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*A Rumor of War*  
A Conversation with Philip  
Caputo at 58

This book does not pretend to be history. It has nothing to do with politics, power, strategy, influence, national interests, or foreign policy; nor is it an indictment of the great men who led us into Indochina and whose mistakes were paid for with the blood of some quite ordinary men. In a general sense, it is simply a story about war, about the things men do in war and the things war does to them.

—from the “Prologue,” *A Rumor of War*

**A** *Rumor of War* was first published in 1977 and has remained in print ever since. As a member of the first ground combat unit committed to fight in Vietnam, Marine Lieutenant Philip Caputo landed at DaNang during the spring of 1965. Ten springs later, as a newspaper reporter, Mr. Caputo was present at the Fall of Saigon. Entanglement with the Vietnam War, coupled with the lucidity and urgency of his prose, has, in Caputo, created art and truth of the highest rank. Ted Solotaroff spoke for many readers when he defined *A Rumor* for *The New York Times Book Review* as “the troubled conscience of America speaking passionately, truthfully, finally.”

Caputo has followed *A Rumor* with seven more books—five novels: *Horn of Africa* (1980), *DelCorso's Gallery* (1983), *Indian Country* (1987), *Equation for Evil* (1996), and *The Voyage* (1999); a collection of novellas, *Exiles* (1997); and a second memoir, *Means of Escape* (1991). In addition to these books, Caputo has for many years been a working journalist. In

fact, it was a serious wounding in Beirut in 1975 that allowed Caputo time to complete *A Rumor*, over the 11 months of his recuperation. As a journalist, Caputo has written for the *New York Times*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times* and *Esquire*. His early journalistic career was with the *Chicago Tribune*, during which time he was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for investigative reporting.

Mr. Caputo visited the United States Air Force Academy on April 27, 2000 for an invited lecture to cadets enrolled in the Academy's core military history course. During the visit, Mr. Caputo graciously consented to this interview.

**WLA:** Why did you want to be a writer? Was there a special prompt?

**Caputo:** I don't believe you *want* to be a writer in the sense that you want to be, say, an engineer or a doctor. Writing is a vocation in the real sense of the term—a *calling*. I don't believe you have much of a choice. Maybe a person *needs* to be a writer. I started writing a lot of articles in high school for the school paper, and I remember I liked doing it. But in actual fact when I was in high school and for the first two years I was in college, I really wanted to be an aeronautical engineer. Then I discovered I had absolutely zero aptitude for such things as calculus, which sort of blocked that avenue.

One thing that tends to drive people to become writers or to *need* to be writers—Hemingway talks about this—is some sort of wound. Really happy, well-adjusted people don't become writers. At least they don't become what we think of as literary writers. I think that what I experienced *in* Vietnam and then the kind of semi-ostracizing of most returning veterans made me—all of us—somewhat of outsiders to our own society. Those experiences turned me into a writer. No matter what kind of writing I had done beforehand—in school or college—the fact was I had a pretty ordinary middle-class background. My parents weren't divorced; I didn't lose a parent; we weren't hungry; we weren't poor. Whatever other things drive people to become somewhat separated from their society, I have not experienced. But during Vietnam and after Vietnam I did.

**WLA:** Then during your combat tour in Vietnam, you didn't know you were writing a book?

**Caputo:** No. I kept a diary, which we weren't supposed to do.

**WLA:** That was official? No diaries?

**Caputo:** In case you were captured.

**WLA:** You were able to put such vivid memories into *A Rumor of War*. How detailed a diary were you keeping?

**Caputo:** It wasn't all that detailed actually, and it wasn't a daily diary because conditions made that impossible. What I did do was a concession to the regulations. It wasn't a little book that I carried with me into the bush. It was more like an 8 1/2"x 11" composition book that I kept back at base camp in my footlocker. I might spend three weeks out in the boondocks and never record a word in it, and then when I came out of the bush, I'd jot a few things about what had happened.

I wrote a lot of letters home, and while I shielded my parents from the more ghastly details, they were fairly detailed letters. I've still got them. Some of them were 8 and 9 pages long. I went to those when I wrote the book. The one thing I found is that when you have had a dramatic or traumatic experience at a fairly early age, the experience is really indelible. You *see* everything—even as time passes. I've made two return trips to Vietnam recently and I was surprised about how much of the landscape I recalled. The only areas I couldn't recall were because an area had been replanted or some other change had come about. There had been this bare, damaged hill. No vegetation, foxholes, barbed wire. By the time I returned it had been replanted, and there was a little pagoda I didn't recognize. But once I climbed the hill, I remembered. These are very vivid memories—very, very, vivid. It's not hard to learn how to recall them.

**WLA:** Were the memories different for the composing of your latest Vietnam War writing—the novella, *In The Forest of the Laughing Elephant*? Not only would the memories be more distant, they seem of a different nature than those that might have prompted *A Rumor of War*.

**Caputo:** I think that *A Rumor*, as far as we're talking about emotional truth of the war itself, does the job. *In The Forest* is really meant to be more of an allegory. It really wasn't about the war itself. It has been rare that I've had that much fun writing a story even though *In the Forest* is a gruesome piece. I loved writing that story.

I had heard these tales during the time I was in Vietnam—about tigers. I was teaching out in Iowa in 1990 when I started the novella. Then, for various reasons I wasn't able to get back to it for the next five years. But I just picked right up where I'd left off, as though the five

years hadn't passed. *In the Forest* is meant to be an allegory: "America in Vietnam." The six soldiers a microcosm of America's involvement. The novella is also a story about America's—maybe even mankind's—relationship with the natural world. The desire in Sgt Coombes is to conquer and overcome, whereas, Han, the native guide goes with the flow, so to speak, and survives. Han teaches this lesson to the single surviving American: Bledsoe. That's the lesson Bledsoe learns—that there's a point at which you submit, where you *must* submit to survive. Bledsoe learns you can be humble without being humiliated. I mean to illustrate that when Han and Bledsoe back away from the tiger with their heads bowed.

**WLA:** Is that the story Bledsoe says he needs to tell his friends?

**Caputo:** Basically, though I don't really know what he's going to say to his friends at base camp. I wanted to leave a bit of mystery. I knew, as I said, that he's got to tell them something, after all that's happened.

**WLA:** What made you think of a leper colony? What a surprise in the story.

**Caputo:** The idea was from direct experience. In April or May of 1965—we hadn't been in Vietnam six weeks—we were out on patrol, in the boondocks. We saw some roofs up in a tea plantation, and my company commander told me to see if there were any Viet Cong around. I entered the ville and it seems nobody's there. Empty and eerie. I've got two squads surrounding the ville, one squad—me, a radioman and a corpsman searching the huts. There was this big stucco-walled building with names of priests written on it in French. I thought it was a monastery at first. Then a woman comes out from nowhere—this Vietnamese woman, with a hand missing—and then somebody else comes out from some other hiding hole. His fingers are gone. I said to the corpsman, "This post must have been hit with a mortar attack," and he said, "Oh no sir, that's leprosy." We rounded everybody up and I said, "Let's get the hell out of here." That memory lingered in my head.

I got to the point in *In the Forest* where Coombes and his troops get to the leper colony. To this point, Coombes is in, so to speak, a state of grace with the jungle. He's figured out how to survive in there. He's lost his sense of western time. He's into it. I knew there would be a moment when he'd fall from grace, but I didn't know how. Then this memory of the leper colony came to mind. I thought it was kind of perfect. There

would be a missionary and Coombes would kill him. That was like the seed of the idea, and I took it from there. The French priest in the novella is an invention.

Vietnam was rich in legends and spooky stories. All kinds of creepy tales. You'd hear stories about blonde-haired, blue-eyed French Legionnaires spotted with the Viet Cong. So I said to myself: suppose it could happen. Suppose some guy was out there in some isolated jungle valley where he caught leprosy and lost his marbles and had no idea there were any Americans, that his war was over with. I played with that. *In the Forest* was not meant to get at the factual texture of the war. It was meant as an allegory.

**WLA:** But it does get to the emotional truth of the war.

**Caputo:** It probably does unintentionally.

**WLA:** *A Rumor* and *In The Forest* may share more personal emotional truth than you admit.

**Caputo:** Well, sure. The dirty little secret of most autobiography is that a lot of it is fictionalized, or it's semi-fictionalized, and nobody ever says so. Michael Herr's *Dispatches*, which I think is a brilliant book, purports to be autobiographical, but Herr has told me, and he's told other people, "I've made a lot of that shit up." But out of real stuff.

**WLA:** A noble lie.

**Caputo:** You could say that. I think you know when you're taking real materials and working them. Let's put it this way: you're thinking back, you remember this chunk, and you remember that chunk of an experience, and you've got to connect the dots. That's the art of it—the connecting. You have to summon things up from your subconscious to create coherence of fragments of memory. Compare it to a paleontologist piecing together a prehistoric animal, a saber-toothed tiger, say. Assembling the fragments he might say, O.K., this is a piece of rib, therefore the whole rib must have looked like this, and then he manufactures a rib. It's like that. You know when you stop making a saber-toothed tiger and you're turning it into a rhinoceros.

In the *Means of Escape*, there is a scene that takes place in a bar in Peshawar, Pakistan. In this scene, there is an old British guy who is an old British correspondent, expatriate. I met a guy like that in a bar in Pakistan. I recalled meeting the guy. I remembered he smoked heavily

and a few words of what he said. Those few words of what he said were significant to me, because he was talking about what they called “The Great Game” in Afghanistan. It all went back to the days of the Russians. He gave me a little seminar. But I didn’t recall that whole colloquy, that whole conversation word for word or anywhere close to word for word, and so I made up a lot of the dialogue in the book. There would be fragment here or a word there and I would work with it.

**WLA:** Maybe imagination is just a tool to make sense of memory.

**Caputo:** Well said. I think, perhaps that’s exactly what imagination is. All you have to do is take a single day in your life, and just imagine yourself—somebody says make a movie of this day in your life—and then videotape every moment of it, and then just show the video tape. There’s no coherence. It’s not art. There’s no art to it.

**WLA:** Maybe another way to say that is if art and life weren’t different, we wouldn’t need art.

**Caputo:** Makes sense.

**WLA:** Who comes to mind as an influence in your writing? Conrad? Mailer? Hemingway?

**Caputo:** Certainly Conrad. Mailer, not at all. I like the *Naked and the Dead*, but I’d say the writer I’m most conscious of, the one who I sometimes, if I read him, can hear him speaking, actually talking to me, is Conrad.

**WLA:** Any book in particular?

**Caputo:** Almost any book Conrad wrote speaks to me. When I read that guy I swear I have these weird feelings, that somehow or another I’ve known him in some other life. Hemingway much less—though I would have called Hemingway an influence many years ago. And I did consciously think of Hemingway when I was writing certain passages in *A Rumor of War*. I was thinking of a comment he made—something about capturing the sequence between motion and fact that *makes* emotion, creates the emotion on the page. I can’t remember how he said it exactly, but I’m close. You should never have to say “Joe is happy,” “Joe is sad,” “Joe was this,” “Joe was that,” if you can write down with perfect fidelity *what* made Joe happy.

**WLA:** Like “Big Two-Hearted River”?

**Caputo:** “Big Two-Hearted River” is the real example. I was conscious of that story in several scenes and passages in *A Rumor of War*. I tried to paint a scene I hoped would put the reader in the jungle so the reader would know what I’d felt.

**WLA:** Remind us of how old you were when you wrote *A Rumor*.

**Caputo:** I started when I was 25. I was 34 when I finished. Not that I worked on it for 9 years day and night. Sometimes I didn’t look at it for a year.

**WLA:** It’s a book that holds up. You must be proud of it.

**Caputo:** I am proud of that one. It continues to sell and seems as though it will continue so.

**WLA:** You’ve mentioned Conrad and Hemingway. Are there contemporary writers you admire?

**Caputo:** I really like Tim O’Brien’s stuff and not just because he has written about the war. I think he’s a real original in *Going After Cacciato* and *The Things They Carried*. They are very different books and both powerful works. Tim’s got this whimsical, almost boyish, quality about him. And it comes across in the writing. It’s hard when I sometimes hear him reading to realize that the guy is over 50 years old. There’s something about the prose—it has a sense of wonderment and a playfulness of imagination I very much admire. I would say especially in *Cacciato*. I know the first time I read *Cacciato*, which is when it first came out, I thought, “What is going on here?” It really kind of threw me. Two-thirds or one-third of the way through the book, I went back and just started all over again. And then something dawned, and I said, “Oh I get it.”

So, I like O’Brien’s stuff. And I like Don DeLillo—a lot. He has the big vision. And his language is stunning. The way he writes, and his ear, especially for street talk. I could hear those people speaking in *Underworld*. When I walk around the Bronx, I can hear it. It’s very mannered, but you realize it’s got to be mannered on the printed page because it sounds different in your head. Hemingway’s dialogue seems very real, but if you read it aloud, it sounds very artificial. So somehow it has something to do in your head. I admire DeLillo. But my favorite is Cormac McCarthy.

**WLA:** Which book? *Blood Meridian*?

**Caputo:** No. I was on the National Book Award Committee that awarded the National Book Award to *All the Pretty Horses*, so I've got to say that would be my favorite. *Blood Meridian* after a while, although it was very interesting, just got to be too much for me. The body count—I told my wife, “This is Sam Peckinpah meets William Faulkner.” I asked couldn't we have a little romantic interest, just something to break the violence up. It was just one killing and murder after another. I liked the trilogy. I think McCarthy's my favorite. I like to read Jim Harrison and there's another guy who I think has written one of the great novels of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that for some reason has gone almost unrecognized and that's Thomas Sanchez who wrote *Rabbit Boss*—a real epic. I love that book. I'm trying to think if there's anybody else.

**WLA:** Do you read any short stories?

**Caputo:** I've just started to do that again. Nabokov—I've read him before. I've also just started to write some short stories, which I've never done before. I guess I wanted to get used to the form by reading. So I started to read Nabokov again. I've read Raymond Carver. I like some of his stories, but I often feel they attenuate fact. I'm not a fan of the minimalist or what is called the K-Mart school of literature. Everything happens in the kitchen or at the mall. I'm not hot on that kind of thing. I haven't read too many short story writers or short stories in recent years.

**WLA:** Your new book is a departure. What you do in *The Voyage*, that voice is so different.

**Caputo:** I meant it to be different. In previous books, my theme was mainly war or its aftereffects, its aftermath. The first two novellas, in *Exiles*, were my first baby steps out of that theme.

**WLA:** You say you did some research for *The Voyage*, but you must be sailing these days?

**Caputo:** I've done some sailing. I'm not that good at it. My wife is the real sailor. She's the one who really knows how, and my father-in-law knows. I did a fair amount of research—book research. I also hired out as a crewman on yacht deliveries—1800-mile passages from, say, the French West Indies to Newport, Rhode Island. It was kind of fun.



**WLA:** If you pick up Henry James and read a passage from any of the books, you know it's Henry James. I'm just restating the admiration I have for this totally different role in your voice. The prose is so certain in that book.

**Caputo:** There were a lot of times I didn't feel all that certain. I wanted the book to sound—because of when it took place—I wanted it to sound at least somewhat 19<sup>th</sup>-century without being ridiculous about it. In Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon* or in Patrick O'Brien's sea stories, the talk sounds 18<sup>th</sup>-century. I wanted my dialogue to work like that, but I didn't want it to sound silly or egregious. Much of the time during the writing I wasn't sure about myself. I didn't want to sound anachronistic and at the same time sound like a parody of a Victorian novel.

**WLA:** So do you worry when you get out of your well traveled area? Tim O'Brien struggles in this way. I've heard him talk about it a number of times—every time he goes the direction he wants to go, the critics boo and hiss and claim they don't admire the switch. O'Brien says he has fun, but then he ends up coming home. He tells the war story again because he's got to keep on telling it.

**Caputo:** I see Tim's point, but I couldn't go back to telling war stories now even if I wanted to. I don't know what else I could say about it. For me war is a topic that's exhausted. It holds no mystery for me. I believe there's a certain amount of mystery that a subject or character has to have for a writer. That's what you're pursuing when you write—the mystery.

**WLA:** Are you saying that if *you're* not discovering something your readers are likely not to discover something?

**Caputo:** I have to feel as though I've embarked on some sort of exploration. Who cares what the critics say? Those jerks are going to say something no matter what you do. *The Voyage* got some wonderful reviews. It also got a couple that were the worst I've ever received in my life. One was so savage that my wife actually had to restrain me. It was a review in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. The by-line said the reviewer taught at Temple University and I was out the door. I said, "I'm going to pound the piss out of that guy. I won't shoot him, I want to feel his bones break." I was just beside myself. My wife calmed me down. I wrote a letter to the editor of the Book Review section of *The Philadelphia*

*Inquirer*. I had never done that before. Actually, it turned out to be a good letter after my wife tempered the excesses.

Unlike *The Voyage*, *Exiles* received universally positive reviews. It was like *A Rumor of War*. I said to my agent, “I got a couple of real slams for the novel, why did *Exiles* get treated so well? And he said, “You don’t know why? You have been in this business long enough. *Exiles* is short. It’s short, it’s novellas. All of those jerks know novellas won’t sell. And that makes them happy! So of course they’re going to be nice to you!”

**WLA:** What is the mystery you were going for in *Standing In*, the opening novella in *Exiles*?

**Caputo:** *The Voyage* was derived from a story my father-in-law told me and so was *Standing In*. My father-in-law had gone to get a haircut, and somehow or another, this barber starts telling this tale about how during the Vietnam war in 1970 he had been a commercial airline flight attendant. On a particular flight, this couple kept staring at him in such a way that it disturbed him. When he approached them, they said, “You’re a dead ringer for our son,” and they showed him a picture and sure enough he was. The couple told him where they lived. He was unhappy with his job as a flight attendant and he ended up living with the couple. Whereupon, he tells my father-in-law that it turned out to be a sort of a body-snatching deal. The couple’s son had been killed in Vietnam. The kid had been a pilot, and had crashed. He had been shot down. There were no more details. I said, “What a story.” And I thought about these people for maybe two years. Finally I asked my father-in-law to ask the barber if I could interview him. I wanted to talk to him. How did he allow this odd arrangement to occur? Was the dead son’s girlfriend in on the deal? It was gothic. My father-in-law reports back that the barber will talk to me. I call the guy up and he says, “Yes, I’ll meet you.” Then he calls to say he can’t make it. I said, “Let’s take a rain check.” He says, “No, I don’t think I want to talk about this.” He was insistent on that. I said to myself, either these events didn’t occur or there is something else going on. So I was left hanging. The mystery was why would a guy submit himself to this kind of passive lull. For what reason? The motive of the parents would be kind of obvious—the resurrection of a son. They would have had to have been a bit off kilter, but I wanted to figure it out—explore it.

**WLA:** Have you written your way out of Vietnam?

**Caputo:** Yes. As a matter of fact tonight—at this lecture—I’m going to announce that I’ve talked my way out of it too. Since 1978 I’ve spoken at schools, universities—some 35 of them—and I don’t know how many TV networks and such, over the years. I thought: here I am at the United States Air Force Academy and three days from now, April 30, is the 25th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam war—the official Fall of Saigon. I said to myself, “This is it.” I feel like Chief Joseph—“I will fight no more forever.”

**WLA:** Are you out of the journalism business?

**Caputo:** Not at all. In fact I’m a contributing editor now for a magazine called *National Geographic Adventure*. *The New York Times* has just called me to do a magazine piece. I still love journals.

**WLA:** Do you like deadlines?

**Caputo:** I do. I like the fact that unlike a book, a journal article is bang, boom, bang. It’s over and you go on to the next project. You get out, you talk to people, see the world. It’s more fun than the cloistered feeling of putting a book together.

**WLA:** In your moving away from your experiences in Vietnam, was there there any sort of defining moment?

**Caputo:** No ceremonies or rituals that I engaged in. There’s an odd process you go through in coming to terms with yourself that is hard to describe. I think it begins with a kind of a resolve that you’re going to move on. As you move, if you allow some sort of schism inside yourself, you’ll become victimized by your own flaws and devils, often without realizing it. You make the effort to move on, I guess. On the other hand, there may be nothing more mysterious to it than becoming middle-aged and your testosterone levels drop. A certain kind of peace or contentment arrives. Maybe I believe that peace and contentment are achievable by an act of intellect or will. My favorite readings are the Roman Stoics—Epictetus, the meditations by Marcus Aurelius. There’s just something about them and that cool quiet, truthful perceptiveness of how to live your life in a wise way that seems to speak to me.

**WLA:** You make a similar point in *Means of Escape* where it’s no longer seeking escape so much as it is a kind of accommodating or accepting, a looking out the window to see if the tides are out or whatever.

**Caputo:** It reminds me of something I heard from a woman, 27-years-

old, who married a friend of mine who was at that time 57 and had been married four times before, and had been a bartender, a saloon keeper and had had more women in-between his marriages and during his marriages than you could probably count. I was just asking his wife, “Diane, what made you do this? You’re young, you’re beautiful. What’s the point?” She is from Arkansas and has a wonderful accent. “Well,” she said, “there is something to be said for exhaustion.” So that may be what happens at the end of *Means of Escape*.

**WLA:** So you’re escaping Vietnam tonight when you speak?

**Caputo:** I’m saying goodbye to Vietnam, to my war. I really have nothing new to say. I’m weary of talking about Vietnam because I can’t think of any new perspective I can shed on the experience. I can’t truly say that I’ll never write about it again, or that it might not surface 10 years from now as the subject for a story. Although I think that for the subject of a story it probably would be like *In the Forest of the Laughing Elephant*. Vietnam might be a setting, but the story wouldn’t be about the war per se.

**WLA:** Could it be that you feel you ought to get credit for some of the other things that you’ve done with your life and writing than Vietnam?

**Caputo:** Yes. That would be nice. I would love to get credit for some of the other things I’ve written, but I don’t think I’m ever going to. I’m 58, so it’s getting a little late now in the afternoon, career-wise. I think I especially realize it with the last book which has done all right, despite the critic I was going to kill with my bare hands. *The Voyage* is not a war book and the reviews were generally favorable, and the sales respectable. If you write a book like *A Rumor of War*, and that’s your first shot out of the gate, you never get out from under it. It would be pleasant if I were asked more questions like I’ve been asked tonight—what do you like to read? what do you think of Don DeLillo? Instead, I’m invited to seminars to talk about war. Twice I ended up on stage with Joe Heller. We had to talk about war novels. It was as though we had no other abilities or no other interests than war. It wears after awhile.

**WLA:** With that in mind, was it hard to go back and write the postscript for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of *A Rumor*?

**Caputo:** No. The postscript was easy to write—in fact, I plagiarized my lecture tonight from it rather liberally. It was fairly easy to write,

comfortable.

**WLA:** It didn't seem like plowing old ground?

**Caputo:** No. It was a retrospective thing. I had never written about the writing of the book, so it wasn't really a struggle for me. I enjoyed it.

**WLA:** What's undone that you feel you want to write?

**Caputo:** Just yesterday I signed a two-book contract with Knopf. There's a book I'm going to do, a novel, set in Kenya and the Sudan, about the war in Sudan and about the bush pilots who are defying the Sudanese blockade, flying aid to the victims of the war on the front. The book is also about people who are attempting to fight the slave trade which, believe it or not, is actually going on as we speak in that part of the world. But by redeeming slaves—buying them back—these Christian organizations are actually encouraging the war.

**WLA:** What do they do with the bought slaves? Take them home?

**Caputo:** No. They bring them back to the villages from which they were captured and they say, "O.K., here we are. I own you now, and now I don't." There are all sorts of wonderful moral questions about an endeavor like this. There's plenty of evidence that these people who mean so well are encouraging the slave trade to flourish. Had the slave trade in Sudan been left to market forces, it would have withered away by now because slaves were going for \$15 a head.

**WLA:** Oh—and if they get bought back for \$30?

**Caputo:** \$50, try \$50 to \$100. There are all the moral complexities about attempting to do good, but, despite your good intentions, making a bad situation worse. That's the project that I'm working on.

**WLA:** You've chosen to write it as a novel rather than as an exposé—a journalistic piece like the one you wrote about the Army Ranger deaths at Camp Rudder? ["The Black Badge of Courage," *Esquire*, September 1995]

**Caputo:** You can get into the moral questions with nonfiction too, but I don't think you can breathe the same kind of life into them. I figure as I near 60 I've got to take one last stab at writing a great novel. I've written a couple of good ones, but I know as well as anybody that none of them should be called great novels. This one at hand has all of the

themes that interest me—foreign adventure, danger, “war.” And: huge moral questions. I want to take a shot at this thing. You never know what will happen. I would like to write a novel that would be a sister or brother to *A Rumor of War*. I would like to write one novel that someone might be reading a hundred or two hundred years from now.

**WLA:** There’d be a bookend quality to it—people making a bad situation worse through good intentions. Vietnam and Sudan.

**Caputo:** Now that you mention it. I hadn’t thought of it that way. Bob Stone who did not serve in Vietnam (though he worked later as a correspondent there), has been asked about Vietnam. He said it would always be with him. He says that no matter where he goes or what he writes about, even if the word Vietnam never occurs, it will always be somehow haunting him in what he writes. That would probably be true of me. It happened with my first novel, *Horn of Africa*: the moral landscape was Vietnam, though the story took place in Ethiopia. It was Vietnam.

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