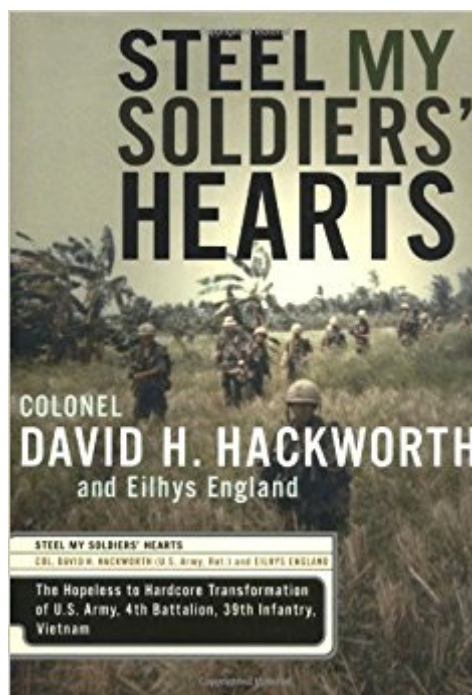




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# Steel My Soldiers' Hearts: The Hopeless To Hardcore Transformation Of The U.S. Army, 4th Battalion, 39th Infantry, Vietnam



## Synopsis

Colonel David H. Hackworth, one of America's most decorated soldiers, lays bare his most daring and legendary tour of duty.1966With a full year of Vietnam combat and five months of in-country intense after-action analysis under his pistol belt, Hackworth pens the classic tactical handbook the Vietnam Primer with military historian Samuel Marshall. In a radical shift from the World War II-era tactics then employed in Vietnam, Hackworth stresses the necessity of using disciplined, small units of well-trained men to best fight the hit-and-run warfare of the elusive Viet Cong. "Out G'ing the G," he called his tactics.1969Hackworth's expertise lands him back in Vietnam. The Army's message is clear-put up, or shut up. Given the "hopeless," morale-drained 4/39th-an infantry battalion of poorly led draftees with one of the Army's worst casualty rates-Hackworth leads from up front and finds the best in every one of his grunts. Together, they take a page from the VC, write their own book, and become the meanest in the Mekong Delta-the Hardcore Recondos.2002With the U.S. again facing elusive insurgent foes-and the hit-and-run tactics of the international terror networks we're presently up against-the 4/39th Hardcore Battalion's successes provide hard-won lessons-learned that are more applicable now than ever.A tour de force of frontline combat action, Steel My Soldiers' Hearts takes readers alongside sniper missions, into grunt ambush actions, above fields of fire with hard-hitting helicopter strikes, and inside the quagmire of command politics. Hackworth graduates the Mekong Delta brotherhood into the pantheon of our nation's most heroic warriors.

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## Customer Reviews

Steel My Soldiers' Hearts is retired Colonel David Hackworth's account of his tour of duty in Vietnam commanding the 4/39th, an infantry battalion operating south of Saigon in the Mekong River delta. Poorly led (the previous commander had based the battalion in the middle of a mine field), with frightfully high casualties (40 percent during the six months prior to Hackworth's arrival), and fighting in the most dangerous of terrain, the 4/39th was a dispirited and demoralized group when Hackworth assumed command in January, 1969. Upon arrival, Hackworth fired many of the senior officers and then put the 4/39th through "Combat 101," which made him so unpopular that at one point Hackworth was warned of a bounty some of his men had put out on him. Over the next five months, however, Hackworth would transform the 4/39 from "hopeless to hardcore," dramatically reverse the casualty rate, score some spectacular victories over the Viet Cong, and earn the undying respect of his troops. Here's a gung ho and earthy firsthand account of the Vietnam War that fans of *We Were Soldiers Once...* will appreciate. --Harry C. Edwards

Soldier-Author-Columnist, as his Web site notes, Hackworth (About Face, Hazardous Duty) weighs in with a long, blow-by-blow account of his second tour in Vietnam, as a 9th Infantry Division battalion commander. (Hackworth denounced the war in 1971, went into self-imposed exile in Australia and later became a high-profile Newsweek military analyst.) He's definitely the star of this production, which is co-written with England but told in his voice, as he describes how he turned a group of decidedly unready infantrymen into an effective fighting force mainly through the strength of his tough personality. My idea of looking after the troops was not to spoon-feed them, Hackworth says, but to make them as hard as forged steel, deadly in their kill-or-be-killed trade. And he's not bashful about naming names: he gives credit to the officers and enlisted men who helped him and pillories ticket-punching and cowardly officers who stood in his way. The result is a readable, gritty, in-the-trenches tale, dotted with clever epigrammatic prose and filled to overflowing with reconstructed dialogue. The main source is Hackworth's memory bank, but he and England also combed through primary and secondary sources and made good use of interviews they conducted with many of his former troops. The portrait that emerges is of a battalion commander with integrity, guts, leadership ability and an abiding concern for the welfare of his men as well as, it must be acknowledged, a modest desire to self-promote. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

This is an amazing book - how do you transform the worst unit in the US Army into one of the best. The first half of the book is amazing, but you have to read closely to see how he did. It is not rocket science, but it is not easy. It helps (read you have to have) good people under you as well to

execute on it. Brilliant. It is glossed over a bit, but this guy was also the preeminent proponent of insurgency operation in the Vietnam Era. Read the book closely, his tactics and strategy are timeless. The second half of the book ends up being a high-lights, and low-lights, reel of the operations, and captures some of the day-to-day life of the grunt. Stuff that you don't see discussed often. The political challenges of incompetent higher-up is laced through out the book. It is a great read just as a story, and if you want to see what it takes to be a leader and change things - it's in there as well.

This book was introduced to me through the Jocko podcast. It was a real eye opener on what happened in Vietnam and how Hackworth turned around a group of poorly lead soldiers to a highly proficient killing machine in matter of months. Very inspiring to see hardcore discipline and experience in action. Never being in the military this book enlightened what the front line soldiers go through. Respect to all our front line soldiers.

[I'll preface this review by admitting I had Hack autograph my purchased copy in 2002-something I've rarely done. Hack died recently - the world will miss his bravery, honor and grit.] The conflicts most important to the US Army are fought in Washington, DC. The results from these battles - between State and Defense - inter-service - or between military contractors - filter down to the troops - tragically sometimes in combat. None can deny that the Officer Corps of the United States Army has become (virtually) a political rat hole. Careerism - in my day - started at Colonel - now some Captains and Majors refuse to be risk takers for fear of career ending errors. Additionally, when how war is conducted becomes the focus of Presidential politics - it is only the troops who suffer. When viewed by civilians - the United States Army is a terrible place to have a career. Low pay, slow promotion, terrible benefits, bad food and housing - and oh ya' - dangerous. So why do we continue to find such strong, smart and larger than life individuals who thrive and succeed in this environment? Young men, such as David Hackworth, volunteer, find themselves and then inspire others to reach their ultimate capabilities and beyond! The Army of today is all volunteer. Most who enlist do so for personal reasons - this thing about defending our country. During the Vietnam War, Col David Hackworth did not have the luxury of commanding a volunteer force. Like him, I commanded a majority of troops who did NOT want to wear the uniform (in my case a platoon) - and worse - found themselves in a combat zone against their will - impressed into an uncaring system that cheapened their contributions, sacrifices - and even their lives. Unlike me - Hack never had the joys and rewards of command in the all volunteer force. "Steel My Soldier's Hearts" is a manual in

the traits of personal leadership for all organizations - how to make them better and allow contributions from all people - of all capabilities and at every level. Hack was an officer who bent people to his will - fierce determination to succeed and to complete the mission - and to take care of his troops. He let nothing stand in his way to achieve his goals. Hackworth succeeded where others failed - by inspiring, leading by example, showing results by and for his troops. First, he taught them how to survive - then defeat the enemy by outthinking them at EVERY turn. Hackworth was a military artist - not a military scientist, his lessons learned were personal. Some techniques are transferrable to others - the will and determination - probably not. This is the David Hackworth I admire. Such personalities collect enemies along the way. Thanks either to fear, intimidation or bad aim - Hack was spared 'fragging' and succeeded building a magnificent fighting force. Criticism of Hack as a self promoting grandstander can probably be justified. He earned the right to do so! He had no tolerance for those he viewed as obstacles. He purged officers - bad and good - deserving and undeserving - happens all the time. Anybody who served on a staff of 'Stormin Norman' Schwartzkopf would make Hack out to be an angel of mercy! Hack tries to show people the truth of war and military service. Anyone who contemplates wearing the uniform should read all of Hackworth's writings. Those who wear the uniform - or have worn the uniform will be comforted by Hack's confirmation of vanity, glory, selfish enrichment and stupidity by those who led us - and of the government we served. [Hack - RIP, Mike Horn, LTC, MI, USA, 1970-1996, ret]

Uncompromising, tough, boots on the ground in the enemy's face. This is the way that David Hackworth ran his battalion and taught them to fight the enemy. That his methods were so successful with an outfit previously dubbed 'hopeless' is vindication of Hack's theory that with proper leadership and training the American soldier can meet and defeat any foe. *Steel My Soldiers' Hearts* is more than a simple primer on combat leadership techniques. It is larger than the historic role it will fill in the library of personal reminiscences of Vietnam. This book captures well the irrational nature of the war as expressed by the national leadership and promulgated down through the military command structure. It touches a poignant nerve of what might have been. Hack had to fight much more than the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army although they proved to be as tough an opponent as he had met on any battlefield. He had to deal with the double dealing and backstabbing of career army officers to whom a dead GI or a false report was of considerably less concern than risking the next promotion or decoration. He was continuously at loggerheads with highers up who saw more benefit in using precious helicopter resources to ferry USO entertainers about than to support American troops engaged in battle. He recounts how his battalion staff, trying

to run interference with him while he led from the front on the ground - something mighty scarce among leaders in that war - had to cope with minutiae and bean counting from higher HQ. Exceeding allotted 'blade time' on helicopter assets meant that you would not supply or maneuver troops in contact, for example. He fought the all too common practice of routinely disregarding or downgrading awards and decorations for combat soldiers while quietly approving them for senior officers who never smelled a sweaty armpit or fresh gunpowder. In the Vietnam era Army the officer's efficiency report form listed 'tact' as an evaluated leadership trait. It was a point of pride for most of us to get low marks in that category. I am certain that David Hackworth set the standard in blunt truth that many of us strove to match. His most recent work *Steel My Soldiers' Hearts* has only added to his reputation for direct and honest expression of thoughts regardless of whose feelings get hurt. Stylistically there are places in the book where I would have suggested different word choice or toning down of expression. To me it got in the way of the narrative. However that might not be Hack. And regardless it ought not get in the way of his core message. This book is a must read for anyone interested in the Vietnam war as it was not as we hoped it might be. It ought to be required reading for anyone responsible for dispatching, funding, managing or leading troops, especially for the politicians who somehow manage to avoid seeing the product of their failed policies.

One of the best books written about the Vietnam war. Hackworth's concern for his men should be the benchmark for officers in the US military.

Started off a bit tough to read, but I was eventually able to get more into the book. Not a bad first-hand account. The lessons learned are still relevant today. Just makes you wonder why they're being ignored.

gave insight on how day to day men try to survive under Colonel Hackworth in Viet Nam. Hack was a warrior

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