

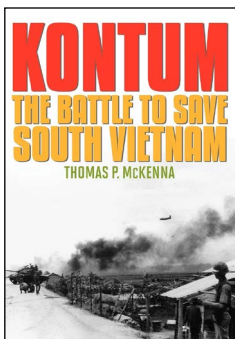
Book Reviews



Kontum: The Battle to Save South Vietnam

By Thomas P. McKenna
Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2011,
376 pages

Reviewed by Gerald Williams



Kontum: The Battle to Save Vietnam is a fascinating and pulse-racing account of what Thomas P. McKenna experienced during the Vietnam War. As a U.S. Army Infantry lieutenant colonel, McKenna gives his account of what he considers to be one of the lesser recognized battles of the Vietnam War. Throughout the book McKenna uses letter dates and material for verifying the events. I was also very appreciative of the preface, which lists the acronyms and terms that he uses throughout the book.

McKenna's descriptions of the Vietnam War and the struggles and complications from allies and enemies shed further light on a history worth knowing. In particular, working alongside allies such as the VNAF (South Vietnamese Air Force) was no easy task. However, McKenna's telling of how they dealt with the issues of evacuations and procedures during these events and how these differed from their South Vietnamese allies, makes for an interesting historical account of how cooperation between two fundamentally different countries can lead to success.

As mentioned before, McKenna uses many terms throughout his novel and as such it can be a little hard to keep them in mind. However, McKenna supplies a glossary that contains military abbreviations and jargon, making it easier for inexperienced readers of military texts to read and enjoy thoroughly. McKenna also includes illustrations which depict anything from positions of enemy lines to pictures of friends and allies during his time in Vietnam.

McKenna's overall flow in writing the book is also spot on. There are times in which McKenna slows down time by giving more background on himself and others. It is then that readers see the human element of those involved in the Vietnam War. Just when McKenna brings in the sense of home and friendship, those human elements are endangered by constant waves of attacks from the enemy. There is definitely more attention paid to the actions of the regiment versus human emotion; however, the addition of the latter helps to make his story more interesting than reading about the events from a history book.

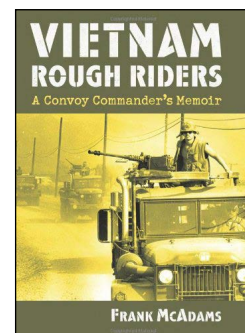
Kontum: The Battle to Save Vietnam is an exhilarating and fact-driven book which seeks to reveal the battle of Kontum as it hasn't been revealed before. It is a story of humanity, conflict, and eventually resolution. For anyone who wants to

know the technical side of a less recognized battle fought in Vietnam, this novel is an engaging and well-thought out read.

Vietnam Rough Riders: A Convoy Commander's Memoir

By Frank McAdams
Lawrence: KS: University Press of Kansas, 2013, 280 pages
Reviewed by LTC (Retired)

Rick Baillergeon



In recent years, we have seen a resurgence in the Vietnam War memoir. As many veterans enter their retirement years, they now have the time to devote to capturing their experiences on paper. I have found the overall quality of these recently penned memoirs to be outstanding. One that particularly stands out is Frank McAdams' superb volume, *Vietnam Rough Riders: A Convoy Commander's Memoir*.

Within the book, McAdams vividly details his tour as a Marine lieutenant in Vietnam (March 1968-March 1969). During that time, he served principally in a Marine Corps transportation battalion. The primary mission of the unit was to deliver supplies and ammunition to line units. Through most of his tour, McAdams led many of the convoys that executed this critical mission. It was a mission as dangerous as any in the war with a continuous threat of enemy ambushes and lethal mines that were emplaced on convoy roads.

Clearly, there have been hundreds of memoirs written by veterans describing their Vietnam War experiences. So the pertinent question regarding McAdams' volume is what distinguishes *Vietnam Rough Riders* from most of these other volumes? I believe the differences lie in four areas:

- * The type of unit the author served in;
- * The decision to emphasize his wife's experiences during his deployment;
- * His ability to capture the challenges faced by a young officer in war; and
- * McAdams' superb writing ability.

A large percentage of Vietnam War memoirs are focused on the experiences of the "grunt." Consequently, McAdams provides a perspective unique in this genre. His discussion on the nuances of Vietnam convoy operations is both highly informative and fascinating. It is a part of the Vietnam War that is neglected. McAdams' memoir highlights the danger and the criticality of this facet of the war.

Another distinctive aspect of the memoir is McAdams' decision to feature his wife's experiences stateside while

he was deployed. The author poignantly describes how his wife coped day to day while he was exposed to the dangers of war. One of the great aids McAdams utilizes in doing this is including letters written to each other during his tour. Obviously, this tremendously personalizes the volume and stresses the powerful impact the “home front” has in enabling a Soldier to face the incredible challenges of combat.

I believe one of the strengths (among many) of *Vietnam Rough Riders* is McAdams’ ability to depict the tests a young officer is confronted with in war. The author shares many of the tests he faced. These included the difficulties he had working with his company commander and some of the field grade officers in the battalion, how he met the physical and emotional challenges of war, and how like many Soldiers (in any war) he questioned the purpose of war and its ramifications. McAdams’ candid discussion will have a powerful impact on many readers.

Unquestionably, *Vietnam Rough Riders* is one of the best written Vietnam War memoirs I have read. McAdams is incredibly engaging throughout his volume. He achieves this through a crisp and descriptive writing style, superb organizational skills creating a smooth flow for readers, and his ability to select events which appeal to readers. Perhaps, most impressive is that McAdams is equally adept at describing the action of an enemy ambush or sharing his feelings regarding his wife.

McAdams has crafted a volume which I consider one of the best Vietnam War memoirs I have read in many years. In fact, it is one of the best books I have read in recent memory. Do not let your apprehension on reading “another” Vietnam War memoir deter you from obtaining this book. Its combination of uniqueness and quality make *Vietnam Rough Riders* a must read.

Swarm Troopers: How Small Drones Will Conquer the World

By David Hambling

**Venice, FL: Archangel Ink,
2015, 323 pages**

**Reviewed by Dr. Robert J.
Bunker**

The author, David Hambling, is a South London-based technology journalist who has written for *Wired*, *Aviation Week*, and other technology magazines as well as authoring an earlier book about military technologies that eventually were applied to civilian applications (*Weapons Grade*, Da Capo Press, 2006). In the new work, *Swarm Troopers*, he focuses on the world of small drones or unmanned aerial systems (UAS) and their future military potential. He argues that the scientific research balance has now shifted, with consumer electronic advances outstripping military electronic advances. As a result, we are the cusp of a technology revolution which will see the future

fielding of mass swarms of small, cheap, smart, and deadly UAS on the battlefield.

These future UAS — or drone — swarms will be said to be made with off-the-shelf electronics and draw upon the characteristics of robustness, low cost, and rapid evolution. Such armed drones can be thought of as “flying minefields” and, while not singularly threatening, en masse will be impossible to defeat. Given ongoing U.S. Soldier concerns related to static improvised explosive device (IED) use by insurgents in Afghanistan and Iraq, the threat of IEDs — especially smart ones — chasing after or, even worse, relentlessly hunting down our troops is a chilling concept. Additionally, such UAS can be armed with pistols, light machine guns, and even anti-tank type systems.

The book opens with a short introduction to the subject matter and the book’s companion website (www.swarm-troopers.com). The individual chapters include content relating to drone history; Predator and Raven use; solar power and energy harvesting for drones; the science of swarming behavior; small drones as weapons; counter-UAS (C-UAS) technologies; and weaponized drone swarm futures. Each chapter has a modest listing of references that is adequate but rather undeveloped. The website is very useful with an image gallery of older and newer UAS systems (since none are found in the book); an updated blog also provides new drone technological developments.

A detracting component of the work is that the author at times has very much of an outsider’s take on UAS threat activities and C-UAS military developments. Active C-UAS programs are being implemented by a number of U.S. governmental and affiliated non-profit groups. As a result, many of the insights and conclusions provided are somewhat off-base though the overall thesis of the book — that autonomous and weaponized drone swarms of thousands, possibly tens of thousands of devices, drawing upon off-the-shelf commercial technologies will be deployed on future battlefields — is still sound.

For U.S. Infantry personnel, *Swarm Troopers* represents a good basic primer and introduction to this emerging threat — and new Army capability — area. While Army troops are already familiar with the Raven UAS for scouting and situational awareness capabilities, we are at the beginning of far larger battlefield changes. This has already incrementally begun with the fielding of the compact Switchblade UAS system that can be fired from a tube launcher and operates as an attack (e.g. kamikaze) drone with a small explosive warhead. Fast-forward a decade or two, however, and one can imagine a battlefield populated by thousands upon thousands of teleoperated and autonomous robots. These systems will not only be operating in the deserts of Iraq and the mountainous terrain of Afghanistan but also in the slums of mid-21st century megacities. On one hand, such autonomous and armed UAS will be the infantry’s best friend while other such drones — that fly, drive, walk, and crawl — will represent a dystopian “terminator-like” threat as human and machine forces are integrated into new forms of combined arms operations.

