

Down from the Mountain: The Path of a Baby Boomer

Brian Vickery

Xlibris Australia (Jul 16, 2020)

Hardcover \$31.99 (306pp)

978-1-984506-53-5

Most concerned with time spent in the Australian military, Down from the Mountain is a motivational memoir about a lifetime of leadership.

Brian Vickery's memoir *Down from the Mountain* tracks his distinguished military career in the Australian army with humility and a light touch.

The book begins with Vickery's impoverished early life, most of it spent in the Tweed Valley town of Murwillumbah, in New South Wales. He was a disinterested student, and he spent several years as a postal worker before being drafted into the military at the age of twenty-one. Most of the book covers Vickery's career as an infantry officer, during which he moved from posts in Australia to Vietnam, where he led an infantry platoon in combat operations, and to postings in Hong Kong, Brunei, the United States, and back in his home country. Each duty station is covered in its own chapter.

The book's episodic, anecdotal narration is dutiful, responsible, and sometimes playful in tone. Its descriptions are full and particular: in Vietnam, where Vickery endures the rigors and horrors of jungle warfare, ambushes, bunker clearings, and minefield sweeps are explained in plain terms. Humor arises in accounts of jumping into a medic's foxhole during a mortar attack, leaving the medic exposed for a moment, but scenes are more often harrowing, as when Vickery recounts being hit by shrapnel, extracted by a helicopter, and exposed to enemy fire.

When it covers Vickery's life outside of war zones, the book's storytelling is more personalized: Vickery records everyday events, like his daughter being injured by a cat scratch; cutting the tie off of the breast of a superior officer; and parties with graduating cadets. In one account, a farmer helps Vickery when his family car breaks down on a cross country trip; in another, soldiers tattoo an Australian flag on the chest of a passed out American soldier.

Vickery is consistent in detailing his own motivations and perspectives. He displays interest in problem solving, and approaches every challenge with optimism. But he also shows that he knows his place in the chain of command. This is a book about getting the job done and having fun in the process; though career-focused, it also celebrates sports, socializing, and lifelong friends. Though it is light on reflection, the book is entertaining throughout.

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JOE TAYLOR (February 4, 2021)

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