

Leonard cheah

[Life](#), [Love](#)



Leonard Cheah 814725425 "Material Allies" In the short story *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien, First Lieutenant Jimmy Cross leads a band of his men through the hills and swamps of Vietnam while dealing with the psychological agony of both his love for Martha and the safety of his men. In wartime however, it is known that your fellow man is anything from safe. Much of the men have camaraderie, but know that at any moment the person sitting next to them could be killed. This is where the theme of classification in personality when it comes what they carried as the expressed nature versus the actual personal experiences they may have previously had. In missions, Cross would continuously try to analyze his men but end up finding the different things they carried as the symbols for their personality or so he assumed. One soldier in particular, Ted Lavender was seen in the group as a symbolic ideal of deadweight in terms of functionality in the group but yet held a parallel to the war and emotional attachment. He was known as a scared soldier, which is universally known to be counter intuitive in a war zone. To kill or be killed, is the motto, and having someone who is scared of the fight yet pushed on was again something more of detrimental ideal to the group. " But Ted Lavender, who was scared, carried 34 rounds when he was shot and killed outside Than Khe, and he went down under an exceptional burden, more than 20 pounds of ammunition, plus the flak jacket, plus the unweighted fear. He was dead weight. " (O'Brien 390). On top of that Lavender was known for having his six to seven ounces of his own premium dope, which for a person of that caliber in war would be essential. It would seem that Cross is the perfect parallel to understand more of the addiction that he deals with Martha. Cross constantly motions his

thoughts about his love Martha to the point that he does not realize that his inability to focus on the task at hand in a more constructive manner causing the death of Ted Lavender. Martha seems to be the item(s) within the story represented by the pebble, letters and pictures one signed love and the other against a brick wall. They were useless items to be carried around. They brought the ideal of hope in something that wasn't currently tangible but constantly used by Cross to hope and dream of better times away from the field of war, but in the end it causes greater consequence. He constantly thinks of Martha as some escape where he could be so happy and how they share this intense love affair that has no real connection to anyone but within Cross himself. This same counter-productive problem can be seen as the dope that was brought by Lavender. Dope from understanding is a drug that carries a feeling and connotation in nature that is the opposite of war. It is a feeling of calm pleasure to the user enabling them to relax and become passive. With the constant fear and agony of war lurking within the men and attitude, which must be stringent and watchful, dope is counterproductive. With its function being completely useless on the battlefield, it only sets up more of a symbolic nature of counter productivity, and thus will be removed. From the macro setting of the group it is that Lavender dies, from the micro standpoint we see that emotional comfort and useless things are eliminated. After the death of Lavender it is seen by Cross that emotional attachment and distraction from the mission at hand lead to the death of his own. In knowing this he burns the pictures of Martha. " On the morning after Ted Lavender died, First Lieutenant Jimmy Cross crouched at the bottom of his foxhole and burned Martha's letters. Then he burned the two photographs. "

(O'Brien 398). This is where the object of useless attachment progresses forward. To reinforce this, Cross also decides to take further measures that he should have taken before in which would be accepting the blame for Lavender's death as well as elimination of anything unrelated to the mission. " He would confiscate the remainder of Lavender's dope...He would accept the blame for what happened to Ted Lavender. He would be a man about it. " (O'Brien 400). In conclusion, the pictures which described both the personality of Cross as well as his addiction to anything but the task at hand, this was due to the fear of losing what he loved which was Martha but later projected as well as his men. He explains at the end that he will finally act properly and calmly as a Lieutenant that dictated no room for argument or discussion. To extend the ideal further, it is also the dope that Lavender had constantly carried that projected the ideal of numbness to the surrounding environment as well as the fear of death. With these feelings also embedded in Cross, it became hard for him to take the task at hand seriously because anything that had risk of loss would put him in a state of imagination back to Martha. Cross didn't want to believe that the missions and the death of a comrade was reality and he tried to focus on any hope of Martha despite it. Lavender was a key moment as well as symbol for Cross to finally see the past creating a bleak future which was enough of a shock for him to finally realize the fake reality of what he was living in his mind. It is also a parallel to that what isn't current to the situation one must live, it goes to show that anything but the immediate present can cause death. This is also the elimination of dope, which symbolizes the spawn of progression within Cross to finally burn the image of what Martha was and actually care about his

men properly with the ending of laxity towards the group. He finally sees that as a leader you must stand tall, and never lose track of the present situation.