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A memoir of stories about soldiers who are engaged not only in the daily hostilities of war but also in larger, more personal combat. It features stories that are comical, heart-rending, frightening, and yet display the incredible insight into humanity characteristic of the author's entire oeuvre.

Last Day in Vietnam Details

Date : Published July 25th 2000 by Dark Horse Comics (first published 2000)

ISBN : 9781569715000

Author : Will Eisner

Format : Paperback 117 pages

Genre : Sequential Art, Graphic Novels, Comics, War, History, Graphic Novels Comics

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From Reader Review Last Day in Vietnam for online ebook

Gayle Francis Moffet says

A set of short stories about war from Eisner, showing us--as he routinely did in his work--the future of comics through true, honest stories about real people. In the intro, Eisner writes about his military experience, both as a soldier in WWII and during his many years as a journalist creating a magazine to teach soldiers good maintenance habits for their gear. All the stories he tells are true, delivered in mostly loose panel layouts that bring a sort of dreamlike quality to the stories that lends to the feeling of being an outsider in all these true stories.

It's a strong collection with each story having a distinct feel and flavor. If you're a fan of war narratives or want to experience some of Eisner's lesser known work, it's a good read.

Joshua says

Not Eisner's best work, I don't see him playing with the form of comics as much as he did in any of his previous books. Still, this book was an interesting take on the Vietnam War principally because it was told through an Eisner narrative structure. The reader gets several small stories told from different perspectives, a trick Eisner used in almost all of his work. Because of this the reader gets a lot of little impressions of the Vietnam conflict, as well as several small studies of humanity.

Richard Barnes says

It's by Will Eisner, so of course the art is superb and the storytelling sublime. What exactly makes Last Day in Vietnam's art and stories so good?

Art - Eisner's cartoony style in no way detracts from the realities of war. The character expressions and movements may be exaggerated but the attention to detail in the backgrounds and costumes etc ground the stories in gritty realism. If anything, it's the cartoon-like style that brings the real humanity of the characters out.

These are a series of vignettes about real people and experiences - most are told as if the character is talking straight to us, and one can imagine that each episode is drawn from Eisner's experiences, from real encounters with the men at the bases.

These aren't war stories of men in action and combat, they are the real stories of the tense grind of real military life.

Café de Tinta says

Creo que no hay cómic de Eisner que no me guste...

Mike Jensen says

I am becoming convinced that graphic novels by nature can not have the impact of a book or film. I'm waiting for an exception. This is not it. It is a wonderful and moving account of people about to be shipped out of Viet Nam. As fine as it is as a graphic novel, it simply lacks the emotional depth of gravity of other stories on similar themes. It is terrific, but maybe it can not be a great book.

Jon(athan) Nakapalau says

Visceral look at the transition many Vietnam vets had to deal with. One of my friends who was in Vietnam said this GN "hit me in the gut".

Kevin says

Will Eisner's Last Day in Vietnam is a graphic novel capturing individual events from the author's tours as a war journalist through several war zones across a couple decades. All are first-person accounts with artwork being drawn from the author's point of view and characters in the panels addressing the author as though it were you.

I'm going to admit off the bat that I wasn't expecting much of this graphic novel. But I picked it up at the library solely because I know of Eisner and his reputation. However, just leafing through, I wasn't a huge fan of the artwork, either. It struck me as a little too goofy for the subject matter. And the idea of a first-person account didn't seem like something that would work in this medium. I can't say I've really read any sort of comic book where you, the reader, are an actual character. But, the deeper I got into this book, the more I realized it actually did work. I found myself really enjoying the experience and being drawn deeper into it.

I felt the only drawback was that the snippets were so short. I was able to tear through this book in a matter of 10-15 minutes. I really wish it were a bit more fleshed out. It would've benefited from a more in-depth analysis of the other characters whose lives you become a part of.

Nick says

These are short wartime vignettes, mostly ones told to Eisner while working for Army publications. Contrary to the title's suggestion, some of these stories predate Vietnam, but the title story and some of the others take place there. The one that Eisner himself witnessed, from World War II, is moving, but the tiny story from Korea was even more so in some ways, because we never learn what made the central character who and what he was.

The title story showcases the high and low ends of human nature, all in just a few pages and a few moments in time. Powerful stuff.

Sam Quixote says

World War 2 was Will Eisner's war though his association with the military would last for decades. He turned instructional manuals into comics to make them easier to read for army personnel, and his work took him to new theatres of war like Korea and Vietnam in the 1950s and 60s. In one of his last books, *Last Day in Vietnam*, he revisited these warzones to tell some brilliant short stories of the people he met.

The title story is the longest, a point of view tale where the reader is escorted by a soldier on his last day in Vietnam before returning to America. We see the infrastructure, the dead faces of the soldiers in the field, the terrifying explosions on the horizon, the beauty and the menace of the jungle, and the constant threat of death everywhere. And yet it's not all doom and gloom as Eisner mixes in some light humour and a few sharply observed portraits of the men he met.

The other stories are brief snapshots of soldiers, told with a virtuoso eye for comics storytelling. *The Periphery* sees a man stagger into a bar after seeing his son blown up in front of him, though he doesn't speak and is also tucked away in the corners of the picture, or the periphery of the page. The dialogue and the focus is on the group of jaded journalists talking about the war.

The Casualty is a silent comic (possibly because the main character has been deafened) who recounts sleeping with a Vietnamese hooker only for her to get up when he was asleep, slip a live grenade under his bed and run off, crippling him. Ever the romantic, he nevertheless finds another Asian woman to be with by the end!

A Dull Day in Korea looks at a southerner who talks about hunting back home in America and how he misses being with his dad on those hunts. It's a brilliantly captured portrait of a lonely, angry man in the middle of nowhere in his own head.

Hard Duty is a wonderfully drawn comical look at a very strong soldier who comes across as intimidating but he's the only one who'll visit the nearby orphanage to play with kids from US soldiers/Vietnamese women.

A Purple Heart for George is the final and best story. A tale from Eisner's time in WW2, the story follows George, a man who tries to transfer from his unit because he wants to die – but only when he's drunk. His friends in the office get in early to tear up his application, secretly saving his life every week. And then one week, they aren't around...

I love Eisner's drawing style. His later work, post-Spirit, is totally without panels but it's almost like there are invisible panels on the page – the art looks very fluid but it's also incredibly controlled. The figures are well placed in a scene, the choreography is real but still remarkable and very visual. A good trick to see the quality of an artist is to just look at the images and seeing if you can understand what's happening on the page without reading the script - Eisner's art is this good every time.

As Matt Fraction notes in his introduction, it's astonishing that Eisner sat on a story like *A Purple Heart for George* for so many years without putting it out earlier, though it's even more impressive that, even at the end of his life, Eisner was still crafting comics this good. The shortness of the book is what keeps it from being up there with his greats, but *Last Day in Vietnam* is still an utterly brilliant book that entertains and

informs as much as it instructs in the art of comics. It's easy to see why the most prestigious award in comics is named after him.

Riku Kauhanen says

Astonishing. Shows incredible skills in storytelling.

Patrick says

Hey, it is Will Eisner book, how could one go wrong?!?!

Deodand says

I wonder if this doesn't get more love because it's not sexy and full of colour. Instead, the comic has a free-form quality, like memories. The first comic is drawn on heavily textured paper that gives the cells a blurry quality, which is a stroke of genius for a comic recalling a distant event. It has the feeling of reality without photo-realism.

Karyl says

I picked this up randomly off the graphic novels shelf in the library (which, shamefully, is located in the children's area) because I was drawn to the title. I knew absolutely nothing about it before I checked it out.

This is a wonderfully drawn set of stories from both the Vietnam and the Korean wars. It shows the inconsistencies and the contradictions of war, and the absolute heartbreak. It also shows a bit of humor and levity that keeps the narrative from being too disheartening.

The art is absolutely fantastic. I love the detail that's present in each drawing, and Eisner's characters are so fluid and kinetic. You can almost hear their voices, and the reader wouldn't be terribly surprised if they ended up flying off the page. Even without clearly defined frames, it's easy for the reader's eye to move along the page to read the narrative in the correct order.

Well drawn, well written. Highly recommend.

Jon Hewelt says

I've loved the work of Will Eisner for a long time, starting with Fagin the Jew and reading, over and over, his Contract with God Trilogy. Last Day in Vietnam is one of his later works, published (to my understanding) 5 years before his passing. In it, Eisner explores not only the Vietnam War, but war in general, and--as always with his work--the struggles of an individual working their way through this world in whatever way they can.

There is a marked "otherness" to the stories in *Last Day in Vietnam*. Eisner's characters often face front and address the reader as if they are breaking the fourth wall, soliloquizing. Their poses from panel to panel are reminiscent of classic pantomime. Most of the time, this direct address is, well, unaddressed, but in the first story of the collection, "Last Day in Vietnam", the reader IS acknowledged as a character: a journalist, an observer to the conflict. And in reading the collection's Introduction, one learns that the reader and the author are one and the same.

After time spent serving in World War II (writing and illustrating for the newspaper, as well as creating instructional comic pamphlets on the subject of machine maintenance), Eisner continued working for the military after his service, traveling to Korea and Vietnam. *Last Day in Vietnam* contains fictionalized accounts of his experiences during that time. This creates a unique perspective, of someone having experienced war writing about a war in which he was not directly involved. But as always with Eisner, the stories he tells are universal ones, and this universal nature strengthens one of the main themes of *Last Day in Vietnam*.

Historically, we have a tendency to simplify wars down to a few key components. The Civil War was "brother against brother", despite the fact that many Northerners held the same prejudiced/segregationist beliefs as the Confederacy. We revere those who fought in World War II as being part of "the greatest generation", despite the fact that the Allies--and the United States in particular--were also guilty of unsavory tactics and human rights violations. For someone like me, who has never experienced war, it's easy to think about and discuss the politics and morality of war without understanding what it's like to be in battle. Often, there is this feeling of "us" and "them": not "us" VS. "them", but "us" and "them", as if there's a fundamental difference between those who fight and those who don't.

To me, this feels especially prevalent in writings regarding the Vietnam war. It is my understanding that, in witnessing the carnage on their television sets, the United States turned against the Vietnam War as an American military endeavor, and shunned its veterans upon returning home. How could our soldiers do such atrocious things? Were they always capable of such acts, or did war change them? Could war change any of us? Works such as *In the Lake of the Woods* and *Apocalypse Now* show soldiers absolutely ruined by war, with no hope of assimilating back into "normal" society.

Eisner does something different. He focuses less on the aftermath, more on the events of the war itself. And instead of dissecting big offensives and climactic turns in battle, he turns his attention instead to the smaller details of wartime life. And these are not just soldiers: these are people. These are not just soldiers. When they look up at us from the pages, we know that we are them and they are us.

(It should be noted, by the way, that I've never seen *M.A.S.H.*, though I assume it does something similar.)

The Vietnam War in *Last Day in Vietnam* is both lurking in the background and front-and-center. It informs the decisions of the characters' lives, but we never get a sense of how sinister the war effort truly is. Its implication informs the stories, but always as a lurking presence, something beyond our scope of comprehension, and indeed beyond the understanding of the characters speaking to us.

To go into any more detail, delving into individual stories, would, I think, ruin Eisner's effectiveness. He's not in the habit of crafting elaborate twists, but his monologues frequently lead to emotionally devastating conclusions: beautiful devastation that is worth experiencing with fresh eyes.

To me this is not Eisner's most compelling work, but make no mistake that it is compelling. If you've never read his stuff before, this is a fine introduction to a man who revolutionized a medium.

David says

Will Eisner. Legend.

This short collection involves some memories from the wars in Korea and Vietnam.

He was a great artist. And his use of the medium is demonstrated here to great effect.

But this is a short collection of short memories. I wish he shared more of them in this collection.
