THIS TIME WE WIN: Revisiting the Tet Offensive

Loring, Robert B

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and Afghanistan war literature, introducing us to new military thinking and transition strategies, including their inherent problems and conflicts.

The six-page glossary of USMC terms and names is priceless, as are the candid snapshots of the Outlanders at work.

Editor's note: Don DeNevi has written several World War II books, and currently he serves as the Supervisor of Recreation at San Quentin State Prison in California.

NOBLE WARRIOR: The Story of Maj. Gen. James E. Livingston, USMC (Ret), Medal of Honor. By James E. Livingston with Colin D. Heaton and Anne-Marie Lewis, Published by Zenith Press, 272 pages, Stock #0760338078. \$25.20 MCA Members. \$28 Regular Price.

"So at 5 a.m., we fixed bayonets and began moving with two platoons." And with that, the Marines of Company E, 2d Battalion, Fourth Marine Regiment, commanded by Captain James E. Livingston, entered the Battle of Dai Do on May 2,

"Noble Warrior" is a biography of Major General James E. Livingston, USMC (Ret), with forewords by Generals Al Gray, Paul X. Kelley and Brigadier General William Weise. Written with the assistance of two authors-one of whom, Colin Heaton, served in MajGen Livingston's command—it has three main parts: a prologue, MajGen Livingston's Vietnam service, and his subsequent career and experiences.

The account of his Vietnam service comprises the major portion of the book (about 146 pages) and describes in vivid detail the circumstances under which he earned the Medal of Honor. The events of his childhood and the first five years of his commissioned service are covered in six pages, and his subsequent career is related in about 24 pages. The emphasis upon his Vietnam service is appropriate in that it provides his detailed perspective on two major battles in which defeat of the American forces would have had disastrous consequences.

Of course, any engagement that results in a Medal of Honor being awarded is significant. But in the case of the Battle of Dai Do, also known as the defense of Dong Ha, there were two Medals of Honor awarded; the second going to Captain Jay R. Vargas, commanding "Golf" Co, 2/4. The battle stands among those in which vastly outnumbered warriors are inspired by exceptional leaders to do the impossible, defeating a vastly superior enemy force in desperate situations. A Marine battalion faced a North Vietnamese Army division, and its victory is a case study in individual leadership and valor.

Although many readers may not have heard of the Battle of Dai Do, most will be familiar with the evacuation of Saigon in April 1975. Then-Major Livingston led the Marines providing security for the evacuation, and he was the next-to-last Marine to board the last chopper out. His description of those final moments, with the North Vietnamese Army entering the city and the South Vietnamese desperate to escape, is tense and dramatic. Again, his leadership enabled success in crisis.

The latter chapters summarize the remainder of his military career and the volunteer work he has done during retirement. His service in the Philippines countering the National People's Army and his civic service in New Orleans prior to Hurricane Katrina are highlights. The biography concludes with MajGen Livingston's personal reflections, his thoughts about worldwide future threats, and his concerns regarding the future of our nation.

The authors capture, in superb fashion, the leadership qualities that enabled MajGen Livingston to inspire his Marines, while highlighting those leadership traits that guided his career. His leadership style, girded by a sincere care and concern for the Marines in his command, was tough, fair and exemplified by a commitment to leading by example.

Embedded comments from Marines who served with MajGen Livingston and information from other sources augment the biography and give contextual information. Here is an excerpt from Lance Corporal Steve Wilson's comments: "... the word came over the net: 'Now fix bayonets!' The sound of steel on steel was not the most prevalent noise, but that of eyeballs clicking. ... This command took us to another fighting level."

Specialist Wally Nunn, an Army door gunner on a Huey in the Battle of Dai Do, compared what he saw to the Battle of Thermopylae in which Leonidas and his Spartan warriors stood against the numerically superior Persian army.

Marine leaders and those who seek to lead will surely benefit from this book. The often blunt, direct style is refreshing and makes it an easy read. The pearls of wisdom are there as is the dramatic battle leadership examples.

LtCol Charles S. Gaede, USMCR (Ret)

Editor's note: LtCol Gaede, an infantry officer and a Vietnam veteran, retired from the Marine Corps Reserve in 1998, after 29 years of service. Obtaining his doctorate in 1993, he retired from the University of Texas at Austin in 2007. Presently, he is an officer in VFW Post 3377 and on the board of his local chapter of the Military Officers Association of America.

THIS TIME WE WIN: Revisiting the Tet Offensive. By James S. Robbins. Published by Encounter Books. 351 pages. Stock #1594032297. \$23.36 MCA Members. \$25.95 Regular Price.

The legacy, legend and misconceptions, which followed the Vietnam Tet offensive, continue to plague both historians and America's recent geopolitical policies. In his new book, "This Time We Win," James Robbins skillfully attempts to debunk the commonly held notion that the Tet offensive represented a resounding defeat for the U.S. and her South Vietnamese allies.

Writing shortly after the attack, Army cavalry officer Colonel Michael Mahler commented: "You had to see the low walls of enemy dead stacked like cordwood outside that ring of armor to understand our bewilderment when we read that we had been defeated."

In early 1968, and during the Tet Lunar New Year, Vietnam exploded in violent attacks throughout the southern regions of the country. Viet Cong soldiers rose up in a bevy of uncoordinated attacks, flung themselves on mostly South Vietnamese targets, and were decisively defeated.

Through intelligence failures, and including the mismanagement of the follow-

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Leatherneck Book Browser –

"I, Sniper: A Bob Lee Swagger Novel." Stephen Hunter is perhaps the best writer of this genre. His latest is as exciting a read as any Mickey Spillane, Dashiell Hammett or Elmore Leonard work. His main character is a retired Marine sniper known as "Bob the Nailer," which gives one a good idea of how he handles villains.

Hunter's lack of expertise in the real workings of the Corps can be a little irritating; however, he's right on when it comes to precise listings of caliber, range and impact. He gives us one hell of a read,

His hardback edition (ISBN: 9781416565154) is 432 pages, published by Simon & Schuster, 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020, www .simonandschuster.com, and costs \$26.

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up news cycle, Americans were largely misinformed of the rapidly developing events. The American public was ill-prepared to hear, understand and absorb the far-reaching shock caused by the wideranging Tet attacks.

Some of the most memorable incidents of Tet typically include the video of a small group of VC entering, and briefly holding, a portion of the U.S. Embassy grounds; a dramatic photo, "The shot seen around the world," showing a Vietnamese general blasting the brains out of a captured VC officer; and the two major set piece battles, at Hue City and the defense of Khe Sanh Combat Base.

At Hue and Khe Sanh, leathernecks battled and defeated well-trained North Vietnam regulars. These prolonged engagements tensely played out on American television throughout the following long month. Both President Lyndon B. Johnson and the American public became transfixed by these graphically savage nightly news reports, and they foreshadowed an ever-growing anti-war reaction.

Robbins, a former assistant in the Office of the Secretary of Defense and a writer for *The Washington Post*, makes a strong case that it was the communist and, particularly, the Viet Cong forces of the South that really took the beating. Consider the failure of North Vietnam to meet its stated objectives: i.e., the South Vietnamese people rising up against the hated Americans; the South Vietnamese armed forces proved ineffective; and, a resulting general uprising would be a *fait accompli* for the Americans. In due course, all these lofty estimations would be proved incorrect.

In his chapter, "Johnson Surrenders," Robbins saves his most vehement core argument against President Johnson. According to the author, LBJ's best chance for victory came in the direct aftermath of the failed Tet offensive. Demoralized by their countrywide failure, Hanoi had been weakened and became vulnerable.

Although LBJ seemed stunned and beaten, American public polls showed backing for a strong display of strength. Robbins writes, "The time was right for a bold gesture that conveyed strength and determination." Johnson, however, sought a negotiated settlement, and never seemed to understand that the North was interested "only" in total victory.

In referring to Ho Chi Minh, Johnson was reported to ask, "What does he want?"

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Johnson, perhaps, thought that "Uncle Ho" could be bought off like an American politician. It was as if Johnson had been playing chess while Ho Chi Minh was playing poker. Here one should note, a poker player may win by bluff, even if he's holding a losing hand.

The "Tet narrative" was set in stone for Johnson when newsman Walter Cronkite pronounced the war unwinnable. Johnson allegedly said, "If I've lost Cronkite, I've lost the war." The President then telegraphed defeat and announced that he would not be seeking re-election. When North Vietnam realized that U.S. policies and the country's political will had been shaken, they smelled victory.

There would be little need to convince the hard-charging Marines who fought in the battles for Khe Sanh or Hue City that they had won. Their exploits are toasted when Marines gather for mess nights around the globe. However, the "Vietnam Syndrome," as it is labeled, specifically characterized by the Tet offensive, has created a rallying point for today's brand of terrorists.

Bin Laden convinced his al-Oaida and Taliban fighters that American's Achilles heel, our unwillingness to "stay the course," had been clearly demonstrated in Vietnam, Beirut and Somalia. The United States,



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he preaches, can be beaten by a smaller force using a combination of political and terror tactics. He continues to promote to his followers the "jihadist equivalent of the Tet offensive.'

This provocative re-examination of the common misconceptions and realities of the Tet offensive, and its attendant baggage, is worth the time to read and ponder. I fully recommend this highly readable volume, "This Time We Win," to Americans of any political persuasion. Read it and you may well weep; but by all means, read it!

Robert B. Loring

Editor's note: "Red Bob" Loring is a frequent reviewer for Leatherneck. A Marine veteran and prodigious reader on Marine Corps subjects, Bob works unceasingly for the Marine Corps Reserve Toys for Tots Program as well as other programs helping the citizens of East Pasco County, Fla.

TIDEWATER WARRIOR: The World War I Years of General Lemuel C. Shepherd Jr., USMC. By Tom Fitz-Patrick. Published by Signature Book Printing. 559 pages. Softcover. Stock #0972866418. \$34.95 MCA Members. \$34.95 Regular Price. (No special member pricing available.)

This is another superior biography of a Marine general officer by Tom FitzPatrick, author of "A Character That Inspired: Major General Charles D. Barrett, USMC.' FitzPatrick has dug in and found whatever was available on General Lemuel Shepherd and provided those details for historians and the general reading public.

The providers of that information included the late Lieutenant General Victor H. "Brute" Krulak, who knew Shepherd for 50 years and served under him during four assignments, and Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons, former director of the Marine Corps Museum and History Division. However, one of the main sources has been the general's surviving son, another Virginia Military Institute graduate, and Marine veteran of the war in Korea, Wilson E. D. Shepherd.

LtGen Krulak, always modest with his laudatory comments, described Gen Shepherd "as one of the Marine Corps' best known combat leaders and the most significant figure he served with during his 34 year career." BGen Ed Simmons considered Shepherd "as one of the top generals he met during his career."

Wilson Shepherd also was praiseful. Gen Shepherd's niece, Mrs. Edith Brooke Robertson of Norfolk, Va., and Robert B. Hitchings of the Sargeant Memorial Room, Norfolk Public Library, were both helpful in describing Lem Shepherd's early life in Norfolk. But without Tom FitzPatrick's diligence in digging up the balance of the story, we would lack a complete picture of that fighting Marine.

Gen Shepherd had a sound family background, which contributed to his formation and education. That included graduation from that prime military and engineering school, the Virginia Military Institute at Lexington in the Shenandoah Valley in 1913. Four years to graduation and a war was on, a big war. Originally, he was interested in a commission in the U.S. Army, although his interest later turned to the Marine Corps. In mid-May 1917, in the mail he received his orders to report to Marine Officer's School (Basic School, if you wish) at Port Royal, S.C.

Early in their second week of training, they were asked if any of the second lieutenants wished to ship overseas with the Fifth Marine Regiment. Several of the 30 men in the class, including Shepherd, raised their hands, and on May 29, 1917,

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