ForeWord Reviews

GENERAL

The Five O'Clock Follies: What's a Woman Doing Here, Anyway?
Theasa Tuohy
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Journalist places readers directly in Vietnam in fictionalized story of a woman covering the war.

The Vietnam War attracted journalists with determination and guts, yet rarely were women audacious enough to pursue this dangerous, male-dominated role. In *The Five O'Clock Follies*, Theasa Tuohy tells the courageous story of Angela Martinelli doing just that. Based on true accounts, this well-researched novel presents the reality of living as an independent female correspondent in devastated Saigon, while facing overt skepticism and sexist attitudes from competitive men.

This was the 1960s, a time when political turmoil and traditional roles conflicted with the expectations of a changing society. Even in Vietnam, a woman fought to hold her place, as Angela does throughout this gritty, often fatalistic, perception of a battle zone.

As the author's title suggests, military-approved briefings, which were a filtered source of information, were dubbed *follies*. Skilled writers like Angela sought depth and intensity, taking risks to get a fresh angle. Despite the heroine's commendable approach to controversy and her desire to go into a volatile area rather than watch at a safe distance, the book lags. Insufficient action detracts from the novel's page-turning potential. Prolonged discussion of sensitive topics, emphasis of romantic relationships, and a tendency to rely on description may have a lulling effect.

Only those who have participated in similar war-torn environments will appreciate the intensive work behind this detailed narrative. Interspersed is a smattering of black-and-white photographs, perhaps more appropriate for a history text. Some scenes are graphic, like this description of a faceless soldier: "His features were melting away from napalm like a mask of wax, literally running down past his eye sockets, his nose holes, dripping into his mouth."

Tuohy is a Manhattan-based writer who has has worked for five daily newspapers and The Associated Press. At its best, her writing conveys a clear picture of the disruptive life in

Vietnam, such as watching the attacks close to an area known as The Iron Triangle. “As they stood near the gangway of a floating restaurant, dark and shuttered for the night, the sky suddenly was lighted, followed by the sound that brought the light. Boom, boom, boom. The B-52s hit or missed their target. … Artillery rockets, chasing after the bombers, streaked the night sky red and yellow.”

The Five O’Clock Follies is a revealing look at the Vietnam War. This novel will escort the audience behind the scenes, allowing glimpses of filthy rooms, street beatings, helicopter ordeals, and even the mundane details of Vietnamese life, all through American eyes. Tuohy has contributed a worthwhile fictional exposé of believable characters interacting during one of the most debated wars in history.

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