

## PREFACE for FEARFUL ODDS

In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

— *Maj. John McCrae*

“Fearful Odds” is about a series of skirmishes in August 1968 during a reconnaissance in force of the Dong So ridgeline in the A Shau Valley. The Dong So was connected to the Dong Ap Bia or Hill 937, often referred to as Hamburger Hill. If anyone had listened to us, the battle of Hamburger Hill would have been fought in a different manner. It was there in May 1969 that three battalions from the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division had 72 killed and 370 wounded. That bloody battle changed the war and led to Vietnamization — having the Vietnamese, supported by U.S. air power, do the bloody fighting.

This is a memoir, not a scholarly history. Some details are missing. I knew many of the men with whom I fought by rank and last name only. Or maybe just a nickname. So where first names are missing, it is because I never knew them or I've forgotten them and have been unable to track them down. Capt. Peter Quirin is the most important person in this book. For many years, I thought he was dead. Recently, I found him alive and well, living in Wisconsin, teaching young policemen to survive urban jungles where they fight for their survival. I thought Tiny Stanchfield died in my arms, but his name is not on the Wall of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington. The casualty figures I list are higher than the official history of my unit, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 327<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. I wrote the names of those wounded and killed when I listened in on our battalion's nightly radio recap of the day's events. I believe my casualty figures are accurate. Figures of those wounded in action were often much higher than unit histories report.

“Fearful Odds” is a memoir of my experiences during my tour in Vietnam. It is about my lifelong struggle with post-traumatic stress disorder after the war. It is my hope that veterans with PTSD and their families will read this and know that it is possible to fight through the disease and lead a productive life.

This book represents all of the information I have been able to gather to date about the cause and effects of my own struggle with PTSD. I began writing when I started professional treatment in 1982. In the decades that followed, I have worked methodically to understand and articulate the defense mechanisms that I developed to cope with everyday life. The summation of all of these discoveries is represented here in conversations with one psychiatrist who has had the most lasting and meaningful impact on my life, the late Dr. Theodore Kaiser.

Most importantly for me, this is a book about universal truths: the nature of war, the nature of leadership, the band of brothers, and reflections about the nature of love between a warrior and his bride. It is about the damage war does to those who survive it. It is about how war destroys love and life. I have also tried to show the beauty of the camaraderie of warriors. The quotations beginning each section will introduce the topics covered there; the challenges I faced are nothing new. They have been faced by other warriors throughout time.

“Fearful Odds” is a book about the Vietnam War and its aftermath, but it also is a book about my family's long military history and the events that formed me. The force that created me created warriors who give up their lives and happiness for others who do not care nor appreciate their sacrifice.

In the end, there is nothing that can hide the devastation of war: the horror of man's inhumanity to man that takes place upon the battlefields of time and the wreckage it makes of all those who survive.