

trenchant. All these points are sound and well taken; it is regrettable that the combination of questionable case selection and the overlooking of salient aspects of the decision-making process conspire to attenuate their force.

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Coleman, J.D. *Pleiku: The Dawn of Helicopter Warfare in Vietnam*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988.

J.D. Coleman's book on the Pleiku campaign is an exceptionally well done narrative on a controversial and important subject. Those interested in the operational history of the Vietnam War, and in the air assault concept, should make every effort to read this book.

Narrative is Coleman's strong suit. The story he tells of the 1st Cavalry Division's battles against three regiments of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) holds the reader's interest throughout. We get the early story (mid 1950s-mid 1960s) of the air assault concept and how a small band of crusaders worked hard, and against substantial opposition both in and outside of the Army, to develop and have the Army accept the concept of air assault warfare. The hope of this group, which included the division's first commander, Major General Harry Kinnard, was that air assault warfare would liberate soldiers from the "tyranny of terrain." With the more powerful and maneuverable helicopters of the later 1950s and the new concepts which came out of this new technology everything, at least potentially, changed. The new found mobility theoretically allowed units to disperse and concentrate on the battlefield, to move and attack the enemy from behind or on his flanks, with astonishing rapidity. The concrete manifestation of the air assault concept's acceptance was of course the approximately 430 helicopters of the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), with troops and pilots trained and prepared to implement the concept. Kinnard and other proponents of airmobile operations believed that the sky troopers—in their helicopter transports, protected by helicopter gunships—could jump over, as Superman's admirers would have put it, tall mountains in a single bound.

After describing the division (its structure and how it was to function), and its deployment to and initial operations in the northern provinces of South Vietnam (July-October 1965), Coleman launches into the story of the Pleiku campaign itself. He gives the reader a clear picture of the enemy, his strengths and weaknesses, his expectations from action in the Central Highlands, and then plunges the reader into action. We are marched smartly through the siege of the Plei Me Special Forces camp (19 October), the cavalry division's role in lifting that siege, it subsequent

mission to pursue the withdrawing NVA forces (27 October-27 November), and, within that story, some very well drawn combat narratives—including the highlights of the book, the battles at Landing Zone X-RAY (14-16 November)—a great success, and Landing Zone ALBANY (17 November)—a disaster. After wrapping up the battle at ALBANY he finishes with an all too brief wind-up of the campaign itself. Never does Coleman's mastery over his material falter. Although he is cautious, too cautious, in coming to judgements, he does give the reader sufficient information to make this own.

The action at ALBANY remains controversial and Coleman's telling of it will be subjected to careful scrutiny. His account is the best and most detailed to appear thus far. Coleman believes that the job of moving the 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry from Landing Zone X-RAY to the ALBANY area was poorly done, and for this the commander, Lieutenant Colonel Robert McDade, must bear the greatest responsibility. The troops marched in a column formation (p. 231) with little or no flank security (p. 234). As the American column approached the landing zone a North Vietnamese battalion, a short distance ahead, was taking a rice break. Its commander, acting with commendable presence of mind, hastily arranged an L-shaped ambush. By the time the first US forces reached ALBANY most of the rest were in the NVA killing zone and the ambush was sprung. The Americans were clearly taken by surprise. Eventually, with fierce and deadly hand-to-hand and close-in fighting, the NVA attack was broken. While withdrawing, the NVA executed all of the wounded Americans they could find outside the American perimeter—savagery never satisfactorily explained. The toll was high on both sides. 151 Americans lost their lives at LZ ALBANY, the North Vietnamese between 300 and 500.

The tragedy of ALBANY should not obscure the larger subject of the book—the test of the air assault warfare concept in combat. Coleman contends—and accepting his narrative as evidence, convincingly so—that the Pleiku campaign proved that helicopters and the concept of air assault warfare did indeed revolutionize combat on land. In proving this concept the 1st Cavalry Division—inflicting over 1500 deaths by body count (plus another 2000 by estimate) against 304 American deaths—handed the enemy a great defeat. Whatever was the enemy's strategic purpose, he had not achieved it. However, while highlighting the accomplishments of the air cavalry in the Pleiku campaign, he fails to give enough attention to the negative side of air assault warfare. For example, he does not discuss in any detail the incredible rate at which the 1st Cavalry Division while in action during the Pleiku campaign consumed resources—fuel, spare parts, pilots, support crews, the helicopters themselves. Logistic and maintenance problems were also considerable. He also fails to seriously reflect on whether the air assault concept was really appropriate to the unconventional war being waged in Vietnam at the time. American units did indeed inflict substantial casualties on the North Vietnamese. This was because the enemy decided, for whatever reason(s), to stand and fight. Although this approach momentarily meshed with the American Army's conventional approach—and with the deadly consequences mentioned, it

was not the usual NVA/Viet Cong style of fighting. Some have suggested that the NVA high command purposely fed the three regiments into the American war machine just to see how well the Americans could fight. That is, they were willing to let their troops be butchered if they could learn and teach others how Americans fought. In short, the American division may well have inflicted casualties because the enemy allowed it to, and not as a necessary function of the division being airmobile.

If this is so then one can conclude that the enemy's actions in the Pleiku campaign produced unanticipated longterm dividends for him. According to this view the American high command took an anomalous series of battles in the highlands, i.e. the Pleiku campaign, to be the enemy's regular way of war. In turn, this confirmed the Americans in their belief that the United States Army, doing what conventionally trained armies do, could win the day. In consequence, the American "victory" in the Pleiku campaign made future American victories, and ultimate victory over the NVA and Viet Cong, more and more problematic.

Coleman's analysis is often perfunctory and his interpretations stick pretty close to what has come to be the orthodox view of the Pleiku campaign. Little critical distance separates him from his material. (However, given his closeness to the 1st Cavalry, perhaps not much distance should be expected. As a staff officer in the 1st Cavalry Division in 1966, he drafted the original after-action report). Another shortcoming is the lack of documentation. There are no notes and the bibliography is most inadequate. This poses a problem to, and raises a question for, the reader unfamiliar with the sources. Is the book reliable as a narrative? Is it based on the appropriate sources? Although I do not agree with Coleman on all points, my own judgement—given as one who mines the same material for a living that Coleman did for this book—is that the work, in terms of its narrative and documentation, is largely reliable. Nonetheless those who do not have this special knowledge may have difficulty reaching this conclusion. If the book goes into a second edition the author should seriously consider preparing a bibliographic essay to discuss sources. Even given these reservations, this writer strongly recommends *Pleiku: The Dawn of Helicopter Warfare in Vietnam* to readers of *Conflict Quarterly*.

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Jones, Bruce E. *War Without Windows. A true account by a young Army Officer trapped in an Intelligence cover-up in Vietnam.* New York: The Vanguard Press, 1987.

Undeniably, many questionable decisions emanated from MACV J-2 (Intelligence), during the Vietnam war. Perhaps the greatest and