



Shot in the Mouth and Still Preaching

Tom Williams

AuthorHouse (Mar 8, 2023)

Softcover \$15.99 (136pp)

979-882300301-8

Shot in the Mouth and Still Preaching is a familiar soldier's memoir about going to war and being changed by the experience.

Tom Williams's engaging memoir *Shot in the Mouth and Still Preaching* combines the danger of combat with a heartfelt calling to preach God's word.

Williams grew up in Ohio with a strict father. Fresh out of high school, he volunteered for military service to avoid the draft. At boot camp, his drill sergeant gave new meaning to strict. He arrived in Vietnam still feeling green and was selected as a radioman, assigned to walk point and lead troops into battle. He was aware of the dangers but also excited; later, he learned that a man walking point was shot every fifty-four seconds and that his role was more perilous than he knew. Still, he navigated the steamy jungle, experienced the terror of finding leeches "everywhere," and felt joy at mail call because of its promise of news from home. And in the end, his army service also led to a lifetime of Baptist preaching.

Accounts from the war are contrasted with memories from Williams's early life in Ohio, told with self-deprecating humor: Williams's home became "high class" when it transitioned from coal to natural gas, he writes. Indeed, casual asides and one-liners pepper the prose—alongside some clichés that obscure the story's particulars. Even in covering Williams's wartime experiences, the book is more often vague than specific, referencing horrors seen and the difficulty of letting go without going deeper. And its time in Vietnam ends with abruptness when Williams is shot. The remainder of the book is devoted to his early days in the Baptist ministry—reflective of how being in a war zone changed him. Here and elsewhere, Williams's presentation is earnest; he takes care to infuse in the text a sense of duty and patriotism.

Simple black-and-white photographs from the Vietnam era personalize the text somewhat. Still, these are stark additions—mere moments from the war that reflect momentary changes for the soldiers who took part in it. The most evocative is a picture of bare-chested soldiers running amid swirling dust and sand—not a fearful depiction after all, but rather an image of a game of football played on a beach during an off period.

The soldier-cum-preacher's memoir *Shot in the Mouth and Still Preaching* covers how the horrors of the Vietnam War were transformed into a trust in God and service.

JEREMIAH ROOD (December 28, 2023)

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