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When he led his troops into battle at Ia Drang, Hal Moore was the first man off the lead Huey. Throughout the fighting, and to this day, he was (and is) "The Old Man" to his men.

Moore had a mission: Find the enemy and go after him. But "the enemy" also had a mission: Draw the Americans into battle, learn how they fight, and figure out how to kill them.

Both sides had the same killing objective because America, with the Ia Drang battles, was truly at war with North Vietnam.

Many Americans hated that war. Most did not understand it. Why fight for a country on the other side of the world? Why help a government so corrupt its own Buddhist priests burned themselves in protest?

But soldiers don't analyze the politics of war. They don't question the mission. Soldiers do what they're told.

Unfortunately, the country-at-large directed hatred of the war toward the men who fought it. As Hal Moore and Joe Galloway put it in *We Were Soldiers Once...and Young*:

Many of our countrymen came to hate the war we fought. Those who hated it the most - the professionally sensitive - were not, in the end, sensitive enough to differentiate between the war and the soldiers who had been ordered to fight it. They hated us as well, and we went to ground in the cross fire, as we had learned in the jungles. ("Prologue," page xx)

If the "professionally sensitive" had talked with soldiers who fought at Ia Drang, what would they have learned?

- Maybe enough to help them realize young Americans, who wished to live, were dying horrible deaths.
- Maybe enough to understand that even veterans of World War II and Korea could not believe the savagery of Ia Drang.

The enemy was all over, at least a couple of hundred of them walking around for three or four minutes; it seemed like three or four hours. They were shooting and machine-gunning our wounded and laughing and giggling.

*I knew they'd kill me if they saw I was alive. When they got near, I played dead. I kept my eyes open and stared at a small tree. I knew that dead men have their eyes open. (Arthur Viera, Jr. quoted in *We Were Soldiers*, at page 7.)*

Who were the soldiers of Ia Drang? Who were the 234 dead (listed on Panel 3 East of the Wall) whose memory Hal Moore and Joe Galloway honored with their book?

We were the children of the 1950s and John F. Kennedy's young stalwarts of the early 1960s. He told the world that Americans would "pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship" in the defense of freedom. We were the down payment on that costly contract, but the man who signed it was not there when we fulfilled his promise.

*John F. Kennedy waited for us on a hill in Arlington National Cemetery, and in time we came by the thousands to fill those slopes with our white marble markers and to ask on the murmur of the wind if that was truly the future he had envisioned for us. (*We Were Soldiers*, "Prologue," xix.)*

Undoubtedly not, for what commander-in-chief would envision such a war? Not even Lyndon Johnson, whose administration escalated hostilities.

And what country would envision a future where Vietnam veterans, who fought and died in that distant land, would become the focus of such war-hatred upon their return?

As General Moore said, after he reviewed this story for accuracy:

Tell Americans to hate war but support their soldiers.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

We are exceedingly grateful to the Ia Drang survivors who reviewed and approved this story. Most especially, we thank General Hal Moore for his generous help and assistance.

DEATH OF JULIA (JULIE) MOORE: Greg Moore, the General's son, advised us that his mother, Julia, "died peacefully today [April 18, 2004] at 12:45 (CST). All of us were together and loved her very closely all day long. As always, she was sweet and wonderful. She will be buried with the 7th Cavalry in Fort Benning."

General Moore asks that anyone who wishes to honor Julia's memory send a contribution to:

"Ia Drang Scholarship Fund" First Cavalry Division Association 302 N. Main Street Copperas Cove, Texas 76522

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/HAL-MOORE-We-Were-Soldiers>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/HAL-MOORE-We-Were-Soldiers>