of the battle.

Second, the book demonstrates that the tactical axiom of infantry victory in combat is the effective employment of the combined arms team. U.S. artillery, attack helicopters, and close air support were the hammers that allowed the desperately outnumbered infantrymen to stay in the fight.

Finally, and most clearly, the book is a tribute to the heroism of the U.S. soldier. The reader sees combat through the eyes of Second Lieutenant Joe Marm, platoon leader and Medal of Honor winner; of company commanders Tony Nadal and Skip Fesmire; and of the countless brave sergeants and riflemen of the cavalry battalions. The lesson is one of raw courage that dominates fear and of the powerful love and sacrifice that glues together the U.S. Army in combat. These are men to be remembered. These are men to be used as examples when we have to face battle again.

In the final section of the book, entitled "Aftermath," the authors detail the slow process of sorting out the reasons for the bloody tactical draw between the most modern U.S. light infantry force in the world and a tenacious, well-led North Vietnamese division. Both the Americans and the North Vietnamese were shocked by the carnage. The subsequent course of the war was profoundly altered as both sides realized that a long, bloody road lay ahead. Many will argue that the North Vietnamese generals and revolutionary leaders had a clearer vision. They crafted a skillful political, psychological, and military strategy that handed the United States a long battlefield stalemate and an ultimate domestic defeat.

The book closes with an accounting of the human dimension of the battle as the authors talk of the children, wives, parents, and friends of the soldiers killed in the Ia Drang Valley. It's a good lesson for all of us who have responsibility for the lives of American

soldiers. The worst effects of combat are not found in the casualty rolls of young lives lost and bodies maimed. Those at home suffer bitterly and with a sorrow that is equally lasting. Their memories of young faces frozen in time and lying forever in soldiers' graves never fade.

If we are to ask the young men and women of the armed forces to fight, we owe them clear political and military objectives and the latitude to close with their task and achieve decisive results. The costs in blood will be unbearable if we fail to understand this lesson of Vietnam. This admirable book brings the lesson home with vivid intensity.

We owe Hal Moore and Joe Galloway a debt for telling us this tale. Read this book of war. Learn of American infantry heroism in the firestorm that poured over outnumbered cavalry soldiers in the Valley of the Ia Drang. The young infantry soldiers who now stand guard for America can take strength from their powerful example.

**CARL VON CLAUSEWITZ: HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL WRITINGS.** Edited and Translated by Peter Paret and Daniel Moran. Princeton University Press, 1992. 397 Pages. \$29.95. Reviewed by Dr. Charles E. White, Chief of Military History, United States Army Infantry School.

This is a splendid collection of Clausewitz's historical and political writings, superbly translated and brilliantly edited by Professors Peter Paret and Daniel Moran. It is intended to be a companion volume to Clausewitz's classic treatise *On War*, and it is a valuable source for understanding the genesis of Clausewitz's ideas on history, politics, and war, as well as his penetrating insights into the social, political, and cultural fabric of Napoleonic and Restoration Europe (1796-1832).

The texts are grouped into two categories: "Historical Writings" and "Political Writings." Introductions, followed by brief analyses, precede each category and individual essay. Footnotes supplement and clarify ambiguities in the texts. All of the transla-

War will be more interesting to social historians than to those primarily interested in military history. Still, the first English translation of this eyewitness account fills a tremendous void in our study of the Revolutionary War period.

**THE U.S. MARINE CORPS IN CRISIS: RIBBON CREEK AND RECRUIT TRAINING**, by Keith Fleming. University of South Carolina Press, 1990. 150 Pages. \$24.95. Reviewed by Dr. Mike Fisher, Kansas State University.

On Sunday night, 8 April 1956, an angry Marine Corps drill instructor, Matthew C. McKeon, led 74 Marines into a tidal swamp called Ribbon Creek near the Parris Island Recruit Depot. Intended as group punishment for individual discipline, the incident resulted in the drowning of six young Marines in the tidewater currents.

Author Keith Fleming, a former Marine and current Marine Corps historian, examines the tragedy of Ribbon Creek, which triggered a national debate over Marine training methods. The slim monograph, written originally as a doctoral dissertation, develops the thesis that the harshness of Marine training fails to promote the combat readiness the Marine Corps seeks. In fact, Fleming proposes, the time-honored traditions of the past did not include the hazing and abuse he finds prevalent during the inter-war years between Korea and Vietnam, 1953-1965.

His arguments merit close attention. First, he successfully completed the rigors of Marine boot camp during 1960 as an enlisted man, becoming in his own words "a true believer" in the Corps. Later, having earned a commission, he led Marines in Santo Domingo in 1965, and a year later in Vietnam, where he commanded a rifle platoon and subsequently a company in combat. Second, since his discharge from the Corps in 1973, Fleming has worked in the Marine Corps historical section, serving as junior author on the recent *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, 1967*. He brings a knowledgeable eye and a discerning sense to Marine boot camp, an American institution that is much discussed but little studied or understood.

Several flaws mar the work, however. Fleming argues erroneously that the brutality in Marine boot camp during the mid-1950s evolved because of the Marines' failure to perform well during the Korean War, 1950-1953. In fact, in the words of General Douglas MacArthur, the Corps had "never shone more brightly" than in that war.

Marine heroics during 1950 on the Pusan Perimeter, at the Inchon landing, and in the struggle at the Chosin Reservoir matched the exploits of any military legion in history. The Marines' prisoner of war record also indicates this performance: Of the 7,000 Americans captured by communist forces during the Korean War, only 227 were Marines. As POWs, those Marines conducted themselves commendably under the harshest of conditions, receiving high praise from a Congress that was dismayed by the performance of some men from other services while in captivity.

Additionally, Fleming fails to note the demographic shift that affected Marine recruitment during the Ribbon Creek days. For the first time, the Corps accepted two-year enlistees during peacetime, indicating the shortage of young adult males as a result of the low birth rates of the depression years. The Corps found itself reaching for volunteers, enlisting youths who in other times of peace would have been rejected. Fleming himself proves an apt example. Washed out of boot camp in 1959 with a bad shoulder, he was reenlisted in 1960.

The author denies the benefit of the intense discipline inappropriately reflected in the Ribbon Creek incident. Many Marines agree with him in principle but also understand that the very privation, misery, and harshness occurring inside the recruit depots forge the bonds of brotherhood and sacrifice so necessary to the combat infantryman.

On another level, the Ribbon Creek incident demonstrated the Corps' ability to contain a politically sensitive situation, damping the flames of Congressional and public outrage. The implementation of a skillful consensus between Congress and the Marine Corps resulted in the summer of 1956 in limited and, some might say, cosmetic reform of boot camp training.

After a 15-day public trial, the drill instructor, Staff Sergeant McKeon, a decorated Korean combat veteran, was found guilty of negligent homicide and drinking on duty. But he subsequently spent only 12 additional nights in the Parris Island brig before being returned to a different Corps duty station at a reduced rank.

Despite the public outcry, veteran Marines—although abhorring the Ribbon Creek incident—emphasized that the conversion of civilians to combatants required special and unique measures.

RECENT AND RECOMMENDED  
LAST SALUTE: CIVIL AND MILITARY

**FUNERALS, 1921-1969**. By B.C. Mossman and M.W. Stark. Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office Stock number 008-029-00086-5. 428 Pages. \$16.00, Softbound.

**FATAL VOYAGE: THE SINKING OF THE USS INDIANAPOLIS**. By Dan Kurzman. Originally printed in hardcover in 1990. Pocket Books, 1991. 336 Pages. \$4.99, Softbound.

**THE VIETNAM WAR AS HISTORY**. Edited by Elizabeth Jane Errington and B.J.C. McKercher. Praeger, 1990. 216 Pages. \$42.95.

**CHEYENNES AND HORSE SOLDIERS: THE 1857 EXPEDITION AND THE BATTLE OF SOLOMON'S FORK**. By William Y. Chalfant. University of Oklahoma Press, 1989. 438 Pages. \$24.95.

**FORTS AND FORTRESSES**. By Martin Brice. Facts on File, 1990. 192 Pages. \$24.95.

**GOD'S SAMURAI: LEAD PILOT AT PEARL HARBOR**. By Gordon W. Prange, et al. Brassey's (US), 1990. 349 Pages. \$21.95.

**THE SPIT-SHINE SYNDROME: ORGANIZATIONAL IRRATIONALITY IN THE AMERICAN FIELD ARMY**. By Christopher Bassford. Greenwood, 1988. 171 Pages. \$37.95.

**FATAL DECISION: ANZIO AND THE BATTLE FOR ROME**. By Carlo D'Este. HarperCollins, 1991. 566 Pages. \$35.00.

**MUNDA TRAIL**. By Eric Hammel. First published in hard cover in 1989. Avon Books, 1991. 320 Pages. \$4.50, Softbound.

**MY TURN TO SPEAK: IRAN, THE REVOLUTION AND SECRET DEALS WITH THE U.S.** By Abol Hassan Bani-Sadr. Brassey's (US), 1991. 240 Pages. \$19.95.

**WAR, PEACE, AND VICTORY: STRATEGY AND STATECRAFT FOR THE NEXT CENTURY**. By Colin S. Gray. Originally published in hard cover in 1990. Touchstone, 1991. 442 Pages. \$12.95, Softbound.

**THE GERMAN SHEPHERD DOG**. By Chris Walkowicz. Denlinger's Publishers (Box 76, Fairfax, VA 22030), 1991. 160 Pages. \$29.95.

**THE FUTURE OF NATO: FACING AN UNRELIABLE ENEMY IN AN UNCERTAIN ENVIRONMENT**. By S. Nelson Drew, et al. Praeger, 1991. 224 Pages. \$42.95.

**NAVAL OFFICERS UNDER HITLER: THE STORY OF CREW 34**. By Eric C. Rust. Praeger, 1991. 248 Pages. \$42.95.

**THE INTIFADA: ITS IMPACT ON ISRAEL, THE ARAB WORLD, AND THE SUPERPOWERS**. By Robert O. Freedman. Florida International University Press, 1991. \$19.95, Softbound.

**FIGHTER AIRCRAFT**. By Alfred Price. Sterling, 1989. 128 Pages. \$19.95.

**BOMBER AIRCRAFT**. By Alfred Price. Sterling, 1989. 128 Pages. \$19.95.

**TANK WARFARE**. By Bryan Perrett. Sterling, 1990. 128 Pages. \$19.95.

**THE BRITISH AIRMAN**. By Kenneth Poolman. Sterling, 1989. 240 Pages. \$19.95.

**THE BRITISH SAILOR**. By Kenneth Poolman. Sterling, 1989. 240 Pages. \$24.95.

**THE BRITISH SOLDIER**. By James A. Lucas. Sterling, 1989. 192 Pages. \$24.95.