

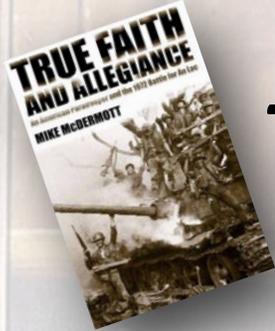
# TURNING PAGES

~ book reviews of interest to the aviation professional

## True Faith and Allegiance: An American Paratrooper and the 1972 Battle for An Loc.

By Mike Dermott. The University of Alabama Press: Tuscaloosa, AL, 2012. Available in hardcover, Kindle and audible formats at <http://www.amazon.com/True-Faith-Allegiance-American-Paratrooper/dp/0817317554>.

A book review by 2LT Jamie Crownover



**T** *True Faith and Allegiance: An American Paratrooper and the 1972 Battle for An Loc* provides a gripping description of the author's experience as senior advisor with Advisory Team 162 for the Vietnamese 5th Airborne Battalion during the battle for An Loc. The stage for this battle is set during America's withdrawal from Vietnam as North Vietnam took full advantage of the situation to overwhelm the South. An Loc was viewed as a gateway to Saigon and became a primary target of the North Vietnamese incursion. Mike Dermott describes coordinating airstrikes, participating in close-quarters combat, and providing life-saving medical care for Vietnamese paratroopers and civilians. The book includes pictures, maps, and appendices that contribute to the author's portrayal of his time in Vietnam.

Mike Dermott enlisted in the Army as a paratrooper before commissioning as an officer through the ROTC program at the University of South Dakota. He served three tours in Vietnam as an Infantry officer with the 101st Airborne Division. During a fourth tour, Mike Dermott volunteered for assignment with Advisory Team 162 as an advisor for the Vietnamese 5th Airborne Battalion. He earned two Distinguished Service Crosses, the Silver Star, the Purple Heart, and more than thirty other awards for bravery and heroism throughout his career. He was a master parachutist, and decorated with a Ranger Tab, Pathfinder Badge, and the Combat Infantryman Badge. Mike Dermott retired as a colonel and currently resides in Wyoming.

The detail in each story line leaves little room for imagination. Mike Dermott begins by describing his arrival at Team 162 and the awkward initial meeting with his Vietnamese commander, Colonel Nguyen Chi Hiu, who felt slighted that he had received a captain for an advisor, rather than the major he was entitled. Forged in part by Vietnamese culture and the persistent and unwelcomed truth that the Vietnamese would not survive An Loc without Dermott and the other American advisors who stayed, fought, and directed critical close air support, the tension in the relationship remained to the end as Mike Dermott boarded an aircraft to return home. Mike Dermott describes the intensity of this battle as only could be told from first hand observation and experience—much of it from the stench of bunkers, foxholes, and cellars while simply trying to outlast the constant rain of North Vietnamese artillery. The battalion surgeon had been killed early in the battle and American medical evacuation helicopters found it impossible to fly in the vicinity of An Loc. Only minor medical care remained, and the sole option for the sick and injured was to endure or die. Antiaircraft fire, including some of the first uses of man-portable surface to air missiles in the Vietnam War, prevented helicopter support. An Loc's lifeline of U.S. Air Force C-130 deliveries of critical supplies was dramatically reduced by the surface to air threat but the determination to continue support to the defenders of An Loc resulted in a host of "experimental" flight profiles until a reasonable solution was achieved and the resumption of resupply partially successful. Pictures of the aircraft supporting An Loc and a summary of aircraft that were shot down during the battle are provided in the book.

Mike Dermott noted that "the bravery and fortitude of those Vietnamese paratroopers surpassed anything that I have ever experienced. There was no possibility of relief and no good outcome in sight, and they just cleaned their weapons and focused on the job at hand" (p. 104). Throughout the book, Mike Dermott stated his continued admiration of the Vietnamese paratrooper's and ranger's dedication and unhesitating willingness to fight until death. He explains in one section of the book, "Seeing their willingness to accept their fate, their own impending deaths shocked me" (p. 64). Many authors of this time period will recount stories of the less than stellar performance of the Vietnamese Soldier. He describes the Vietnamese Airborne and Ranger Soldier performance under incredibly difficult conditions at An Loc as focused, determined, and professional.

He describes his experience at An Loc in such descriptive terms that the reader can taste the fear of almost certain death and smell the cordite of the nearly constant bombardment. Because of its depiction of combat MEDEVAC and AH-1 Cobra close air support, it is highly recommended for Army aviators, and for any U.S. Soldier deploying overseas in an advise and assist role.

