

Book Review By Mr. Andy Watson

Unsung Heroes, Saving Saigon

Brigadier General Albin F. Irzyk (Retired)

Ivy House Publishing Group, 2008

When offered the opportunity to review *Unsung Heroes, Saving Saigon*, I was excited about the prospect of reading a “new” history of events that took place during the opening phases of the Tet Offensive in Saigon. Additionally, because January 2008 marked the 40th anniversary of these attacks, the timing of the release was fitting.

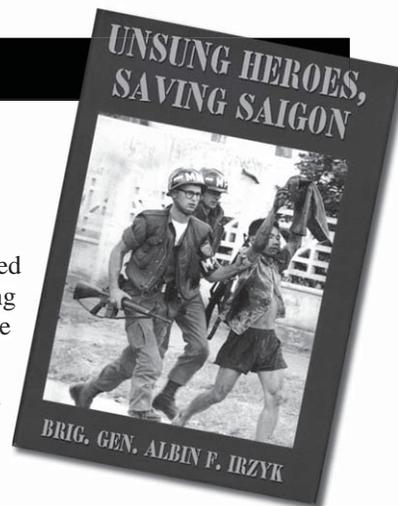
The author, Brigadier General Albin F. Irzyk (Retired), served as the Saigon area commander at the time of the Vietcong attacks. He provides the reader with brief glimpses of what the city of Saigon was like before U.S. involvement, and he describes the changes that took place—changes that were particularly important to someone in his position, since law enforcement, traffic congestion, flooding, and enemy activity became concerns. Brigadier General Irzyk describes his position as the Saigon area commander and briefly mentions his Army career prior to serving in Vietnam. Although his previous accomplishments—including the receipt of the Distinguished Service Cross during World War II—are impressive, he doesn’t lose focus.

General Irzyk sets the stage for the opening of the Tet Offensive and then describes actions in a detached manner. This allows the reader to view subordinate commanders and individual Soldiers in a more complete manner rather than from a personal viewpoint. In addition, Irzyk ensures that important details are not omitted. For example, he points out that although the American Embassy in Saigon was attacked, it was never overtaken by the Vietcong. He also includes details about the important battles fought near Bachelor Officer Quarters (BOQ) 3 and the Phu Tho Racetrack. Although these battles receive less attention than others, they accounted for a staggering loss of Soldiers—most of whom were military policemen.

The chief reason I read this book is the military police connection. While the book is not completely about military police Soldiers, they are prominently featured. First, their patrols and tasks through Saigon are described. This is followed by a description of their mission during the attacks. According to Irzyk, “It took the 716th Military Police Battalion less than three hours to transform itself from a police element to one that was as close as it could be to an infantry battalion. It was ready for combat.” While many of us know about the outstanding job performed by these Soldiers, Brigadier General Irzyk is able to articulate the details of their mission and express his thanks.

I have few criticisms of the book. More information concerning the battle near Phu Tho Racetrack would be beneficial, but it may not be available. The drawing and many images of the American Embassy compound are great, but a map showing battle points of Saigon might be valuable.

Although much of the information presented about the Tet Offensive in Saigon was previously known, *Unsung Heroes, Saving Saigon* provides a different perspective that assists in the research and understanding of these events.



Mr. Watson is the U.S. Army Military Police historian.

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