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# Memoirs of Vietnam War Veterans

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Chtěl bych touto formou poděkovat PhDr. Christopheru Koyovi, M.A., Ph.D. za zapůjčení knih, trpělivost, cenné rady a připomínky které vedly k dopracování mé diplomové práce.

## **Abstract**

This thesis focuses on the memoirs of American veterans of the Vietnam War. Through the analysis of selected works, their unique perspective and personal experience of this war are presented. This thesis highlights the trauma and stresses the young men were exposed to, as well as the psychological effects of war on individuals and coping with the effects through the use of addictive substances. Furthermore, this thesis examines the criticism of the Vietnam War, which has been aided by the media that has allowed testimonies of the horrors to be brought into the homes of people in the US and around the world. However, these testimonies have often been edited to glorify American military power and downplay the human cost of war.

**Keywords:** War in Vietnam, media coverage of the Vietnam War, substance abuse, psychological toll of war

## **Anotace**

Diplomová práce se zaměřuje na memoáry amerických veteránů z války ve Vietnamu. Pomocí analýzy vybraných děl je představen jejich jedinečný pohled a osobní zkušenost s touto válkou. V této diplomové práci je poukázáno na trauma a stres kterému byli mladí lidé vystaveni. Poukazuje také na psychologické dopady války na jednotlivce a zvládání dopadů pomocí návykových látek. Zároveň se tato práce zabývá kritice války ve Vietnamu, čemuž přispěla média, která umožnila přenést svědectví o hrůzách do domů obyvatel v USA a v celém světě. Tato svědectví však byla často upravována tak aby oslavovala americkou vojenskou sílu a bagatelizovala lidskou cenu války.

**Klíčová slova:** válka ve Vietnamu, role médií ve vietnamské válce, užívání drog, psychologické dopady války

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## 1. Introduction

A memoir is a unique form of nonfiction literature that allows authors to share their personal experiences and reflections with the public. When it comes to memoirs about the Vietnam War, the memories can be painful and difficult to revisit. In this diploma work, the struggles of veterans and a journalist to recall their experiences during the Vietnam War will be examined, along with the criticism of the U.S. political and military system and leadership in the decision-making involved in the conflict.

Unlike previous wars, the Vietnam War was particularly divisive and controversial, with significant public criticism directed toward the U.S. government's decision to become involved. The authors of these memoirs offer a unique perspective on the conflict, which is often critical of the U.S. political and military system and leadership. The diploma thesis will examine these criticisms and how these authors criticize issues surrounding the Vietnam War.

However, writing about traumatic experiences can be challenging, and recalling memories can be particularly difficult for veterans of the Vietnam War. The diploma work will also consider the trauma experienced by these authors and their families and how it shapes the personal nature of their writing.

Overall, this diploma thesis will explore the intersection of personal experience and political criticism in memoirs of the Vietnam War. The thesis analyzes these texts, the thesis aims to provide insight into war's psychological and emotional toll and how personal narratives can point out broader societal issues.

## 2. A brief history of the Vietnam War

The Vietnam War was the first television war regularly broadcasted in people's living rooms through nightly news. Audiences worldwide closely followed the war's progression and were shocked by the brutalities reported by correspondents and photographers on-site. The war elicited protests and counter-protests globally, and the images and footage captured during the war became iconic. Eventually, governments and ordinary citizens everywhere demanded its end. [ASSELIN 2018: 2]

The Vietnam War was a crucial part of the Cold War and represented a significant challenge to the capitalist Free World against the communist Progressive World. The war had far-reaching impacts on the world, escalating Cold War tensions and raising the specter of a superpower war. It also marked the emergence of China as a significant player in world politics and strengthened the political, military, and economic ties between the US and several Asian nations. The war led to the formation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and contributed to the erosion of Taiwan's sovereign status through the One-China policy. [ASSELIN 2018: 3]

The Vietnam War profoundly impacted the United States, capturing the attention and emotions of the nation like no other Cold War episode. It caused an acute national identity crisis that exacerbated existing divisions and created new ones. The war led to mass demonstrations, violent riots, deadly protests on university campuses, and even domestic terrorism. Unlike other major American wars, the outcome of Vietnam was primarily determined by the domestic and international response to it rather than the events on the battlefield. [ASSELIN 2018: 4]

The Vietnam War impacted American culture, and eroded people's faith in political, cultural, and traditional institutions, including the presidency. This loss of confidence was exemplified by the Watergate scandal that ultimately led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon and other controversies that caused Americans to question their socio-political order. The criticism of American policy and actions in Southeast Asia by protesters and activists boosted the legitimacy of progressive action groups that challenged the status quo. This loss of faith in the system still resonates in American politics today. [ASSELIN 2018: 5-6]

The defeat in Vietnam shattered the idea of American exceptionalism and caused the nation to become more cautious in international affairs. The reluctance to involve ground forces in overseas combat can be attributed to the desire to minimize casualties and the lasting impact of the Vietnam syndrome that still echoes in political and military circles. The Vietnam War had a transformative effect on American society and prompted a reevaluation of core values and public policies, resulting in significant political, social, and economic changes. Many of the ideals now embraced by young Americans are direct legacies of the Vietnam era, which changed the United States in profound ways that differed from how it affected Vietnam. [ASSELIN 2018: 5-6]

### 2.1. 1959-1964

In 1959, the North Vietnamese representatives decided to support the guerrilla warfare of South Vietnamese citizens who disliked the rule of President Ngo Dinh Diem to help spread communism to South Vietnam. The United States supported the South Vietnamese regime by sending military advisers. [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 112]

The rise of the Viet Cong in the South helped the communist movement survive and thrive, with increased assistance from the North. The Politburo authorized the escalation of political and military activity, resulting in the creation of the first Viet Cong revolutionary bases. Revolutionary bases in the South became the backbone of the war effort, serving as staging areas for attacks and safe havens for troops. Hanoi leaders insisted that their forces treat civilians with respect and refrain from stealing or confiscating from them. Diem's armed forces reversed Viet Cong gains in 1962 with the help of large contingents of US military advisers and sophisticated military hardware. The Strategic Hamlet program and other policies were successful in compromising Viet Cong efforts and limiting their access to resources. Diem believed he could defeat the Viet Cong within a year and turned down American offers to dispatch combat forces. [ASSELIN 2018: 103-104]

In 1963 the United States backed a military coup in which Diem was killed. In 1964 the Tonkin Gulf Incident occurred, in which the United States fought with North Vietnam on the sea. This led to the escalation of war and US military involvement in Vietnam. [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 112]

The Tonkin Gulf Incident took place in the context of an escalating conflict in Vietnam. Le Duan, the new leader of the North Vietnamese Communist Party, had

increased assistance to Southern guerrillas, and there were frequent and intense Viet Cong attacks. Le Duan was ideologically committed to promoting revolution and saw capitalism and imperialism as being on the defensive worldwide. The US government, under President Lyndon Johnson, felt that losing South Vietnam to communism was not an option, and responded with massive military support to Saigon, increasing the number of advisers to 23,000 and deploying a covert operation, OPLAN-34A. On 2 August 1964, the USS Maddox was fired upon by North Vietnamese patrol boats, and two days later, the USS Turner Joy reported being shot at. Despite the evidence of the second attack being circumstantial, the US Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, authorizing President Johnson to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed forces, to promote peace and security in Southeast Asia. In essence, the Tonkin Gulf Incident marked a turning point in the Vietnam War, as it gave President Johnson a blank check to wage war in Vietnam. The incident also highlighted the ideological differences between North Vietnam and the United States, with Le Duan promoting revolutionary militancy while the US sought to stop the spread of communism. The incident was significant because it paved the way for the deployment of US ground troops to Vietnam, leading to a protracted and costly war that would last for several years and result in a significant loss of life on both sides. [ASSELIN 2018: 112-113]

In 1959 an undeclared war between North and South Vietnam began to look serious. The US presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy decided on military and financial aid for falling South Vietnam. „*At the end of the 1950s, South Vietnam appeared to be prosperous and stable—thanks to more than \$200 million dollars worth of military and economic assistance from the US each year. By 1960, such aid made up as much as 70 percent of the country’s total budget, and Saigon was booming.*“ [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 119] However in cities lived only a minority of the population. In the villages where 90 percent of the population lived, living conditions didn’t improve. These people who were living in the villages were unsatisfied with the living conditions and asked for change. Le Duan, a former South Vietnamese activist who had fled to the North, encouraged other members of North Vietnam's politburo to provide stronger support for the insurgents in the South. The committee approved the use of force in South Vietnam in January 1959 as a result. It aimed to build an effective rebel army in the South and provide it with weapons, but not wanting to provoke its opponents,

particularly the Americans, with an outright invasion. Group 559 was formed to organize supply lines. The first uprising occurred in the province of Ben Tre where the bells summoned locals to take control of their village. The same month the rebels stole weapons from the South Vietnamese army. Diem's presidential mansion was encircled by three divisions of paratroop battalions, said to be among the most loyal of the South Vietnamese soldiers. The coup attempt was only narrowly repelled by forces loyal to the president. The rebels targeted local officials and by the end of 1960, more than 1400 government officials were killed. [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 118-121]

In 1960, the National Liberation Front was founded. „*The US viewed the NLF as an arm of North Vietnam and called its military wing the Viet Cong—short for Vietnam communists. By then, insurgents dominated large areas of the Mekong Delta, the Central Highlands, and the coastal plains. Their fighting strength had risen to an estimated 25,000 guerrillas, while the NLF's political wing had as many as 200,000 active sympathizers. Washington responded by sending in more weapons, training, and aid to support Diem.*” [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 122]

The Viet Cong weren't just locals unsatisfied with the South Vietnamese government but more importantly war veterans of the war against the French with many experiences in guerrilla warfare. Also, some of the recruits were sent for political indoctrination and intensive military training in 1954. These recruits were equipped with AK-47 rifles and their variants. In 1962, the National Liberation Front had 300 000 active members and one million passive supporters. Recruiters gave promises and used manipulation to persuade recruits to join the Viet Cong. The Viet Cong opponents were at huge disadvantages thanks to the difficult terrain of South Vietnam's rainforests, mountains, and swamps. Also, it was a war in which was no frontline. [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 126-128]

In October, the first PAVN units began marching South via the Ho Chi Minh Trail and reached their destinations a little over a month later. Hanoi then decided to launch a major offensive to take place in two phases between December 1964 and March 1965, intending to confront and destroy main force ARVN units and expand liberated areas. The campaign's success depended on the capabilities of the armed forces and the willingness of the Southern masses to rise against the Saigon regime. The results of the campaign turned out to be mixed, with Saigon's armed forces only dented, and there

was no popular uprising. The attack on an American air base at Pleiku became the last straw for Washington decision-makers, and American intervention on a massive scale began shortly thereafter. As 1964 gave way to 1965, Hanoi was at war with the South, and preparing for American intervention and an onslaught against the North. The Vietnam War had begun, and it would not be the last time communist forces paid the price for their leaders' errors. The capital had become a city of war, with anti-aircraft guns positioned on rooftops, and people busy digging trenches in the streets. [ASSELIN 2018: 115-116]

Ho Chi Minh Trail was used to infiltrate South Vietnam and support Viet Cong fighters. It was a secret trail through the demilitarized zone between North and South Vietnam. When South Vietnamese Army realized that NVA are using this trail, they sent reinforcements to Khe Sanh to eliminate the Viet Cong in this area. In the early days of the war, the trail was basic but later when the war escalated the trail was improved by North Vietnamese Army thanks to Soviet and Chinese machinery. They built roads and bridges that could withstand heavy trucks and tanks. It was important for North Vietnamese to protect this trail so North Vietnamese built bunkers, hospitals, barracks, and assigned battalions of soldiers. *„The number of infiltrators rose, reaching an average of 4,500 soldiers a month by 1966 and 6,000 a month the year after that. As even the US government reluctantly came to realize, what the North Vietnamese had created was one of the great military engineering achievements of the 20th century.“* [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 141-143]

The US president at the time was John F. Kennedy who won the US presidential election in the 1960s. For him, Vietnam was an ideological war between communism and the freedom of Western hemisphere. Kennedy wanted the US to fight in small-scale conflicts to destroy communism. For this cause, he recruited Robert McNamara as secretary of defense, Dean Rusk as the secretary of state, Mc George Bundy as a national security adviser, and General Maxwell Taylor who became Kennedy's military aide. *„Taylor was a military maverick, preferring „flexible response“ to traditional US strategy that relied on overwhelming retaliation. He argued that it was „as necessary to deter or win quickly limited wars as to deter general wars.“ In his view, retaining a strong and flexible infantry was as important as possessing nuclear missiles.“* [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 147]

In the 1950s it was believed that if communism was allowed in one nation, the other neighboring countries will also become communist countries. South Vietnam was a testing ground on how to stop the spread of communism. Kennedy wasn't so keen to send US ground forces to Vietnam. Instead, he doubled American military and economic support to South Vietnam. Believing that the United States was well on its way to securing stability in South Vietnam, Kennedy authorized McNamara in the fall of 1962 to plan to reduce the number of US military advisers in the country to 1,500 by the end of 1965. The strategy never took place. In reaction to the Viet Cong's rise in 1963 and growing public resistance to President Ngo Dinh Diem, Kennedy increased US military aid. There were 16,000 American troops in Vietnam by the end of 1963. Kennedy and his advisors concluded that President Diem's authoritarianism in South Vietnam was part of the issue, not the solution. Kennedy and his aides secretly supported an ARVN coup and the establishment of a military government in South Vietnam in November 1963. Kennedy was killed in Dallas, Texas, three weeks later. [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 149-152]

In 1960 Laos was in a civil war where several factions competed for power. Both the US and North Vietnam intervened. North Vietnam to gain access to Ho Chi Minh Trail and the United States to fight against communist Pathet Lao. The United States had been pouring resources into Laos, Vietnam's neighbor, to construct a pro-Western administration. As a military adviser, Eisenhower deployed a small unit of Special Forces. The first of them arrived in July 1959 disguised as contract civilian specialists. Initially, the teams were only allowed to operate as instructors, but in August 1960, they were entangled in a civil war between neutralists (who supported a neutral foreign policy) and pro-Westerners (who supported a pro-Western foreign policy), with the communist Pathet Lao waiting for an opportunity. „Eisenhower had advised the new president that the situation in Laos was so grave that it might be necessary to deploy ground forces. Laos, he said, was the key to all of Southeast Asia. If it fell to communism, then South Vietnam, Cambodia, Burma, and Thailand would follow.“ [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 162] Kennedy, on the other hand, did not commit US foot soldiers into battle. He agreed to attend a peace conference in April after concluding that a negotiated settlement was the best he could hope for. After then, there was a year of

discussions. The establishment of a neutral and independent Laos was finally agreed upon in July 1962. [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 160-165]

The notion of recruiting the Montagnards as allies in the war against the Viet Cong originated from the CIA, not the South Vietnamese Diem government. They chose Buon Eno, in the heart of Rhade country, just northeast of Buon Ma Thuot, to test the strategy, and Nuttle, a CIA official, and a Special Forces medical specialist visited the village in November 1961 to speak with tribal elders. The elders agreed to collaborate with the Americans after more than two weeks of negotiations. The Montagnards showed their bravery right away. Village defenders in the Sedang tribal area, for example, withstood a Viet Cong attack armed only with knives and bows and arrows in June 1962. The Green Berets built dams, roads, bridges, and schools for the Montagnards with the support of the US Navy's Seabees. They dug wells and offered basic medical care as well.

The outcomes validated the collaboration's success. By December 1963, 19,000 Montagnards had joined part-time village militias, with another 6,000 serving in CIDG strike units, ready to be airlifted to problematic locations. *„Around a quarter of the prewar population of one million Montagnards died during the war. Many were killed in action, including around half of the 900 Montagnards who assisted in the defense of the Special Forces camp of Lang Vei during the Siege of Khe Sanh.“* [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 175-178]

## 2.2. 1965-1967

In early 1965, the United States launched Operation Rolling Thunder, which was a bombing operation against North Vietnamese and Ho Chi Ming Trail. American military involvement in Vietnam escalated. The US Army and Marine Corps were under command of General William Westmoreland. Nonetheless, relentless bombardment failed to discourage North Vietnam's determination to fight. As American deaths rose at an alarming rate and personnel numbers increased, the draft was extended. A small antiwar movement grew in strength in the United States. [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 253]

The decision by President Lyndon B. Johnson to increase American military participation grew over time. Massive troop expansions were planned in the early 1960s

when the US invested extensively in South Vietnam's military and logistics infrastructure. Johnson advocated a more forceful, military approach when economic help, diplomatic initiatives, and military advising failed to reduce support for the rebellion. But first, he needed public support to escalate a conflict in which he had promised the American people that he would not send their kids to war. A Viet Cong attack on Camp Holloway, a US base near Pleiku in the Central Highlands, on February 7, 1965, provided Johnson with a valid justification for such an escalation. The attack, which resulted in the deaths of eight Americans, dozens more being injured, and several helicopters being destroyed, was utilized by the Johnson administration to gain public support for increased involvement. On the same day, President Lyndon B. Johnson approved Operation Flaming Dart, a retaliatory airstrike campaign. On March 8, 1965, members of the Ninth Marine Expeditionary Brigade arrived near Da Nang and were greeted by local government officials and a cheering crowd on the beach. These Marines were the first official American combat forces in South Vietnam, tasked with defending American outposts to free up South Vietnamese men for combat operations. More than 180,000 American servicemen were stationed at bases across South Vietnam by the end of the year. As ground patrols around US bases pushed further and further in search of the enemy, the defensive duty of US forces transformed into an offensive mission. [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 259-261]

Protecting US military sites, eliminating the Ho Chi Minh Trail and other supply channels, and conducting a search-and-destroy campaign were all priorities on the ground. *"This strategy of attrition involved locating and killing enemy combatants, discovering, and destroying material intended to support the enemy (including food), and identifying and neutralizing people who supported the enemy and their efforts. The helicopter was essential to such operations. Its unprecedented mobility allowed the delivery of combat troops to remote areas."* [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 304] Statistical analysis of data—pounds of rice taken, quantity of weapons captured, and number of combatants killed—was used by Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) to evaluate search-and-destroy operations. The body count became the major measure of success for search-and-destroy, with combat units awarded with commendations, bragging rights, and even incentives like stand-down R&R, which some units arranged at regular intervals. [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 305]

The North Vietnamese population had a significant involvement in the war effort, unlike most Americans. Children assisted host families and artists performed to entertain troops and boost morale. Hanoi propagated the idea that it was everyone's duty to defend the fatherland against the United States and coercion was used when necessary. The war was considered an existential struggle similar to the Soviet Union's fight against Nazi Germany in World War II, and Le Duan aimed to mobilize and lead his people to victory. [ASSELIN 2018: 122]

*„The indiscriminate nature of the violence generated by search-and-destroy was ripe for tragedy. Combat efforts against NVA regulars resulted in battles between well-prepared foes, but operations against Viet Cong insurgents yielded frequent civilian casualties. It was difficult to distinguish ordinary civilians from insurgents, whose family homes were often in contested areas.”* [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 307]

During the 1950s, the usefulness of air transportation became apparent. Having the capacity to scatter and deploy soldiers swiftly gave greater force security during the Cold War than having huge formations of troops vulnerable to nuclear assault. Despite the competition between the US Army and Air Force, as well as concerns from the old guard that helicopters were too vulnerable to assault, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara had the idea tested at Fort Benning, Georgia. The Army formed the First Cavalry Division in 1965 and deployed it to Vietnam because of the positive results. While helicopters allowed generals to deploy soldiers rapidly and without the exhaustion of a long march, the enemy was alerted by their loud approach. Not only the surprise factor was lost, but the landing zone might also be under enemy fire. Furthermore, most of the terrain in Vietnam was hilly and densely forested, making it impossible for helicopters to land and even ground soldiers to establish a large enough landing zone. [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 317-319]

During the war, the United States established hundreds of bases throughout South Vietnam. Some were rough outposts situated on mountaintops or concealed deep in the bush, while others were as well-equipped as any US base. As time progressed, bases grew more complex, demanding all the services provided by modern US cities—water treatment, rubbish collection, and fire protection. Priorities in construction shifted away from homes and services and toward recreational facilities to boost soldier morale. Commanders permitted the establishment of theaters, craft shops, education

centers, libraries, sports courts, and swimming pools to provide amusement while also preventing mischief like drug usage and being absent without leave. There were almost 2,000 open mess clubs (unit-run bars) throughout South Vietnam, indicating that alcohol and drug usage was widespread among American troops. A thorough R&R program was also used by the military to give relief to US troops from the war. Across South Vietnam, it constructed dozens of stand-alone R&R centers. These were conventional bases with additional facilities where combat troops rotated while they were not in action. [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 332-343]

The Vietnam War was the first time the United States fought a war with a completely integrated force. Even though the Armed Forces were technically desegregated by 1954, racism persisted, preventing Black soldiers from ascending through the ranks. Racial tensions remained high at home, particularly as the Civil Rights Movement continued to rise. „African Americans' historic support for military participation began to fade during the Vietnam War, and by 1969, 56 percent of African Americans were opposed to the war. Many of those already fighting for civil rights opposed the draft, with groups like the Black Panthers and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee opposing the war. The killing of Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968 was a significant moment for African Americans, inciting a wave of racial violence. Some white troops publicly cheered on Dr. King's death in Vietnam. Race relations were generally excellent in combat regions, where the risk of bloodshed made unity and brotherhood an operational necessity, and some soldiers discovered that the experience of fighting had forced prejudices to be thrown aside. Racial tensions came to the surface in backward districts and bases such as Long Binh, where life was peaceful.“ [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 379-381]

The National Liberation Front (NLF) of Vietnam was able to appeal to and gain sympathy from individuals and organizations in the United States due to its struggle for justice and its outreach efforts to American antiwar and social activists. The NLF's propaganda differentiated between the American people and Washington policymakers, portraying Americans as peace-loving and progressive while criticizing the leaders as duplicitous and imperialistic. This approach helped turn American opinion against the war and contributed to the rise of antiwar sentiment in the United States, which encumbered Washington's efforts to prosecute the war and widened the

credibility gap between the government and the people. The antiwar movement in the United States, though it never rallied a majority of the population, was vocal and well-organized, featured prominently in the media, and raised troubling questions about the legitimacy and effectiveness of the American intervention in Vietnam. It widened the credibility gap between the Oval Office and the people, incited foreign criticism of American policy in Indochina, and contributed to a growing lack of trust in the competence of the federal government. This movement became emblematic of a larger malaise in American society and ultimately played a role in toppling an American president. [ASSELIN 2018: 146-148]

Between outbursts of violence and fear, American ground forces had to deal with a variety of physical challenges, particularly in the jungle. They went across difficult terrain on patrols that lasted many hours, days, or even weeks. Frustration was likely the infantrymen's primary state of mind, generated not just by the physical discomforts they faced, but also by the puzzling as well as alienating cultural and political environment in which they fought. They were unprepared for the complexities of this specific conflict. The guerrillas were frequently invisible from the civilian population of South Vietnam, although North Vietnamese soldiers were easily identifiable. Mines and booby traps planted by the enemy killed tens of thousands of Americans, second only to small weapons fire. Because soldiers in the forest knew that each step could be their last, the psychological effects of these weapons were certainly much worse. The risk was especially severe for the first man in a column of troops, whose every sense was straining to catch sight, sound, or scent of the enemies. Point duties was usually cycled to keep the first man emotionally and physically fresh. [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 485-486]

### 2.3. 1967-1968

North Vietnam and the Viet Cong started organizing an offensive in the fall of 1967 with the hopes of winning the war. They launched the main offensive during the Tet (New Year) holiday in early 1968, after distraction strikes on American positions in border areas. The Viet Cong fought for control of towns and cities throughout South Vietnam, while the North Vietnamese Army captured Hue. Despite the scale of the offensive, the communists' Tet Offensive was a military disaster. Urban areas were retaken by US and

South Vietnamese soldiers, and US Marines successfully defeated the siege of Khe Sanh. [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 503]

On January 21, 1968, communist forces attacked the American garrison at Khe Sanh, but despite heavy artillery pounding, the Americans controlled the surrounding hilltops and continued to receive air-dropped supplies, and they survived for 77 days. Meanwhile, a much larger attack was being planned in the background. On January 30, the cities of Da Nang, Nha Trang, Pleiku, Ban Me Thuot, Hoi An, Qui Nhon, and Kontum all came under attack. These smaller attacks came before the imminence of a much larger, general offensive, the Tet Offensive. The Tet Offensive was an unprecedented effort, involving some 84,000 communist troops who attacked a total of 100 urban centers, including all large cities and provincial capitals in South Vietnam. The Tet Offensive was a massive shockwave not just in South Vietnam but also around the world. At a time when American and South Vietnamese forces had made progress, the scale and nature of the offensive seemed unfathomable. It exploded the myth of American progress in the fight against Vietnamese communist forces, shattered the credibility of the Johnson administration, and called into question the whole project of the American military enterprise in Vietnam, all in an American election year. The storming of the American embassy in Saigon became the symbol of these fears and concerns. [ASSELIN 2018: 156-157]

The Tet Offensive was a military disaster for the North Vietnamese but was a significant psychological victory. The impact of the offensive was on perceptions of the war in the United States and around the world, which turned against the US. The offensive demonstrated that communist forces were much better organized, disciplined, and capable than Washington had ever assumed. The final military tally was less important than the iconic images and acerbic analyses generated by the Tet Offensive. The victory would vindicate Hanoi's decision to undertake such a daring, risky, and costly wager, while the false but enduring assumption that psychological victory had been their principal objective all along made North Vietnamese leaders look like wizards who seemed to have inflicted a mortal blow on Washington and Saigon's ability to carry on the war. The cost of the offensive for Hanoi exceeded 40,000 troops killed, and perhaps 165,000 civilians also died during the campaign, and between one and two million were displaced from their homes. [ASSELIN 2018: 158-160]

*„During the early years of the war, the media painted an optimistic picture of inevitable US victory in Vietnam. Due to this positive coverage, the Pentagon allowed journalists unprecedented access to US troops, bases, and battlefield operations. At the beginning of the war, the Pentagon had no reason to believe that its special relationship with the press would sour.“ [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 662-663]*

Before Tet, negative news coverage of the Vietnam War began. When New York Times reporter David Halberstam was deployed to Vietnam in 1962, he wrote disturbing reports about what he observed. General Harkins' famous remark that the conflict will be „finished by Christmas“ seemed to contradict his reports. President John F. Kennedy tried to persuade the New York Times to recall its reporter, while Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson implied, he was a traitor. But Halberstam stood firm and earned a Pulitzer Prize for his war coverage two years later. Following the Tet Offensive in 1968, the Pentagon's policy of granting exceptional access to media would backfire. Despite American leadership's statements that Tet was a win for the US and the ARVN, photographs, videos, and reports from the attack appeared to show otherwise. The media projected an image of approaching defeat after witnessing violence on the streets of every major South Vietnamese city. [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 663-665]

On January 31, 1968, shortly after 2 a.m., the NVA launched an assault on Hue. A small squad of NVA soldiers dressed in ARVN uniforms fooled the guards and gained access to the Citadel on the north side of the Perfume River through the western gate. The city was considerably less fortified than Saigon. Most of the attackers' strategic objectives were quickly taken, including jails housing almost 2,000 political detainees and 400 communist prisoners of war. A Viet Cong banner was flying over the Citadel by morning. [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 673-674]

Hue was not entirely under communist control. A small group of US military advisers had entrenched themselves inside the MACV facility in the city's commercial district, and the First ARVN Division had successfully repelled the initial communist attack on their Citadel headquarters. A company of ARVN Black Panther guarding Tay Loc airstrip inside the Citadel was the third group to survive the night. *„US Marines stationed at Phu Bai airbase and other spots within 10 miles (16 km) of Hue were ordered to reinforce the city, but they also came under fire, a combination of ground attacks and rocket-mortar*

*bombardments that kept them either pinned down in the airbase or engaged in local firefights.” [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 675-678]*

The Battle of Hue is also called one of the bloodiest battles of the Vietnam War. *„Communist resistance was much tougher than expected, and casualties mounted at an alarming rate as American GIs confronted a warren of snipers, machine-gun nests, spider holes, bunkers, and booby traps. US commanders eventually reversed their earlier decision not to bombard the city, but even then they and their ARVN allies had to fight hard.“* The weather improved which helped US aircraft provide close air support on February 21. The communists were forced to make a desperate stand in the Citadel's southwest corner on the same day. The few Viet Cong and NVA soldiers that remained inside the fortifications were told to flee under cover of night. Clean-up activities in the new town and Citadel continued until February 25, when the Battle of Hue came to an end. Over 5000 NVA and Vietcong and 600 ARVN and US soldiers were killed in the battle. *“In addition to 800 civilians who died as a result of the battle, on February 26, the day after the battle ended, US and ARVN forces found the mass graves of around 3,000 civilians who had been massacred during the month-long occupation.”* [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 679-685]

#### 2.4. 1969-1971

On March 30, 1968, US President Johnson declared on national television that he would not seek another term in office and announced an indefinite suspension of bombing North Vietnam above the 20th parallel, hoping to encourage peace talks. However, the announcement boosted Hanoi's confidence and gave credibility to their exaggerated claims of victory during the Tet Offensive. Meanwhile, the counterculture movement in the US destabilized the government and created an unprecedented schism between traditional authorities and militant protesters. Martin Luther King's assassination in April led to race riots in over 100 American cities, and anti-establishment protests disrupted the Democratic Party's National Convention in Chicago in August. Despite setbacks and slow progress, these events encouraged Le Duan's regime in North Vietnam to continue the struggle against the US and its allies, feeling that time was on their side. [ASSELIN 2018: 163-165]

In 1969, President Richard Nixon pledged to withdraw American troops from Vietnam while preventing the spread of communism in South Vietnam. His policy of

„Vietnamization“ involved training and arming the South Vietnamese (ARVN) to take on a more significant role in the conflict, which led to a gradual reduction in US troop levels. However, the ARVN's performance against North Vietnamese (NVA) forces was inconsistent due to ineffective leadership and low morale. Meanwhile, peace negotiations in Paris hit a roadblock. [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 783]

The Vietnamization policy was marketed as progress in Saigon, but it primarily served President Nixon's goal of ending the war's impact on the United States and reducing domestic pressure. The policy's implementation was heavily influenced by US politics, and its success was measured by reducing American casualties and outcry against the war. While it reduced American troop involvement, Vietnamization aimed to bolster the ARVN's supplies and strength to maintain US support for South Vietnam. However, the policy required more than a simple substitution of ARVN troops for US units. MACV shifted back to an advisory role and established training programs to modernize and enhance the ARVN's capabilities as US troop levels rapidly decreased in 1969 and 1970. [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 809-812]

The effectiveness of the policy was challenging to evaluate. South Vietnam made progress in caring for refugees and implementing land redistribution, and significant improvements were made to roads and agriculture. However, the successes were modest in scale. Assessing the policy's impact on the war was more complicated. Despite reduced activity by the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese in certain regions of South Vietnam, the ARVN's growth was likely not the main factor. The politburo in Hanoi delayed further action, anticipating additional US troop withdrawals. Poor morale and weak leadership continued to hinder Saigon's troops, and those responsible for training the ARVN struggled to meet Nixon's timeline due to time constraints. [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 815]

Vietnamization, the policy of President Nixon to withdraw American troops from Vietnam and transfer the burden of fighting to the South Vietnamese, was publicly celebrated by Hanoi as a symbol of American failure and the beginning of a new era of „indigenization“ of hostilities. However, privately, the regime was deeply unsettled by the prospect of increased Vietnamese-on-Vietnamese violence and the consequent return of a pure civil war in the South. This would make national reconciliation more difficult after the war and compromise reconstruction and economic development.

Furthermore, Vietnamization would hamper Viet Cong recruitment efforts and potentially undermine Hanoi's self-image as a nationalist enterprise against foreign imperialism. As the war became de-Americanized, the onus for its continuation would fall on Hanoi, and the regime would face mounting pressure to withdraw its forces from the South. Ultimately, Vietnamization would pose a serious challenge to Hanoi's vision of reunification and the image of Vietnam as a model of national liberation. [ASSELIN 2018: 173-174]

The attention of the American nation was drawn to controversial court martial proceedings in 1971. These trials centered around an incident that occurred in 1968 when an infantry company killed 504 unarmed Vietnamese civilians in the hamlet of My Lai, in the village of Son My. The participants and their commanders kept the event a secret for a year and a half until Ron Ridenhour, a soldier who learned of the incident from men in the company, began writing letters to the Army, members of Congress, and the president. The story was eventually covered by *Life* magazine and CBS News, prompting an official inquiry in 1969 led by Lieutenant General William Peers. The Peers report, released in March 1970, recommended that 28 officers be charged. [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 884-887]

This event became a propaganda tool for Hanoi, as they used the exposure of the massacre to dominate their efforts to win hearts and minds abroad, disseminating propaganda materials documenting the incident and other war crimes actually or allegedly perpetrated by US forces. This campaign made Washington policymakers and US forces accountable to world opinion for their actions, and it no longer mattered that US troops in Vietnam acted professionally in the vast majority of the cases of combat operations. The propaganda implied that the Americans always behaved callously and savagely in Vietnam, giving Hanoi the moral high ground. Reports of the My Lai massacre and other incidents of wanton violence by US forces against civilians became important recruitment tools for the NLF among appalled, fearful, and incensed civilians in South Vietnam, increasing the Front's appeal among conservatives and non-communist nationalists in the South. [ASSELIN 2018: 181-182]

In November 1970, a court martial began, charging only 14 officers who were asked to explain their actions. The evidence revealed a grim story. As part of post-Tet operations in 1968, a task force, including three infantry companies, was sent to Son

My. Charlie Company, led by Captain Ernest Medina, landed outside My Lai on March 16. Two platoons, expecting to find a Viet Cong unit, began rounding up the inhabitants with guns firing. [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 884-887]

By noon, every man, woman, and child in the hamlet was dead, with only one US casualty, self-inflicted. The commanding general falsely reported 128 enemy casualties, but no hostile forces were actually present. Within the division, My Lai was kept as a secret act of cold-blooded brutality, including rape and murder. The My Lai court martial trials in 1971 resulted in 13 officers being acquitted and one officer being charged with the cover-up and acquitted. Lieutenant William Calley was ultimately found guilty of the murder of 102 Vietnamese civilians and sentenced to life in prison but served only three months in military prison and three and a half years under house arrest due to public pressure. The testimony of witnesses contradicted Calley's claim that he was only following orders, and he was held responsible for personally killing 22 villagers. [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 884-890]

## 2.5. 1972-1973

In 1972, North Vietnam attacked South Vietnam using tanks and heavy artillery, capturing Quang Tri, and advancing toward Kontum and An Loc. The US responded with bombing raids and air support for South Vietnamese troops. After initial setbacks, the South Vietnamese army halted the offensive. Later, the Paris peace talks broke down, leading President Nixon to order air raids against Hanoi and Haiphong. Negotiations resumed in 1973 and resulted in a ceasefire agreement and the withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam. [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 970]

By March 1972, the American military had significantly reduced its presence in Vietnam through the policy of Vietnamization. However, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) still heavily relied on American support to effectively combat the North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong. American advisers were working with the ARVN Third Division, responsible for defending the Quang Tri region in the northernmost zone, but the ARVN forces were thinly stretched. [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 995]

In late March, the ARVN Joint General Staff was warned of an impending North Vietnamese attack on March 29 and ordered an alert. However, the ARVN forces were unprepared. General Giai, commanding the Third Division, was repositioning his regiments, and none of them had fully occupied their defensive positions when the

attack began. The attack came across the DMZ, which was unexpected, and the most effective regiment, the Second Infantry, was being removed from the sector. Some South Vietnamese Marines holding firebases behind the DMZ had noticed NVA probes and activity in the previous days, but General Giai felt that he had no strength to counter a ground operation beyond his defensive line. [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 996]

During the Easter Offensive in 1972, the NVA occupied Trang Bang village, causing families to flee. South Vietnamese pilots dropped napalm bombs, mistakenly believing they were targeting enemy soldiers. Nick Ut, a photographer, captured a photo of nine-year-old Phan Thi Kim Phuc running naked and screaming „Too hot!“ in agony. She suffered burns on her left arm and spent 14 months in the hospital undergoing 17 operations. Her dream was to become a doctor, but her studies were interrupted. She sought asylum in Canada in 1992 and now speaks publicly about the incident. [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 1008-1009]

In December 1972, Hanoi and Washington agreed to reopen the peace talks in Paris, and by January 5, 1973, they were discussing ways to enforce a peace agreement, including the creation of an International Commission for Control and Supervision (ICCS) to handle issues related to monitoring military equipment replacement on a one-for-one basis. The Paris Agreement included a standstill ceasefire that left all military forces in their positions at the time of the ceasefire. The agreement also provided for the withdrawal of all remaining American forces and the return of US prisoners of war. Two joint military commissions would be created among the Vietnamese to discuss the ceasefire's enforcement. [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 1088-1089]

On January 27, 1973, the peace agreement between the United States and North Vietnam was signed, with William Rogers and Nguyen Duy Trinh as the signatories. The protocols that included the two South Vietnamese parties were signed by Tran Van Lam of Saigon and Nguyen Thi Binh of the NLF's Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG). The following day, on January 28, 1973, the guns stopped firing, and the American war in Vietnam officially ended. [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 1093-1094]

## 2.6. 1973 – The end of the war

After the departure of American forces, the war in Vietnam continued despite an official ceasefire, and North Vietnam launched a final offensive in the spring of 1975, leading to the fall of Saigon and the reunification of Vietnam under a communist regime.

Cambodia also fell to the Khmer Rouge, causing immense suffering. Vietnam fought further wars against the Khmer Rouge and China and eventually achieved a kind of peace. In America, coming to terms with the war and its consequences was a painful and prolonged process. [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 1099]

In the spring of 1975, the Ford administration faced a dilemma as South Vietnamese forces collapsed, and the communist advance posed a clear threat to Americans and other foreigners in Saigon. Plans were made for a mass evacuation, but implementation was obstructed by concerns that a rapid pullout might fatally undermine the chances of continued South Vietnamese resistance. The US Ambassador in Saigon, Graham Martin, was resistant to authorizing a general evacuation, but by early April, US military aircraft were making regular flights out of Saigon to evacuate nonessential American personnel and „at risk“ Vietnamese. [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 1156-1157]

On April 28, 1975, two US Marines were killed during a bombardment, marking the last American casualties of the Vietnam War. The next day, the US authorized a backup plan called „Frequent Wind“ for final evacuation by helicopter. Helicopter crews flew back and forth between Saigon and US Navy carriers off the Vietnamese coast, evacuating people from assembly points, including the Defense Attaché Office compound and the US Embassy building. The evacuation was chaotic, with desperate Vietnamese flocking to the evacuation sites. Despite the difficult conditions, helicopter crews demonstrated outstanding skill and efficiency. In addition to the airborne evacuation, more than 40,000 fleeing Vietnamese escaped by sea to join private or naval vessels. In the early hours of April 30, the only remaining evacuation point was a helipad on the roof of the US Embassy. Ambassador Martin was among the last to be flown out, as panic-stricken Vietnamese stormed the embassy building, desperate to escape the city. A few hours later, North Vietnamese tanks reached the presidential palace in the heart of Saigon. [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 1160-1162]

In April 1975, the Khmer Rouge took control of Cambodia and the People's Democratic Republic of Laos was proclaimed, completing the „liberation“ of Indochina. Vietnam was officially reunited with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam on July 2, 1976, under communist governance. However, national reconciliation and unity were difficult to achieve as Southerners were reluctant to accept the new regime and buy into its socio-political and planned economic order. Mutual acrimony and mistrust persisted

long after hostilities ended. Former enemies of the victors were mistreated, and as many as one million Southern „reactionaries“ were incarcerated in more than eighty „re-education camps“ across the country. The detainees were subjected to mandatory „education“ centered on history and communism, forced to write their life history, confess as well as atone for their crimes. They were often beaten, suffered malnutrition and disease, and over 150,000 died in these camps. Northerners also had their emotional wounds to heal. They blamed Southerners for causing and prolonging hostilities by colluding with the United States. Tensions between Northerners and Southerners remain palpable to this day, and Northerners felt a great deal of anger and resentment toward their government and leaders. Many Northerners had served in the South, with most fighting for multiple years and countless never returning. During the war, the DRVN authorities rarely notified families of the confirmed death of a relative, but after the war ended, the government had to inform those families. It was only at that point that Northerners began to understand the true cost of the war. [ASSELIN 2018: 234-239]

### 3. Criticism of the Vietnam War

Many young Americans, inspired by a speech by President John F. Kennedy on January 20, 1961, volunteered for the service in the Vietnam Conflict. What first seemed like a service for the country and global peace resulted in disillusionment and trauma. The official discourses resembling motivational speeches rather than providing information about the conflict spoke about the new beginnings, spreading of democracy, and protecting the safety of U.S. citizens and the global community. The split between the official U.S. discourses and the way young Americans were thinking about the war eventually widened. [HÖLBLING 2014: 116]

The way authors wrote about the Vietnam War was different compared to World War II. *„Until the Vietnam War, the dominant model for American war writing in the 20<sup>th</sup> century war is World War II – you fight a just war against a formidable enemy; after serious sacrifices you are victorious, and all the surviving soldiers go back home and lead a happy, peaceful life.“* [HÖLBLING 2014:116] The reality of the Vietnam War was different as the author of the article states: *„...no traditional ‘victory’ or ‘progress’ are visible and the same hills, villages, towns, access routes, and bridges are fought over*

*again and again; the one-year rotation scheme of soldiers as well as the long duration of the war leaves most of the participants with only a rather fragmented perspective and no sense of closure...*" [HÖLBLING 2014:117] The difference was also that the war in Vietnam was largely covered by the media. For some authors like Tim O'Brien, William Eastlake, or Robert Mason, as Höbling states: *„...war turns into complex metaphor for – as well as critique of – a world in which individual as well as collective aggressive behavior seems to have become a generally accepted model of social and political interaction."* [HÖLBLING 2014:116] Nowadays we are used to the fact that there is always some war somewhere and it affects us even if we live in a peaceful part of the world. [HÖLBLING 2014: 116-117]

Höbling quotes Tim O'Brien's *Going After Cacciato* (1978) According to Höbling it is the best presentation of the gap between expectations and actual experiences of young American soldiers. The quote from the chapter „*The Things They Did Not Know*” shows the ordinary life of American soldiers in a country where they don't know the language, and customs and thanks to the lack of knowledge it is difficult for them to distinguish between friends and enemies. The same thing is described in Robert C Manson's *Chickenhawk* (1984) which expresses the experience of not only soldiers in Vietnam but also young soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. *„Once more they are thousands of miles from home, in a country whose language, customs and cultural codes remain alien to most of them; once more they find difficult to distinguish between friends and enemies (and, therefore, tend to shoot first and ask questions later), and once more they discover that the people whom they were sent to protect more often than not consider them invaders/oppressors rather than liberators.[...] In spite of the different political and historical contexts of the Iraq engagement, the experience of American soldiers is reminiscent of that of their parents' generation in Vietnam; so is the media coverage, whose daily reports of soldiers and civilians wounded or killed in Iraq or Afghanistan resemble the notorious „body counts” of the Vietnam Years."* [HÖLBLING 2014: 118-120]

After returning from the Vietnam War, some veterans experienced adjustment problems such as drug and alcohol addiction, PTSD, inadequate medical and mental health services, and negative perceptions of Vietnam veterans, including indifference and outright hostility. For the 10% of veterans who engaged in combat operations, these issues were particularly acute. African American veterans faced additional challenges,

including returning to the same discrimination they had experienced before their departure and a more radical Civil Rights Movement. While some rural communities expected Black veterans to quietly return to traditional racial patterns of Southern life, some urban Black veterans found militant groups like the Black Panthers especially appealing. Furthermore, unemployment was a significant issue among African American veterans, with a nearly 33% unemployment rate for comparable Black veterans aged 20-24 in 1973, compared to just under 6% for white veterans. US veterans' organizations, which were dominated by World War II veterans, were resistant to the new generation of veterans and especially unwelcoming to African Americans. [GERHARD, PARRISH 2021: 1244-1245]

The Vietnam War resurfaced in public discourse a decade after the United States' withdrawal from Indochina, with a group of military figures, scholars, and politicians seeking to rehabilitate America's involvement in the war. These revisionists challenge the widely held view that America erred in entering Southeast Asia and suffered a military defeat there. Revisionists like Harry Summers and Richard M. Nixon argue that the United States could have achieved a strategic military victory in Vietnam, but weak politicians prevented the military from using the force required for victory. They also contend that the peace movement at home, led by radicals and manipulated by Hanoi, undermined the war effort. The revisionists emphasize that the United States concentrated on counterinsurgency doctrine, limiting America's strategic options, and failed to take the strategic offensive by neglecting opportunities to take the war to North Vietnam. However, these suggestions distort many respected military leaders' analyses, attitudes, and conclusions about Vietnam. Retired Generals Matthew Ridgway, David Shoup, and James Gavin publicly opposed the war from the mid-1960s onward. Although Nixon and the revisionists argue that the war was misunderstood and misreported then, they are the ones who have „misremembered“ the war. The war is best understood as an act of „external aggression“ by the North and a strategic defeat for the United States due to its misplaced emphasis on guerrilla war and its failure to take the strategic offensive. [BUZZANCO 1986: 559-561]

During the Vietnam War, several high-ranking military leaders spoke out against the war, including General Matthew Ridgway, General David Shoup, and General James Gavin. These leaders testified before congressional committees, wrote books and

articles, appeared on television and radio programs, and made the front page of American newspapers, always with the message that the Vietnam War was a political, strategic, and moral blunder from which the United States should quickly disengage. Their views gained the attention of millions of Americans, played an important role in the national debate over Vietnam, and provided clear evidence that a single military solution to the war in Indochina did not exist. These military leaders were arguably the most respected and influential military figures of their time, and their credentials were virtually unchallengeable. Their views were therefore legitimate, respected, and often unquestionably accurate. Importantly, the generals spoke against the war while the domestic consensus in support of American involvement was still strong. The generals continued to question America's commitment throughout 1966, assailed the intensification of the war from 1967 to 1969 and 1970, and opposed America's Vietnamization policy during the Nixon administration. Their criticisms added an important dimension to the public debate over Vietnam by moving beyond accusations of imperialism on the left and advocacy of unrestrained war on the right with a reasoned, yet passionate, strategic appraisal of the war based on their experiences as military leaders. [BUZZANCO 1986: 561-562]

The generals argued that intervention in Vietnam did not serve the national interest because Southeast Asia was not vital to American security and the nation had little to gain from the war there. They believed that success in Vietnam would be elusive, and a commitment of 600,000 to 750,000 American troops was unreasonable. They also thought that the war in Indochina could undermine American hopes for arms control, exacerbate United States-Soviet tensions, cause heavy casualties, and drain the nation's capability to react to other crises. Therefore, the United States should „repudiate once and for all the search for a military solution.“ General Ridgway, who helped kill the idea of American military support during the siege of Dienbienphu in 1954, argued against intervention in Vietnam in April and May of that year. He concluded that Vietnam was not central to American security in Asia, was devoid of important logistical facilities, and that the combat obstacles of guerrilla war would require a vast American commitment. Ridgway also dismissed advocates of United States air support, finding it „incredible... that we were on the verge of making that same tragic error.“ Therefore, the United States did not intervene at Dienbienphu in 1954, but it did help create and support the

government of South Vietnam at the Geneva Conference of May 1954. [BUZZANCO 1986: 562-564]

Some generals developed a critique of the conflict under the umbrella of national interest, arguing that the war lacked adequate forethought, was unlikely to lead to victory, and would damage American prestige and divide the nation. The generals believed that American involvement in Vietnam was politically, militarily, economically, and morally flawed, and involvement in such a situation would severely hurt the United States. They criticized American foreign policy, which primarily sought to thwart or reverse the extension of communism, arguing that it lacked restraint and balance. The generals believed that the United States was backing an autocratic regime, the GVN, against an enemy with strong native support. They criticized American policy for being too reflexive and that it lacked a calculated appraisal of its interests or role in the region. America entered Vietnam without adequate consideration of the effects of war and had the urge to intervene in Vietnam due to the anticommunist consensus, leading the United States to believe that it had a duty to save the world from communism. Ultimately, the generals hoped that the nation's leaders and citizens would learn that they could not reorder the world in America's image and that people should determine their destiny. [BUZZANCO 1986: 564-567]

The United States failed to achieve any kind of reconciliation with Ho Chi Minh and continued to escalate the war in Vietnam. Military generals who were anti-war believed that even if the reasons behind the intervention had been logical, the military strategy would not succeed, and Richard Nixon's plans for disengagement worked to maintain the war rather than wind it down. The US forces in Vietnam lacked clear and reasonable objectives, the American strategy of military expansion was counterproductive, and American civilian and military leaders consistently described America's aims in abstract terms, making the military situation irremediable. The absence of objectives presented severe problems for America and compounded its difficulties by consistently intensifying the war. The generals argued that expansion would not work in Vietnam, and escalation undermined the military necessity for limited war. Limited wars were not small conflicts that would later expand, but rather wars in which national interest and military capability limited political goals. The generals believed that military victory, as we usually conceive of it, was impossible. If America

failed to effectively limit the war, it could trigger an expanded conflict, and China and the Soviet Union could pursue expansive if not reckless, foreign policies since the United States could not challenge their behavior while bogged down in Vietnam. [BUZZANCO 1986: 567-569]

Some American generals criticized the geographic expansion of the Vietnam War, including Nixon's incursions into Cambodia and Laos. General Ridgway compared it to the Korean War and warned against bombing Vietnamese sanctuaries. General Gavin feared that Nixon might venture into North Vietnam as well. General Ford questioned the meaning of having an enemy if Cambodia was a friend of the US. The generals also criticized the Vietnamization strategy, with General Hester finding it more cynical and immoral than direct slaughter, and General Gavin contending that it undermined America's stated aims. They believed that American resources should only be used to extricate US forces from Vietnam. General Shoup called on Nixon to set a date for complete withdrawal from Vietnam, stating that Vietnamization was not devised to end the war, but rather to continue it with South Vietnamese mercenaries while reducing casualties. Shoup believed that even with American pull-back, it would take millions of dollars to equip and train the ARVN. General Ford also criticized Vietnamization, stating that it was not possible without a stable government and army in the South and that Americans were ignoring the plight of the Vietnamese. The generals believed that the Vietnam War had become an unwinnable Catch-22 situation. The war had to be kept limited to avoid intervention from China, but the United States could not expect to succeed in its limited war in Indochina. [BUZZANCO 1986: 570-571]

Military officials believed that the war was morally unjustified and detrimental to America's global position. These officials argued that American involvement in Vietnam was destroying the country's economy, society, and morality. General Gavin argued that the war was not worth the cost and questioned whether the United States was losing sight of the bigger picture. The officials argued that America's dirty, bloody, and dollar-crooked involvement in Vietnam was immoral and unjust, and that the U.S. should keep its fingers out of other nations' affairs. They criticized the body count and the use of chemical warfare and argued that the air war was morally reprehensible, militarily unproductive, and would ultimately result in a nuclear exchange or genocide. They feared that America was becoming an industrial-military dictatorship and that the

government was grossly neglecting the nation's needs. General Gavin's *Crisis Now* explored the twin crises of Vietnam and the disintegration of American society. He argued that while America spent billions on the war, violence and pollution grew, and Americans lacked adequate healthcare, employment, housing, and education. Gavin argued that inequality created worldwide discontent with which the United States would ultimately have to contend. The passage demonstrates that antiwar generals believed that the Vietnam War had a tremendous economic and moral impact on America, and that America's involvement in Vietnam was destroying the country's global position. [BUZZANCO 1986: 571-573]

The antiwar generals during the Vietnam War, including Ridgway, Shoup, and Gavin, were instrumental in providing a critical voice against America's involvement in Southeast Asia. Their message was directed toward a national audience, and their critique of the war contributed to the national opposition to Vietnam. Many politicians and media praised and cited the military leaders' views to legitimize and strengthen their opposition to the war. Their antiwar message reached a large and diverse audience, including the *Nation*, *New Republic*, *Time*, *Forbes*, and *National Review*. The antiwar generals' impact was undeniable. They were taken seriously by the Johnson and Nixon administrations and their supporters. Under Secretary George Ball quoted extensively from Ridgway's memoirs to urge disengagement in a 1965 memo to Johnson, and the general himself was a member of the „wisemen“ called upon to advise the President in early 1968. The generals' views pose a formidable barrier to the conservative revision of Vietnam in the 1980s. As Americans confront the Vietnam War as history, the views of the new revisionists have gained legitimacy and authority. [BUZZANCO 1986: 571-576]

#### 4. Military Jargon

The way war is described, especially by those in positions of power, can mask its true physical, emotional, and psychological effects. This is achieved through the use of analogy, euphemism, ellipsis, and oversimplification. Metaphors embedded in the language of war frame it as part of an appealing „fairy tale“ narrative, a game, medicine, or a rational business model. This framing can influence how people understand the violence of war. The use of jargon, which is a specialized language used by members of a particular profession or group, also plays a role in framing the violence of war. Military

jargon can be so complex that it becomes a „habit of mind“ for those who use it. This can depersonalize individuals involved in war and obscure the realities of violence. [Hill 2008: 175-176]

When military jargon is used outside of its context, it can be confusing and misleading. The use of jargon and standardized language in writing can strip it of its uniqueness and emotion, reducing horrific subject matter to little more than a form letter. This dilutes individual responsibility for and investment in the subject matter, precluding meaningful representation of personal connection with the topic. Jargon can become a way of surreptitiously embracing silence and not articulating anything new, providing the illusion of communication. [Hill 2008: 176-177]

During the Vietnam War, the use of jargon and officially mandated catchphrases distorted and controlled language to advance the political and military aims of the US government. The language was often used to mask violent details and create a sense of detachment from the actual actions being taken. By reducing these actions to jargon, they became pure form without substance, making it harder to assign blame for negative outcomes. [Hill 2008: 177-178]

However, creative writing on the Vietnam War rejected the insular and sterile official representations of the war and critically examined the myths and delusions that those representations helped engender. War literature aimed to reveal the horrors and ugliness of war, stripping away sanitized and safe representations. War literature encompasses various forms, including fiction, memoir, poetry, and drama, and reflects a crucial need for American writers to question the political, psychological, and moral consequences of their nation's actions during the war. Ultimately, recognizing the metaphors and jargon used in describing war is essential to avoid falling prey to their manipulative effects. [Hill 2008: 179-180]

## 5. Tobias Wolff

### 5.1. About the author

Tobias Wolff is an American writer who was born on June 19, 1945, in Birmingham, Alabama. He is widely regarded as one of the most important contemporary Southern U.S. writers, particularly in the genres of memoir and short fiction. Wolff's writing often explores themes of isolation, poverty, and the search for identity, drawing heavily on his own life experiences. [BRITANICA: A]

Wolff's literary career began in the 1970s, with the publication of several short stories in literary magazines such as *The Atlantic* and *The Paris Review*. He gained wider recognition in 1981 with the publication of his first short story collection, „*In the Garden of the North American Martyrs*,“ which was followed by the publication of several other acclaimed works, including *The Barracks Thief*, *Back in the World*, and *The Night in Question*. [BRITANICA: A]

Wolff's most famous work is his memoir, *This Boy's Life*, which was published in 1989 and later adapted into a film starring Robert De Niro and Leonardo DiCaprio. The book is a coming-of-age story that tells of Wolff's troubled childhood, his relationship with his abusive stepfather, and his struggle to find a sense of identity and purpose. Wolff has also written a second memoir, *In Pharaoh's Army*, which chronicles his experiences as a soldier in the Vietnam War. Like his other works, the book is marked by its spare, understated prose and its unflinching honesty. [BRITANICA: A]

Throughout his career, Wolff has been recognized with numerous awards and honors for his writing, including the PEN/Faulkner Award, the Rea Award for the Short Story, and the Story Prize. He has also taught creative writing at several universities, including Syracuse University and Stanford University, where he is currently a professor.

In addition to his literary accomplishments, Wolff is also known for his work as an editor and mentor to other writers. He has edited several anthologies of short fiction, including *The Vintage Book of Contemporary American Short Stories*, and has been a mentor to many aspiring writers through his teaching and workshops. [BRITANICA: A]

### **Review of *In Pharaoh's Army***

The review published in *Commonweal* magazine discusses Tobias Wolff's book *In Pharaoh's Army*, which is a memoir of his experiences as a soldier during the Vietnam War. The author notes that Wolff's writing style is superior to that of other writers who have attempted to describe the war. The article praises Wolff for his ability to balance pity for his vulnerable teenage self with an ironic examination of that self's outrageous posturing. The article discusses what attracted Wolff to the military, noting that he admired writers such as Norman Mailer, Eric Maria Remarque, and Ernest Hemingway, and believed that he needed experiences like theirs to write about. Wolff found himself just squeaking by in Officer Candidate School on the strength of his talent for writing satire. Assigned as an advisor to an ARVN battalion, Wolff took up residence in My Tho, a Mekong Delta town about which some of the book's most luminous and absorbing passages are written. It was in My Tho that the twenty-year-old Wolff took pleasure in being one of a very few white men among these dark folk, big among the small, rich among the poor. [Garvey 1995: 30]

The article notes that Wolff's sensation of himself as father or lord would be shattered during the Tet Offensive, of which Wolff's laconic eight-page account is the most honest and useful description the author has yet read. Wolff describes how the VC came into My Tho and all the other towns knowing what would happen. They knew that once they were among the people, the Americans would abandon their pretense of distinguishing between them. The Americans would kill them all to get at one. In this way, they taught the people that the Americans did not love them and would not protect them; that for all their talk of partnership and brotherhood, they disliked and mistrusted them, and that they would kill every last one of them to save their skins. The article notes that Wolff refuses to depart from the gritty surface of the particular, and his descriptions of the personnel of a U.S. base near My Tho eloquently magnify the local desolation. In their anger at being in this place and their refusal to come to terms with it, they had created a profound, intractable bog. A sourness had settled over the base, spoiling, and coarsening the men. The resolute imperial will was all played out here at the empire's fringe, lost in rancor and mud. The article concludes by noting that Wolff's memoir is a crucial and funny and mysterious exercise in examining the self during wartime. [Garvey 1995: 30-31]

## 5.2. In Pharaoh's Army – Plot Analysis

### Main Characters

**Lieutenant Tobias Wolff:** Lieutenant Wolff, the protagonist of the book and the author is a young soldier who serves in the Vietnam War as an officer. The author is intellectual, reflective and thoughtful. He struggles to understand the ethical and moral implications of war. Wolff is deeply affected by his experiences in Vietnam.

**Sergeant Benett:** Sergeant Benett was Wolff's direct superior in Vietnam. It is said that he's a veteran and tough soldier with combat experience. Wolff is his platoon leader and trainer. He has an intense sense of responsibility for the men he leads.

**Hugh Pierce:** Hugh Pierce was a fellow soldier of Wolff in Vietnam. Hugh Pierce is an introspective and quiet man, who has been deeply impacted by the brutality and violence of war. Pierce is a confidant and close friend of Wolff, with whom he shares his fears and concerns about the war.

**Wolff's Father:** Wolff's father is an incredibly complex, troubled individual who inspires and frustrates his son. His experiences during World War II have left him deeply scarred. Wolff's dad is an empathetic, compassionate man who supports his son in his passions and dreams despite his flaws.

**Canh Cho:** Canh Cho, Wolff's pet dog in Vietnam. Wolff can't take his faithful companion home. Wolff is forced to say goodbye to his faithful dog, but the locals host a farewell meal for him. They later tell Wolff that the natives killed his pet and prepared the food.

### Thanksgiving Special

The first chapter of the book opens with Wolff and Sergeant Benet arriving at what appears like a bike accident. People are standing in the middle of the road even if Wolff and later Sergeant Benet sound the horn. When people finally clear the road, Wolff has already lost his temper and run over the bikes with the truck. Sergeant Benet doesn't like how Wolff handled it. In this chapter, Wolff explains that he used to be different at the beginning of the tour seven months earlier. He used to call citizens people instead of peasants and he wouldn't run over their bikes, but the war changed him. Now he can see people as a threat so he no longer stops because it could be a setup to kill them. He is also scared of mines after seeing what a mine could do to a truck. *„I'd seen a two-and-a-half-ton truck blown right off the road by one of those, just a few vehicles ahead of me*

*in a convoy coming back from Saigon. [...] When we finally got up and looked in the truck there was nobody there, nothing you could think of as a person.” [Wolff 1995: 3-4]*

After that traumatic experience, Wolff puts sandbags under his seat and on the floor of the truck. As he states the measures are inefficient, but it gives him some comfort. *„After that I always packed sandbags under my seat and on the floorboards of anything I drove. I suspected that even the scant of comfort I took from the doleful measures was illusory, but illusions kept me going and I declined to pursue any line of thoughts that might put them in danger.”* Soldiers believe that if they do everything right according to the protocols they will survive. Wolff admits that to some degree it is important to pay attention and take good care of a weapon. However, after some time, soldiers noticed that it doesn't matter if you do everything right – survival is not just about being a good trooper. Some soldiers including Wolff carry talismans which they believe are deeply connected with their continuance. For Wolff, it is a gold pocket watch given to him by his fiancée. *„It went with me everywhere, rain or shine. That it continued to tick I regarded as an affirmation somehow linked to my continuance, and when it got stolen towards the end of my tour I suffered through several days of stupefying fatalism.”* [Wolff 1995: 4-6]

Wolf is at first stationed in the Delta which is much safer, and quieter compared to the north of Vietnam where soldiers fight in combat operations with North Vietnamese Army units. *„Tens of thousands of men had died for places that didn't even have names, just elevation numbers or terms of utility — Firebase Zulu, Landing Zone Oscar — and which were usually evacuated a few days after the battle, when the cameras had gone back to Saigon.”* From Wolff's narrative the reader can understand that for him this is worthless and a waste of material and more importantly a waste of people's life. In the Delta, the enemies are small groups of local people. As the author writes they only occasionally organize a bigger attack. The nature of the fight is not most of the time face-to-face. Enemies usually plant a booby-trap on trucks, trails and drop mortars to inflict not only physical damage but also damage to the soldier's morale. Sometimes they also use animals and people to block the road and kill those who stop. *„We did not die by the hundreds in pitched battles. We died a man at a time, at a pace almost casual. You could sometimes begin to feel safe, and then you caught yourself and*

*looked around, and you saw that of the people you'd know at the beginning of your tour a number were dead or in hospitals."* [Wolff 1995: 6-7]

Wolff explains why he is stationed in the delta. Story turns back to times before his presence in Vietnam. He enlists in the Special Forces and is later promoted to an officer. During the training, he studies Vietnamese where he learns to *„...speak the language like a seven-year-old child with a freakish military vocabulary."* When he arrives in Vietnam the officer read through his file and assign him as an adviser to the Vietnamese artillery battalion outside My Tho. The officer also apologies for the assignment, but for Wolff it is a relief. *„Several men I'd gone through training with had been killed or wounded in recent months, overrun in their isolated outposts, swallowed up while on patrol, betrayed by the mercenary troops they led."* This also happens to his best friend Hugh Pierce who dies few months before he is shipped out. The loss of his best friend is a huge shock for Wolff, and he never gets over it. When Wolff arrives, he is scarred which is not a unique feeling among newcomers. He has another reason. *„I was completely incompetent to lead a Special Forces team. This was adamant fact, not failure of nerve."* At first Wolff is relieved but later that day when he is in a bar, he changes his mind. *„I would refuse the Delta post. I would demand to be sent to the Special forces, to wherever the latest disaster had created an opening, and hope that by some miracle I'd prove a better soldier than I knew myself to be."* Wolff leaves the bar and sees the newcomers who as he describes try to look like killers but for the observer, it is apparent that they just arrived. *„...I would have recognized them as new guys by their look of tense, offended isolation. It came as a surprise to men joining this hard enterprise that instead of being welcomed they were shunned. [...] You noticed it as soon as you got off the plane."* That night Wolff and others experience an alert. It is just a probe on the perimeter. Newcomers including Wolff have not received their combat gear. Wolff feels that nobody cares about their lives, about his life and that he and the newcomers are left alone and helpless. *„I could feel my life almost as a thing apart, begging me for protection. It was embarrassing. Truly, my fear shamed me. In the morning I went back to the personnel officer and asked him to change my orders. He told me it was too late, but promised he would note my wish to be transferred to the Special Forces."* [Wolff 1995: 8-10]

His headquarters is placed in My Tho, on Mekong River. The place resembles Europe to him even though he has never been to Europe. The town is quiet and peaceful and in recent years the place has not experienced bomb attacks. It is very unusual and some of the theories are that either the chief has been giving some money to local guerrillas or that guerrillas use this city to relax and recover. In My Tho, there are almost no Americans allowed in town. „*I was glad that American troops were kept out. Without even meaning to they would have turned the people into prostitutes, pimps, pedicab drivers and thieves, and the town itself into a nest of burger stands and laundries. Within months it would have been unrecognizable; such was the power of American dollars and American appetites.*” [Wolff 1995: 12-13] It helps to preserve the original culture as well as it gives Wolff a special position. The American base is in Dong Tam which is more protected and better supplied than the place where Wolff stays with his battalion. Wolff is not a fan of the policy that they should live like their Vietnamese counterparts. He wants to live as an American among Vietnamese. When Sergeant Benet arrives, they agree that they can live better than previous advisors. It is hard so they have to do business with troops at Dong Tam who rarely leave the base. „*The letters they wrote home didn't always make this clear. In their boredom they sometimes allowed themselves to say things that weren't strictly true, and in time, as they approached the end of their tours, a fever came upon them to find some enemy artifacts to back up the stories...*” [Wolff 1995: 16] They later exchange these items for mines, barbed wire and other items which are used to secure the perimeter of their understaffed battalion. The most valuable item is Chicom rifle because it is not possible to fake it, but others can be faked, and nobody recognize it. By the end of the year, Wolff and Sergeant Benet manage to get electric lights, tv, stereo, and other home appliances. They want to watch a two-hour special of *Bonanza* but their TV is just black and white. Sergeant Benet manages to arrange a deal, a Chicom rifle for a 21-inch TV. On Thanksgiving Day 1967 they go to Dong Tam.<sup>1</sup> [Wolff 1995: 11-18]

When they finally hit the road. There is no convoy, so they must travel alone. It is dangerous and Sergeant Benet is happy that they must travel alone. They cross the river using an old ferry. Wolff is behind the wheel while Sergeant Benet fiddle with the

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<sup>1</sup> It was the day Wolff ran over the bikes with a truck.

radio. Wolff drives fast through the holes in the road and between the people. Wolff explains his morbid habit. „...picking places in the distance ahead and thinking, There – –that’s where I’m going to get it . . . seeing the mine erupt through the mud, through the floorboard, the whole picture going red.” When he reaches the place, he chose another distant place. The road to Dong Tam seems endless to Wolff. Not because it is far but because the distance is for him more of a psychological condition than a measurable unit and he has the same feeling about time. „Indeed, just about everything in our world had become relative, subjective. We were lied to, and knew it. Misinformed, innocently and by design. Confused. We couldn’t trust our own intelligence, in any sense of that word. Rumors festered in our uncertainty. [...] The truth was not forthcoming, you had to put it together for yourself, and in this way your most fantastic nightmares and suspicions became as real to you as the sometimes unbelievable fact of being in this place at all. Your version of reality might not tally with the stats or the map or the after-action report, but it was the reality you lived in, that would live on in you through the years ahead, and become the story by which you remembered all that you had seen, and done and been.” [Wolff 1995: 18-20]

When they arrive at the gates of Dong Tam, Captain Cox comes to them and inspects the truck. He finds the Chicom rifle. First Captain Cox wants to put the rifle into custody but thanks to Sergeant Benet’s lie that the rifle is a gift for General Avery, they are let in. The camp resembles a bog and because of the malfunctioning latrine system, there is a horrid smell so people are in a bad mood. Before trading the Chicom rifle for a TV set they spend an hour in the US Army base retail store. When they try trading a rifle for TV there is a problem. Lyons, the man who can give them the TV, suddenly decides that he wants two Chicom rifles for the TV. Sergeant Benet and Wolff get into the truck in a bad temper. They drive to an empty officers’ lounge where Sergeant Benet unplugg 25-inch TV and tell the Vietnamese woman behind the bar that they need to get it fixed. On their way home, they meet Captain Cox at the gate. He orders to turn off the engine. Cox goes around the truck to inspect it and then stop at Sergeant Benet’s window. The situation is not good for them, but Sergeant Benet has a solution. He first goes for a talk with Captain Cox and then gives him Chicom rifle which works as a permit to pass the control. [WOLFF 1994: 21-28]

When they board the ferry, Sergeant Benet takes a quick nap. Wolff recognizes a woman with a five- or six-years old son. Wolff later tries to make a conversation with the boy, but he is not successful with the boy. Although the act of kindness helps him to talk with the woman named Anh. She works at division headquarters as secretary and interpreter. When she later loses her job, Wolff has not seen her since and sometimes her face comes to his mind. During the ferry ride he promises to give the TV to the boy and Anh. He knows that Sergeant Benet won't be happy, so he needs a cover story. When they are at the crossroad, Sergeant Benet turns towards My Tho. Wolff can tell him to drive to Anh but he changes his mind „*I this moment of the darkening road, Anh seemed a lot farther away than My Tho – an impossible distance. I was glad to be off the hook, and heading home to a good show.*” [WOLFF 1994: 36] They set up the TV and make dinner just in time for the popular TV western series entitled Bonanza.

### **Command Presence**

In this chapter Wolff describes the time when he was eighteen. He works on a ship in Norfolk. One of his shipmates is not giving him a friendly look. Wolff gives following description: „*He was one of the ship's mechanics. He Had rabbit eyes and red hair cropped so close his scalp showed through. His skin was white. Not fair. White, the pallor of life spent belowdecks. He hardly ever spoke. I had felt the weight of his scrutiny before, but never like this. I saw that he hated me.*” [WOLFF 1994: 39] One day he takes a nap resting his head against one of the propeller blades. He is awakened by someone who goes up the ladder. It is the mechanic who later turns the engine and propeller starts spinning. He cannot argue with him directly because the mechanic, nor complain to the captain. He is helpless almost on his own. The two other shipmates promise to keep an eye on mechanics. When the boat is about to leave for a trip to the Azores, he knows that if he sails to the Azores with the mad mechanics something bad can happen to him.

He wants to go for a trip, but he misses the boat anyway. He does not know where to go. Wolff in this part explains to a reader that during his childhood he was unsuccessful at school. His mother is according to him unteachable optimist and Wolff does not want to tell her some story why the ship is sailing without him. His brother Geoffrey is in England. His father is also unable to host him because he is in jail in California. „*When there was no longer any chance of meeting my shipmate I got up stiffly*

*and walked into town, where I ate a jumbo breakfast and pondered the army recruiting office across the street.” [WOLFF 1994: 43]*

Idea of wearing uniform is not new for Wolff. He looks up to Norman Mailer, Irwin Shaw, James Jones, Erich Maria Remarque, and Hemingway. He wants to be a writer as well as these authors and serve in a military. Next reason is that Wolff wants to be respectable. He wants others to look forward to him, to clean his name which is ruined by his father. He sometimes even tells that his father is dead when people ask about him. Wolff wants to be different. He does not join up the army that day. He goes to Washington to say farewell to his mother.

Later in the story he goes to basic training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. It is during a hot wave and many recruit drops because of the difficulty of training. Wolff experience the first significant success when he realizes his body is capable of good performance. He realizes some recruits are not good enough. At first, he helps one of the recruits Sands. Sands is always last. Later, Wolff realizes that Sands is not trying hard enough and that there are many like Sands. He learns to spot them. *„I was recognized as having ‘command presence’ – arrogance, an erect posture, a loud barky voice. They gave me armband with sergeant’s stripes and put me in charge of other in my platoon. It was like being a trusty.” [WOLFF 1994: 49-50]*

Later he volunteers for the airborne. They send him to jump school at Fort Benning, Georgia. When he arrives, he and other recruits are welcomed by drill sergeant with push-ups and other exercises. In Fort Benning he becomes friend with Hugh Pierce. Hugh likes the exercise and according to the Wolff, he likes making it harder for himself and pushing the limits. In the last week Wolff and Hugh Pierce sign for the Special Forces in Fort Bragg. In Fort Bragg, Wolff realizes he can keep up with others physically but not mentally. One of the problems is that he does not believe in himself. According to Wolff there is no single thing he cannot learn.

When they are on a smoke break, one of the two instructors’ sitting behind them receives orders for Vietnam. He keeps saying to the other one: *„I am not going.”* Wolff is thinking about the situation in silence. *„Here you had a man who knew all the tricks and knew them well enough to teach them to others. He’d been there twice and been competent enough to get home. [...] He was afraid and didn’t bother to hide it from another man...” [WOLFF 1994: 54]* This conversation troubles Wolff. When they are

afraid to go to Vietnam, he does not have a chance. He never bothers Hugh with his worries. They have a plan to throw a big party and travel around Europe when they get from the army. Hugh gets later send for medic's training; Wolff receives a letter for Hugh from the girl Hugh was seeing. Hugh is about to be a father. Wolff is at the time applying for Officer Candidate School puts the letter away.

When the orders come, he is sent to artillery Officer Candidate School in Fort Sill. After six months he is sent back to Fort Bragg. In the end he finishes the Officer Candidate school and becomes an officer in the United States Army. At the time many Wolff's friends are already in the war. He is awaiting his orders but instead of Vietnam he is send to Washington to learn Vietnamese. His mother is still living in Washington as well as his brother. He is also put on civilian status. He buys a Volkswagen, smokes marihuana, and meets with a Russian woman named Vera who is related by marriage to a Russian prince. Although she has a boyfriend she has fallen in love with Wolff. She has a brother Grisha. He is almost all the time in his room. His mother brings him meals and takes dirty dishes and laundry from him. He wants to finish diploma by correspondence. Wolff is asked about his opinion but he does not hit the mood in the family. His mother is embarrassed because Wolff says that Grisha is not in the center of the universe which he is for the family.

One night Wolff visits his mother for a dinner. While he is waiting for the dinner, he reads Hug Pierce's name among the dead in the newspaper. Wolff calls his mother and tells her. Then Wolff remembers about Yancy's letter. He searches for the letter and for Yancy but without luck. Wolff regrets not sending letter to Hugh. *„I don't know exactly what I would have done if I'd found Yancy. Given her the news, of course. Tried to find out if she'd the baby. I wanted to ask her about the baby – lots of questions there. And I would have said I was sorry for sitting on her letter, because I was sorry, I am still sorry, God knows I am sorry.”* [WOLFF 1994: 70-71]

After a year Wolff is promoted to first lieutenant. Before he receives the orders, he is a temporary commander for a training in the mountains of Pisgah National Forrest. He is nervous because after a year he forgot the essentials. He tries to learn it all night before the training. While waiting for the green light to drop on a parachute he mistakes the smoke warning with the smoke coming from the damp. He makes the order and

jumps with the rest of the men several miles from the drop zone. Two weeks later he is sent to Vietnam.

### **White Man**

A week after thanksgiving Sergeant Benet and Wolff are ordered into the field to the countryside where they are ordered to secure the place. They go through deserted villages for about four or five kilometers. In one village they find a white puppy and one of the soldiers decide to take the dog with them. Because of the flooding, the division is forced to walk on the trail. Wolff is worried of snipers and booby traps. He is the tallest man in the group according to his description at least by a head. The whiteness of his skin is also a perfect target for potential sniper. He anxiously scans the trees for snipers while walking from side to side. At the time he feels that he does not belong to that place. All the houses are small, other Vietnamese soldiers as well and his white color of his skin was too noticeable.

Wolff remembers one time in My Tho when he was on his way home, he was surrounded by crowd of Vietnamese soldiers. They hit him with bamboo sticks. He now understands that they confused him with another American. They were after Lieutenant Polk who stood nearby. Polk cocked his pistol and saved Wolff. Later Wolff realized that he also had a gun and could have saved himself from the situation.

After a walk, they found a position for the camp. Soldiers are not supposed to build fires, but they lit one anyway. Nights in the field are stressful for Wolff. He is always prepared to call airstrike in case of enemy attack. The soldiers are playing with the dog, chasing him, and shaking him. Wolff is curious about the name of the dog. Vietnamese soldiers named the dog Canh Cho – dog stew. Wolff asks sergeant when they are planning to eat the dog. The sergeant made spooning gesture and answered tonight. Wolff tried to persuade them that the dog is still too small. Sergeant puts the dog over the fire back and forth to show that he really means it. *„I know I should keep my mouth shut, but when the pup started choking I couldn't help myself. I ordered him to stop. And again. He wasn't playing with the dog, he was playing with me, my whiteness, my Americanness, my delicate sentiments – everything that gave me my sense of superior elevation.”* [WOLFF 1994: 82] Wolff feels that he cannot win, so he turns and walks away until he hears the despair of the dog. He buys the dog for a thousand piastres to save him. Wolff takes the dog to the tent where he pets him and clean him until the dog falls

asleep in his lap. *„It spread through me like a blush, like the sudden heat of unexpected praise – an exotic sensation, almost embarrassing in its intensity. I hardly recognized it. I hadn't felt anything like it in months.”* [WOLFF 1994: 83-84] From this day other troops greet Wolff with spooning motions, especially when he takes Canh Cho for a walk.

After Christmas he receives letter from Vera in which she wrote that she wants to suspend the engagement. *„Though I managed to strike a note of offended trust and virtue in my letter back to Vera, I didn't really feel it, and knew I had no right to it.”* *The truth was, I'd been unfaithful to her ever since I got to My Tho. [...] My letters home were by turns casual and melodramatic, and had little to say of love. If, as she'd asked me to do, I had written about boredom, dread, occasional outright fear, and the sexual hunger that fear left boiling in its wake.”* [WOLFF 1994: 84-85] Letter from Vera give him a kick to finish the novel he has begun in Washington.

### **Close Calls**

A series of close calls happens before Vietnamese New Year to Wolff. The first one happens a few days after he joins battalion. Wolff joins Sergeant Benet for a service in local church. Service ends and they go to the village market to buy some food. Sergeant Benet does the shopping and Wolff relax in a car with his eyes closed. Suddenly voices in the village stop. A circle of people forms around the car and a woman points under it. There is a grenade under the jeep. Sergeant Benet and Wolff walks back to base for help while the villagers make sure nobody touches the grenade. Wolff's legs act funny probably from the stress, so Sergeant Benet gives him support. The grenade is American made and does not go off on its own.

The second close call happens when Wolff hooks up howitzer to Chinook helicopter. On his head he wears a ski goggles Vera sent him. He has done it many times but this time it is different. He is used to the job that he no longer watches how Chinook helicopter lifts off with the howitzer. This time he hears some unusual sound. This sound makes him look up to see that the howitzer is slinging and shifting from one place to another. When suddenly it falls to place where he has been standing.

The third one happens before Christmas. Wolff is stationed at the fire direction center. One of the infantry companies walks into an ambush. All advisors gather around the radio where General Ngoc gives orders. There is also Colonel Lance, adviser who does not speak Vietnamese and lieutenant Keith Young. Colonel Lance rests his hand on

lieutenant Young, but there was a high chance that he could rest his hand on Wolff. The company has casualties and needs an American adviser to go in with the reinforcements and call-in medical evacuation and air support. Colonel Lance chooses lieutenant Young which is later killed that day. The death of Lieutenant Young affects Wolff to extent that he realizes that his life or death is determined not only by his choices but also the choices of his superior. What struck him the most is the similarity between him and Lieutenant Young as well as pure luck. „...I myself had a suspicion it should have been me – that Keith, and Hugh, and other men had somehow picked up my cards and stood in the place where I was meant to stay.” [WOLFF 1994: 96] Wolff does not know Lieutenant Keith Young personally. He just knows that he has multiple suits made by tailor in Hong Kong. What he is thinking about now is what happens with all the suits.

### **Duty**

In Vietnam many volunteers work as medics. One of them is a Canadian Macleod serving in medical camp. Wolff describes him as someone who does not smile or laugh. Macleod thinks that he is surrounded by fools all the time. Sometimes Wolff goes with Macleod to Medcap. Wolff treats people with first aid kit while Macleod takes care of the rest. These outposts make Wolff feel useful so that is why he keeps going. On one of these outposts, he meets Sergeant Fisher who is waiting for the replacement of the lieutenant who is killed. Fisher asks Wolff if he is believer. Fisher used to believe in God, but when he saw what war can do with the body, he struggles to imagine how it will be possible to be resurrected. „The other thing is, how do they figure out who gets resurrected? If you're saint or something, okay, sure, that's easy, but what if you're a Christian but you've killed people?” [WOLFF 1994: 103] The helicopter arrives to take Macleod and Wolff back. When Wolff offers Fisher to go with them, but he does not answer. Luckily for Wolff it is a good thing he does not go with them because he can get both into a trouble. The chopper lifts with Macleod, Wolff, and mother with a daughter who need an operation of cleft palate. After arrival he and Macleod go into My Tho for fish soup and discuss what needs to happen to a person, so his hair turns white. For Macleod it is genes for Wolff it is a scary experience. After the Vietnamese New Year, Wolff visits a hospital where he sees people suffering with different wounds. He meets Doctor Macleod at the hospital who makes a joke about his hair turning white. „'Your hair! It's white as snow!' He caught me completely flat-footed, and before I could stop myself I

*felt my hand fluttering toward my head. He smiled and shook his finger at me and moved off down the aisle, trailed by a fussing retinue of Vietnamese doctors and nurses. He was in his glory.” [WOLFF 1994: 107]*

### **A Federal Offense**

Before Vietnamese New Year Wolff's father sends him a Christmas card. He wrote Wolff that he is proud of him. His father gets from prison while Wolff is in Officer Candidate School. A friend helps him to find an apartment in Manhattan Beach. After Wolff gets orders for Vietnam, he decides to visit his father. When he gets to LAX he cannot find envelope with his address so he has no way to contact his father other than contact the owner of Scandinavian imports store. The owner agrees to help Wolff and offers him a ride. When Wolff arrives, his father does not recognize him at first. They have couple of drinks. The apartment is small and Wolff notices color TV and an expensive watch on his father's wrist. They go for a dinner where they talk about past but nothing about Vietnam. When they get home, his father asks if Wolff has to leave tomorrow. To Wolff's answer his father responds: „'Well, kiddo...' He put his arms around me and I let myself lean against him. It was a relief not to have to look into his face anymore, into his terrible sadness. We didn't say a word. I don't know how long we stood like that, but it began to seem a long time. Then I straightened up, and he let go of me.” [WOLFF 1994: 117]

When Wolff is at the replacement depot in Oakland he meets a friend from Fort Bragg, Lieutenant Stuart (Stu) Hoffman who is according to Wolff even a worse officer than himself. They are scheduled for the same flight to Vietnam, so they have two days in Oakland, California. They change into civil clothes and go to San Francisco to attend hippie's party. They also go to bar and Stu talks about his family. Stu's dad Bill is a petroleum engineer and war hero. His father is a little hard to talk to because he never tells what he is thinking. When Stu decides to drop out of school his father does not say a word. The next day Wolff accompanies Stu to a family dinner. It is apparent that his dad is worried about Stu. He asks Wolff about his opinion about General William Childs Westermoreland. Wolff does not know what to answer. Stu's father says that this General does not care about Wolff or any other soldiers. He also mentions tragedy when General Westermoreland ordered parachute training in high winds in which all recruits were killed. Stu and his dad are not so close.

After a dinner they go for a drink upstairs to the piano bar. There Stu tells Wolff that his father wants him to stay at home. „*'Come on. What're you supposed to do – desert?' Stu didn't answer. 'What, he wants you to desert?' Stu looked at me. He still didn't say anything. 'It's a federal offense,' I said.*” [WOLFF 1994: 125] After few drinks they all go home. It is still dark when Wolff and Stu board the busses. Sergeant reads the names, but Stu does not answer. The atmosphere in the bus is tense and almost no one speaks. In Wolff's head he has seen many scenarios how his orders are canceled. He sees a gang of fathers who stop the bus and help them escape. It seems crazy but according to Wolff not as crazy as the reality. „*They call our names, and then we know who it is behind the blinking lights. It's our fathers. Our fathers, come to take us home. Crazy. But not as crazy as what they actually did, which was let us go.*” [WOLFF 1994: 128]

### **The Lesson**

The chapter begins with the competition in shooting with a tall Vietnamese at the Tet carnival. Wolff misses a shot, so he quits because he fears that he is going to miss more. From the beginning of chapter, it is apparent that something bad is going to happen. Wolff mentions that he was in his bed when the killing started. First killed is a young American who is driving home from the bar. After Vietcong shot him, they drag him around. When the body is found Doctor Macleod describes his body full of holes as ocarina. Vietcong have not killed just Americans but also Vietnamese and even more efficiently. They had a list of locals who they killed early in the morning. This massacre called Tet Offensive wakes up Wolff at three-thirty-four in the morning, January 31, 1968. He and Sergeant Bennet dresses up and arrive to Major Chau's headquarters. The situation is still hot but nobody knows anything. My Tho is in enemy hands and most divisions are under attack. Same thing happens at other places in Vietnam. The situation is critical and the battalion is undermanned, and air support is not available.

Later that day there is an airplane above them. The pilot warns them that a huge group of Vietcong is heading towards their perimeter. They use pilot as their eyes and artillery as their weapon. They successfully repel the attack. First, they bomb the perimeter, then bridges and in the end everything. „*I saw the map, I knew where the shells were going, but I didn't think of our targets as homes where exhausted and frightened people were praying for their lives. When you're afraid you will kill anything that might kill you. Now that the enemy had the town, the town was the enemy.*” [WOLFF

1994: 138] After couple of days, jets show up and finish what Mayor Chau begun. When the town is freed of Vietcong, the smell from the dead bodies is so intense that they must wear medical masks scented with cologne. Wolff finds out that they have bombed a school building where kids learn revolutionary history and songs. „*As a military project Tet failed; as a lesson it succeeded. [...] They knew that once they were among the people we would abandon our pretense of distinguishing between them. [...] In this way they taught the people that we did not love them and would not protect them; that for all our talk of partnership and brotherhood we disliked and mistrusted them, and that we would kill every last one of them to save our own skin. To believe otherwise was self-deception.*”  
[WOLFF 1994: 140]

### **Old China**

Old China chapter is about adventures of Wolff and a friend Pete London, who met with Wolff at language school. Pete is a Foreign Service officer who is very savvy in foreign languages. Pete is sent to Vietnam before Wolff, and he offers a bed for Wolff in Saigon whenever he needs. Peter has four civilian roommates in his villa. After the formal dinner they discuss different topics in, according to Wolff, Socratic fashion. After the discussion they go out to town. When they get back Wolff stays up with Pete because he likes his presence and hospitality.

After Tet, Pete visits Wolff at battalion with another man named Shaw. They travel from Saigon to Ben Tre but thanks to road conditions they stay in My Tho. Shaw goes to showers while Wolff and Sergeant Benet walk Pete around the battalion. Shaw is also a Foreign Service officer, stationed in Thailand. When Shaw and Sergeant Benet go to bed, Wolff and Pete stay up and drink beer.

The next morning, Pete changes the plan. He wants to visit a village west to My Tho. Sergeant Benet does not like the idea. They loaded Land-Rover with weapons and ammo. Sergeant Benet advise Wolff to stay but Wolff wants to go. When they leave My Tho the countryside changes as there are no beggars, sellers, and military vehicles. Before the noon they reach the location of Ong Loan, who is a small old Vietnamese. Pete and Ong Loan speak in Vietnamese, so Shaw does not understand a word. They discuss Chinese porcelain which is Pete sort of a collector. Pete's perfect Vietnamese helps him easily take place among people and be one of them. After a long discussion Pete apologizes for a quick departure. He receives a blue-and-white bowl on a wooden

base. On their way back, it is raining heavily. On their way back, Pete tells Wolff with enthusiasm that he spoke with General Reed and that he is going to transfer him to have more fun. Wolff is not so enthusiastic because he does not want a transfer at all. Luckily, his term is ending in two months. When Wolff undresses he finds Pete's package in the pocket of his jacket. Later Wolff gets the information to send the package to Pete with a priority mail with extra padding. *„I put the packet on the floor and pressed at it with my stockinged foot, for better control and so as not to leave any bootprints. [...] Though I didn't hear the break, I felt in trave up my leg – a sudden, sad release. I picked up the package and make sure I hadn't broken just the wooden base. It was the bowl. It had cracked into several pieces.”* [WOLFF 1994: 158-159]

### **I Right a Wrong**

Sergeant Benet ends his term about a month before Wolff. The replacement does not come. Sergeant Benet does not want to go by helicopter, he wants to go by a car. Before he leaves, Wolff convinces him for a last beat on Tu Do Street because he wants to have a personal talk with him. Instead, he watches a Vietnamese girl singing. All the other guests are white skin as Wolff, and they are looking at them unfriendly. After a beer they drive to out-processing. It is too late for Wolff to get back to My Tho so he books nearby hotel and goes to a bar on roof. He drinks brandy and thinks about the men in the bar who gave unfriendly looks to Sergeant Benet. At the sunset he goes to railing and smokes the pipe. *„The pipe, the idea of myself smoking pipe, alone at the railing, gave me a gallant and philosophical picture of myself. I smoked my pipe and gazed over the city, over the people below, to whom I felt superior because I was feeling deep and dark things of which they were ignorant.”* [WOLFF 1994: 164]

Wolff gets idea to go back to go back to that bar where he was with Sergeant Benet. He goes to couple more bars before he hit the destination. He immediately gets into an argument with the pipe still in his mouth and then leaves the bar. People from the bar who Wolff called crackers also go out. They get again into an argument. *„'I'm a Negro,' I said. 'What're you stupid redneck going to do about that?' 'I could kick your ass,' the guy in the cast said.”* [WOLFF 1994: 166] The argument escalates, and in the end, they punch Wolff multiple times in the face. He even feels the bumps on his head and his pipe is broken and a chunk of his pipe is missing so he goes back to the alley where he got hit. In the end the people help him search for the missing piece.

## **Souvenir**

To the battalion is assigned temporarily Captain Kale, who is waiting for his reassignment to another battalion. He is disappointed by the current assignment as temporary replacement of Wolff who is about to leave in a few days. Captain Kale thinks that Wolff is a catastrophe in his job because the battalion does not have American standards of aggression. Captain Kale does workout whenever he can. He wants to have his future battalion of killers. He learned some Vietnamese to issue commands, but others ignore them because Major Chau tolerates disobedience.

Captain Kale comes to Wolff because he needs the sling for moving the guns with Chinook helicopters. Wolff unties Canh Cho and send Kale to Lieutenant Nam. Wolff goes with him just in case. When Kale tries to move the howitzer to a place where they can be lifted, he issues a set of commands without the appropriate effect. Finally, they reach the place with the help of Wolff who does not like the place because it is too dumpy. Wolff suggests a solution to move the howitzers to different place, but Kale keeps boasting that he knows what to do. Wolff get the radio, and he can call the Chinooks off, but he does not. He wants to fulfil the orders of Captain Kale. *„I wanted his order followed to the letter, without emendation or abridgment, so that whatever happened got marked to hi account, and to his account alone. I wanted this thing to play itself out to the end. I was burning, I wanted it so much.“* [Wolff:178]

When the chinooks arrive it is hard to see because of the rotors which blow the dust around. Wolff has ski goggles from Vera which he can borrow to Captain Kale, but he does not. It is apparent that Captain Kale has never done this. After the job is done Kale is rubbing his eyes full of dust. A wind from the rotors also spreads pieces of wood around which are parts of the local's buildings as well as photo of a young woman. Kale asks by standing woman if the photo is hers, but it is not. *„Someday it would end up in his Bavarian trophy case, with his Chicom rifle and VC flag and all the medals he was going to write himself up for, but Captain Kale didn't know that yet. He was new here.“* [WOLFF 1994: 181]

## **The Rough Humor of Soldiers**

As a farewell party for Wolff, they start the evening in the bar in My Tho and later move to Major Chau's house for dinner. Mayor Chau introduces to guests his niece Be. She pours whiskey for the guests and refills it when needed. She gives Captain Kale more

than the others. She likes him and he likes her and to all present it is evident. Major Chau says that Miss Be will be more than happy to dance with Captain Kale who reminds her of Fred Astaire. Captain Kale agrees, and they dance in the circle with their eyes closed. When the song stops, they keep dancing. Major Chau shows them another room where they can have more privacy. Miss Be and Captain Kale exchange smile and go through the doorway.

Major Chau raises his glass and gives a toast to Wolff. „*He praised my implacable enmity toward the communist insurgents, my skill as a leader of men, my reckless courage under fire. He said that my presence here had dealt the Vietcong a blow they'd never recover from.*” [WOLFF 1994: 186] The rest of the people begin with the feast while Wolff has to listen to a toast. When Major Chau stops with the toast Wolff can begin with the meal. He eats spring rolls, clear soup, fish and rice, noodles with vegetables and tender meat. Suddenly there is a loud yell and Captain Kale comes to the room where others are feasting. He has lipstick on his face. „*'Did you know she was a guy?' he said. I was too surprised to speak. I shook my head. He gave me his full attention. Then he said, 'I'd kill you if you did.' I understood that he meant it. Another close call.*” [WOLFF 1994: 188] Captain Kale looks at the other guests and walks out the door and drives away. When Wolff fills his plate, Lieutenant Nam says „bon appetit.” Wolff asks what it is because the meal is delicious. Lieutenant Nam howls to indicate that it is the dog, Canh Cho to be precise. At first, Wolff is unpleasantly surprised but then admits that the future of a dog named Canh Cho has been inevitable. „*I'd been fretting about his prospects. Now my worries were over. So were his. At least there was some largesse in this conclusion, some reciprocity. I had fed him, now he fed me, and fed me, I have to say, right tastily. There was only one way left to do him justice. I bent to my plate and polished him off.*” [WOLFF 1994: 189]

### **Civilian**

When Wolff steps out of the plane in Oklahoma and the personnel officer asks him whether he will consider going back as a captain. After four years in the army, he is finally free and needs a plan for what to do with his life.

The first week he stays in a hotel in Tenderloin spending his free time in bars. He feels freedom but also aimlessness and solitude. He does not miss the army, but he has

been a soldier since he was eighteen years old. He spends his afternoons walking. It occurs to him many times when he walks past the windows that also his appearance changed. He can go to Washington to his mother, friends and Vera who wants to try it again with Wolff, but he decides to stay. He does not feel comfortable among civil people. *„In Vietnam I'd barely noticed it, but here, among people who did not take corruption and brutality for granted, I came to understand that I did, and that this set me apart. San Francisco was an open, amiable town, but I had trouble holding up my end of conversation. I said horrifying things without knowing it until I saw the reaction.”* [WOLFF 1994: 195]

Wolff wants to apply to a school in Berkeley but when he gets there, he comes to a gathering in Sproul Plaza, where he listens to speakers. One of them is a reading list of demands addressed to President Johnson. It is hard to understand thanks to the microphone, but Wolff understands the essentials of the speech like the withdrawal of troops from Vietnam, recognition of Cuba, and the immediate commutation of prosecuted students. Wolff laughs when the speaker says that he is in a state of unconditional war with the US government. Wolff argues with a young man with a Chinese girlfriend. Wolff is later sorry when he realizes what he was yelling at the young. People are watching Wolff pitifully, so he turns away ashamed of himself.

He goes to surprise his father again who is about to put into the microwave a frozen meal. Wolff insists that they go for dinner at the restaurant where they were a year ago. Wolff's father says that he does not feel ok but goes for dinner anyway. His father tells Wolff a couple of stories of his youth. It is the best night they ever had.

The next day his father is diagnosed with the flu. Wolff takes care of his father because he is too weak to take care of himself. To Wolff, he reminds a baby, and he enjoys the care he receives from Wolff to the point that his father becomes annoying. Wolff even calls his father by his name. The next day his father gets better. In the meantime, Wolff does small things for his father which frees him of feelings of uselessness. At first, Wolff wants to just pay a visit to his father and as the days go by, he spends nights in bars and days with his father talking about everything except Vietnam and prison. His dad notices that he drinks too much. Wolff wants to enroll at a local community college to get the money because nobody is checking if you study at all. What Wolff admits is that he does not need the money, he needs actual education.

After a week in town, he meets a woman on a beach named Jan. He asks her out to visit Grand Illusion at the local art theatre. Wolff has seen Grand Illusion many times before to the point that he memorized some parts. That night he cannot follow the plot because he is focusing on Jan. He takes her hand, and she does not pull away. When the show ends, they go to a bar which is not the best, but she insists on staying. It is a bar where former servicemen, and uniformed are going. Wolff and Jan meet there Dicky and Sleepy, two regulars. Dicky asks inappropriate questions which annoys Wolff. Jan does not know that Wolff was in Vietnam and Dicky's questions reveal the secret. „*‘What were you, then?’ Jan said to me. ‘First lieutenant.’ ‘Same thing,’ Dicky said. ‘Lieutenant, cap’n, all the same – hang you out to dry every fucking one of em.’ ‘That’s not true.’ ‘The Fuck it isn’t. Fucking officer, man.’ ‘I didn’t hang anybody out to dry. Except maybe another officer,’ I said.*” [WOLFF 1994: 207] At this point Wolff knows when he starts the story about Captain Kale wanting to attach howitzers to Chinook, it should not be told. Wolff struggles to set the tone of the story and even questions whether the story should be told at all, considering the public opinion and how the public might react and how they will judge Wolff. When he finishes with the story it does not land well. „*...I looked over at Jan and saw her watching me with an expression so thoroughly disappointed as to be devoid of reproach. I didn’t like it. I felt the worst kind of anger, the anger that proceeds from shame. So instead of easing up I laid it on even thicker, playing the whole thing for laughs, as cruel as I could make them, because after all Dicky had been there, and what more than that could I ever hope to have common with her?*” [WOLFF 1994: 209] After the story Dicky is amused and Sleepy gives a disturbed expression.

The next morning Wolff calls Vera. It has been a year since he heard her voice. They talk like lovers who follow up on a conversation from yesterday. When he hangs up, the panic of loneliness is even worse than before. He has not seen his nephew Nicolas who was born when he was in Vietnam. All his friends and family are in Washington. He decides to fly home the next day. That night he and his father go for dinner at a French restaurant. They do not drink much and over a coffee, Wolff spills the beans that he is leaving tomorrow. Wolff's dad asks whether he will come back. They agree on the next summer. „*I meant it when I said I’d be back but it sounded like a bald-faced lie, as if the truth was known to both of us that I would not be back and that he would live alone and die alone, as he did, two years later...*” [WOLFF 1994: 211] They

exchange the watch, he gives his father his 20 dollars Seiko and his dad gives Wolff his Heuer chronograph. When he gets home Geoffrey notices the watch and asks questions about it.

He later moves to Maryland with Vera to help her with the haying, and he also tries to find a way to live together which is not much of a success. The relationship does not work to the extent that her mother moves back to Washington. When the sun is out, he works outside and, in the afternoon, he goes to his office where he has begun writing another novel. He wants to be better at what fulfils him. He enjoys working with the text, re-ordering the words, and imagining the story. In the servants' quarter he is a man of reason in the rest of the house he is not. Vera and he try to make it work but it has reached the point where he cannot continue and leaves for Washington. He calls her to say good-bye and she answers with the pistol to her head. „...*she asked me to wait, then picked up the phone again and told me she had a pistol in her hand and would shoot herself if I didn't promise to come back that same night. 'Vera, really, you already pulled this.' 'When?' 'Before we got engaged.' 'That was you? I thought it was Leland.' She started to laugh. Then she stopped. 'That doesn't mean I won't do it. Toby? I'm serious.' 'Bang,' I said, and hung up.*” [WOLFF 1994: 213-214]

In weak later Wolff travels to England with friends. It is a good place for him because nobody talks about Vietnam, and he has time to go to his room every afternoon to write. He is encouraged to take the Oxford Entrance exams in four and a half months. He hires Latin tutor Miss Knight who offers him a room at her house. Miss Knight according to Wolff wears man's clothing and runs an animal hospital. Thanks to her, he passes the exams and matriculates into the university. For four years of his studies, he makes many friends, travels, and falls in love.

One night he is translating the West Saxon Gospels. It reminds him of the story of a wise man and foolish men who both built their houses on different bedrock until the floods came and destroyed the house of a foolish man who had built his house on sand. He was sitting at the place where Jonathan Swift and Evelyn Waugh studied. It seemed to him as fate that he was studying in a country far from his own, living a different life than he had imagined. He had grown up and with a solid foundation from the university, he is more than capable to succeed in life.

## **Last Shot**

Wolff's son is writing a paper on Orwell, and he wants to be able to talk about it with his son. He reads an essay called *How the Poor Die* which is new to him and comes across a line „*It is a great thing to die in your own bed, though it is better still to die in your boots.*” Wolff takes this line as an insult, and he has to walk it off because he doesn't agree with the propagation of dying young. It was written before WWII, so dying in their boots is seen as an act of being blown out of them. It reminds him of his friend Hugh Pierce who died in Vietnam. „*Instead of remembering Hug as I knew him, I too often think of him in terms of what he never had a chance to be. The things that rest of us know, he will not know. He will not know what it is to make a life with someone else. To have a child slip in beside him as he lies reading on a Sunday morning. To work at, and then look back on, a labor of years. Watch the decline of his parents, and attend their dissolution. Lose faith. Pray anyway. Persist. We are made to persist, to complete the whole tour. That's how we find out who we are.*” [WOLFF 1994: 220] Wolff acknowledges that thinking about him like that and making him a character in his book is a selfish use of him. Wolff instead describes Hugh just as he remembers him.

## 6. Robert Stone

### 6.1. About the author

Robert Stone was an American novelist, short-story writer, and journalist, best known for his works that often explored the dark side of American culture, politics, and society. He was born on August 21, 1937, in Brooklyn, New York, and grew up in a broken family. His parents divorced when he was young, and he spent time living in orphanages or with relatives. [BRITANICA: B]

Stone dropped out of high school and enlisted in the Navy at age 17. After his service, he attended New York University on the G.I. Bill, but dropped out after one year. He then worked as a journalist for several years, covering the civil rights movement in the South and the Vietnam War. [BRITANICA: B]

Stone's first novel, *A Hall of Mirrors*, was published in 1967 and was set in New Orleans during the Civil Rights era. The book received critical acclaim for its exploration of racial tensions and its portrayal of characters struggling to find their place in a changing world. Stone's second novel, *Dog Soldiers*, won the National Book Award in 1975 and was later adapted into the film „Who'll Stop the Rain“ starring Nick Nolte. [BRITANICA: B]

Stone went on to write several other acclaimed novels, including *A Flag for Sunrise* (1981), which examined U.S. involvement in Central America, and *Outerbridge Reach* (1992), a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize that explored the American Dream and the desire for adventure. Stone was praised for his ability to create complex characters and vivid settings, as well as his sharp social commentary. [BRITANICA: B]

In addition to his novels, Stone also wrote numerous short stories, including „Bear and His Daughter“ (1997), which won the William Faulkner Award. He also taught creative writing at several universities and was an elected member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Stone died on January 10, 2015, at the age of 77. [BRITANICA: B]

Robert Stone was an ambitious author whose reach sometimes exceeded his grasp. Despite this, he projected a powerful vision of America through his work, defining the contours and tapping the pulse of the country. Stone's first novel, *Hall of Mirrors*, published in 1967, marked the beginning of a distinguished career. Stone's distinctive

sensibility earned him the William Faulkner Foundation award for the best first novel of the year. He followed this up with four other novels between 1967 and 1992, each contributing, unevenly, to his stature and reputation. [FINN 1993: 10]

Stone's life experiences, transmuted into fiction, had a significant influence on his work. He spent time in Antarctica in 1958 and traveled to Vietnam as a correspondent. Stone drew on these experiences in his writing, and his firsthand knowledge of drug culture in particular was evident in his work. *A Hall of Mirrors* drew heavily on his time selling encyclopedias in Louisiana and working as a census taker in the black slums of New Orleans. The novel features a large, sprawling narrative with multiple incidents that follows the lives of the loners, drifters, and god-forsaken strung-out losers on the edge of the abyss. [FINN 1993: 10]

Stone's experiences in academia as a writer-in-residence and in Hollywood, where two of his books were turned into major but unsatisfactory movies, also informed his writing. Stone's language was particularly remarkable, an admirably supple instrument that could pass readily from the low colloquial to elevated rhetoric. His ear for dialogue was equally impressive, with conversations ringing with complete conviction. Stone's writing carried readers from a low-keyed opening to a highly charged, fever-pitched ending, as exemplified by an extended quotation from one of his books. [FINN 1993: 10]

In his novel *Dog Soldiers*, Robert Stone tells the story of Converse, a journalist in Vietnam who becomes involved in smuggling heroin back to the United States. The novel explores themes of drugs, violence, and moral ambiguity against the backdrop of the Vietnam War. Converse and the other characters struggle with questions of identity and purpose as they navigate a world of confusion and disillusionment. The novel is similar to Stone's previous work, *A Hall of Mirrors*, in its use of drug culture and violence, but the focus on the Vietnam War adds a new dimension. Stone shows how the war affects the characters' lives, both in Vietnam and back home in the United States. The value of human life is a recurring theme throughout the novel, and Stone explores the moral implications of violence and drug use. [FINN 1993: 10-11]

The characters in *Dog Soldiers* are often reduced to their most elemental selves, struggling to survive and find meaning in a chaotic world. Stone weaves religious themes throughout the novel, showing how concepts of good and evil play out in the lives of his characters. The novel's strength lies in its ability to blend the high and the low, drawing

the reader into a deeply imagined world where the characters' struggles feel real and immediate. Overall, *Dog Soldiers* is a powerful exploration of the human condition in the face of violence and moral uncertainty. Stone's skillful use of language and vivid imagery make the novel a compelling read, and its themes of identity, purpose, and the value of human life remain relevant today. [FINN 1993: 11-12]

Stone's stories often include references to war, suggesting that it is an unavoidable aspect of his work. Having experienced war firsthand and imagined its impact, Stone has considered its role in American society. However, his opinions on the subject, particularly with regards to foreign intervention, appear to be limited by his experiences during the Vietnam War and subsequent conflicts in Central America. [FINN 1993: 14]

## 6.2. Dog Soldiers – Plot Analysis

### **Main Characters**

**John Converse:** John Converse is a disillusioned journalist who is desperate to make enough money to support his wife and child. He becomes involved in a drug deal in Vietnam, hoping to sell heroin in the United States for a profit. Converse is a complex and flawed character who is struggling with his own demons, including his alcoholism and his troubled marriage.

**Marge Converse:** Marge is John Converse's wife. She is an unstable and unpredictable woman who is prone to emotional outbursts. Marge is deeply unhappy with her life and her marriage, and she becomes involved in the drug deal with Converse as a way to escape her problems.

**Hicks:** Hicks is a former Marine who is also involved in the drug deal. His full name is Ray Hicks. Hicks is a volatile and unpredictable man who is prone to violent outbursts. He is fiercely loyal to Converse, but he is also deeply distrustful of others and prone to paranoia. Hicks is a symbol of the violent and chaotic world of the Vietnam War.

**Dieter:** Dieter is a German drug dealer who is involved in the deal. His full name is Heinrich Dieter. He is a sophisticated and cultured man who is deeply cynical about the war in Vietnam. Dieter is a master manipulator who is able to play all sides against each other in order to achieve his goals. He is a symbol of the corruption and deceit that pervades the world of the novel.

**Marge's Father:** Marge's father is a wealthy businessman who disapproves of Converse and Marge's lifestyle. He is a cold and calculating man who is willing to do whatever it takes to protect his own interests. Marge's father becomes involved in the drug deal in order to gain control over his daughter's life. He is a symbol of the corrupt and powerful forces that are constantly working against the novel's protagonists.

### **Pages 1-50**

John Converse sits on a bench next to a middle-aged American lady. Next to him, he places an oversized briefcase. It is siesta hour and no one else is in the park. Converse watches the woman sitting next to him reading *The Citadel* by A. J. Cronin. Converse goes to the park to read his letters and kill time before his appointment. While reading the letter he looks at the woman who then asks him if it is a letter from home. Converse and the woman then talk. „Everything fine with your folks?“ She asks when he folds the letter. In this section, we learn that Converse works as a journalist and has been there for 18 months. Converse learns that the woman has resided in Vietnam for 14 years as a missionary. He also learns that she is flying back to America in the next few days and that her husband was killed. „They'd left us pretty much alone. One night they came into our village and took Bill and a fine young fella named Jim Hatley and just tied their hands and took them away and killed them.“ This makes Converse remember a story from Ngoc Linh province where a missionary is kidnapped, and a hungry rat is attached to his head. The hungry rat then begins to feed on the missionary's brain. During their conversation, Converse moves over to the woman. He feels the need to invite her in. She seems to approach him as well. After he makes up his mind to ask her to dinner, he learns that she is leaving that day and that it wouldn't be a good idea anyway. Converse wishes her a safe journey and goes to the streets.

On his way to the meeting, he passes police officers in grey uniforms who are preparing for a demonstration. He takes a taxi on Pasteur Street just in time for the monsoon rain. The journey takes 15 minutes and the driver drops him off at the end of the road where Charmian lives. Charmian is a tall blonde who greets him with a kiss on the cheek when he arrives. Upon arrival, Converse asks if a man already arrived. She says a man came in and Converse immediately recognize that she is under the influence of drugs. From a metal locker, she pulls out a package of heroin wrapped in newspaper. Converse decides to test the quality of the goods and Charmian points out to him that

the drugs are pure and even from such a small amount he can feel their effect. Charmian re-packages the drugs and gives them to Converse, who is affected by the heroin. The drugs will be sent to his wife and the dealer will pick them up in Berkeley. Charmian does not trust his wife at first, but Converse convinces her. Converse asks about Colonel Tho, who he later learns has a new meth deal. Charmian says that as soon as the deal is done, they will fly to Phnom Penh to get drugged and have a massage. The deal is to smuggle three kilos of heroin into the US on board a marine ship. Charmian is worried about the plan, but Converse assures her that his wife Marge is trustworthy and Hicks, his friend, and smuggler as well.

Sergeant Janeway at the JUSPAO office (Joint United States Public Affairs Office) thinks about implementing stricter regulations for the bao chi cards and for journalists because many people get accreditation. After all, Sergeant Janeway thinks that they are smugglers and hippies. Converse wants to go to My Lat, where according to Sergeant Janeway nothing happens. Sergeant Janeway recommends Converse bring malaria pills. Converse forgets about malaria pills and when he looks at the watch it is too late to get them. His hop to My Lat is scheduled for tomorrow.

Converse has been an author for ten years and after 10 years he has a play about the Marine Corps. It was a success thanks to the marriage with the daughter of an editor and publisher. His father-in-law Elmer Bender edits and publishes magazines that look and sound like popular magazines. He employs Converse as a writer for one of the tabloids. Thanks to this job he gets press accreditation and becomes a correspondent in Saigon. Converse thinks that it will be good for his career as a writer and that something might emerge from the experience, a book, or a play. One afternoon he goes to a place called Krek where he experiences the bombing. After this experience, he becomes a drug addict. *„After his exercise in reality, Converse had fallen in with Charmian and the dope people’ he became one of the Constantly Stoned.”* [STONE: 24]

Converse meets with Jill and Ian Percy at the Crazy Horse. They are a couple and his friends. Jill likes to go into topless bars. On his way to Crazy Horse, Converse gives 20 piasters to a legless man. The legless man always smiles when he gives him money, Converse thinks about what the reaction would be if he didn’t give him the money. The beer without heroin costs 250 piasters at the Crazy Horse. He is first at the bar, so he orders a beer and watches the people in the bar. When his friends arrive, it is evident

that they are drug addicts by the way they speak to each other. They sit in the bar drinking „33 beer” and talk about Saigon. „33 beer” is made with formaldehyde and it is a drink of choice. Converse drinks whiskey. They talk about politics and the upcoming elections. Ian is an agronomist with the Australian government. He is also a pacifist and unhappy about his latest employer which is the South Vietnamese government. He isn't unhappy just about the South Vietnamese government he doesn't seem to like anyone. *„He also hated the South Vietnamese government and its armed forces, Americans and particularly the civilians, Buddhist monks, Catholics, The Cao Dain, the French and particularly Corsicans, the foreign press corps, the Australian government, and his employers past – and, most especially – present.”* [STONE: 27] They also talk about lots of people leaving Vietnam and that nobody wants to be the „last rat” to leave. The topic of conversation changes to Charmian and her ties to Colonel Tho what is in the „cinnamon” business. They also talk about their trip to Cambodia and the horror they saw. *„Both Jill and Converse had gone to see the invasion of Cambodia, and both had had experiences which had made them cry. But Converse's tears had not been those of outraged human sensibility.”* [STONE: 31]

While dining, there is an explosion at the tax office nearby. Many people go to the place of the explosion. People are sitting on the street and picking concrete out of their wounds. The bomb was set off using plastic. Nobody but Jill can see through the crowds. There are a lot of people killed including children. They stay until the Arvin (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) arrives with a barbed wire to secure the place. *„Converse went across the street and watched the ambulance people lug body bags over the rubble. Dead people and people who appeared to be dead had been laid out on the exposed earth where the cement had been blown away, and the blood and tissue were draining into the black soil. There were chopsticks, shards of pottery, and ladles lying about, and on close inspection, Converse saw that at least some of what had appeared to be human fragments might be chicken or fish. Some of the bodies had boiled noodles all over them.”* [STONE: 36]

Converse goes to My Lat where he picks up a supply of malaria pills. He has a low fever, but he isn't concerned. He meets one of the other journalists First Class Mac Lean. Mac Lean tells Converse that he should see the beach which is the most beautiful thing in Vietnam. Converse isn't interested in the beach, and he relates the beach to leprosy

and declines the offer. Converse also speaks with a Jeep driver about sappers. He gets to the Oscar Hotel where he gets a room. He is approached by a prostitute, but he isn't interested in sex, he just wants to find his friend Hicks.

### **Pages 51-103**

It is already dark when Converse meets with Hicks. Converse teases Hicks that he is still having around a copy of *The Portable Nietzsche*. *The Portable Nietzsche* is a translation of four major works of Friedrich Nietzsche by Walter Kaufmann. They also discuss the plan to smuggle heroin into the US. Hicks is suspicious and asks questions about Marge, Conrad's wife. „*Think of it in terms of money. You take it straight to Marge's in Berkeley. We'll pay you twenty-five hundred bills.*' 'You and Marge? Who's we?'" [STONE: 51] Although Hick's plan is foolproof, he is still uncomfortable about the trip. They talk about the CIA and the morality of selling drugs. „*I thought you were a moralist. You and your old lady – I thought you were world-savers. How about all these teenyboppers OD-ing on the roof? Doesn't that bother you?*' 'We have dealt with the moral objections,' Converse said." [STONE: 54] It takes a great effort to convince Hicks to take the briefcase with the drugs. When Converse leaves, he thinks that Hicks is probably a psychopath.

The story moves to Odeon Theater where Marge works with Rowena and a man called Holly-O. The theater isn't an ordinary theater it is a pornographic theater. Thanks to the nature of the theater, the clients are often immoral, shady, and secretive about their presence at the theater. Marge and Rowena talk about drugs and Marge tells Rowena that she heard about a new drug that she would like to try. Marge asks Holly-O if he knows someone who would prescribe her the new drug. „*Holy-o,*' Marge said, 'you know a writing doctor, don't you?' *Holy-o* shook his head as though he were telling her no. 'So what?' he asked. 'If you can get Dilaudid, I'd like some.' 'What for? You got a pain?' *Just wanted to try it.*" [STONE: 65] Several topics are brought up including Manson which upsets Holly-O. When Rowena and her boyfriend Frodo left, Holly-O approaches Marge and gives her four tabs of Dilaudid. He also advises her not to take more than one tab.

When Marge arrives home later in the evening, Mrs. Diaz, the babysitter asks the usual questions before she goes home. Mrs. Diaz also tells Marge that her father called her and that she should call back. She takes one pill of Dilaudid and calls Elmer. Elmer and his wife with plastically enhanced breasts pick up the phone at the same time. Elmer

is paranoid that his phone is tapped, and it probably was. He asks questions concerning Converse. Their conversation continues cryptic. Elmer thinks that Converse should come home. Elmer also tells her to visit him tomorrow. Marge hangs up the phone, checks on her daughter Janey and goes to bed under influence of drugs.

Hicks makes it to California although it is more difficult because more than ever agents checked the passengers with sniffing dogs. There are also some agents on the board dressed as hippies offering people joints. Hicks composes a new plan to smuggle drugs. He plans to dump the drugs into the dumpster and then recollect it in next morning. He tries to read Nietzsche, but he doesn't understand it. He also thinks about some other books he also read. One of them is written by Converse whom he respects. He also thinks about Japan and his failed marriage to a girl named Etsuko. He also mentions the Battle of Bob Hope in which almost everyone including Hicks was either wounded or shot dead.

Hicks goes to Seaman's YMCA where he rests for some time and then he goes out. He gets drunk and talks with Alex who is the Finish bartender at the Golden Gateway. One of the go-go girls appears to be Japanese which upset Hicks. He calls Etsuko who is unhappy to hear from him. She hangs up on him, so he calls again with the same effect. „*Don't you miss me, Etsuko? I miss you sometimes.*' *He could picture her again quite clearly; her mouth would be rippled with a small tremor of embarrassment and faint disgust. 'Give me a chance,' she said. 'Stop calling.' 'Christ's sake, I haven't called you for a year. More than that.'* *'When I get calls from you,' she said. 'I think you're becoming a drunken bum. Too bad for a man of your intelligence.'"*

[STONE: 82] After that he calls Marge to plan the delivery of drugs for the next morning. When the plan is finalized, he is approached by a young man. The young man asks Hicks if he could help him with a murder of a rich man that night. The young man says that the guy is gay, and they have a date planned. Hicks agrees to help and when the young man left, he calls the rich man to warn him. From the bar, Hicks goes back to YMCA. The next morning, he wakes up and feels miserable.

Hicks arrives at Marge's house. She is a mess because she slept under influence of drugs. He is upset when he learns that she doesn't have the money. She tells him that she planned to visit the bank but went to the aquarium instead. Hicks gets angry at Marge who is probably still under influence of drugs. She is wearing dirty clothes; drunk

burnt coffee and she doesn't know what to think of Hicks. He approaches Marge who makes no move to stop him. „*He had reached out and placed his forearm across the back of her thighs; his arm slid upward until his palm was stretched across her buttocks. She was not facing him and he did not turn her toward him, but took one of her breasts in his hand and held it– not caressed but held it – an act of acquisition.*” [STONE: 95] She looks at him and after some time looking at themselves, they kiss.

The house is approached by Broadway Joe, the young man from the night before, and one more man. They try to trick Marge and Hicks that they are federal agents, but it is not true, and Hicks is aware of that. They just want heroin. Marge wants to give it to them, but Hicks tells her that even if she gave it to them they would kill them anyway. One of the men is handcuffed at the toilet and the other one Broadway Joe is unconscious. Hicks, Marge, and Janey are leaving the house and the man on the toilet is issuing threats.

### **Pages 103-156**

Marge and Hicks go to the bank in Marge's car. They leave Janey in June Owens' house, which is the right thing to do. June will give Janey to Converse when he returns from Vietnam. They stop at the house in the desert, and there are some people. Hicks knows a man there who is friendly. The other people are unfriendly. No one wants to buy the heroin. In the night, Marge has sex with Hicks. When Converse returns from Vietnam, he goes home. When Converse enters the house, Hicks and Marge are already gone. He sees that someone painted a devil on a wall where stood Janey's bed. The painting troubles Converse, so he speaks with the landlord to ask him whether Marge left some notes for him. She didn't. He tells Converse that he isn't the only one asking about Marge. He goes to Odeon to speak with Marge's coworkers. They say to him that she hasn't shown up for weeks. Converse is anxious when he hears the news, so he calls Elmer, his father-in-law, from the pay phone. Elmer tells him that someone is probably following him. He tells Converse that he should try losing them and then come to him. Converse takes a taxi to Macy's, where he successfully escaped from someone in the past. At Macy's, he sees a bearded man following him. Converse loses him and goes immediately to Elmer's office.

Elmer tells Converse that his daughter is in Canada with her family. Elmer believes that Marge is probably with Hicks. Elmer knows his daughter well, so he expects

this kind of behavior. He criticizes Converse that he is supposed to be smarter than that, and tells Converse that he disappointed him. Elmer also talks about the Feds and gives his opinion on what Converse should do, and Antheil asks questions about Marge. Elmer suggests that Converse should visit a lawyer, gives him the lawyer's name, and tells him what to do. While he is in the office, Elmer and Frances give Converse the job of writing a couple of articles for their magazines and tabloids. Converse stays in the office and talks and drinks with Douglas. Douglas asks Converse about Vietnam as he is interested in the details of being in Saigon during the war and what it was like to face threats, deaths, and destruction. Converse explains that he isn't the right man for these questions. For the true image of Vietnam, he should ask some soldiers. Converse, as a journalist, spent most of his time in peaceful areas and hotels. He was only on the line once, and he feared for his life so much that it was unbearable. „' *Once I was so scared I cried.* 'Is that unusual?' 'I have an impression,' Converse said, 'That it's fairly unusual. I think it's usual to cry when you're hurt. But to cry before is uncool.'” [STONE: 130-131] Marge and Hicks go to the strip in the morning to have breakfast. Hicks tells Marge that they will visit his friend Eddie Peace after breakfast. He tells Marge that he will help them get rid of heroin. They go to Eddie's house at Laurel Canyon, where they find that Eddie isn't home. Lois tells them that Eddie abandoned drugs and associated businesses and that he no longer does what they did in Malibu. Hicks persuades Lois to say to them where to find Eddie. He is at Gardena Auditorium. When they arrive, they see a room filled with extras commanded by a director. When they finally find Eddie, he tells them to meet him at Quasi's so they can talk. When they are about to leave, Eddie offers sex to Hicks, who declines.

Converse wakes at seven in the morning in Elmer's office. He leaves the building and walks around the city. He thinks of his mother and decides to visit her. Converse's mother suffers from mental issues and probably dementia. During lunch, Converse notices two men following them. One of the men is the one who followed him earlier.

### **Pages 156-204**

After lunch, the two men grab Converse and kidnap him. They are all in the kitchen of some home or apartment. They drugged Converse and interrogated him. The name of the two interrogators is Smitty and Danskin. It takes Converse a long time to convince them that he has no idea what happened to drugs and where are Marge and Hicks.

Smitty takes over the interrogation, and no matter what Converse says, Smitty beats him. Because Converse is drugged, he can't defend himself. He keeps beating Converse until Danskin stops him as Converse convinces him about his innocence. During the interrogation, they even burn his hand on a hot burner.

Hicks wakes up in a building in the canyon. The police are in the canyon, so Hicks wakes Marge, who is sick. Hicks gives her drugs that help with her sickness. They are on the run. Hicks drives to a hotel, and Marge is again ill. He opens one of the packages with heroin and gives her the drug. She immediately feels better, even deliriously happy. He is concerned whether she remembers everything that happened.

The story shifts again to Converse. Converse goes to Elmer's lawyer. The lawyer gives Converse advice. Converse isn't impressed. Later, Converse finds June Owen and visits her. Converse asks her about Marge, and she tells him about an affair with Hicks. She tells him that he should look back to Vietnam and that it was when the problems began. She also tells him about Antheil, who isn't a cop but a lawyer with rather unusual methods. He spends more time with June, and they get high and intimate. Converse remembers an incident that took place in Cambodia.

Marge wakes up in the night. Eddie and a couple comes to the hotel. Hicks comes out of the bathroom with two guns. When Hicks puts the guns down, Eddie introduces the couple. Their name is Gerald and Judy, Gerald is a writer who wants to write a book about the heroin drug scene. He has never done heroin, so he wanted to try it so he could write from his own experience. Hicks isn't happy about it. Eddie tells Hicks that he is doing him a favor and that Gerald is willing to pay 6000 dollars to try it and possibly even more. Judy is an heiress, and she isn't concerned about money. Eddie gets the first shot of heroin. The following person is Judy, but Hicks intentionally sticks a needle into Gerald. Gerald collapses, and Marge runs to him. She knows that he is worrying. Hicks and Marge leave, and later asks Hick what happened. Hicks explains that he realized that he took his rage on the wrong person and blamed the whole incident on him being drunk.

### **Pages 204-267**

Converse returns to the house where he used to live with Marge. Mr. Roche, the landlord, tells Converse that he changed the locks. When he enters the apartment, he meets with Antheil. There are two other men in an apartment. Antheil and Converse go

to Janey's room and talk about Converse's play and its main character. Antheil asks Converse if the play is autobiographical because it resembles him Converse. Antheil tells Converse that he is being stupid. Converse refuses to talk without a lawyer because Antheil has nothing that would prove that he did something wrong. Antheil threatens Converse that he can let him go, and within 24 hours, someone from his past might kidnap him or worse. At this point, it is evident that Converse met the wrong people. „' *I guarantee you'll be picked off the street within twenty-four hours.*' He leaned forward confidentially. *'Did you think about who you were cutting it on, running Scag? The bike clubs. The black dudes in Oakland. The syndicate. I think I'll feed them your ass'*". [STONE: 208] Antheil asks Converse what he thought when he decided to smuggle heroin to the US. He seems to Antheil as an educated man. Antheil then asks questions about Marge. Converse answers in a way that he talks about Marge's background, which is known to Antheil. He wants to know what kind of person Marge is and how to deal with her. Antheil wants to know if she is someone who would betray her husband and run away with three kilos of heroin and a stranger or if she is a victim. Converse thinks about it and says that Marge is moral.

Antheil says to Converse that he is the one who can save him and Marge from problems. He also says that if they don't follow the orders, they will both die. Converse again explains that he doesn't know where Marge and Hicks are. Antheil tells Converse that they are with Those Who Are, which is a group of dealers, faggots, and extremists. Antheil also calls them the scum of the earth. Antheil wants Converse to convince Marge to come out to avoid injuries or even death. Converse isn't convinced by Antheil and wants to walk away, which isn't allowed. The whole plan seems illegal to Converse. Antheil tells Converse that he needs to leave the town and that Danskin and Smith will transport him to a new location.

Hicks and Marge arrive at a new place in the desert which looks like Mexico to Marge because there are a lot of people in Mexican clothes. People in this place stare at them strangely. They enter a large building in which what looks like service is going on. A boy approaches Hicks. Hicks asks him where he can find his father. Hicks introduces the boy as Kjell, which tells him where to find his father. The cable car leading to Kjell's father is gone, which upsets Hicks because he was looking forward to riding in a cable car. They have to walk up the steep hill, and at the hill, there is a building. There are no

trees around the buildings, but there are a lot of lights and loudspeakers next to a bell tower. There are also many symbols, including swastikas and a serpent. Out of the house walked a red-faced man speaking in a Dutch or German accent. There is a strange atmosphere between Hicks and a man whose name is Dieter. Dieter is a Zen master who suffers from paranoia. Marge prepares to take a shot of heroin in her leg, and Hicks warns her to be careful. Marge is bothered about Janey and thinks that she will do the same as what happened to Gerald.

Hicks talks with Dieter about his need to get rid of heroin. Dieter refuses, and Kjell adds that the only drugs they have are mushrooms. Kjell also talks about the foundation of the place called El Incarnacion del Verbe, which was formerly a Jesuit mission house. Kjell also talks about how people think that Dieter is a God. Marge and Dieter get into an argument because Marge is a former Communist and thinks Dieter is a fascist. Marge blames the need of the people for all the troubles in the world and says that the world would be a better place if it was bombed. This idea makes Dieter angry. „When you say that, It’s cheap junkie pessimism. If you spend your time making holes in yourself and tripping on cracks in the wall – how else can you think?“ [STONE: 231]

Smitty, Danskin, and Converse go to a Fremont Hotel, where Converse realizes that they aren’t going to kill him. Smitty and Danskin play chess and get into an argument because Smitty plays poorly. Later, when Danskin goes to bed, Smitty starts to talk with Converse about his life and his job at the agency with Antheil. Converse is unable to stop Smitty from talking. Luckily for Converse, Danskin wakes up and stops Smitty. The next day Smitty talks about his skill in writing and that he could be a great writer, and that he could give Converse many ideas. Smitty also criticizes Converse and the tabloid they produce. Smitty becomes unpredictable during the day, and Danskin can control him only to some degree. Danskin tells Converse about his nine-year-old sentence for murder to impress him. Antheil is apparently angry about something. They go up to approach Dieter’s house, but their guide flees, and they get stranded in a wide open.

### **Pages 204-267**

Marge wakes up in the morning and immediately looks for the heroin. She takes high doses of heroin, resulting in vomiting and passing out. When she wakes up again, she speaks with Hicks and Dieter. Dieter tries to explain how it was before he surrendered to American Dream. There is a warning signal, but no one knows what it means.

Suddenly they hear a gunshot. There haven't been hunters for a long time in the area, and the only reason why they heard gunshots is that Hicks and Marge followed them. Hicks wants to leave and find the way out, but Dieter says it is too dangerous and that only the locals know the way out.

Smitty is more and more unpredictable and wants to shoot Marge and Hicks from under the hill. Another shot is heard, and Kjell screams. Smitty kills his horse for no reason. A man comes to the building on top of the hill and describes Smitty, Danskin, and another guy. Hicks says that they aren't cops at all. Antheil and others try to find a way up to the hill, and there is no known trail. Antheil says that the locals and police know the way up. The men form a plan. Converse will yell at Marge and convince her that they have their daughter Janey and if she doesn't give them the heroin, they all will be killed. Marge becomes hysterical when she hears John's voice. Hicks tries to comfort her that there is no chance they have Janey because June gave her to Elmer. Marge isn't convinced and agrees to take heroin to a point where it can be seen. She tells the man to meet at the village.

Marge approaches the men, and Converse tells them not to hurt her. Danskin mocks Converse and everything turns into madness. The gunshots are fired, including explosives, while Dieter's voice is heard from the speakers. Hicks is shot, and when Converse and Marge get to him, he is seriously injured. They form a plan that Hicks will be the decoy while Marge and Converse get the car and destroy all the other cars so the attackers are stranded. Hicks gets back to Dieter's house uphill. Dieter and Hicks get into an argument about leaving the mountain. Dieter's argument is that he is badly wounded. Hicks also wants more heroin, and Dieter is against it. According to him, he should forget about the drugs and focus on getting away. Dieter pretends to throw the heroin off the mountain, and Hicks shoots him dead.

At the very end of the story, Hicks walks along the track, fully aware of his bad state and that he is dying. He recalls many things from his past. Hicks gets to the point where he and Converse with Marge arrange the meeting. When Converse, with his wife, gets there, Hicks is already dead. Marge and Converse know that they have no other choice than continue with their run. Soon also, Antheil and Angel find Hicks' body, and on his backpack is a white tissue, signaling surrender. The heroin is in Hicks' backpack.

Angel wants to get the heroin and dump the dead body, but Antheil insists on burying him with dignity.

## 7. Michael Herr

### 7.1. About the Author

Michael Herr, an American journalist, and author who was famous for his acclaimed book *Dispatches* about the Vietnam War, has died at the age of 76. According to the reports, he passed away at a hospital in New York after a long illness. [WEBER: 2016]

*Dispatches*, published in 1977, was a groundbreaking work of war reportage that vividly captured the chaos and horror of the Vietnam War. The book was widely praised for its unflinching portrayal of the war and its impact on those who fought and reported on it. Herr was a correspondent for Esquire magazine during the war, and his book drew on his experiences as well as those of other journalists and soldiers. [WEBER: 2016]

Herr's writing in *Dispatches* is a unique blend of journalism, memoir, and fiction that is deeply personal and yet speaks to the universal experiences of war. The book is known for its vivid descriptions of the war and the soldiers who fought it, as well as its honest portrayal of the emotional toll that war takes on those involved. [WEBER: 2016]

In addition to *Dispatches*, Herr also worked as a screenwriter, contributing to films such as *Full Metal Jacket* and *Apocalypse Now*. He was known for his close association with director Francis Ford Coppola and for his contributions to the script of *Apocalypse Now*, which is widely regarded as one of the greatest war films ever made. [WEBER: 2016]

Herr's work has had a profound impact on the way that Americans remember and understand the Vietnam War. His writing, both in *Dispatches* and in his other works, has helped to shape our collective memory of the war and its lasting impact on American society. [WEBER: 2016]

## 7.2. Dispatches – Plot Analysis

### **Breathing In – part 1**

Michael Herr worked in Vietnam as a war correspondent. The book opens with a description of Herr's apartment in Saigon, the capital city of South Vietnam. The apartment has a wall map left by a French soldier before the United States entered the conflict after the First Indochina War, which ended in 1954 and, more seriously, in the 1960s. The country has been in the war for decades, new enemies kept reemerging after they were eliminated, and these enemies used terrain as a cover. The main tactic of the US army is to destroy it.

At the time, it was common for soldiers to use drugs often prescribed by medics. One of them was Dexedrin, which was an amphetamine that kept soldiers awake and alert, and another one was a drug to decrease anxiety and pain. One member of Long-Range Reconnaissance Patrol boasts that he had found the perfect balance between the drugs, and the effect of this mixture is that he can see at night the same way as if he was using night vision. He is on his third tour and has survived though he came back because war is the only thing he can handle in life. He has long hair to his shoulders, and nobody dares to tell him to cut his hair because of his craziness. He always wears a .45 pistol and knife, just in case.

Two other correspondents spend a month with him. Sean Flynn was a son of a famous actor and Page, who looked like a hippie. They didn't take the unit commanders seriously and often joked with the soldiers. They smoke marijuana and listen to rock'n'roll. One of the soldiers told them they needed to be always moving, which was the trick to staying alive. Helicopters were used to deliver ammo and reinforcements and take soldiers from action and back home to the dead. In the camp at Soc Trang, Herr is about to go into a firefight. He observes soldiers preparing for the battle. For example, they painted their faces as camouflage and tied rifle clips to one another for fast reloading. He also saw unusual and non-standard weapons. The atmosphere was tense, but no one came, so Herr left by helicopter the next morning.

Herr and Sean Flynn visit a large Tactical Base of Responsibility, where the Colonel is drunk, and discipline is absent. He fails to develop war metabolism, a special ability that helps you overcome the boundaries, like slowing down when the mind tells

you to run. There was no need for tension because Viet Cong wasn't seen for months. Herr spent four days at the base even though no action was to be seen.

The Viet Cong controls the ground, especially in a jungle, and American forces control the air with helicopters and jets. The daytime is the advantage for Americans, but the nighttime is the advantage for Viet Cong. During the daytime, it is hard to tell who is with you and who is against you. A servant can serve Americans drinks during the day, but at night he can bomb or mortal American base. There is no safe place, especially around the trails where are booby traps and, on the road, where there are satchels set around, and every movement is therefore risky. The danger is even more apparent while heading out of the base in a fast-moving helicopter. While jumping out of the helicopter, one of the soldiers injured and sprained both ankles.

Herr describes that war and its horrors the youth face every day drain the youth out of young men. It's the fact that they have seen too much death and severe injuries. Herr remembers one time he took a helicopter full of dead people. Some of them were in bags, and some of them had their heads covered with ponchos. The wind blew the cover of one of the soldiers whose eyes were still open. Herr had to cover his face and was amazed he could do it. For Herr, every war is hellish, and some will never recover. According to Herr, some soldiers lost their compassion for humanity and became killing machines, while others tuned into alcoholics and drug addicts. Medics often gave drugs to soldiers to keep them going. The danger is always there, with the dead serving as a horrific by-product of the war. There is no such thing as a safe place; the tense atmosphere stays, and discipline often breaks down. Herr emphasizes that few people can survive this without being permanently and negatively impacted.

The Vietnam War was the first war which was covered by war correspondents. It shocked the American public with its vivid and cruel realism. It is also criticized as one factor contributing to the war's failure because it turned the public against the war, which resulted in pressure on politicians to withdraw from the Vietnam War. On the other hand, everyone needed to understand what war entails as a hope that future conflicts would be resolved diplomatically. During the Cold War, the US and NATO, which supported South Vietnam, fought the USSR and China, which supported North Vietnam, in an indirect war. Herr writes in a narrative style that resembles a stream of consciousness. He interlaces together momentary impressions and scene fragments.

## **Breathing In – part 2**

Herr looks back on his first few weeks as a war reporter. He recalls seeing photographs of dead people in the war in magazines as a child. He feels the same way when he sees sexual pornography: shame, shock, and fascination at how something so unnatural can appear so real. In Vietnam, American soldiers kick enemy soldiers in the head and then shoot them again to ensure they are dead. Herr notices sexual arousal on the face of one of the soldiers who did the shooting. Herr is frequently asked why he came to Vietnam. His motivation may be to advance his writing career, but the war has a far greater impact on him than he could have imagined. Soldiers are there for various reasons, ranging from romanticized military service to killing as many enemies as possible. Herr hunts for contacts on his first day as a war correspondent in the field, dressed in a new military uniform. He finds himself on an airfield near Kontum, surrounded by soldiers who have just fought the war's largest fight. They appear as if they survived a stroke rather than a heroic battle.

Herr tells the three-week combat these troops fought at Dak To in November 1967. The front stretches for thirty kilometers, passing through hills. As the situation worsens, full divisions join the fighting, which is the most intense in two years. The conflict then unexpectedly stops when the North Vietnamese Army retracts. Herr examines the war aftermath while the soldiers tell short stories. Herr notices that most people's war stories are brief and clichéd, with the occasional original take thrown into the mix. Soldiers disobey a captain's orders to patrol the flooded airfield. Another correspondent asks a stupid question about what happened during a bad battle, only to be told that everyone was shot to bits. A soldier describes how he disobeyed his lieutenant's command to go up a mountain and report back. The lieutenant tries to do it himself and dies in the process. Friendly villagers surround helicopters evacuating soldiers from one area, according to one soldier. The Americans shoot the villagers to scare them away, but they keep approaching, seemingly more terrified of the NVA than the American fire. Herr had heard it all after almost a year.

A mortar round lands thirty yards from Herr. Everyone falls to the ground, and the soldier in front of Herr kicks him in the nose. Both think Herr is badly injured at first, and the soldier is concerned, but it turns out to be just a bloody nose. According to Herr, the soldier was laughing at him. The soldier may have laughed out loud, relieved that

the kick to the skull had caused no significant injury. Emerging saints, homicidal madmen, lyrical poets, and the brainless are the four types of soldiers identified by Herr.

### **Breathing In – part 3**

Herr explains that he does not remember dreams thanks to smoking marijuana before bed. According to him, many soldiers try to avoid dreaming because the mind filters out impressions from the senses, and dreams become agonizing because of the sensory overloads of battle. In the mountains, Americans trade cigarettes for marijuana. The author discusses how men go insane during wartime and the prevalence of body-part trophies. Herr comes across a soldier with a bag full of dried human ears while stoned with other soldiers. When Herr objected, a soldier tried to threaten him by pointing a gun at his heart and afterward laughed about it. Newly arrived correspondents have many questions about the dangers of war, but veteran correspondents believe the only thing to learn is to hit the ground running.

Saigon appears gorgeous from the air, yet the streets are teeming with violence and garbage. The Vietnamese do not always follow American orders; many pickpockets take everything they can, and the danger can make soldiers long for field firefights. Herr, on the other hand, points out that terrorism was at its peak from 1963 to 1965. Herr discusses how the secret military operations of the early war years, when the US was not as involved, were idealized. By 1967, these days had passed. The war continues to escalate.

At times, soldier requests can number in the hundreds of thousands. Meanwhile, the North Vietnamese Army is working on a strategy that US military intelligence is unaware of. The opponent attacks irregularly and for brief periods. The NVA never makes an appearance. The NVA troops are preparing for the Tet Offensive, which will begin on January 30, 1968, but this is unknown.

### **Breathing In – part 4**

Herr's nights in the woods progress acoustically from the ordinary jungle sounds through unnerving silence to war noises. He discusses how exhaustion affects troops more than it does in any other human activity, causing them to miss facts that may have saved their lives or to fall asleep while standing and conversing. The conversation concerns whatever they dream about, not their current surroundings. In the bush, the days are just as tough as the nights. Malaria and other infections can quickly immobilize even the

strongest of men. Whether they mean it or not, everyone uses the term good luck. Luck may even mean being murdered in their sleep or living to see another day. Soldiers who have survived a close encounter are frequently regarded as good luck to the rest of their unit. Most people have a good luck talisman, a religious object, or something from their homeland. Whatever you look at it, luck isn't enough to keep the battle at bay. Insanity affects most troops in one or more of its numerous forms. Herr uses the example of a grenade-booby-trapped latrine door. Because the enemy would not bother with anything so insignificant, a soldier who had crossed the line had to have set the trap.

Soldiers discuss how to win the battle, and one prevalent thought is to demolish the country and kill everyone, enemy and non-enemy alike. The pointlessness of this dark joke is similar to the pointlessness of the Vietnam War, except for some who believe that if the Communists are not stopped in Vietnam, they will invade the United States. Herr believes fighting on American soil would be more effective than fighting in Vietnam. The author joins the military on patrol.

The operation takes the entire morning, but only one man is killed, and no one can identify the body as a Viet Cong. In any case, the kill is classified as a Viet Cong. This occurs frequently, and different commands have varying policies regarding when to fire. The VC has a habit of preserving ammunition. Herr discusses how the sights and sounds of war persist in a person's mind even when not in a conflict zone. During the Tet Offensive's early days, Herr takes up arms. Before the Tet, he did everything for himself except carry and handle a firearm. Because the enemy encircles his camp during the Tet, he abandons his reporter duties and becomes a gunner. He goes to work in a hospital the next morning, doing whatever he can to assist out. Herr compares it to being at the Alamo. „... *as we understood it at the moment, they had the embassy, they had Cholon, Tan Son Nhut was burning, we were in Alamo, no place else, and I wasn't reporter, I was a shooter.*“ [HERR 1978: 68]

## **Hell Sucks**

The chapter's title is inspired by one of the slogans written on the soldiers' helmets and flak jackets. Herr illustrates the Tet Offensive's opening weeks in war colors.

In Saigon, strict movement restrictions turn the city's ordinary desolation into a dark shade of melancholy. The US forces are in a state of defeat, but the high command proclaims victory. Herr points out that the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army occupied most of South Vietnam until all US forces withdrew. Two popular rumors are confirmed: some Americans fight alongside the VC, and the NVA has slaughtered thousands of South Vietnamese in or around Hue, Herr's next destination. Herr rides in a truck with soldiers and other correspondents. The muddy route is lined with refugees, and the weather is rainy and cold. Sniper shots and rockets are fired at the convoys. Everyone understands that liberating Hue from the NVA will be difficult and bloody. They discover a deserted settlement, but the NVA still controls the Citadel of Hue on the other side of the Perfume River. The Castle becomes the focus of the fight that follows.

Hue was previously regarded as Vietnam's most beautiful city. There were buildings and a university built by the French. But the war had come to town, and bombed-out buildings, bullet-scarred walls, and napalm-scorched dirt greeted Herr. A US boat on a neighboring canal fires unintentionally on the soldiers Herr is accompanying, dispersing them for shelter. Nobody is hurt, but they are on the point of opening fire on the boat. The wall enclosing the Castle, where the North Vietnamese has dug in, is hammered by airstrikes. Herr sees a sniper shoot and kills a fleeing North Vietnamese soldier. Everyone wonders if they will make it out alive due to the heavy fighting on the ground. Casualties arise and rush the field hospital, forcing doctors to choose between those who might live and those who will die. One soldier with a knee injury is informed that he will be flown back to the United States to complete his service.

The soldier cannot seem to stop grinning. Marines work on putting their deceased into corpse bags. A difficult task becomes nearly impossible when a mortar round explodes on a pile of full bags. After over a week of warfare, reinforcements push the Viet Cong from the Castle. After the combat with Major Trong of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, Herr visits a palace. The palace and its surroundings are littered with dead bodies. It looks that restoring the place is impossible. Herr asks questions

about who the last monarch of Vietnam was, to which Major Trong responds that he is the current emperor.

### **Khe Sanh – part 1**

Herr argues that „*acute environmental reaction*“ [HERR 1978: 91] was used during the Vietnam War but that shell shock was used in previous battles. On the other hand, no parent wants their son to return home with shell shock. Regardless of the length, the soldier might not want to return home. Herr watches a young Marine approaching the end of his service during the winter of 1968. The soldier always smiles, yet his eyes never appear to be amused. If he laughs at all, it is a high-pitched laugh. He had been caught in an ambush that killed nearly half of his company, and the horror of the situation still haunts him. The time has come to go from Khe Sanh. The young Marine travels to the airfield and waits for a C-123 transport plane, but it never arrives, so he returns to his unit. This repeatedly happens before Herr departs Khe Sanh, so he never finds out if the young Marine ever returns home.

### **Khe Sanh – part 2**

Vietnam is divided into four geographical regions: the delta, the flats, Piedmont, and the highlands. However, military descriptors that carve the country into four regions roughly following the geography and named with simple Roman numerals are used in news reports on the war: I Corps (pronounced eye-core) from Danang North to the DMZ, II Corps (two core) from Cam Ranh Bay north to I Corps, III Corps (three core) from Saigon North to II Corps, and IV Corps (four-core) from the southern tip of the country North to III Corps. Herr believes that this turns people away from the country's character. He places Khe Sanh on a plateau in the Piedmont area. Close by, the hills rise, a location that would be dangerous even if the conflict did not exist. Montagnard tribes rule the mountains and hate the South Vietnamese. Because the civilizations are so dissimilar, and the Montagnards are isolated and primitive, there has been hatred between them throughout history. The tribes dislike the North Vietnamese for conquering their land, so they join forces with the Americans to fight them.

### **Khe Sanh – part 3**

The Khe Sanh Combat Base began in 1962 when a Special Forces Team of approximately a dozen Green Berets joined 400 indigenous troops to take over what was originally a French base. Tactically, the base is largely irrelevant initially, serving as an observation post to check up on North Vietnamese soldiers advancing south. Khe Sanh reports a concentration of North Vietnamese forces surrounding the base in 1966, causing the deployment of a battalion of Marines as reinforcements. More reinforcements arrive a year later. The preparation proceeds throughout the summer, with correspondents comparing the Khe Sanh situation to the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, which took place in 1954 and saw the French take a shocking defeat. For Khe Sanh, the proportion of enemy attackers to defenders is nearly the same. Surrounding Dien Bien Phu, the enemy dug trenches, and they are doing the same around Khe Sanh. Military officials counter this claim by pointing out that Khe Sanh is located on high ground, so more soldiers may be sent in if needed.

The North Vietnamese began shelling Khe Sanh a week after the Tet Offensive. As the presence at the military base catches the enemy's notice, a conflict appears to be unavoidable. President Lyndon B. Johnson declared that Khe Sanh must be secured at any cost to shift blame for failure onto the army. With 8,000 American and Vietnamese soldiers confronting 40,000 North Vietnamese soldiers, leaders want to fight this war on US terms and kill enough enemies to force the NVA to surrender and abandon South Vietnam. The Marines believe each is worth ten times as much as everyone else. Unfortunately, for many Marine patrols ambushed, this does not make them bulletproof. The mentality encourages the belief that being outmanned five-to-one makes no difference. The Marines at Khe Sanh, their commanding officers, and American politicians anticipate winning this war, despite a potentially catastrophic error: underestimating the opponent.

### **Khe Sanh – part 4**

During the siege of Khe Sanh, Herr stays for several days and nights. The base is probed by the North Vietnamese which is made up of three circles of razor wire placed around the combat base. The Marines are regularly subjected to incoming artillery and mortar shells and injuries. Five kilometers distant, the North Vietnamese attacked a location known as Langvei. The NVA surprises everyone by sending 24 Special Forces personnel

and 400 ARSV troops to defend against nine light Soviet-made tanks. Approximately half the Special Forces and 300 Vietnamese are killed in the battle. Khe Sanh is hit by a six-round-per-minute artillery assault simultaneously with the Langvei combat. Langvei survivors go to Khe Sanh, where some have gone insane.

Others are shocked by the fact that the North Vietnamese has tanks. Herr has an unspoken fear: what if the NVA performs a similar but greater offensive and overruns Khe Sanh?

Herr meets two Marines: Day Tripper, a massive black man from Detroit, and Mayhew, a white man from Kansas City who is very little for a Marine. Mayhew asks questions about one of his best friends as they stroll together to a mortar pit. His friend was wounded and is currently rehabilitating in Danang before returning to Khe Sanh. On their way to get supplies, the three men walk together by a triage hospital tent. Day Tripper is disturbed by the sight of the wounded and is concerned about what war causes to individuals. Mayhew ignores the situation as they walk by and carelessly sings a popular song. Herr gathers his belongings from a safe and secure bunker to join Day Tripper and Mayhew in their more potentially dangerous bunker near the perimeter.

The perimeter bunkers and connecting trenches are only 300 meters from the North Vietnamese trenches. Herr enters the bunker into darkness and smell, but it's nothing compared to what he has already been through. He speaks of a North Vietnamese sniper who, even though napalm is dropped on his position, proves tough to kill in his spider hole and how the Marines appreciate him for it. Day Tripper is irritated when Mayhew announces that he has prolonged his four-month tour. He's baffled as to why anyone would want to spend an extra minute in Vietnam. Herr ponders the various methods in which troops can be killed or crippled in war, as well as how they respond when an artillery round is fired. The North Vietnamese test the base at night. Herr and Mayhew go out to check the continuous shooting of an M-60 machine gun. One of the North Vietnamese soldiers has been injured and is screaming hysterically into the night. Another Marine shoots the victim with an M-79 grenade launcher, putting him suffering.

### **Khe Sanh – part 5**

Two realities define the conflict: the Marines at Khe Sanh and the higher command levels who speak to the media. The reality described by higher command levels completely contradicts what the Marines experience. Put another way. Commanding

officers lie to make things appear better than they are. Bad weather is beneficial; heavy casualties are minor; defeat is a tactical shift. Colonel David Lownds serves as Khe Sanh's press secretary. He dismisses criticism with platitudes and arrogance and claims to have no knowledge of Dien Bien Phu, even though this is exceedingly unlikely. Herr believes the Colonel is a decent soldier who would do things differently if he had his way, despite his shady dealings with the press. Herr travels across the DMZ in late February with Time magazine's Karsten Prager. The commanding officers are positive, but Herr and Prager aren't so sure.

They speak with General Tompkins, commanding officer of the 3rd Marine Division, who is dressed casually and sits in a spotless office, even though the two journalists have three days-worth of filth and odor on them. Prager asks a long, complicated question that takes around three minutes to answer. Prager is told to repeat the question by the General, who claims he has bad hearing. With a stronger voice, Prager asks what the General would do if the North Vietnamese attacked Khe Sahn and all the surrounding bases simultaneously. The General responds that this is precisely what the Vietcong should do. The two journalists travel to Danang at the end of their DMZ excursion, where a brigadier general from the III MAF Marine Headquarters holds a press conference. In a barely controlled voice, Peter Braestrup of the *Washington Post* raises a question. The veteran Marine wants to know why the Khe Sanh forces have not dug in. The general dismisses the question.

### **Khe Sanh – part 6**

At Khe Sanh, or anywhere else, the expected attacks never happen. By the spring, most North Vietnamese troops had left the area, as had the exhausted Marines relieved by the air cavalry. Due to intense bombing, shelling, defoliation, and napalm strikes, the previously lovely hillsides around Khe Sanh resemble moonscapes. The relief mission for Khe Sanh, Operation Pegasus, began on April 1. The Cav constructs a massive base eleven miles northeast of Khe Sahn, followed by smaller sites along the route to Khe Sanh. Marines walk cautiously into the hills, where they discover the NVA has fled in a panic, leaving their backpacks and equipment, indicating that the winter bombing was successful. Herr returns to Khe Sanh, where the situation has improved dramatically. He speaks with a black Marine about Martin Luther King's assassination and how it affects all black soldiers.

### **Postscript: China Beach—Khe Sanh**

Herr visits China Beach, a resort in the country where he may relax and unwind. Marines stationed there relax in the sun and beach, shower in hot water, and eat hot cuisine. Good combat Marines get leave China Beach frequently, but everyone gets to travel at least once during their thirteen-month tour. Day Tripper has arrived at his destination. Two troops recognize Herr from the 26th Marines' Hotel Company, who delivers him both good and bad news. An RPG killed Mayhew shot to the chest (rocket-propelled grenade).

### **Illumination Rounds**

Herr presents twenty separate situations with only one thing in common: they all occur in Vietnam during the war. While riding aboard a Chinook helicopter, Herr first interacted with Marines. He hears what he thinks is a huge hammer slamming the helicopter's underside, but it turns out to be gunfire from the ground. One of the young Marines is shot and dies right before Herr's eyes. From the battle for Hill 975, the 173rd Airborne returns. The Red Cross sends out young women to offer coffee, but most soldiers are too exhausted from battle to stop and say hello. One of the young women cries after one of the soldiers says something to her.

A senior Special Forces NCO begins with a story about how one of his friends licks the face of a good-looking teacher, and she likes it. The Continental Hotel caters to intoxicated military and civilian engineers from the United States. Because of their ugliness and arrogance, the Vietnamese tolerate the soldiers but despise the engineers. A young Special Forces sergeant runs the EM Club. He has been in Vietnam for 36 months and is nearing the end of his third mission. He can go home after three purple hearts but wants to finish this tour and return for another. He is, however, no longer capable of fighting.

Someone on the ground fires at the helicopter, prompting a Huey pilot to fire back. Herr keeps an eye on the tracers from the helicopter and the blinking gun on the ground until they get close enough to intercept. The ground's winking comes to a stop. A twenty-four-year-old Special Forces captain tells Herr about killing one Viet Cong and releasing one prisoner. His commanding officer presents him with a medal the next day for killing fourteen VCs and releasing six captives. A freelance photographer tells Herr that he witnessed the bodies of deceased VC being dropped from a height of two

hundred feet into the heart of a VC village. Herr overhears a young Marine inquiring about his legs with a Catholic chaplain. They are, according to the chaplain, but both were blasted off. The Marine begs for the chaplain's collar cross pin after his treatment and then curses the pastor for lying.

Herr and Davies, a helicopter gunner, share a joint. Davies lives with a group of Vietnamese ladies and believes one of them to be his wife in the nation. Davies is enraged by his wife's continued prostitution. He decides to relocate. A commanding officer explains why VC and NVA troops are referred to as Dinks. This is a shorter version of Rinky-Dink, which is a nickname for Charlie, a name that is all too often linked with soldiers' families and friends. Another correspondent questions the number of days a tired young soldier has been in the country. Slowly and glumly, the soldier responds. A loud-mouthed Texas helicopter gunner brags about himself.

A huge black soldier claims to be a member of the Black Panther Party and is attempting to recruit for the organization. During a firefight, another person plays Jimi Hendrix. Every day, a soldier from Miles City, Montana, checks the casualty list to see whether anyone from his little town has been injured. Because he forced a helicopter evacuation from another unit, a sergeant gets a lecture from his Colonel. A Native American soldier privately thanks Herr for a favor offered the night before if the man died. During surgery, Herr hands an exhausted doctor a beer. Herr is informed that a dead Marine costs the country \$18,000 and is told about his unusual dreams by a major.

### **Colleagues – part 1**

Herr opens with a staged World War II scene. By candlelight, a silver-haired war correspondent types a tale in a bunker. Two soldiers watch, and the Kid, the younger of the two, asks the Colonel why the journalist does this of his own volition. The Colonel believes the correspondent believes he has a job to fulfill and that he genuinely cares. Herr describes the complicated relationships that develop among reporters, photographers, and various types of soldiers, referring to war correspondents as „*Those Crazy Guys Who Cover The War.*“ [HERR 1978: 188] Herr, unlike most reporters, does not travel with a camera. He prefers to write his scenes in words rather than cameras, which he believes adds unnecessary weight to the process. The journalists and photographers treat one another as coworkers, fellow professionals who understand each other's motivations and feelings about the war, and the soldiers who fight it.

Soldiers' attitudes toward war correspondents range from admiration to hatred to disgust as to why anyone would voluntarily go to Vietnam.

The appearance of a letter usually attracts curious soldiers who want to see the weird animal that goes to fight unarmed. Some, such as Dana Stone, gain respect by leading patrols and scouting for traps and ambushes. Others are welcome in modest quantities because the military expects the journalists to report the truth. The Marines' missions are also made more important by their presence. The Marines are disturbed by the arrival of too many reporters and cameras just before a planned battle, as they wonder what kind of horrific circumstances they would face.

Sean Flynn, a good-looking son of the movie star, appears far too attractive to serve in a war zone. Despite this, he has an unmatched presence among reporters, as well as a writing style that characterizes the battle in a harsh, realistic way that few other reporters can understand. Herr believes that certain journalists are on par with accountants. They publish the facts, not the core of war or its underlying meanings. They don't have poetry, and many don't require it. Dana Stone, a twenty-five-year-old combat photojournalist, is accepted by all Marines. Stone enjoys confronting his coworkers and, in the process, making them laugh with his dry sense of humor. In an attempt to disturb Flynn, he tells him about the fierce battle Stone witnessed a year ago on a ridge the Marines are about to take. When a Marine overhears, Stone apologizes and admits that the false story was merely a silly joke on his coworkers.

Marines approach the photographers all the time after a battle. Predictably, all the photographs are of the same subjects and themes, none particularly interesting or amusing, and most are gory and tasteless tourists at war. The troops want to know if some of the images will be published in Stars and Stripes. The idea makes the photographers laugh. Herr admits that the soldier who displays a great dislike for correspondents may be right. While war journalists make a profession by reporting on other people's deaths, they also endanger their own lives.

### **Colleagues – part 2**

War affects both correspondents and troops in similar ways. After the first few firefights, most people lose their sense of adventure. Still, some keep going as if they're in a war movie. Herr and another Time correspondent, David Greenway, request the protection of a Marine as they sprint through a risky area, a senseless risk straight out of the movies.

Greenway stops to take a picture along the route, another risky move that may have cost him his life. Other correspondents take risks as well. In the thick of a conflict, photographer John Schneider rides his bike from Hill 881 North to the bottom of Hill 881 South.

Most reports given to the public by the Joint US Public Affairs Office and American editors highlight the war's positive aspects. Progress is always made. The kill ratios are altered against the NVA and in favor of the United States. Only a small percentage of true stories make it past the bureaucracy. Herr's MACV (Military Assistance Command, Vietnam) credentials are given to many non-correspondents, including feature writers from religious and firearms magazines, student journalists, book authors, and older journalists puzzled by the war, according to Herr. In his late twenties, Herr is terrified of the following in the footsteps of the older journalists. Unlike the other correspondents who must cover JUSPAO meetings and interview generals, Herr's job with Esquire permits him to spend most of his time in the field.

The correspondents are a broad group of people who share common emotions about the war. Everyone takes their jobs seriously, and friendships form rapidly. There is only one political stance: they are in the middle of a war, and that is a position. The correspondents are also subjected to accusations that their coverage of the conflict is losing the war by inciting more criticism back at home as well as providing the enemy with military intelligence. While doing their jobs, war correspondents put their lives in danger. Herr inadvertently wanders down a trail lined with bobby traps, miraculously avoiding setting any of them off. Reporters and photographers are killed by machine guns that do not cease firing even when they scream in Vietnamese that they are journalists (Bao Chi). Herr compiles a list of correspondents who died during the last two weeks. Herr tells the story of Page, a brilliant British correspondent. Page takes numerous risks and is repeatedly wounded by shrapnel. Page expects his friends to help him when he is in financial trouble. When he has a large sum of money, he helps his friends and repays twice as much. The Marines get nervous when Page enters a room because of his flair and obvious crazy. Page is a weirdo, a long-haired hippie, who embodies the true enemy whom soldiers want to kill.

### **Colleagues – part 3**

Herr maintains contact with his correspondent friends upon his return to the United States and feels unsettled, but he does not want to be obsessed with war all the time. His interactions with old friends are marked by longing and emptiness. During his first month back, he had strange dreams. According to the report, a massive piece of shrapnel struck Page in the base of his brain. Page survives, although he is not expected to survive. Page, who was expected to be paralyzed on one side of his body, regains some but not whole use of his limbs. Page arranges a party for his twenty-fifth birthday, not only to celebrate his survival but also to enhance his strange personality.

He talks about a British publisher who wants him to create a book about Vietnam that takes the sparkle and glamor out of the conflict. Page politely declines the offer. He feels that the glamor of war is not only accurate but also important.

### **Breathing Out**

Herr learns that people who served in Vietnam avoid talking about it. He also finds it more difficult to speak about war than to write about it. The subjects of his nostalgia include a black soldier with a peculiar dance, a bulldozer digging up the bones of a Viet Cong cemetery, a war photographer, Flynn, a scene of dead troops in a truck, his enjoyment of flying in helicopters, and China Beach. Herr sees no distinction between combat and rock and roll veterans for the time being. Rock musicians die regularly. The 1960s had its share of casualties. He notices a photograph of a North Vietnamese soldier sitting by the Danang River in a familiar spot where he had sat with his friends during the Vietnam War.

## 8. Philip Caputo

### 8.1. About the author

Philip Caputo is an American author and journalist who is widely known for his works about war, nature, and human nature. Born in 1941 in Westchester County, New York, Caputo spent his childhood exploring the outdoors and developing a love for nature. After graduating from Loyola University, he joined the United States Marine Corps and served as a second lieutenant during the Vietnam War. Caputo was one of the first American soldiers to land in Vietnam in 1965, and his experiences there deeply impacted him and served as a major influence on his writing. [CAPUTO: 2023]

After returning from Vietnam, Caputo became a journalist and worked for the *Chicago Tribune* for nine years. During this time, he covered numerous stories, including the civil rights movement in the South and conflicts in the Middle East. He also won a Pulitzer Prize for his reporting on election fraud in Chicago. [CAPUTO: 2023]

Caputo has written over 20 books, including novels, memoirs, and nonfiction works. His most famous book, *A Rumor of War*, is a memoir of his experiences in Vietnam and is considered a classic of war literature. Caputo's other notable works include *De/Corso's Gallery*, *Indian Country*, and *Acts of Faith*. In addition to writing, Caputo has also worked as a screenwriter and a teacher. [CAPUTO: 2023]

Throughout his career, Caputo has received numerous awards and honors for his writing, including the Guggenheim Fellowship and the National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship. His works have been translated into multiple languages and have been widely acclaimed for their vivid descriptions of war, nature, and the human condition. [CAPUTO: 2023]

In *Conversation with Caputo*, Philip Caputo discusses his muted response to deaths and suffering in foreign lands, with his emotional temperature having reached absolute zero. Caputo also experienced behavioral problems following his participation in the filming of *A Rumor of War*, which involved realistic battle scenes that re-triggered his suppressed memories of the Vietnam War. His life was characterized by post-traumatic growth, contributing to his creativity and enhanced use of sensory details as a writer, both in capturing his wartime experiences and years later as a correspondent. Caputo notes that the Vietnam War made him a writer and shaped his narrative style. Despite

trauma experts attributing Caputo's emotional numbness to PTSD, Caputo detests that term and instead uses combat veteranitis to describe his years dealing with depression and violent anger. Caputo states that the Vietnam War remains an open emotional circuit for him, and his experiences highlight the psychological damage that can occur following exposure to long-term violence. Caputo's life was coming apart at the seams, marked by heavy drinking, drug use, womanizing, and bar fights, which he admitted to being ashamed of. His first marriage lasted from 1969 to 1982; his second, just three years. His self-destructive behavior caused him to treat his family poorly. [MASSÉ 2015: 118-124]

Caputo's writing is driven by his desire to understand the nature of moral evil and to better translate human nature amidst tragedy and trauma. But reviewers also noted the book *Rumor of War* accounts of loyalty and devotion among Caputo and his men. Caputo's contributions to the canon of Vietnam War literature and to the field of trauma journalism are marked by his parallel narratives as a Marine in Vietnam and as a globetrotting journalist. In a 2014 interview, Caputo discussed many topics, including the disturbing state of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans' health care, but he didn't express opinions on what can or should be done to help today's veterans. [MASSÉ 2015: 115-117]

## 8.2. *A Rumor of War* – Plot Analysis

### **Chapter 1**

Caputo enlists in the Marine Corps at age twenty, hoping to stop his monotonous days of comfortable living in a tiny, mid-western suburban town. He goes into the war with romantic ideals of being a hero, thinking of ending the war in a matter of weeks or months and returning home to a march of patriotic compatriots who would pat him on the back and ask him to tell them another great story about his adventures in Vietnam. On the other hand, he discovers an unpleasant awakening to the realities of jungle combat with the Viet Cong, who refuses to play by the norms he acquired in military school. Caputo learns the truths of warfare in the jungle while also learning to understand himself, at least as much as he learns to comprehend the enemy.

Caputo begins his account by providing background information on the events that led up to the United States engagement in the Vietnam War. There was the strong

patriotism of a country that had just come out of World War II, the complacency that had set in now that the economy was growing again, and the government's effort to defeat Communism worldwide. Caputo goes on to give a number of personal motivations for wanting to fight in the war. Then there was John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address, where he asked men to do all they could for their country. Then there was Caputo's want to be a man and to be perceived as one by others. Finally, he had a strong need for thrills and risk. Caputo decides to join the Marines because they promise him whatever he wants.

Caputo studies battle tactics in the Marines' version of Basic Training at Camp Upshur, Virginia, followed by advanced training in Quantico, Virginia, two years later, and Officers Basic School after graduating from Loyola College. Survival skills, Marine history, rules and regulations, armament, and, most crucially, how to kill are all taught to him. On the other hand, Caputo recognizes in retrospect that he was only playing a game. He didn't realize he was playing with death because he wanted to be a man and was in danger. Nothing he had studied in his training could have prepared him for what he witnessed in the Vietnam jungles.

## **Chapter 2**

Caputo gets his first outpost in Okinawa, Japan, with a group of forty Marines from the Third Marines Division, following officer training. Instead of being welcomed by soldiers who have worked long and hard on the battlefield, he is greeted by men who spend their days playing in the bush and their nights drinking with prostitutes. Caputo tries to blend in with his platoon, a group of men who have been together since the beginning, enlisting, training, and traveling together. On the other hand, he feels like a foreigner in a new world. Slowly, Caputo gets to know some of the men, and he understands that they, like him, want to stop sitting around and get down to business.

However, this time is not wasted as Caputo learns valuable command lessons. Caputo learns the value of blending in and gaining acceptance from his superiors on one unfortunate day in the jungle. He takes this lesson to Vietnam and battles with it later as his criticism of the war emerges. There are multiple false alarms of war, but none work out for the men, and they eventually become weary of the hurry up and wait game.

## **Chapter 3**

Caputo keeps showing the reader the reality of war as they develop in front of his eyes.

The Marines' enthusiasm to fight a war they believe they can win continues to draw them in. Caputo introduces the reader to proud men and then tells stories about how they died or were seriously injured in battle. The novel takes on a grim tone as it progresses. Caputo's soldiers and two other companies are given orders to return to Vietnam. On the other hand, the guys are out partying or having fun with prostitutes instead of getting ready to go to war. Before they load up and leave on large C-130 jets, Caputo assists in rounding them up. On March 8, they depart at 8:00 p.m. for a defensive mission in Danang, Vietnam.

As the men pack and stack sandbags and dig foxholes and ditches on their first day in Danang, disappointment sets in. They were under the impression that they were about to go on a combat operation. Even when they hear about soldiers being killed or paralyzed, a dog being blown up, and a sandbag between two guys in a foxhole being blown up, they do not believe the war has begun. Caputo's first display of fear about being hit by enemy fire comes at night, with sniper fire in the distance and swarms of biting insects.

#### **Chapter 4**

Caputo and the rest of the Soldiers have been patrolling the perimeter, constructing new barricades, digging trenches, and waiting for direct action for more than a month. The soldiers of C Company have become depressed because of the heat and the heavy dust that accumulates on everything. Diarrhea, dysentery, malaria, and fevers of unexplained origin are among the illnesses that men suffer from.

They experience combat for the first time when they replace another unit on Hill 327, where they will have to wait some more. The first real action fought by an American unit did not occur until April 22, when the Viet Cong and B Company fought a battle. The commanders decide to change their defensive assignment into an offensive mission, and they prepare for a search-and-destroy operation because of this first true adrenaline rush. Caputo and the other men act like small children, motivated to participate as a brave hero. Although some platoon sergeants attempt to warn the young soldiers about what is to come, their remarks are ignored.

#### **Chapter 5**

The sound of battle wakes Caputo up. Ivan's guns are spraying bullets, and he's experiencing mixed feelings. He wants to witness action while also hoping to avoid it.

They are given a once-in-a-lifetime steak and eggs meal, one last excellent meal before they head on the dangerous journey ahead. Howitzers fire, and helicopters send three squads of soldiers straight into their first big fight in breathtaking jungle scenery and a fresh early morning wind.

They arrive in Viet Cong territory, the Annamese Cordillera. They pan out in groups in search of a small enemy battalion in the enormous jungle. Due to the dense vegetation, they can hardly see past the soldier in front of them. They are terrified, even though nothing happens except the enemy firing a few random shots. Caputo and his men arrive at a village four hours and three kilometers later, where they stop to look. They discover evidence of enemy operations there, including an elderly woman caught manufacturing anti-helicopter weapons. Even though she is a Viet Cong supplier, Caputo's empathy for her overcomes him, and he commands her release. Enemy snipers shoot at them, baiting them deeper into the jungle.

Caputo and his unit retreated deeper into the jungle, only to be restrained by enemy fire. They were knocked to the ground by the opponent, who had made them completely immobile. A sniper nearly hits Caputo as he gives the move-out signal, leaving him to reflect the coldness of killing. They look for ghost soldiers who have vanished into the large green bushes once the gunfire is over. Caputo says they haven't found anything after a day of searching and shooting.

## **Chapter 6**

Caputo writes about his first day of fighting in the spring of 1965 in a stream-of-consciousness style. Battle memories are mashed together and rolled over one after another. Lance Corporal Stone's hand is wounded, a corpsman is crippled, firearms malfunction, Viet Cong attack them, fellow soldiers collapse to heat stroke, a soldier dies from his injuries in a few days, and the third platoon burns down a village out of rage and hatred. Caputo makes it obvious throughout the story that he and the other guys, are beginning to realize the extent of the harm caused, both physically and mentally.

## **Chapter 7**

Caputo and C Company are transported into an isolated jungle southwest of Danang for a face-to-face encounter with the enemy. C Company begins crossing a muddy stream from the landing zone, only to be forced to retreat when they are ordered to retrace their footsteps in pursuit of a group of Viet Cong heading towards the dense jungles on

Hill 270. The VC is forced to flee through the swamp and then into the forest by the Americans' overwhelming firepower. C Company sees a still-burning fire destroying critical Viet Cong documentation, and they realize that a Viet Cong is nearby.

They find images of the enemy soldiers and their families and letters from home when they track blood trail into the jungle. Even more alarming, they learn that the Viet Cong soldiers are the same as them, kids with families and friends back home. The Marines' pleasure in a kill is mixed with their regret over what they've just done because of this finding. By the time Caputo and his men set up camp that night, each man is dealing with his powerful conflicting emotions. Some fearlessly speak out against the murders. Others tell the story of the war to help them get through it. Some still romanticize it. But, sooner or later, they will all succumb to the silence of sadness, which will last for a long time.

### **Chapters 8 - 10**

C Company resumes their jungle chase of the enemy after a restless night at the landing zone, passing through Giao Tri and returning to Battalion headquarters by vehicle convoy. Liberty is called the next afternoon, and twenty-five men are transported to Danang for a night of alcohol and sex. With that tiny boost in morale, two more weeks of missions bring them back to much the same situation as before. Bush searches, ambushes, sniper fire, waiting, and a few more liberties are all part of the game. Some Marines are injured occasionally, but Caputo's Company is not reported to have lost any lives. Caputo is ordered to return to Okinawa, Japan, for a week of training as an assistant adjutant before the end of May. Caputo, who is now incredibly close to the men in his squad, tries unsuccessfully to avoid the assignment and stay in touch with his men.

After training in Japan, Caputo returns to Danang and settles in at Company Headquarters. However, when he returns to C Company's camp to reclaim things he left there before leaving for Japan, he is met by his old platoon in a mournful, distant tone. He discovers after a short time that Sullivan was murdered by an enemy sniper while filling canteens on the riverbank. Sullivan is C Company's first casualty, and it comes as a shock to everyone. On his way back to headquarters, Caputo is left alone. He thinks about death the entire meal. He thinks of Sullivan, as well as himself and his soldiers.

Caputo takes on various part-time duties that are often assigned to junior staff. He oversees the mess hall's casualty reporting, document security, and legal matters. The most crucial to Caputo's mental and emotional development is his responsibility for casualty reporting. In this essay, Caputo's last romantic ideals of combat collapse into figures, mounting numbers of dead or injured men, both Americans and Viet Cong. Their men, personnel blown up by mines or mortar shells, run over by convoy trucks, or killed or wounded in helicopter crashes. Death takes on a more consistent look at this point. Americans, Vietnamese, men, women, and children who have died all have the same appearance, smell, and end. Caputo better understands the consequences of war while supervising the dead. People are dying. Houses are being demolished on both sides. During his time in this position, he begins to question America's true intentions in Vietnam.

### **Chapters 11 – 13**

The Viet Cong broke through their airfield fence and attacked headquarters in the middle of the night, which could have been easily avoided if the headquarters command post had been alert. The fighting is done by morning, but several vital planes have been lost. When Caputo's duty as a casualty reporter requires him to identify three soldiers from his old C Company, life at headquarters returns to normal. After their identification, he has everyday flashbacks of these dead men marching under his leadership, which proves to be a very traumatic time for him. Caputo views himself as a dead officer, and he sees the faces of the dead transferred onto the faces of the living everywhere he looks. Many people in his environment suffer from severe anxiety and sadness, harming themselves or others in violent outbursts. Caputo always keeps track of the stats.

Meanwhile, Operation Blast-Out begins, in which three thousand marines and ARVN forces, assisted by armored vehicles, artillery, planes, and the six-inch cannons of a US Navy cruiser, killed two dozen Viet Cong in three days. Men like Caputo, who have to keep a record of the score, are all too accustomed to statistics like this. Several soldiers and suspected VCs are arrested and escorted to Danang's headquarters. Everyone, young and old, is interrogated one by one. Viet Cong suspects are sent to the South for questioning and, most likely, execution by the South Vietnamese Army, while innocent citizens are released to return to a devastated country.

With the onset of the monsoon season in September, the number of people killed increases by three to four times. Caputo's previous battalion is sent out and replaced by a group of eleven hundred men from the United States. 30 percent will be killed or injured in the next six months. The conflict is still going on. More numbers are rolling in on the scoreboard of deaths as headquarters goes to the Dai-La pass. Caputo struggles to find meaning in the war and the losses it comes when Walter Levy, a guy who trained at Quantico with Caputo, is named as another combat fatality.

#### **Chapter 14**

As autumn approaches, the number of VC strikes, war losses, and aircraft damage continue to rise. On both sides, the war is getting uglier. Prisoners are seized, severely tortured, and executed as a way of dealing with the raging emotions that field soldiers experience. The men are ruled by fear and total disrespect for the rules of war. Caputo's persistent requests for reassignment to line duty are eventually given in November. He reports to C Company's base camp and begins rotations with his new unit on perimeter defenses. Within 24 hours, he second-guesses his decision to reenlist on the front lines. Caputo, on the other hand, continues, and after a month of Viet Cong strikes, sniper fire, and monsoon downpours, he receives his first R&R in nine months.

Caputo returns to normal life in Saigon for three days. He eats at the Continental Palace Hotel, walks on the streets, and hears gunshots from afar. He even considers deserting the war before realizing he could never do so without endangering his friends still fighting on enemy lines. Caputo is back on an aircraft to Danang when everything seems to be back on track. Then the fear comes back again.

#### **Chapter 15**

The guys of the Third Platoon are completely exhausted. They fight with commanders, fantasize about rebellion, fight temptations to beat up on little old ladies and wander around half-crazed with fear and anxiety. There is no way for them to get out, no way for them to move into a safe position. This is a problem that affects all battle lines.

Caputo and his men, on the other hand, are revitalized when they are assigned to cover D Company in their effort to remove Viet Cong from Hoi-Vuc. Caputo and his men are tasked with distracting the VC's attention from the village long enough for D Company to enter and take control. They find the VC by a river in the middle of the forest, and

Caputo's lead men alert him to get the men ready. When Caputo gets halfway across the clearing to deliver the good news to his soldiers, a fire breaks out all around him.

### **Chapter 16**

Caputo's division suffers no casualties due to their successful military barrage in establishing a cover for D Company. A handful of enemies, though, are killed. Caputo and his men experience the thrill of a group of men working together in a life-or-death situation. Caputo's feelings are heightened by the realization that his commands and quick thinking are responsible for the Viet Cong's death. Caputo's soldiers decided to stay on the battleground, anxious and fearful of retaliation from the Viet Cong. They are shelled early in the morning by their men or the enemy; they are unsure. Despite this, his platoon is uninjured.

They travel to Hill 92 after catching their breath after the onslaught, slicing their way through six or seven hours of jungle and tripwires to set up a patrol. Captain Neal radios in a Christmas cease-fire with an order to retreat to friendly lines as quickly as possible when they finally reach the hill and begin to rest for the first time in twenty-four hours. Because a helicopter lift is impossible, the guys must safely return through the bush. The men promptly headed out with applause and strong hopes for much-needed relaxation. Tragically, catastrophe hits in the form of an ambush-detonated mine just as they felt secure in their march back. Nine men have been seriously injured. Everyone is furious that they were so close to a momentary freedom just to have the VC take it away. The remaining guys uncover a wire extending into a nearby village and burn it down in retaliation for harboring Viet Cong after the badly wounded are flown away. They sit calmly and watch as Vietnamese residents flee the fire. They walk away without remorse or rage, just with feelings of pain.

### **Chapter 17**

The men who were hurt in the ambush were fortunate. They are either sent home to heal or return to war. No one is killed. However, on January 6, C and D Companies landed in the middle of enemy fire during a daytime helicopter attack. This time, the soldiers aren't that fortunate. Almost all people are injured or killed due to blind wrath that turns into mob behavior. They burned down Ha Na village, which housed over 200 Vietnamese citizens, without hesitation or thought.

The soldiers' nightmares vanished with the smoke of the village fire as they inflicted similar horror on others. There are simply ashes and calm towards the end of the evening. The injured and dead are flown out by helicopter the next morning while both sides continue to fire, and the fight continues.

## **Chapter 18**

The chaos continues as the battle claims the lives of the injured and the morals of the others. The danger starts when Lance Corporal Crowe learns of the whereabouts of two Viet Cong. An informant named Le Dung, who was previously interrogated and freed, not only points out the Viet Cong residence in Giao-Tri but also sketches images of their weaponry and provides the location of their squad. Crowe, on the other hand, instead of detaining the two VCs, takes the information back to camp and informs Caputo.

That's the first misstep. The second is that Caputo has a stronger need to do something, and he eventually decides to revenge for the rage and fear that rages within him. He orders the two identified VCs to be captured and, if necessary, executed. The VC is murdered, as he had planned, and one of them turns out to be their collaborator, Le Dung. Five months later, Caputo and Crowe are on the run for the murders of these same VCs. Caputo is irritated by the military court's carelessness in the horrors of war. He's being tried as if he killed a person walking down the streets of America, where no war is happening, and enemy snipers aren't randomly picking out friends one by one.

Caputo's evidence and Crowe's are expertly constructed by his advocate to obfuscate the truth, even though it is true. Of course, the higher-ups overlook this, preferring to keep the case out of the spotlight to not expose as much about the war or the thoughts of the soldiers fighting it. Crowe is released, and Caputo is convicted of only one minor crime of altering his statement under oath, for which he receives a slap on the wrist. Shortly later, he gets an honorable discharge and, along with 150 other nameless, faceless men, returns home to America.

## **Epilogue**

Caputo is back in Vietnam 10 years later, this time as a Chicago Tribune correspondent. As word of the war's end spread worldwide, he felt obligated to see the end of a decade of horrors he had observed while serving. Thousands of people flee the South Vietnamese and their allies' capitulation under North Vietnamese air assaults, shellings, and missile fire. Caputo watches in numbing horror as the aircraft before him is shot

down when the Americans are given the evacuation order. His helicopter, on the other hand, quickly clears the field. He and other journalists, military, and government officials fly over the South China Sea, greeted by a helicopter assault ship and a hot dinner. Soon after, Saigon falls, and the war's end weighs heavily upon those who served there.

## 9. Thematic Analysis

### 9.1. Substance abuse

In Robert Stone's novel *Dog Soldier*, the main character John Converse is a journalist covering the Vietnam War. The conflict disillusioned him, and he smuggles heroin from Vietnam to the US. Later he becomes addicted to heroin. Robert Stone wrote about drugs in connection to Vietnam War because many soldiers and journalists became involved in drug use, and heroin was often used to cope with the trauma of war. Drug use and addiction also serve as criticism and reflection of social issues of the time. The destructive power of drug use on individuals and society is shown throughout the novel. The following quote is when Hicks is on the run with Marge, the wife of John Converse, who is struggling to cope with depression, anxiety, and isolation.

*„She held the needle point upward and looked at the sky. [...] With her tongue in the corner of her mouth, she jabbed her thigh, lay back, and handed him the needle.“*  
[STONE 1997: 225]

In Michael Herr's *Dispatches*, soldiers use drugs prescribed by medics. It helped them to stay alert and reduce anxiety and pain. In the following quote, a soldier takes pills, „downs“ refers to sedatives, and „ups“ refers to stimulants.

*„Going out at night the medics gave you pills, Dexedrine breath like dead snakes kept too long in a jar. [...] I knew one 4th Division Lurp who took his pills by the fistful, downs from the left pocket of his tiger suit and ups from the right, one to cut the trail for him and the other to send him down it.“* [HERR 1978: 4-5]

Smoking marijuana while listening to rock n' roll was also popular.

*„„We packed grass and tape: Have You Seen Your Mother Baby Standing in the Shadows, Best of the Animals, Strange Days, Purple Haze, Archie Bell and the Drells, „C'mon now everybody, do the Tighten Up....“* [HERR 1978: 8]

The author himself smoked marijuana before sleep to escape sensory overload and trauma. Smoking marijuana helped him to forget all that happened the day before. The author also describes that the only thing left after a night of bad dreams is the sour taste of smoking marijuana.

*„In Saigon I always went to sleep stoned so I almost always lost my dreams, probably just as well, sock in deep and dim under that information and get whatever rest you could, wake up tapped of all images but the ones remembered from the day or the week before, with only the taste of a bad dream in your mouth like you'd been chewing on a roll of dirty old pennies in your sleep.“ [HERR 1978:33]*

In *In Pharaoh's Army*, Tobias Wolff also mentions marihuana. Although, it must be noted this was before his duty in Vietnam. This shows the presence of drug culture in the US, which was spread as a byproduct of the hippie movement.

*„I bought a Volkswagen and took girls to Wolf Trap and the Cellar Door. I smoked dope. I began a novel, which, somewhat to my surprise, I managed to work on in a fairly disciplined way. I fell in love. „ [WOLFF 1994: 61]*

In *Rumor of War*, Philip Caputo also mentions substance abuse.  
*„Proffitt and I stayed up half the night, drinking the last of our beer, smoking the last of his dope, reminiscing about the past and speculating about tomorrow. Although we hoped the embassy would order an evacuation, we had our doubts.“ [CAPUTO 1996: 340]*

## 9.2. Media coverage of the Vietnam War

Vietnam War was the first conflict that was hugely medialized. As Philip Caputo points out, some media had a shifted view of veterans. Media representing the left political view saw veterans as ignorant, gun-toting hardhats, or even psychopaths in uniform. This portrayal also ignored the reality of the experiences of many Vietnam veterans and served to demonize them. On the other hand, media representing the right political view showed Vietnam veterans as drug-addicted, undisciplined losers who were emblematic of America's first military defeat.

*“By the time Saigon fell in 1975, a ‘lot of hawks’ had an almost cartoonish view of the Vietnam veteran as a drug-addicted, undisciplined loser, the tattered standard-bearer of America’s first defeat. The Left drew an equally distorted picture of him as, at best, an ignorant hardhat with a gun, at worst as a psychopath in uniform. In the eyes of the antiwar movement, each soldier was the incarnation of what it considered a criminal policy.“ [CAPUTO 1996: 349-350]*

Herr, in *Dispatches*, describes how American soldiers and war correspondents used sanitized language to downplay the violence and destruction of the Vietnam War, perpetuating a false narrative that glorified American military power while downplaying the human cost of the war.

*“It was a characteristic of a lot of Americans in Vietnam to have no idea of when they were being obscene, and some correspondents fell into that, writing their stories from the daily releases and battlegrams, tracking them through with the cheer-crazed language of the MACV Information Office, things like ‘discreet burst’ (one of those tore an old grandfather and two children to bits as they ran along a paddy wall one day, at least according to the report made later by the gunship pilot), ‘friendly casualties’ (not warm, not fun), ‘meeting engagement’ (ambush), concluding usually with 17 or 117 or 317 enemy dead and American losses ‘described as light.’” [HERR 1978:222]*

Some of the coverage of the Vietnam War was redacted. The military personnel believed that the media coverage of the war was negatively affecting American morale and public opinion and ultimately hindering the military effort.

*„...sooner or later all of us heard one version or another of ‘My Marines are winning this war, and you people are losing it for us in your papers,’ often spoken in an almost friendly way, but with the teeth shut tight behind the smiles.” [HERR 1978:228-229]*

*„All reports had to be written in that clinical, euphemistic language the military prefers to simple English. If, say, a marine had been shot through the guts, I could not write ‘shot through the guts’ or ‘shot through the stomach’; no, I had to say ‘GSW’ (gunshot wound) ‘through and through, abdomen’ [CAPUTO 1996: 166]*

*„Sometimes I had to verify the body counts. Field commanders occasionally gave in to the temptation to exaggerate the number of Viet Cong their units had killed.” [CAPUTO 1996: 169]*

### 9.3. Personal experience and psychological toll of war

*In Pharaoh's Army*, the author reflects on his opinion about the impact that American troops would have on a small Vietnamese town during the Vietnam War. Wolff believes that it would have a negative impact on local people and the town's culture.

*"I was glad the American troops were kept out. Without even meaning to they would have turned the people into prostitutes, pimps, pedicab drivers, and thieves, and the town itself into a nest of burger stands and laundries. Within months it would have been unrecognizable; such was the power of American dollars and American appetites."*

[WOLFF 1994: 12-13]

Wolff isn't aware that even he has a negative influence on local people. Vietnam War changed him, but he is not aware of it. The following quote is from an incident when Wolff and Sergeant Bennett run over bikes with a truck.

*"I didn't say anything. What could I say? I hadn't done it for fun. Seven months back, at the beginning of my tour, when I was still calling them people instead of peasants, I wouldn't have run over their bikes. I would have slowed down or even stopped until they decided to move their argument to the side of the road if it was a real argument and not a setup. But I didn't stop anymore. Neither did Sergeant Benet. Nobody did, as these peasants—these people—should have known."* [WOLFF 1994: 4]

It shows the impact the war had on his perception of Vietnamese people. The war had a dehumanizing effect, and how it affected empathy with others. Wolff also states that he didn't run over bikes for fun but because he became accustomed to treating local people with disdain and a lack of empathy.

During the attack on My Tho, he realized that he and US soldiers were doing more harm than good. The quote suggests that the local people in Vietnam clearly understood how American soldiers would treat them if they were caught between the soldiers and the enemy. The narrator also reflects that this lesson was not lost on the soldiers. He implies that he learned this lesson, suggesting that he came to understand the reality of how the war was being fought and its impact on the Vietnamese people.

*"They knew that once they were among the people we would abandon our pretense of distinguishing between them. We would kill them all to get at one. In this way they taught the people that we did not love them and would not protect them; that for all our talk of partnership and brotherhood we disliked and mistrusted them, and that*

*we would kill every last one of them to save our own skins. To believe otherwise was self-deception. They taught that lesson to the people, and also to us. At least they taught it to me.” [WOLFF 1994: 140]*

In *Dispatches*, Michael Herr describes the soldier's face as having all the youth sucked out of the eyes, with the color drained from his skin and cold white lips. This suggests that the soldier has aged beyond the years of his war experiences and has lost the vitality and energy of youth. At the end of the quote, Herr asks the young soldier how he feels. Soldiers' answer suggests that war has affected their physical and emotional well-being. The quote highlights war's devastating impact on young recruits sent to war.

*“He had one of those faces, I saw that face at least a thousand times at a hundred bases and camps, all the youth sucked out of the eyes, the color drawn from the skin, cold white lips, you knew he wouldn't wait for any of it to come back. Life had made him old, he'd live it out old. All those faces, sometimes it was like looking into faces at a rock concert, locked in, the event had them; or like students who were very heavily advanced, serious beyond what you'd call their years if you didn't know for yourself what the minutes and hours of those years were made up of. Not just like all the ones you saw who looked like they couldn't drag their asses through another day of it. (How do you feel when a nineteen-year-old kid tells you from the bottom of his heart that he's gotten too old for this kind of shit?)” [HERR 1978:16]*

In the following quote, Herr retrospectively looks at his experience in the Vietnam War. He acknowledges that he didn't fully comprehend the seriousness of the war and the dangers he faced. The quotes from various medical personnel highlight the cold, mechanical nature of the war and how soldiers were viewed as mere objects to be transported and disposed of.

*“Coming back, telling stories, I'd say, ‘Oh man I was scared,’ and, ‘Oh God I thought it was all over,’ a long time before I knew how scared I was really supposed to be, or how clear and closed and beyond my control ‘all over’ could become. I wasn't dumb but I sure was raw, certain connections are hard to make when you come from a place where they go around with war in their heads all the time. ‘If you get hit,’ a medic told me, ‘we can chopper you back to base-camp hospital in like twenty minutes.’ ‘If you get hit real bad,’ a corpsman said, ‘they'll get your case to Japan in twelve hours.’” If you*

*get killed,' a spec 4 from Graves promised, 'we'll have you home in a week.'"* [HERR 1978: 21]

In the chapter *Breathing In*, Michael Herr shows that war correspondents weren't the cause of bad results in a war. Exhaustion and lack of attention to detail lead to fatal mistakes. This passage also highlights the constant stress and danger that war brings to individuals with the metaphor „half-assed and depressed, „which suggests that it was impossible to maintain effectiveness.

*"Every day people were dying there because of some small detail that they couldn't be bothered to observe. Imagine being too tired to snap a flak jacket closed, too tired to clean your rifle, too tired to guard a light, too tired to deal with the half-inch margins of safety that moving through the war often demanded, just too tired to give a fuck and then dying behind that exhaustion. There were times when the whole war itself seemed tapped of its vitality: epic enervation, the machine running half-assed and depressed, fueled on the watery residue of last year's war-making energy."* [HERR 1978: 54-55]

Some soldiers were disillusioned with the war that they wanted the whole country to be destroyed. The idea that the country could never be won, only destroyed, reflects a sense of hopelessness and despair among some involved in the conflict. This passage highlights the ethical and moral problems of the Vietnam War. Many extreme attitudes and actions were present throughout the war.

*"Some people just wanted to blow it all to hell, animal vegetable and mineral. They wanted a Vietnam they could fit into their car ashtrays; the joke went, 'What you do is, you load all the Friendlies onto ships and take them out to the South China Sea. Then you bomb the country flat. Then you sink the ships.' A lot of people knew that the country could never be won, only destroyed, and they locked into that with breathtaking concentration, no quarter, laying down the seeds of the disease, round eye fever, until it reached plague proportions, taking one from every family, a family from every hamlet, a hamlet from every province, until a million had died from it and millions more were left uncentered and lost in their flight from it."* [HERR 1978:59]

The following passage in *Dispatches* describes a soldier with a two-thousand-yard stare. The author notes that the eyes of soldiers in Vietnam were often strained, blank, or blazed-out, giving them a look of extreme fatigue or madness. The war profoundly

impacted young soldiers, pushing them to the limits of their endurance and changing them in difficult ways for civilians to understand. It also suggests that the impact of the war was not just limited to the battlefield but extended into every aspect of the soldiers' lives, including their expressions and body language.

*“It was the eyes: because they were always either strained or blazed-out or simply blank, they never had anything to do with what the rest of the face was doing, and it gave everyone the look of extreme fatigue or even a glancing madness. (And age. If you take one of those platoon photographs from the Civil War and cover everything but the eyes, there is no difference between a man of fifty and a boy of thirteen.) This Marine, for example, was always smiling. It was the kind of smile that verged on the high giggles, but his eyes showed neither amusement nor embarrassment nor nervousness. It was a little insane, but it was mostly esoteric in the way that so many Marines under twenty-five became esoteric after a few months in I Corps. On that young, nondescript face the smile seemed to come out of some old knowledge, and it said, „I’ll tell you why I’m smiling, but it will make you crazy.” [HERR 1978:87]*

Tobias Wolff, in *In Pharaoh’s Army* gives a description of life after war. Right after discharge he felt aimless.

*“I was no longer a soldier and feeling that change not the way I’d imagined, as freedom and pleasure, but as aimlessness and solitude. It wasn’t that I missed the army. I didn’t. But I’d been a soldier since I was eighteen, not a good soldier but a soldier, and linked by that fact to other soldiers, even those long dead.” [WOLFF 1994: 193-194]*

He felt that it is hard to follow the ordinary life.

*“San Francisco was an open, amiable town, but I had trouble holding up my end of a conversation. I said horrifying things without knowing it until I saw the reaction. My laugh sounded bitter and derisive even to me. When people asked me the simplest questions about myself I became cool and remote. Lonesome as I was, I made damn sure I stayed that way.” [WOLFF 1994: 195]*

## 10. Conclusion

The selection of authors gives readers an intimate view of the complicated and sometimes terrifying conditions during the Vietnam War. These authors, who draw both from their own experience and the experiences of their brother-in-arms, skillfully communicate the complex emotions they experienced during the war. Vietnam veterans offer a rare perspective on the effect of war on society, both individually and collectively, through their vivid memories.

Many Americans saw this conflict as a turning point in their lives. It forced them to face the harsh realities of war and its toll on individuals and society. The authors of Vietnam War literature highlighted the impact of constant danger on young recruits as one of their key themes. Vietnam War veterans' personal stories offer powerful insight into the hardships and experiences of soldiers who served on the front lines. These include the emotional and physical toll of war, civilian life adjustment, and trauma's long-lasting psychological effects.

These authors emphasize that the Vietnam War was different from any other conflict in terms of its intensity and scope, as well as the way it was fought. New technologies and tactics like helicopter warfare and guerrilla tactic created an unpredictable battlefield environment where soldiers were continually in danger and had to make difficult decisions, often with life-or-death consequences. The stress and intense pressure caused significant mental and emotional problems for soldiers. This led to PTSD, depression, and substance abuse, also discussed in Chapter 3—Criticism of the Vietnam War.

Another topic was the media coverage of the war. The media portrayal of Vietnam veterans during the Vietnam War was distorted and negative. One political view depicted them as gun-toting psychopaths wearing uniforms, while the other portrayed them as ignorant, gun-toting, hardhat-wielding soldiers. While the right view portrayed them as drug addicts and unrestrained losers, it symbolized America's first military defeat. Soldiers and war correspondents used sanitized language to downplay the war's destruction and violence. This false narrative glorified American military power while downplaying its human cost. Redactions were made because military personnel felt negative media coverage hindered the military effort and American morale. Reports had

to be written in euphemistic, clinical language. Field commanders sometimes exaggerated the number of Viet Cong killed by their units.

Regarding substance abuse, Robert Stone's novel *Dog Soldier* features John Converse, a journalist covering the Vietnam War. He becomes disillusioned with the conflict and smuggles heroin from Vietnam to the US. He becomes addicted to heroin later. The novel shows the devastating effects of drug abuse on society and individuals. The use of drugs and addiction is also a critique and reflection on social issues at the time. Robert Stone wrote about drugs and Vietnam War because soldiers and journalists were often involved in drug abuse, and heroin was used frequently to deal with war trauma.

Michael Herr's *Dispatches* describes soldiers who use medications prescribed by doctors. It allowed them to remain alert and helped reduce their anxiety and pain. This book vividly depicts the experiences of American soldiers during the Vietnam War. Herr was a war correspondent. He was also known to have used marijuana to escape the trauma and sensory overload of war. He found that smoking marijuana helped him forget everything that had happened the previous day. He also said that smoking marijuana leaves him with a sour taste.

*Dispatches* describe soldiers smoking marijuana and listening to rock 'n' roll. The book describes soldiers who smoked marijuana while listening to Jimi Hendrix and The Animals. Soldiers used it to help them escape from the realities of war.

Tobias Wolff's *In Pharaoh's Army* also mentions marijuana. It should be noted that this was before his service in Vietnam. This shows the existence of drug culture in America, which resulted from the hippie movement.

*A Rumor of War* also includes Philip Caputo's mention of soldiers using marijuana. He recounts staying up for half the night, drinking their last beer, smoking their last dope, reminiscing over the past, and speculating on the future.

Drugs were integral to the Vietnam War experiences for soldiers and civilians. The use of drugs was a way to deal with trauma, relax and escape from reality. Many literary works on the war show that drugs had a devastating effect on society and individuals. It also reflects on the social issues at the time that drug addiction and use are depicted.

Even though the Vietnam War is long gone, its legacy lives on in people's hearts worldwide. These authors have produced remarkable work through their unflinching honesty and willingness to confront hard truths. These writers provide a touching reminder to the servicemen who gave their lives and the lasting effects war has on our psyches.

## 11. Resumé

Vybraní autoři nabízí jedinečný pohled na komplikované a někdy strašlivé podmínky války ve Vietnamu. Autoři čerpali především z jejich osobní zkušenosti a ze zkušeností jejich spolubojovníků. Podařilo se jim tak vyjádřit komplexní emoce a dopady války skrze jejich živé vzpomínky. Mnoho Američanů vnímalo tento konflikt jako zlomový bod v jejich životě, a soudobé události je donutili čelit drsné realitě a dopadům války na jednotlivce a společnost. Autoři literatury o vietnamské válce především zdůrazňují emoční a fyzické dopady neustálého působení stresu na mladé rekruty, dále pak přizpůsobování se civilnímu životu po válce a dlouhodobé psychologické potíže a traumata.

Válka ve Vietnamu byla dle autorů odlišná od předchozích konfliktů. A to především díky odlišnému způsobu vedení války a také její intenzitě a rozsahu. Dále pak nové technologie, partyzánský způsob boje, užití helikoptér, nepředvídatelné bojové prostředí, soustavné vystavení nebezpečí, a nutnost rozhodnout se na místě v kritických momentech boje s finálními důsledky na délku života. Tento neustálý stres, vystavení riziku způsobovalo u vojáků mentální a emoční problémy.

Dalším důležitým tématem ve spojitosti s válkou ve Vietnamu je mediální zpravodajství o válce. Pohled na veterány z Vietnamu byl často zkreslený a negativní. Levicový pohled je viděl jako ozbrojené psychopaty v uniformě, a naopak ten pravicový zdůrazňoval, že vojáci jsou nekontrolovatelní, pod vlivem drog a mohou za porážku Ameriky. Korespondenti a vojáci používali pouze takové výrazy, aby zlehčili válečné násilí a ničení. Toto umožnilo vyobrazovat válku v pozitivním světle a oslavovat americkou vojenskou sílu a bagatelizovat lidské oběti. Tyto úpravy sdělení byly nutné, protože vojenský personál měl pocit, že negativní zpravodajství brání vojenskému úsilí a americké morálce. Někdy se stávalo, že například polní velitelé upravovali počty zabitých příslušníků Vietkongu tak, aby bylo mediální sdělení působivé.

Dalším tématem literatury z války ve Vietnamu je užívání drog. V románu *Dog Soldier* Roberta Stona vystupuje John Converse, novinář, který se věnuje válce ve Vietnamu. Ten je z válečného konfliktu rozčarován a rozhodne se pašovat heroin z Vietnamu do USA. Román ukazuje ničivé dopady užívání drog na jednotlivce a společnost. Užívání a závislost je užito jako zrcadlo tehdejších společenských problémů.

Robert Stone píše o drogách a vietnamské válce, protože vojáci a novináři byli často zapleteni do užívání drog, a to konkrétně do heroinu, který byl užíván k vyrovnání se s válečnými traumaty.

Michael Herr v biografické knize *Dispatches* velmi barvitě popisuje zážitky amerických vojáků ve Vietnamu a užívání léku a drog na předpis od polních lékařů. Užívání těchto látek pomohlo vojákům zůstat ve střehu a zároveň snížit jejich bolesti a úzkosti. Herr byl sám válečným zpravodajcem užívající drogy jako marihuana, aby unikl traumatu a smyslovému přetížení. Sám zjistil, že marihuana mu pomáhá zapomenout na vše, co se stalo předchozí den s jediným negativem, že zanechává kyselou chuť v ústech. V *Dispatches* popisuje cesty vrtulníkem, při kterém vojáci kouřili marihuanu a poslouchali u toho hudbu od Jimi Hendrixe anebo kapely *The Animals*.

Další vybraní autoři se také zmiňují o marihuaně, například Tobias Wolff v *In Pharaoh's Army* zmiňuje svoji zkušenost s touto drogou ještě z dob před válkou. To ukazuje existenci drogové kultury v USA, která byla důsledkem hnutí Hippies. V biografické knize *A Rumor of War* se o vojácích užívajících marihuanu zmiňuje také Philip Caputo. V krátké pasáži vzpomíná na chvíle se spolubojovníky. Konkrétně na událost, kdy zůstali vzhůru dlouho do noci, kouřili marihuanu, a debatovali o životě. Drogy byly nedílnou součástí vojáku a civilistů ve vietnamské válce. Užívání drog bylo způsobem, jak se vyrovnat s traumaty a uniknout z reality. I když je vietnamská válka dávno pryč, její odkaz žije v srdcích lidí po celém světě. Vybraní autoři vytvořili významná díla, a to především díky své neúprosnosti, upřímnosti a ochotou konfrontovat se s obtížnými fakty. Jejich díla poskytují dojemnou připomínku na vojáky, kteří položili své životy.

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