



Vidaurri, Richard

THE GATES OF THE SHADOW

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A 17-year-old protagonist captures the Vietnam War experience with eloquence and wit.

Richard Murphy drops out of high school during his senior year to volunteer for the Vietnam War. He likens the opportunity to the rush a football player feels when he's headed to the playoffs, making it clear that Richard is not your typical 1970-era army enlistee. Neither is this slim novel the typical, ham-handed war epoch. Vidaurri, who also served in Vietnam from 1970 to 1972, paints a complex image of the war, using excerpts of fictionalized letters and subtle psychological analysis. Wide-eyed and observant, Richard arrives in Chu Lai, Vietnam, and immediately realizes the worthlessness of his army training. He has never seen a land mine, isn't aware that he should avoid bathing alone in the rivers and is nearly flattened by the oppressive heat. But after adapting, he becomes a tank gunner who witnesses the quiet beauty of Vietnam as well as the brutality of war. The author describes the thrill of pristine beaches and the South China Sea as well as the hazards of fire ants, snakes and tree mines. We meet Mata, a stoic soldier on his fifth tour of Vietnam who walks off into the jungle rather than leave the country with the rest of the army. Richard and his best friend Edward celebrate their 19th birthdays together; later Richard retrieves the faceless body of his friend after he is killed by a landmine. During his time off, Richard reads Capote, Hemmingway, Maugham and a host of other literary icons. The author surrounds the teen with expressive imagery and scenes filled with breathless action, writing with enough detail to pull readers into this tension-filled world. After almost two years in the war, Richard becomes disconnected from his life in Los Angeles—he's entranced by the constant adrenaline surge and wants to stay in Vietnam. Vidaurri weaves a bittersweet tale that leaves readers similarly enthralled.

A gripping account that will appeal to fiction-lovers and war historians alike.

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