

Lions and Tigers and Cong

Theodore Wild

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Lions and Tigers and Cong is a war memoir with literary flourishes.

Theodore Wild's *Lions and Tigers and Cong* is a bracing firsthand account of the grunt's life during America's long war in Vietnam.

In 1966, Wild was an average guy. He volunteered for the draft with the understanding that by volunteering he would serve for two years, not three. When Wild, whose alias is Jim Reynolds in this memoir, was called up, he joined a band of young warriors and was put into Charlie Company, 5/46th Infantry. Later, Reynolds/Wild was transferred to Bravo Company, 4/21st Infantry Division. In both units, Reynolds met and made friends with a cast of characters who relied on black humor to deal with the horror of war.

The writing pulls no punches. All emotions are thrown on the table, and most come with expletives. This war memoir is full of rugged and hard men who are caked in violence, and is not for audiences who are squeamish—or who demand linear narrations. Battle scenes are interspersed with scenes of tomfoolery and excerpts of poetry meant to showcase Reynolds's profound thoughts.

Reynolds is not the only star in this book. Fellow soldiers drawn from all walks of life are given the spotlight in order to show the war through their eyes and to understand their experiences after the war. There's a streetwise stickball player from New York, Grover; a sunburnt Texan, Dobert; and other members of Bravo Company. However, frequent changes between characters are distracting and involve sometimes drastic changes in scenery and times, mimicking the discombobulating nature of combat and memory.

When the book focuses on Reynolds's interior life alone, it does so to excess, slowing the pacing to convey his singular experiences in country alongside postwar traumas. The varied prewar and postwar lives of these men are discussed at length, along with the culture of the 1960s that they all enjoyed. For example, while relaxing after a patrol, the boys of Bravo Company sit around and listen to Little Anthony and James Brown. Also shown are some of the letters that Reynolds/Wild received from the home front, highlighting the fact that Vietnam did not just impact those fighting it on the ground or in the air.

Above all about the veterans of Bravo Company, Wild's text forwards the message that war never ends for former soldiers. *Lions and Tigers and Cong* is a war memoir with literary flourishes.

BENJAMIN WELTON (August 8, 2019)

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