



Ordinary Lives: Platoon 1005 and the Vietnam War

W.D. Ehrhart

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In the summer of 1966, in the middle of the Vietnam War, eighty young volunteers arrived at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot on Parris Island, South Carolina, from all over the Eastern United States. For the next eight weeks, as Platoon 1005, they endured one of the most intense basic training programs ever devised. Parris Island was not a place for idle conversation or social gatherings, and these men remained from start to finish almost complete strangers. Ehrhart did get to know one Marine, his bunkmate John Harris, who quietly shared his sweetheart's letters. He was a friend who died in Vietnam only a year later. Twenty-seven years after basic training, Ehrhart began what became a five-year search for the men of his platoon. Who were these men alongside whom he trained? Why had they joined the Marines at a time when being sent to war and of the country that sent them to fight it? What does the Corps mean to them? What Ehrhart learned offers an extraordinary window into the complexities of the Vietnam Generation and the United States of America then and now. Based on supporting materials from military records and family members as well as interviews -- some of which Ehrhart held in such active secondary roles as dairy farmhand, fishing companion, and impromptu guest at a family wedding -- this book records the more-than-30-year journey that each man took after his boot-camp graduation on August 12, 1966. Photos of the men, both then and now, accompany the profiles. Their stories are diverse, but as Ehrhart says, "It was, in short, history, and each of these men was and is a part of that history...There are, no doubt, scoundrels and liars and losers among these men, but as a group they have mostly impressed me with their decency and their loyalty and their hard work and their perseverance in the face of hardships and hurdles, the everyday obstacles that make ordinary lives extraordinary."

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