ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

Helicopter Love Mail: Part 1
Bill Clark
Donna Clark
CreateSpace
978-1-4680-2088-5
Three Stars (out of Five)

For US soldiers in Vietnam, the whoosh of a helicopter propeller was at times one of the best sounds in the world. The copter carried news from back home—letters filled with everything from important updates to the comforting mundane written by loved ones.

For Captain William "Bill" Clark, who was on his third tour of Vietnam, the arrival of the helicopter meant contact with Donna, his wife of one year, whom he left while she was four months pregnant with their first child. In the foreword, the reader learns that the Clarks have now been married for over forty years. Thus, this record of their love as newlyweds carries with it the weight of something durable and timeless.

Donna and Bill agreed to write to each other every day while he was gone. *Helicopter Love Mail* is a record of their penned communication. Part one begins with Bill's departure and ends with the birth of their son six months later. Chapters are organized by month, and the set of letters from each partner is distinguished by a different font.

As expected, much of their back-and-forth revolves around Donna's budget and Bill's salary sent back home. More interesting, however, are the uncensored intimate thoughts revealed within their mail. Both Bill and Donna have amorous moments where they profess their physical longing for each other using twee euphemisms like "humpa humpa."

It is thrilling how candid Bill is in divulging news from the front regarding men wounded, battalions attacked, and weapons seized. While these passages serve as peaks of drama for the reader, these war details are difficult for Donna to hear. After a particularly bloody attack in which four hundred Vietnamese soldiers surrounded and killed an entire Ranger battalion, Bill wrote home, "I mean this, Honey, so don't worry; just pray for my battalion as they go and pray that they will come back safely. I have many friends in that battalion. I just know some are not coming back."

As there could be anywhere from five days to three weeks between letters, the

correspondence has an odd rhythm in which letters often address events introduced long in the past. And because the armed services mail couldn't always be reliable, the Clarks sometimes endured as long as a month without communicating. Readers may find it interesting how Bill almost seems to be addressing himself about his feelings for his wife while he suffers through four long weeks without word from home.

At its worst, *Helicopter Love Mail* is simply too full of the commonplace details of daily life—meals, weather updates, shopping lists—to make the book palatable to a wide audience. Yet those who have endured a similar long-distance affair, or who know loved ones who have experienced something similar, will enjoy reading about how two people keep their connection alive across an ocean and through a war.

Amanda McCorquodale