

BOOKS

May I Kill You? — Draft-Dodging and Military Escape Stories

Review by Goyo Nuncafalla

[A collection by R.E. Ward. P.O. Box 10045, Eugene, OR 97440. 142 pp. \$5. By Mail, \$6.]

Is there any relevance to draft-dodger stories from the Viet Nam era? Aren't the resisters all returned from Canada and safely implanted in law firms or realty offices? Why dwell on the past?

Because the wheel has made a full turn since the sixties, and the next generation is about to play the same game. Again the TV is telling young men to hurry down to the post office and register; 15 million have done so. The jungle training goes on in Honduras every day, and it looks as though our leader from Hollywood will surpass even his misguided counterpart from San Clemente. Our current administration is making sure there'll be trouble: If we can't bully the Nicaraguans into a fight, we've got a back-up war ready with the Arabs.

This book of draft-dodging stories is all too relevant. It tells what it is like to face a half-hour physical exam which can determine the next four years of your life—even the duration of your life.

The inductees in these stories went to extreme measures to fail their physicals. They starved themselves, went without bathing for weeks, cut off fingers, wet the bed, and gobbled hallucinogens—among other ploys—to make themselves unfit for the military. There seemed to be no fool-proof means of getting out. Draft boards were arbitrary in judging the physical and mental condition of their candidates. The inductee could not be sure of his status until he walked, crawled, or staggered from the examination room.

In collecting these stories, R. E. Ward was hardly the clinical, dis-

passionate observer. Himself a resister at the Portland induction center, Ward was threatened with arrest by the FBI, but eventually was placed in a 1-H or "holding" category. The years went by, and the bureaucracy simply never got around to processing him. But Ward never forgot the draft, nor did he alter his belief that the United States was fostering an illegal and immoral war in Vietnam. In the late 1960's he started interviewing men who had faced the draft, eventually talking with hundreds of them, recording their stories in their own words. *May I Kill You?* is a collection of 138 such stories, graphic anecdotes told in plain street talk. For example, one young man who was drafted to become a flame thrower, was stationed in San Francisco where he "... decided that it was better to end it all. I simply started walking across the city taking one aspirin for every city block that I walked. I was walking and popping my way out of this world. I made it up to a hundred and eight when two cops drove up to check me out because I was behaving in such a strange manner. I was wobbling all over the place. As they approached, I had to bend over. I started barfing up black slimy vomit and they rushed me to the hospital and pumped my stomach. After this happened, I was given a Section 8 psychological discharge."

The speakers in this book are anything but heroes; most have nothing to say about a political ethic, only that they want to avoid the army. They are victims of a draft system that discriminated against poor, uneducated young men. For author Ward, these stories were important in making his own statement on U.S. military expansion. Dedicated to finishing this work, he typed the interviews into an old Vector computer, then took years setting aside enough money to finance a press run of a few thousand copies. The book finally came out last year. It is a fascinating look at the military system. It is also a sobering omen for the 15 million new registrants—and for us all.

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