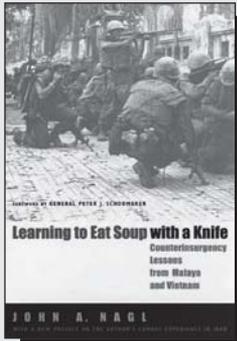


Book Reviews

Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam, by John A. Nagl. The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, Ill., 2002; rpt. 2005, 249 pages, ISBN 0-226-56770-2, \$17.00 (paper).



“What does Nagl propose that is any different than Galula, Trinquier, or any of the other classic authors of counterinsurgency warfare?” was the question a recent graduate of the Command and General Staff College posed to me after I had spent an evening reading this book whose title, quoted from T.E. Lawrence, describes the slow and messy nature of counterinsurgency operations.

That was a fair question because as many students of counterinsurgency are aware, these works often present overarching concepts (such as legitimacy, commitment, intelligence) and then leave the reader struggling to draw his own conclusions on how they may be applied to a given contemporary military operation.

However, I found an answer to the question in Nagl’s premise that it is in the processes, not the concepts, where one finds the key to defeating insurgencies. Nagl supports this premise by offering the reader a process used throughout the book to examine the decisions and actions taken or not taken by militaries in their effort to become counterinsurgency learning organizations.

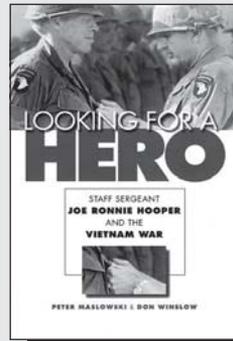
If the use of a systemic, iterative, organizational learning process like the one Nagl employs sounds familiar, it should. Two recent Combined Arms Center and Fort Leavenworth commanding generals have forwarded a similar construct called “The Engine of Change” that is being put to use throughout our Army to support coalition counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Specifically, military engineers may find Nagl’s work particularly familiar because it allows for structured thought while examining emerging counterinsurgency doctrine. After introducing the reader with his methodology in the early chapters, Nagl demonstrates how it can be applied to analyze the development of counterinsurgency doctrine and practice during the British Malayan Emergency from 1948 to 1960 and again with the doctrine the United States developed in the Vietnam War from 1950 to 1975.

At the conclusion of the Malayan Emergency and Vietnam War analyses, Nagl leaves the reader well positioned to personalize and apply this approach for immediate use in military transition teams, provincial reconstruction teams, and full-spectrum operations.

Reviewed by Lieutenant Colonel Paul B. Olsen, P.E., Speechwriter to the Commanding General, Combined Arms Center and Fort Leavenworth, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

Looking for a Hero: Staff Sergeant Joe Ronnie Hooper and the Vietnam War, by Peter Maslowski and Don Winslow, University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln, 2004, 618 pages, ISBN 0-8032-3244-6, \$29.95 (hardcover).



This book covers the tragic life of Staff Sergeant Joe Ronnie Hooper, arguably the most decorated soldier of the Vietnam War. In addition to two Silver Stars, six Bronze Stars, and eight Purple Hearts, he was presented the Medal of Honor for actions near Hue in February 1968. At the time, he was assigned to Delta Company, 2d Battalion, 501st Infantry, 101st Airborne Division.

Looking for a Hero takes you through Hooper’s life and military career, as well as discusses the Vietnam War itself.

Although this book contains detailed and valuable information about the war, it does have a biased tone and does not lend itself to being an objective source for learning about the Vietnam War. But Maslowski and Winslow’s extreme thoroughness in telling Hooper’s story offsets their antimilitary bias and makes their work a more than respectable contribution to the Vietnam War literature. At times, the book seems to be more about the war than about Hooper. But in many ways, Hooper serves as a symbol for that conflict; his life had so many highs and lows, paralleling the upheavals in American society during the war.

Looking for a Hero gives you the objective truth about Joe Hooper’s life and leaves you either respecting him or disliking him. Every Medal of Honor recipient is a hero; but some, like Hooper, are not saints. What this book does is show you that all heroes are human, and the events that made them heroes become quite a heavy load to carry.

The sad part of Hooper’s life, as with many veterans of the Vietnam War, was the post-traumatic stress disorder that he suffered from. Neither Hooper nor American society knew how to handle the problems that grew out of this. The combination of drugs and/or alcohol added to the disorder for many veterans and often destroyed not only them but their families as well.

Hopefully, America has learned from the war in Vietnam and is preparing itself and facilities to help the veterans of the War on Terrorism deal with the horrors of war and the injuries they have sustained.

Reviewed by Mr. Jeffrey L. Rosemann, an instructional systems specialist with the Officers Training Development Division, Directorate of Training and Leader Development, United States Army Engineer School, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. A retired infantry Soldier, he also served as the 2d Infantry Division historian.