

Effects of war on the mind and body



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

All around a person can easily hear or read a story about a soldier of war and how that person is forever scared mentally or physically, by the things he or she encountered or saw in their time of duty. Demonstrated in the movies all the time are veterans having flashbacks back to the war or often how a loud sound easily frightens them conveying the permanent effects of war on a person. Not only are the repercussions of war mental though; physical effects are very likely also, such as an amputated limb, foot or hand.

In the novel “ The Things They Carried,” the effects that a war has on a person mentally and physically are greatly demonstrated though the true instances of the characters during and after the Vietnam War. In the novel “ The Things They Carried” there of course are many situations where men in the platoon are killed by enemy fire or from landmines; but obviously death does not take a toll on that person mentally or physically because they are simply lost souls. However, for the other men in the platoon it takes a heavy toll on the men.

For instance, when the platoon was underneath the canopies of the trees taking a break from humping in the middle of the jungle and Curt Lemon and Rat Kiley began goofing off with a smoke bomb. The platoon was not under fire or in any threat at the time but for a mere moment Lemon and Kiley let their guard down which in return caused a lost soul. O’Brien himself was a ways away watching the two goofing around with the smoke bomb while he watch Lemon step into the sunlight which he described as his face turning suddenly brown and shining, his sharp grey eyes, lean and narrow-waisted; then going on to say that his death was almost beautiful.

Although Lemon's death was only one of many, he cannot get the image out of his head. Stated in the text, O'Brien says that it happened nearly twenty years ago and yet he can still remember the trail junction, the giant trees, and the soft dripping sound somewhere beyond the trees. For O'Brien, the image of watching Curt Lemon disintegrate into the trees will forever be haunt him which is a prime example of the mental after effects of war. Although this incident happened over twenty years ago he can still remember clear as day.

Needless to say though, not all traumatizing events like this take the same toll on everyone. Dave Jensen for example begins to sing " Lemon Tree" while he and O'Brien are ordered to peel Lemon out of trees. While O'Brien was struggling to do so, Jensen had no problem in peeling his parts from the surrounding trees. Then later on down the Junction Trail, reality finally breaks Rat Kiley down and begins shooting the buffalo, first through the right front knee, then shot off an ear, then in the hindquarters, in the hump of the back, twice in the flanks and finally shot its mouth away.

Rat did not stop there, he began to take out his anger of losing his best friend all on the baby water buffalo, shooting its tail off and then began to shoot it everywhere in automatic mode. Mid-way through his breakdown he began crying and saying things but no one could understand him. After he had quit firing on the animal he cradled his gun and went off on his own while Kiowa and Sanders threw the buffalo in the village well. Some people today say war is not a big deal and it does not take a mental toll on the ones who serve but that is a fact of opinion.

Not all people can put the traumatizing images and experiences behind them. A perfect example of this from the novel is Norman Bowker and how he was 'responsible' for the death of Kiowa. After the war had ended, Bowker returned home to Iowa where he tried to return to his old life style before the war had started. Read in the text, it describes how Bowker had briefly worked as an automotive parts salesman, a janitor, a car wash attendant, and a cook at A&W; none of which had lasted more than ten weeks.

He had also enrolled in junior college but soon dropped out because none of the courses seemed tangible. Bowker stated at one point that it was almost as if he had sank down into the sewage with Kiowa because there was no purpose in life for him anymore. O'Brien goes on to explain how Bowker could not find life outside the war and hanged himself three years later in the locker room of the local YMCA. While some soldiers could not escape the traumatizing memories and could not wait to leave the war, there were some that got caught up in the war, for example Norman Bowker and Mary Anne Bell.

Like explained earlier, Bowker went home after the war and could not find his place in life besides the war, he could not escape it mentally. On the other hand however, Mary Anne got completely wrapped up in the war while she was visiting her boyfriend Mark Fossie. During the weeks Mary Anne was visiting Fossie, she quickly fell into habits of the bush. She quit wearing jewelry and makeup and even cut her hair short. For the short time she was at the base she quickly picked up all the ways of the soldiers. She could

disassemble a M16, went out on night ambushes and soon was talking the war lingo.

After the three week visit Fossie sent Mary Anne back home but only for a short period, within three weeks she was back in the war with the six Greenies. When Fossie asks Rat Kiley what happened to Mary Anne, he simple says, “ Vietnam had the effect of a powerful drug: that mix of unnamed terror and unnamed pleasure that comes as the needle slips in and you know you’re risking something. ” Then one morning Mary Anne walked off into the mountains all alone and no one has ever seen her since, simply taken in by the war.

Not only does a war affect a person mentally though; physical change is often just as common as any. While humping through all the rough terrain whether it is hot, sandy, dry terrain or cold, muddy, wet terrain; the obstacles take a toll on the body. For example in “ The Things They Carried” O’Brien describes the wet and muddy terrain of the jungle and how the rain did not stop for weeks. Humping through mud with wet boots and clothing would create sores on the feet causing great pain. Traveling miles and miles and miles without end will fatigue the body greatly making a person sore and physically dead.

Although the physical soreness and fatigue was most common among soldiers there was/is the issue of physical harm from enemy fire, landmines and missiles. Throughout wars and battles there is a nonstop amount of people coming in with amputations of limbs and severed appendages. Sometimes the wounds are not bad enough to be honorably discharged and

sent home such as O'Brien. He had been shot twice but both times not vital enough to be sent back to the U. S. However, if one was to lose a limb they are automatically brought back home and most likely receive an honorable discharge.

There are some instances though where some individuals have amputated a limb and with a prosthetic have returned to active duty. Another point I would like to bring up is throughout the course of war, at least in the older war days, soldiers would cope with mental and physical pain and agony through the use of drugs such as marijuana and tranquilizers. Ted Lavender for instance, in "The Things They Carried" relied upon drugs very heavily. Though it was a punishable offense under army rules many soldiers would still smoke marijuana because it would keep them mellow and focused.

With the hectic atmosphere of enemy fire and exploding missiles and bombs surrounding the soldiers, sometimes the use of dope was the only way to cope with it all, get a chance to relax, and even help them sleep. War can have no impact on a soldier at all or for others it can impact them greatly and sometimes permanently. For some, repercussions of a war are mental or physical, and for others it can be a combination of both. In the novel "The Things They Carried," the effects that a war has on a person mentally and physically are greatly demonstrated through the true instances of the characters during and after the Vietnam War.