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They Heard the Bugle's Call: Pawtucket and the Vietnam War

Terry L. Nau

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“They Heard the Bugle’s Call: Pawtucket and the Vietnam War,” tells the story of 21 former city residents from this Rhode Island community who were killed in that unpopular conflict. This book, virtually an oral history of a tragic era in American life, focuses on how family members dealt with the loss of a father, son, brother or husband over the years. The mission of the book is to honor and remember these heroes one more time in their hometown, nearly 50 years after the war took them away from their loved ones. The book begins with the story of Pawtucket’s first casualty, Marine Corps Lance Corporal Antonio Maciminio, age 20, who died on May 21, 1966 near Da Nang. Maciminio, whose wife Cathy was four months pregnant at the time, had only been in country two months but he had written letters home, telling his family that “this is a crazy, mixed-up war and the way they are fighting it, it’s going to last a long time.” Pawtucket lost another Marine – 21-year-old Ronald Pierce – in September 1966. Three more of the city’s soldiers died in 1967, beginning with Army Specialist Fourth Class Normand Plante, 20, who wrote an “If I die” poem to his parents that spoke of hearing the bugle’s call to war. Plante ended his poem by asking his parents not to cry for him. “Be proud of me. My work is done.” The shocking reality of war hit the city hard on Oct. 14, 1967 when Marine Corps First Lt. Charles Yaghoobian, 23, died at Con Thien Combat Base on his fourth day in country. Five weeks later, Army Specialist Fourth Class Raymond Michalopoulos, 21, was killed in the Battle of Dak To, on the infamous Hill 875, which became known as “Hamburger Hill” after the month-long fighting finally ended. As the city suffered more and more losses over the next four years, the sounds of military funerals echoed beyond cemetery boundaries and out into the community. The bugler’s rendition of Taps and the accompanying 21-gun salutes became all too familiar and painful for citizens to endure. After the funerals ended, families were left alone to deal with their grief. Parents never recovered from the loss of their son. Brothers and sisters tried to go on with their lives, always remembering that young soldier whose image had been frozen in time, forever young. Widows faced heartbreaking challenges. Three of these Pawtucket widows gave birth to children who would never know their father except through pictures and family recollections. “They Heard the Bugle’s Call” is a story that played out all over America during the Vietnam War. Here is one community’s perspective on the Vietnam War, as told by the families and friends of these young men who died while serving their country.

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