



RAIN IN OUR HEARTS: ALPHA COMPANY IN THE VIETNAM WAR

BY JAMES ALLEN LOGUE
AND GARY D. FORD

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REVIEW BY FIELDING S. FREED

The idea of the warrior's homecoming as a transformative experience is an old one. The ancient Greeks called it *nostos*, and it figured heavily in their culture and literature. In Homer's *Odyssey*, Odysseus's *nostos* is the central plot line. In *Rain in Our Hearts: Alpha Company in the Vietnam War*, author Gary D. Ford aptly uses the word *odyssey* several times to describe the journey he took across the United States with photographer and Vietnam War veteran James (Jim) Allen Logue.

The framework of the book is an impressive collection of more than 150 photographs taken by Logue during his tour in Vietnam. Drafted away from his civilian job as a professional photographer in May 1969, Logue found himself jumping off the skid of a hovering Huey into the Quang Tin Province as a replacement infantryman that October. He reported to Company A [Alpha Company], 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 196th Light Infantry Brigade, Americal (23d Infantry) Division, the unit with which he would serve his twelve-month tour.

When Logue was not aiming his rifle, he was aiming his Nikonos camera. The caliber of Logue's photography throughout the book reveals a photographer in his prime. There is a noticeable intimacy in the images that only comes when the

subjects are comfortable and trust the photographer. During that long year in Vietnam, Logue found mental respite in documenting the daily life of his fellow grunts. "To take my mind off the war, I took pictures," he later said (3).

Through Logue's camera lens we view the placid smile of Sp4c. Daniel Simmons, surrounded by village children after handing out candy; images of the strain and stress of combat on the taut faces of young men aging quickly; and moments of joy mixed with the relief of surviving another day. Logue's stamina and dedication to his photography is impressive. Even after he was made a radio operator and had to hump an extra twenty-five-plus pounds, he still summoned the energy to make photographs. Ford emphasizes that unlike well-known news photographers from the war, Logue "was building an archive as someone rare: a combat soldier and professional photographer who both fought and documented the last major American conflict shot in black-and-white and color film" (7).

After the war, Logue boxed up his black-and-white negatives and, like so many others, did his best to keep moving forward and forget the war. But years later, after a particularly difficult period of familial losses, Logue began losing his struggle with post-traumatic stress disorder. Ford writes that "the war found him [Logue] in the green, tangled Florida countryside, slithering like a sapper through Jim's mental claymores and the tangles of concertina wire he raised against the assault of memory" (11).

At the urging of his therapist, Logue revisited his Vietnam photographs in an effort to quell his recurring nightmares. "Steadily, Jim broke from the cell that incarcerates so many veterans: their own silence," writes Ford (11). Logue reconnected with his best friend from the war, Ben Perry, who encouraged him to share his images online, which had a cascading effect, leading to connections with other Alpha Company soldiers as well as members of his regiment, including Ford.

The pair met at a 31st Infantry reunion in 2011. Ford, a Vietnam-era National Guard veteran, is an author seasoned from thirty years of working as a travel editor and senior writer at *Southern Living* magazine. Logue's photographs

captivated Ford, but they left him with a powerful question that would take the pair multiple years and trips across the United States to answer. What happened to the men of Alpha Company?

What sets *Rain in Our Hearts* apart from many other Vietnam photography books is the partnership Logue and Ford formed to answer that central question. The pair traveled 54,000 miles across the United States over four years to interview seventy-one Alpha Company veterans or their survivors. For each interview, Logue took prints of his photographs, which evoked both laughter and tears. Ford put his compassionate storytelling to work by fleshing out the backstory of each image and, in turn, the post-Vietnam life of each of the men pictured.

Logue dedicated the book to the nine Alpha Company soldiers who were killed in action during his tour. Of the nine, Logue and Ford located and met with family members of eight. It was the first time that some had met with a veteran who had known their loved one during the war. For the family of Sfc. Everette Caldwell, Logue's recounting of his death differed from the account they had been told. Logue left the family with a photograph which they had never seen before of Caldwell taken the day before his death. "Now I know the truth," his widow Loretta said (128).

Because the journey from warrior to civilian after combat is one of the main topics of *Rain in Our Hearts*, the book helps dispel the lingering and unfortunate trope of the maladjusted Vietnam veteran. Through Ford and Logue's frank conversations with the remaining men of Alpha Company, it becomes clear that each man found something to keep himself going both through the war and afterward. For this reason, all combat veterans are likely to find something in common with their stories.

Rain in Our Hearts concludes with an epilogue titled "The Last Sweep". It recounts Logue and Ford's bittersweet return to Vietnam to retrace the path of Alpha Company's red, mud-caked boots across the former Quang Tin Province. In a powerful twist befitting the conclusion of an epic odyssey, Logue's photographs lead him to come full circle in a chance encounter that leads to a reunion with one of his camera's subjects.

Rain in Our Hearts: Alpha Company in the Vietnam War is the second book in the *Peace and Conflict* series published by the Texas Tech University Press with Ron Milam as the general editor.

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