The Book “A Rumor of War”

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The Vietnam War goes down into history as the only war ever lost by America. America entered the war with the aim of bringing peace to a conflict that existed between the North and the South. This war changed the literature of the U.S., particularly on the memoirs documented by war veterans, giving an account of all the events in the war. It is through an autobiography that a story can be narrated through the personal experience of the author. A Rumor of War is a memoir written by Philip Caputo that gives an account of the war while reflecting on the author’s changing attitudes towards the military, the war and the decision to enter into the Vietnam War.

Summary

The book has three distinct sections with the initial section of the foreword detailing the purpose of the author in writing the book. Caputo declares the intention to write a book that detailed the experiences of a single soldier in the Vietnam War. It would be through his personal experience that people would be able to read and get a picture of the war. After the foreword, the contents of the book are divided into three sections that address different issues.

The initial section provides the background of the author while joining the American army. Caputo joined USMC, where he underwent basic military training that prepared him to fight in a war. While in training, Caputo provides a feeling within the military that perceives the Vietnam War to be insignificant. The decision was reached, and Caputo, together with other marines, departed for Vietnam. Before leaving for Vietnam, American troops did not engage in war but served as advisors. When they arrived in Vietnam, there was fierce fighting between the North Army and a South Vietnam group. The group, referred to as the Viet Cong, was fighting in defense of an airstrip. It was then that Caputo and his colleagues realized that the war was complex.

The second section describes a different perspective because of the change in the role of the author while in Vietnam. Caputo was assigned the role of documenting the number of soldiers who died in the war. In the new position, Caputo was critical of the American commanders who failed to recognize the threat posed by the two conflicting groups and the effect it had on the American army. Caputo narrated the manner in which the officers watched movies amid night attacks. The author also provided an account of the torture of dead Americans by the Viet Cong and the retaliation of U.S. troops on the bodies of enemies.

The third section gives an account of Caputo’s involvement in frontline fighting after being reassigned

from the job of documenting. It is in this section that Caputo describes the change of attitude of the Marines towards the enemies. The marines were now serious in identifying traps and flushing out the Viet Cong from their hideouts. The highlight of the book is the transfer of Caputo to a training camp in Carolina after the officers under Caputo defied orders by killing Viet Cong soldiers. The move to take responsibility saw Caputo being demoted and sent back to the U.S., where he finished his term working with the army. In the epilogue, Caputo went back to Vietnam this time as a news reporter. It was during this period that the war ended after the victory of North Vietnam against a side, a side supported by America. Caputo was left thinking of the comrades they served together in the war.

Opinion About The Book

The book is a nice read that draws one's attention as well as creates a mood that makes one understand how it feels to fight in a war. The choice of the author to provide a personalized account of the war adds originality to the book by giving an account of all the key activities that took place in Vietnam. The choice of the author to highlight some of the issues that led to the failure of American troops in defeating the North Vietnam army helps the readers and the citizens to know the circumstances in which the U.S. ever lost a war in history. I believe that any reader would find this book interesting, particularly in the scenes where the author almost succumbed to death or evaded attacks that could have resulted in numerous casualties. I expected to learn about the causes of the failure of the war. The book met these expectations through the narration of the author and personalized opinion regarding the cause of the defeat. After finishing the book, I wish I could talk to the author, asking him more questions about the war. It would have been great if the author gave an opinion in regard to the role played by the government in the war. It would have been great if the author provided an opinion on the issue of blaming the government for entering a war, which they eventually lost.

Thesis

Vietnam War was not taken seriously, and the failure of the American troops to defeat North Vietnam was due to the misconception about the war. Right from the training of the Marines, the war in Vietnam was considered small, and it could take little effort to end the war. It was not the case, however, as American troops suffered numerous casualties and eventually lost the war. Studying the reasons behind the failure in Vietnam is a thesis that is examined throughout the book. The narration of the author, coupled with other stories that have been read about the war, enriches the thesis and provides several areas for examining the argument. The American troops underestimated the strength of North Vietnam, and it serves as a lesson on the need to focus and adopt better strategies to defeat an enemy.

Author’s Aims

The author, in writing, aims to provide an account of what transpired until the end of the war. The main aim is to provide information about what the American troops did well and the areas of failure that eventually led to a shocking defeat. The other aim is to allow the reader to picture the emotional and psychological challenges faced by the American troops in Vietnam. Through a personal approach to the book, the reader can get a vivid picture of the war, which helps them to appreciate the role played by the army in protecting the citizens. The author achieves the aims through the persuasive nature of the book. The book has been purchased overwhelmingly as several people have gotten the chance to read the book. The readers have additionally left reviews about the book, citing insightful approaches to learning about the Vietnam War. The organization of the book has supported these aims. The message provided in the foreword informs the reader that the book is an autobiography, and understanding and analysis solely lie on the reader. The different sections of the book describe the war to the point when the author thinks of his friends who have died and those who survived while fighting in the war.

Assumptions

The author made a basic assumption by not providing a detailed explanation of what forced the American troops to be deployed to Vietnam. The author assumes that the reader is aware of the cause of the war and the interest of America in fighting in the war. It is the responsibility of the reader to have prior knowledge of historical issues surrounding the war. The assumption plays an integral role in the book as it allows readers to search for outside sources to learn about the war before concluding the book (Appy, 1993). The technique with the assumption works perfectly well, and I do not think that this assumption should have been made. The assumption enriches the book by creating an urge among the readers to read more about the war and draw comparisons with the book.

History Motivation

Both individual and economic forces drove the move to fight in the Vietnam War. According to the author, the period preceding the war was filled with tension, mainly from the Soviet Union, and the U.S. needed a means of exerting its dominance and control in world politics. The fear of the spread of global communism persuaded President Johnson to seek a resolution from Congress for America to enter into war. The motivation to stop the spread of communism in other countries saw the U.S. enter into a war. The U.S. firmly believed in capitalism and allowing other countries to adopt communism would have seen its influence in world politics significantly dropping. The U.S. was motivated by being a world superpower, and using its military to fight in such a war would have served as a means of warning other countries about its capabilities.

Presentation

I believe that the presentation of the author is accurate based on the manner in which the book is written. The book has been written based on all the places in which the author worked. While recording the number of deaths of the American troops, the author provided an account of how the soldiers tortured dead bodies. When he returns to fight in the front line, the story shifts, which gives focus to the author in detailing the events he saw and experienced. The decision of the author to take responsibility for the two deaths of Viet Cong soldiers slightly brought the story to an end at the point when he returned as a reporter. The shift in the story from one location to the other supports the accuracy of the events described by the author. The vivid description that has scary moments shows the level of accuracy of the author in writing the book.

Evaluation

The book has been written through the eyes of the author. In reading the book, the reader can look at the war vividly by smelling what transpired. The choice of words and the arrangement of the book add accuracy and authenticity. I would recommend the book to any person, particularly those interested in learning about U.S. history.

References

Appy, C. G. (1993). *Working-class war: American combat soldiers and Vietnam*. University of North Carolina Press. https://uncpress.org/book/9780807843918/working-class-war/