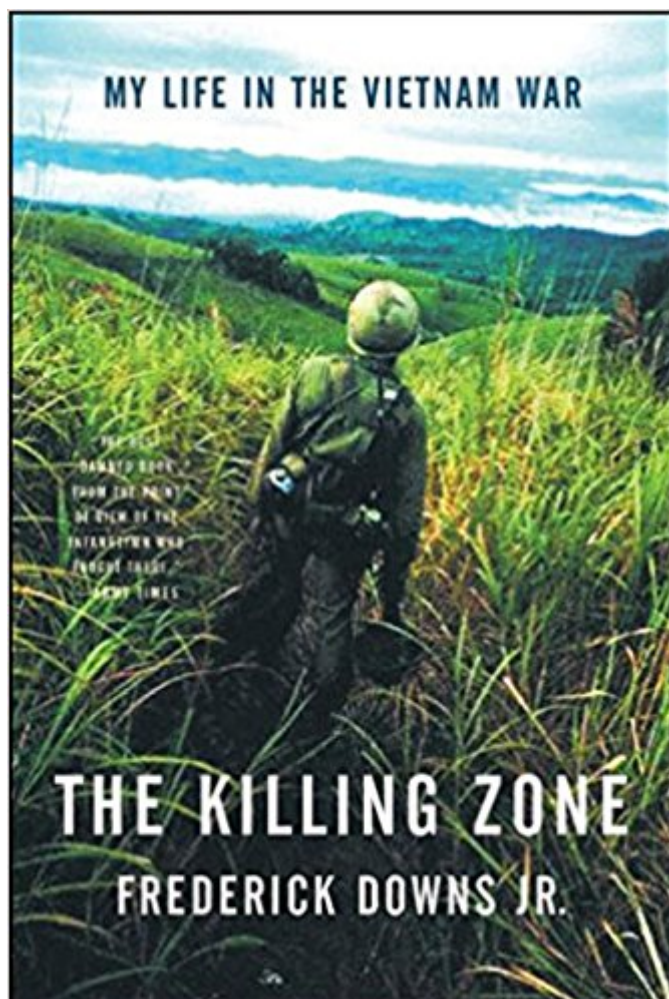


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# The Killing Zone: My Life In The Vietnam War



## Synopsis

“The best damned book from the point of view of the infantrymen who fought there.”  
—*Army Times*  
Among the best books ever written about men in combat, *The Killing Zone* tells the story of the platoon of Delta One-six, capturing what it meant to face lethal danger, to follow orders, and to search for the conviction and then the hope that this war was worth the sacrifice. The book includes a new chapter on what happened to the platoon members when they came home.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“The best damned book from the point of view of the infantrymen who fought there.”  
—*Army Times*  
---This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

Frederick Downs Jr. received four Purple Hearts, the Bronze Star with Valor, and the Silver Star for his service in the Vietnam War. He lives in Fort Washington, Maryland.

I concur with other five star reviewers but have some comments to add as one who served with the Americal in the same area of Quang Ngai from March to early July, 1970 and who has been back to the area. For starters, I can vouch for the accuracy of Downs' account in relation to geography and terrain. He has a good memory for detail. The hill he refers to as "Thunder Mountain" about five miles south of Duc Pho ("Due Pho," unfortunately, in the Kindle edition) is Nui Dau, which for us was the site of Firebase Debbie (formerly LZ Thunder). The village areas, and even Duc Pho itself (more

a town than a village) on highway QL-1, have not really changed all that much. I have had the opportunity to meet several former VC in the area, one of whom told me about blowing up one of those bridges along the highway. Everything Downs says relating to the geographical features and village areas makes sense in relation to what I know of them. For me, the greatest impact of this book is how vividly it spells out the cost of war for its participants. Downs is to be commended for arising from his ruins to make a good and productive life for himself and assist others in doing the same. But if you have any enthusiasm for war, reflect carefully on its realities as portrayed in this book, especially in its concluding pages and in the Afterword. And take note of those reviewers who complain that such an account is not sufficiently entertaining.

Frederick Downs was a an infantry officer in Vietnam from late 1967 through early 1968 when he was severely wounded and ultimately lifted out the war. His story, written in 1978 is honest, gritty and full of inner thoughts. From the writing style, he comes across as smart, determined and a good soldier. There is no gung-ho, let me at em type of rhetoric but more of there's a job to do, let's do it and not be stupid. His concerns for the men in his command grow over his time in country and as more of his men are killed, wounded or rotated out of Vietnam he takes the pain more and more personally. It wears away at his inner soul. He's honest to a fault insomuch as he refers to all Vietnamese as "dinks" whether friend or foe. He castigates the ARVN soldiers as useless, afraid to fight and more than willing to let the Americans die in their place. He highlights many problems about the whole Vietnam episode but, even at his lowest point, there's a job to do and men to protect. More than likely, the welfare and protection of his men is what kept him sane and on task. I've read many, many Vietnam memoirs. All the writings are guttural and honest but, somehow, Downs' memoir goes a little further in exploring his inner thoughts. The tone of the book is one of someone who has a job to do and isn't too concerned with the politics that got him to where he is. His job is to make sure his men survive by employing sound, sensible and tested tactics against an enemy that is cunning, dirty and determined. Vietnam seemed to have a way of turning young boys into men quickly in that, spit, shine, patriotism and gung-ho are replaced by survival in a hurry. Down's was injured severely and the original book ended where his heart stopped on an operating table. In 2007 he added an afterword that goes on to detail his unit's missions after his untimely departure due to his injuries. He also brings us up to date on the whereabouts of his men since Vietnam. Also, the afterword details his many trips back to Vietnam as a U.S. envoy trying to open dialogue aimed at learning more about U.S. MIA, POW. It's a great story that, for me, is one of the better ones. Thank you for your service Mr. Downs and thank you so much for writing it all down

for us.

This book captures just how difficult it was for U.S. soldiers in Vietnam. The enemy was everywhere and could appear or disappear easily. I wondered why there was so much pressure on the troops to report enemy kills and weapons captured. But then reading *Dereliction of Duty* it became clear - McNamara was data centric and measured US progress according to the number of enemy killed and weapons captured. I was in Vietnam in July and visited a place where there were tunnels used by the Viet Cong. We were told the VC had created 175 miles of tunnels over a 20 year period. The tunnels we saw had special traps where a US soldier would fall into a pit filled with bamboo spikes. The heat and humidity I experienced in Vietnam made all the more vivid the accounts in the book about the conditions under which our soldiers fought. This book should be read with other books such as *Dereliction of Duty* by H.R. McMaster and *Vietnam History* by Stanley Karnow. Together they show how ignorant we were of Vietnam history and how we were obsessed with the domino theory and failed to understand that Ho Chi Minh and his allies were most interested in independence after centuries of Chinese domination and then at least 70 years of French domination.

This was an excellent book, not only did the author do a great job explaining the battles and how and where they took place. The author also did a great job explaining the wear and tear on the soldier both physically when it came to wounds and hiking for hours with little rest and mentally seeing friends get killed and maimed nerves that they could be next and other atrocities of war that can wear on a person.

Thank you for your service and all you do.. i pray many more will record their unpleasant truths... we are volunteers for Central Missouri Honor Flight . . We tske Veterans to DC to see their memorials free of charge to them.. ee sre so honored snd humbled by your and their service,, thanks agsin..  
Kstie Msry Roberson

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