

Story about the first
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[Government](#), [Military](#)



War impacts all, families, communities, countries and individuals most of all. The book *A Rumor of War* by Philip Caputo captures the ugliness of war in Vietnam and the arduous journeys the author had to face. In this paper, I will discuss Caputo's trials and tribulations he had to face in the Vietnam war and how those experiences shaped his outlook and ideals 10 years after the war. Caputo's vivid and captivating writing style immerses the reader into the hellish world experienced through Caputo's eyes. From the first day off the plane in Danang to his return 10 years later not as a soldier but as a civilian, Caputo's search for manhood is met with many horrific challenges that forever change him. In the book, Caputo mentions the weight of war and the mental and emotional burden taxed upon the soldiers during and after the war. " We went overseas full of illusions, for which the intoxicating atmosphere of those years was as much to blame as our youth"(prologue xii, Caputo). Starry-eyed young men like Caputo have no idea what to expect when they leave the only home they know now to be tossed into a hell with no end in sight. Caputo highlights his emotions and pride when first enlisting to when he is at his weakest, haunted, and scared by the horrors he has witnessed and experienced. Caputo treated his platoon as a brotherhood, a soldier is not a killing machine, or a pig sent to slaughter, but human beings with a story and a life.

Caputo not only documents his own emotional and physical decline throughout the war but the degradation and toll that war weighs upon all men in war. Caputo writes about the evolution of young American men eager to travel and protect their country with pride in their hearts. In to the killing machine war has forced them to become manifested by hate and anger. "

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Ethics seemed to be a matter of distance and technology. You could never go wrong if you killed people at long range with sophisticated weapons” (253, Caputo). Caputo discusses his experiences when it came to the elimination of the enemy, how killing not only became routine but also encouraged. Later on, in the novel, Caputo was tasked with counting the dead on both sides. Recording and witnessing numerous dead bodies began to change Caputo’s perspective and ideals surrounding the US’s involvement and purpose in Vietnam. Caputo’s new perspective on the war and the purpose for why they were there, shed light on the impact war can have on an individual’s sanity. “ As for the rest, they are now just names without faces or faces without names” (27, Caputo). Caputo had become desensitized to the mindless violence and death that surrounded him; that was all they could see surrounded by hate catalyzed by war. Caputo gains a sense of reality in all the chaos and violence, of what he and his men have become and who they once were before, experiencing the atrocities of war. War never ends, war is relieved and fought in the minds of those who experienced it. War not only brings out the ugliest in people, but it degrades a person’s sense of self and strips them from the person they once were. Happiness is replaced with hate, love is replaced by pain and sanity is replaced with anarchy. Caputo expertly documents his emotional downfall and the psychological trauma that plagued him through the duration of the war, that will haunt him for the rest of his life. Caputo observes firsthand the brutal malice acts he and his men committed in the name of the United States and the preservation of freedom. With no end to the war in sight

Caputo sees release as the only way to escape the deterioration war has inflicted upon him.

The once thing Caputo can't escape from are the atrocities he witnessed, that will forever be a part of him. " They were to a man thoroughly American, in their virtues as well as flaws: idealistic, insolent, generous, direct, violent, and provincial in the sense that they believed the ground they stood on was now forever a part of the United States simply because they stood on it" (Caputo, 50). Caputo observed the US military as being a brute and bullish invader with no real purpose of being their only to say, they are there and that they own and control wherever their boots walk upon. Living and fighting for the county of the free is no excuse to play the role of world police and turn a blind eye to the horrors inflicted upon suffering nations. Empty truths and false promises are what Caputo witnessed as the selling point for joining the US Army. What the US government doesn't show you is the nightmarish side effects of war suffered by soldiers emotionally and physically. Caputo's moment of realization that the Vietnam war was a war with no purpose, simply a war to show the world that the US is incapable of justifying a fight that no one wanted, in the name of combating communism. Caputo finds himself in front of a jury accusing him of the death of two boys that he ordered to be executed. Caputo in court weights the difference between the killing of two suspected Viet Cong boys and the hundreds of dead civilians he personally counted. Caputo is bewildered with accusations against him.

A soldier's job in war is to eliminate the enemy by any means necessary and now he is on trial for murder. Through this lengthy trial, Caputo discovers the underbelly of the US government and their countless covers ups made to prevent the US public from witnessing the widespread madness and lack of sanity being waged in Vietnam. " They had already been where we were going, to that frontier between life and death, but none of us wanted to listen to them. So I guess every generation is doomed to fight its war, to endure the same old experiences, suffer the loss of the same old illusions, and learn the same old lessons on its own" (104, Caputo). As Caputo stated " every generation is doomed to fight its war" war will always exist and as long as we exist. Caputo's hopes in telling of his own experiences in *A Rumor of War* are to highlight the dramatic evolution an individual is capable of going through when placed in war. Caputo's transformation before and after the war can be attributed to a multitude of reasons from the constant normality of death to the senseless barbaric destruction waged upon civilian's homes, families and emotions, forever lost. Americans in any war employ very routine and brut military tactics, turning a blind eye to the mass destruction left in our path with little regard for morality.

After the end of the Vietnam War, many secrets kept by the US government surrounding the war were kept away from the public. Caputo's story is one of millions, forever haunted and crippled by the person they became but eager to share their stories in hopes of change and exposure of the unethical military practices committed in Vietnam. Americans back home could only witness the war from their home tv's seeing only the progressive sides of the

war never the ugly reality soldiers would be faced with every day. During the Vietnam war back home, widespread protests against the US's involvement in the war swept the nation. Protesters would burn draft cards or flee to Canada upon hearing some of the horror stories soldiers would bring back with them from Vietnam. US soldiers returning home from the war in Vietnam received a far different welcoming than WWII veterans received. Soldiers would be spit on called names such as " baby killers", they were outcasted rather than welcomed, being treated like scum for serving their country. This widespread disdain towards US troops only added to the demons and pain that scarred them in war.

Americans at home took it upon themselves to end the war because the US government was too blind to see the lasting impact this would cause upon both nations and the eventual defeat in a fight we had no place being involved in. What makes *A Rumor of War* such a popular piece of literature is its exposure of the brute reality of war no one talks about. The capability war has to dramatically change an individual's identity to become a form of themselves they never want to see. War is as much a physiological fight as it is a physical one, there's no winner or loser in war. Caputo is one of the first writers of his time to expose the fact that war changes people for the worse and the lasting impact that can have upon a person, once the violence ends the memories and pain remain. Plato has a quote that I believe best summarizes Caputo's central theme of *A Rumor of War* " Only the dead have seen the end of war" (Plato).