



Marines Never Cry: Becoming a Man When It Mattered

Timothy C. Hall

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Marines Never Cry is an uncompromising coming-of-age story that clarifies the nature of war.

He laughed his way through high school and basic training. Now, fresh off of Parris Island, Zeke Hammond is eager to join the fight against communism in South Vietnam, but his high ideals slowly fade into a grisly tale of murder, revenge, and vigilante justice. *Marines Never Cry: Becoming a Man When It Mattered* is a story inspired by author Timothy C. Hall's experiences as an enlisted marine serving in the turbulent Vietnam of the 1960s.

From his grandparents' dairy farm in northeastern Pennsylvania to the back roads, jungles, and rice paddies of DaNang, Zeke Hammond's journey to manhood is marked with highs and lows. Zeke travels to his first duty station in Santo Domingo, then to Okinawa en route to Vietnam. Sharp colors, sights, and sounds build a clear picture, finding beauty in what becomes, for Zeke, "a cesspool of blood and pain." He joins the ranks of heavy platoon, driving M54s, the five-ton cargo trucks that transported supplies throughout an increasingly hostile and treacherous region.

Although Zeke's account is fictional, it is built on the actions of real people, places, and events of the Vietnam era, particularly in 1966 and 1967. This lends an air of authority and truthfulness to the often harsh, ugly realities found on the front lines of war. Liberally infused with local vernacular, military slang, slurs, and abbreviations, the lives of rank and file marines take shape, as the rules of engagement clash with fights for survival and sanity.

Descriptions are graphic and bloody, coupled with gruesome, macabre joking. Zeke has a unique, smart-mouthed sense of humor and a propensity to be irreverent. The result is a dark comedy of sorts, one that is driven by action, with profound moments of reflection and insight. Dangers are always at the fore, from land mines, snipers, and the Viet Cong to the dreaded black syphilis.

The fear and anger generated through politics and propaganda are also made clear through the expressed attitudes of civilians and servicemen, both at home and abroad. Shifts from proud send-offs to troubled returns are particularly acute, exemplified by Zeke's own transformation. He struggles to make sense of war and his role in it; everything jumbles into "one big cauldron of insanity."

When it comes to capturing the era and its reigning sentiments, music plays a key role, from mentions of the Animals' iconic "We Gotta Get out of This Place" to Credence Clearwater Revival's ominous "Bad Moon Rising." Songs mark tempestuous feelings on both sides.

Marines Never Cry is an uncompromising coming-of-age story that clarifies the nature of war while celebrating the dedication, bravery, and sacrifice of enlisted United States Marines.

PALLAS GATES MCCORQUODALE (August 16, 2017)

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