

Cong Catchers: A Soldier's Memories of Vietnam

Lee Halverson

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Lee Halverson's memoir *Cong Catchers* recalls his service as a military police dog handler during the Vietnam War. Chronicling Halverson's training, deployment, and experiences in the aftermath of the war, the book includes piquing details, as of the hostile reactions of the public to returning veterans and the long-term tolls of battle.

Halverson was raised on an Iowa farm. He went to Vietnam following college, and he worked to maintain his Christian values during the war. But the experience was a trial by fire, marked both by drama and by the rigor of daily duties. In time, Halverson became disillusioned by his experiences. These feelings were deepened in later years, when he witnessed how soldiers who were exposed to Agent Orange were neglected.

Halverson's descriptions of combat are matter-of-fact, covering situations like taking fire while out on patrol and of a bombing on base in unemotional terms. For instance, Halverson recalls looking out the window "just in time to see another rocket explode right off the wing tip." He notes, too, that "nothing gets done in the Army unless a superior orders it done." He recalls unproductive periods and busywork as well.

Misspelled words and other errors appear throughout the text, sully its prose. Still, some of the book's comparisons are evocative, as when decaying foxholes are juxtaposed to the memory of a neglected machine shed on the farm. And Halverson honors the personalities of his fellow soldiers, including an Arkansas-raised transportation soldier with a big Ozark smile who never buttoned his shirt, wore his hat, or tied his shoes: "The big guy shuffled along with his boots flapping on either side of his unbloused pant legs." He also notes curiosities like soldiers' vices during their downtime. The result is an unvarnished treatment of the war and the people who fought in it.

Halverson's uneasy return to the US is covered in clear terms, too. He writes that the Iowa summer felt freezing because his body had adjusted to the heat of Vietnam; he observes how much weight he lost during the war and records how long it took for him to return to a healthier weight. But the inclusion of poems and recapitulations of sermons dilutes this more personal work. The book ends by covering the after stories of all of the soldiers who appeared in Halverson's story of the war, used to push the message that a war does not end when a soldier's deployment does.

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JOSEPH S. PETE (June 6, 2023)

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