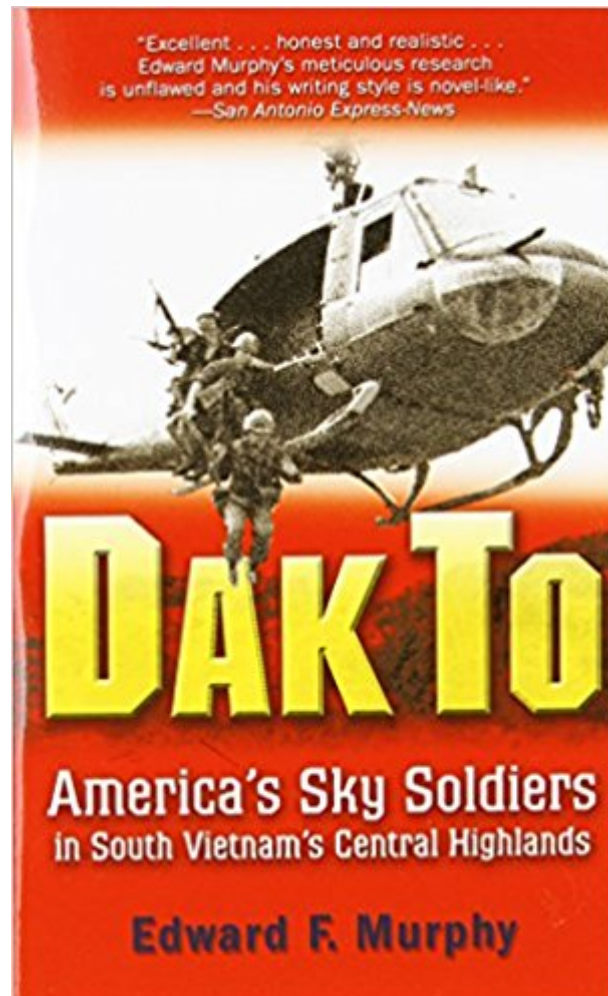




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# Dak To: America's Sky Soldiers In South Vietnam's Central Highlands



## Synopsis

Brings together interviews with more than eighty survivors to recount one of the bloodiest battles of the Vietnam War, the 1967 campaign in the mountains of Dak To, during which members of the 173rd Airborne Brigade found themselves caught up in a deadly struggle against overwhelming odds, often cut off from supplies, communications, and reinforcements.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

One of the best recent accounts of the ground war in Vietnam, this profiles the 173rd Airborne Brigade, the first Army ground combat sent there. Initially assigned to guard airfields, it was soon launched against two Vietcong strongholds, War Zone D and the Iron Triangle. But the centerpiece of this fast-paced history is the extensive account of the battle for Hill 875, where the brigade went up against the North Vietnamese for the first time. They proved to be a much tougher adversary than the VC. The Hill 875 sequences have an impressive immediacy, with the gore and carnage presented in shockingly sharp focus. According to Murphy ( Vietnam Medal of Honor Heroes ), founder of the Medal of Honor Historical Society, many of the survivors considered the battle for 875 a futile effort. But he points out that in the context of General Westmoreland's strategy of attrition, the dusty hill in the Central Highlands was "just one more place where the enemy could be killed." Photos. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Instead of fighting Communist insurgents in Vietnam using their own guerrilla tactics, General

Westmoreland chose to employ conventional means, hoping that attrition would wear down the enemy's will. In June 1967 he sent the 173d Airborne to a Central Highlands mountain hamlet named Dak To. At the outset, an entire U.S. company had over half its number killed in ambush, and fighting continued until many Americans died for ground that was soon abandoned. Military historian Murphy's workmanlike account of Dak To is well detailed, though not as gritty or compelling as Eric Hammel's oral histories (e.g., Lima-6 , LJ 11/15/89). And though the author provides an ample overview of where the battle fits in the greater scheme, the late Brig. Gen. S.L.A. Marshall, for one, bettered him in books like *West to Cambodia* ( LJ 12/15/68), giving greater insight into the military mind. Nonetheless, this work is recommended for libraries with large Vietnam War collections.- Richard Paul Snyder, Cty. of Los Angeles P. L., Huntington Park Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I have always been interested in this battle since I saw one of those Vietnam specials on TV. First and foremost let me say that the "Sky Soldiers" were an elite unit, who were dedicated to their cause, highly trained; and fought bravely with a ferocity and selfless actions expected from an unit of this caliber. Another interesting twist the author uses is what was going on back in the States at the time many of the battles involving the 173rd were taking place. Having said that, I was disappointed from a personal/professional standpoint (I'm a veteran), of the overly confident nature of these brave men (more so their brigade/division commanders). They did not take advantage of the advice of those who had been fighting in the central highlands longer than the 173rd. This is where their over confidence/bravado and swagger cost them dearly in men and material. Coupled with the fact that the 173rd subscribed to head on frontal assaults against an extremely well equipped and fortified enemy. The book became redundant from the standpoint that the 173rd was involved in battles for so many hills it felt as if the book author began repeating himself (understand they used the same tactics in every hill engagement). Close to the end of the book, I found myself fighting hard not to skim through the remaining pages. The author needed more maps such as the one regarding the last battle. In that so many units were op-conned/attached and so many hills were attacked, I found myself referring to the map at the beginning of the book to keep myself oriented as to the general location of the battles. More sketch (for me) would have made it easier to follow the battles and keep the confusion of the order of battle to a minimum. *Dak To* is a good book that I do recommend to anyone interested in the Vietnam conflict.

I joined the 173rd Airborne on 5-20-67. After the Herd's Jungle School i joined them in Pleiku. We

were there for a short time before flying to Dak To. I was in C/2/503d in the 3rd platoon. I was a fire-team leader as a Spec-4; was battlefield promoted to Sgt. E-5(buck sergeant) on 7-1-67. I spent my entire time with the Herd in the Central Highlands. I was there of course on 6-22-67, The Battle of the Slopes(Hill 1338), when Alpha company took many casualties. As a witness on the battlefield, I can testify that the majority of Sky Soldiers killed were executed at close-range with head shots. Charging Charlie was the first company in to the killing zone. One Alpha trooper ran up to my fire-team dropping to his knees in front of us crying, while clutching a single hand grenade that he didn't have to use on himself. My fire-team found a dead Chinese advisor in Chinese uniform in a shallow grave. We humped him down to an landing zone. I left the Herd on 10-2-67 to go to a LURP company that was formed mostly from the 173rd. Co F. 51st Inf. LRP ABN Team 1/5 assistant team leader. We grieved when we heard about the losses taken on Hill 875 by our brother troopers. As a grunt, a ground pounder in the Central Highlands, I never knew where I was exactly. This book was a great help to me in piecing together about where I was during my time with the Herd. What the operations were called, etc. This book does a good job of reporting on how difficult life was as a line doggy and the many difficulties we faced each and every day. Airborne! We Tried Harder! Sgt. Rock

Everyone knows Vietnam turned out to be a very bad situation. The way it was conducted forced many good men to situations that many claim were unnecessary and deathly. The taking of certain objectives, that later would be abandoned only to be retaken back by the enemy, sound like useless and crazy operations, all at the expense in Dak To of the tough 173d Airborne Brigade, who found themselves fighting a resilient enemy against incredible odds. Known as the Sky Soldiers, they suffered tremendous casualties as they bravely stood up to well trained enemy soldiers. The author, Mr. Edward F. Murphy writes with precision, as he describes all angles of this conflict, where both sides paid the ultimate price. Nothing more sadder than the staggering errors of friendly fire, that took apart the brave men without warnings. Errors of this type happen from time to time, but as much as these attacks were meant strictly to be used against the persistent and well entrenched enemy, they wiped out our own. One small miscalculation after another, cost untold pain. This book is well written, and once again reveals what our fine troops had to endure as they follow their orders, as crazy and reckless as they seemed at times. Once a person reads what happened in Dak To, all they will be able to do in this great account, is bow in sincere admiration and horror, for what these brave men went through. 4.5 Stars.

Prior to reading this book I finished doing some research on all that I could find on "The Battle of the Slopes" as the Sky Soldiers called it, (June 22, 1967). There's After Action Reports, a Newsletter from 173rd with first hand accounts, general military history books on Vietnam, etc. But when I read this book I knew I was reading something the closest we will ever get to the truth about that battle. It is a story that has been hidden and ignored and I'm not the first to say that. If you read it I think you will agree. It's disturbing. If it were made into a movie it would probably be called an "anti-war movie." No, it isn't that. It would be an "actual war movie." I am reminded how this battle and the Battle of the Little Big Horn are similar, a few examples, on how little our officers knew going into battle of the terrain that was home to the enemy, the underestimating of the fighting strength of the enemy, in both cases the men's lives going in, and so much more.

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