

Book review on platoon leader: a memoir of command in combat

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James R. McDonough once stated that his story is not a comprehensive documentation of the Vietnam War, but a mere account of an American platoon leader in battle. Lt. McDonough had, for a year after West Point, been situated in specialized training bases to be part of an airborne brigade. And as he was readily equipped, he was brought to the Strategic Hamlet Program – formed by the US armed forces in the 1960s to weaken the Viet Cong through civilian control, which, failed in the 1970s. Nevertheless, the US armed forces have not dissolved this program yet. 2nd Lieutenant McDonough found himself commanding a platoon led by a non-commissioned officer. Everyone was in low morale and inefficient as the lieutenant McDonough was replacing refused to wage war – all the time keeping the platoon from being harmed. Setting his goals straight, McDonough looked forward to gain the loyalty of his platoon, as well as, completing the mission with minimal or no casualties on their part. McDonough journeyed through a difficult period of founding leadership. He practiced careful observation and frequent combats with the enemy to lay out plans that would ensure an accomplished mission. An air of loneliness have also been created throughout the whole story as platoon men shared their piece of sufferings, fears and yearnings both in their military and personal lives. The novel provided a realistic point of view to both sides of the war – good and bad, the thoughts that prevail to each character in the story and the choices each one of them has to make in the line of duty (Hopkins).

The three things this memoir might embed in the reader's mind might include:

Doing the right thing – in the right time and with the right reasons;

There is a given responsibility each soldier has to his fellow comrades – it is to protect them at all costs; and

Tiny mischiefs might ignite large conflicts – this should teach vigilance in discipline (Jacobs).

These are just three of three of the important points presented in this memoir. But, among the most significant to note is leadership. He has set goals for a demoralized group of men, has aided each one of them to brave in realizing these goals, and ensuring that each of his men savor the success of these goals. McDonough made a comparison between good and bad leadership through the two lieutenants – the non-commissioned officer who refuses to fight, and he who wishes to be a real leader.

Vivid details in the memoir bring the setting come to life along with the compelling set of characters. McDonough seemingly did not find it necessary to delve much in the morbid images of the war, rather, on the relationships that developed throughout the story. It was reflected in moments of irony and humor – an indication of the need to be resilient. He also enumerated different strategies and tactics that had been formulated during the war. These relationships were part of the humanizing aspects of the story, including issues that involve latrines.

McDonough filled his memoir with discovering varied kinds of relationships with different men – from high-ranking men to allies and enemies, and civilians. It was a compilation of the view and experiences of war by different people. The Platoon Leader also indicated the ethics and morals of the war, the dehumanizing possibility a soldier might come across in the cruelty of the war.

McDonough's instrument character in this memoir is his being a leader – it enabled him to explore relationships, establish a set of war ethics and morals, a progression into a real leader. He portrayed a wise, humane, tough and firm leader, under the most difficult circumstances. The novel is a profound documentation on wartime virtues – making it a very important piece in American literature (Mazza).

References:

Hopkins, Martha. " Platoon Leader: A Memoir of Command in Combat." 2003. 25 May 2007 .

Jacobs. " Platoon Leader: A Memoir of Command in Combat : Review." 2007. 25 May 2007 .

Mazza, Michael. " Platoon Leader: A Memoir of Command in Combat: Review." 2004. 25 May 2007