

THE WORDIES

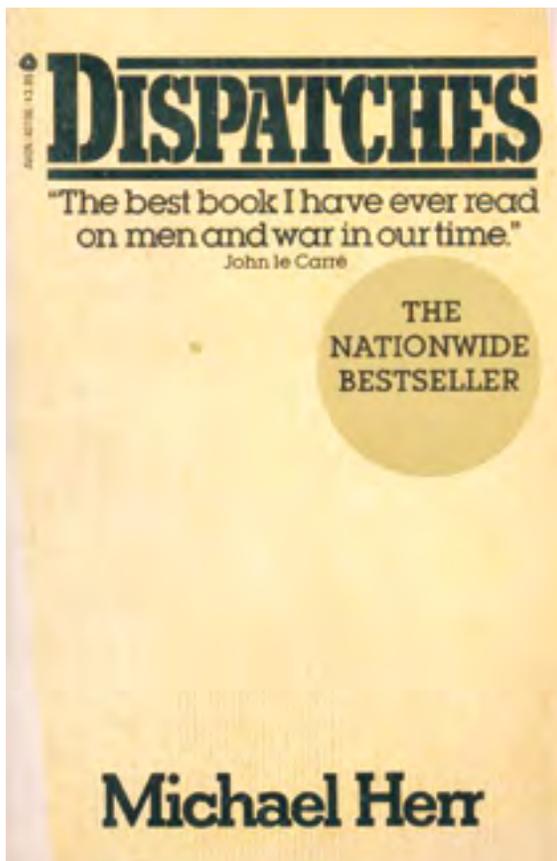
The award for being fresh off the boat; the 'I Don't Care' award; the compass award for taxi drivers; the best expat slang award; the prize for the best underwater project in Vietnam or perhaps the tastiest burrito in Hanoi.

Over the following pages we answer all those things you've always dared to ask but never wanted to know.

Interested? Well better read on, then. You may even find out who won the award for the grubbiest-looking craft brewer in Vietnam.

THE AWARD FOR AN IMPORTANT PERSPECTIVE ON VIETNAM GOES TO...

MICHAEL HERR



Michael Herr's death at the age of 76 in June 2016 led to worldwide tributes to someone who became synonymous with Vietnam.

Dispatches, a masterpiece that chronicled his time spent writing on the war for *Esquire* magazine from 1967 to 1969, is regarded as one of the greatest books on war ever written. He writes in *Dispatches* that "everywhere you went people said: 'Well, I hope you get a story,' and everywhere you went you did." But unlike many reporters covering the war, Herr wasn't interested in political posturing or operational minutiae. Rather, he focused on the human stories of war. Warts and all.

Herr famously chose to avoid press conferences from the generals and assorted higher-ups in favour of immersing himself with the troops who were fighting on the front line. He became part of the brotherhood, and the vignettes that pepper the narrative are heartbreaking and full of pathos. From the naive Mayhew cheerily singing among the bloodshed, "When you get to San Francisco, be sure

and wear some flowers in your hair", to the 19-year-old soldier who grimly tells Herr that "he's gotten too old for this shit".

The American troops were battling the landscape, too. Herr's descriptions of "ghastly mists fuming out of the valley floor, ingesting light" are hardly love letters to the countryside that many of us have fallen in love with. It's a travel diary as much as it is a brutal account of war and his poetic prose is like Shelley and Byron infused with the beat poet. Wartime Saigon is described as being like "inside the folded petals of a poisonous flower". The cloying atmosphere seeps off the pages.

For Americans the war represented the final, fatal full stop to the optimism of the 1960s and Herr masterfully captured this loss of innocence through a generation of war's lost boys. *Dispatches* offered a perspective on war, Vietnam and human nature that was uncompromising and essential.

"I realized that the only corpse I couldn't bear to look at would be the one I would never have to see." — *Thomas Barrett*