



Letters from Tommy J.: A Marine's Story - 1966-1967

Terri C. Walker, Connie C. Hughes

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Letters from Tommy J.: A Marine's Story - 1966-1967 Terri C. Walker, Connie C. Hughes From the Book Jacket "Small cars, big dances, football, the gang. Boy I sure wish we could go back to it. Now it is a little more serious." In June of 1966, when Thomas J. Holtzclaw graduated from O'Keefe High School in Atlanta, Georgia, he was an A student with a sweet-sixteen girlfriend and a burning desire to become a Marine. Six months later, he boarded the D.S.S. Gaffney, en route to a tropical Southeast Asian country he knew almost nothing about: Vietnam. There, he would find a war in which the enemy was invisible, the notion of fair fighting was gone forever, and no one even knew who was winning. Within a few months, marooned on a mountain top and cut off from everything except his fellow soldiers and the Viet Cong who inexorably poured into the region, Tommy J., as family and friends called him, wrote home almost every day. These letters-to his parents, his best friend, his girlfriend, and his siblings-forged a bridge of hope: Hope that America would win. Hope that he could stay alive. Hope that one day he would see his family again. From December of 1966 to April of 1967, the letters Tommy wrote capture the essence of the Vietnam experience as seen from the perspective of both the boy he was and the man he became, and express the hopefulness of the era and the reality ushered in by the War itself. In frank, unassuming prose, Tommy J. revealed his loneliness. He offered first-hand, terrifying accounts of ambushes and lives lost to mines. He wrote about his fears, about the battles he fought, about the heat and the C rations and the rats. He told jokes, he asked for small favors, he gave thanks for care packages and newspaper clippings. Every day, he wrote himself home again. With text that clarifies the history of the Vietnam War and puts each of the months Tommy J. spent in Vietnam into perspective, Letters From Tommy J. offers a moving portrait of an American patriot who grew up in a very short time, during a very intense conflict. His experience is as relevant today as it was then, and is powerful testimony to the integrity and loyalty of those who fight our country's wars.



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