

# The horrors of the vietnam war essay sample

[Countries](#), [Vietnam](#)



Bernard Edelman's *Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam* anthologises a broad range of experiences of and attitudes to the Vietnam War from those who were 'humping the boonies', 'the rear-echelon types' in administration compounds and the photographers who documented the action. We read commentary on the pressures and atrocities of the war in letters that are both stark in their reportage and emotionally charged in their reflections. It is the range of personal perspectives presented in this collection that gives a human face to the men and women who found themselves fighting a highly controversial war.

Many of the letters give vivid accounts of the harsh realities of warfare. For so many of the soldiers, letter writing is cathartic process in which they can unburden themselves of their of "their own special nightmare[s]" to a certain extent. Because the letters are written to trusted loved ones, the content is often uncensored and conveys, at times, distressing and heart wrenching events. Edelman's opening chapter, "'Cherries": First Impressions', contains the reader's first glimpse of the shocking transformation undergone by the 'newbies' as they become 'hardened' in such a short time. Mike Ransom, one of thousands of young Americans cut down in their prime, reveals in a letter to his parents the devastating reality that some men found a lust for killing. He tells them of a lieutenant who described the 'kick' he got out of 'rolling a gook 100 hundred yards...with his machine gun.'

The racism is somewhat understandable; however, the desensitisation undergone is one of the most abhorrent and damaging by-products of conflict. It is hard not to feel some level of sympathy for the troops, despite

the atrocities they commit. Edelman constructs the text in order to elicit this particular response. John Dabonka writes to his family about two men from his company who drowned when they ' got stuck in the mud'. Salvador Gonzales relates the sickening experience of having to dig up dead enemies and endure the ' terrible' smell. This sensory writing gives the intended recipient, as well as the reader, a certain level of insight into what the soldiers endured in their own personal version of ' hell'. Kevin Macauley elucidates another transformative aspect of warfare in his letter to his parents, young men grown old before their time. Macaulay explains, ' with all the death and destruction I have seen..... I have aged greatly. I feel like an old man now'. Dear America illustrates too many ways in which the ravages of war take their toll.

Dear America is a confronting text, largely due to the fact that so many horrific and painful experiences are revealed on such a constant basis. There is little relief from comments about physical pain and emotional torment. Edelman has fused the letters in an attempt to gain the reader's sympathy and overturn the American public's resentment towards the Vieterans. This collection of letters, poetry and photographs is a graphic and poignant testimony to the sacrifices made by so many thousands of young Americans. Incorporating various narrative styles reinforces the widespread atrocities, ensuring that the reader is left with no question of the hell that was the Vietnam War.