

## WE WERE SOLDIERS ONCE . . . AND YOUNG<sup>1</sup>

REVIEWED BY MAJOR MICHELE B. SHIELDS<sup>2</sup>

In February 1963, the United States Army created the 11th Air Assault Division (Test) at Fort Benning, Georgia to assess a new concept of warfare—airmobility. The intent was to produce faster paced combat by bringing the infantry into battle via helicopter. Lieutenant Colonel Harold G. Moore, Jr., took command of one of the battalions of the 11th Air Assault Division in June 1964. He trained and tested the officers and soldiers of his battalion for over a year. Upon completion of testing, the 11th Air Assault Division (Test) was redesignated the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), and Lieutenant Colonel Moore's battalion was given the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry colors. The sister battalion became the 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry. In August 1965, the 1st Cavalry Division, including the 1st and 2d Battalions, 7th Cavalry, deployed to Vietnam.

*We Were Soldiers Once . . . and Young* is about these two battalions and their respective battles at Landing Zones X-Ray and Albany in the Ia Drang Valley. In the prologue, the authors state the purpose of the book: “[T]his story is about the smaller, more tightly focused ‘we’ . . . the first American combat troops, who . . . fought the first major battle of a conflict that would drag on for ten long years . . . .”<sup>3</sup> The authors never stray from that purpose. In just four days, over two hundred Americans and thousands of North Vietnamese died in combat. The memories of those who fought and died in the Ia Drang Valley are brought to life throughout *We Were Soldiers Once . . . and Young*.

The authors reproduce the intensity of combat at its highest. They stress the importance of organization and communication in battle. They prove that tough training and discipline save lives in battle. Because these concepts can be applied to many aspects of day to day life, any leader, mil-

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1. LIEUTENANT GENERAL HAROLD G. MOORE (RET.) AND JOSEPH L. GALLOWAY, *WE WERE SOLDIERS ONCE . . . AND YOUNG* (First Harper Perennial ed., 1993) (1992).

2. Judge Advocate General's Corps, United States Army. Written while assigned as a student in the 46th Judge Advocate Officer Graduate Course, The Judge Advocate General's School, United States Army, Charlottesville, Virginia.

3. MOORE AND GALLOWAY, *supra* note 1, at xvii.

itary or civilian, can learn from this book. *We Were Soldiers Once . . . and Young* is a must read for all.

Both authors, Joseph L. "Joe" Galloway and Lieutenant General (Retired) Harold G. "Hal" Moore, are distinguished in their respective fields. Joe Galloway was a war correspondent for United Press International (UPI) in 1965-1966. He was attached to the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry and was present at Landing Zone X-Ray. He spent three additional tours in Vietnam and fifteen years overseas as a writer for UPI. Hal Moore graduated from the United States Military Academy in 1945. He commanded the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry at Landing Zone X-Ray in the Ia Drang Valley. During his career, he was the commander, 3rd Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, Vietnam; commander, 7th Infantry Division, Korea; commander, Fort Ord, California; and Army deputy chief of staff for personnel. He retired from the U.S. Army as a three-star general in 1977 after thirty-two years of service. The vast experiences of both authors contribute to this well-written and informative book. Most importantly, the authors' presence at Landing Zone X-Ray allowed them to express the sights, sounds, and feelings of combat from a personal perspective. The reader can truly appreciate the openness and candor of these respected men as they describe their own and others' emotions throughout the book.

The authors conducted extensive research over several years to document their book. At the first Ia Drang Reunion in 1988, they received a large amount of material from surviving American soldiers. This material included photos, letters, Army orders, newspaper and magazine clippings, and more. The authors also received valuable information through questionnaire responses and personal and telephonic interviews. Some soldiers offered their personal notes, diaries, and maps for their perusal. Additionally, the authors inspected military records, including studies, after-action reports, and maps. They also met with several North Vietnamese commanders to discuss the battles of the Ia Drang. One North Vietnamese commander brought his personal diary and battle map to the interview. The authors returned to Vietnam and revisited the battlefield. They document their sources in detail throughout the book, and the extensiveness of their research is readily apparent by the number, diversity, and cross-referencing of sources. Galloway and Moore should be applauded for the time, energy, and attention to detail that they devoted to researching and writing this book.

The authors' efforts to substantiate events with facts from more than one source reveal their determination to provide an accurate account of

each battle. The reader can easily deduce, however, that some surviving soldiers may not have cooperated with the authors in their search for the facts. For example, one prominent individual, Lieutenant Colonel Robert McDade, commander of the 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry at Landing Zone Albany, was seldom quoted. Other surviving soldiers were briefly mentioned without quotes. Despite these barriers, the authors' conclusions are generally logical. Yet, their lack of impartiality is apparent at times. The authors were present at Landing Zone X-Ray. They were not present at Landing Zone Albany. The book indicates their bias in favor of the leadership and management style used by Lieutenant Colonel Moore at Landing Zone X-Ray.

The authors include numerous maps and photographs to assist the reader. The maps, which are located in the front of the book, depict key terrain features and the locations of friendly and enemy forces. They include maps of Landing Zones X-Ray and Albany at different times during each battle. They are simple but useful. Although a military officer or soldier may prefer more detail, the maps are a valuable resource to any reader, because they help the reader to see and to understand the changes as the battle unfolds. Numerous photographs are also included in the middle of the book. Some photographs are U.S. Army official photographs; others are personal photos; and most of them are posed. The photographs tell a story of their own and help the reader to visualize many aspects of the war. They show the youth of the soldiers, the families of these soldiers, and the camaraderie between soldiers. The photographs portray many things that words cannot describe.

Although the authors do not include many photographs of combat, they easily paint the bloodshed. The descriptive words, formatted in a novel-like package, reveal the true suffering, sacrifice, and heroism of battle. Their portrayal of piled up bodies makes the reader envision them. Their recounting of the filth on those soldiers who camouflaged themselves with the ground makes the reader see those dirty, grimy soldiers. The authors depict each minute and each hour of those long days and nights at Landing Zones X-Ray and Albany. Galloway and Moore keep the reader continually mesmerized.

The biggest hurdle while reading this book is keeping track of all soldiers mentioned—their names, their platoons, and their companies. There were approximately 450 soldiers in each battalion. Fortunately, the authors do not attempt to account for each one, but they do mention quite a few. The authors attempt to assist the reader in tackling this obstacle by

describing a few of the key players up front. However, it is hard to remember each soldier due to the large number mentioned and the fast-paced action of combat. The reader may have to flip back and forth to the maps, photographs, and other pages to comprehend fully each soldier and his position in the battle. In addition, the reader may refer to the appendix, where the authors give brief histories of numerous soldiers, including their platoons and companies and their most recent locations and professions. The distraction of flipping pages is minimized by the compelling urge to keep reading and to see what happens next.

A reader with limited military knowledge should not shy away from this book. The authors explain simple and intricate military maneuvers in terms that lay people can understand. They consistently place asterisks by uncommon military terms and provide brief, meaningful explanations. This information is beneficial to any reader and is not distracting in any way. Few asterisks are required, and the book continually flows in novel-like form.

Galloway and Moore divide their book into four sections: "Going to War," "X-Ray," "Albany," and "Aftermath." The organization is simple but deliberate and meaningful. Each section is divided into appropriately titled chapters. The authors begin each chapter with a quote from a notable leader or writer. Each chapter title and quotation is well thought out and gives the reader a better understanding of what occurs in that chapter.

The first section, "Going to War," describes the development and training of the 11th Air Assault Division (Test). In this section, Hal Moore takes command of his battalion at Fort Benning. Upon assumption of command Lieutenant Colonel Moore tells his troops, "I will do my best. I expect the same of you."<sup>4</sup> He and his battalion spend most of their time in the field, training in the new techniques of helicopter warfare. Moore emphasizes tough military training, tough discipline, and tough physical training while preparing his battalion for combat. He also stresses to all of his soldiers the importance of leadership in combat. He trains each subordinate to be prepared to take charge if his superior is killed in combat.

Moore was fortunate to serve as the battalion commander for fourteen months before his unit was deployed to Vietnam. However, many of the battalion's soldiers did not deploy to Vietnam because their active duty tours were not extended by executive order. At deployment, the battalion

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4. *Id.* at 20.

was understrength by about 100 soldiers. At this point, Moore had to adhere to the philosophies he preached to his subordinates—flexibility in training and attitude. Lieutenant Colonel Moore’s standards, goals, and philosophies were right on target, and, at Landing Zone X-Ray, his battalion benefited from his tough training.

The second section, “X-Ray,” describes the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry’s battle at Landing Zone X-Ray. On 14 November 1965, helicopters dropped the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry at Landing Zone X-Ray. Their mission was to find the enemy. As soon as the American soldiers hit the ground, they spotted the enemy. The North Vietnamese soldiers immediately surrounded the battalion. The battle of the Ia Drang Valley began when the American soldiers landed, and it continued for three days.

This section describes the details and swiftness of combat as the battle at X-Ray unfolds. The descriptions include horror, death, and destruction. The authors also describe the bonds that developed between the soldiers in those hours of intense combat.

The authors emphasize the leadership characteristics of the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Moore. They depict Moore as a courageous and selfless leader. One aviator is quoted as saying: “[A]s we broke over the trees into the clearing I could see Hal Moore standing up at the far end of the LZ [landing zone], exposing himself to enemy fire in order to get us into the safest position possible in the LZ.” Additionally, the authors highlight Moore’s leadership style. He maintained a “take charge” attitude and led by example. Moore’s philosophy was that the commander should always be the first person into, and the last one out of, a combat area. Moore arrived at Landing Zone X-Ray on the first helicopter and instantly set up his command post. At one point in the battle, Moore had to make a conscious effort to resist his instincts to become another soldier on the perimeter. He knew he had to maintain command and control to keep his battalion alive. Moore maintained command and control until the battle was over. He was the last soldier to depart Landing Zone X-Ray.

Hal Moore was also a compassionate leader. After the battle at X-Ray, he took the time to shake his soldiers’ hands and to thank them. He also spent numerous hours drafting letters to the families of soldiers who had been killed in action. When Lieutenant Colonel Hal Moore turned over command of the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry on Tuesday, 23 November 1965, he stood with his soldiers in formation, spoke to them, and cried. His care and concern made an impact on many soldiers. Almost twenty years

later, Sergeant First Class Clarence W. Blount wrote, "I remember you [Moore] . . . gave our entire unit a fine speech for the great artillery support . . . . That speech made a lasting impression on me. I felt that my usefulness to my country, the Army, and my unit was really at its peak at that time."<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, the authors do not discount the mistakes made by the commanders and soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry. Over 100 American soldiers died at X-Ray. Galloway and Moore never let the reader forget the effect that those deaths had on them and on the other survivors.

Lieutenant Colonel Moore was instrumental in the success of his battalion at Landing Zone X-Ray. Yet, the authors do not believe that this battle was a "win" for the U.S. Army. In fact, the authors interviewed several North Vietnamese leaders who claimed a win. In the authors' opinion, the Americans could consider X-Ray a "draw," at most.

The organization and communication of the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry were significant factors in the survival of its soldiers at Landing Zone X-Ray. Additionally, Moore credits "luck, rapid reaction to orders, and trained and disciplined soldiers"<sup>6</sup> for the battalion's success. Moore was fortunate; he had the opportunity to train and to lead his soldiers for over one year before they entered the Ia Drang Valley. Lieutenant Colonel McDade, the battalion commander at Landing Zone Albany, was not blessed with the same opportunity and luck.

The third section, "Albany," describes the 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry's battle at Landing Zone Albany. On 17 November 1965, the battalion marched from Landing Zone X-Ray to Landing Zone Albany. Its mission was to move to Albany and to establish a landing zone. North Vietnamese soldiers ambushed the American soldiers when they arrived. Once more, the authors detail each event of the battle, and the story of valor, confusion, and horror on the battlefield continues.

The 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry was not as cohesive a unit as the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry was. Immediately prior to its deployment to Vietnam, the battalion was formed from units that were scattered throughout

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5. *Id.* at 239.

6. *Id.* at 84.

the United States. Lieutenant Colonel McDade took command of the battalion only a few weeks before the battle at Albany.

The battalion's mission appeared to be simple. The intelligence section did not report enemy in the area. The leaders and soldiers of the 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry were under the impression that they were going on a walk through the jungle.

While the troops were dispersed during the march, Lieutenant Colonel McDade called a meeting of his commanders. All of the commanders and their radio operators were gathered together when the North Vietnamese attacked. The result was chaos. Lieutenant Colonel McDade lost organization, control, and communication. Like the battle at X-Ray, over 100 Americans were killed.

The authors do not attempt to compare these two battles. They point out the differences in the battalion commanders and their leadership styles. Like Moore, Lieutenant Colonel Robert McDade was a combat veteran. He commanded a rifle platoon in World War II and a rifle company in the Korean War. He was awarded two Silver Stars and three Purple Hearts. Unlike Moore, McDade had not received training in airmobile techniques.

The authors portray Lieutenant Colonel McDade as a passive leader. One of the soldiers in the 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry described McDade as "laid back."<sup>7</sup> An officer said, "McDade took over, and . . . he quietly observed, giving what I would call sotto voce orders."<sup>8</sup> In reality, however, Lieutenant Colonel McDade may not have had the chance for his leadership style to emerge. He took command of his battalion just a few weeks before the battle at Albany. Many officers stand back and silently observe their organizations for a few weeks or months before they initiate changes.

The authors pinpoint McDade's meeting with his commanders as his biggest mistake. This criticism is easily deduced. When the North Vietnamese attacked, McDade lost communication and control. His commanders and a few others were centralized in one perimeter, and the remainder of the battalion was scattered throughout the jungle. This mistake could have been avoided. Lieutenant Colonel McDade should have realized that the enemy was nearby when his soldiers captured two North Vietnamese prisoners. He should have exercised caution and developed

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7. *Id.* at 247.

8. *Id.* at 246.

another plan to communicate with his commanders. McDade's mistake cost lives.

Galloway and Moore point out many other mistakes that were made. For example, the intelligence section reported no enemy in the area; the mission lacked a clear objective; and the mission did not include airmobile techniques. These mistakes were made at levels much higher than the battalion commander. These mistakes also cost lives in the battle at Landing Zone Albany. Those same higher level mistakes cost American lives in the battle at X-Ray and other battles in Vietnam.

The authors do not focus on criticism. They commend other leaders at Albany. For instance, Captain Forrest, the Alpha Company commander, left McDade's meeting before he was dismissed. He ran over 600 yards with bullets zipping by him so that he could organize and control his company. He immediately formed his company in a defensive perimeter. Forrest's courageous act saved many lives. He is a truly selfless leader who placed the lives of his soldiers above his own.

The last section, "Aftermath," summarizes the two theses of the book. First, the authors discuss the effects of the Ia Drang battles on the Vietnam War. In these battles, the 1st Cavalry Division implemented new tactics and techniques. Afterwards, military commanders looked at the statistics—a kill ratio of twelve North Vietnamese to one American—and claimed victory. Commanders deduced that they could "bleed the enemy to death."<sup>9</sup> As a result, the United States committed additional men, money, and material to Vietnam, despite the uncertainty of success and the probability of a lengthy war. Airmobile warfare was validated. However, the North Vietnamese remained tenacious. The battles in the Ia Drang Valley were the first of many. The Vietnam War lasted ten years, cost 58,000 American lives, and ended in an embarrassing loss. The authors do not analyze the how and why of the Vietnam War, but at least one critic wanted more details. "[A]lmost every important question the reader might have about the deeper issues of this battle go[es] unanswered and unasked."<sup>10</sup>

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9. *Id.* at 399.

10. William Broyles Jr., *Remember the 60s? The War We Were Soldiers Once . . . and Young*, L.A. TIMES, Dec. 13, 1992.



Certain issues, however, are clearly beyond the scope of the book, and the authors properly excluded them.

The authors' second and most meaningful message is a dedication to the brave soldiers, American and Vietnamese, who fought at the Ia Drang Valley. This message recurs throughout the book. "Aftermath" emphasizes this thesis by including emotional stories from surviving soldiers and family members of deceased soldiers. Many lives were touched by the deaths of the American soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry and the 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry. The emotions one feels while reading *We Were Soldiers Once . . . and Young* are best expressed by Specialist Four Ray Tanner, Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry. Specialist Tanner said, "As I reflect on those three days in November, I remember many heroes but no cowards. I learned what value life really had. We all lost friends but the bravery they showed on the battlefield will live forever."<sup>11</sup>

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11. MOORE AND GALLOWAY, *supra* note 1, at 375.