

F.N.G. (Revised Edition)

Donald Bodey

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Reviewed by Richard R. Blake for Reader Views (5/08)

Donald Bodey captures the feeling of loneliness mixed with the camaraderie of being part of the team as a combat soldier in Vietnam. He describes with graphic realism the fear of death and the horrors of warfare experienced by Gabriel Saurers, infantry man assigned to Two Squad in the combat zone of Vietnam in 1969 in the novel "F.N.G." During Gabriel's first night on assignment he learned the ravages of combat, incoming mortars, casualties, and the trauma of seeing a new buddy killed in action.

Gabriel faced the conflict of eager patriotism with the question of purpose, as he was drawn between a rebellion against the "army of COs" and loyalty to the "army of grunts" in the trenches.

Bodey's fictional account of day-to-day details is a composite of the life of the American soldier serving in the infantry during the Vietnam War. Bodey writes with such strong feeling that I felt I was reading an actual autobiographical account taken from entries recorded earlier in his personal journal.

Descriptions of Vietnam, the terrain, the vegetation, the bird sounds, the bush, ravines, mountains, and the sound of silence make it hard to understand how a country so beautiful could be turned into a battle zone filled with tension and the intermittent sound of artillery explosions so strong that its victims soon become mentally paralyzed.

Bodey describes the monsoons and the tedium of living in mud-soaked dugouts near the Cambodian border in the midst of incoming mortars and unrelenting enemy attacks. Here, in a few short months the incoming new recruit becomes a hardened veteran left with nightmares that linger years later.

Forty years later, Gabe is grappling with another conflict as his grandson Seth is scheduled for deployment to Iraq. His reaction will have a dramatic impact on their lives forever.

This is strong writing, convincing, and compelling. It should be required reading for every member of Congress and everyone with influence in the military. "F.N.G." is an important reflection on a period in American History. This is a book that will touch the hearts of veterans. It will help the families of men returning from combat to understand Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and the nightmares which follow as their loved ones return to the "World" after being a part of another world far removed from the life we know and experience.