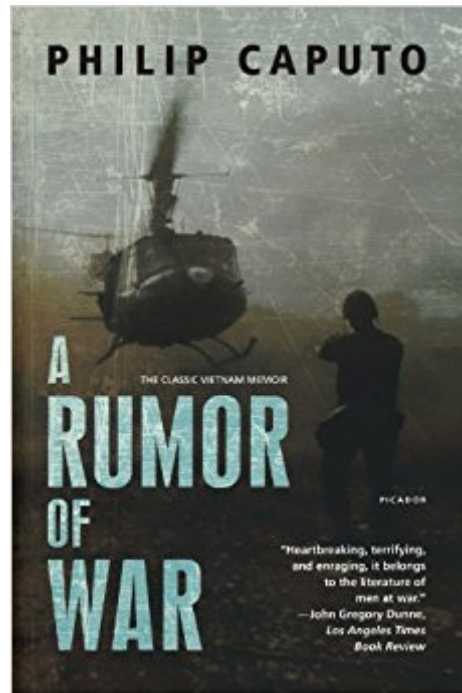




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A Rumor Of War



Synopsis

The classic Vietnam memoir, as relevant today as it was almost thirty years ago. In March of 1965, Marine Lieutenant Philip J. Caputo landed at Da Nang with the first ground combat unit deployed to Vietnam. Sixteen months later, having served on the line in one of modern history's ugliest wars, he returned home—physically whole but emotionally wasted, his youthful idealism forever gone. *A Rumor of War* is more than one soldier's story. Upon its publication in 1977, it shattered America's indifference to the fate of the men sent to fight in the jungles of Vietnam. In the years since then, it has become not only a basic text on the Vietnam War but also a renowned classic in the literature of wars throughout history and, as Caputo explains, of "the things men do in war and the things war does to men." "A singular and marvelous work." —The New York Times

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Customer Reviews

20th-anniversary edition of Caputo's memoir of fighting in Vietnam. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.

—“To call it the best book about Vietnam is to trivialize it . . . *A Rumor of War* is a dangerous and even subversive book, the first to insist—and the insistence is all the more powerful because it is implicit—that the reader ask himself these questions: How would I have acted? To what lengths would I have gone to survive? The sense of self is assaulted, overcome, subverted, leaving the reader to contemplate the deadening possibility that his own moral safety net might have a hole in it. It is a terrifying thought, and *A Rumor of War* is a terrifying book.” —John Gregory

Dunne, Los Angeles Times Book Review

“Caputo’s troubled, searching meditations on the love and hate of war, on fear, and the ambivalent discord warfare can create in the hearts of decent men, are among the most eloquent I have read in modern literature.”

William Styron, The New York Review of Books

“Every war seems to find its own voice: Caputo . . . is an eloquent spokesman for all we lost in Vietnam.”

C. D. B. Bryan, Saturday Review

“A book that must be read and reread--if for no other reason than as an eloquent statement against war. It is a superb book.”

Terry Anderson, Denver Post

“This is news that goes beyond what the journalists brought us, news from the heart of darkness. It was long overdue.”

Newsweek

“Not since Siegfried Sassoon’s classic of World War I, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, has there been a war memoir so obviously true, and so disturbingly honest.”

William Broyles, Texas Monthly

This was my second reading of this book and it struck a chord with me. If you want to get a sense of the Vietnam War (1965-66) from the point of view of a young USMC infantry lieutenant (a platoon leader) then this is the book. You will feel the oppressive heat, you will see the jungle, the dirty river, the small villages, you will hear the cannon fire. There is blood, sweat, tears, mud, mosquitoes, leeches, monsoon rains, muck filled fighting holes, the stench of your own feet and body, the stench of dead bodies, confusion & chaos, boredom. Imagine being on a patrol in the jungle (searching for VC) but distracted by mines, booby traps, trip wires, snipers and mortar fire or sitting in a fighting hole looking for signs of the enemy to your front in the pitch black night. This book will take you there. And I’m not even going to mention the politics of it all. What was the point, what was the mission? There was a great story in the book from the mouth of a chaplain re. what the death of a single marine does to a family back home ("the world"). Like Lt Caputo, I was a Lt in the USMC (1978-82) but I was lucky, there was no war in Vietnam. There was no war in Afghanistan. Vietnam, Afghanistan, it’s the same thing. What is the national security issue and the mission in Afghanistan in 2014? Why do we continue to lose good young men? For what? Lt Caputo had the good fortune to survive his 16 months in Vietnam. He left w/o physical injuries but fellow marines he knew did not. He wrote this book for the purpose of telling the truth about the ugliness of war. He succeeded. This book should be required reading at West Point, the Naval Academy, the AFA. Read this book and understand. The things men do.

I’ve been reading many books recently about Vietnam, since my current w.i.p. is a story of brothers who both served in Vietnam. While it’s not a story about the war,

it is an essential part of who my protagonists are. The lives of those who served in Vietnam
those who survived were forever altered. I just completed Philip
Caputo's *A Rumor of War*, and I'm still dealing with this
remarkable piece of literature and how deeply it affected me. More than any of the other books
I've read, this one put me right into the country, into the battles and frustrations
and agony and yes, the excitement, Caputo experienced during his tour of duty. I understand now
why I had often seen this book recommended as the definitive work on the
warrior's experience in Vietnam. It took the author ten years to write, partly
because of the overwhelming impact from his tour of duty. He shows us a clear-eyed,
heart-wrenching, totally honest look at the things war can do to a man. And the things a man can do
while he is at war. I salute his courage, I admire his skill, and I thank him for his service. And I
wonder: how would I have reacted if subjected to what these military men had to deal with? My
Native American ancestors have a saying my mother made part of who I am: Do not judge another
until you have walked a mile in his moccasins. Philip Caputo took me much farther than a mile into
the darkness that was Vietnam.

A Rumor of War is an important companion to Nick Turse's *Kill Anything That Moves: The Real
American War in Vietnam* (American Empire Project), which I read immediately before reading *A
Rumor of War*. Turse's book explains that many atrocities were committed against civilians
throughout the war because of the policies that shaped how the war was fought. Policies such as "If
it's dead and it's Vietnamese, it's VC," "search and destroy," and authorizing troops to kill
Vietnamese villagers if they ran, are mentioned repeatedly in Caputo's book, as is the heavy
emphasis that the Pentagon placed on a high body count. Without reading Turse's book, it would be
natural to think that Caputo was a homicidal psychopath. But Turse's book, which puts the conduct
of American GIs in the context of the Pentagon's policies, makes it clear that atrocities were
inevitable. I strongly recommend reading *A Rumor of War* after reading Turse's *Kill Anything that
Moves*.

A Rumor of War by Philip Caputo was a very good book. Taken from his experiences as a marine in
Vietnam, Caputo narrates the events and conflicts that he went through. For those who like more of
a narrative that describes more of the actual fighting and conditions on the frontlines rather than a
holistic approach to history this is the book. He begins with his first experience as a lieutenant
waiting for the orders to move out to Vietnam from Okinawa, hence the title of the book *A Rumor of*

War which speaks of the long wait for the eventual conflict to come. He then writes of the various encounters and experiences he had while fighting in Vietnam. This conflict differed in the lack of major battles with large confrontations between opposing forces. Instead there are many small ambushes and patrols that are documented in the book. This can get a bit tiring because of the repetitive subject of patrol after patrol, but Caputo always includes some different aspect about each patrol. Thus the book captures your attention. Caputo maintains a respectful position throughout the book by not letting his views on the war influence the way he portrayed it. He explicitly states in the book that his narrative is not to glorify or challenge the war. It is simply to say what happened. Caputo does this very well when he keeps to his narrative style while being able to reveal the emotions and thoughts of individual soldiers. Thus we get a deeper view of what Caputo felt and thought at the time while he was in the war. He lays plainly the conditions and dilemmas that soldiers faced in fighting an enemy they could not always see or identify. Through this process and the atrocities they face, the soldiers become increasingly demoralized and dehumanized. Thus Caputo really captures the essence of war and its psychological conditions. As a historical account, this book does not suffice. But as a narrative, what its focus really is, it stands as a great testimony to the conflict. "War is hell."

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