
LEAVING “THE WORLD”

Richard Pena, Summer 1972

THESE ACCOUNTS AND INTERPRETATIONS ARE NOT WRITTEN FOR NOTORIETY nor out of boredom. There is a story here in Vietnam that must be told. It goes beyond the farce and political tragedy that American involvement in this country has come to represent. It has nothing to do with the causes or mistakes that led to our involvement; rather it deals with the human consequences of those policies. The world must see how little consideration is being given to the people whose homes are being destroyed and who we “are protecting.” Indeed, can history ever reflect the contempt that those responsible deserve for what they have done here? Our nation must also see what it has done to our sons and daughters, and in the end, the destruction it has set in motion for itself.

I begin these accounts after having been in Vietnam for two months. Only now, after long months have passed, have I overcome my initial disbelief of this apparent madness. How distant this is from law school, from the concepts of justice, fair play, and logical reasoning. Soon after I was drafted, I was to find that there is little justice, fair play and logic in the military. There is even less in this war.

In the beginning, I attempted to ignore the people of this country and their stories. I attempted to isolate myself in a bubble in order to prevent myself from being affected by this war. A goal, common to us here, is to survive 365 days and then retake our place in American society. However, no one who is or was in this forsaken land will ever return home the same. Nor should that be anyone’s wish. Those who are fortunate to return home with their physical qualities intact can better conceal the scars and imprints left by this war. However, they will never forget. Nor will the hundreds of thousands who return home as shattered specimens. Then there are those who return to America only to be housed in the mental wards of Veteran’s Hospitals. They also bear the scars of Vietnam. They are the ones who cannot forget.

It is to these men and women that the following pages are dedicated.

THE DEBATE WHICH THE VIETNAM FIASCO HAS PROMPTED, IS BOTH DIFFICULT and necessary. Was **CLICK HERE TO READ MORE** mention in this small country? Has Vietnam been an accident, an abortive