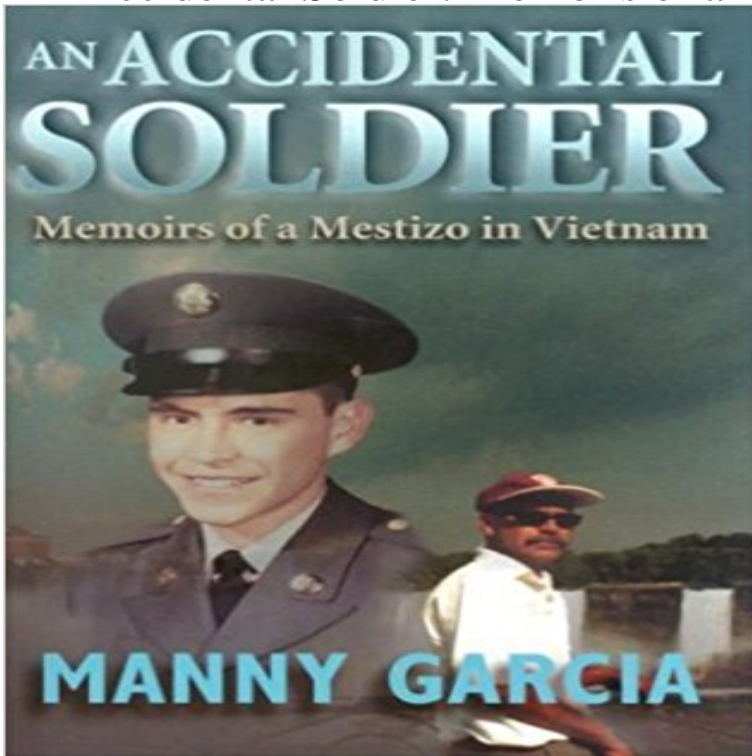


An Accidental Soldier: Memoirs of a Mestizo in Vietnam



I was born in a log cabin just like Abe Lincoln, except our cabin was a rental. Starting with this account of his humble origins, Manny Garcia, who describes himself as a left-handed, rather contrary Mestizo-American, has written a memoir that begins in late 1947 in the San Luis Valley of Southern Colorado and takes him to Utah and a stint as a Mormon and ultimately to Vietnam. In late 1965, a cocky, naïve, alienated teen-ager, Garcia joined the army almost accidentally, enlisting for three years. At eighteen he became an Airborne Ranger, a combat infantryman with the crack First Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division, the Screaming Eagles. His book shows you the war from the point man position, up close and personal, at eye level. I returned to the body and checked for booby traps. I noticed the guerilla's small bare leathery feet. I rolled the body over and realized the corpse at my feet was an old woman. Her hair was pulled back and tied in a bun, like how my grandmother used to wear her own hair. This was my first kill. I killed a woman before I made love to one. I killed a woman before I was old enough to vote. I killed a woman before I bought my first car. I killed a woman and I was an Eagle Scout. I killed a woman while I was on probation to the Juvenile Court. I killed a woman before I knew she was a woman. I killed a woman while working for the United States Army in South Vietnam. I had killed before I had lived. The afternoon in the jungle was bright and hot. I stood there

sweating, bewildered, dumfounded, and completely absorbed by the power.” from An Accidental Soldier A valuable contribution to the growing list of Viet Nam narratives told from communities whose histories have yet to be fully recognized.” Jorge Mariscal, University of California, San Diego

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