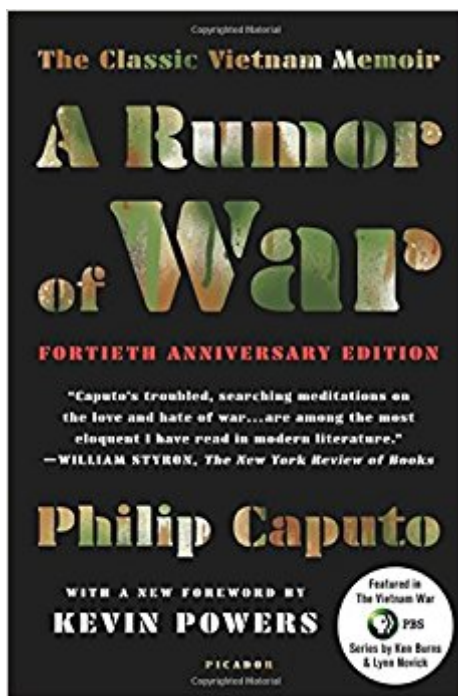


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A Rumor Of War: The Classic Vietnam Memoir (40th Anniversary Edition)



Synopsis

The 40th-anniversary edition of the classic Vietnam memoir *A Rumor of War* featured in the PBS documentary series *The Vietnam War* by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick with a new foreword by Kevin Powers. In March of 1965, Lieutenant Philip J. Caputo landed at Danang 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 far 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 the author writes, of "the things men do in war and the things war does to them." "Heartbreaking, terrifying, and enraging. It belongs to the literature of men at war." --Los Angeles Times Book Review

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Customer Reviews

20th-anniversary edition of Caputo's memoir of fighting in Vietnam. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the School & Library Binding edition.

"Caputo's troubled, searching meditations on the love and hate of war . . . are among the most eloquent I have read in modern literature." *William Styron, The New York Review of Books* "[*A Rumor of War*] is unparalleled in its honesty, unapologetic in its candor, and singular in its insights into the minds and hearts of men in combat. . . . As powerful to read today as the day it was

published." *Kevin Powers, author of Yellow Birds, from the Foreword*"A singular and marvelous work." *Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, The New York Times*"To call it the best book about Vietnam is to trivialize it. Heartbreaking, terrifying, and enraging, it belongs to the literature of men at arms." *John Gregory Dunne, Los Angeles Times Book Review*"A Rumor of War is the troubled conscience of America speaking passionately, truthfully, and finally." *Theodore Solotaroff, The New York Times Book Review*"Caputo's searing account of life for an American at the end of a barrel of a gun is a classic." *The Guardian (London)*"I hope many people in a position to affect future diplomatic and military moves will keep Caputo's book by their bedside. It is tough and honest; it is so honest it makes the attraction of combat understandable. This is not a simple book. It may even be profound." *Margaret Manning, The Boston Globe*"Only a warrior could have written A Rumor of War; warrior, honest man, powerful writer. His book is a grim triumph, and will live." *Stephen Becker, Chicago Daily News*"In this powerful book, Caputo does what most of us have yet to do: face the enemy within and overcome the wounds." *Peter J. Ognibene, The Washington Post Book World*"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, The Denver Post*"This is news that goes beyond what the journalists brought us, news from the heart of darkness. It was long overdue." *Newsweek*"A superb macabre evocation of those aimless searches and the destruction not only of property but of men's bodies and minds as well. . . . At times, it is hard to remember that this is not a novel." *William Shawcross, New Statesman*"This is a story of courage, comradeship, horror, and corruption, and at the same time a moving and bitter testimony. . . . Vivid, real, searchingly honest, it's war writing of a high order." *Publishers Weekly*"A Rumor of War is not only precious for its moral depth and gravity, it is also a battle narrative of the first rank." *Geoffrey Wolff, New Times*"Every war seems to find its own voice: Caputo, it seems to me, is an eloquent spokesman for all we lost in Vietnam." *C. D. B. Bryan, Saturday Review*"This is the hardest review I have ever had to write. I can tell you that A Rumor of War is the most daunting and significant personal account yet generated by our great dishonor, Vietnam. . . . Yes, but would you read it? Oh, I'd like to have authority over your life. For just this moment. To hit you across the mouth, take your first-born child, invalidate your credit cards, whatever, if you don't read A Rumor of War. I am that sick with passion for this book." *D. Keith Mano, National Review*"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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