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Mobile Guerrilla Force: With the Special Forces in War Zone D

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The reputation of the Marine Corps reconnaissance community was shaped by the men and exploits of the Vietnam War. In this regard, I believe Lee's book has something for all military professionals. For the small unit leader, from team leader to company commander, it offers insight into building a tough, cohesive unit in a fluid combat environment. For those serving in reconnaissance units today, Lee gives firsthand knowledge of the training, mission planning, and employment of reconnaissance teams. Also, he shows how little the Marine Corps changes: the same battles fought then in regard to manpower, modern equipment, and correct employment of forces are still being fought today. For senior commanders and staff members, there are valuable details concerning the support requirement of and planning considerations for intelligence collection assets; for the national security community, there are particularly insightful comments dealing with the employment of ground reconnaissance units on the operational and strategic level, during a period when the United States commitment in Vietnam was on the decline. Finally, for the historian, Vietnam enthusiast, and former recon Marine, there is Lieutenant Colonel Lee's story itself, which intertwines well written history, humor, and a bit of the "old Corps" to produce an account that is brutally honest, entertaining, and a significant contribution to the field of military history.

Some readers might find Lee glib in his praise of his unit. However, unlike such authors as the "rogue warrior," Richard Marcinko, Lee also freely criticizes his own merits and failings as a leader. Above all, in both the introduction and conclusion he explicitly states

his purpose for writing this book. "The people of the United States of America . . . failed those gallant men . . . by permitting them to be vilified upon their return home. Those who served in Vietnam were characterized as personifications of evil, and the nation ignored the honor . . . and the bravery that they exhibited in a war that was not to be won. The men of Third Force Reconnaissance Company . . . have now passed on into history, unremarked and unremembered by a nation that should not be allowed to forget that some men willingly go forth to risk both their lives and their honor when the bugles call."

STUART R. LOCKHART
Captain, U.S. Marine Corps

Donahue, James C. *Mobile Guerrilla Force: With the Special Forces in War Zone D*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1996. 228pp. \$28.95

James Donahue served with the Green Berets in Vietnam. *Mobile Guerrilla Force*, his second book based on his experiences there, focuses on operation BLACKJACK 31, a legendary Special Forces (SF) mission conducted in early 1967. The Mobile Guerrilla Force (MGF) was a special operations strike unit created by the U.S. Army's 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), manned predominantly by indigenous troops and led by American Green Berets. This distinguished the MGF from the common SF experience in Vietnam. Generally, as with the Civilian Irregular Defense Group program, indigenous units were led by South Vietnamese Special Forces personnel; U.S. Special Forces troopers served as advisors. Sergeant James Donahue was an assistant

platoon leader and medic with the MGF during **BLACKJACK 31**.

The operation was a month-long incursion by an MGF company into War Zone D, a communist sanctuary north of Saigon that allied conventional forces had never entered. The mission was led by Captain James Gritz (recently in the news as a negotiator during the Freeman standoff in Montana). Between 9 January and 7 February 1967, Gritz's men, consisting of fourteen Americans and 108 Cambodians, fought fifty-one engagements, called in air strikes on twenty-seven targets, and raided fifteen enemy base camps.

Donahue's story is enhanced by rich detail (although one sometimes wonders at the recall of surroundings and conversations that took place nearly thirty years ago). The book is fast-paced and never gets bogged down. The author describes the formation and training of the MGF, then quickly moves to the action. Special Forces procedures are interestingly described, including an innovative use of A-1 Skyraider attack planes: in an effort to deliver supplies deep in enemy territory while masking both the patrol's location and the true nature of the air drops, A-1s were used instead of cargo planes or helicopters, and the supplies were packaged inside napalm-bomb canisters. Donahue never lets the reader forget that the jungle itself was a foe and that anyone entering it, in whatever uniform, was an interloper. War Zone D's rightful tenants included elephants, tigers, snakes, monkeys, and a river that was one of the more serious and dangerous obstacles to the completion of the mission. The author's vivid descriptions of the environment and the action hold the reader's attention.

This book also reminds us that America's Vietnam war came after many years of fighting and that a broad mix of cultures and peoples were involved (not unlike the situation in the Balkans today). One reason the Special Forces were so successful at unconventional warfare was their respect for the various groups, including the Montagnards and the Cambodians, with whom they served—a counterpoint to the disdainful attitude toward minorities widespread among South Vietnamese leaders and officers. Donahue documents the efforts made by the Green Berets to maintain the trust of their Cambodian troops before and throughout the mission. It was not always easy, but it was vital, and the results were obviously beneficial. Near the end of the mission, a Cambodian soldier says, "When I was Viet Minh, we do not fear Saigon soldier because they are like elephant. Mobile Guerrilla Force is like tiger."

BLACKJACK 31 was an unblemished triumph, based on, to a large extent, American air power and communications technology. But fundamentally it was a triumph of leadership, fortitude, endurance, and of sound, sometimes daring, small unit infantry tactics. As the author says, for a month the Green Berets fought the war their way. Donahue's account reminds one of the epic Guadalcanal patrol by Carlson's Raiders, and of the patrols by "Chesty" Puller, "Red Mike" Edson, and "Haiti" Hanneken (often leading indigenous troops) in small wars around the globe. This type of warfare is not going to go away, even in an age of precision guided missiles and "command, control, communication, computers, and intelligence." In fact, in many trouble spots, conventional warfare may prove more relevant than any high-tech weaponry. The United States needs to keep an

institutional memory of unconventional warfare successes such as these. James Donahue's *Mobile Guerrilla Force* is a welcome addition to that lode.

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Wooldridge, E.T., ed. *Into the Jet Age: Conflict and Change in Naval Aviation, 1945-1975*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1995. 321pp. \$32.50

With this volume, noted naval aviator and aviation historian E.T. Wooldridge has compiled an impressive collection of oral histories on the thirty-year period between the end of World War II and the end of Vietnam. The dedication, "To those who fought to preserve our naval aviation heritage," sets the tone. What follows are nineteen vignettes by leaders who fought the battles both within the Beltway and in hostile skies to keep U.S. naval aviation viable and effective. The majority of those discussed achieved legendary status through their actions and leadership; several paid a professional price for their beliefs.

The interviews are arranged in the categories of "Images of Flight," "The Washington Scene," and "Crises, Conflict, and Limited War." Vice Admiral Gerald E. Miller talks about the post-World War II Navy and of the excitement of deploying with new aircraft on new carriers that was balanced by defense cutbacks, lack of training, and a horrendous accident rate. Miller's second chapter covers his experiences in the "come as you are" Korean War as a carrier division Flag Secretary. Captain Gerald G.

O'Rourke contributes his memories of early night-fighter operations in Korea, with both F4U Corsairs and F3D Skyknights; in a subsequent chapter he expands on the subject, recalling problems with integrating a new weapon system (the Skyknight) into the air wing, and also his happy discovery that the Marine night fighters wanted him and his men.

Vice Admiral Kent Lee's and Admiral George W. Anderson's interviews constitute four additional chapters. Admiral Lee served as one of the early commanding officers of the USS *Enterprise*, relieving future Chief of Naval Operations Captain James L. Holloway. He discusses the ship's two eventful combat tours under his command, which included the *Pueblo* incident and a flight deck conflagration. He also evokes with great clarity the view from the bridge as air wing personnel were sent off daily to fight an unpopular war. In another chapter, Lee, who was later Commander, Naval Air Systems Command, comments about the development and gestation of the F/A-18 Hornet "strike fighter," the current and future mainstay of naval aviation.

Particularly fascinating and enlightening for this reviewer are Admiral Anderson's two chapters on his tour as Chief of Naval Operations. His comments on his service in the Kennedy administration under Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara cover the Cuban Missile Crisis, the development of the TFX (eventually to be known as the F-111), interservice rivalries, and the clashes between the military and its civilian leadership. Additional chapters provide similar Washington, D.C. experiences of Vice Admiral Gerald F. Bogan, Admiral Arleigh Burke, and Admiral Charles D. Griffin, who served under Admiral Louis Denfeld from 1945 to 1950,