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# Green Berets at War: U.S. Army Special Forces in Southeast Asia 1956-1975

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Vietnam experience from its corporate consciousness and even now is unconvinced that low-intensity warfare represents the most likely area of future conflict.

This is an important book. It is well researched and clearly written, though it lapses into jargon at times. The author does set the stage for a doctrinal debate with the Army's conventional school by setting forth his conclusions in a provocative but plausible manner.

*One caution:* the book is, as the title indicates, about the Army. While the political/social milieu in which the war took place is alluded to, nowhere is it evident that in the final analysis this, and not doctrine, controlled the manner in which the war was fought. This is intentional on the author's part, but is an inhibiting factor for the general reader, considering the political nature of the war. Nevertheless, I strongly recommend this important book to both students of the war and to those interested or involved in current Army doctrinal debates. The outcome of these debates is vital not only to the Army's future but, more importantly, to the Nation's.

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Stanton, Shelby L. *Green Berets at War: U.S. Army Special Forces in Southeast Asia 1956-1975*. Novato, Calif.: Presido Press, 1985. 360pp. \$18.95

This book, about the exploits and accomplishments of Special Forces, is sure to raise the "hackles" of many in military and civilian circles. Shelby L. Stanton has provided a straightforward description of Special Forces organization and combat performance in Southeast Asia. He describes the individual exploits of Special Forces personnel in detail, bringing to the narrative a personal dimension and ground combat-level reality seen only in the better accounts of the wars in Southeast Asia. While his insights may offer little that is new to those who understand and are familiar with Special Forces, they are useful to those in the military mainstream.

Special Forces became involved in Southeast Asia long before U.S. policy made the area a major national security concern. As early as 1956, the 14th Special Forces Operational Detachment was activated for the purpose of "leading Asian resistance forces against Sino-Soviet forces expected to overrun the rim of Asia." Other Special Forces detachments were activated for operations in the Pacific. In 1959 Special Forces were operating in Laos, carrying civilian identity cards. In 1961 the U.S. Military Assistance Group in Laos was activated and the civilian cover discarded.

From such beginnings the author traces the development and expansion of Special Forces operations throughout Southeast Asia, with the major part of the book devoted to operations in South Vietnam. Using primarily operational after-action re-

ports, Stanton describes in detail virtually every Special Forces operation during the course of the Vietnam War. He provides a word picture of Special Forces personnel performing feats of heroism and day-to-day operations involved in everything from border surveillance, special reconnaissance, MACV-SOG operations, to the Son Tay raid and expendable infantry.

Stanton describes the effectiveness of Special Forces in establishing, maintaining, and operating the Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) and a variety of camps. Some of the most dramatic narrative is on combat in defense of these camps.

The chapter on "The Green Beret Navy" is particularly interesting. Special Forces units were instrumental in developing doctrine for waterborne operations in the Mekong Delta south of Saigon. Early in the war in rice paddies, bogs, marshes and interconnecting rivers, the Special Forces fought particularly difficult battles with the Vietcong. Only later did good doctrine and effectively designed watercraft result in successful operations.

Stanton notes that "Many senior Army commanders were adamantly opposed to Special Forces, primarily because they did not understand its purposes and functions." He takes General Creighton Abrams to task for his opposition to Special Forces. The distrust of Special Forces was apparently common throughout MACV circles. Interestingly enough, similar attitudes appear to characterize the contemporary U.S. military.

Stanton gives us a descriptive and detailed historical account of a period in U.S. history that is being revised, reinterpreted, distorted, and maligned by many. To be sure, there are incidents and policy decisions associated with Southeast Asia and the U.S. role that hardly bring glory and honor to the U.S. military, among others. But there is still much to commend in the efforts and actions of the military and civilians in trying to carry out policies and strategies of the U.S. Government. Stanton attempts to balance the record and he does so without apologies. His book describes the Special Forces efforts in Southeast Asia, "warts and all."

With all of its strengths, the book is not without shortcomings. It would have been useful had the author placed the role of the Special Forces in Southeast Asia in the context of the broader international security environment. It might have been revealing, for example, to examine in more detail the problems of the conventional military during the 1960s and 1970s and the problems the regular combat units had in Vietnam in comparison to the Special Forces. Perhaps a more detailed comparison would blunt some of the criticism of those who saw little good in the Vietnam involvement and little good in the military.

In the final analysis, what this book does is confirm the view that the Special Forces is indeed a special kind of unit with special kinds of people who have been the spearhead in some of the most dangerous and "lonely" missions that the United

States has undertaken. It also points out that the misuse of Special Forces by those who have little concept of unconventional conflicts is the road to disaster, not only for the Special Forces, but for the U.S. military.

Some of the most poignant parts of the book are in the appendices, "Special Forces Personnel Missing in Action" and "Special Forces Medal of Honor Recipients." One need not have worn a green beret to understand the meaning of such a sentence as ". . . was wounded in the left leg, captured by North Vietnamese troops, and never seen again," or the sentence, "Enabled his surrounded company to escape by charging several Viet Cong positions before he was killed by a rocket . . . in Long Khanh Province, Vietnam."

This book will find its place on the shelves of those in Special Forces and all those who understand unconventional conflicts and Special Forces. More important, it deserves a place on the shelves of those concerned professionals who know little about Special Forces and unconventional conflicts. For those people it can shed light on the realities of such warfare and the fighting men who carry it out.

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Hallin, Daniel C. *The "Uncensored War": The Media and Vietnam*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. 285pp. \$22.50

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Professor Hallin has written a painstaking and provocative study of the U.S. media in Vietnam in which he focuses on what he regards as the myth that print and television reporters opposed Washington's policy from the beginning and, thus, helped lose the war.

It took Hallin, who teaches political science and communications at the University of California at San Diego, 10 years to turn out *The "Uncensored War": The Media and Vietnam*. Even then, his extensive research which included content analyses of 779 newscasts of the three major networks from August 1965 to 1973 and numerous interviews with reporters who were there, was limited to only one newspaper—the *New York Times* whose files he examined from 1960 to mid-1965. One may question whether one newspaper's reportage, even one as important as the *Times*, is enough upon which to make general conclusions about the print media.

Hallin writes clearly and with a minimum of professional jargon. Ample quotes, public opinion poll data and statistical graphs illustrate his points. He strives for balance. Yet, when all is said and done, he fails to come to any hard and fast conclusion as to the extent of the impact the media had on Washington's decision to wind down the war and quit the field of battle. He does conclude, with many others, that the majority of the media, not unlike the American people and Congress, supported the war effort in the early days and perhaps up to the time of the Viet-