

Made in America, Sold in the Nam: A Continuing Legacy of Pain, 2nd edition Ed.

Rick Ritter and Paul Richards

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Reviewed by Mary Simmons for Reader Views (12/06)

“Made in America, Sold in the Nam” is a collection of short stories, essays, poems, reflections and quotes about the experiences of those who were directly and indirectly affected by U.S. involvement in the war in Vietnam. It includes personal accounts by combat veterans as well as articles on the war’s impact on veterans and their families. It also explores how women experienced their own hell on earth during their tours in the war-ravaged country and incorporates a background on the war, explaining the historical and political context.

According to co-editor, Paul Richards, the majority of Americans have not wanted to listen to the stories of Vietnam veterans. “Most of the people in the nation spent their time trying to turn a deaf ear to the veterans, trying to forget that our country had ever been involved in such a dirty little war.” He goes on to say, “Wars are not made of heroes... Wars are made up of young men and women staring at the sky with vacant eyes, their life blood mixing with so much mud and slime.” As this statement suggests, this anthology does not shy away from the ugly side of the war, both in the heat of combat and in the aftermath. It was a horrendous time that has haunted those involved and the accounts are not to be read lightly. They speak of a deadly serious subject and contain real pain and horror.

You can’t come away from this book without being emotionally affected by the content. But before you read those words and say, “Well then, that’s way too heavy for me,” and therefore decide not to pick up this book, let me say that it is through painful experiences that we sometimes learn the most. One of the messages, or common themes, that jumped out at me while reading “Made in America, Sold in the Nam” was that veterans have felt ignored and unappreciated since returning to the country they fought for.

As veteran Charley Knepple describes it in his contribution, “Nothing Left to Give: A Journal of Viet Nam,” “Worst of all, I just felt used. The way in which I was used leaves me feeling angry, confused and with a rotten self-image that I have to deal with every day. I was naïve. I didn’t know what to expect from the Army or Viet Nam. I was afraid of Nam but nearly neutral on the issue of our involvement there. In Basic Training I was indoctrinated that our victory in Viet Nam would be a noble experience and that I should want to go, that combat was my birthright as a man.” He says that was the biggest lie of all and “the indoctrination had been a veiled attempt to charge us up to do the impossible for the ungrateful.” The anger, pain and disillusionment of the veterans seep through the pages of this collection, “Made in America, Sold in the Nam,” in unmistakable, blunt honesty. They will no longer be ignored and discarded. They are taking their place in world history.