

SMY
books

Vietnam/Nonfiction

STEVEN M.
YEDINAK

HARD TO FORGET
AN AMERICAN WITH THE MOBILE GUERRILLA FORCE IN VIETNAM

U.S.
\$17.50
Canada
\$19.50

In the glory days of the Green Berets, he served with the very best.

HARD TO FORGET

AN AMERICAN

WITH THE

MOBILE

GUERRILLA

FORCE IN

VIETNAM

STEVEN M. YEDINAK



Book Review by David H. Hackworth

HARD TO FORGET:

AN AMERICAN WITH THE MOBILE GUERRILLA FORCE IN VIETNAM

Explodes like a grenade! Couldn't put it down. Riveting story about **Green Beret** training and how they fight. Might well be a model for secret operations being conducted by ***Special Forces in Bosnia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and beyond.*** **Yedinak**, a young Captain on the ground, offers a highly personal, **Green-Beret**-honest account of how ODA-303 recruited, trained, equipped, and commanded the **Khmer Serei** (ethnic Cambodians) during two secret missions:

Black Box was the recovery of a System 13-A device from a crashed U-2 Spy Plane, the sleek, high-flying bird used during Enduring Freedom.

Blackjack 31 was unconventional warfare at its best - the first extended penetration of War Zone D, the North Vietnamese Army sanctuary, to locate targets for F4-C Phantom Jets conducting radar bombing. Holding friendly casualties to a minimum, the Mobile Guerrilla Force had 52 NVA and Vietcong confirmed kills while destroying 15 enemy base installations killing hundreds more.

MGF commanded Cambodians and, to protect the nature of the secret missions, ***took no prisoners.*** Under laws protecting the disclosure of secret missions, the story, under the sanctions of US law, was concealed for 25 years.

HTF is about a young soldier who took his Green Beret to Vietnam in 1966, only to discover that the ***real war*** started when the fighting stopped. A book about forgiveness, friendship, and survival.

WAW

Hack

Colonel Hackworth, one of America's most known and respected combat leaders, authored the following books:

Vietnam Primer

Brave Men

About Face

Hazardous Duty

The Price of Honor

Steel My Soldiers' Hearts.

As soon as we'd fired, we raised up to confirm our kills. To my surprise, I could see nothing but dirt. I motioned our Cambodians forward. As we neared, still unsure of what had happened, I saw two shovels near the fringes of the hole, but still no VC. Then it dawned on me. They were both in the hole. How efficient. Walking up now with a foolish sense of boldness, peering into the hole, I saw there were four VC. The "foxhole" we'd thought they were digging had been a shallow grave for two other VC killed by trail mines. It was now to be the final resting place for all four.

We had no sooner finished filling the hole than shots rang out. We were under attack from the north. It was now about 1730 hours, and the first shadows of a long, hot day began to reduce our ability to acquire targets. Still, we pursued the enemy as the volume of fire told me we were at even strength, but we had the the coveted M-16 rifles. . . .

To my parents, family, and friends who
cared for me and who still care for me.

To my brothers in arms, those proud and
dedicated Green Berets with whom I
served as a member of Task Force 957,
Mobile Guerrilla.

To the Cambodians-the Khmer Kampuchea
Krom- who fought valiantly with the Mobile
Guerrilla Force and whose families are still
scattered by the ravages of war.

To all: ***De Oppresso Liber***

Contents

Introduction	1
I What Price Freedom?	5
II The Beginning – Training for War	15
III Vietnam – A War Without Boundaries	49
IV Post War Adjustments	219
V Hard to Forget	237
 Epilogue	 269

Introduction

Vietnam was a long time coming. It was not as if the United States, prior to the buildup of American forces in 1965 and beyond, had no historical record. And, unfortunately, it was not as if our experiences in Vietnam had failed to produce the kinds of evidence that would compel our leaders to reverse course.

From 1946 to 1954, the destruction of the French Army culminating at Dien Bien Phu proved that large-scale warfare in Southeast Asia was, at best, militarily untenable. More important, the French-led allied effort revealed that such a war, unwinnable on the battlefield, was divisive at home. U.S. advisers and U.S. dollars notwithstanding, the French action against the Communist Viet Minh ended in complete disaster for France and in an embarrassment for the United States. There were no winners on the side of democracy for warriors or politicians. That the U.S. first used Special Forces advisers, military men trained to assess the political and military environment, then failed to take heed of their experience, was even more ironic.

The next twenty years can be described, in U.S. terms, as five-card stud. That we continued to support efforts to spread our influence in Vietnam—a noble deed, in and of itself—when it ought to have been clear there was no war to win, was unfortunate. However, President John F. Kennedy was not to be denied. With poor input from his staff, the so-called “best

and the brightest," the vanguard of the "Eastern Establishment," Kennedy set out to teach the Russians a thing or two about American resolve. Unfortunately, his assessment that a few hundred well-trained Green Berets could turn the tide in favor of a corrupt South Vietnamese government was optimistic. It soon became obvious that more troops would be needed. How many more was unknown, but with Kennedy's assassination came a headstrong Lyndon B. Johnson, who would begin to find out.

Unfortunately, Johnson listened to the wrong advice. In April of 1963, his Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, told him—and the American people—that "the South Vietnamese themselves are fighting their own battle." And on June 13, 1963, F. E. Nolting, U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam, told Johnson—and the American people—that "South Vietnam is on its way to victory." The Vietnamese general in charge, Tram Van Dong, on October 1, 1963, told the U.S. that "I feel we shall achieve victory in 1964." A White House statement the next day, apparently in response to Dong's optimism, indicated that "Secretary McNamara and General Taylor reported that the major part of the U.S. military task can be completed by the end of 1965." On October 31, 1963, the commander of the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV), General Paul D. Harkins, said, "Victory is just months away." Rusk, apparently coming up for air, on February 24, 1964, was quoted by the press as saying, "The Vietnamese can handle this problem primarily with their own effort." Not to be outdone by the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara said, on May 14, 1964, "I think the number of U.S. personnel in Vietnam is not likely to increase substantially." To his credit, McNamara has already asked for forgiveness.

Perhaps more deceptive than all others was President Johnson's assertion on October 21, 1964, that "We are not about to send American boys ten thousand miles from home to do what Asian boys ought to be doing for themselves." When Johnson made his statement, less than 150,000 troops were committed to Vietnam. Four years later there were nearly

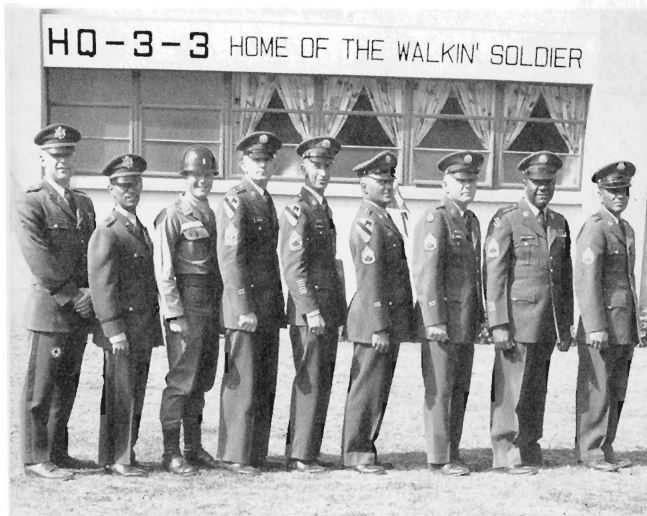
500,000 men and women in arms. In retrospect, Johnson's political statement about the war appears to have been consistent with his own personal thoughts and feelings regarding the commitment of U.S. forces. Tapes released on February 14, 1997, by the LBJ Presidential Library in Austin, Texas, revealed secret conversations Johnson had with his national security adviser, McGeorge Bundy, and close friend and mentor Senator Richard Russell of Georgia, on May 27, 1964. Almost a year before he began the large-scale buildup in Vietnam, President Johnson called the war "the biggest damn mess I ever saw" and lamented: "I don't think it's worth fighting for, and I don't think we can get out. What in the hell am I ordering [a soldier] out there for? What the hell is Vietnam worth to me? What the hell is Laos worth to me? What is it worth to this country?" Unfortunately, if Johnson, as president, agonized over Vietnam and was tormented by the prospects of sacrificing U.S. soldiers to a war he considered pointless, Johnson, as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, failed to act.

If not from the start—and I have my doubts about even that—then shortly thereafter, our leaders, intentionally or otherwise, deceived the nation. It is little wonder that this war, undeclared though it may have been, not only caused dissension in the ranks—mostly over the way it was being fought, using massive conventional forces—but turmoil at home. That said, I pray that the time has come when we can begin to listen to each other's stories about Vietnam. Not just the stories of those who went, but also the stories of those who did not serve. And the stories of those who raised our children.

Hard to forget is a book about a young Special Forces soldier who took his green beret to Vietnam in 1966, only to discover that the real war began when the fighting stopped. *Hard to forget* is a book about forgiveness, friendship, and survival.



Second Lieutenant Yedinak, Airborne!



Cadre at Headquarters and Headquarters Company,
Home of the Walkin' Soldier.



The author, a handsome devil, as HHC company commander.



The author and classmates in Special Forces Officer Training.
Note their disheveled state, for which Special Forces types are justly famed.



Lori, eighteen months old, in her father's uniform.



The pointer rests on Suoi Da Special Forces Camp.



The 81mm mortar position at Suoi Da.



Author with John Wayne during the actor's visit to C3, 5th SFGA.



LBJ walking his pet Special Forces first lieutenant.



Author conducting class at Ho Ngoc Tao, 1966.



Author (right) and Capt. Bo Gritz (left) demonstrating holds and throws at Ho Ngoc Tao.



The author sharing a gourmet meal and a vintage brew with S.Sgt. Joe Cawley at Ho Ngoc Tao.



Captain Yedinak
and the
“black box.”

The author at Duc Phong
after Blackjack-31.





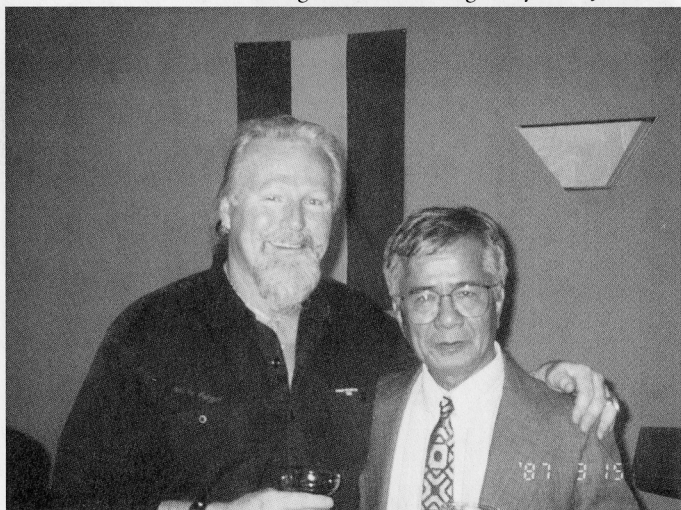
Special Forces Team A-303 with 5th SFGA Commander, Colonel Blackjack Kelly.

Team Members are:

Foreground (left to right): CPT Gritz, COL Kelly, CPT Yedinak, SGT Donahue.

Second Row: ILT Chilton, SSG Cawley, SFC Wagner

Back Row: ISG Howard, SFC Kindoll, SFG Doyle, SFC Glossup, SFC Ovsak, SSG England, SGT Montgomery, SFC Jarvis



The author with Kim Lai at the Khmer Krom Convention in Philadelphia, November 22, 1997.



STEVEN M. YEDINAK retired from the United States Army as a Lieutenant Colonel after twenty-six years of service.

In a career that encompassed two tours to Vietnam and coveted assignments to the Special Forces and 101st Airborne, Yedinak's combat awards include the Combat Infantry Badge and four Bronze Stars.

A 1958 graduate of Gonzaga Prep in Spokane, Washington, Yedinak earned his infantry commission upon graduation from Gonzaga University. He also earned advanced degrees from Loyola University in Chicago and George Washington University in Washington, D.C. He lives in Newport News, Virginia with his wife, Tracy, to whom he has been married for ten years.