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TRANSITION 2005 AT CFR.ORG

Soldier Dead: How We Recover, Identify, Bury, and Honor Our Military Fallen. Michael Sledge. : Columbia University Press, 2005, 376 pp. 2005

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Reviewed by Lawrence D. Freedman, *Foreign Affairs*, [September/October 2005](#)

The subtitle of this splendid book accurately describes its contents. Sledge starts with attempts to recover the fallen in the midst of battles still under way (which often adds to the fatalities in the process) and moves on to postwar recovery. He describes U.S. military practice, beginning with systems that were set up during the American Civil War and refined during the world wars. Vietnam posed special problems, mainly due to the lack of access to the country and the U.S. withdrawal. Detailed, and often grim, descriptions are interspersed with thoughtful observations on the impact of these various tasks on those involved and the wider political and cultural meaning of the messages sent about how a country treats those who fall in its service. Sledge believes strongly that the same respect should be shown to the enemy dead and chronicles many instances, including some from Iraq, where the United States has not followed this principle. This book truly fills a gap in the literature on war, and does so in an informative and sensitive way.

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