Clarion Review

General

De Oppresso Liber
C.C. Southerland Jr.
BookSurge
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Three Stars (out of Five)

De Oppresso Liber opens on Gabe McCarthy, a junior medic serving in southeast Asia during the Vietnam War. Because of his training and natural abilities, he has been selected to be part of a Special Forces group, an A-Team. In the book's bloody battle scenes, readers see Gabe, the *Bac-Si*, as a natural healer and a man of great compassion under fire. C.C. Southerland, Jr., a physician and former Special Forces medic, tells the story of Gabe and his company's journey through one of the United States' most fascinating wars.

Southerland writes with an extraordinary amount of detail about the war and his character's duties. In the chapter, "Operation Wet Eagle," for instance, Gabe performs a parachute drop. Southerland constructs the scene with such detail that the reader could probably parachute themselves without previous experience. "He could vaguely see the ground rushing up to meet himÂ…" Southerland writes. "A moment later, he impacted, twisting legs as he did so. Toes, calves, thighs, buttocks and fleshy portion of the back, rolling his feet up in a near perfect Parachute Landing Fall (PLF)."

Some of these facts are fun discoveries that readers will store away as the story unfolds. For example, it is interesting to learn that medic uniforms were never specially marked because enemy combatants would shoot medics to destroy a company's morale.

But problems occur when Southerland's tale becomes too weighted down in facts. When details and information span several pages and acronyms pop up in every other sentence, reading becomes like watching an action movie in slow motion; the writer may have covered every detail, but he's lost his readers by complicating the action.

For writers who have lived through the topic they are writing about, as Southerland has, providing detail is a delicate balancing act. While they may have scads of knowledge, their priority as storytellers should be to give just enough detail to keep the story moving and capture

their reader's imagination.

When Southerland takes it easy on the operational details and deals with his characters, the story flourishes. The relationship between Gabe and his home front wife who must compete with the memories of Vietnam is touching. In one of the lighter moments of the novel, we follow Ron Winkle, a sergeant on Gabe's team, who learns his girlfriend is about to marry another man and wants to stop the wedding.

For historians and devotees of war stories, *De Oppresso Liber* is an interesting addition to the military canon and may provide new details about the Vietnam War. Others may see it as the Vietnam War is generally seen-as an experience that we wish could have gone differently.