



***Vietnam Rough Riders: A Convoy Commander's Memoir***

**By Frank McAdams**

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**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.