

A Tale of Two Commands: The 1st Battalion/16th Infantry Regiment in the U.S. Army's 1st and 9th Infantry Divisions, Vietnam 1968

On 13 September 1968, the 1st and 9th Infantry Divisions exchanged a pair of battalions in the Republic of Vietnam. The 1st Battalion of the 16th Infantry (Airmobile), located in Lai Khe, north of Saigon, replaced the 5th Battalion of the 60th Infantry (Mechanized) in the Mekong Delta region. The battalions, headquarters, troops, and equipment were all relocated, and the battalion “colors” were eventually exchanged. This move made sense on its face, as a mechanized unit could not perform efficiently in the swampy rice-growing region of the Delta, while an air assault battalion was well-suited to that terrain. The redeployment of the 1/16th struck a blow to the battalion when the men came to realize that this was no temporary attachment but a permanent reassignment. Complicating this transition was the death of the 1st Division’s commander, Major General Keith Ware, a recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor. This loss occurred on the very day of the transfer. These circumstances linked with the 1st Battalion’s reception upon reporting to the 9th Division and issues involving the 9th Division’s chain of command caused a ripple effect lasting to this day. The 9th Division’s culture of success through “body-count” created additional corollaries.

This paper will illuminate understudied issues regarding the leadership and decision-making at the division level and below of the American Army in the Republic of Vietnam in the aftermath of the Tet Offensive. Relying on archival sources, memoirs, and interviews conducted by the author, this paper argues that uprooting and reflagging this battalion and separating it from the 1st Infantry Division transgressed Army tradition, initially impacted unit morale, and created an unnecessary threat to combat readiness. It presents a “close-in” view of the lower-level command choices that shaped the Vietnam War.

Part of the 1st Infantry Division, the legendary “Big Red One,” the 16th Infantry was not just any infantry regiment. The 16th had a long and proud lineage, unbroken from the beginning of the Civil War to today. Few regiments have had such a storied past, and fewer still have played such a dominant role in American popular culture. From F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* and the epic World War II film *The Longest Day* to the *Call of Duty* video game series, the 16th has loomed large in the American story for well over 100 years.¹

Unit lineage and history are critical components of creating a cohesive group identity. These histories are so essential that the Department of the Army, Office of the Chief of Military History created a pamphlet in November of 1962 entitled “Organizational History: Its Preparation and Use.” The stated purpose of this pamphlet is “to assist commanders in using organizational history to enhance troop morale and foster esprit de corps, increase individual and group motivation and interest, and promote public pride and respect in organizations of the United States Army.” The pamphlet goes on to say, “Until each soldier can say, ‘I belong to the finest outfit in the world,’ he has neither assimilated the Army’s great traditions nor acquired the esprit de corps inherent in membership in a distinguished fighting unit with a glorious past.” According to the Department of the Army, “The most useful items he (a commander) can fall back upon are symbols of the history of his outfit; the *colors and standards with streamers*, the guidons with streamers and silver bands, the coat of arms and *distinctive insignia*, and historical properties belonging to his organization.” (italics mine) Again, the Army Chief of Military History states, “General George C. Marshal once said, ‘It is not enough to fight. It is the spirit we bring to the fight that decides the issue. It is morale that wins the victory.’” Finally, according to

¹ U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH), “16th Infantry Regiment(Semper Paratus),” 16th Infantry Regiment | Lineage and Honors | U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH), accessed April 21, 2022, <https://history.army.mil/html/forestruc/lineages/branches/inf/0016in.htm>.

the pamphlet, “To have meaning and to enhance materially esprit de corps, a custom should grow naturally *out of some especially significant event or experience in the life of the organization.*”² (italics mine)

For the 16th Infantry, this “significant event” occurred in June of 1944 when Allied troops stormed the beaches of Normandy, France, as part of “Operation Overlord.” Among those landing at Omaha beach were the troops of the 16th Infantry. According to Darrel Gibson, author, and member of the 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry in Vietnam, this is how the 16th got its nickname of “Rangers.” In his book, *Charlie Rangers at War: An Infantry Soldier’s Journal, Vietnam 1968-1969*, Gibson states, “Our regiment picked up the Ranger nickname late in WWII after the vicious fighting on Omaha Beach in Normandy, France. Intercepted radio communications from the Germans defending Normandy... described the American forces as such fierce and effective warriors that they must be the elite Army Rangers. The name caught on, and the 16th Inf. was informally labeled “Rangers” from then on.”³

In July of 1968, in the wake of the Tet Offensive, Lieutenant Colonel Willard Latham arrived in Vietnam after graduating from the Army War College. A career Army officer and combat veteran of the Korean War, LTC Latham had served in 1966 as a battalion commander under Major General John Hay in the Berlin Brigade. In early 1968, Hay had relinquished command of the 1st Infantry Division after promotion to Deputy Commander of the II Field Force. When Latham reported to the 1st ID, a report arrived stating that his friend, Lieutenant Colonel Richard Eaton, had been wounded. Hay had recommended Latham for command of

² Organizational History: Its Preparation and Use, November 1962, RG0472, A11230, Container 1, U.S. Forces in Southeast Asia 1950-1975, 9th Infantry Division National Archives, College Park, MD.

³ Darrel Gibson and Robert Cooper, *Charlie Rangers at War: An Infantry Soldier's Journal: Vietnam 1968-1969* (North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2018), 12.

Eaton's battalion, the 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry (Airmobile).⁴ Another officer joined the battalion at almost the same time. Captain Warren J. Goss became a staff officer and then commander of Company C. Courageous and calm under fire, Goss' men almost worshipped him, and LTC Latham had immense respect for him. Darrel Gibson said, "He was unique. He was a very tall black officer, which was new to us. We'd had black drill sergeants, but you didn't see many black officers. We quickly learned that he was very compassionate, very smart, and very courageous. He would always take care of us."⁵ "Charlie" Company was in good hands.⁶

The 1st Division in Lai Khe, north of Saigon, was now under the command of Major General Keith Ware. Ware received the Medal of Honor in World War II and was highly respected and admired for his leadership. LTC Latham also came to admire him greatly.⁷ Division and unit morale was high for many, if not most, who served in the Big Red One during that period, and there was pride in being a "Ranger," too.⁸ The 1st Division's leadership was not known for rigid adherence to Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and General William Westmoreland's "body count" policy. Ware clarified to his commanders that "if there was a body, there damn well better be a weapon."⁹ General Ware was also known for being close to the action. On one occasion, heading out on a mission, Latham noticed Ware was nearby. "We had an operation against an intended village, and I was up there with them. I looked around, and here

⁴ Steven E. Clay and Gerald K. Griffin, *Blood and Sacrifice: The History of the 16th Infantry Regiment from the Civil War through the Gulf War* (Wheaton, IL: Cantigny First Division Foundation, 2001), 310.

⁵ Darrel Gibson, interview by author, Arlington, TX, January 28, 2022.

⁶ Darrel Gibson and Robert Cooper, *Charlie Rangers at War: An Infantry Soldier's Journal: Vietnam 1968-1969* (North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2018), 61.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁸ Darrel Gibson, interview by author, Arlington, TX, January 28, 2022.

⁹ Willard Latham, interview by author, Arlington, TX, October 25, 2021.

was the division commander. I said, ‘General, you need to get your ass out of here. I don’t want you killed on my watch!’ And he said, ‘I’ll let you know.’ That’s all he said. He didn’t leave either!’”¹⁰

The 1/16th performed well under their new commander. However, after two months, Latham was informed that he and his battalion would be moved south to the Mekong Delta in the 9th Infantry Division’s area of operation. General Ware explained, “I’m sorry, Will. You’re the last in, so you’re the first out. They need an airmobile battalion in the Delta.” The 9th would be sending up a mechanized battalion, the 5th Battalion 60th Infantry. The 5/60th (Mechanized) was not well suited to operations in the rice paddies of the Delta, and on paper, the swap made sense. What was not clear to anyone below the division level was that this was to be a permanent move. The 5/60th had performed courageously in the Delta, but the tactics adopted by the 9th Division, called “jitterbugging,” required more flexibility and mobility than they could provide, so someone at the II Field Force or above decided to swap these two battalions. This exchange occurred in the middle of a war, in the middle of two combat areas of operation, and required the units to “stand down” for a short time. Each unit was uprooted from an area they were familiar with, where they had extensively trained, and moved to terrain that could not have been more dissimilar.

The history of the 9th Infantry Division is less celebrated than that of the 1st. Established in the build-up to World War I, the Army never deployed the 9th Division to Europe. The division was demobilized soon after the Great War and remained inactive until the United States began mobilization efforts leading up to World War II. The 9th served heroically in several campaigns in Africa, Sicily, and Europe during the war, but the Army deactivated the division

¹⁰ Ibid.

again in 1947. In 1966, as Vietnam heated up, the division was reactivated under the command of Major General George Eckhardt and, after training, was deployed to Vietnam. It was deactivated again in 1969, only to be reactivated stateside in 1972, serving as an equipment testing division until 1991.¹¹

By 1968, the 9th Infantry Division or “Old Reliables” and the 5/60th (Mech) had established their own traditions and reputations. The division had a controversial commander in Major General Julian Ewell. This division commander was the former Executive Assistant to an equally controversial General Maxwell Taylor, a Vietnam-era presidential advisor, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and Ambassador to the Republic of Vietnam. Ewell’s Chief of Staff was Colonel Ira Hunt. General Ewell and Colonel Hunt were enthusiastic “body count” men, and they let those under their command know it. It was not unusual to hear one of the brigade commanders or even the Chief of Staff himself flying over a battle area demanding to know the body count. Latham himself heard Hunt shouting over the radio on at least one occasion, “I know there are more goddammed bodies down there than that! Count ‘am again!”¹² General Ewell maintained highly detailed statistics down to the platoon level.¹³ Troops might count the individual body parts of enemy combatants, non-combatants, and even animals to punch up the numbers. Ratios of bodies to weapons were not a consideration.¹⁴ “In every little skirmish, in every little firefight, someone would fly over in a helicopter, and the first question was, ‘What’s

¹¹ “Our History,” Ninth Infantry Division Association, May 28, 2020, [https://9thinfantry.org/#:~:text=The%209th%20Infantry%20Division%20\(Division,placed%20on%20the%20inactive%20list](https://9thinfantry.org/#:~:text=The%209th%20Infantry%20Division%20(Division,placed%20on%20the%20inactive%20list).

¹² Willard Latham, interview by author, Arlington, TX, October 25, 2021.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Colonel David Hackworth and Julie Sherman, *About Face: The Odyssey of an American Warrior* (London: Pan Books, 1991).

the body count?’ A lot of times, it was still going on! I mean, it was ridiculous sometimes.”¹⁵

Hunt was best known for his charts, graphs, and obsession with body count. He was so intensely interested in the statistics that he would enter combat areas demanding numbers.¹⁶ At one point, Colonel Hunt, a career engineering officer, staff officer, and academic with little to no experience in combat, temporarily took command of the 1st Brigade after that brigade’s commander was wounded. After serving for six weeks in this position, Hunt received the coveted Combat Infantryman’s Badge, two Silver Stars, a Soldiers Medal, a Distinguished Flying Cross and a Legion of Merit.^{17, 18} Said one officer who knew Hunt well, “I always felt the only thing that kept complete mutiny against Hunt at bay in the 1st Brigade was that he was very much the boy of Julian Ewell.”¹⁹ This was the culture of the 9th Infantry Division, and this was to be the new home of the 1/16th.

On September 12th and 13th, 1968, the 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry began moving south. Before their departure, General Ware reminded Latham, “You know, you can wear the 1st Division patch on your right sleeve and the 9th Division patch on your left.” (This is Army tradition.) Likewise, the 5/60th received written orders to wear the 9th Division patch on their right sleeve.²⁰

¹⁵ Darrel Gibson, interview by author, Arlington, TX, January 28, 2022.

¹⁶ Willard Latham, interview by author, Arlington, TX, October 25, 2021.

¹⁷ “Geraci Assumes 1st Bde Command: CIB to COL Hunt During Ceremony,” Old Reliables News, accessed April 21, 2022, <http://www.2nd60th.org/Old%20Reliable/or23Oct68/or23oct68pg3.gif>, 3.

¹⁸ “Ira Hunt - Recipient,” The Hall of Valor Project, accessed April 21, 2022, <https://valor.militarytimes.com/hero/143602#180775>.

¹⁹ Colonel David Hackworth and Julie Sherman, *About Face: The Odyssey of an American Warrior* (London: Pan Books, 1991), 667.

²⁰ Oplan: Project 1-9, 08 September 1968, RG0472, Box 832, 5/60 Infantry, Op. Plan Files: 1968-1970, National Archives, College Park, MD.

Tragedy struck the 1st Division on the final day of the move. Major General Keith Ware died when his command helicopter, damaged by enemy fire, crashed. All eight people on board, along with the General's dog, King, were killed on impact.²¹ "I have since felt an odd relationship between that event and our battalion moving south." Author Darrel Gibson said. "It was as if the shield of protection provided by our battalion was no longer there to cover the General." ²²

Adding insult to injury was the "welcome" received by the 1/16th soon after they arrived at Dong Tam, the headquarters of the 9th Division. On their second night, still proudly wearing the 1st Division patch as authorized, some soldiers attended a show at the enlisted club. The club was a novelty for the men as Lai Khe did not have many of the luxuries found at Dong Tam. The entertainment that night was a troupe of Australian women who acknowledged the presence of the members of the Big Red One. The acknowledgment brought jeers from soldiers of the 9th Division, which, in turn, led to a brawl. "We assumed they knew that we were better than any other division.", said Darrel Gibson.²³ The Rangers, who were present, bested the home team but paid the price for it. General Ewell expressed his dissatisfaction with the Rangers the following day, telling Latham. "Get those goddammed (1st Division) patches off!"²⁴ Following this order,

²¹ Report of Investigation of Death of Maj Gen Keith Ware, 25 September 1968, RG0472, A11154, Container 8, US Forces in Southeast Asia 1950-1975, 1st Infantry Division Organizational History 1920-1970, National Archives, College Park, MD.

²² Darrel Gibson and Robert Cooper, *Charlie Rangers at War: An Infantry Soldier's Journal: Vietnam 1968-1969* (North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2018), 86-87.

²³ Darrel Gibson, interview by author, Arlington, TX, January 28, 2022.

²⁴ Willard Latham, interview by author, Arlington, TX, October 25, 2021.

Latham and his battalion were “exiled” to the Plain of Reeds, a tough area not far from Vietnam’s border with Cambodia.²⁵ This, however, was not the end of the bad news.

On 21 October 1968, LTC Latham and his staff were ordered back to the 1st Division HQ at Lai Khe. “He (Ewell) insisted on this formal change of flags. We changed flags and all that, which was, in a way, stupid.”²⁶ Unbeknownst to the Rangers, this would be the end of their association with the 1st Infantry Division.²⁷ Upon the “exchange of colors,” the 1st Battalion of the 16th Infantry was officially designated the 5th Battalion, 60th Infantry of the 9th Infantry Division, and the 5/60th, in turn, became the 1/16th (Mechanized) of the 1st Division, forever after to be known as the “Iron Rangers,” an appropriated nickname adopted for the sake of lineage.²⁸ According to the Operational Report of the 9th Division, this “switch in designations” was necessary so that “the divisions could retain lineage already established.”²⁹ In a speech given on this occasion, Major General Orwin Talbot, the new commander of the 1st Division, said the 1st of the 16th had special meaning to the Big Red One because it was the unit that represented the 1st Expeditionary Force, marching through the streets of Paris to announce the arrival of American troops in France on 4 July, 1917. Talbot reminded the battalion of their record in World War II and Vietnam. In his welcoming speech, Major General Ewell informed the new

²⁵ Steven E. Clay and Gerald K. Griffin, *Blood and Sacrifice: The History of the 16th Infantry Regiment from the Civil War through the Gulf War* (Wheaton, IL: Cantigny First Division Foundation, 2001), 312.

²⁶ Willard Latham, interview by author, Arlington, TX, October 25, 2021.

²⁷ Darrel Gibson, interview by author, Arlington, TX, January 28, 2022.

²⁸ 1/16th Historical Supplement, 31 March 1969, RG0472, A11154, Container 8, US Forces in Southeast Asia 1950-1975, 1st Infantry Division Organizational History 1920-1970, National Archives, College Park, MD.

²⁹ Operational Report, 9th Division 15 Nov 1968, , RG0472, Box 828, 5/60 Infantry ACOS, Operational Reports-Lessons Learned: 1969 Thru 1970, National Archive, College Park, MD.

members of the 9th, “You’re joining a division that has to look up to no one.”³⁰ The “real” Rangers were not so sure. From this point on, they wore bandanas around their necks emblazoned with the name “Rangers.” According to Gibson, “This was a part of our field uniform almost from the moment we arrived in the Delta.”³¹ “I was proud (of the Rangers name). I don’t know how everyone felt, but I was certainly proud of it.”³² Dan Gowing, an enlisted infantryman who arrived after the relocation but before the redesignation, said, “Some of the older guys explained the nickname to me. Even though I was the new guy, I was very proud of it.”³³

LTC Latham and the newly designated 5/60th did their jobs well despite the change in scenery and the culture. Latham was known for being a commander on the ground, not flying above the fighting as many commanders did. Darrel Gibson said, “He was very much respected. He was with us. When we were expecting heavy contact, he was on the ground with us, and I always admired him for that.”³⁴ At one point, Latham almost bit off more than he could chew. “When I had just come on board as battalion commander, we thought we had secured a village, but we kept finding these tunnels, so we brought in the ‘tunnel rats.’ This one big guy (tunnel rat) was down there, and when he came out, I said, ‘What’s it like down there, Sarg?’ Ask a stupid question... Anyway, he said, ‘If you want to know Colonel, come down and look.’ and guess who had to go down there?! I went into the hole with a cocked .45 pistol and a flashlight, looking

³⁰ “New Battalion Assumes Designation of 5th-60th,” Old Reliables News, accessed April 21, 2022, <http://www.2nd60th.org/Old%20Reliable/or30Oct68/or30oct68pg3.gif>, 3.

³¹ Darrel Gibson, interview by author, Arlington, TX, January 28, 2022.

³² Ibid.

³³ Dan Gowing, interview by author, Arlington, TX, March 20, 2022.

³⁴ Darrel Gibson, interview by author, Arlington, TX, January 28, 2022.

for booby traps. When I came out, I didn't see anybody cheering, but they sure as hell would've noticed if I hadn't gone!"³⁵

Leadership mostly shielded the newly designated 5/60th from the challenges coming from the division level. According to an officer familiar with the Division CO, "Julian Ewell was a very effective commander in Vietnam because whatever else might be said about him (like he had no heart...), he brought home the bodies."³⁶ "All of the battalion commanders had to carry around a 3"x5" card with an up-to-date, day-to-day, week-to-week, month-to-month body count just in case General Ewell showed up wanting to know."³⁷ Ewell adopted a policy that every platoon, company, and battalion in the division would move 1500 meters per day to "maintain contact" and he had no mercy on the commanders who would not or could not perform this feat. "I stayed off his radar because we were always on the move," Latham said. "We stayed in contact."³⁸ The 5/60th's statistics bear this out even with a new emphasis on "area control" advocated by Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV). Comparing the same periods from 1967 and 1968, although the battalion killed 35% fewer enemy combatants, they captured 77% more POWs, had 71% fewer U.S. killed in action, 51% fewer U.S. wounded in action, performed 43% more combat operations, and had 68% more enemy contacts.³⁹ Latham was selected to command the 3rd Brigade for a brief period when LTC John Hemphill was wounded.

³⁵ Willard Latham, interview by author, Arlington, TX, October 25, 2021.

³⁶ Colonel David Hackworth and Julie Sherman, *About Face: The Odyssey of an American Warrior* (London: Pan Books, 1991), 667.

³⁷ Geoffrey C. Ward, Ken Burns, and Lynn Novick, *Vietnam: An Intimate History* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017), 473.

³⁸ Willard Latham, interview by author, Arlington, TX, October 25, 2021.

³⁹ Individual Unit Statistics 67-69, 30 June 1969, RG0472, Box 828, 5/60 Infantry ACOS, Operational Reports-Lessons Learned: 1969 Thru 1970, National Archive, College Park, MD.

Hemphill impressed upon Latham the number one rule in the 9th Division, “Remember Will, (for Ewell) it’s about body count!”⁴⁰

One tragedy relating to the 9th Division’s push for “1500 meters a day” occurred on 6 December 1968. While on patrol with his company, Captain Warren Judge Goss was killed in action. Goss did not have to be on this mission. His tour was over. When the mission came down, LTC Latham tried to discourage him from going out. Goss knew his replacement did not feel ready for command and insisted that it was his duty to go. “Colonel, these are my boys!” Goss told Latham. At about 1500 hours, the company had come to a halt because there was evidence of booby traps in the area. Circling in a helicopter overhead, an unknown commander was shouting at the company over the command net, “Get Moving!” Goss moved up to investigate the situation only to be hit by sniper fire.⁴¹ Latham and the battalion were devastated. Almost fifty-five years later, Latham still questions his decision to allow Goss to go. With tears in his eyes, he says, “I should’ve done something different. I shouldn’t have let him go.”⁴² “We all knew we had a good leader, and morale was never higher.” reflected Gibson.⁴³ General Ware had recognized the promise in the young Captain Goss. According to Goss’ radioman, Pete Breidenbach, when the battalion was still with the 1st Division, “General Ware used to fly in wherever Goss was and have private in-the-field talks.”⁴⁴ After the incident, Goss’ replacement refused to take command of the company.

⁴⁰ Willard Latham, interview by author, Arlington, TX, October 25, 2021.

⁴¹ Daily Staff Journal , 6 December 1968, RG0472, Box 836, 5/60 Infantry ACOS Daily Journal: 10/22/1968 THRU 12/13/1968, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁴² Willard Latham, interview by author, Arlington, TX, October 25, 2021.

⁴³ Darrel Gibson and Robert Cooper, *Charlie Rangers at War: An Infantry Soldier's Journal: Vietnam 1968-1969* (North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2018), 155.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 166.

By late 1968, General Creighton Abrams, Westmoreland's replacement at MACV, had finally gotten the word out. There was to be a deemphasis on body count. Pacification was the new order of the day. Most commanders knew of highly inflated body count numbers, and they felt that the false numbers were a blot on the honor of the officer corps. Abrams was more focused on area control than kills.⁴⁵ Ewell was livid. "I've made my career and reputation by going 180 degrees counter to such orders as this!"⁴⁶ However, being a good soldier, General Ewell reluctantly acquiesced and began a Civil Affairs program in the 9th Division. The officer in charge of the program for the 5/60th was First Lieutenant Bob Cooper. Latham picked Cooper because he was a person of exemplary character and would get the job done. Up to this point, the 9th Division had one of the worst Civil Affairs programs in all of Vietnam.⁴⁷ Cooper's program became the model for the entire division. Latham thought Cooper was one of the finest officers he ever had in his command.⁴⁸ General Ewell recognized Cooper with a Bronze Star for his Civil Affairs success. A new day was dawning in Vietnam, and the Rangers were leading the way.

In January of 1969, LTC Latham, his battalion time complete, was assigned back to the 1st Division as the Division G3 (Plans and Operations). Then in June of 1969, the 9th Infantry Division was notified it would be rotated back to the United States, bringing the Rangers' story to a close.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Lewis Sorley, *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and the Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam* (San Diego, Calif: Harcourt, 1999), 30.

⁴⁶ Geoffrey C. Ward, Ken Burns, and Lynn Novick, *Vietnam: An Intimate History* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017), 513.

⁴⁷ Darrel Gibson and Robert Cooper, *Charlie Rangers at War: An Infantry Soldier's Journal: Vietnam 1968-1969* (North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2018), 147.

⁴⁸ Willard Latham, interview by author, Arlington, TX, October 25, 2021.

⁴⁹ Ira Augustus Hunt, *The 9th Infantry Division in Vietnam Unparalleled and Unequaled* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 150.

This presentation aims not to malign the brave soldiers of the 9th Infantry Division or their honorable service in Vietnam. The author only seeks to demonstrate the potential challenges and hardships created by shuffling battalions amid combat operations in the middle of a war. Without the leadership displayed by Major General Keith Ware, Lieutenant Colonel Willard Latham, Captain Warren Goss, First Lieutenant Bob Cooper, and all of the men of the 1/16th and the 5/60th, this decision might have been a disaster. Taking away their unit identity, placing them in an entirely different culture and terrain, and treating them as second-class soldiers violated United States Army standards and traditions, endangering operational readiness and unit morale. This, while the Army was already cracking under the pressure of a poorly executed war in Vietnam and war-weariness at home. Self-congratulatory efforts on the part of some 9th Division-level staff cannot hide this fact.

This work raises questions for additional study about decision-making at the Field Force and division levels during the Vietnam War, challenging the notion that military units are somehow “plug and play,” and can be expected to function in any environment without some level of reconfiguration. This presentation also provides thought-provoking examples of the transcendent leadership in an ever-changing modern military environment. As Sun Tzu said, “Treat your men as you would your own beloved sons, and they will follow you into the deepest valley.”⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Strategies for Influence, “Sun Tzu - The Art of War,” Strategies for Influence, November 11, 2019, <https://strategiesforinfluence.com/sun-tzu-the-art-of-war/>.