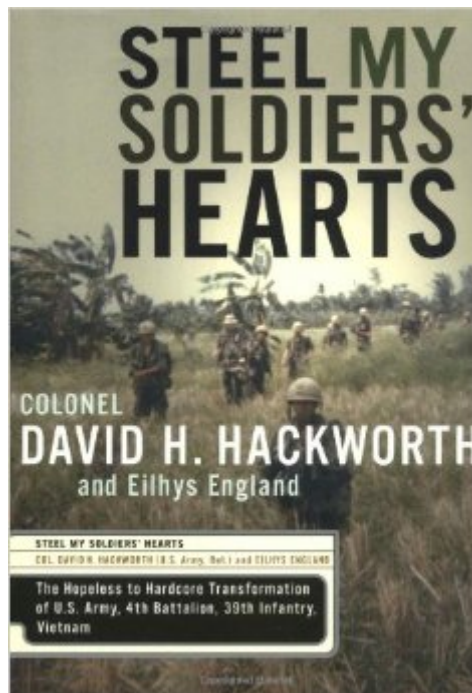


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Steel My Soldiers' Hearts: The Hopeless To Hardcore Transformation Of The U.S. Army, 4th Battalion, 39th Infantry, Vietnam



Synopsis

Colonel David H. Hackworth, one of America's most decorated soldiers, lays bare his most daring and legendary tour of duty. 1966 With a full year of Vietnam combat and five months of in-country intense after-action analysis under his pistol belt, Hackworth pens the classic tactical handbook the Vietnam Primer with military historian Samuel Marshall. In a radical shift from the World War II-era tactics then employed in Vietnam, Hackworth stresses the necessity of using disciplined, small units of well-trained men to best fight the hit-and-run warfare of the elusive Viet Cong. "Out G'ing the G," he called his tactics. 1969 Hackworth's expertise lands him back in Vietnam. The Army's message is clear-put up, or shut up. Given the "hopeless," morale-drained 4/39th-an infantry battalion of poorly led draftees with one of the Army's worst casualty rates-Hackworth leads from up front and finds the best in every one of his grunts. Together, they take a page from the VC, write their own book, and become the meanest in the Mekong Delta-the Hardcore Recondos. 2002 With the U.S. again facing elusive insurgent foes-and the hit-and-run tactics of the international terror networks we're presently up against-the 4/39th Hardcore Battalion's successes provide hard-won lessons-learned that are more applicable now than ever. A tour de force of frontline combat action, Steel My Soldiers' Hearts takes readers alongside sniper missions, into grunt ambush actions, above fields of fire with hard-hitting helicopter strikes, and inside the quagmire of command politics. Hackworth graduates the Mekong Delta brotherhood into the pantheon of our nation's most heroic warriors.

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War

Customer Reviews

This is the first Hackworth book I have read; sorry I waited so long. Could not put it down once I started. I like his colloquial style of prose (whether his or his wife's, the result on paper was excellent), and the terminology and language rang true to in my memory. He nonetheless took great pains to define terminology and explain essentials to the uninitiated, so anyone can and should read and understand this work. It was a narrative, but carried many strategic and tactical lessons in the midst of it. It was a combat saga, but the political and bureaucratic people and actions that adversely effected our war effort at every level in Vietnam received their due. Vietnam combat "lessons learned" did not have to be "relearned" at the expense of more lives under Hackworth's command. While he "led from the front" whenever possible, he also had the correct management/command style in letting his subordinate commanders--company, platoon, squad and fireteam--lead and be responsible at their own respective level and develop along the way. If only other field commanders had led (or been allowed to lead) infantry and combined arms in this manner in Vietnam, we would have "out-G'd the G" (as Hack puts it). His criticism of our military's strategy, innovation, imagination and tactics (or lack thereof) are well justified and have been expensively documented in our blood. Hackworth's emphasis on economy of force, stealth, surprise and violent initiation of action and counteraction (applied accurately and at the right time) were the only way to successfully conduct a war that had no geographic objectives, no ground to hold for any length of time. Attrition tactics can always be questioned, but it is unquestionably better to be well on the "winning" side of the kill ratio.

I've been a fan of Colonel David Hackworth's writing since reading his hilarious putdown of hapless, happy warrior Oliver North in a Playboy article entitled "Drugstore Marine". This book handily illustrates why he is held with such regard by his peers, and demonstrates once again that Hackworth is a guy that calls them as he sees them. In "Steel My Soldiers' Hearts", Hackworth recalls his own combat experiences in the darkest days of Vietnam, taking over command of one of the worst units then "in-country". Sent there in an effort by the brass to either prove his newfangled theories of insurgent warfare or shut up, Hackworth attempts to give his theories a fair chance of proving themselves. However, the job would not be an easy one to accomplish. The troops, demoralized, undisciplined, and literally out of control, were experiencing some of the highest casualty rates in the conflict, and needed drastic intervention to turn them around. Their ability to seek out and successfully engage the enemy was dismal, and they foundered when circumstance suddenly changed, requiring a change in tactics. In the space of a few months, Hackworth wrought a radical transformation, and the statistics of the unit proved it. But to reach his objective of turning

the troops around, Hackworth had to take some drastic action, such as firing most of the senior officers and tightening the screws on the troops until they finally heeled. The results were impressive, and the casualty rates and most other statistics became much more positive. Hackworth had made his point and illustrated the utility of his rather unconventional ideas regarding small unit tactics in Vietnam.

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