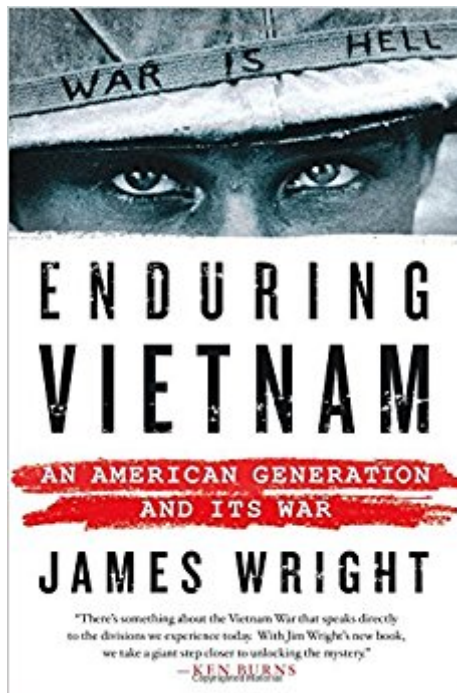




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# Enduring Vietnam: An American Generation And Its War



## Synopsis

The Vietnam War is largely recalled as a mistake, either in the decision to engage there or in the nature of the engagement. Or both. Veterans of the war remain largely anonymous figures, accomplices in the mistake. Critically recounting the steps that led to the war, this book does not excuse the mistakes, but it brings those who served out of the shadows. *Enduring Vietnam* recounts the experiences of the young Americans who fought in Vietnam and of families who grieved those who did not return. By 1969 nearly half of the junior enlisted men who died in Vietnam were draftees. And their median age was 21—among the non-draftees it was only 20. The book describes the “baby boomers” growing up in the 1950s, why they went into the military, what they thought of the war, and what it was like to serve in “Nam.” And to come home. With a rich narrative of the Battle for “Hamburger Hill,” and through substantial interviews with those who served, the book depicts the cruelty of this war, and its quiet acts of courage. James Wright’s *Enduring Vietnam* provides an important dimension to the profile of an American generation and a rich account of an American War.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"There's something utterly revealing about the Vietnam War, something that speaks directly to the divisions we experience today. With Jim Wright's new book, we take a giant step closer to unlocking the mystery, and gain, at the same time, the intimate consequences of the conflict many of us would rather forget." —Ken Burns  
“Broad in scope and as human a history as could be written of the “enduring” impact of our nation’s Vietnam experience, this is

a beautiful piece of work. Richly informative and uncompromising, Jim Wright captures the tone of those tumultuous years, unflinchingly acknowledging the mistakes, courage and long-lasting effects on America through the lens of a generation that came of age in the sixties. With honesty and compassion for those who carried and still carry burdens from the war years, no book better captures the totality of that era." —James N. Mattis, General (ret.) United States Marine Corps

"This clear, concise, and highly readable book is a must read for anybody who wants to understand the Vietnam War, its politics, critical decisions, effects on individuals who lived through it, and its reverberations in current American culture and foreign policy. It provides the reader with a greater understanding of the nature of war and personal experiences of those who served, and a feeling for the times usually only found in a novel. It is destined to become a standard reference for the history of the Vietnam War. This is a great book." —Karl Marlantes, author of *Matterhorn*.

Vietnam veteran —"Jim Wright's history of the Vietnam War captures the voices of the combat veterans who bore the brunt of their leaders' mistakes in the Vietnam War. His pitch perfect account of what those men experienced reminds us again of so many lives lost too soon, of wounds both physical and psychological, of the losses that last for lifetimes, all for a cause that was never clear or compelling. *Enduring Vietnam* is an important addition to the literature of the Vietnam War." —Peter S. Prichard, retired editor, *USA Today*, Chairman, Newseum.

Vietnam veteran —"James Wright's *Enduring Vietnam* offers an intimate, moving, sometimes heartbreaking account of Americans who fought in Vietnam, focusing on 1969, a time when combat was still at a peak of intensity but when a majority of citizens —including many GIs—had turned against the war. Wright takes us from the harrowing bloodbath of Hamburger Hill to the troubled homecomings of veterans and never reduces the human complexity of his subject with sentimentality or broad brush polemics." —Christian Appy, author of *Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered from All Sides*

"The best books about conflict and combat weave into their narrative personal stories, vignettes that plumb the human landscape of war. James Wright has written one of those best books. Anyone who wants a glimpse into the psyche of the Vietnam combat veteran should — must — read *Enduring Vietnam*."

—Bernard Edelman, editor of *Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam*. Vietnam veteran —"This important investigation of the Vietnam War and its effects on an entire generation will appeal to both Vietnam-era specialists and general readers."

—Library Journal (starred review) —"There have been hundreds of books written about the Vietnam War, but this is among the most powerful and heartbreaking."

—Booklist —"Wright's worthy effort is a tribute to Americans who saw the worst that the

Vietnam War offered, combined with a broad look at the domestic and geopolitical factors that led to the U.S. getting involved in the long, controversial conflict. "Publishers Weekly"[A] superb book." Vietnam Magazine

JAMES WRIGHT is President Emeritus and Eleazar Wheelock Professor of History Emeritus at Dartmouth College and the author or editor of several books, including *Those Who Have Borne the Battle*. His efforts on behalf of veterans and education have been featured in the *New York Times*, *Boston Globe*, NPR, and more. He serves on the Boards of the Semper Fi Fund, the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, and the Campaign Leadership Committee for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund Education Center. He lives in Hanover, NH.

Very well done with the history leading to Vietnam, the politics involved and the ground environment over a few month period, but in detail. The author captures the experiences of the 'grunts' as well as the turmoil in the U. S. with anti-war demonstrations and lack of support for the troops there. As a veteran during that time I recognize the hostility toward those in uniform that was prevalent.

Very well written. It provides great insight not only into the Viet Nam era from different perspectives, but also into the psychological and emotional impact the war and its' aftermath had on those of us who fought there and our families back home.

A well written historical perspective on how the Vietnam war evolved, escalated and then turned into a meaningless but costly stalemate after the 1968 Tet offensive

You would have had to be there in order to get a better viewpoint and understanding of the American Soldier in Viet Nam. James Wright comes as close as possible.

Excellent. Well researched and documented. Should be required reading for any 20th century American History course.

My stepfather fought in Vietnam. I served a tour in Iraq in 2007. Every generation fights its wars. Some wars are worth fighting for. Others make no sense. In this book, historian James Wright details both sides of the war: those who fought and those who fought hard not to fight it, and those who fought for it in Vietnam. This book at times can be an emotional read. Wright covers both sides

of Vietnam in equal balance. The draftees and the volunteers and the draft dodgers all have a say. He even features Vietnamese soldiers, both from the North and South. While the focus is on 1969 when support for the war waned, he also portrays the soldiers of 1965, when our troop numbers surged, as mostly patriotic fighters wanting to hold back the Communists. But after a few weeks or months or even after multiple tours in the jungle, these young men's voices become defeated and negative: too many young lives were wasted over a cause that wasn't quite clear. The narrative comes from 156 interviews of soldiers, Marines and a few nurses, and many more through historical documents such as newspaper and magazine interviews already published. Wright gives short biographies of these people so we know where they are from, what social class they associate with, and what they experienced. Interestingly, many recount the sounds and smells: sounds of hovering helicopters or torrential downpours, and smells of the damp jungle or of its native people. There are many detailed accounts of combat brothers lost to wounds or of commanders giving orders that weren't quite clear because even the commanders were unsure of what was to be expected. There are also many stories of soldiers having to gerryrig their gear to make it more effective because good gear ended up in garrison far away. Some names like Bob Kerrey, Colin Powell, Muhammed Ali are well known. The most emotional stories, however, are the accounts of soldiers who give great detail when they lost their combat buddy. Even Wright lost a dear friend who died in Vietnam and he dedicated this book to him. Wright fills in the narrative with the political background to better explain how the war progressed (or regressed?!). There's a big difference between 1965 and 1969. This is a very good read for people who were there and for people who heard about it from those who were there. What keeps me from giving this five stars is the often overdetailed narrative, and the co-mingling of stories from both the warriors and the draft dodgers that at times stifles the flow. Still, this is a book I'd recommend. Have a box of tissues nearby, though.

James Wright, Marine (in the 1950s), PhD in history from the University of Wisconsin, professor at Dartmouth College as well as its President Emeritus, has written a fascinating and superb history of the American war in Vietnam. Wright is also an adopted member of the Dartmouth Class of 1964 and it is therefore surprising that he (1) chose to date the American War from LBJ's 1965 introduction of conventional combat forces and (2) does not even cite the collective memoir of his adopted class, *Dartmouth Veterans: Vietnam Perspectives*. For Wright's purpose the war does not include as its prime protagonists his adopted classmates. Yet, for all of us who served during that era, whether Wright's baby boomers, or those of us who are older, the Vietnam War is calculated from President Kennedy's introduction of Special Forces advisors in 1961 making it a 12 year war. A

second fault in Wright's account is that he downplays North Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh's commitment to communism calling him a nationalist revolutionary. Ho was, indeed, all of that but he was also a founding member of the French Communist Party in 1919 as well as an agent of Stalin's Comintern. While these two failures degrade somewhat from his macro history, the great strengths of the book more than make up for them. What Wright has accomplished is a history that weaves together individual stories and the context in which those stories take place, both in Vietnam and back home. Moreover, the weaving is seamless, so much so, that the book is a compelling read. Wright's battle scenes are as harrowing as Hal Moore and Joe Galloway's description of the 1965 battle of the Ia Drang Valley. His stories of the families of those killed and of the wounded are full of pathos. He clearly captures life on the home front and shows the shift from support for the war to opposition. In short, Wright captures the era better than most and his book harkens back to the symbolism of the Wall - rising to a crescendo and then falling slowly back in accordance with the pace of Vietnamization. Wright draws his sources from interviews, documents, books and articles. Among them are war novels from the era like Phillip Caputo's *A Rumor of War*. I do wish that for the final years he had drawn from John DelVecchio's *The 13th Valley*. Nevertheless, these criticisms are minor. James Wright has captured the essence of the American War in Vietnam from 1965 until 1973 and its lack of a clear end. Thus, the war endures in the minds of all who lived through the period or are related to those who did.

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