

Vietnam War Medic Shares Lessons Learned on the Battlefield

Minnesota Publisher Calumet Editions Releases *Care Under Fire* in May 2020

By Rachel M. Anderson, Contributing Writer

(Twin Cities) – More than 50 years may have passed since the most protested conflict in U.S. history: The Vietnam War; but to Bill Strusinski, 73, of Scandia, Minn., the memories of what happened there are as fresh on his mind as if they had happened just yesterday.

“I remember the sheer chaos of it all, the smells and sounds, rendering care to my first KIA (Killed in Action) experience,” he says. “I think about them every day.”

Strusinski also uses the skills he learned in Vietnam, where he served as a combat medic from Aug. 1967 to Aug. 1968, on a regular basis. “I learned how to make good decisions by first analyzing the situation then developing a plan and implementing it; and how to be flexible because plans and circumstances can change,” he says.

Over the years, Strusinski has shared these lessons over and over again through his work as a senior lobbyist at Minnesota’s State Capitol. But it wasn’t until asked to give a speech to the Minnesota Ambulance Association in 2017 that he decided to share exactly how those lessons were learned.

At the beginning of his memoir, *Care Under Fire* (Calumet Editions, 2020, \$16.99), Strusinski explains the book came about because the Minnesota Ambulance Association asked him to speak to the organization, not regarding his expertise on lobbying for good policy, but on how he learned to deal with the unpleasant side of life in a combat zone.

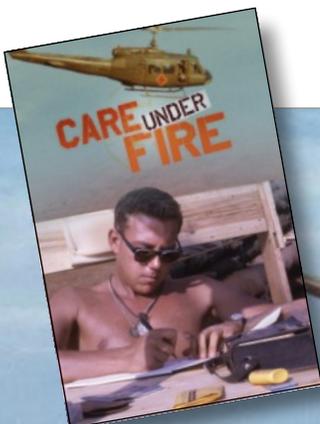
At the beginning of the book he writes, “It was the first time in five decades that I was formally asked to present my story. Old memories, some good and some bad, quickly came back to me.”

The story begins with Strusinski sharing memories of his early days as a boy growing up in St. Paul. It quickly transitions to the day he received a letter from the President of the United States that changed everything. Throughout *Care Under Fire*, Strusinski discusses what it was like to be thrust into a training regimen designed to teach him everything he needed to know about saving a life in just ten weeks. He also explains how he felt when the transport he was on touched down in Saigon; and the significant things that happened in the warzone between the day he landed in Vietnam in Aug. 1967 and when he returned home 366 days later.

Strusinski reveals vivid details about life in the jungle, sharing how he had to sleep with one eye open so he could be on alert for snakes and scorpions; explaining how he had to be alert to booby traps set during the night or an ambush that could “start the day in a bad way;” and sharing the anxiety he felt every time someone called out for a medic.

“Despite the bullets flying all around us, when someone shouted, ‘Medic!’ I was the one who had to make my way towards the injured soldier to try and save his life. That was my job,” says Strusinski, who estimates that during his time in Vietnam, he was involved in close to 200 patrols, about 60 of them at night.

“I also remember the sounds of nature, which provided guidance on how our daily adventure was to proceed,” he writes in Chapter 9: Life in the Infantry or Adapting to the Boonies. “If the birds were chirping, it was a good thing. If the baboons were hollering, it was not a good thing—something was obviously disturbing their routine... My anxiety worked overtime the whole year I was in Vietnam.”



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In addition to sharing his memories of life in the war zone, Strusinski is hoping his book will make a difference for his fellow service members. His intent is for the book to help political decision makers understand the real impact their decisions will have on people; and call attention to the growing need to treat older veterans living with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

“I think there are a lot of people my age who are moving into retirement and will soon have a lot of time on their hands to reflect and look back. When they do so, I’m afraid the regret and remorse over what happened in Vietnam will hit them like a ton of bricks. We need to provide support. People need to know they are not alone,” says Strusinski, who is among the 30 percent of Vietnam Veterans the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs estimates are living with PTSD.

Early reviews of *Care Under Fire* have been very favorable. “Several million Americans wore the uniform of the United States during the Vietnam years. But a small minority were ground combat soldiers engaged in ground combat. Bill Strusinski’s book is remarkable in telling the story of average young people who our country called on to fight for us. His talking about everyday problems of soldiers will bring back to our heroes who did the fighting the problems they faced and the pride they felt in serving honorably. The way Sergeant Strusinski tells the stories will remind his fellow heroes that their cause was just and that they did their duty... Everyone who respects America and what we stand for will benefit from this book and will get an understanding of the warriors who have made our country great,” said Harry Sieben, Jr., - Brigadier General, U.S. Air Force, Retired.

“In a few pages, Bill Strusinski has captured in vivid detail the trepidations and fears of a young soldier in Vietnam who managed to balance the inconsistencies and horror of war with instinctive bravery as he gave his heart and soul to his wounded comrades, eventually coming out of it all with a high degree of post traumatic strength,” said Jerry Newton, Command Sergeant Major, U.S. Army, Retired.

“Bill Strusinski’s *Care Under Fire* is a must read for military, combat medics, EMTs and all first responders! This is the self-help book for those of us that have served in the military or as first responders and have had to deal with PTSD, the haunting questions and guilt when we lose a soldier or patient. Questions like ‘What did I forget to do’ or ‘Could I have done more?’” said Jeff Howe, Lieutenant Colonel, Minnesota Army National Guard, Retired.

More information about *Care Under Fire* is available at Careunderfire.us. Books can be purchased online through the website, and are also available on Amazon.com.

About the Author

Bill Strusinski has over 40 years of state government lobbying experiences. Early in his career, he served in a variety of positions in the Executive Branch, including Deputy Commissioner and Commissioner of Administration. He served three Governors, including Wendell Anderson, Rudy Perpich and Al Quie.

He was also responsible for the day to day operation of the agency was the Governor’s lead advocate to secure legislative funding support for over \$1 Billion in state capital investment projects.

Since his early days in State Government, Strusinski has developed expertise in building and construction regulations, government finance and tax policy, public health policy, capital investment (bonding projects) and business regulation. He continues to work extensively with the major business regulatory (commerce), legacy, environment, finance, capital investment and tax committees in the legislature and understands their impact on small business and individuals.

Strusinski formed his own public policy firm in 1981 and has been advocating on the behalf of good public policy development as a lobbyist since that time. He has received numerous awards recognizing his professional abilities, including being named as one of the top ten lobbyists in Minnesota by the Star Tribune newspaper. He says what he



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enjoys most about lobbying is empowering people, and using his rich experience and contacts in the public and private sectors to successfully represent his clients.

Bill Strusinski and his wife, Kirsten Libby, make their home in Scandia, Minn., a suburb of the Twin Cities.

Book Description

For many surviving military veterans, the Vietnam War is an indelible part of their lives. That they survived is due in many cases to the heroic, life-saving actions of combat medics like Bill “Doc” Strusinski. Being a frontline medic was, and still is, one of the most dangerous jobs in the Army. Medics were targeted by the enemy and often called upon to aid fallen soldiers in the line of fire. In Strusinski’s riveting book, ***Care Under Fire***, he thrusts the reader squarely into moments of terror during firefights, the exhaustion of endless patrols, the anguish of losing buddies despite best efforts to save them, and the intimate bonds created during times of desperate need. This is a book about war, yes, but even more about how one man was transformed by his “sacred duty” to offer care under fire to the young soldiers he fought beside.

EDITOR’S NOTE: This feature article is available for your use copyright free and cost free. High resolution photography is also available for free upon request. To request an interview of your own with Bill Strusinski, contact Rachel M. Anderson, Publicist, Calumet Editions, at 952-240-2513 or rachel@rmapublicity.com.

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