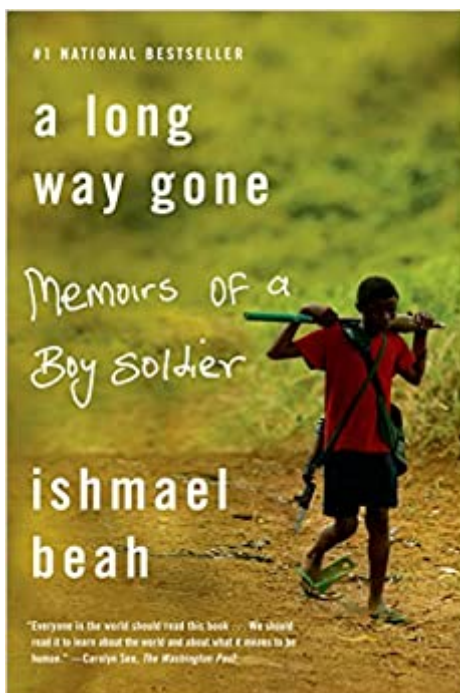


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# A Long Way Gone: Memoirs Of A Boy Soldier



## Synopsis

This is how wars are fought now: by children, hopped-up on drugs and wielding AK-47s. Children have become soldiers of choice. In the more than fifty conflicts going on worldwide, it is estimated that there are some 300,000 child soldiers. Ishmael Beah used to be one of them. What is war like through the eyes of a child soldier? How does one become a killer? How does one stop? Child soldiers have been profiled by journalists, and novelists have struggled to imagine their lives. But until now, there has not been a first-person account from someone who came through this hell and survived. In *A Long Way Gone*, Beah, now twenty-five years old, tells a riveting story: how at the age of twelve, he fled attacking rebels and wandered a land rendered unrecognizable by violence. By thirteen, he'd been picked up by the government army, and Beah, at heart a gentle boy, found that he was capable of truly terrible acts. "This is a rare and mesmerizing account, told with real literary force and heartbreaking honesty." "My new friends have begun to suspect I haven't told them the full story of my life. 'Why did you leave Sierra Leone?' 'Because there is a war.' 'You mean, you saw people running around with guns and shooting each other?' 'Yes, all the time.' 'Cool.' I smile a little. 'You should tell us about it sometime.' 'Yes, sometime.'"

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. This absorbing account by a young man who, as a boy of 12, gets swept up in Sierra Leone's civil war goes beyond even the best journalistic efforts in revealing the life and mind of a child abducted into the horrors of warfare. Beah's harrowing journey transforms him overnight

from a child enthralled by American hip-hop music and dance to an internal refugee bereft of family, wandering from village to village in a country grown deeply divided by the indiscriminate atrocities of unruly, sociopathic rebel and army forces. Beah then finds himself in the army in a drug-filled life of casual mass slaughter that lasts until he is 15, when he's brought to a rehabilitation center sponsored by UNICEF and partnering NGOs. The process marks out Beah as a gifted spokesman for the center's work after his "repatriation" to civilian life in the capital, where he lives with his family and a distant uncle. When the war finally engulfs the capital, it sends 17-year-old Beah fleeing again, this time to the U.S., where he now lives. (Beah graduated from Oberlin College in 2004.) Told in clear, accessible language by a young writer with a gifted literary voice, this memoir seems destined to become a classic firsthand account of war and the ongoing plight of child soldiers in conflicts worldwide. (Feb.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Adult/High School • This gripping story by a children's-rights advocate recounts his experiences as a boy growing up in Sierra Leone in the 1990s, during one of the most brutal and violent civil wars in recent history. Beah, a boy equally thrilled by causing mischief as by memorizing passages from Shakespeare and dance moves from hip-hop videos, was a typical precocious 12-year-old. But rebel forces destroyed his childhood innocence when they hit his village, driving him to leave his home and travel the arid deserts and jungles of Africa. After several months of struggle, he was recruited by the national army, made a full soldier and learned to shoot an AK-47, and hated everyone who came up against the rebels. The first two thirds of his memoir are frightening: how easy it is for a normal boy to transform into someone as addicted to killing as he is to the cocaine that the army makes readily available. But an abrupt change occurred a few years later when agents from the United Nations pulled him out of the army and placed him in a rehabilitation center. Anger and hate slowly faded away, and readers see the first glimmers of Beah's work as an advocate. Told in a conversational, accessible style, this powerful record of war ends as a beacon to all teens experiencing violence around them by showing them that there are other ways to survive than by adding to the chaos. • Matthew L. Moffett, Pohick Regional Library, Burke, VA Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

"A Long Way Gone" is actually the second book by Ishmael Beah that I have had the pleasure of reading. I initially fell upon his book "Radiance of Tomorrow" at the beginning of my book journey,

and it definitely helped to set the tone in regards to my book choices. Like many things in the news, boy soldiers was something I heard and read about, but it was such an abstract concept to me. It didn't sound real, it didn't sound possible. Furthermore, I lacked the necessary background knowledge on the context of these conflicts that were creating these boy soldiers. It is a privilege to have been able to sit back and just hear about children being trained to be soldiers by not only rebel groups but the governing bodies of countries. It is a privilege to have been almost totally unaware and uneducated on the plight of people in countries like Sierra Leone. It is a privilege that I try to be aware of and recognize, and books like "A Long Way Gone" and "Radiance of Tomorrow" are instrumental in checking my privilege. Through "A Long Way Gone", Ishmael Beah takes boy soldiers out of the abstract and into the realm of reality, giving the term "boy soldier" the human faces that have been wiped by such an umbrella term. There was a bit of controversy regarding this book, primarily because people were skeptical to the actuality of this story. "A Long Way Gone" is intended to be a memoir of Ishmael Beah's own journey as a child soldier, and there were supposedly conflicts in the timeline. However, regardless of whether or not this story was the true experience of Ishmael Beah, it cannot be denied that he shares with the world a story that must be exposed and shared. He also raises many ethical questions in regards to child soldiers and how they are dehumanized. Ishmael takes you through the full scope of what being a child soldier entails, including the aftermath. More specifically the rehabilitation that is required and the re-entry into mainstream society. A lot like "The Memory of Lost Skin", this book challenged my perceptions of criminality and rehabilitation. With child soldiers, society condemns them and takes away their status as children because of the atrocities they are brainwashed to commit. Nevertheless, at the end of the day these children are STILL children, and if we are to ensure that they do not continue on a violent life course, we need to believe they can be rehabilitated and take the necessary measures to do so. The human brain is most plastic at younger ages, so making efforts to rehabilitate children will help to mitigate the creation of a whole generation of adults that perpetuate violence due to the residual effects of these conflicts. This is definitely not an easy read, particularly when you realize these are real events that have occurred to thousands of boys in Sierra Leone and other countries. However, if you want to understand what it means to be a boy soldier, this would be a good place to start. A good read to accompany "A Long Way Gone" is "What is the What" by Dave Eggers. Compliments well the story of "A Long Way Gone", and gives a differing perspective, i.e. what happens if you are "fortunate" enough to escape being taken as a child soldier. Keep in mind "What is the What" covers an entirely different topic (The Lost Boys of Sudan), but it is essential in helping one realize that all these things are connected and not just isolated events.

It is a profoundly hopeful message, especially in these cynical times. But the book left me with two questions. Where did the money come from that fueled the destruction that engulfed Ishmael's life and all of Sierra Leone? Only with western dollars and with western weapons was this possible, and to that extent we are all guilty and responsible for these events. And the second question, of course, is where did the madness come from that rose up and annihilated the wise and gentle culture that Ishmael depicts?

I loved this book. However, at the conclusion of the book, wanted to know more about the man he is now and the journey he took after he arrived in the US. His story is riveting and the thoughtful way he writes makes this an incredible read. The sad realities of a war torn country and the corruption, desperation and killing that went on during his time are mind bending. Humans can be so good and so bad. The author has redeemed himself via great insight. Great read!

Ishmael Beah, a 12 year old boy living in Sierra Leone faces war when him and some friends are performing in a rap group. Once their village is attacked everyone went into panic. They searched for food and shelter while also looking for their families. Every day they struggle for their survival, and eventually find themselves stealing from others. Beah explained why he joined the army, "I joined the army to avenge the deaths of my family and to survive, but I've come to learn that if I am going to take revenge, in that process I will kill another person whose family will want revenge; then revenge and revenge and revenge will never come to an end." The boy soldiers were given marijuana so they will get through the emotions and have the courage to kill the many other soldiers. The UNICEF took the child soldiers to a rehab center. Once he finish rehab Ishmael was invited to New York City to tell his story. The Wall Street Journal says "Beah speaks in a distinctive voice, and tells an important story." Ismael won the NAACP award for his outstanding literary work. I personally think the book is a very deep and important story for young adults to adults to read this if they don't understand the cruelty what some children face in war. The book is extremely shocking that it is true

As harsh as the subject matter of this book is, I found it a totally illuminating read. There is something very uplifting about a story that takes you through the worst of situations that can befall a young boy, and brings you out the other side to a remade life and reclaimed humanity. Beah's

account of his enforced conscription into the worst of the Sierra Leone madness is conveyed with honest simplicity and lack of self-pity that makes it extremely powerful. It puts into perspective our own little troubles and challenges our comfortable certainties of what constitutes humanity in a world gone mad. His second book, *The Radiance of Tomorrow*, a fictionalised account of return to war-ravaged regions, has its own 'radiance' of wisdom, beauty and insight to impart.

Although this was a heavy book to digest, I feel it deserves five stars for the beautiful writing and the constant action moving the story forward. I do not normally read memoirs, and only read this one because one of my private students had to for a tenth grade Eng class. I'm glad I was introduced to a time and place I knew very little about, and that I was able to peek into this man's childhood, harrowing that it was. Hats off to the author for his brutal honesty, and for teaching me lessons along the way. His journey became my journey. As an aside, I do not feel this book should be read by anyone under high school age. But that's just me. I tend to be conservative when it comes to graphic storytelling, especially war-related books.

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