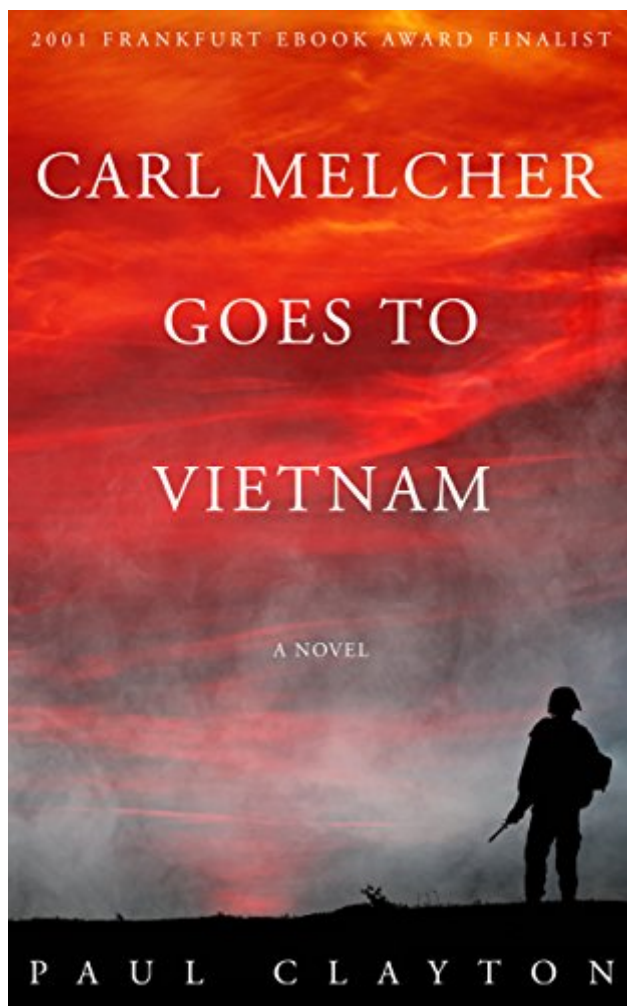


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# Carl Melcher Goes To Vietnam



## Synopsis

2001 Frankfurt eBook Award Finalist: The year is 1968. Like thousands of other American boys, Carl Melcher is drafted and sent to Vietnam. His new company is infected with the same racial tensions plaguing the nation. Despite that, Carl makes friends on both sides of the color line. The war, like a tiger lurking in the bushes, picks off its victims one by one. Naively over-optimistic, Carl believes that karma and good intentions will save him and his friends. Then fate intervenes to teach Carl something of the meaning of life, and death. Carl Melcher Goes to Vietnam was a finalist at the 2001 Frankfurt eBook Awards, along with works by Joyce Carol Oates and David McCullough. Recommended by: Library Journal: "In this fictional account of the Vietnam War, Clayton shuns drama and political issues, detailing instead the minutiae of one soldier's experience. The simple language reflects the identity of an uncertain youth drawn involuntarily into a new and unfamiliar world. This novel does reveal Clayton, himself drafted in 1968, to be a reflective and strategic writer."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I've read numerous books both factual and novel about the Vietnam War, and I found this book to be a combination of the two. Even the fictitious parts have the ring of actual history. It is really an Everyman's account this horrible and needless, dare I say criminal, war. The author captures the horrors of war as well as the bonds that form between men in such situations. I would put this book right alongside Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*. There can be no doubt that many troops sent to Vietnam had to question the reason they were sent there in the first place. This book tells the story of such young men. They weren't fighting for love of country or to protect the freedoms of those back home. They fought, and in over 50,000 cases, died for the love of each other.

Good story about a bad war. The details of living in a war-torn country were interesting and accurate. I expected more about the missing 201 file but the author seemed to drop it out of the story. The ending was quick without any conclusion. Overall a good story probably based on experience.

As the wife of a Vietnam veteran, the story was very good and has helped me understand more. Thank you Paul Clayton. I purchased the audio version so he can listen to it also.

I have read a lot of Vietnam War-era fiction, many by war veterans, and *Carl Melcher Goes to Vietnam* is by far one of my favorites. Admittedly, there was probably an extra level of enjoyment on my part because of the fact that I spent almost 14 years as an active duty Army soldier myself. There was something very human about this novel, something that made it more realistic than many of the novels I have read set in this era. The novel is written in the first person from the point of view of the title character, Carl Melcher, a naive 18 year old drafted into the Army and the Infantry. In his telling of the story, there was a lot of explanation of basic terms (like "Charley" and "R&R") that most of us already know the meaning of, but that just added to the youth of Carl. Personally, I think Melcher is an accurate representation of the average soldier in Vietnam, as in other wars. He's a young kid, drafted into the war, and largely naive as to what that means. He spends most of his ToD in places that don't put him in imminent danger, leaving him bored and doing many of the countless details that are a part of a deployment. But over it all is the constant threat and fear of what could happen next. Over the course of the novel, Melcher changes as he goes through love and loss. Because of the subject matter, it may not be the book for everyone. It isn't a happy book, but it isn't all sad, either. I personally loved it, although it almost feels wrong to "love" a book about war. But I couldn't put it down, completely engrossed and involved with the story and the characters. I

recognize that the fact that I am an Army vet, married to a deployed soldier, may have heightened the experience for me, but even aside from that, this was an excellent book.

For almost fifty years I have avoided books, movies, and mostly discussions about Vietnam. I decided to read this book to see if my memory had softened the experience. I can't think of any other time in my life that is still so vivid as those the book brought back. Time doesn't seem to have changed it. As I read the book I could even remember the smells of rice paddies, cordite, and sweat.

Tons of novels have been written about war. It seems like half of Hemingway's oeuvre qualifies. "Catch-22" and Ron Kovic's "Born on the Fourth of July" are two classics. Some glorify war while others illustrate its absurdity. "Carl Melcher" is one that shows the absurdity, but takes a more subtle approach than the over-the-top satire of "Catch-22." Sometimes contrast can illustrate an idea better than repetition. Rather than continually showing the absurd, as Heller did in "Catch-22," Clayton shows the contrasts. Many days Melcher is bored, working in the camp in the Vietnam jungle with no imminent danger. Even while on patrol it is usually a whole lot of no action. Yet the threat is always there and the sheer terror when attacked shows why war changes a soldier. Melcher's changes are gradual - some good, some not, and some hard to judge - yet over the course of the novel the amount of change is immense. It seems to me that Melcher's experiences are probably more true to what the typical soldier in Vietnam actually experienced than most other Vietnam War novels. This makes its message both more powerful and more credible. \*\*Originally written for "Books and Pals" book blog. \*\*

Main character Carl Melcher is drafted and sent to Vietnam. The book starts out with Carl arriving in country with two friends he met during basic training. At first the three are sent to a relatively safe area. There are lots of details about the camp. I loved the way the author developed the characters and told enough about them to get me emotionally vested in them and their fates. Eventually his unit ended up in the middle of the action. Carl can't believe it at first when some of his friends, people he has grown to care deeply about, are killed. He has managed to cope up to this point by telling himself that the good guys, those who do everything right, will stay safe. Now he has to deal with the knowledge that survival depends on luck and nothing else. After Carl is wounded and sent to a hospital in Japan he begins to realize that those who haven't experienced combat in Vietnam for themselves have no idea what it's like. After he is finally sent home, this realization is reinforced when his family and friends carry on as if nothing important has happened to him. Carl knows he

has to readjust to civilian life without getting the emotional support he'd expected from those he cares about. They simply don't understand. I liked the characterizations as the best part of this book. What I didn't like as much were the stereotypes--a soldier killed a few days before the end of his tour of duty, a soldier killed by friendly fire, a tough officer who lives by the rule book. Overall a good read with authentic details that really put the reader in the picture.

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