

Keeping Each Other Alive: A Vietnam War Memoir

Norman Hile

iUniverse (Jul 22, 2021)

Softcover \$16.99 (362pp)

978-1-66321-689-2

Keeping Each Other Alive is an engrossing soldier's memoir about experiences during the Vietnam War.

Norman Hile's memoir *Keeping Each Other Alive* covers his tour of duty in Vietnam.

Hile was a soldier during Vietnam; his book expresses cynicism about the US's motives in war, as well as about military culture and leadership in general, all while teasing out its political and historical themes. Hile, who was drafted from law school after student deferments were cancelled in 1970, reveals that he entered the war already skeptical of the US's involvement, though—and his experiences only reinforced that distrust. He also discusses tough experiences in a compelling manner, like the first time he saw a dead body, and being hit by a bullet.

With its bold descriptions of combat and of the Vietnam countryside, this detailed and empathetic account follows Hile from the moment he took his first step onto the tarmac in country. Its entry into his wartime experiences is immediate, and it covers everyday activities alongside accounts of unexpected terrors. Some anecdotes, as of a fellow soldier who suffered an emotional breakdown and fired his rifle into the camp, result in tension; that was one of many incidents in which threats came from unexpected directions.

Thorough when it comes to details as of the equipment used by Hile's artillery unit, the roles of different soldiers, and the items that went into soldiers' pack, this is educational work. For Hile, it's not enough to mention that there was only one non-commissioned officer in the field: the book explains why that was the case, while also providing relevant background on the military and cultural situations that lead to so many non-commissioned officers being far away from the front lines to begin with.

Still, this attention to detail leads to a somewhat repetitive narrative: as the soldiers in Hile's company rotate between headquarters and the field, a sense of routine sets in. This is interrupted by reflections on life during war, like the culture of smoking and the nature of c-rations, but the book as a whole still seems episodic, and its transitions between incidents are abrupt.

Evocative photographs complement the story, while an appendix tracks that letters that the book was based on. The glossary covering military terms, acronyms, and slang is also useful, helping to make *Keeping Each Other Alive* an engrossing soldier's memoir about experiences during the Vietnam War.

MATT BENZING (January 7, 2022)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Reviews make no guarantee that the publisher will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.