



Black Prisoner of War: A Conscientious Objector's Vietnam Memoir

James A. Daly, Lee Bergman

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Black Prisoner of War chronicles the story of James Daly, a young black soldier held captive for more than five years by the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese and subsequently accused (and acquitted) of collaboration with the enemy. One of the very few books about the Vietnam War by an African American, Daly's memoir is both a testament to survival and a provocative meditation on the struggle between patriotism and religious conviction.

First published in 1975 as *A Hero's Welcome*, Daly's memoir had only a brief exposure before it sank from sight. At the time, most Americans simply wanted to forget about the war. But, as Jeff Loeb argues, Daly's story is a compelling one that merits a much wider readership.

Raised in Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant area, Daly fought to overcome difficult circumstances through hard work and religion. When the Vietnam War intervened, he was denied conscientious objector status, despite his strong pacifist beliefs. He then enlisted in the U.S. Army, but only after a black recruiter assured him he would receive a non-combat assignment. Instead, he was sent to fight in Vietnam, where he was denied repeated requests for reassignment. In protest, he refused to load or fire his weapon, even when sent out on patrol.

When his unit was ambushed by the Viet Cong, he began his long ordeal in captivity, first in the jungles of South Vietnam and then in the infamous "Hanoi Hilton." As a POW, he was still an outcast: a black "grunt" and pacifist among mostly white air force officers who considered any sort of accommodation treasonable. Such charges were eventually leveled at Daly for joining the so-called Peace Committee and signing a letter condemning American actions in the war. Although Daly's decisions were in keeping with his pacifism and he was later cleared of the charges, he remains a controversial figure for many Vietnam veterans.

Exploring the limits of both accommodation and resistance, Daly's memoir forces us to reassess the POW experience and race relations in Vietnam, as well as the complex relationship between personal belief and public duty.

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