

by his radio call sign, "Condor Six," Newman is described by the author as a dynamic combat leader who "led from the front" and possessed an "innate understanding of what was demanded of him as a commander." But Condor Six hardly looked John Wayne-esque, Putzel notes:

Physically and on paper he seemed an unlikely candidate for the role. Short in stature and uneducated, [Newman] walked with a limp he couldn't hide and spoke with diction and profanity that instantly exposed his humble upbringing in the rural South. He was neither profound nor particularly curious, yet his superiors listened to him as a wise man, and his officers and men idolized him. He was eerily calm in a crisis and brave to the point of foolhardiness.

This emphasizes the important truth that the common denominators of outstanding combat commanders are unrelated to their physical appearance or the source of their commission. Those vital attributes are courage (moral and physical), competence, commitment and a talent for inspiring soldiers to accomplish tasks they never dreamed possible. Newman exhibited all of those attributes and in return "received unquestioning loyalty from his troops." Condor Six forged the men of C Troop into fierce and skillful warriors in the crucible of battle.

Yet, as Putzel discovered, Newman returned from Vietnam a different person. He walked out on his family, entered into another miserable marriage and "committed a series of inexplicable transgressions that doomed any chance he had to achieve high military rank. "Vietnam changed him," was all that Newman's estranged family could say to explain his dramatic postwar transformation. Putzel found that Condor Six was far from the only C

Troop soldier forced to deal with the often debilitating aftereffects of intense combat:

The war changed them all. Some self-destructed as soon as they got home; others enjoyed successful careers, marriages, children, then crashed many years later. I found only a couple who soldiered on and never looked back. There was not one pattern or one course they followed.... But they all grappled with their experience one way or another. Many still do.

Although the story of Newman and his family is the common thread in the book's narrative, it is not the only story Putzel relates in his riveting account of Vietnam combat and its aftermath. He skillfully recounts the experiences of 17 officers, warrant officers and soldiers in the unit. One of those immediately grabbed this reviewer's attention: C Troop's aero-rifle platoon leader, 1st Lt. Ed Kersey, my West Point Class of 1969 classmate. The book's second chapter is the dramatic account of Kersey's abrupt introduction-only days after the young lieutenant had arrived in-country—to incredibly intense, life-or-death combat with his platoon while outnumbered five-to-one by several surrounding North Vietnamese Army battalions.

Putzel's harrowing account shows how the aero-rifle platoon narrowly survived a three-day struggle against seemingly impossible odds through the soldiers' courage, sacrifice and endurance--and Kersey's superb battlefield leadership and resourcefulness.

Putzel's compelling, skillfully written book is a "must read" that eloquently and in-depth delivers on the promise of its title and subtitle—the price soldiers paid for their Vietnam combat and how they endured the physical and emotional wounds of the war.



—Jerry D. Morelock