

Mohawk Brotherhood

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Terry Malloy, a history professor at a Georgia university, is leading a comfortable, respectable life, but one built upon the ugly experience of jungle combat in Vietnam. Malloy's only child, Ella, at loose ends after the death of her young husband, volunteers for the army and to serve in Iraq. There she is killed by a roadside bomb. Malloy's world implodes.

Believing Malloy should have persuaded their daughter from enlisting, Malloy's wife withdraws from him emotionally and physically, before leaving for a sojourn in England. Malloy's emotional equilibrium deteriorates further when he begins to see and hear the ghosts of his Vietnam squad mates. The hallucinations are so vivid he begins discussing his life with the apparitions. Readers meet Cochise, a hard-charging Hispanic from Texas; Brumsen, a native of Washington, DC, who lugs around family worries as heavy as his M60 machine gun; Duffy, from Iowa, confused over how everything he's learned about right and wrong has been lost on the battlefields; and finally, Anderson, their strong-willed leader.

The author's descriptions of men at war are riveting, and battles explode off the page with cinematic power.

The claymores and grenades had cleared a large area. Trees were down. Someone groaned. Terry lifted the branch of a felled tree. A man struggled to stand on bloody legs. The flesh around one of his knees had been shredded. A kneecap dangled from a shard of skin.

Terry's uneasy grip on reality grows more complicated when a callous reporter attempts to turn Ella's death into a political statement—a situation that soon leads to her being falsely linked to the abuses at Abu Ghraib. Fortified by too much scotch and his spiritual connection to his dead buddies, Terry agrees to participate in a seminar on the Iraq war. There he becomes a pariah when he suggests that contemporary culture holds its soldiers to standards far more restrictive than to those applied in World War II, a war in which the deaths of hundreds of thousands of civilians was considered acceptable.

Simultaneously, Terry is caught up in bizarre incidences of political correctness at his university, including a fellow professor's evangelizing for the Unitarian Church of Universal Victimology, an organization of college courses for people who cannot read; Multi-Media Approaches to Achieving Your BA Degree: History on TV and Film, a deconstruction of the learning-through-books myth; and animal-rights advocates supporting cattle thefts to prevent the rapes of lesbian cows.

The author's narrative rings with authenticity, even in overdrawn caricatures of the politically correct. A second plot-line—Terry's developing romance with fellow professor Sarah Stableford—is realistically handled. Foremost, the author is to be commended for his ability to make Malloy's long-dead squad mates an integral part of the narrative.

The novel's epilogue—Terry visiting the Vietnam Memorial with his grandson—will bring tears. There he again meets Duffy, Cochise, Anderson, and Brumsen, all accompanied by his daughter, who urges him to, "Stay with the living, not the dead. Remember us."

Any reader who lived through the Vietnam era, who remembers someone scarred by that conflict, will appreciate the

power of *Mohawk Brotherhood*.

GARY PRESLEY (December 3, 2010)

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