



## Marines of Que Son

**R.B. MacNichol**

FriesenPress

(374pp)

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*In the humane historical novel *Marines of Que Son*, men in a war-torn area face internal battles, too.*

In R. B. MacNichol's historical novel *Marines of Que Son*, soldiers and civilians are brought together in the middle of the Vietnam War.

Ryan, a private security officer, like Corporal R. D. Sanders and Sergeant Bolton, is on an important personal mission in Que Son, a war-torn district. Ryan is there to meet his fiancée, Vân, at a compound deep in the bush; Bolton is searching for MIA marines and potential defectors; and Sanders wants to destroy any and all enemies in the valley, all while keeping those in his squad alive. But the men have to balance their agendas with their reliance on others around them if they are going to survive.

Though it is set up as a familiar war story focused on the bonds of a single squad of soldiers, the book's story line is in fact multifaceted and complex. In the place of action scenes, there's a lot of waiting, watching, and planning involved, but rather than dragging on, such sections are involving. They make ample room for characterization via shared back stories. The book's many developments are both unexpected and earned, and its unhurried, gradual build and sustained tension make it engrossing. The setting—wartime Vietnam—is addressed in suitable measures, too, with descriptions of combat that are vibrant and satisfying.

The lives of soldiers in Vietnam are portrayed in an accurate, immersive manner. Their daily challenges feature military operations, but also make room for forays into Vietnamese culture. The result is a robust atmosphere that's deepened by dialogue, wherein gallows humor and dark musings share space with tender sentiments between lovers.

The book's thoughtful diction makes use of era-appropriate terms and phrases, as well as relevant military jargon. Its descriptions are clear, and its mentions of famous war rumors, as of rock apes and the notorious defectors Salt and Pepper, inspire interest in aspects of the war that exceed common knowledge. Audiences will leave the book with a stronger knowledge base of the war, but also having spent time with dynamic characters who are prone to both selfless acts and selfish actions, and introspection and spontaneity in turn. Their plausible behavior results in uncommon narrative depth.

The dramatic historical novel *Marines of Que Son* is set during the Vietnam War, whose dangers and ugliness are acknowledged, and whose players are humanized as they battle internally, too.

IAN DAILEY (April 10, 2021)

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