



# **The Odyssey of Echo Company: The 1968 Tet Offensive and the Epic Battle to Survive the Vietnam War**

*Doug Stanton*

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**SELECTED BY *MILITARY TIMES* AS A BEST BOOK OF THE YEAR \* SELECTED BY THE SOCIETY OF MIDLAND AUTHORS' AS THE BEST NONFICTION BOOK OF THE YEAR**

The *New York Times* bestselling author of *In Harm's Way* and *Horse Soldiers* shares the powerful account of an American army platoon fighting for survival during the Vietnam War in “an important book....not just a battle story—it’s also about the home front” (The *Today* show).

On January 31, 1968, as many as 100,000 guerilla fighters and soldiers in the North Vietnamese Army attacked thirty-six cities throughout South Vietnam, hoping to dislodge American forces during one of the vital turning points of the Vietnam War. Alongside other young American soldiers in an Army reconnaissance platoon (Echo Company, 1/501) of the 101st Airborne Division, Stanley Parker, the nineteen-year-old son of a Texan ironworker, was suddenly thrust into savage combat, having been in-country only a few weeks. As Stan and his platoon-mates, many of whom had enlisted in the Army, eager to become paratroopers, moved from hot zone to hot zone, the extreme physical and mental stresses of Echo Company’s day-to-day existence, involving ambushes and attacks, grueling machine-gun battles, and impossibly dangerous rescues of wounded comrades, pushed them all to their limits and forged them into a lifelong brotherhood. The war became their fight for survival.

When they came home, some encountered a bitterly divided country that didn’t understand what they had survived. Returning to the small farms, beach towns, and big cities where they grew up, many of the men in the platoon fell silent, knowing that few of their countrymen wanted to hear the stories they lived to tell—until now. Based on interviews, personal letters, and Army after-action reports, *The Odyssey of Echo Company* recounts the searing tale of wartime service and homecoming of ordinary young American men in an extraordinary time and confirms Doug Stanton’s prominence as an unparalleled storyteller of our age.

## **The Odyssey of Echo Company: The 1968 Tet Offensive and the Epic Battle to Survive the Vietnam War Details**

Date : Published September 19th 2017 by Simon Schuster Audio

ISBN : 9781508227571

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Format : Audio CD

Genre : History, Nonfiction, War, Military Fiction, Military, Military History



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# **From Reader Review The Odyssey of Echo Company: The 1968 Tet Offensive and the Epic Battle to Survive the Vietnam War for online ebook**

## **Jeff says**

I rarely give books "four" or "five" stars, but this book certainly deserves a "four" in my opinion. Having grown up as a teen in the sixties, I was very well aware of Vietnam. Although I was lucky enough to have not been drafted, several of my friends weren't so lucky and served time over there.

Books on Vietnam interest me if a lot of the book deals with the thoughts and emotions of the soldiers. Any particular battle , and the actual mechanics of the skirmish don't interest me, I want to read about the thoughts and fears of the individual soldiers, before, during and after the conflict. In my opinion this author did a great job in accomplishing this. His writings of Stan Parker and the rest of Echo Company were spot-on in my opinion. I felt the fears, anxiety, and doubts.

The book was very graphic in describing the carnage. However it was done so in a manner that lent itself to the story and of the feelings of the grunts portrayed. It wasn't done for sensationalism.

After finishing the book I was left with a heavy heart. We lost 58,000 brave young men there, and many thousands more forever damaged. Why? Our government knew very early in Johnson's term that is war was unwinnable. Damn shame.

Read the book and honor all of these brave young men.

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## **Douglas Fugate says**

This is the story of Recon Platoon, Echo Company, 1st Battalion (Airborne), 501st Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division – December 1967 to December 1968.

This story is a “you are there” look at the Vietnam War from the ground level at the most basic unit. Stan Parker is the main focus, but each member of the recon platoon lends their viewpoint and oral history. Mr. Stanton’s writing allows the reader to experience the war as though they were part of the platoon.

The reader is there when Stan decides to go against his mother’s wish and enlist. The pain, blood, anger, fear, and all other emotions of the battle, the down-time, the confusion and the grief are intimately portrayed. The battles, the hospital recoveries, the grief over the death of platoon members are all presented in a manner that tugs at heartstrings. The episode of Stan returning to San Francisco in his class A uniform after serving one year in combat is well worth the time spent reading the book.

Anyone old enough to remember 1964, will be – in your face – reminded of the USA and how returning soldiers, sailors and marines were “welcomed home” in the late 1960’s and after 1968 particularly.

This book is a war story and contains very graphic depictions of battle.

I concur with Tom Brokaw – “A book for all Americans to read.”

I recommend this book for high school students and adults.

FIVE STARS +

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### **J. says**

I read Doug Stanton's "Horse Soldiers" and really enjoyed it, so I was thrilled when I saw that he had written a historical piece on the Vietnam War, an area of particular interest to me. Alas! This book should really just be called the "Biography of Stan Parker" since there's hardly any information about Echo Company or the Screaming Eagles at all! The writing is just awful stream-of-consciousness story-telling and is hallucinogenic at times. It's bizarrely non-sequitur and jumps from war accounts to childhood memories of getting into scraps in school, with the protagonist always seeming to come out on top of some Goliath no matter the odds or authority figure keeping him down. Training sequences in any military book are extremely boring, I wish authors would just cut them out. I think everyone knows you have to scrub the latrine when you join the military. Some of the stories, including Parker's multiple wounding sequences, are borderline fictional. I doubt Stanton did enough research with any other vets to corroborate these accounts. While this book may give an accurate portrayal of Stan Parker's recollections, it comes across as a bunch of conflated tall-tale war stories while the guys are throwing back beers at a bar. No one doubts the bravery, camaraderie, or sacrifice, but I certainly doubt "the fish was this big!" sometimes. This book only addresses the "who" and maybe a little bit of the "what," but entirely leaves out the "where," "when," "why," and "how." Look elsewhere if you want detailed geo-political or military factual accounts of the Tet Offensive. I firmly believe you can still weave interesting and important eye-witness soldier accounts into a larger narrative and several historical authors have done so successfully (see Stephen Ambrose, David Halberstam, David McCullough, etc.).

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### **Mojofiction says**

The Vietnam War is an interesting thing when it comes to storytelling. For previous wars, particularly WWII, there are no shortages of fascinating stories of bravery and tide-turning battles, how some soldier, or some company, or some event contributed to victory. In Vietnam, the battle plan for American soldiers was simply to survive. The usual war objectives didn't exist. A successful day of survival never seemed to count towards any kind of victory.

How do you make sense of such stories where a larger meaning is so elusive?

"The Odyssey of Echo Company" is non-fiction, drawing on interviews with survivors of the company, along with research trips to the specific locales discussed in the book. Ultimately, the story is told through the eyes of Stanley Parker, a member of Echo Company. In fact, it's less about the whole company and more of a character study about him.

Beginning after high school graduation in Gary, Indiana, in 1966, we meet Stanley, his family and friends. Like many young men, he views joining the military through the lens of history. It's a noble rite; America always wins. He wants to go to Vietnam to be a part of something bigger, to be part of something to make

his forefathers proud. Like many young men (and the American public in general), he doesn't understand the reality of the war.

As you can guess, Stanley gets his wish and makes it to Vietnam. What happens to him is at times terrifying, tragic, and outright bizarre. You can't help but think he shouldn't be alive. You get the feeling he believes it, too. The meat of the story takes place during the Tet Offensive of 1968, which encompasses Parker's time in Vietnam. It was a hell of a time to show up. During his tour, a microcosm of almost everything that could happen to a soldier happened to him. I won't spoil the details, but I think the reality of it will confound you.

In an effort to build the main character, author Doug Stanton takes the reader back and forth in time, illustrating both how Parker's upbringing shaped him into the man who landed in Vietnam, and how his experience there shaped the rest of his life. Sometimes this method of storytelling can disrupt a good narrative. Thankfully, the back-and-forth is never distracting or confusing. It's well thought out, bolstering the events in Vietnam and providing depth to the man who's story we're following.

On the downside, we don't really get enough of a sense of the rest of the company. In terms of Parker's story, it's works, because we're seeing the Vietnam experience through his eyes. But the author refers to several secondary characters often, and even provides epilogues for them at the end. But without the same depth we get with Parker, it lacks some emotional resonance. It's still interesting, though, and does add a layer to the overall long-term impact on the lives of soldiers who served in Vietnam.

The frightening thing is, Parker's time in Vietnam has a beginning, but no middle, and no real end. It's like it exists in a dream state, like where suddenly you find yourself in the middle of the night. You're there, things happen, and then you wake up, with no understanding of what just happened or why. There's no meaning to your actions, only unseen consequences.

That dream-like state is perhaps why the author begins the book with a disclaimer about memory. His interviews with survivors led to conflicting accounts of events. He says he related the version that is most consistent with each account. It might make one think that maybe this isn't all true. But as I read the events of Parker's time in Vietnam, I couldn't help but wonder, who would make this kind of thing up? There's no glory; only strange and terrible things.

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### **Buddy Draper says**

This is the story primarily of a guy who volunteered to join the Army to fight in Vietnam. He fought hard to stay alive and then had to fight to get back into civilian life.

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### **Ruth Woodman York says**

I received this book in a giveaway from Goodreads, with the expectation of an honest review. While I have read several books on the Civil War and World War II, this was my first involving the Vietnam War. Admittedly, this was on a small portion, mostly the Tet Offensive. I was excited to read it, as my husband served with the 101st in the late 90's-early 2000's. This book was well written. While not an enjoyable read per se, it was very good. Reading the accounts of exactly what the conditions were for the men fighting was horrific, yet something I felt I should read. It gave me a better understanding of the trauma these men

suffered, in what they saw, what they were forced to do, and what they endured. This book will be making the rounds to many of my friends who also like to read military history books.

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### **David Schroeder says**

As I've read many books and watched movies around the subject of Vietnam, it is difficult to compare them because of their inequality of experiences. Each person's story is their own and in "The Odyssey of Echo Company", author Doug Stanton features multiple perspectives on their experiences during the Tet Offensive of January-February 1968. I think the best part of the book along with the graphic description of combat was the experience of "coming home." In my head, I thought that the book would be more evenly distributed in stories about different people. Most of it centers around Stan Parker because you get to know him best from his childhood to Vietnam and back home. "Odyssey" ranks among the best I've read on Vietnam. It is another reminder to treat Vietnam veterans the way we have treated Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, by standing up when they enter the room and not turning our backs the way so many American civilians did in the 1960s and 1970s.

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### **Matt says**

Got 100 pages in and had to stop reading. The narrative is so entirely unbelievable that it makes one wonder if Doug Stanton actually believed the memoirs that he used for his sources. I was already questioning the validity of many of the stories (to include Stan calling the president, but instead getting the Secretary of Defense to tell him about his jerk company commander...or a soldier who was too tired to be bothered during a bayonet assault so he went back to sleep), but the below example was when I put the book down.

Example:

On page 89 Stan allegedly becomes annoyed with his helmet during a bumpy ride in the back of a truck. He proceeds to throw his helmet out of the truck, because of how much it annoyed him. Somehow a helicopter who witnessed this, swooped over the road, a crewman leans out and picks up Stan's helmet, they then fly directly to Stan's truck (it was easy to see that Stan was the one who threw it from 300 feet up) and the crewman hands him his helmet back, and the helicopter zooms away. Stan's response? "Well I'll be damned, now I've seen it all."

If these are the types of tales you enjoy reading then this is your book.

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### **Justin says**

Amazing. Highly recommended.

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### **Chris says**

A misnomer in that this is more the story of one man- Stan Parker. It's quite a story especially his combat experience during the Tet Offensive. I found the story of young Stan who lived in 43 states and went to like

23 schools (something like that) just as compelling. Stan was always the good guy standing up against bullies, both students and teachers. Stan was wounded three times during his tour and after reading some of his deeds you wonder why he wasn't awarded the Silver Star or higher. Stanton captures the loyalty and camaraderie of infantrymen as well as the very dark and savage results that lead to PTSD. Stan after a lifetime of serving in the Army as a reservist finally finds closure and redemption by returning to the RVN. A great personal story masterfully told that leaves you wondering how many other men like Stan Parker quietly live among us as our neighbors.

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### **Rolf Kirby says**

I had mixed feelings about this book, though it was good enough to finish.

The story of Stan Parker is a remarkable one, from the roughness of his upbringing, (not due to his family, which was stable, but rather from moving around due to his ironworker father's jobs. Every school seemed full of bullies ready to fight) to the almost hallucinogenic intensity of the fighting in Vietnam.

The terrible fighting and suffering in Vietnam is described intensely, and is the book's strong point. The author waxes philosophically in a way that was appealing.

The book is misnamed, and should be called The Odyssey of Stan Parker, Chapter One. A whole further book should be written about his years in the Special Forces that followed Vietnam and lasted until the current War on Terror. The book follows him the vast majority of the narrative, and only touches a bit on the rest of Recon Platoon much less the rest of Echo Company.

There were parts of the book I found hard to believe, like soldiers sleeping through savage enemy attacks.

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### **Kevin says**

The Odyssey of Echo Company is a history of Stan Parker and his small recon unit of airborne soldiers as they served in Vietnam in the late 60's and during the Tet Offensive. The stories contained are snapshots of the more active moments of his tour. This was one of the first conflicts fought in modern times where there was no front line, one didn't know from which direction the enemy was, and how territory held by both sides was blurred. There has been some discussion on how this dynamic impacted the soldiers as they fought and ultimately returned home. The book also bridges into the time period as Stan returns home. It is difficult to hear how Stan and others were treated upon their return, especially when so many where upstanding people and tried to do what was right.

The stories are captivating, well written, and allow the reader to envision what took place. In books such as this, it almost feels as if you can reach in and touch what is happening. The stories were great, but in my opinion the final pages of the book were the absolute best and brings closure, and a portion of peace to the story. It couldn't have been planned any better had Disney conjured it up.

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### **John Florian says**

Another excellent book by Mr. Stanton that brought tears to my eyes several times. I was born about the time that all this was happening though I have several dear friends who served during this war and all are deeply affected in one way or another. The wounds that aren't visible are often the worst. I'm utterly embarrassed by my fellow Americans who treated these returning veterans (or those of any conflict) with disdain. I cannot

comprehend such ingratitude. One needn't agree with the rationale for any war to show proper respect to those who serve \*our\* country by putting their life on the line. Furthermore, I don't feel that anyone has the right to judge how a war was conducted unless they were present in the combat. I abhor war and all the ugliness that goes with it. I dream of a world that can live peacefully. Until that happens though, the least I can do is to pay respect to those who get involved, regardless of which side they're on. The only ones deserving of hatred are the despots who use their power to perpetuate this malady of the human condition. My heartfelt thanks goes to Mr. Stanton for repeatedly bringing honor to these ultimate civil servants. If my review is overly emotional, well I'm sorry, that's just the state this book left me in.

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### **Chris says**

I listened to the audio book and it's pretty good. I did not realize that Doug Stanton also wrote, "In Harm's Way" the story about the sinking of the U.S.S. Indianapolis (the ship that carried the nuclear components of the first atomic bomb dropped during WWII to Tinian island) and that book is much better than this book.

This is the second book about the Vietnam War I have read and it's pretty good in that it details Stan Parker and his family life and career. I did not like that it jumped from Stan's childhood to Vietnam back to Stan's childhood back to Vietnam back to Stan's adolescence, etc. I wish it was just straight chronology from beginning to end.

There are some funny stories in this book and the book about Stan's father and the teach with the "board of education" is amazing and well worth reading or listening to.

I like that the author meets Stan in Iraq or Afghanistan and travels with him to Viet Nam with a few other survivors of Echo Platoon and they meet Mr. Sin or Xin and the special moment Stan shares with him. It made me wonder if veterans of the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq will return in 40 years or 50 years or 60 years to meet some of their adversaries and share the bond of combat in peaceful times?

This is a good book that I highly recommend and I give only 3 stars because "In Harm's Way" is better.

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### **Robert Enzenauer says**

I bought a hardcover of this great book, at a book signing at Tattered Cover in Denver - a great event with the author and TWO members of Echo Company. I have grown to really appreciate the hard work and personal research that Doug Stanton does since reading his previous book about the "early days" of Afghanistan - HORSE SOLDIERS. As a member of the Colorado Army National Guard, and battalion Surgeon for 5/19th SFG(A), I of course knew "Sergeant Major Parker." Yet, I knew nothing of early service in Vietnam. So, I agree with other reviewers that the real attraction for me is the first-person history that Stanton creates combining pages and pages of after-action reports with hours of personal interviews. It is hard to read sometimes, because of the personal pain and tragedy so eloquently told. This is as good as any previously published Vietnam histories. And for me, as poignant as COLD MOUNTAIN, another "odyssey" story of a returned Civil War veteran. This book is very well written. And it is very hard to put down. Strong work Doug Stanton.

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