



Recondo: LRRPs in the 101st Airborne

Larry Chambers

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Author Larry Chambers vividly describes the guts and courage it took to pass the though volunteer-only training program in Nha Targ to be part of the 5th Special Forces Recondo School, the hair-raising graduation mission to scout out, locate, and out-guerilla the NVA. Here is an unforgettable account that follows Chambers and the Rangers every step of the way--from joining, going through Recondo, and finally leading his own team on white-knuckle missions through the jungle hell of Vietnam.

From the Paperback edition.

Recondo: LRRPs in the 101st Airborne Details

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From Reader Review Recondo: LRRPs in the 101st Airborne for online ebook

John Daleske says

Appreciate the details!

Sgt Chambers provides an excellent detail on the daily life of the Long Range Patrol. Each story riveted me. Well done!

David A. Carey says

I received two books from my brother, this one and "Eyes Behind Enemy Lines" by Gary Linderer. I read the book by Gary first.

I was surprised as I started the second book that the author of this book "Recondo" and the author of the first book I read "Eyes behind the lines" not only knew each other. They were in the same company in Vietnam and overlapped by about 6 months. This made for very interesting reading.

The books are about day to day events in L Company, Rangers, in Vietnam.

I am a Vietnam Vet but have never been interested in reading about the war. These books have changed my mind. I find them very enjoyable.

Steve says

Lately I have been reading about LRRPs in Vietnam. This is my second book on the subject and it was an interesting book. The courage these men display going deep in the jungles of Vietnam close to the Viet Cong is outstanding and I'm sure scary. The author describes the training in the Recondo school to become a LRRP.

Gerry says

The book is a work of literature from a first person account of the Vietnam War. Mr. Chambers provides the reader with a concise; and, yet comprehensive perspective from his eyes – these same "eyes" were behind the enemy lines during the Vietnam War. The historical backdrop within the introduction provides the reader a chance to feel the location of life and innocence before going to Vietnam. Once in Vietnam we read and can literally "see" the tribulations for what they were – many brave men went off to this war; and, yet many died as a result of the poor political choices that the President of the time on down through the chambers of the House and Senate. The clamoring protesters assisted the North Vietnamese in this time frame – General Giap himself had stated this long before his own death.

If the First World War veterans would later be called the "Lost Generation" then the Vietnam War Veterans

could be called the “Expended Generation”. They were underappreciated for many reasons and as they were expected to go to war – they did. Mr. Chambers captures within this book the grimy, dirty life of a LRP. One in which showers maybe at times weeks away from the last. The essence is captured in a manner to where I became mesmerized and felt I was “there” inserting and extracting. My stomach jittered when Mr. Chambers expressed in writing his own internal fears as VC may have been as close as 10 meters away or less and had not noticed the LRP team in hiding

The moments of the book that touched me deeply were not only when close friends had been killed or wounded; but, Mr. Chambers reflects several times upon his Father – it is obvious he has still to this day an admiration and love for his Dad that entwines with his own existence and soul. These reflections allow the reader to momentarily pause before “going out again” from Camp Eagle.

This book should be mandatory reading for any person who considers themselves a student of Military History – regardless if you’ve served in uniform – the “ivory tower” needs to step back from the occasional smugness and get dirty with these heroes. I hope one day that Mr. Chambers will come back to this book and add an “Afterward” in a future edition. I wished this book had gone on for another 200 pages – this is how wrapped I was in this book – I intentionally read this one slow – each word on each page was literature in its own form and manner. The appendices in this book assist the reader to keep it all together – I found myself going to and fro’ the back of the book to the pages I was on – attempting to “see” what Mr. Chambers experienced.

Thank you Vietnam Veterans for your service – I am grateful for what you attempted to do and brave you all were.

Semper Fidelis,
Gerry

Ryan says

Fantastic and intense book that I could not put down! I picked this up at a yard sale for 50 cents and was much better than I could have expected. I am a history buff but I never really learned about our tactics in Vietnam. This book has given me an even bigger respect for what our troops did in Vietnam, especially the special forces. If you’re looking for an intense and gripping true story that is an easy read this book is definitely for you!

Kevin says

Fantastic read. Gripping, intense, well-written and researched. Provides an outstanding account of LRRP tactics, equipment, organization, and operational procedure. One man has told more in a few hundred pages than an LRRP encyclopedia can tell in thousands. Also provides a great account of the little-known yet highly influential MACV Recondo School. Definitely check this one out.

yimei Mullen says

Gratitude from a fellow "baby-boomer" who was traumatized over Nam without stepping one foot in country

Since my 1965 graduation from high school I have been conflicted about choosing the Army National Guard as my alternative service to Vietnam. I assuaged my guilt and feelings of cowardice with a mental commitment to serve Vietnam vets after I had earned my license to practice law. This I did whenever the opportunity presented itself.

Regardless, Chambers words rocketed me to the jungles of this far off country and placed me in the middle of a war zone. I was privileged to vicariously serve in his elite groups of heroes.

His "G I humor" that was so effectively portrayed allowed me, for the moment, to believe that I was indeed an accepted member of his inside band of brothers.

I even learned intimate details that were formally known exclusively to this tight group of warriors.

What a privilege!

Sgt Chambers humble presentation of himself and his contributions has allowed me a realistic perspective in self-forgiveness as to choices made in my past life. Perhaps I owe him counseling fees! SSgt Patrick Mullen

Edward Poole says

I enjoyed reading his version of his time in Vietnam The 1st hand version was well done !!

Lisa says

It's weird how someone can write a book like this. He experiences the full range of human emotion over the course of one year and is able, years later, to vividly recall each different phase and present it in language and with stories that make it all come alive for the reader. It's basically four sections. The first two chapters are about the guy getting drafted, going through basic, choosing airborne, going over to nam, being all wide eyed and fascinated by the helicopters and then choosing to join the Long Range Patrol (LRP) team. In the next section he is out on patrols, has some scary moments, makes some really good friends and then loses some of them to an ambush and a bunch of others go home. In the next section he goes to Recondo school has other adventures such as capturing an NVA officer and eventually goes back to his unit. In the final section he is sort of winding down, he gets struck by lightning while out on a patrol, has some odd assignments, gets over his fear of helicopters, feels like all his friends are gone and there's really no one he can relate to, eventually is sent home and feels like a complete alien. Very weird, sad, anti-climactic ending...

People always say that veterans...especially Vietnam Veterans... are all bottled up and don't want to talk about it, but usually they talk to me about it...at least a little. This guy says at the end of the book: "It didn't matter because nobody seemed to have any interest in where I'd been or what I'd been doing. I really wanted someone to ask. I wanted to tell someone about what it was like trying to survive in torrential rain and mud and thick steamy jungle, and the danger I'd faced. I wanted to recount details about the combat I was in, complete with the numbers of kills and a listing of awards."

I'm glad he was able to write this book and tell this story and I'm glad so many soldiers have benefitted from his wisdom over the years.

Fred says

Pretty good book and worth reading although not one that I'll save and add to the collection or anything. If you're interested in Scouts, Recon, or the Vietnam War then this is probably right up your alley. I have to admit that before reading this I wasn't really familiar with the old Recondo school that was run and taught in Vietnam although I'd come across a few references to it in other reading. The writer referred to it as "Graduate School for LRRPs." I almost wish that we still ran some schools that way but having a school taught in country where the final week is a real world mission in which people are sometimes known to die would probably not go over very well with the American people or the press in today's world.

Jason says

Continuing my current "military library" reading streak, we have "Recondo" by Larry Chambers. This is a book I've owned for years and have read several times. Reading it from beginning to end again was enlightening though; you pick up on things you missed before, things you weren't old enough or mature enough to realize, etc.

SUMMARY

Larry Chambers recounts his time in Vietnam from late 1968 – 1969, during which he served with F Company, 58th Infantry (later changed to L Company 75th Infantry (Ranger)). These men were members of Long Range Patrols (LRPs), and would infiltrate enemy territory in small, six-man teams to gather intelligence, ambush enemy forces, and coordinate artillery and air strikes for days at a time. Chambers spends a fair amount of the book describing the three weeks he spent at MACV Recondo School at Nha Trang.

OVERALL: 3.4 out of 5

I read this book in two days, despite having read it a few times before. It's good, it's fast, and it's fun (despite involving the generally unpleasant subject matter of war).

I believe that this is because Larry Chambers is himself a fun, interesting guy. Everyone else describes him that way, and even in the photographs where all the other LRPs/Rangers are snarling and showing their war-face, Larry is frequently grinning (young Larry Chambers kind of looks like young Jean-Claude Van Damme, if you ask me).

His writing voice comes across as very personable, and he's easy to relate to. Whereas Gary Linderer has a fiancé waiting for him and a good Midwest (Missouri) background, Chambers spends his time daydreaming about girls, cars, and low-cut Converse shoes. It's impossible for me not to agree with Gary Linderer: Chambers seems to go through some of the ugliest stuff and come out smelling like roses.

This is an excellent book; its shortcomings are due to the short length. I would recommend it to anyone, though I think it is best read when combined with Gary Linderer's "Eyes of the Eagle" and "Eyes Behind the Lines" and John Burford's "LRRP Team Leader". (The "Six Silent Men" series also sheds more light on the

unit, the missions, the personalities, and the history). Chambers has his own voice, his own stories, and his own humor that makes his contribution to the unit's history unique and enjoyable.

RATINGS BY CATEGORY

CHARACTERS: 3 out of 5

Capturing the core of a real person in nonfiction is difficult; reality is more subtle than the exaggerated characters found in fiction. Chambers does an okay job, though he doesn't spend a lot of time describing anyone in detail. There are a few introductions when he first meets people, but others are just introduced as people the author had known for a few weeks or few months. They disappear as quickly without much explanation.

This is a difficult category to rate for anyone who has read books by other people in the author's unit (Gary Linderer's "Eyes of the Eagle" and "Eyes Behind the Lines", "LRRP Team Leader" by John Burford, "Six Silent Men: Books 1-3" by Reynel Martinez, Kenn Miller, and Gary Linderer), because the reader develops clear ideas about the soldiers of F Company (despite differences in authors and their friendships, they're all pretty consistent when describing people).

I don't think the author's goal was to really dig into the men he was around though; he recounts his time in Vietnam, and the major players are described well.

PACE: 4 out of 5

Chambers's book is fast; I wish it was longer and as detailed as Gary Linderer's nearly day-for-day recounting. This is mostly the "highlights" of the author's time in Vietnam; he goes from a "cherry" new guy to an experienced Ranger in about three or four chapters. The action is fast and never feels exaggerated or glamorous.

STORY: 4 out of 5

I don't think it's possible for someone engaged in the type of missions of the LRRP/LRP/Rangers were involved in could have a boring story. Chambers does a good job describing his surroundings, the events, his thoughts, and his motivations. He doesn't shy away from some of the embarrassing stuff (though he doesn't mention the ammo bunker Gary Linderer claims he accidentally blew up); his own mistakes and fears are on display.

Chambers doesn't have any of the "desperate battle" stories of his own that some of the other authors from his unit can describe. Most readers would probably agree with Linderer that Chambers had a degree of luck that other men just didn't have; he was never shot or spent time in a convalescence hospital (at least, not that he mentions), and though he was present during some bad fights, he was usually on another mission far away. He has his challenges, but his lack of "really bad" experiences (in addition) makes his book more fun... though that doesn't mean he didn't suffer and lose his fair share of friends either.

DIALOGUE: 3 out of 5

The dialogue is realistic and feels authentic, and not as profanity-laden as the books of some of Chambers's contemporaries. There's still plenty of adult language though (I don't want to be accused of misinformed those readers with pink ears).

STYLE/TECHNICAL: 3 out of 5

The writing is generally clear and easy to understand, but there were some parts that don't link up. A few passages appeared to be contradictory, while there were two or three paragraphs (total in the entire book) that felt like first drafts (repetitive words, the same idea expressed twice in as many sentences, etc.) There's nothing here to stop a reader from understanding, enjoying, and finishing the book though.

John Podlaski says

"Recondo" is a captivating and engaging story about an infantry soldier who goes to Vietnam and volunteers for the LRRPs in the 101st Airborne and later gets accepted into the prestigious Recondo training program. The training is rigorous, demanding, and sometime dangerous. The author doesn't go into much detail about the training modules but paints an overview for readers to get a feel for what it was like. The 3rd week (final week) entailed small teams to go into the Ashau Valley to gather intelligence and to locate an NVA Regimental headquarters. A program cadre member accompanies each team - failure for individuals to demonstrate skills from their first two weeks of training will result in expulsion from the class.

Chambers and his team climb mountains and near the end of the week find themselves in a situation that was almost unbelievable; this hill was later immortalized as Hamburger Hill by the 101st grunts after their 10-day battle to take the mountaintop. As a former 101st grunt myself, I could relate to much of what the author wrote. I was familiar with the mentioned firebases and also patrolled through the Ashau Valley. We also learned that holding blasting caps during a thunder storm could be hazardous to our health, and especially, if they were already installed in grenades, claymore mines, C4 or carried loose in somebody's pocket - my unit experienced that same thing that Chambers LRRPs did during a storm, but without the same consequences. I also enjoyed the author's wit and sense of humor; many of the comments he made during the story made me laugh out loud.

"Recondo" flowed nicely and kept my interest from beginning to end. It would have been an added bonus if the author might have touched upon his R&R to Australia...showing what these soldiers experienced and why the trip was so important to them. I thoroughly enjoyed this story and recommend it to anyone interested in learning more about these small LRRP teams - their missions and training to survive. Great job, Mr. Chambers. Thank you for your service and sacrifice. Welcome home, bro!

John Bishop says

Great Read

This is a well written account of what it was like to be a soldier in Vietnam. His first hand style describes it well and you feel you are there.

Larry says

I am the author. I wrote that years ago. I'm here in Cambodia writing about my trip to vietnam. My trip back to Vietnam did more to heal my own PTSD than a100 therapists could have even done because I was able to

see the Vietnamese as real people, not as targets, gooks, sloops, or someone to fear. I had a moment of insightful on the winding mountain road to the A Shau Valley three hours West of Hue city; the battlefield where my 101st Division fought during my tour. We followed a body retrieval truck for NVA missing soldiers. A grim reminder of our shared past and the shared human need to bring home the missing and dead. Honestly I never thought about the enemy as having families that would still search for their dead forty years later, like have. That was the healthiest journey that I have ever experienced in my life because I saw things for the way they really were, not the way I imagined them to be. I found that almost everything I once believed about present day vietnam wasn't true.

Most of what we had been told about the NVA soldiers that were fought against were mostly a collection of myths, legends, fables, and basic bullshit. The NVA soldiers didn't have some kind of unique ability to live in that harsh jungle environment without the same problems we had. The truth is they suffered like we did in that hot unforgiving Asian jungle and many died before they ever got to the battlefields—and not from B-52 air strikes either; mostly from the same list of deadly things that happened to anyone trying to march on foot a thousand miles through some hot insect-infested jungle.

Vietnam today is the model of prosperity, ten years of double digit economic growth, practically no poverty, and a literacy rate so high that every Asian country should feel embarrassed about. I was curious as to what happened to Vietnam but felt a little disappointed when I didn't find at least part of the country in rubble. Maybe it's just me but growing up believing the best thing that could have ever happen to Japan and Germany was losing World War Two to America. Because afterwards we invested billions to help them rebuild all while we provided military protection. After the war both countries were restricted to a small percentage that they could spend on their military, those saving were reinvested into their economies giving them both a competitive advantage. But that didn't happen that way for Vietnam. America left and never looked back, and for most of the last forty years pretended as if Vietnam didn't exist in the western world. So Vietnam whatever Vietnam did they did on their own and without any help from America. Maybe it's Karma or maybe it's their hybrid model of a centrally controlled government over a free-market economy, but for whatever reason they've been doing something right.

I share in the pain people on both sides share who lost family but there is a huge gap in history has been missing and I'm committed to changing that. During my tour I witness incredible acts of bravery, heroism and camaraderie.

Larry Chambers the author

Hans S. says

Good book about the LRRP's of the Vietnam war. Very readable and gripping storyline. Could have been longer, I'm sure there was much left out of the book.
