

# Steel My Soldiers' Hearts: The Hopeless to Hardcore Transformation of U.S. Army, 4th Battalion, 39th Infantry, Vietnam

*By Col. David H. Hackworth*

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David H. Hackworth had just completed the writing of a tactical handbook for the Pentagon, and now he had been ordered to put his counterguerilla-fighting theories into action. He was given the morale-drained 4/39th—a battalion of poorly led draftees suffering the Army's highest casualty rate and considered its worst fighting battalion. Hackworth's hard-nosed, inventive and inspired leadership quickly turned the 4/39th into Vietnam's valiant and ferocious Hardcore Recondos.

Drawing on interviews with soldiers from the Hardcore Battalion conducted over the past decade by his partner and coauthor, Eilhys England, Hackworth takes readers along on their sniper missions, ambush actions, helicopter strikes and inside the quagmire of command politics. With *Steel My Soldiers' Hearts*, Hackworth places the brotherhood of the 4/39th into the pantheon of our nation's most heroic warriors.

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## Steel My Soldiers' Hearts: The Hopeless to Hardcore Transformation of U.S. Army, 4th Battalion, 39th Infantry, Vietnam Summary Details

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*Steel My Soldiers' Hearts* is retired Colonel David Hackworth's account of his tour of duty in Vietnam commanding the 4/39th, an infantry battalion operating south of Saigon in the Mekong River delta. Poorly led (the previous commander had based the battalion in the middle of a mine field), with frightfully high casualties (40 percent during the six months prior to Hackworth's arrival), and fighting in the most dangerous of terrain, the 4/39th was a dispirited and demoralized group when Hackworth assumed command in January, 1969. Upon arrival, Hackworth fired many of the senior officers and then put the 4/39th through "Combat 101," which made him so unpopular that at one point Hackworth was warned of a bounty some of his men had put out on him. Over the next five months, however, Hackworth would transform the 4/39 from "hopeless to hardcore," dramatically reverse the casualty rate, score some spectacular victories over the Viet Cong, and earn the undying respect of his troops. Here's a gung ho and earthy firsthand account of the Vietnam War that fans of *We Were Soldiers Once...* will appreciate. --Harry C. Edwards

From Publishers Weekly

Soldier-Author-Columnist, as his Web site notes, Hackworth (About Face, Hazardous Duty) weighs in with a long, blow-by-blow account of his second tour in Vietnam, as a 9th Infantry Division battalion commander. (Hackworth denounced the war in 1971, went into self-imposed exile in Australia and later became a high-profile Newsweek military analyst.) He's definitely the star of this production, which is co-written with England but told in his voice, as he describes how he turned a group of decidedly unready infantrymen into an effective fighting force mainly through the strength of his tough personality. My idea of looking after the troops was not to spoon-feed them, Hackworth says, but to make them as hard as forged steel, dead in their kill-or-be-killed trade. And he's not bashful about naming names: he gives credit to the officers and enlisted men who helped him and pillories ticket-punching and cowardly officers who stood in his way. The result is a readable, gritty, in-the-trenches tale, dotted with clever epigrammatic prose and filled to overflowing with reconstructed dialogue. The main source is Hackworth's memory bank, but he and England also combed through primary and secondary sources and made good use of interviews they conducted with many of his

former troops. The portrait that emerges is of a battalion commander with integrity, guts, leadership ability and an abiding concern for the welfare of his men as well as, it must be acknowledged, a modest desire to self-promote.

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#### Review

Harold G. Moore Lieutenant General (U.S. Army, Ret.), coauthor of *We Were Soldiers Once...and Young* A riveting, candid and hard-hitting combat narrative by one of the top few brilliant battlefield leaders in the history of the U.S. Army. Outstanding!

*The Washington Post Book World* An exceptional warrior...a soldier's soldier.

*The Philadelphia Inquirer* [Hackworth is] perhaps the best military leader this country has had since Patton.

Frederick W. Smith chairman, president and chief executive officer, FedEx Corporation Col. David Hackworth is a national treasure....If you are interested in leadership, character, values and commitment to mission, you need to read this book.

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