



Bringing It All Back Home: An Oral History of New York City's Vietnam Veterans

Philip F. Napoli

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A collection of heartrending oral histories that topples assumptions about the people who served in Vietnam

The Vietnam War was a defining event for a generation of Americans. But for years, misguided and sometimes demeaning clichés about its veterans have proliferated widely. Philip F. Napoli's *Bringing It All Back Home* strips away the myths and reveals the complex individuals who served in Southeast Asia. Napoli was one of the chief researchers for Tom Brokaw's *The Greatest Generation*, and in the spirit of that enterprise, his oral histories recast our understanding of a war and its legacy.

Napoli introduces a remarkable group of young New Yorkers who went abroad with high hopes only to find a bewildering conflict. We meet a nurse who staged a hunger strike to promote peace while working at a field hospital; a paratrooper whose experiences on the battlefield left him with emotional scars that led to violence and homelessness; a black soldier who achieved an unexpected camaraderie with his fellow servicemen in racially tense times; and a university administrator who helped to create New York City's Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Some of Napoli's soldiers became active opponents of the war; others did not. But all returned with a powerful urge to understand the death and destruction they had seen. Overcoming adversity, a great many would go on to lead ambitious lives of public service. Tracing their journeys from the streets of Brooklyn and Queens to the banks of the Mekong, and back to the most glamorous corporations and meanest homeless shelters of New York City, Napoli reveals the variety and surprising vibrancy of the ex-soldiers' experiences. "For almost everyone the time in Vietnam was the most exciting and the most alive time of your life," one veteran recalls. He adds: "I still have this little trick . . . When I lie down and go to sleep, if there's something bothering me, I say, 'You're warm, you're dry, and there is no one shooting at you.'"

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