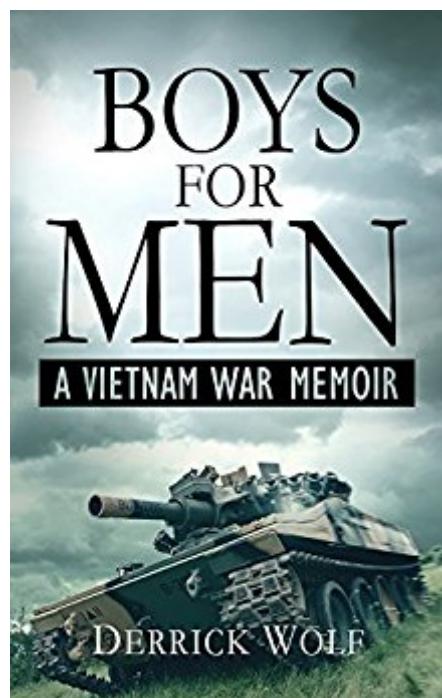


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Boys For Men: A Vietnam War Memoir



Synopsis

The true stories of two soldiers. Though they are separated by almost 100 years, the similarities in their experiences are striking. When Derrick Wolf left the U.S. for Vietnam in 1970 on January 6th, the day of Epiphany, little did he realize what a prophetic day it would turn out to be for him. Boys for Men is a journal of his tour of duty. Wolf tells of the grim daily routine of a tank crew near the De-militarized Zone just south of North Vietnam. From the near constant rain during monsoon to the unbearable high temperatures and humidity of the dry season, life becomes a series of long periods of boredom and hardship interrupted abruptly by deadly situations. Combined with Wolf's stories are excerpts of the previously unpublished 1876 journal of Sylvester Waltz, an infantryman during the Great Sioux War. Waltz was a member of the Yellowstone Expedition, which culminated in the Battle of the Little Bighorn where General George Armstrong Custer was killed and his forces defeated. Of No Value, a sequel to Boys for Men, is now available on !

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Customer Reviews

Great concept of telling the story, (in their own words), of two American soldiers who fought a century apart. I was also surprised at being drawn in, page after page, day after day of seemingly routine (same-same BS) only to find that the author had succeeded in keeping me right there with him until the very end. Great job Wolf !

Very good book, very real and brought back many memories to me. I was in the 1/9th infantry (recon) in Korea and a Sheridan driver in the 3/2 ACR in Germany not Nam but the boredom and lack of choice ring true. I appreciate playing c-rat roulette the hated 45 and all the memories this book brought back to me. The comparison between the 1875 and 1970 show how little some things change.

I've read several Vietnam War era memoirs over the years, but I must say that "Boys For Men" is the best. Derrick Wolf expresses himself in a manner that combines humor, honest and a level of articulation I wasn't expecting from a 20-year-old drafted. Frankly, I wasn't ready for the book to end. The inclusion of the journal of the Army soldier engaged in combat in 1876 proved to be more a distraction than a complement to Wolf's journal entries, with one exception. I found it beneficial to include the massacre of General Custer and his troops with the description of the lone firefight that Wolf's 2nd platoon experienced with the North Vietnamese Army. In his account of the firefight, Wolf seems to play down the level of his bravery in keeping the gunner, Big Al, on 2-6, supplied with sufficient ammo for the .50-cal. gun. I certainly hope that Derrick Wolf was appropriately rewarded for his courageous action under fire.

While this rather lengthy story (752 pages) has been criticized for the seemingly endless repetition of each day's activity, I believe it accurately represents the tedium and boredom of war. There are daily accounts of minute details filling the days and days of a soldier's existence while in a combat theater, punctuated by one or more hours of intense activity during a fire-fight. As the author repeats again and again: "War Is weird." And this story of one man's experiences demonstrates how war can serve to deliver boys of 18 or 19 years into a situation that, if they survive, results in experience that matures a man. The parallel account of an inductee's exhausting 800 mile trek to the site of Custer's disastrous defeat provided an interesting account of how war from a different perspective can seem just as futile. In both cases, a soldier lives a portion of his life doing what he is told to do with little or no explanation of why he is doing this or that. It leaves a man (or now a woman) who is in a combat region much opportunity for endless speculation as to why their life matters. I really

enjoyed this account and appreciate the author's efforts to show how war is experienced by those who actually conduct the day to day activities involved.

There are a couple of dozen paragraphs, and even descriptions of entire days, that the author repeats, almost verbatim, all the way through the book. If you stick with it, it has the effect of making you simultaneously bored, frustrated, and anxious about what's coming. Essentially the experience the author had as a soldier in the Vietnam "police action". That makes the book successful at conveying the experience. However, since the experience being conveyed is mostly tedious, it makes for a tedious read, especially because it is told from the POV of a typically immature 20-year-old without any deeper insight. Night time was scary, the food was bad, the smells were bad, the bugs were bad, there is a lot of body bag humor, they are ordered to do potentially dangerous and often apparently nonsensical things by higher-ups who give no information about what the objective is or what they are going to do next. Day after day after day, with (it seems) every single day described the same way. The question is, how much time are you willing to spend to get a taste of the tediousness and frustration of that experience? For me, as someone who hasn't had any military experience and has never read or watched stories about the military and war, it gave me an increased understanding and appreciation for what enlisted men (people) in the military go through, especially those who didn't enlist of their own free will. Truthfully, I don't know that I needed to read the same thing over and over for hours to get that understanding, but I can't say I regret the time to read it. And the repetition makes it good for bedtime reading when you want a sleep aid. The device of interspersing the Vietnam memoir with the journal of a US soldier in the field near the Little Big Horn at the time of Custer's Last Stand is an interesting idea, but it doesn't ultimately add much other than to accentuate the assertion that tedium and being in the dark are the soldier's lot in every time period.

I was a TC on a PC (ACAV in my unit) in 68-69 down between Bien Hoa/Saigon and the Cambodian border. Followed tanks busting jungle quite a bit during spring of 69, mostly M48s though a few Sheridans came into the unit prior to my departure. I have read a lot of Vietnam stories and really liked reading of the experience of being in an armored unit near the DMZ. Found the parallel story interesting as well, always fond of military stories from that period and it was a little gem. Yes a lot of this is relatively boring and repetitive. That is the nature of war predominately. The average reader may have difficulty getting by the repetition, but if they can they will have more insight into what it was like to be in the army, particularly armor, in Vietnam, a seldom told story. The descriptions of

day to day life in Boys for Men - sights, sounds, smells, and sense of touch are really good. The lack of sleep, fending off mosquitoes when trying to sleep, c-rations, interactions with the locals - all well told. Most of us did not want to be there, but we fought to protect each other as well as we could. We were not heroes we were just doing our job best we could to be able to make it home. Glad you made it home Wolf so you could tell this story! Welcome Home and thank you for your service!

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