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Before leaving for Vietnam, twenty-one year old Fred Krebsbach received a piece of advice from his uncle: carry something with you into combat that will give you comfort in a time of need. He figured it was worth a shot and chose his First Communion rosary. This turned out to be a life-changing, maybe even life-saving, decision. Sent into combat as an M-60 machine gunner, for almost seven months Fred faced danger from booby traps, enemy combatants, and the jungle itself. After becoming injured and returning from the hospital he gave up the M-60 to become a squad leader for Special Forces. He endured seven more months of constant change and surprise, but one companion was constant? a voice inside his head that helped him find the right course of action to keep him alive. To this day Fred doesn't know what it was exactly, but it may have had something to do with that dang rosary! Though he survived Vietnam, Fred was changed in irrevocable ways. He hopes his story helps his grandchildren and other young people understand the cost of combat and the value of thinking it through before engaging in war.

Okay Okay: Holy Sh*t Vietnam Details

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Norm Goldman says

The war in Vietnam or as more formally known as the Second Indochina War began in 1955 and ended in 1975 when North Vietnamese forces captured Saigon. It claimed the lives of millions of civilians on both sides as well as countless soldiers who were physically and psychologically injured when it was over. As Fred Krebsbach in his memoir OKAY OKAY Holy Sh*T Vietnam quotes one of his buddies: “there is no glory in war and no glory in life after Vietnam. We all come home dead, they just forgot to bury some of us. Then we have to start all over again.” In fact, as Krebsbach states that nobody said hello or goodbye as people just disappeared.

Krebsbach, a farm boy from Iowa, was only twenty-one when he enlisted in 1968 after being told that he would receive his draft notice the first week of January 1969. Eventually, he spent fourteen months in Vietnam. He admits he was totally uninformed and had no idea what was going on in the world. He quickly discovered that he and his buddies were just “meat on the hoof.” Unfortunately, this was shamelessly confirmed to him while wounded and in a hospital ward, when the commander of the entire war, General Westmoreland, who, before taking a photo with him, just looked at him as if he was a swamp creature. This was the first time he felt dismissed, expendable, a future casualty of war-meat!

Before leaving for Vietnam, a wise piece of advice he received was from his uncle who had counselled him to always carry something with him into combat that would comfort him in time of need. This turned out to be his First Communion rosary and probably had a great deal to do with his survival when he was ordered into combat as an M-60 machine gunner. As a side note, this weapon had been introduced in 1957 and has served with every branch of the U.S. Military. It is generally used as a crew-served weapon and operated by a team of two or three individuals. The team consists of the gunner, the assistant gunner (AG), and the ammunition bearer.

Many of us don't realize, as Krebsbach points out, that the army does not use the best nor do they issue the best to its armed forces. Unfortunately, the quality of weaponry is very often sub-par and the credibility of the entire army supply was suspect and corrupt. Consequently, he and his buddies began their own quality-control effort, piecing together another M-60 which he carried with him throughout the war.

Krebsbach gave up the M-60 to become a squad leader for Special Forces after he was injured and returned to active duty when discharged from the hospital. He experienced numerous changes and surprises but his one companion seemed to be the voice in his head that guided him in finding the right course of action needed for his survival. Until today, he still cannot explain what this voice was, but as he mentions, maybe it had something to do with the dang rosary.

Most interesting about this memoir is Krebsbach depictions of the horrendous encounters with the enemy which are far more chaotic than what we witness on television or the movies when bullets are flying all over the place and the dangers of booby traps are always present. And many soldiers did not have the foggiest idea as to why their country was at war with the Vietcong. Numerous missions appeared to lack any clear benefits either for the soldiers or for the civilians they were supposed to be protecting. Furthermore, soldiers were encouraged to be cruel and sadistic as reflected in a scene Krebsbach described where a female nurse prisoner of war who had been brutally beaten during her interrogation.

Krebsbach has written a memoir par excellence with a terrific narrative drive and has captured through vivid descriptions the pandemonium and havoc as well as what it means to be made less than human in a meaningless war where too many good people lost their lives.

Follow Here goo.gl/NFXFA2 To Read Norm's Interview With Fred Krebsbach

John J. says

It was the great and venerable Confederate General Robert E. Lee who famously said, "It's a good thing that war is so horrible, so that people might never get too used to it."

Vietnam veteran Fred Krebsbach says he wrote his personal memoir about his 14 months as a grunt and foot soldier in that war to do that very thing; to remind people of the horrors of war. His tour de force reminiscence, titled "Okay, Okay – Holy Sh*T Vietnam" does exactly that as he floods the reader's every sense with memories of the mud, muck, bullets, death and terror he encountered during his tour of duty. The book reads like a fever dream – one nonstop nightmare from the day the author received his draft notice on Jan. 5, 1969, and became what he calls "Fresh Midwest Meat" for the war machine, which was on full tilt at that time in American military history. The author's experience should serve to warn future generations of young Americans from falling into the giant booby trap of chaos and confusion that defined the Vietnam War for author Fred Krebsbach.

The key to any great book about combat experience is the ability to tell a great story (check), that brings the reader right alongside him (check) into a netherworld where absolutely nothing makes any sense (check). Krebsbach was what someone once referred to as a "ragamuffin gunner," straight out of the heartland of America that was Iowa and through his long 14-month duty, manning the big M60 guns in the 5th Battalion, 60th Infantry Regiment. He takes us through a rather rapid basic training at Fort Polk, Louisiana, and through a leadership preparation training program ... back home for a short leave and then straight into the belly of the beast that was Vietnam in 1969. Krebsbach recalls the last-minute decision to grab his rosary beads from his bedroom, a kind of good luck totem that he would wear through his entire engagement, and that may have kept him alive.

Once the author's plane sets down on the landing strip in "the Nam," you can feel the intense heat coming off the asphalt and smell the acrid fumes of the machinery of war as he arrives in Dong Tam, South Vietnam. Overnight, this "new-timer" is shipped off to brigade headquarters in a place called Tan An, and is assigned to what Krebsbach describes as "one humungous, stinking mud hole" that was the village of Rach Kein. He arrives at the start of the monsoon season and basically spends the next six months attached to the Second Platoon of Alpha Company, basically trying to survive each new day.

It is early in the book that we are introduced to the character who Krebsbach calls, "Okay, Okay," which is not really a living person but rather a reassuring and helpful voice that assures him at the worst of times that everything is going to be ... "Okay."

We are also introduced to several of the author's best buddies in Alpha Company, many who will not survive that first tour in one piece. Krebsbach also tells of how quickly he learned that he would not be able to wear underwear, a belt, and socks because of "ringworm," which would be inevitable if he did. And we find out

about the author's other primary adversaries: snakes of all varieties, rats and, worst of all, landmines and booby traps. If he can avoid all these, not to mention the Viet Cong trying to kill him every day, Krebsbach is confident he may see his family again.

The action is hot, heavy and extremely hazardous and it is a wonder how any grunt made it out of that quagmire of a war alive. "Okay, Okay" proceeds like much of the author's duty, at a fever pitch, and once we feel locked and loaded there is no putting down this book. It's a primer in survival, in the nature of random chance and stupid mistakes that would either kill you or make you wiser. "Okay, Okay" is written with passion and relentlessness and it's one of the best books on war I've ever read.

At the end of 14 months, Krebsbach comes home to a different world, and although the memoir ends on a happy note in terms of the author's outlook and future, you can tell he's a different person than the clean-cut kid who first showed up for basic training. If the author's intention truly is warn others like him of the meaninglessness and waste of war, he succeeds heroically.

Grady says

'To think and not to panic were a big part of my actual combat experiences. '

Iowa born Fred Krebsbach has been a farmer, real estate investor, and systems analyst with IBM now lives in Minnesota. He earned an electronics degree from United Electronic Institute of Des Moines and a business degree from Rochester Community College. But more significant to this book is the fact that Fred was drafted in 1969 into the Army and sent to Vietnam where he served in combat for over a year. The experiences he brings to the reader create this memoir of his personal perceptions and experiences in war more visceral and realistic than the many other writers who have related novels of the Vietnam experience.

'Okay Okay: Holy Sh+ t Vietnam' opens those aspects of war that only veterans understand. Fred's book takes us through the experience of being drafted, the training – both in Basic Training and in Advanced Infantry Training – where men are treated like meat to prepare them for combat, through the anxiety and separation from family to be transported from middle America to war-shredded Vietnam, and the experience of living in monsoon weather and that special form of Viet Cong ambush and punji sticks and landmines, loss of fellow soldiers, disease induced by both the climate conditions and the food and of course enemy fire. All the inexplicable aspects of being a part of a war as a combat trooper are presented in a manner all readers can approximate if not completely understand.

All of this Fred tells in pungent detail – but he also addresses the desperate need for survival, the dark humor that surfaces in the strangest of situations, the camaraderie among the troops, and the mental, emotional and spiritual challenges that accompany combat and the world of war in general. The title of the book references a conversation and gift from his uncle before he departed for Vietnam – that Fred should wear or carry something that would give him comfort in time of need. 'I decided to wear that first communion rosary around my neck with my dog tags and thought nobody would probably know the difference. That dang rosary took on a life all to itself from that point on!' It is the presence of that rosary and the accompanying inner voice - 'The next thing I heard was "Listen to me," which I assume was from the spiritual side of my brain. It didn't sink in until I heard again, only a little more forceful this time, "Listen to me—slow down, slow down." Well, my response was, "Okay okay!"'

Few authors can match the extraordinary attention to detail about every aspect of being on a battle ground as a soldier as Fred accomplishes here. One reason he states for writing this book is to offer solace to fellow veterans who have been inalterably changed by war, no matter the location or years of their combat experience, and have been unable to share those experiences with family and friends. But another aspect rarely found in books about the Vietnam War is his examination of the social injustices, racism, military blunders from the top, and the madness of the concept of war. 'We destroyed Vietnam - why? What if there is another war...what have we learned from all the wars.'

This is a monumentally real account written by a man whose skill and humanity offer, finally, a more focused view of all aspects of war. Highly Recommended.

Pamela Gossiaux says

Vietnam Vet Opens Up About the Real Costs of War

In his new book *Okay Okay, Holy Sh*t Vietnam*, author Fred Krebsbach does something that war veterans rarely do—he opens up about his combat experiences in Vietnam.

"I've had the privilege of being in the company of many WWII combat veterans and one of the things that I've heard them say most often is how they wish they would have been more open with family members about what they thought of war and how their experiences changed their lives. They wanted to say something, but just couldn't or wouldn't. That's what I would like to do with *Okay Okay*," says Krebsbach in the preface of his memoir. He has a story he wants to share with others, especially for the sake of his grandchildren, and he does that with an honest voice and riveting story that kept me turning pages until the end.

Having just graduated from college, Krebsbach is about to embark on a career search when he gets drafted. He says his goodbyes, and then is thrown into the jungle.

The fight for survival began as soon as he landed. He was handed a M16 and told their truck was going through a couple of villages. Nothing should happen but just in case it did, "shoot in the air and hang on for dear life...and if anything is tossed in the back, jump."

In a conversational tone that makes you feel like you're sitting across the kitchen table from him, Krebsbach tells his story of the months he spent in the thick of battle. Krebsbach faced daily challenges, including: sleeping in mud, losing his ammo men to enemy attack, watching an enemy woman pulled out of the water and severely beaten, having a friend who was struck by a bullet that left a hairline part across the top of his scalp, and his mind a wreck of jittery fear, and so much more.

Through it all, Krebsbach weaves a spiritual sense in the form of a 'voice' that he heard, telling him "Okay, okay...". Upon leaving for Vietnam, his uncle gave him a rosary to carry with him. It hung around his neck the entire time.

The rosary still hangs in his house today, in a shadowbox put together by his wife, surrounded by his medals. It's a sentiment of a time long ago, and a symbol of surviving combat and coming through in one piece.

While he admits to being emotionally closed off for a long time, Krebsbach has written this book to encourage other vets to speak about their experiences and not be afraid to open up to those who love them.

“We combat veterans come home fully aware of our losses. WWII veterans already knew it, but it remained unspoken. We wouldn’t talk about it, even to our children.

“This book is my attempt to honor WWII veterans by doing something they didn’t—talk to their kids, grandkids, grandnieces and nephews, and anyone else about how they would lose a part of who they are because of war.”

After the war, Krebsbach decided that he wanted to live a productive life and went back to college, married, and had two beautiful daughters. It’s his hope that his book will resonate with his grandchildren and that they will understand the full impacts of war, including those injuries of the spirit and the irrevocable change when one sees so much death.

I highly recommend this book. It’s a vivid retelling of one man’s battle to survive and an eye-opening lesson for us all on the many casualties of war and the price of trying to handle them alone.

Diana says

I read this book from cover to cover in one sitting. I ended up going to sleep at 3am. This book is written by a man who is retelling his story so that we can understand a little of what our military members have to go through when we send them to war. It is obvious that his emotions are wrenching him in different directions at the same time. The story is detailed and heart wrenching. The photographs help to put faces on these people who we do not personally know. I doubt that most people have ever thought of the psychological as well as the physical trauma every veteran is exposed to when they are serving our country. Fred Krebsbach allows us a look into the conditions endured by our Vietnam Vets. Without dramatizing the story, he allows us to develop an idea of what it was and is like to go to war. His story is one in hundreds of thousands that have not been told. I take my hat off to every man and woman that serves their country. The book took me 4 hours to read, the only thing that I will say about it that is not positive is, I would have liked it to be longer. A very good book that is worth reading.

Susan Keefe says

In November 1968, Fred Krebsbach had just turned twenty-one, he had finished his education with a tech degree in engineering, and was looking forward to a bright future. However the US military had other plans, the war in Vietnam needed soldiers and he was called up for draft.

Before leaving for basic training, his uncle Gene, a WWII veteran advised him to take something which would give him comfort, with him, and he chose his First Communion rosary, something which would sustain him through the months of conflict.

After he had completed his training, he left his homeland for the Tan Son Nhut Republic of South Vietnam. Thus began his tour of duty in that hell hole, where for nearly seven long months he served as an M-60 machine gunner.

The author freely admits that he was changed in irrevocable ways, and reading his story, how can he not

have been. Fighting the Viet Cong, and the North Vietnamese Army under terrible conditions, losing many of his ammo bearers to booby traps, and for me, one of the saddest things was that they never said hello, because then they would never have to say goodbye...

The detailed descriptions of army life in Vietnam, and how he survived it, is absorbing reading. I was amazed to discover that captured, and rehabilitated Viet Cong, were used by the army as Tiger Scouts, and sent out in front of the soldiers to find the booby traps, punji pits, daisy chains and explosives set by their ex-comrades.

The author says that hearing WWII veterans say that they wish they had talked to their family more, has been an important factor in his decision to writing this book. I can understand this as my own Granddad was a WWII veteran who was lost, presumed dead. In fact my Grandmother was told he was dead by the British War Office. Then he turned up in Australia a couple of years after the war had ended. Apparently, he had been taken there, having been released, he had been tortured, and it was that long before they could discover his identity. I remember, he never, ever, talked about his experiences.

It must have taken a lot of courage for the author to put these words down on paper, to search his memories, trace people, and diagnose the effect on his life of those months.

Yes he came back alive, and despite sustaining injury, in one piece. However the man who returned was totally different from the 'boy' who left his home to fight for his country.

He married Marcia, has had children, and grandchildren, he was one of the lucky ones, thousands did not. Because of this, he wanted to put pen to paper to explain in real terms the true cost of war, both mentally and physically.

Thank you Fred.

Charles says

The major advantage of the publishing of books being opened to all is that the common, yet unique personal stories are being expressed. One of the most frequent books that I receive review requests for is the memoir of the combat soldier, where much of what they experienced is what they all went through, yet what they did and how they dealt with it remains unique.

As is pointed out in this book, one significant difference between the U. S. soldier in World War II and that of the fighter in Vietnam was the time spent in harm's way. For the most part in World War II the front lines were well defined, so a unit would be rotated forward for a certain amount of time, then moved back to the rear and safety.

In Vietnam, units were helicoptered into action, fought and then were extracted, only to repeat the process. Furthermore, a battle with local VC could erupt at any time and place. Krebsbach was a member of a unit that was repeatedly injected into combat situations and so, by the end of his tour, he was very close to the last man standing.

People that have read other material written by Vietnam veterans will have experienced almost identical accounts before. Only the names have been changed to reflect the unique perspective. Krebsbach spends some ink describing the difficulties he faced once he returned to civilian life, yet that uses up only about ten pages. He does mention that people, including his father, were afraid of him and that he did receive some kind of counseling help. There is no mention of any serious legal or life trouble.

While it would have made the book much more personal if Krebsbach had been more detailed regarding his transition back to civilian life, it would also have given the reader more insight into the problems of returning soldiers. Given the large numbers of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, this is important. I teach as an adjunct at a local university and have had many veterans in my classes, recently they have been roughly fifteen percent of the students. Any insight that I could receive regarding their circumstances would be helpful as I deal with them in the classroom.

Lynnea Olson says

great read
