

In Memoriam: LTG Harold G. “Hal” Moore

*“There is no such thing as closure for soldiers who have survived a war. They have an obligation, a sacred duty, to remember those who fell in battle beside them all their days and to bear witness to the insanity that is war.” — Harold G. Moore, **We Are Soldiers Still: A Journey Back to the Battlefields of Vietnam***

Retired LTG Harold G. “Hal” Moore, the leader known for saving most of his men in the first major battle between the U.S. and North Vietnamese armies, died Feb. 10. He was 94, two days short of his 95th birthday.

Moore died in his sleep at his home in Auburn, AL. He was preceded in death by his wife, Julia B. Compton Moore, whom he married in 1949 and who died in 2004.

Then a lieutenant colonel, Moore commanded 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment, at the Battle of Ia Drang in November 1965 during the Vietnam War. In 1992 Moore co-authored a book on this battle with Joseph L. Galloway, a former United Press International reporter, titled **We Were Soldiers Once ... and Young**. The book was adapted into the 2002 film **We Were Soldiers**, which was filmed at Forts Benning, GA, and Hunter Liggett, CA, depicting Moore’s command of 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry, at Fort Benning and in the Battle of Ia Drang. Moore was played by actor Mel Gibson.



Figure 1. Pictured here as a colonel, LTC Hal Moore was the on-scene battalion commander during American forces’ initial large-scale encounter with regular enemy forces in the Ia Drang Valley in 1965. (*U.S. Army photo*)

Moore and Galloway wrote another book together, a follow-up to their first collaboration. **We Are Soldiers Still; A Journey Back to the Battlefields of Vietnam**, published in 2008.

Moore’s leadership in ‘battle that changed everything’

The Battle of the Ia Drang Valley has been touted as “the battle that changed everything.” For Americans, it was the beginning of a new kind of warfare using helicopters. The battle was also a historical turning point because it

changed American involvement from advisers and materiel support to full-scale combat. Veterans from 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry, and the newly created 2nd Battalion, 7th Cavalry, were in fierce firefights with the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) for the first time in the Vietnam War.

The initial NVA assault against 1/7 Cav's landing at Landing Zone (LZ) X-Ray was repulsed after two days and nights of heavy fighting Nov. 14-16, 1965. There the Americans inflicted major losses on NVA and Viet Cong guerrillas. Encircled by enemy soldiers with no clear LZ that would allow the Americans to leave, Moore managed to persevere despite being significantly outnumbered by NVA forces that would go on to defeat the marching column of 2/7 Cav only 2½ miles away the next day in the most successful ambush of U.S. forces of the Vietnam War. Moore's dictum that "there's always one more thing you can do to influence any situation in your favor" and the courage of his entire command are credited with this outcome.

When former leaders from 1/7 Cav and 2/7 Cav participated in leadership professional-development sessions at Fort Benning Nov. 24, 2015, to help the Maneuver Center of Excellence commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Ia Drang, the guest speakers' overall theme was that training saved the day for U.S. Soldiers. However, retired COL Ramon "Tony" Nadal of 1/7 Cav thought there was one other factor: "The role of the leader in a battle of this intensity [1/7 Cav at LZ X-Ray] is essential," he said. He credited Moore with the unit's survival.

Nadal linked Moore's training philosophy for SFC Clyde "Ernie" Savage's ability to command the "Lost Platoon" (2nd Platoon, Company B, 1/7 Cav). "Moore's philosophy was to train two levels down," Nadal recalled, "so when Savage lost his platoon leader and platoon sergeant, he – as an assistant platoon sergeant – was able to assume command."

J.L. "Bud" Alley Jr. of 2/7 Cav commented that his unit was the opposite of the well-trained 1/7 – 2/7 was the "oh shucks battalion." The antithesis of Moore's philosophy of command, 2/7 Cav was "a green, green unit; we had not trained together; we didn't know each other," Alley said.

As much as 2/7 Cav had a leadership vacuum, Alley saw a strong leader at 1/7 Cav. He said that after the battle for LZ X-Ray, reporters came to see Moore. "This stern, stoic man, a man of men, teared up when talking about the heroism of his Soldiers," Alley said. "This taught me that you can love your men."

Summation of service

Moore was the recipient of the Distinguished Service Cross, which is the U.S. military's second-highest decoration for valor, for extraordinary heroism at Ia Drang. He was the first of his West Point class to be promoted to brigadier general, major general and lieutenant general. (See sidebar for other awards and honors.)

Moore received an appointment to the U.S. Military Academy shortly after the United States entered World War II. He graduated West Point June 5, 1945, and was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Infantry Branch. After graduating Infantry Officer Basic Course at Fort Benning and jump school at 11th Airborne Division in Tokyo, Japan, he was assigned to 187th Glider Infantry Regiment at Camp Crawford near Sapporo, Japan. He then commanded a company for seven months, with a follow-on assignment as Camp Crawford's construction officer, in which he was responsible for all construction improvements being made at the camp.

In June 1948 he was reassigned to 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, NC. He volunteered to join the Airborne Test Section, a special unit testing experimental parachutes, and he made some 150 jumps with the section during the next two years. Over the course of his career, he became a master parachutist with more than 300 jumps.

In 1951, he attended Infantry Officer's Advanced Course at Fort Benning, then in June 1952, he was assigned to 17th Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division, where he commanded a heavy-mortar company in Korean War combat. He next served as regimental assistant chief of staff, operations and plans. Since the 7th Division commanding general's policy was that no promotion to major was possible without command of an *infantry* company in combat, the division commander personally assigned Moore to an infantry company so that Moore could be promoted to major and thus become division assistant chief of staff for operations.

Moore returned to West Point in 1954 and served three years as an instructor in infantry tactics. While serving as an instructor, Moore taught then-Cadet Norman Schwarzkopf, who called Moore one of his "heroes" and cites Moore as the reason he chose the Infantry Branch upon graduation.

After attending Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, KS, in 1956, Moore then reported to the Office Chief of Research and Development at the Pentagon, where his initiative and insights were key to the development of new airborne equipment and airborne/air-assault tactics. Following graduation from the Armed Forces Staff College at Norfolk, VA, in 1960, Moore served a three-year tour as North Atlantic Treaty Organization plans officer with Headquarters Allied Forces Northern Europe in Oslo, Norway.

In 1964, now a lieutenant colonel, Moore studied at the Naval War College while earning a master's degree in international relations from George Washington University. He was then transferred to Fort Benning to command 2nd Battalion, 23rd Infantry – later to become part of 11th Air Assault Division, which was undergoing air-assault and air-mobility training and tests.

On July 28, 1965, President Lyndon Johnson announced that he was sending “the airmobile division to Vietnam.” That same month, 11th Air Assault was re-designated 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) and alerted for deployment to Vietnam. Moore's battalion was redesignated as 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), the same regiment that was LTC George Armstrong Custer's command when the Irish song *Garry Owen* was adopted as a marching tune. (In fact, blond-haired Moore was known as “Yellow Hair” to his troops at the Battle of Ia Drang as a tongue-in-cheek homage to Custer, who was commanding the same 7th Cavalry Regiment at the Battle of the Little Bighorn just under a century before.)

The Garry Owen Brigade left Fort Benning Aug. 14, 1965, and deployed to South Vietnam by way of the Panama Canal, arriving at the division's An Khê Base Camp a month later. Beginning Nov. 14, 1965, Moore led 1/7 Cav in the Battle of Ia Drang. After this battle, Moore was promoted to colonel and commanded Garry Owen Brigade (3rd Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division).

After his service in the Vietnam War, Moore served at the Pentagon as the military liaison to the assistant secretary for international affairs in the Office of Undersecretary of Defense. In his next assignment, the Army sent him to Harvard University, where he completed his master's of arts degree in international relations in 1968. Moore then reported to the Pentagon again to work with the deputy chief of staff for operations, where he helped draft the Army plan for the withdrawal of two brigades of 9th Infantry Division to the United States as a part of the Vietnamization-of-the-war effort.

Moore was promoted to brigadier general Aug. 31, 1968, and, in July 1969, he was assigned as assistant chief of staff for operations and plans of Eighth Army in South Korea, where tensions were high from incidents along the demilitarized zone, and drug use and racism among Eighth Army troops were at an all-time high. Moore became commanding general of 7th Infantry Division and was promoted to major general – both in 1970 – and was charged by the commanding general of U.S. Forces Korea with cleaning up the drug-abuse and racial-strife problems that were prevalent at the time in 7th Division.

His plan established officer leadership schools for company-grade officers and a noncommissioned-officer leadership school for staff sergeants and below. Moore also issued equal-opportunity policy and backed up the policy with the promise to punish leaders who discriminated based on race, ethnicity or creed. As a part of the reformation of division morale, he established several athletic programs, including football, basketball and boxing.

Next, as commanding general of the Army Training Center, Fort Ord, CA, from 1971-1973, he oversaw the experimentation in adapting basic and advanced individual training under Project VOLAR to prepare for the end of conscription and the institution of the modern Volunteer Army. In 1975, the Army's Center of Military History published *Building a Volunteer Army: The Fort Ord Contribution*, by Moore and LTC Jeff M. Tuten; the 139-page paperback is a monograph concerning the Project VOLAR experiments during Moore's tenure in command of Fort Ord.

In August 1973, Moore was assigned as commanding general, U.S. Army Military Personnel Center, and in 1974 he was appointed the Army's deputy chief of staff for personnel. In this last assignment before leaving the Army, he dealt with Army recruiting issues after termination of the draft as well as the orderly drawdown of forces after the Vietnam War's close.

Moore was next slated to become the commanding general of U.S. Army Japan, but he elected to retire instead. He retired from the Army Aug. 1, 1977, after completing 32 years' active service.

Acronym Quick-Scan

LZ – landing zone

NVA – North Vietnamese Army

OLC – oak-leaf cluster