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For some, Hill 488 was just another landmark in the jungles of Vietnam. For the eighteen men of Charlie Company, it was a last stand. This is the stirring combat memoir written by Ray Hildreth, one of the unit's survivors.

On June 13, 1966, men of the 1st Recon Battalion, 1st Marine Division were stationed on Hill 488. Before the week was over, they would fight the battle that would make them the most highly decorated small unit in the entire history of the U.S. military, winning a Congressional Medal of Honor, four Navy Crosses, thirteen Silver Stars, and eighteen Purple Hearts—some of them posthumously.

During the early evening of June 15, a battalion of hardened North Vietnamese regulars and Viet Cong—outnumbering the Americans 25-to-1—threw everything they had at the sixteen Marines and two Navy corpsmen for the rest of that terror-filled night. Every man who held the hill was either killed or wounded defending the ground with unbelievable courage and unflagging determination—even as reinforcements were on the way.

All they had to do was make it until dawn....

Hill 488 Details

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From Reader Review Hill 488 for online ebook

Skuli Saeland says

Mögnuð átakasaga lítillar liðssveitar Bandaríkshers sem varðist áhlaupum hers N-Víetnams og Viet Congs skæruliða á lítilli nafnlausri hæð. Andstæðingarnir voru töluvert fleiri, sennilega 25falt fleiri, en þrátt fyrir það börðust bandaríkjamennirnir þrotlaust þar til þeim var bjargað í dagrenningu. Liðssveitin hlaut flestar hernaðarviðurkenningar BNA fyrir vikið allt til þessa dags, sumar hverjar voru veittar látnum hermönnum sveitarinnar (Congressional Medal of Honor, 4 Navy Crosses, 13 Silfur stjörnur og 18 Purpura hjörtu.)

David says

I really enjoyed reading Hill 488 and even more so that the story was written by one of the survivors. The narration includes details about a lot of the men before arriving at Hill 488, to include their training, other missions and back grounds. The details of the twelve plus hour fight between 18 Marines and 450+ People's Army of Vietnam regulars pulls you into the action and by the time it ends you feel that you had been there. The battle at Hill 488 took place during the night of June 15 and lasted until about 0900 June 16, 1966. I highly recommend Hill 488.

Ryan says

Really gripping story. Tough to put down.

Steve says

The author Ray Hildreth wrote this stirring account when he and his fellow Marines of the 1st Recon Battalion, 1st Marine Division held and defended Hill 488 in Vietnam on June 15, 1966. The Marines were outnumbered 25-to-1 by a battalion of NVA (North Vietnamese Army) regulars and the VC (Viet Cong). Each man were killed or wounded, but still held their position. They later became the most decorated small military unit in the entire history of the U.S. military, winning a Congressional Medal of Honor, four Navy Crosses, thirteen Silver Stars, and eighteen Purple Hearts-some of them posthumously. This is one of the best accounts I have read about one of the battles fought during the Vietnam War.

Robert Tracy says

Co-authored by Ray Hildreth, one of the survivors of "Howard's Hill". It's the story of that battle in Vietnam and the 18-man Marine Reconnaissance unit. Outnumbered 25-1 these Marines and Navy Corpsmen would "fight the battle that would make them the most highly decorated small unit in the entire history of the U.S. military".

Written in the somewhat vulgar style of a Marine, taking the reader from the author's boyhood and troubled adolescence to Marine boot camp (which is where I've left off reading for now).

I'm reading the book in memory of my own time with the same unit (1st Reconnaissance Bn., 1st Marine Division), different company. Gunny Howard, of Charlie Co., preceded me in that unit by a year and a half. Yet his story was terribly inspiring and motivating to us in Echo Co. When back in the rear we'd take 4-mile runs at least once every day and add 1 mile in honor of Gunny Howard who earned the Medal of Honor for his action on Hill 488.

This is not a case of reflected glory; I've always wanted to read a first-hand account of "Howard's Hill" and simply did a search--and there it was! "Hill 488".

John F. says

Outstanding book!

Unless we know our past, we will continue to repeat it! The story of Hill 488 is riveting. The Marine retelling the firefight puts you in the foxhole right next to him. America owed so much to the men and women who fought and served in Vietnam. America needs to read this book! I highly recommend it!

Thomas says

This Book gave me a very good look into a very brave Battalion in the Marines that served in the Vietnam War. These soldiers knew that they were outnumbered, but they also knew that they just had to make it until the Morning for the reinforcements that they needed. These men never gave any thought to turning and running, even though it wasn't an option, they were going to serve their country with honor even if all of them had to die to do so.

The 16 men of the 1st Recon Battalion, 1st Marine Division were stationed on Hill 488, even though it was just a landmark in the War, these soldiers would have the fight of their lives on the top of a rock that wasn't even in their homeland. They were fighting for what they believed in life, also for the freedom of the Vietnamese people that lived there. The 16 men on the Hill were outnumbered 25-1 and reinforcements were not going to arrive until the morning. Before the week was over, they would fight the battle that would make them the most highly decorated small unit in the entire history of the U.S. military, winning a Congressional Medal of Honor, four Navy Crosses, thirteen Silver Stars, and eighteen Purple Hearts—some of them posthumously. Every man who held the hill was either killed or wounded defending the ground with unbelievable courage and unflagging determination—even as reinforcements were on the way.

I would suggest this book to all those that want to learn more about the Vietnam War, also to all those who want to learn about 16 men that gave all they had to protect what they believed in.

John Yearwood says

yeah. I lived it with these guys. I've been in tropical jungles like this, in the bush on these kinds of nights, but I was never attacked like these guys. It's an awesome story.

Frank Colley says

Marines...the best in the world!!!!!!!!!!

I have read somewhere in vicinity of 70 Vietnam war books. Hill 488 is one of, if not the best of all. Thank you Ray Hildreth and your entire platoon. Thank you to every veteran on this Veterans Day.

Dana says

I liked this book not because it was a literary masterpiece, but because it was told from first hand knowledge of a Marine who lived through one hellish June night. Corporal Hildrith not only lived through that long night but lost many of this friends on Hill 488 in the Vietnam jungle.

This book is told through Oklahoman Hildrith's life during those few days leading up to and through June 15th -16th, 1966.

There are a few typos and editing errors, but for the most part this is a pretty interesting book.

Dennis S says

I have read the book and cannot believe the bravery exhibited by those Marines. I served in the same company as Gunny Howard was in from October 67 through November 68. The ordeal that those Marines faced with the enemy at their feet is amazing. Fantastic reading and very well written. I highly recommend this book. It makes me very proud to be a Marine and to have served in that unit.

Jean says

I found this to be an excellent book about the Vietnam War and the story reveals the ethos of the United States Marine Corps. The story provides the minute by minute recounting of the overnight battle on June 15-16, 1966 on Niu Vu Hill (Hill 488) in the Hieg Due Valley.

Sixteen marines and two Navy corpsmen overcame 25 to 1 odds to survive one the most famous battles in Vietnam. When rescued in the morning it was discovered that of the eighteen defenders six were dead, the remainders were gravely wounded. The marines had eight rounds of ammunicions left when rescued. Hill 488 produced the most highly decorated small unit in American history. Platoon Sergeant Jimmie Howard received the Medal of Honor, thirteen others were awarded the Silver Star, four received the Navy Cross and eighteen received the Purple Heart. Lance Corporal Ray Hildreth was awarded the Silver Star and the Purple Heart.

Hildreth tells his story from a teenager to joining the marines. He tells of his life in the marines leading up to the fateful battle. He provides a detailed account of what happened that night to the members of 1st Platoon, Charlie Company, 1st reconnaissance Battalion, 1st Marine division. I read this as an audiobook downloaded from Audible. The book was narrated by Jonathan Yen.

Janet says

Not sure why we never made it to the Vietnam War in history classes, but we always seemed to stop well before that time period. Consequently I never knew anything, really, about a war that my own father fought in. (How embarrassing.) I am grateful my dad lent me this book as it gave me a much needed lesson on why we got involved in Vietnam and what it was like to be deployed to the jungles of Vietnam. It was from reading this book that I became aware of how little I actually knew about some of the most common aspects associated with the Vietnam War. For instance, I knew that Agent Orange was a highly toxic chemical used during the war, but I never knew until the author mentioned it that it was an orange-colored defoliating "agent" that was used to help improve visibility of the heavily forested terrain.

Hildreth, the author, gives a descriptive (but not monotonously so) account of his time in the Corps from when he enlisted through the Battle of Hill 488. I enjoyed the anecdotes and traditions of the USMC that he included, as well. I now know why Marines are nicknamed Leathernecks, for example.

It also seemed like there was enough of a connection created beforehand between him, his fellow Marines, and myself (as the reader) that when it came time to be dropped in this foreign land that I was deployed along side him. The intensity and detail with which the unbelievable battle on Hill 488 takes place was captured so authentically that you might notice you're holding your breath while reading the pages. Their eighteen-man platoon sure did hold steady during a 9 hour assault that seemed to go on and on and with seemingly insurmountable odds.

It is best before picking this book up to keep in mind that this is a war story, so there's nothing pretty about it. Nor does the ending get tied up with a cute little bow and a fantastically happy ending. Some of their comrades make it. Some do not. I do, however, appreciate the inclusion of the citations at the end of the book, as it helps to recap who was who and who braved what. (I now also have a deeper understanding of what The Medal of Honor versus a Navy Cross versus a Silver Star means (1st, 2nd, and 3rd highest military decorations that can be awarded, respectively). Certainly the language of the book is reflective of someone in the military and certainly of someone in a combat zone, so Southern gentility flies out the window.

I think Hill 488 or a similar first-hand account of the Vietnam War is something that most every American (16+) should read to foster a better appreciation for just how costly our freedom is and just how valuable peaceful conflict resolutions are to this country and to all other nations, as well. Perhaps if we are forced to live (albeit vicariously) inside that hellacious world even briefly, then perhaps we would be more resolute in figuring out peaceful ends to the inevitable conflicts that erupt.

Thank you Ray Hildreth, first for your unwavering service to our country, and secondly for sharing that experience with all of us.

Mike (the Paladin) says

I recently read 2 books hearkening back to Vietnam. These books were hard for me but I'd like to recommend them to anyone with even a semi-open mind. Most of what people think they know about Nam and the soldiers who were there is the product of Hollywood...a very politically left Hollywood where people had a thought process of "since we are against the war we must be against everything about the war".

The movies from the time almost universally show the troops to be crazed maniacs.

Anyway, I recommend this one.

Woody James says

The beginning of this book reminded me of my boot camp experience but while serving in Vietnam I never experienced the horrors these men experienced. I do remember the sense of never knowing what the heck we were doing out there. And feeling like mushrooms (kept in the dark and fed s__t).
