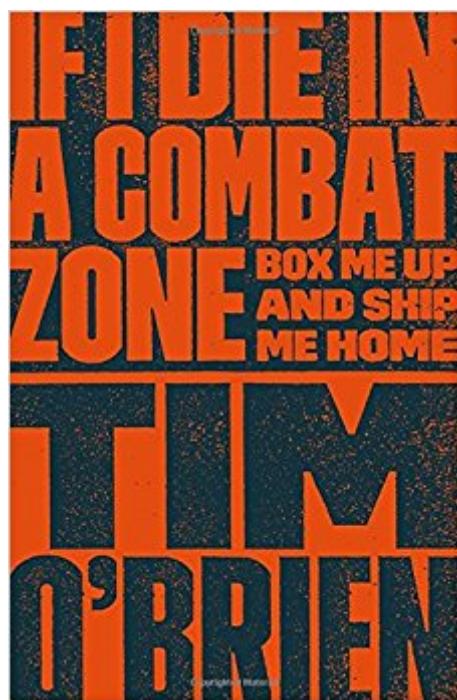


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# If I Die In A Combat Zone: Box Me Up And Ship Me Home



## Synopsis

A CLASSIC FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF THE THINGS THEY CARRIED Before writing his award-winning *Going After Cacciato*, Tim O'Brien gave us this intensely personal account of his year as a foot soldier in Vietnam. The author takes us with him to experience combat from behind an infantryman's rifle, to walk the minefields of My Lai, to crawl into the ghostly tunnels, and to explore the ambiguities of manhood and morality in a war gone terribly wrong. Beautifully written and searingly heartfelt, *If I Die in a Combat Zone* is a masterwork of its genre. Now with Extra Libris material, including a reader's guide and bonus content

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## Customer Reviews

Over time, Tim O'Brien has used both art and artifice to shape his fictional accounts of Vietnam. Award-winning novels such as *Going After Cacciato* and *The Things They Carried* offer up a surreal view of the war: a soldier who decides to walk to Paris, leaving only a trail of M&M's in his wake; a young man who imports his high-school girlfriend to his base camp high in the jungled mountains, only to lose her to a shadowy squad of Special Forces Green Berets and to "that mix of unnamed terror and unnamed pleasure" that was Vietnam. O'Brien's first account of the war, however, was written in the raw, unfiltered months following his return from Southeast Asia in 1969. *If I Die in a Combat Zone* has all of the eloquence and attention to language and detail that are a mark of the author's work; what is different about it is its straightforward, unembellished depiction of his personal

experience of hell. "When you are ordered to march through areas such as Pinkville--GI slang for Song My, parent village of My Lai ... you do some thinking. You hallucinate. You look ahead a few paces and wonder what your legs will resemble if there is more to the earth in that spot than silicates and nitrogen. Will the pain be unbearable? Will you scream or fall silent? Will you be afraid to look at your own body, afraid of the sight of your own red flesh and white bone? You wonder if the medic remembered his morphine." O'Brien paints an unvarnished portrait of the infantry soldier's life that is at once mundane and terrifying--the endless days of patrolling punctuated by firefights that end as suddenly and inconclusively as they begin; the mind-numbing brutality of burned villages and trampled rice patties; the terror of tunnels, minefields, and the ever-present threat of death. Powerful as these scenes are, perhaps the most memorable chapter in the book concerns his decision to desert just a few weeks before he was sent to Vietnam. "The AWOL bag was ready to go, but I wasn't.... I burned the letters to my family. I read the others and burned them, too. It was over. I simply couldn't bring myself to flee. Family, the home town, friends, history, tradition, fear, confusion, exile: I could not run." Tim O'Brien went into the war opposing it and came out knowing exactly why. *If I Die in a Combat Zone* is more than just a memoir of a disastrous war; it is also a meditation on heroism and cowardice, on the mutability of truth and morality in a war zone and, most of all, on the simple, human capacity to endure the unendurable. --Alix Wilber --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"O'Brien brilliantly and quietly evokes the foot soldier's daily life in the paddies and foxholes, evokes a blind, blundering war. . . . Tim O'Brien writes with the care and eloquence of someone for whom communication is still a vital possibility. . . . A personal document of aching clarity. . . . A beautiful, painful book."•The New York Times Book Review"One of the best, most disturbing, and most powerful books about the shame that was / is Vietnam."•Minneapolis Star and Tribune

... but the writing is five stars when compared with others). When I read O'Brien's memoir/novel "The Things They Carried," I came away incredibly impressed with O'Brien's storytelling style. He's one of the few great writers out there, as far as I'm concerned. He's very concise, painting detailed images with an economy of words, and that's what makes his style so powerful. He has a point to make and doesn't waste time--yours or his--making it. He comes across as direct yet literary--sort of like Hemingway--but far more engaging and intimate. "If I Die in a Combat Zone" doesn't quite measure up to "The Things They Carried," but it's still miles above many other first-hand accounts out there. While it comes across as honest, it lacks the humorous style of Philip Caputo's "A

Rumour of War." I grant that there's nothing particularly funny about wandering purposelessly through Vietnam wondering whether or not you're going to make it, but Caputo comes across like a funny guy while O'Brien takes a more serious tack. The result is that Caputo seems like the guy you'd wanna have a beer with whereas with O'Brien you're not quite sure. Basically, "If I Die . . ." reads a lot like "The Things They Carried," honest and poignant. Interestingly, there's a few occasions where O'Brien mentions his friend, Erik, from basic training and it almost seems like the two are lovers or something (they're not). Granted, Erik has an interest in poetry (a regular Siegfried Sassoon, he is), so his letters, perhaps, come across as a bit more sensitive, flowery and introspective than the usual dispatches you might encounter from the typical Army recruit. You just don't capture much humor between the two. You might expect that "If I Die . . ." is strictly an account of O'Brien's one-year tour of duty in Vietnam, but he includes depictions of his home town right after high school, how he responds to being drafted, how he plans to skip the country (and why he doesn't). In addition, if you're in the Army for a year, you've got to get trained first, so O'Brien talks about his time in basic and advanced training. You're well into the book before he even gets to Vietnam (and the book is less than 210 pages long). But, as I said, O'Brien is concise and completely captures his Vietnam months without seemingly missing any of the details, so you won't feel as though anything's missing. Highly recommended.

Mr O'Brien has had a lot of issues to deal with. Having served as an infantryman with the 173rd ABN 67-68 I don't believe there's a week that goes by that I don't think about the waste that happened. Total insanity. We always had a standing thought of LBJ vs Uncle Ho, stripped down to their skivvies, fighting it out in the wonderful forest of the central highlands. Let the best man win and the winning team gets to go home. His narrative of life in the bush is spot on. Trying to justify just what the hell we were doing is something else.

Another excellent read by Tim O'Brien. Walk with him through the putrid rice paddies, the smell of napalm, and the ear splitting noise of fire-fights. I felt every bit of his book, the pain, the anger, the agony of losing a friend and the tense fear of the unknown. His book is about being human, dropped into the chaos of war, in an unknown land, far away from anything experienced in his young life. A thoughtful read for anyone that has been there, and for anyone that wants to begin to understand those that have walked in similar boots.

and I've read more "involved" books by Vietnam vets. Many of the boys who served in VN were/are

my peers and I have very confused feelings about the VN war. It changed our lives, maybe partly because of the kind of young people we were. And I continue to have the need to read the memoirs (even if fictionalized) of the VN vets. O'Brien brings his stories in his books. But I always get the feeling he has walled off a lot of his personal emotions about this war, you get the feeling he knows they are there inside him but he cannot and will not let them come for fear he's completely lose it, turn into sobbing jelly or whatever. That's ok. That does come through. And maybe the vets who did return and didn't become one of those street people who (still) have signs saying they are VN vets with PTSD, who came back and somehow carried on a "normal" American life all have had to do that walling off thing. I know my uncle has (3 terms in VN). I know my cousin did before he died from the aftereffects of Agent Orange. O'Brien chooses to gloss over the horrors of that war, chooses to focus on the "comedic" things the guys had to do to stay sane. I'm just worried it gives the younger people who didn't live through those times a false impression of just how bad the VN war was.

Viscerally cutng. Mr. O'Brien doesn't mince words proving over and over the Truth is often ugly and painful to avoid a pretty ending and narrative.

O'Brien's memoir of his Vietnam service covers his tour to Vietnam as a combat infantryman with the Americal Division in the region around My Lai, from 1969-70. It is one of the earliest books about Vietnam by a combatant. It is a very cleareyed, gripping account of his war.

Great book, interesting topic.

This is a very good read about someone who served in the much maligned Americal Division during the Vietnam war. If McNamara and Johnson had spent a week with these guys in the field they would have realized how futile the effort in Vietnam was. I was not in a combat unit but it only took me about two weeks into my Vietnam tour of duty to feel the frustration that the whole thing did not make any sense whatsoever.

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