



Up Country

Nelson DeMille

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The last thing Paul Brenner wanted to do was return to work for the Army's Criminal Investigative Division, an organization that thanked him for his many years of dedicated service by forcing him into early retirement. But when his former boss calls in a career's worth of favors, Paul finds himself investigating a murder that took place back in Vietnam thirty years before. Now, returning to a time and place that still haunts him, Paul is swept up in the battle of his life as he struggles to find justice.

Up Country Details

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Author : Nelson DeMille

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Cyn says

This book was probably one of the most compelling representations of Vietnam I've ever been exposed to: the war, reflections on the war, and present-day - at least, when the main story takes place, in '97.

What I mean by that is that I developed a deeper understanding of the people, their tenacity, and various things that occurred during the war. I haven't changed my opinion that the Communist North should have been crushed like a bug (we could have done it, we just lacked the will - and the South Vietnamese citizens paid the price when we left).

DeMille's writing really put me in the situation and I felt like I was there, experiencing what was happening, right along with Paul Brennar. This was probably one of his deepest books yet - and that's saying a lot since I adore his other character so much more (John Corey).

The reason I took off a star was because of the length. I felt like it took the same amount of time to listen to it as the length of time in which the story takes place (two weeks). It really didn't take me **that** long, of course, but the writing style, the depth of description, and the plot were so involved that when it was over and done with I felt about as wiped out as Brennar's character did when the story came to a close.

On the flip side, if everything hadn't been as well developed as it was, I wouldn't have had such a rich listening experience. Once again, Scott Brick's narration was excellent.

Marcus says

Initially, this book can give the impression of being standard De Mille fare. Jack Brenner, by now retired military police investigator introduced to us in "General's Daughter", is being sent to Vietnam to investigate vague news about a murder committed in the middle of the Tet offensive 1968.

For those that know what kind of books De Mille usually writes, it would be easy to expect a story with twists and turns in the plot, with lots of action and one or two femme fatales in distress. And sure enough, those elements can be found in "Up Country", but the thriller element moves very quickly to the backseat in favor of completely different topic. You see, Jack Brenner is a Vietnam War veteran and his less than willing return to this country forces him to deal with all the issues connected with his personal participation in that war and how it affected the rest of his life. His search for the truth takes him through the entire length of Vietnam and as he visits his old battlefields and meets some of the people he once fought with or against, he is forced to deal with some very dark personal demons.

Knowing that the author is himself a Vietnam war combat veteran and that he visited Vietnam in the late nineties gives a lot of insight into what this book is about and perhaps why it was written at all. It is not too farfetched to assume that "Up Country" is to large degree auto-biographical and a way for DeMille to deal with some very real personal issues. Parts of the book certainly did sound very personal and it was a touching and fascinating read for me.

However, this book has one major flaw and it is the fact that it is presented as a thriller. Like I said earlier,

there is a thriller element in "Up Country", but its primary task is to take Brenner from point A to point B and allow him to deal with his war experiences. Compared with DeMille's previous books, this one has a miniscule amount of action and anyone who will pick up "Up Country" in belief that it's another "Charm School" or "Lion's Game", will be very sorely disappointed. I liked "Up Country" a lot, but it's misrepresented and definitely not for De Mille's usual audience.

Alice says

Good and bad, really. It was a great vehicle for a tour of Vietnam, past and present, and DeMille manages for the most part to keep up the pace over 650 pages - though an editor could have cut out a good quarter, in my opinion.

On the down side, he layers cliché upon cliché, and wrongly assumes that acknowledging the clichés by having the main character occasionally say things like "I felt like James Bond!" negated their predictability.

I was frustrated to once again encounter a strong, independent, flawed, and interesting female character who meets a guy and becomes 'undone' instantly, becoming a tag-along puppy dog willing to go wherever he does. But perhaps that scenario appeals to men?

A good albeit fluffy read, made weightier by the historical and geographical setting, and the knowledge that DeMille was drawing from experience in writing about Vietnam past and present.

Richard Small says

Just finished reading Up Country by Nelson Demille for at least the third time. Enjoyed it just as much as the first time I read it. If I can read a book three times and still feel it is as fresh and interesting as the first time I read it, then I believe the book deserves 5 stars.

If you are interested in gaining some insight into the Vietnam War, then this book will satisfy that desire. Demille, an officer who survived two deployments to Vietnam, offers clear and concise information about what this country is like as he travels from Saigon to Hanoi, with a stop in Dien Bien Phu along the way, where the French lost the war in 1954.

Written in the first tense, main protagonist Paul Brenner, a retired Criminal Investigative Division officer for the U. S. army, is lured into an assignment where he is pulled out of retirement to investigate a long-standing murder during the TET offensive of 1968. His exploits against the Vietnamese secret police, who suspect he is doing more than being a tourist, haunt him from the South to the North of the country. He does complete his mission, and manages to escape from the clutches of the secret police and his own government, who is perturbed about the fact that he now knows "too much" and must be eliminated.

The story is fast-paced and filled with action and suspense, as only Demille can write.

If you haven't read this book, I would highly recommend it. If you have, consider reading it again.

Dryfly says

Not quite a terrible book but certainly not very good. I'm not even sure why I bothered to finish it, other than the fact that I read it while on vacation in Vietnam.

To begin with, hardly anything happened in the first 300 pages, other than Brenner's girlfriend smoking a lot. Why did he have to describe her everytime she lit up? At least he didn't bother us with descriptions of her trips to bathroom.

Secondly, there seemed to be some big gaps in logic. I'm still not sure why they hired the private car when they could have safely taken the bus and it was all okay for the itinerary.

Most importantly I grew tired of the us vs them attitude. I guess this is due to the book being set during a very short period in time, the mid 90's. Prior to this, travel was restricted and difficult. But Vietnam has really opened up and embraced a lot of capitalism ideals (as alluded to in the novel). I don't know if there was a lot of anti-Americanism in the 90's, but on the surface there doesn't appear to be any now.

Finally, I don't understand why Brenner was needed for the mission. The lady did everything: translations, communications, transportation, etc. Generally speaking I would simply say that the book was silly.

Freda Malone says

Nelson DeMille is a brilliant storyteller. Though this brick of a book was over 700 pages, I couldn't put it down, for the sheer suspense of it all. I've met Vietnam Veterans and heard some stories when I was a teen. It was a horrible war, senseless to a lot of Americans and with age comes knowledge and wisdom. The shocking knowledge that anyone is capable of 'madness' follows the wisdom to understand the emotional stress of that type of war. DeMille has described his views and personal experiences nicely in this novel. However, I've heard factual stories that would give you nightmares for months, and these were closer to 'home'. I read somewhere that John Travolta might be doing this book as a film but that was many years ago. A production company still has the film rights but not sure what happened there. The first Paul Brenner book, *The General's Daughter*, was a great movie.

Needless to say, I'll be reading more of DeMille, but not for a while, as his novels seem to become longer and longer. One a year is good enough for me.

Tom Kjos says

There was a story about novelist and Vietnam veteran Nelson DeMille in a recent issue of *American Legion* magazine. I was struck by the similarity between his Vietnam tour and my first one: to the 1st Cavalry Division in November 1967, battles in Bong Son, then north to Quang Tri for Tet, the relief of Khe Sanh, the A Shau Valley, finally back to "the world" a year later. A fraternity brother gave me the paperback just a week ago. Nelson DeMille seemed familiar, even though I'd not read any of his books. Not personal, it's just that crime novels have never attracted me.

I flew through the 700 pages (hardbound) in less than a week. The repartee of the characters was

entertaining; the pace of the story was just enough to hold my interest. One story? Not really. This novel is at least three things between two covers. It's a murder mystery, and regardless of Mr. DeMille's reputation, that story is pretty thin. It's a romance, the principal characters engaging in a barbed repartee between shared beds, showers, and (of all things) a Nha Trang, Vietnam nude beach. DeMille writes the comedy of the battle of the sexes – in this instance CIA and Army CID – with a deft touch, enough to elicit frequent smiles and an occasional chuckle from this reader.

But what it is mostly is a memoir of combat in Vietnam, told as fiction, with some hyperbole (a machete-entrenching tool mano-a-mano duel with the enemy? Please) but with the edgy undercurrent of a real soldier's narrative. A soldier returning thirty years on to the killing fields where he lost his youth. That young soldier was Lieutenant DeMille, leading a platoon in D Company, 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry, and that soldier was me, with my own platoon in D Company 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry. Both in the 1st Brigade, both "saw the elephant" in Bong Son, then on to Quang Tri, Khe Sanh, and A Shau. The book's protagonist, Paul Brenner, the investigator in "The General's Daughter" is on the ultimate "cold case," a murder in a combat zone. That's the thin part, except that Mr. Brenner takes a tour of Vietnam, returning to those fields with Susan Weber, the object both of his affection (eventually), and his suspicion (immediately). She isn't the murderer, of course – that's never in play – but she may not be an ally, either. A literal case of "sleeping with the enemy."

DeMille (through Brenner) takes Susan on a tour, and for a veteran, his word picture of those places at that far away time, and his description of those places as they were in 1997, when he made his own trip back, is more than worth the read.

DeMille. There was a DeMille once, I thought. The photograph inside the back cover was familiar, recalled in a younger version. I pulled out a blue construction paper program, saved for nearly a half century. The front, "Graduation Ceremony, Infantry Officer Candidate Class Number 23-67." On the back, the poem, "I am the Infantry." Inside, my name; Chuck Mohr, who became a friend in a later assignment; Robert Marasco, who became famous to some, infamous to others; and there, too "Nelson R. DeMille." I knew it.

He writes that Paul Brenner first "saw the elephant" in Bong Son, but makes no mention of my current project, "The Battle of Tam Quan," fought over two weeks in December 1967. That sent me scrambling to my research, a unit-by-unit recap of maneuver and contact. For 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry, no D Company. I'll find them, I'm sure on firebase defense duty, and none will regret that luck of the draw.

Nancy says

Sometimes, Nelson DeMille seems to be writing on auto-pilot. The sentence " He/she/they didn't reply," for example, is one of DeMille's narrative tics. There are other irritating DeMille-isms in this (very long) book: His predilection for young, attractive female heroines who hook up with older men, for example. Smartass dialogue that wears thin. The lack of emotion, in favor of action. Short, action-verb sentences, and a lack of introspection.

But. This was a very good book, one that kept me turning pages, and thinking about the absolute horror of serving in combat, especially in VietNam, the meaningless jungle war that waited for many of my high school classmates, back in the 1960s. The plot was interesting, and kept cooking along, as bits of information were released or confirmed. And (apparently in contrast to other readers) I found the ending fascinating--a genuine quandary, terrible and difficult moral issues: Is there a limit on criminal offenses committed during a

stupid and immoral war? If that war was 30 years ago? What should we expect from a country where we fought, killing off a generation of young men and devastating the country's economy for another generation? How would we expect to be treated there, in a place with residual bitterness and anger?

I think it's one of DeMille's better novels, because you can feel his own experience bubbling up in the story. Four stars.

Jill says

I like Paul Brenner, but I prefer John Corey by far (from Plum Island, & The Lion's Game & Night Fall) due to the fact Paul Brenner can't seem to get past 3 paragraphs without having a 2 full-page Vietnam war flashback! Not to trivialize the war or whatever, but particularly the trip up to Quang Tri flashback section goes on way long to hold your interest. And yes, there's no less than 854 mentions of "Susan lighting up another cigarette again" references. We get it already! She's a smoker!

Having finished this book, I would say I agree from the other reviewers who inevitably asked the question "why the heck would Paul Brenner get sent to do a job that clearly Susan could do herself?" I also am left questioning the legitimacy of Susan's "undying love" for Paul Brenner as it seems just a little severe and til-death-do-us-part to have really truly developed over just a short 2 weeks.

Mike says

The descriptions of the war, the land, and the people, as well as ties to actual history that I'd never learned about before (thanks to public school teachers who repeatedly spent too much time on the first two wars in American history and never got past 1945) saved this from being a boring book. The overall idea is interesting, but lacking for a thriller. Sure they get chased around and all that, but there could have been so many easier ways of accomplishing the end goal.

On top of that, the main characters are lacking. Susan is proven to be untrustworthy many times, yet Paul can't seem to let her go, even when he clearly knows better. Susan doesn't seem to really need Paul in order to do her job. So why do they stay together? I don't follow how Susan and Paul could have developed any sense of a lasting relationship from their experiences together, nor was the dialogue very convincing of such a strong lasting bond. While Paul Brenner shares many qualities with John Corey, likeability doesn't seem to be one of them. I didn't care for him too much in General's Daughter either.

Then there is the ending: Very disappointing. Of course we find out who did it, but there is no satisfaction in it. All I could think at the end is, "They risked their lives for THIS!?! They killed Vietnamese soldiers for THIS!?! What a waste!"

Overall, it's barely ok.

Maria says

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Fred Forbes says

Thank goodness, thinks I, for a high draft number. I had a marriage/family exemption then lost it when I divorced. Received a student deferment but lost it upon graduation, despite the fact that I was married again and had two kids instead of one. Fortunately, the lottery number I got was high in 1970 and they were winding the Vietnam war down and I never served. Many of my friends did, however, some came back whole, some did not. Some did not return alive. My gratitude to all of them, friends or not. But I have read a few novels dedicated to 'Nam, as well as a significant number of non-fiction titles.

If this were a simple tale of moving from A to B, the book would be half the length it is. But, with the main protagonist returning to the places he "saw the elephant" (experienced combat) the book gets much more involved. Been there and want to re-live it? This is your book. Been there and want to go back? This is your book. Never been there but wonder what it was like and what it took to survive? This is your book. I was especially taken by the psychological insight into war, and what one goes through in these life and death circumstances. This is a powerful and moving book of insight and while the plot is bit simplistic at times, it is twisty and curvy enough to hold your interest and keep you guessing. Well done.

This was thrust upon me by a friend who served there with the words, "I need it back by next week to return it to the fellow who lent it to me. One of the best I have read." Well, it is a 700 pager so the other books I was reading went to the side and I hoped it would hold my interest long enough for me to finish by the deadline. It did. I enjoyed it enough to order a copy of the paperback (850 pages) for a friend whose stories of his service were quite similar.

Rick Silva says

At one point in the story, retired US army detective Paul Brenner's contact in Vietnam says to him, "To your generation, Vietnam is a war. To mine it's a country."

That summed up a lot of how I felt reading Up Country as a US expat living and working in Vietnam.

The story involves an extreme cold-case: The murder of an American soldier during the Vietnam War by one of his fellow officers. The only witness is a former North Vietnamese soldier, who may not even still be alive.

Paul Brenner served two tours of duty during the war, and now he is heading back to Vietnam as a cop playing in a game of spies, dealing with a vindictive Vietnamese secret police inspector while caught up in layers of lies and deception by the people who sent him on his mission.

I definitely had mixed feelings about this book. First of all, I was pleased with the homework that Mr. DeMille had put into the setting. Vietnam of 1997, as depicted in the story, held fascinating comparisons to the Vietnam of 2015 that I am experiencing, and just for the level of detail, this was a worthwhile read.

It was also fun to see references to locations mentioned in other works set in Saigon. The Rex Hotel, which I frequently pass in my wanderings around the city, featured in this book as well as in Graham Greene's The

Quiet American. There is a sense of connection that DeMille has tapped into, and he definitely does a nice job of capturing the feel of the city and the country.

The character of Paul Brenner is a cynical Boston smartass, macho enough to handle himself in some harrowing situations, but with enough self-awareness to know that he is no James Bond, as much as he jokes about it. Brenner gets some great one-liners, and his perspective is generally pretty entertaining.

The macho element of his character gives way to casual sexism quite a bit, which is completely in-character, but disappointing in how predictable it is. He also tends to paint the Vietnamese people with a rather broad brush, and that problem extends further into the structure of the story.

The most developed characters in the story are generally Western. Vietnamese characters tend to be bit players or background decoration, and the major exception to this is a character who is essentially the villain (antagonist might be a better term, but he is bestowed with all of the classic heelish traits one would expect for a character in his role).

The story is mostly travel and intrigue with some romance, but when the action heats up it is quite good, including one of the better car chase scenes I have seen in print format.

I was a bit disappointed with the ending, both in terms of it being somewhat inconclusive (this was intentional, but it didn't completely work for me), and in terms of some of the major plot-reveals being predictable.

Despite the book's flaws, it was a pretty gripping read. It definitely plays more to the audience that thinks of Vietnam as a war, but DeMille still managed to include some good accounts of the country that Vietnam was in 1997 with some good insights into the direction the country was moving in to get to my own present-day experiences.

Mohamed says

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Julie Whelan says

This is a page turner in the "James Bond" style starring a Vietnam veteran, Tom Brenner, now a retired investigator for the Army's Criminal Investigation Unit. Brenner is persuaded to return to Vietnam to help solve a murder that occurred decades earlier during the Tet Offensive. He meets and partners with a young American woman, Susan Weber, who appears to be a business executive for an American company with investments in Vietnam. Pursing them from Brenner's arrival in Ho Chi Minh city (Saigon) onward, is Colonel Mane of the Vietnamese Internal Security Agency.

The duo travels to the most isolated, mountainous northern border of Vietnam in search of the only witness to the murder under investigation.

The style is brisk and always in scene and I often found myself reading way past my bedtime. However, there is more here than the usual best seller, formulaic tale of espionage. Recollections of the Vietnam war haunt these pages and are related from the perspectives of American, South Vietnamese and North Vietnamese veterans. This tapestry of suffering, and violence is always a backdrop to the characters' narrow escapes and nail biting adventures. Names resonate with readers like me who were young at the time and keenly aware of that conflict: Da Nang, Camron Bay, Hue, Quen Tre, Hanoi, trigger memories, emotions and images from that war. While you won't find the depth of books like, The Things They Carried, it is well worth the read.

Eric_W says

One of my favorite characters, Paul Brenner, is back from one of my favorite authors. Having pissed off the brass in his last case, see The General's Daughter, Paul has been forcibly retired having pissed off a lot of brass His former boss, Colonel Helden, calls him up for a meeting at the Wall where he presents a most interesting proposal. They have a letter from a witness who says he say an army captain shot an army lieutenant in cold blood during the Tet offensive in Vietnam. The army wants the killer identified and punished. So Brenner, in return for a bigger pension and reinstatement, must solve a case that has no body, no apparent motive, no accused, no witnesses except for the letter, a witness who may have died years before, a witness who happens to have been NVA, a killer who may even be dead; a murder that may not even be a murder and which occurred during the midst of a heated battle over thirties years before. Not to mention that the dead man's name is inscribed on the Wall and his relatives and friends all assume he was

killed in battle.

Things are never what they seem, and Brenner learns from his FBI briefing just as he is about to embark on the trip to Vietnam to find the NVA witness, assuming he is still alive, that there are many things the army CID and FBI would rather he not know, but he suspects they want him to locate the man so they can kill him. Just his cup of tea.

Once in Vietnam, Paul meets Susan. Boy meets girl, they fall in love, etc., except that Paul suspects that Susan, who ostensibly works for the Bank of America on trade issues, might also have a connection to the CIA. She and he travel together, her knowledge of Vietnam proving to be invaluable and Paul begins to put some of the pieces together.

Many of the DeMille books I have read exist on several levels. One suspects that this book is a much a personal meditation on the war that DeMille served in as an infantry lieutenant. Some of the stories that Paul recounts to Susan are just too real. I think it's one of the best books I've read about our nation's coming to terms with our Vietnam experience

Nick says

Not bad but could have been a lot better. Usual DeMille quality in atmosphere and dialogue. But--it takes a long time for anything to happen. Basically the first third of the book could have been cut drastically.

Another problem I had was with the obnoxiousness of the main character. I realize that Brenner showed up in a previous book, which I have not read, but he is also very similar to the main character in the Gold Coast and Plum Island. That is, the typical DeMille main character is a tough guy who is funny, sarcastic, and annoying but girls like him anyway. Still, I enjoyed reading this for the insight into Vietnam both 40 years ago and more recently.

Andrew Smith says

As a non-American, my knowledge of the Vietnam war was virtually nil. This book changed that significantly: it's not a chronological account of the battles but, as the story unfolds, it fulfills that role. It's set long after the war ended and features a veteran re-treading his steps as he carries out a mission on behalf of the military police. Anyone who has read *The General's Daughter* will recognise the lead character, Paul, Brenner.

The inspiration for the story was a post war visit made to Vietnam by the author and some of his friends - all Vietnam veterans. Brenner was chosen as the vehicle for this tale as he is an established character who had completed two tours to the country, during the war. It's a long book (over 850 pages) but, for me, it flowed so easily it belied its length. Brenner (like many of DeMille's characters) is a wise cracking smart ass and I laughed a lot reading this book. But there's a lot more than that here and I felt I learnt a lot and gained a reasonable perspective on what happened through those dark times and why. I also thoroughly enjoyed the engrossing tale. Great read.

Jerry B says

A "5" for us boomers: truth, suspense, and sexual tension...

Nobody but a Vietnam War (in country) veteran could have written this book. Indeed, Nelson DeMille was an Army First Louie in 1968, a very troubled time for our country and the world. According to his web site, he returned for a nostalgic tour of Vietnam just a few years ago, and from that trip was hatched this book. Part travelogue, part intimate retrospective, it will probably hit home far harder for those of us over 50 than for those who really don't know what Vietnam was or wasn't about. Even so, the horrors of war depicted are almost too lucid -- in fact, I felt I was almost watching a movie throughout much of the proceedings; and to no little surprise came the author's revelation in his afterward that a screen version is indeed in the making.

There is a gripping plot to go with the history lesson. Reprised from DeMille's novel "General's Daughter" (also a movie) is criminal investigator (now retired) Paul Brenner, who is a twice survivor of tours in Nam. He is persuaded to go back to investigate the 30-year-old alleged murder of a US Army Lieutenant by a US Army Captain. There is more unsaid about the mission and the probable outcome than is revealed, and we get wiser with each succeeding 100 pages (of 700) as to the real motivations and story behind the mission. Meanwhile, our hero meets a sexy "helper", businesswoman Susan Weber, who (eventually) Paul beds during the night while worrying during the day that her orders are to kill him. This relationship adds a great deal of tension to an already excellent premise. The ending, of both the plot per se, and the boy/girl sub-plot are not totally resolved, which will disappoint some readers who like things all wrapped up. What a jump point for a sequel though!

I found myself picking up this book to notch a chapter or two at other than my normal reading times, so it had my attention throughout. And while I personally never got further than Hawaii during the war, one could not help recalling much of one's own experiences, politics, and feelings -- then and now. To the extent much of the material almost has to be autobiographical, I applaud the author's sincerity and courage for telling it like it was and like he recalls. It was not obvious he did a thing to spin the mutual devastation to make things nice. And his descriptions of some of modern day Vietnam were truly frightening.

Possibly a little sharper editing (we could probably have stood a couple of hundred pages less) would be all to move this book, Demille's 12th novel, to the top of the scale. Nonetheless, a very fine book.

Sheila says

I am fan of DeMille. Only a Vietnam veteran can write a good story. It is still a dark coud on American history lost so many good men to senseless war. Could not give 5 stars due to length of the novel. DeMille definately could have done a better and shorter narrative.
