



Vietnam Zippos: American Soldiers' Engravings and Stories (1965-1973)

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We are the unwilling, led by the unqualified, doing the unnecessary for the ungrateful
—from an engraving on a Vietnam-era Zippo lighter

In 1965, journalist Morley Safer followed the United States Marines on a search and destroy mission into Cam Ne. When the Marines he accompanied reached the village, they ordered the civilians there to evacuate their homes—grass huts whose thatched roofs they set ablaze with Zippo lighters. Safer's report on the event soon aired on CBS and was among the first to paint a harrowing portrait of the War in Vietnam. LBJ responded to the segment furiously, accusing Safer of having “shat on the American flag.” For the first time since World War II, American boys in uniform had been portrayed as murderers instead of liberators. Our perception of the war—and the Zippo lighter—would never be the same.

But as this stunning book attests, the Zippo was far more than an instrument of death and destruction. For the American soldiers who wielded them, they were a vital form of social protest as well. *Vietnam Zippos* showcases the engravings made by U.S. soldiers on their lighters during the height of the conflict, from 1965 to 1973. In a real-life version of the psychedelic war portrayed in Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, Sherry Buchanan tells the fascinating story of how the humble Zippo became a talisman and companion for American GIs during their tours of duty. Through a dazzling array of images, we see how Zippo lighters were used during the war, and we discover how they served as a canvas for both personal and political expression during the Age of Aquarius, engraved with etchings of peace signs and marijuana leaves and slogans steeped in all the rock lyrics, sound bites, combat slang, and antiwar mottos of the time.

Death from Above. Napalm Sticks to Kids. I Love You Mom, From a Lonely Paratrooper. The engravings gathered in this copiously illustrated volume are at once searing, caustic, and moving, running the full emotional spectrum with both sardonic reflections—I Love the Fucking Army and the Army Loves Fucking Me—and poignant maxims—When the Power of Love Overcomes the Love of Power, the World Will Know Peace. Part pop art and part military artifact, they collectively capture the large moods of the sixties and the darkest days of Vietnam—all through the world of the tiny Zippo.

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