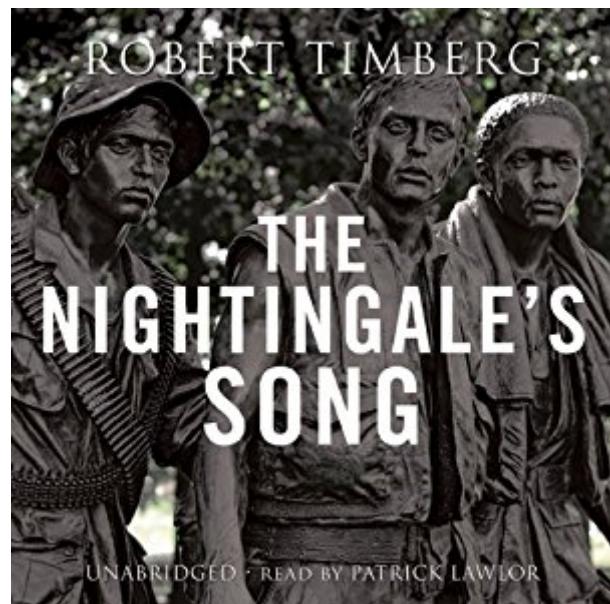


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The Nightingale's Song



Synopsis

Robert Timberg weaves together the lives of Annapolis graduates John McCain, James Webb, Oliver North, Robert McFarlane, and John Poindexter to reveal how the Vietnam War continues to haunt America. Casting all five men as metaphors for a legion of well-meaning if ill-starred warriors, Timberg probes the fault line between those who fought the war and those who used money, wit, and connections to avoid battle. A riveting tale that illuminates the flip side of the fabled Vietnam generation -- those who went. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

After reading "Into Thin Air" a year ago, I thought that it would be a long time before I read anything quite so mesmerizing. Well, "The Nightingale's Song" rivals "Into Thin Air" in this regard. Written by a Naval Academy graduate, Robert Timberg, "The Nightingale's Song" is chock full of incredibly interesting insights about the lives and careers of five Naval Academy graduates who are somewhat familiar to anyone with an interest in national politics. Additionally, Timberg's nuanced analysis of the political innerworkings of the Reagan Administration which contributed to the Iran Contra debacle seems to be completely on the money. Relative to the five individuals profiled (Messrs McCain, North, Webb, Poindexter and McFarlane), Timburg paints five fascinating profiles which honestly deals with the strengths and weaknesses of each. One can read the book and still feel great respect for Oliver North, whose penchant for excess is thoroughly documented, due to his undying commitment to getting the mission accomplished (whatever it might have been). Case in

point: Timberg's account of how North went back to Vietnam (after having ended his tour) on his own time and money to defend a former colleague on an unfair charge is one of the most inspiring of many inspiring stories in the book. My admiration for John McCain, which was high before I read the book, is through the roof after reading about the courage and tenacity with which he conducted himself while in the Hanoi Hilton. If anything, Timberg's own personal connection with the Academy gave him a great perspective with which to delve into the lives of each of these men and what forces might have shaped their individual characters. I can't recommend this book strongly enough.

The author's thesis about the connections between the Vietnam experience, the overall substance and process of policy-making in the Reagan administration, and the Iran-Contra affair is well-supported and compelling. As someone who was born during Vietnam and who watched the Iran-Contra hearings on TV during high school, the book did me a great service by suggesting a connection between these two experiences that was not obvious from learning about each of them in isolation. The biographies of the five key figures in the book are fascinating in and of themselves, quite apart from their role in advancing and supporting the author's main argument. The material on McCain is especially interesting, particularly in light of his current bid for the presidency. The author gives a gripping account of McCain's extraordinary heroism and sacrifice, but stops well short of uncritical hero-worship, portraying McCain's flaws and mistakes as well. I disagree with the previous reviewer who thought that Reagan and North didn't get a fair shake in the book. The book's criticisms of both men were supported by ample evidence and in my opinion were on-target. The treatment of North in particular was actually quite balanced -- the author tells us an awful lot about how truly impressive North was in many respects. The author doesn't have a whole lot good to say about Reagan, but that seems to be because there's really not a whole lot good to say about Reagan's role in these events. I don't take the book to mean that there was nothing at all redeeming or successful about the Reagan presidency in other respects. Overall, a great book, well worth reading.

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