

Gene Basset's Vietnam Sketchbook: A Cartoonist's Wartime Perspective

Thom Rooke

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In 1965, Gene Basset, a well-known political cartoonist, was sent to Vietnam by his newspaper publishing syndicate. His assignment: to sketch scenes of the increasingly controversial war in order to help the newspaper-reading public better understand the events occurring in Southeast Asia. In much the same way that M.A.S.H. gave viewers an irreverent, wry view of war and its devastating effects on citizens as well as soldiers, Basset's sketches portray the everyday, often mundane, aspects of wartime with an intimate touch that eases access to the dark subject matter. In this affectionately curated collection, author, doctor, and longtime friend of the artist, Thom Rooke, deftly leads us through more than eighty of Basset's cartoons, organizing his insights according to the well-known stages of grief, from denial to acceptance, and demonstrating how Basset's images convey moments of trauma, coping, and healing. From scenes of American GIs haggling with Vietnamese street vendors to a medic dressing the wounds of a wide-eyed soldier, Basset's endearing sketches and Rooke's friendly prose humanize life during wartime. The seriocomic vignettes and analyses are delivered with wit, compassion, and subtle charm sure to please academic, artistic, and casual readers alike.



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