

The War Around Us

Wolfgang Peter May

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Born in Germany during World War II, Wolfgang Peter May experienced the horrors of war even before he could walk. Later, as a naturalized American citizen, he served as an officer in the US Army, first in Germany and then in Vietnam. In *The War Around Us*, May shares the personal experiences and observations that have profoundly impacted his perspective on war.

Featuring short, precise chapters offering both first-person accounts and ongoing commentary about the evils of war, May's book is well researched and well written. While not all readers will share his opinions or agree with his conclusions, it is difficult not to be impressed with May's ability to present and support his arguments. He demonstrates great courage in his willingness to take on politicians, the government, the news media, and the military itself, quoting from the likes of Pat Buchanan, George Orwell, Kurt Vonnegut, and numerous others to present his critical assessments of what he deems "the truth about war." Sometimes heavy-handed but never unfocused, May states his point of view clearly and unrelentingly.

For those less inclined to appreciate the author's political agenda, a significant portion of *The War Around Us* also offers a true memoir, with May recounting tales from his days of service in Vietnam. Personal, disturbing, sometimes very sad, and occasionally even funny, these stories reveal much of what has influenced May's current philosophy on war. From military arrogance and incompetence to the devastation created and enforced under the guise of military orders, the war as May experienced it is examined and explained. Often cynical, he points to the horrors he witnessed and the lunacy of everything from the military's tendency to wildly exaggerate enemy casualty numbers to the widespread use of drugs among American troops to make his case about what is inherently wrong about war.

May's Vietnam stories deal with people and events that still haunt him. His tales of defending and working among the native Montagnard population are particularly gripping. Pages of black and white photographs add veracity to his words. Certain accounts, such as one in which he describes American troops sitting in lawn chairs drinking beer while watching "the utter and complete annihilation of the Vietcong unit that dared to attack" their airbase, unwilling "to stop watching the spectacle unfolding before their eyes," are chilling.

May speaks of both the humanity and the inhumanity of military conflict. He believes that a "common humanity" and an "unbreakable bond" exist among soldiers, appreciating that those on both sides are facing the same emotions and obstacles. For May, all are gullibly led into unnecessary wars by similarly evil "purveyors of propaganda."

In writing his own stories, May also urges anyone who has ever been witness to war to join him in demanding peace. He urges others to share their own information and opinions, and to provide testimony that "will one day build bridges across the abyss that separates the many cultures of our world." May rigorously defends his beliefs, and even those who do not agree with his position will be affected by his passion.

CHERYL HIBBARD (October 3, 2012)

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