Commandant’s Professional Reading List

- Why Read *We Were Soldiers Once… and Young*? -

“Uncommon valor truly was a common virtue on the field at Landing Zone X-Ray those three days and two nights.”

- p. 345, Lieutenant General Harold G. Moore, U.S. Army (Ret.)

Uncommon valor as a common virtue is the unifying theme of Moore and Joseph L. Galloway’s *We Were Soldiers Once… and Young: Ia Drang – The Battle That Changed the War in Vietnam*. Moore and Galloway’s book examines two of the battles fought by 3rd Brigade of the 1st Cavalry Division in the Ia Drang Valley during November 1965.* *We Were Soldiers Once…* is the story of two battalions of the 7th Cavalry Regiment – then Lieutenant Colonel Moore’s 1st Battalion and Lieutenant Colonel Robert A. McDade’s 2nd Battalion – at Landing Zones X-Ray and Albany. It is a study in contrasts between the battalion commanders: Moore, a week away from giving up command, and McDade, only days into his command. Yet *We Were Soldiers Once* is far more about the non-commissioned officers, along with the lieutenants and captains, who led their troopers at the tip of the spear.

In retelling the events at Landing Zone Albany, Moore and Galloway quote General William T. Sherman, “we have good corporals and good sergeants and some good lieutenants and captains, and those are far more important than good generals.” (316) Indeed, Moore and Galloway’s accounting of the battles exemplify Sherman’s maxim for good company-level leadership proved far more important than battalion- and brigade-level leadership not only at Landing Zone Albany with McDade but also at Landing Zone X-Ray with Moore. As such, *We Were Soldiers Once…* is a study in combat leadership at the squad-, platoon-, and company-level; thus, it is the story of men under fire, of undaunted courage, and the battlefield self-sacrifice and heroism of NCOs and Staff NCOs.

Arguably, the battles in the Ia Drang Valley in November 1965 changed the war in Vietnam; however, *We Were Soldiers Once* does not address the change rather it examines the battles. Four sections – Going to War, X-Ray, Albany, and Aftermath – comprise Moore and Galloway’s book; however, the heart of the story is the chapters on Landing Zones X-Ray and Albany. As prologue and epilogue, the initial and concluding chapters offer reasons for what occurred at the two landing zones. Moore served with the division and commanded his battalion in garrison and during pre-deployment training; consequently, he had forged a cohesive fighting team that withstood the test of combat as a team. In contrast, McDade had less than a month in command of a battalion that had existed as a unit for little over a year. Nevertheless, both battalions fought well and did so because of their NCOs. In discussing his own battalion, Moore suggests why McDade’s battalion survived the ordeal of Landing Zone Albany, “the real strength of my battalion was its sergeants.” Dudley Tademy, then a Captain and the 3rd Brigade fire-support coordinator, provides a key take-away in his later advice to his battery commanders, “it isn’t us who die in combat; it’s those young kids who die. Those kids we are responsible for training and leading. It’s our job to get the job done and get those kids home safe.” (312)

*Note: The 2002 film starring Mel Gibson only covers the events at Landing Zone X-Ray.*