

Review/Comments on Echoes of Our War

Brotherhoods Forged

An early 1960s television detective show, situated in New York City, concluded with the narrator intoning, “There are eight million stories in the Naked City. This has been one of them.” With an estimated 2.7 million veterans having served in the Vietnam war, the tally of stories to be told about that conflict are numerous. “*Echoes of Our War: Vietnam Veterans Reflect 50 Years Later*” does a tremendous job of capturing some of them. The stories shared are not limited to battlefield experiences. They include the war fought afterward against Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Agent Orange exposure, and the memories of warrior bonds only death terminated. Each story bears a lesson unto itself. Each storyteller seems to have been haunted by the ghost of Vietnam past—one in need of expungement in order to regain a life of normalcy. For some, defeating that ghost was more difficult than others; yet in the end, so many came so far to do so. This book is a testimonial to all who served. It tells of a war that, despite being poorly planned, was courageously fought. It tells of a brotherhood forged on battlefields that remains intact for survivors half a century later. It dispels the myth that many of those who returned fell on hard times, unable to rejoin and contribute to society. Into Vietnam’s valley of death marched 2.7 million warriors; 58,220 failed to march back out. For those who did, the reflections in this book let them know they are not alone.

LtCol James G. Zumwalt USMCR

Detachment Commander, 4th CAG Persian Gulf War

Delta Company Commander, 1st Bn, 4th Marines Vietnam

Author, *Bare Feet, Iron Will - Stories from the Other Side of Vietnam’s Battlefields*

Living the Juche Lie-North Korea’s Kim Dynasty

Doomsday Iran-The Clock is Ticking

Contributor: *Leadership in Action-Principles Forged in the Crucible of Military Service*

Can Lead Corporate America Back to the Top; Profiles in Patriotic Leadership

Writer of hundreds of op-eds on foreign policy and defense-related issues

A Leader Reflects

Having spent most of 2018, almost day by day, recalling the events of my 1967-68 tour in RVN as I wrote my book, “*Letters To Pat*,” those memories were stirred once again as I read “*Echoes of Our War*.” The places and events, described in vivid and emotional ways, caused me to sit back and reflect on what I had written about a time unlike any other in our history . . . and in that sense, I felt a bond with these Marines and Corpsman, who have shared their innermost thoughts and feelings in this wonderful exposé of a war that most will never fully understand. In truth, I am still learning as I read what others are willing to share. But this “cleansing of our souls,” if you will allow me, is surely headed on the right azimuth, as Bob Fischer has laid out in his Commander’s Guidance.

I was older than these young warriors when I first entered combat, and had the advantage of having taught tactics at The Basic School to many of the young lieutenants with whom I would later serve . . . And yet looking back after 50 years, we all seem to have arrived at the same conclusions. The war was always about

politics, theirs, and ours; not about the people and their culture, and not about the history of the land. The way our senior leaders ran the war was not only wrong, but it also made it unwinnable by the US. As an advisor to the 4th Battalion, Vietnamese Marine Corps, we fought battles in all four Tactical Corps Zones to include Saigon and later Hue Citadel during the '68 Tet Offensive. We won every battle we fought . . . and it did not make any difference! The Echoes described by these ten combat veterans tell us why!

Major General Bill Eshelman USMC (ret)

Major General Eshelman graduated from the United States Naval Academy, served 35 years as a Marine, and was the Director of the Marine Corps Staff, HQMC when he retired in 1994. His career covered many different command and staff positions, but it was during his time as a military advisor to a South Vietnamese Marine infantry battalion in 1968 that he faced many of his greatest challenges.

“I Experienced Similar Reactions...”

Reading the heartfelt first-person input by the ten presenters had a profound impact on me. Cathartic it was. I experienced similar reactions in the past when writing about my own experiences of two one-year combat tours in Vietnam. The first as an Advisor to a Vietnamese Marine Corps infantry battalion beginning in 1964. My second tour began in February 1968 during the Tet Offensive deploying south of Da Nang and then to Hue City after it had been recaptured. There, I met my good friend Grady Birdsong.

Setting up our headquarters in a schoolhouse east of the city we had to deal with many of the same enemy forces that fought during the battle for the city in early February but went to ground in the coastal area. We conducted many patrols into the canal area east of Hue which extended to the coast, among mostly unfriendly villagers, many who were active supporters of the enemy forces.

I share many of the feelings about the war that were expressed by the ten Authors. I believe that we could have won the war had we used a different strategy. I have a distrust of just about everyone over the age of fifty until I determine what they did during the war years and how they feel today about the war and those that served in Vietnam. As a result, I have few friends other than Marines and Navy Corpsmen I served with, and their family members.

Colonel Franklin P. Eller USMC (Ret)

Senior U. S. Marine Advisor, “Covan” to the 4th Vietnamese Marine Battalion RVN 1964-65
Executive Officer, 1st Battalion, 27th Marines 1967-1968
United States Naval Academy, Class of 1955

We Get Old and Too Late Wise!

Reviewing *Echoes of Our War* is a special honor for me. Led by Grady Birdsong and Bill Purcell, these patriotic young men willingly gave their efforts to win a War they never understood. Thank you, Colonel Fischer, for sharing their experiences with us. I am proud of them.

For the record, I am a Montford Point Marine, a veteran of two Wars (WWII Pacific & Korea). When I sought a commission and service in a non-segregated Marine Corps unit, my all-officer review board rejected my request and walked out on me! That is why I am happy to see you all serving the country with Marines of all backgrounds. Thank you again for your service.

As preparations for lectures on the Vietnam War, I have read many books on the subject. One such was by a North Vietnam Author, who entered service at seventeen years of age, and served for ten years. This experience was quite like our young patriots, including his search for recreation and agony over tasks that impinged on his sense of humanity. Not unlike our young men, including Corpsman Sedlack, who was charged with saving a life or witnessing death. Or young Mike Frazier, who saw others dying from wounds while trying to stay alive after suffering his own. Like other experienced young officers, Dan Guenther found himself obeying questionable orders from seniors lacking both experience and intelligence. Others invited death-dealing “friendly fire” on themselves in order that colleagues might live. While none of our heroes received little or no philosophical basis for American participation in Vietnam, their adversaries were regularly subjected to political sessions explaining their mission. The U. S. rationale was generally accepted as fighting communism.

The abrupt ending of American participation in Vietnam left much bitterness among our young warriors. Their targets ranged from diverse citizens to military and political leaders. The lack of gratitude by families and fellow citizens for their service was especially hurtful. It may be that Americans had lost sight of our goals in that far away country. The war for civil rights on the home front, coupled with the killing of popular supporters, took attention away from Asia.

These days, fifty years later, the young warriors are now fathers and grandfathers, who have come through the lingering effects of Vietnam, both mentally and physically. For some, it has been difficult, as wounds, PTSD, and Agent Orange have ravaged their bodies. Others have settled into civilian pursuits, successfully, while fighting recurring memories. It has been inspiring to us, their fellow Americans, to witness their return to Vietnam on missions of mercy and support.

Today, our ten are older and wiser. It cannot be said that they are men of peace or that their voices are directed towards peace. They are told: We lost! A few ask: What would be different if we won? Today, we are trading with that business oriented country, Vietnam. We are giving medical assistance to those affected by the war or wounded by land mines. We also ask: Did we have to lose 58,000 troops to reach our present relations? Did Vietnam have to lose Three Million?

It is often said: Too soon we get old, and too late, wise. Their “Echo” shows that they quickly became clever, but only now, wise! All Americans should be grateful to these aging warriors. We need their wisdom!

Ambassador Ted Britton Jr.

US Ambassador to Barbados & Grenada - US Representative to Caribbean Island Nations
HUD Deputy Assistant Secretary Research & Technology

Honorary Consul General, Republic of Albania

Chairman, US-China-Soviet Union Agreement on Housing & Planning

Life member, 2nd MarDiv & Montford Point Marine Associations - Veteran of WWII & Korea

Survivors Guilt

After reading the detailed, and sometimes graphic, recollections of the nine Marines and one Corpsman, in *Echoes of Our War*, here are my reflections:

The Vietnam War experiences, recalled in *Echoes of Our War*, makes my year in Vietnam, 1968-1969, seem like a picnic in comparison.

When we first arrived in Vietnam, there was not a request form where we could indicate what we wanted: A. Easy experience, B. Moderate experience, C. Difficult experience. So, we dealt with the "roll of the dice," and fate, as to what we experienced. On my tenth day in Vietnam, only 20 hours after reporting to Bravo Company 1/7, I found myself engaged in the deadly battle for Hill 310, described in Captain C. R. Cusack's chapter, going after the 12.7mm gun that shot down his F-4. In the fog of battle, I was reported as KIA. Fortunately for me, that report was wrong. Bravo Company had a KIA they could not identify and thought that Marine was me. They did not know that I was still on the side of Hill 310, with two other Marines, one still alive, the other indeed tragically KIA.

I can relate to most of the experiences in this book, including, "Survivors Guilt" from coming home to my wife and family when so many of the Marines I served with did not.

I extend my deep appreciation to Grady Birdsong, Colonel Robert Fischer, and Dan Guenther, and the Authors in creating *Echoes of Our War*.

LtCol Jack Wells USMC (Ret) RVN 1968-1969

Artillery Forward Observer for A and B Company 1st Bn, 7th Marines, and for the ARVN 21st Ranger Battalion. Finished tour in Vietnam as XO for H Battery, 3rd Battalion, 11th Marines, at Firebase Six Shooter, near Ap Dai La, 5 miles from 1st Marine Division CP. Author of the book, *Class of 67: The Story of the 6th Marine Officers Basic Class of 1967*. The book tells the story of 43 Marine classmates who did not return from the war. LtCol Wells also contributes articles for Vietnam and Leatherneck magazines.

Real History Not Revised

"You can't trust history books," a Marine told local college students. "They get revised. Get the worm's eye view instead." Here is a history from the worm's eye view.

This riveting memoir, written by Marines, captures the raw, immersive truth of the Vietnam War. Walking point through elephant grass, going eight days without a meal, the fugue state of combat, waking in a pile of the bagged bodies of men who were fighting alongside you hours earlier. Amoebic dysentery and infected wounds. Helicopter crashes, a downed F-4, and coming to as they are about to zip you into a body bag. There are also helmet chefs, a flambéed shitter and countless rescues. The kid missing body parts who reassures the stranger beside him that he will be fine. And the haunting last words of a Major: "Please God, take care of my Marines." In these pages, each Marine relives harrowing battles and humid fatigue, and exposes petty, incompetent leadership, all the way to Washington D.C. They all address whether the war was wrong or a waste and discuss racial issues and moral injuries. Many describe survivor's guilt and trust wounds. The hostility they came

home to silenced them for decades. Here, they revisit their darkest hours and faithfully record them in one more act of generous courage.

Echoes of Our War is brutal, honest, often poetic, and deeply edifying. It documents how the Vietnam war divided a nation in ways that linger still. It made me long for a nation whose citizenry is worthy of its military.

Carol Keeley - Creative Writer, Editor, Author & Teacher

Carol has taught at Columbia College, University of Colorado, and the Naropa University. She earned her degrees in Philosophy, Literature, and Creative Writing

Unvarnished History

In all the literature on the Vietnam War, there is no more honest, realistic, or moving description of the Vietnam War than *Echoes of Our War*. Told by living heroes from a forgotten war, this is the real deal unvarnished, brutal, without a shred of sentimentality or false loyalty, a profound primer on what it actually was like to serve on the ground in Vietnam. *Echoes of Our War* is a must for every historian who looks up to the military heroes who served before us.

Timothy Davis, Founder & President

The Greatest GENERATIONS Foundation – “Every Day is Memorial Day”

Echoes of Our War Will Blow You Away!

Echoes of Our War: Vietnam Veterans Reflect 50 Years Later, presented by Colonel Robert Fischer, USMC (Ret.) outlines the experiences of ten Vietnam War veterans – eight Marine grunts, a Marine F-4 Phantom pilot, and a Navy Corpsman. Three were officers, the others were enlisted men. I know them; they are friends of mine. Their experiences are harrowing. If you really want to know what it was like to be at the tip of the spear in Vietnam, as described by the guys who fought the war, “up close and personal,” in their own words and pictures, then you’ll appreciate this book.

What makes *Echoes* different is not simply the number of stories but the *intensity*. There is some humor in the book, but not much. It is mostly a series of emotional (well-written) vignettes that will leave you breathless and, from timeto-time, tearful. You will not believe what these ten men went through for God, Country, and Corps in the belief that what they were doing mattered and was worth risking their lives. But they did. It is all true.

You will also appreciate how they mustered the intestinal fortitude and inner strength to overcome their psychological and physical wounds. If that were not enough, they also had to deal with the challenges of being stigmatized for having served in an unpopular war. Yet, they became highly educated, successful members of society. So much for stereotypes, eh? And their look-back on the war a halfcentury later will blow you away!

Timothy C. Hall USMC Vietnam – 1966-67

Former Deputy Executive Director, Colorado Department of Human Services - Veterans & Disability Services, and author of the award-winning book,

Reading This Book Ripped Me Open. Thank you!

Thank you! Thank you for this courageous accounting of war.

As a civilian, never tested by the rigor of war reading *Echoes of War* was inspiring and gut wrenching all in the same moment. In these pages, ten combat veterans engage in explosive truth telling engulfing the reader in the raw chaos of combat, the heroism of their brothers in battle, the creeping erosion of trust in their culture and the gnawing futility of fighting a war that they felt their highest leadership did not have the nerve to win.

But once they led us through their memories of combat each writer drew us into a vivid picture of what it took to come home from war. Each had their own way to carry the burden of their war and even more so, to carry the burden of our peace for over 50 years now.

Though challenged by their experience of war, each of them led successful lives.

This is no small feat. But they did it. And they did it with honor and grace. I believe we civilians have a duty to breathe these stories into our own lives. Then, when we find those special moments to offer our appreciation to these amazing warriors, we can say, "Thank You!" -And for many of us, for the first time, we will truly know what we are thanking them for.

Robert Bellows

Bellows is founder and orchestrating artist of the Warrior Storyfield Sculpture Project. The mission of this project is to pursue expression, community and connection between veterans and civilians through collaboration on a large work of art. Warriorstoryfield.org

Heroes Twice Over!

Dad, Grandpa or Uncle John fought in a War but never talked about what they experienced. Most of us have heard that sort of expression many times.

An experiential "gap" exists between those who have lived through the terror and hardships of combat compared to those who have not. This wonderful book will help close the gap in no small part.

The warriors who have shared their stories of battle in this book are heroes for a second time. Putting pen to paper and telling these stories took a lot of courage!

Manert Kennedy

Infantry Platoon Sergeant USMC

Korean War 1950-51

Emeritus Professor, Scientist, Administrator at University of Colorado – Boulder 1965-1995; Twenty-seven trips to South Korea as visiting professor, Korea, and Seoul National Universities; Consultant for several Institutions of Higher Education in South Korea; Author and Co-Author of 17 Science books and numerous Science Journal papers

What Does the Future Hold For Current Veterans...?

Echoes of Our War is a moving account of the individual experiences and perspectives of this group of men who fought over 50 years ago in Vietnam. I have been privileged to know several of them, and one, Denny Sedlack, has been a close friend for over 30 years, with us having met while I was in the US Air Force. Their stories have the common thread of having volunteered to serve, and then having returned home to little appreciation for their sacrifices and, for many, disdained for their service. Their experiences makes me wonder what the future holds for the young men and women who have fought around the world over the last 20 plus years since 9/11. As a group they have gone through multiple deployments to many different places with uncertain threats, and while they have not borne the brunt of society's disdain as was experienced by Vietnam veterans, they are part of a society that is less connected both to the military and to community institutions that can support these young vets. Who is going to find a way to help them over the years as they confront the ghosts of their wars?

Dr. Alex Limanni

USAFA Graduate 1975

MD, New Jersey Medical School (Rutgers) 1979

Flight Surgeon – Chief Aeromedical Services/Commander 39th Transportable Hospital while attached to 612th Tactical Fighter Squadron, Torrejon AB, Spain;

Rheumatologist, Keesler AFB, MS; Assistant Professor Internal Medicine, University of South Alabama; Rheumatologist, Arthritis Centers of Texas, Dallas TX; Chief of Rheumatology, Baylor University Medical Center, Dallas TX;

Clinical Assistant Professor Internal Medicine, Texas A&M

A Tribute

This collection of stories from the Vietnam War is brutally honest and painful. From the emotional description of being a cherry Corpsman, to the firefight by firefight details of urban warfare, each veteran's story is a cherished and appreciated description of the terror, confusion, and friendships that stay with them even so many years following their time in Vietnam.

This collection is a tribute to the unappreciated, forgotten, and misunderstood veterans of not just Vietnam, but every conflict. It is important that we never forget the huge sacrifices made by those who went and whose lives were changed forever.

Echoes of Our War will help us remember.

Robert A. Hill, LCDR, U.S. Navy (Ret)

Multiple Airframe Instructor Pilot; Combat Pilot, Middle East Operating Areas; Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance Specialist and Command Pilot