

# BOOK REVIEWS



***Hallowed Ground: The Last Battle for Pork Chop Hill.* By Bill McWilliams. Naval Institute Press, 2004. 494 Pages. \$29.95, Hardcover.** Reviewed by Colonel Mike Davino.

The Korean War is often called the “Forgotten War.” However, in truth, the war of maneuver that made up the first year of the war has been the subject of many excellent books. The stationary, or “outpost war,” that was fought from 1951 to 1953 has received far less attention. For example, the U.S. Army’s official history of the war devotes two volumes to the first year, but just part of a single volume to the combat operations conducted during the final two years of the war. Bill McWilliams’ book, *On Hallowed Ground: The Last Battle for Pork Chop Hill*, is a close study of one of the most brutal battles fought during that period.

Pork Chop Hill may be familiar to some readers as the subject of SLA Marshall’s book and the subsequent movie starring Gregory Peck. That book and movie deal with the April 1953 battle for the outpost on Pork Chop, so named because of its resemblance to a pork chop when depicted on a topographic map. McWilliams, a retired Air Force colonel and 1955 graduate of West Point, reviews that earlier battle as well as the overall strategic situation. Of particular note is his account of the efforts by the South Korean president, Syngman Rhee, to undermine U.S. negotiations to conclude an armistice agreement with the North Koreans and Chinese. Rhee ordered his Soldiers to release thousands of North Korean prisoners as well as prohibited South Koreans to continue to work for the United Nations Command. His actions prolonged the fighting and are a vivid reminder that the challenges associated with coalition warfare are nothing new.

McWilliams’ recounting of the organization, training, operations and

leadership of the 7th Infantry Division provides a fascinating look inside the U.S. Army of 1953. The 7th Division, with its attached Ethiopian and Colombian battalions along with more than 2,000 attached South Korean Soldiers, was in itself, a mini-coalition. He explains the heavy pressure on the division’s leadership to keep friendly casualties to a minimum and how leaders above division level severely limited the freedom of action of the division commander and his subordinates.

The real focus of this book is on the July 1953 battle in which regiments of the U.S. 7th Infantry Division fought against a Chinese enemy determined to seize the company-sized outpost on Pork Chop. McWilliams does a great job in describing this chaotic battle and the bravery of the Soldiers in the rifle companies and their supporting units that fought it. Using a combination of official records, letters written by Soldiers to family members, and interviews with survivors, he recreates the decentralized bunker-to-bunker fighting that characterized the numerous attacks and counterattacks. He examines in detail the decisions made at high levels of command that ultimately determined the outcome of the battle. And finally, in his section on the aftermath of Pork Chop, he puts it in the perspective of both history and the families of the fallen.

This is a great addition to the history of the Korean War. Infantrymen assigned to the brigade level and below should read this book as well as those infantrymen working in headquarters that are responsible for multinational operations. It will also be of interest to both students of the Korean War and those readers with a general interest in military history and ground combat.

***Nuclear and Sri Lanka.* Lieutenant Colonel Chandana Weerakoon, Godage International Publishers, No. 661, Maradana Road, Colombo 10, Sri Lanka. \$10.** Reviewed by Russell A. Eno.

This paperback is well worth the nominal cost. Lieutenant Colonel Weerakoon — a major at the time the book was written — is a graduate of the Infantry Captains’ Career Course at Fort Benning, and has effectively discussed the issue of nuclear proliferation from the perspective of a small nation in the Indian Ocean, between the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal. His topic, relevant enough if only viewed in light of the potential secondary effects of a nuclear exchange between major world powers, has assumed greater even urgency now that India and Pakistan now boast their own nuclear capabilities. Given the implications of the global war on terror and the threat of nuclear materials falling into terrorists’ hands, it requires little imagination to understand the importance of maintaining in that region stable governments whose interests and foreign policy goals are congruent with those of the United States.

LTC Weerakoon does a good job of outlining the backgrounds of various nations’ nuclear capabilities, focusing on those of India and Pakistan because any effects of such weapons would quickly and irrevocably be felt in his own island nation. He uses the downwind effects of the Soviet Union’s Chernobyl disaster as an example of what could befall Sri Lanka and nations along the Pacific Rim after a nuclear exchange. The author spends some time discussing the immediate and long-term effects of a nuclear detonation and offers extensive charts, tables, and diagrams to support his points.

The book is written in clear, concise English, and the occasional typographical error does not significantly detract from

either the book's readability or its relevance in today's highly-charged environment. The message the reader carries away is that — while major world powers have by and large come to grips with the need to control the proliferation of nuclear weapons — the smaller and potentially less stable members of the nuclear club will need supervision and incentives to forestall the world-wide catastrophe that we have been trying to prevent since the end of World War II. The nuclear genie is out of the bottle, and the issue today is not so much whether we can once again confine him, but rather how we can best restrict his movements until he can once again be brought under control.

*Nuclear and Sri Lanka* is worth the read. Buy it.

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***The Vietnam War in History, Literature, and Film.* By Mark Taylor. University of Alabama Press, 2003. 160 Pages, \$48.00 (Hardcover), \$22.95 (Softcover).** Reviewed by Command Sergeant Major James Clifford.

*The Vietnam War in History, Literature, and Film* is a survey of the Vietnam War depiction in contemporary and immediate postwar American films and books. The author provides six short chapters that succinctly divide the subject into digestible portions. Chapter 1 explains the difficulty in telling war stories. Specific to Vietnam, Taylor introduces readers to an approach to writing that seems tailor made for those bent upon presenting their preconceived ideas by twisting facts to fit their political agenda. This 'new journalism' as practiced by journalists and novelists gives credibility to a definition of truth where faithfulness to facts is less important than expression of the authors' perceptions and feelings.

"Heroes" is a dissection of the concept of heroes and bravery as represented by Army special operation forces with special emphasis on Robin Moore's 1965 book *The Green Berets* and John Wayne's movie of the same title. Green Berets represent all that was right, and all that was wrong, with the Vietnam War. Depending on one's frame of reference, the Green Beret was either a selfless hero that risked all to protect, guide, and nurture a helpless people

or a bloodthirsty savage that ruthlessly killed without remorse.

A second chapter focusing on movies takes on Oliver Stone's *JFK*. This film puts forth the premise that the President was assassinated by a conspiracy hatched to ensure that America stayed in Vietnam. In order to begin to accept such an accusation one must believe that Kennedy was about to pull America out of Vietnam. Mark Taylor uses critical excerpts from the movie, Stone's own statements, and the documentary record to cast serious doubt on that premise. He thoroughly destroys the credibility of *JFK* while at the same time lending credence to Stone's right to present his mangled view of the facts.

In a chapter on battles, the author uses Khe Sanh as an example of the slanted writing coming out of Vietnam. Several authors wrote books that misrepresented what happened there. One novel of the period was written so skillfully that some historians have since used it as a factual reference, perhaps not realizing that much of the book is a composite of events and participants.

Up to this point the book is a strong presentation that outlines the significant distortions in Vietnam writings. Anyone reading this book will approach any future works with a jaundiced eye from then on thanks to this author's insightful analysis. Had the author stopped at this point the book would have been an important contribution to Vietnam studies. In fact, the author includes a chapter that seems to be an unfocused search for a point. In "Villains" the author retells the story of American war crimes in the Vietnamese hamlet of My Lai. His telling of the story lacks any significant reference to the history, literature, or film other than some discussion of contemporary journalistic reporting and polling data. Most of the chapter discusses the official report and later book on the incident authored by Lieutenant General William Peers.

In the final chapter, "Veterans," the author describes how America media and entertainment outlets bought into the stereotype picture of a burned out Vietnam veteran. He lightly compares and contrasts this picture with that of the World War II veteran. Veterans of that war were also

portrayed as being problem ridden although the depth of that stereotype was not as deep. Although the stereotype has been significantly debunked by the facts, large portions of American society still believe that Vietnam veterans were somehow more profoundly damaged than veterans of other wars.

*The Vietnam War in History, Literature, and Film* is billed as an interdisciplinary approach to the Vietnam War that clarifies the relationships between how that war is portrayed. Hardly. Rather than clarify anything, the book straddles the fence on the issue. The author skillfully outlines how much of the journalism, history, novels, and cinema related to Vietnam is politically motivated and designed to manipulate the audience into denying the truth and accepting unsupported conclusions that comply with the authors' preconceived ideas. The weakness of this book is that after all the analysis and discussion the author is still unable to present a conclusion other than to say that there is no conclusion, and that further study is needed. Well, who did not already know that? Did we not know that nearly every article, book, and movie of Vietnam was either a piece of conservative propaganda or liberal hatchet job? We did, and this book just restates the obvious. A second weakness is the author's granting validity to inaccurate portrayals of the war. The morale equivalency offered to those with an ax to grind about Vietnam is aggravating in the very least.

The real question, the important question, is not what contemporary or immediate postwar literature tells us. We already know that the work of that era will be worthless to future generations of Americans. The question we should be asking is, what does current literature and movies teach us about the Vietnam War 30 years after? One can only trust that those currently writing are not infected by the same anti-Vietnam fever as those writing a generation before. Hopefully someone is working on that and we won't have to wait another 30 or more years to get a legitimate answer. Additionally, we hope that a similar group of charlatans will not gain possession of our history in regard to our operations in Iraq.