

Douglas Brinkley



# TOUR OF DUTY



# JOHN KERRY

★ ★ ★ ★ AND THE ★ ★ ★ ★

# VIETNAM WAR

★ ★ ★ ★ ADVANCE PRAISE FOR *TOUR OF DUTY* ★ ★ ★ ★

★ ★ ★ ★ JOHN KERRY AND THE VIETNAM WAR ★ ★ ★ ★  
**TOUR OF DUTY**



**DOUGLAS  
BRINKLEY**

*Wm*  
MORROW

“The experience of war does a great deal more than make men out of boys. All wars, be they just and necessary or not, are epic calamities and their devastation and inhumanity will cause moments of doubt in the mind of the most ardent soldier and trouble all but the meanest conscience. In *Tour of Duty*, an account of my friend John Kerry’s experiences and great courage in Vietnam, and his role in our national debate over that lost cause, Doug Brinkley does a masterful job of showing how war, with its unique mix of sacrifice and malice, courage and trepidation, both burdens and strengthens the heart of the combatant, who learns in equal measure how cruel and how noble human beings can be.”  
—**JOHN MCCAIN**

“Doug Brinkley succeeds in humanizing John Kerry, something the senator often has trouble doing himself. *Tour of Duty* is an incisive look at a man who would be president.”  
—**BILL O’REILLY**

“John Kerry in Vietnam was a thrice-wounded man of action and a serious, critical thinker. The letters and journal he wrote at the time are the core of this haunting account of the U.S. Navy’s small-boat campaign in the canals and narrow rivers of South Vietnam, a microcosm of the folly of the larger war. Douglas Brinkley’s interviews with survivors who fought alongside Kerry and his mastery of the vast literature on the war give the book added heft. For this reader the message is ‘lest we forget.’”  
—**GADDIS SMITH**

“A gripping story filled with old-fashioned courage and postmodern despair. Eminent historian Douglas Brinkley has perfectly captured the absurdity of the war that continues to haunt a generation. But it’s John Kerry’s raw heroism—both as a U.S. Navy Swift boat commander in the Mekong Delta/Ca Mau Peninsula and as an antiwar activist—that comes bursting through this riveting narrative. Without question *Tour of Duty*—a classic Vietnam War odyssey—is a tour de force.”  
—**BOB KERREY**

“Douglas Brinkley’s *Tour of Duty* reminds me of *PT-109*. This book is a vivid chronicle of the horrors of war and a young man’s extraordinary experience in coming to terms with it. The story of John Kerry’s journey from brave Swift boat commander in Vietnam to leading antiwar activist is a must-read. It captures the essence of a true profile in courage who changed America for the better, and who can do so again.”  
—**TED KENNEDY**

“No one weaves narrative with analysis more deftly than Douglas Brinkley, and never has he had a more compelling and important tale to tell. The river war in Vietnam, the making of a hero, the education of a public man—*Tour of Duty* has it all. Splendid!”  
—**H. W. BRANDS**

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**“Douglas Brinkley’s vivid rendition of brown-water operations in *Tour of Duty* rings true, with all the sights, the sounds, and the smells that made it such a unique experience. But this is far more than another war story. It is an account of a young man’s journey through his own ‘heart of darkness,’ ultimately emerging with his soul intact and his need to serve undiminished, ready to wage a different kind of war.”**

—THOMAS CUTLER, author of *Brown Water, Black Berets*

Covering more than four decades, *Tour of Duty* is the definitive account of John Kerry’s journey from war to peace. Written by acclaimed historian Douglas Brinkley, this is the first full-scale, intimate account of Kerry’s naval career. In writing this riveting narrative, Brinkley has drawn on extensive interviews with virtually everyone who knew Kerry well in Vietnam, including all the men still living who served under him. Kerry also entrusted to Brinkley his letters home from Vietnam and his voluminous “War Notes”—journals, notebooks, and personal reminiscences written during and shortly after the war. This material was provided without restriction, to be used at Brinkley’s discretion, and has never before been published.

John Kerry enlisted in the Navy in February 1966, months before he graduated from Yale. In December 1967 Ensign Kerry was assigned to the frigate U.S.S. *Gridley*; after five months of service in the Pacific, with a brief stop in Vietnam, he returned to the United States and underwent training to command a Swift boat, a small craft deployed in Vietnam’s rivers. In June 1968 Kerry was promoted to lieutenant (junior grade), and by the end of that year he was back in Vietnam, where he commanded, over time, two Swift boats. Throughout *Tour of Duty* Brinkley deftly deals with such explosive issues as U.S. atrocities in Vietnam and the bombing of Cambodia. In a series of unforgettable combat-action sequences, he recounts how Kerry won the Purple Heart three times for wounds suffered in action and was awarded the Bronze Star and the Navy’s Silver Star for gallantry in action.

When Kerry returned from Southeast Asia, he joined the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW), becoming a prominent antiwar spokesperson. He challenged the Nixon administration on Capitol Hill with the antiwar movement

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cheering him on. As Kerry's public popularity soared in April–May 1971, the FBI considered him a subversive. Brinkley—using new information acquired from the recently released Nixon tapes—reveals how White House aides Charles Colson and H. R. Haldeman tried to discredit Kerry. Refusing to be intimidated, Kerry started running for public office, eventually becoming a U.S. senator from Massachusetts. But he never forgot his fallen comrades. Working with his friend Senator John McCain, he returned to Vietnam numerous times looking for MIAs and POWs. By the time Bill Clinton was elected president in 1992, Kerry was the leading proponent of “normalization” of relations with Vietnam. When President Clinton officially recognized Vietnam in 1995, Kerry's three-decade-long tour of duty had at long last ended.



David G. Spielman

**DOUGLAS BRINKLEY** is director of the Eisenhower Center for American Studies and professor of history at the University of New Orleans. Brinkley's recent publications include *Wheels for the World: Henry Ford, His Company and a Century of Progress* and *The Mississippi and the Making of a Nation* with Stephen E. Ambrose. He lives in New Orleans with his wife, Anne, and daughter, Benton.

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