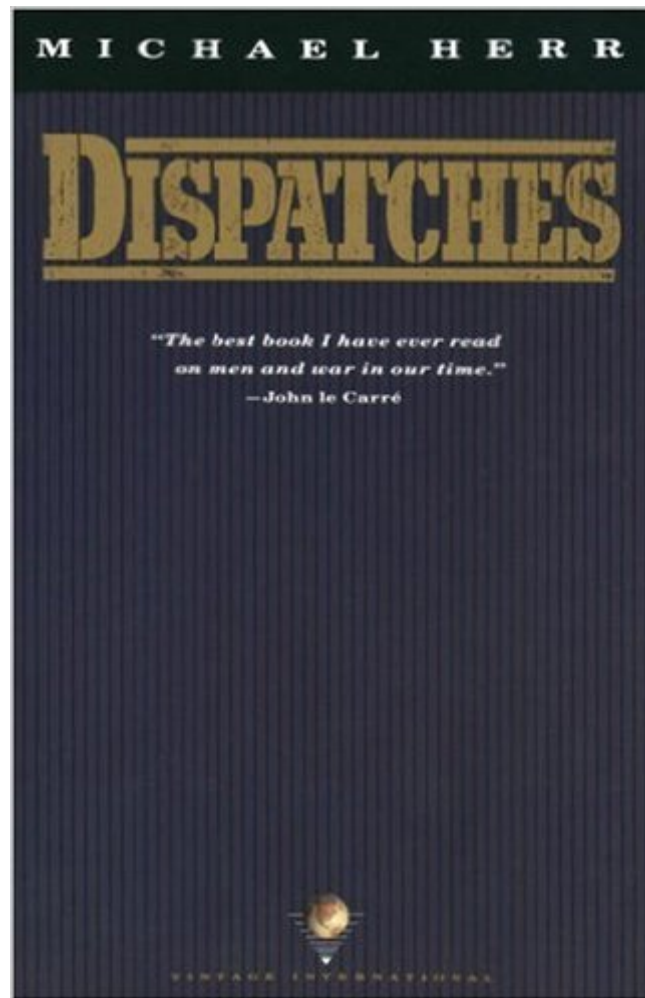


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Dispatches



Synopsis

Written on the front lines in Vietnam, *Dispatches* became an immediate classic of war reportage when it was published in 1977. From its terrifying opening pages to its final eloquent words, *Dispatches* makes us see, in unforgettable and unflinching detail, the chaos and fervor of the war and the surreal insanity of life in that singular combat zone. Michael Herr's unsparing, unorthodox retellings of the day-to-day events in Vietnam take on the force of poetry, rendering clarity from one of the most incomprehensible and nightmarish events of our time. *Dispatches* is among the most blistering and compassionate accounts of war in our literature.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Maybe it's because Michael Herr wrote the narration for the film, but reading *Dispatches*, you can't help but feel that you're getting another peek into the thoughts of Martin Sheen's character Captain Willard, from *Apocalypse Now*. Willard if he was wimpier, actually; Herr makes no bones about the fact that he was scared out of his wits throughout most of his stay in Vietnam. One of the pieces in *Dispatches*, "Illumination Rounds," really slams this point home; Herr comes off like a paranoid wreck in it. Beyond that, Herr's writing is almost poetic. His descriptions of the war and the men who fought in it are impressive, borderline masterly. In addition he throws off gems of impromptu character studies, almost throw-away sentences that describe the very core of the soldiers he met. One of my favorite lines that Herr wrote for *Apocalypse Now* is when Willard meets the PBR crew; he says they're "rock and rollers, with one foot in their graves." *Dispatches* is filled to the brim with such lines, and if you enjoyed Martin Sheen's voice-over in the Coppola film, you'll really enjoy this book. I've read *Dispatches* a few times, and each time I've taken something new from it. The "Khe

Sanh" section is obviously the centerpiece of the book; it dwarfs all of the other stories. Stuck in the bombed-out, besieged base, Herr effectively conveys the sense of doom and paranoia that gripped the Marines trapped inside. This section features one of the more memorable soldiers in the book, the black Marine Day Tripper, as well as a mysterious grenade launcher who provided the inspiration for the character Roach in *Apocalypse Now*.

A warts-and-all account of the Vietnam War. Possibly the best book on this subject in the last thirty years, Michael Herr gives us an objective look into the horror of combat without looking through the eyes of rose-tainted patriotism. He invokes the dread and chaos of the battlefield and weighs out the whims of human behaviour, bravery and insanity, meekness and humanity, without the judgement or condemnation that might be meted out by a loftier author. Herr's use of brutal imagery absorbed me into his savage surroundings. From the soldier who can't stop drooling as a result of a particularly dreadful gun battle, to the scenes of the dead, American and Vietnamese, adult and infant, on eclectic battlefields and village streets. The characters are real people in a situation that most of them neither like nor understand. They are young men who invoke the same shortcomings we all have. But they are a step above the common reader. They are professional soldiers and act that way despite their misgivings. They push past the boundaries of fear and into the realms of heroism or insanity or death. Everyone that he introduces is individual. There are no carbon copy soldiers here. They are funny or musical or religious or delusional, whatever their idiosyncrasy may be. I felt as though I was being introduced to people I knew throughout the book. Most books on the topic of war that I have read tend to stay with one platoon. Herr constantly shifts places and battalions and makes the reader feel as though he/she is part of something bigger. There is no single climax in the book. An honest reflection of that war perhaps. Each chapter is as horrific and exhilarating as the next.

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