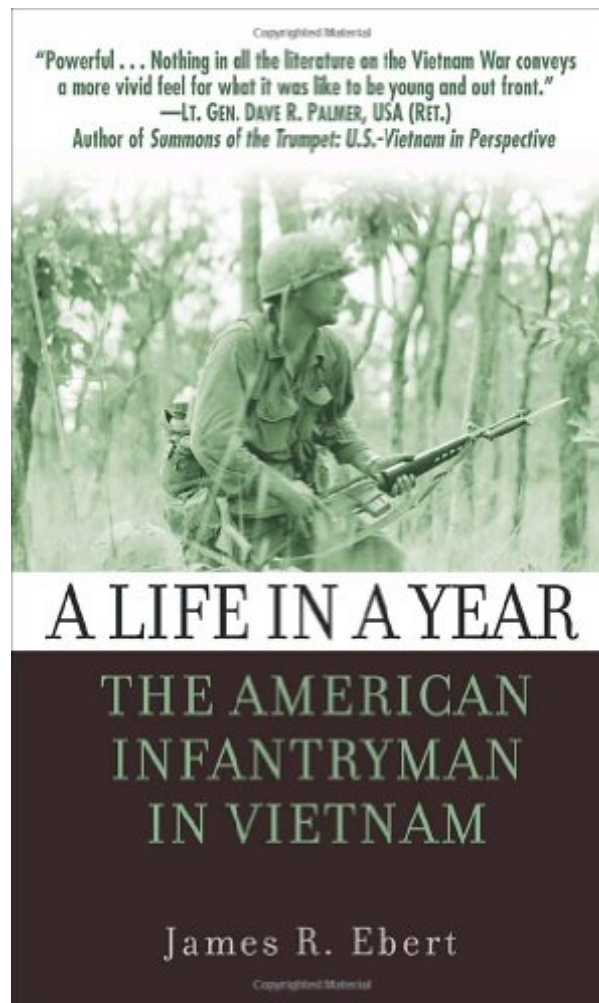


A LIFE IN A YEAR: THE AMERICAN INFANTRYMAN IN VIETNAM BY JAMES EBERT



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"Powerful . . . Nothing in all the literature on the Vietnam War conveys a more vivid feel for what it was like to be young and out front."

—LT. GEN. DAVE R. PALMER, USA (RET.)

*Author of *Summons of the Trumpet: U.S.-Vietnam in Perspective**



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THE AMERICAN INFANTRYMAN IN VIETNAM

James R. Ebert

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From Publishers Weekly

Ebert combines interviews and printed primary sources in this brilliant reconstruction of the infantryman's experience during the Vietnam War. Though accounting for less than 10% of the American troops in Vietnam, the infantry suffered more than 80% of the losses. Ebert, a secondary school teacher in Wisconsin, tells their story chronologically, from the grunts' induction and training, through their arrival in Vietnam, their first encounters with battle and their final rendezvous with the airplane that would carry them home--the "freedom bird," one of the numerous military terms, abbreviations and Vietnamese words defined in the glossary. The infantrymen confronted environments from rice paddies to jungles, from densely populated cities to virtually empty countrysides. They fought in patrol skirmishes and in division-scale battles. They learned to kill, but few understood a war with no clear objectives. They survived, but most paid a price for their survival. The book belongs in every collection on America's longest and most controversial war.

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From Library Journal

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- John R. Vallely, Siena Coll. Lib., Loudonville, N.Y.

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Southeast Asian battleground in its true, unglamorous colors: One soldier likens his first exposure to the country's heat "to having someone hold a hair-dryer up to his nose"; the author says that Vietnam's pervasive odor was characterized by many as "seminauseating and often likened to dead fish"). In this Vietnam, grenades are dangerous to friend and foe alike (one soldier describes standing in a chow line as someone accidentally pulls a pin, killing two and wounding 26), and "humping" the bush is a miserable, surreal existence, but one that most grunts stick to in order to avoid being branded a quitter--the lowest of the low--even though most days nothing is attained but total exhaustion. Also detailed are offensive operations, corpse mutilation, booby traps, drug use, racial conflict, and varied atrocities. As the soldiers' time in Vietnam gets "short" (Army men serve 12 months; Marines, 13) their primary aim becomes survival before their luck runs out. Finally--as detailed in a too brief epilogue--the soldiers fly home, muster out of the service, and then often must withstand criticism for their part in a hated war. Even jaded or knowledgeable Vietnam War-readers will find fresh material here. -- Copyright ©1993, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

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This provocative in-depth book focuses on the experiences of the infantry soldier in Vietnam. More than 60 Army and Marine Corps infantrymen speak of their experiences during their year-long tours of duty.

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Most helpful customer reviews

15 of 15 people found the following review helpful.

Best down to earth, reality oriented Vietnam book I've ever

By William Ficks

I've read many books on Vietnam and this is the best yet if you are interested in the real life of the grunts. A very down to earth and human look at the Vietnam experience. From prior to induction to return home. I highly recommend it to anyone interested in the real nitty gritty of the average guy in Vietnam. As I said, best I've ever read!!!

12 of 12 people found the following review helpful.

Great Reference for Infantryman's Experience

By mockingbird

When I first started researching the Vietnam war, I happened to come across this book at the library--exactly what I was looking for since I wanted to understand the individual experience of the infantryman. I had been warned by veterans that a lot of inaccurate books were out there, and since the writer's credentials were simply that he was a high school teacher, I first read it with a somewhat skeptical eye. As I continued to read memoirs and histories and speak with veterans, though, I also kept coming back to this book. Finally I just broke down and bought it. Though I've only spot read various passages throughout the book, it is even-handed, always rings true, is consistent with other information I've gotten, and offers factual information to set things in context (I wish there was a little more of that). Ebert has done a great job getting vets to talk--not always easy--now maybe he should create an updated edition to flesh out the coming home aspects. I hope this author still teaches high school.

9 of 9 people found the following review helpful.

This is what the grunts really went through.

By Jimmie A. Kepler

I would give this book more than 5 stars if possible. Wisconsin high school teacher James R. Ebert does a masterful job as he combines interviews and printed primary sources in this remarkable telling of the infantryman's experience during the Vietnam War. Ebert tells the story of the US Army and a few US Marine infantrymen during the Vietnam War. He takes their story from induction into the service through basic and advanced individual training, arrival in Vietnam, their first combat experiences, the first killed in

action they experience, in some cases the soldier's death, and the freedom birds that take them back to the world. Ebert points out while infantryman accounted for less than 10% of the American troops in Vietnam, the infantry suffered more than 80% of the losses.

Ebert uses an interesting technique starting every chapter with a letter by Leonard Dutcher to his parents. Dutcher just wanted to do his part for God and country and go home at the end of his tour. In the last chapter, we find out that Dutcher was killed. It caught me off guard and really added to the impact of the book. Ebert takes many of the soldiers and Marines experiences word for word from the individual himself through interviews or letters. It is a collective look at similarities of the many infantry soldiers and Marines in the war. It is a very personal account from many points of view.

This is an important book in Vietnam War literature. This is what the grunts really went through. I was left with somewhat of feeling of guilt from reading the book. Why? I graduated high school in 1971. Some of my high classmates went to Vietnam and fought. My classmate Everett Maxwell was killed in action. I went to college and was ultimately commissioned a second lieutenant in the infantry, went through airborne school and served three years active duty. My becoming an officer deferred my entry on active duty from 1971 to 1975. This is the reason for my reflective thoughts.

Read and reviewed by Jimmie A. Kepler.

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