

VIETNAM BAO CHI: Warriors of Word and Film by Marc Phillip Yablonka



Kenn Miller

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Perhaps the least known elite members of the US military in the Vietnam War were the soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, and Coast Guard members who served as both warriors and reporters, often putting their lives on the line in order to gather and tell the story about what their fellow military members were doing in Vietnam. Among those in this book who may be fairly well

known are Dale Dye, John Del Vecchio, Jim Morris, and Marvin Wolf. They are among the elite of this elite because they were among the military journalists who had combat arms training and experience before becoming Bao Chi. But even the Bao Chi who had no such training and experience before they became military journalists were almost certain to learn and experience a lot of both the combat and the non-combat sides of the war. Through the eyes and ears, thoughts and memories of a broad and diverse assembly of former military journalists Marc Yablonka's *VIETNAM BAO CHI* gives us as wide and varied a picture of the American experience of the Vietnam War as any other single book of which I am aware.

The duties of military journalists in Vietnam were diverse and many. Perhaps the most important mission of the American military Bao Chi in Vietnam was to let the American people—and the military members serving in Vietnam—know what our service personnel were doing, from infantry combat, to logistics, to road building and building construction, to aircraft maintenance, to taking pediatric dentistry out to rural villages, and just about everything in between. Another important role the Bao Chi and other public personnel took very serious was to interview and photograph sailors, airmen, Marines, and Coast Guard members and see that these pictures and short interviews got to the service member's hometown news media.

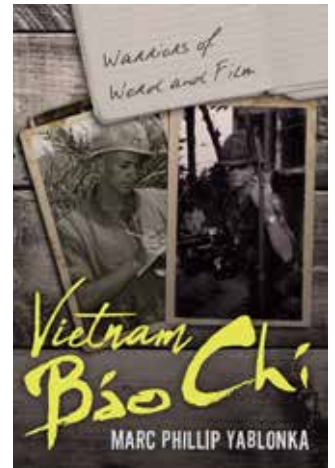
And then there was combat. Military journalists spent much of their time living with, covering, fighting alongside, and sharing danger with combat soldiers. Some of the men in this book had combat wounds before they became military journalists, and were wounded again as military journalists. Chapter 78 member Jim Morris, for example, had already suffered some legendary wounds before the 5th Special Forces Group made him the group's Public Information Officer and, as military journalist as well as a fighting Green Beret, he received yet another gunshot wound, one so serious it almost cost him his life, and did force him to take a medical retirement.

Theirs was a very dangerous job, and those who had that job has also to have a large battery of courage.

But one of the military journalists interviewed in this book raised an interesting question about the definition of a "combat soldier" when he comments about a signal corps soldier without a "combat arms" military occupational specialty high up on a telephone pole calmly stringing wire while under heavy enemy fire.

In some ways the American military Bao Chi in Vietnam were a privileged elite. They may be out on some miserable fire base, or out in the bush with the infantry, or flying in a helicopter or fixed wing aircraft, or on a river boat, or learning about life and logistic work in some large warehouse, and then be filming and shooting in the midst of hellish close in urban fighting in the streets of Hue, or off at some isolated Special Forces camp—but they would rarely be in any of those places for a very long time, and when they returned to the rear area, they would have plenty of work writing and developing photos, but then they would usually have at least a short break before being sent out again. Bao Chi military journalists were at least occasionally able to interview senior officers for the "bigger picture" and get a better understanding of what's going on than the mainstream of soldiers, sailors, air men, and Marines out there doing the hard and dangerous jobs. It seems that wherever they were and whatever unit they were covering, the Bao Chi considered themselves members of those units when with them.

Among the many duties of American military journalists was the job of escorting civilian journalists and occasional other prominent visitors. Among the civilian journalists their military counterparts were fortunate enough to know were the likes of Catherine Leroy, Eddie Adams, and Nick Ut. Some of the military journalist in this book continued into civilian journalism, and some went in other directions. But they did a difficult and also dangerous job with skill and dedication worthy of our admiration. *VIETNAM BAO CHI: Warriors of Word and Film* tells some of the most interesting stories of the war, told by people who were able to see it with a wide and unique perspective. ❖



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By Marc Phillip Yablonka

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