

Book Reviews

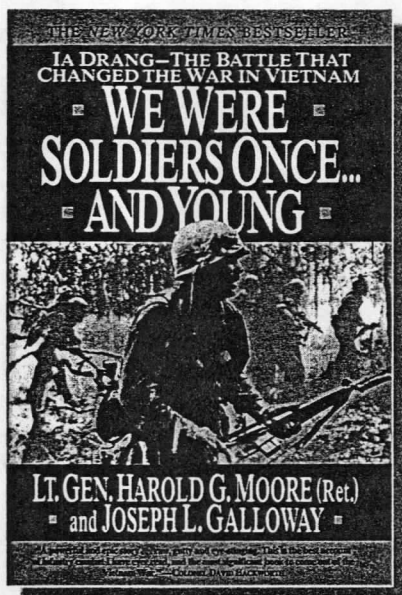
Special Warfare

We Were Soldiers Once ... and Young. By retired Lt. Gen. Harold G. Moore and Joseph L. Galloway. New York: Harper Perennial, 1993. ISBN 0-06-097576-8. 471 pages, \$13.

This book is, without question, the best volume written to date on infantry combat in Vietnam.

There are a number of features that distinguish this book from the chronicles of others. First and foremost, it was written by two men who were there in November 1965 at Landing Zone X-Ray, in the Ia Drang Valley, for the first major battle between the forces of North Vietnam and the men of the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry. Harold Moore, then a lieutenant colonel in command of the 1/7, and Joe Galloway, a noted war correspondent, provide a blow-by-blow account of one of the most savage battles of the Vietnam War.

The book is gutsy, absolutely realistic and filled with heart-rending and inspiring examples of common men caught in the meat grinder of combat and rising to the occasion through the performance of uncommon acts of bravery and heroism — many of which went unrecognized because so many of the participants did not survive the battle. The book lays open the most horrifying ordeals faced by men in close combat. Moore and Galloway must have spent years conducting interviews with the privates, sergeants, and young officers who fought the battle either as individual or as members of squads, platoons or companies. Moore himself provides insights



into his thinking as the ground commander as events of the battle unfolded. He discusses how he used artillery and close air support to halt the multiple attacks of the North Vietnamese and how he attempted to employ his men in the most desperate of circumstances — inflicting maximum damage on the enemy while conserving his combat power as best he could.

Moore and Galloway returned to Vietnam 25 years after the battle to conduct interviews with the enemy commanders. These interviews provide key insights into the thinking of the Vietnamese commanders and their leadership. The Vietnamese had never faced large numbers of Americans on the battlefield before. Their orders were to win at any cost. The North Vietnamese military leadership felt that their first major battle with the Americans must be a victory — which explains

why the fighting at LZ X-Ray was so ferocious and unyielding.

Moore and Galloway also interviewed some of the families who lost sons and husbands at LZ X-Ray. These interviews provide a look at "the other face of war" seldom examined by contemporary military writers — the devastating effects those losses had on American families. The sacrifices made by those left at home are as moving as any acts of heroism accomplished by the soldiers of the 7th Cavalry on the battlefield.

The book discusses only briefly the American political/military strategy in Vietnam; it is not about the failure of the American political system in the conduct of the Vietnam War. The book is about soldiers in combat — up close and personal. If you can read this book without being deeply emotionally affected, you have no heart.

This is not a book to be read quickly. Because so many first-person narratives are included, it is sometimes difficult to follow every soldier's story. This is meant as no criticism of Moore and Galloway's efforts. The first-person narratives of the soldiers who fought the battle add immeasurably to the book's realism. The book accurately reflects, as well as a book can, the terrifyingly tumultuous events of combat — the gut-wrenching fear, bone-numbing fatigue, exhilaration and comradeship that only combat veterans can know. If you read only one book this year, make it this one.

*Lt. Col. Robert B. Adolph Jr.
Joint Special Operations Cmd.
Fort Bragg, N.C.*

