

Things they carried



**ASSIGN
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The Things They Carried Essay In the book *The Things They Carried* guilt plays a huge role in how the men react and carry themselves. How does the guilt affect the men and how they carry themselves? In the book, the men in Alpha Company felt guilt for many things. Some felt guilty from killing while others from letting people get killed. In a way everyone feels guilty from something different, but yet they are feeling the same. Some of the men take the guilt in different ways some write while other burn pictures of the ones they loved. It can be said the guilt has changed the way they will carry themselves for the rest of their lives.

I guess you could say that all soldiers in these situations would do the same that the men of Alpha did. The first person that we see that feels guilty is Jimmy Cross. Jimmy was the lieutenant of Alpha company. Jimmy was not the leader type he was always thinking of home and the girl he liked, Martha "More than anything he want Martha to love him as he loved her"(O'Brien page1) . Jimmy kept Martha's picture and thought of her often. Jimmy would think of her on the beach, in volleyball, etc. One day Jimmy and his men were clearing the VC tunnels. Jimmy was thinking of Martha the whole time.

Not soon after one of Jimmy's men, Ted Lavender was shot and killed. Jimmy immediately felt the guilty of not being on task and letting one of his men die. Jimmy thought if he burned his one distraction he would never let another one of his men die again. Later on Jimmy burns the pictures of Martha and abandons the pebble that she gave him. Guilt made jimmy be a better leader and take his actions serious, Jimmy never did forgive himself for letting Lavender die. Tim O'Brien was one of the people who felt guilty

while in the war. Tim was on duty one night when a VC soldier walked by his post.

Tim feeling scared threw a grenade, the soldier shuffled his feet and turned to run. The grenade killed him and made a star impression on his eye. Tim looked at the soldier for a long time. Tim thought a story about him " he had no stomach for violence. He loved mathematics. " (O'Brien page 121) Tim's friend Kiowa comforted him trying to let him see the brighter side and helping him understand " You feel terrible, I know that"(O'Brien page 119). Tim dealt with his guilt by thinking of a story about the soldier, I think Tim dealt with a lot of what happened in Vietnam by writing his stories.

Tim had the guilt of not only killing a man but also of witnessing his friends die and people get killed. Tim's telling of stories helped him get a weight off his shoulders and get what he feels out in the open. The emotions that drive Tim to write is the same as other soldiers dealing with their problems may it be drinking or writing stories. Another person who had to deal with guilt was Norman Brooker. Norman Brooker was a member of Alpha Company; One night he tried to save Kiowa from getting stuck down under the sludge in a muddy field.

Norman pulled but he couldn't help Kiowa from sinking into the sludge. After Kiowa died Norman felt like crap and what made it worse that they now had to search for his body. The book goes into another chapter that tells about Norman Brooker's life. The chapter is based on the fact Norman is back home and drives around this lake many times and while he does he thinks about what if he had saved Kiowa and received the silver star. Norman then thinks

about how his father would be proud of him and how he would tell the people in town and the girl he once loved but now was married.

Norman drives around the lake many times and then goes to the drive in restaurant where he almost tells the order taker his story. I think Norman not only felt guilt about Kiowa but also about now receiving the silver star. If Norman would have received the silver star he thought how his father would talk to him and people in town throw a parade. Later Norman committed suicide, I think from depression of not feeling useful and having no place to go. Rat Kiley was a medic for Alpha Company, he liked to tell stories of wild things and make jokes.

Rat had a friend named Curt Lemon who was like Rat a jokester and loved having fun. Lemon would do crazy things like go trick or treating practically naked in a Vietnamese village and play with smoke grenades. Rat and Curt were inseparable they would do everything together practically. One day Curt and Rat were in the shade of the trees along the pathway on a patrol. Rat and Curt were playing a game where they throw a smoke grenade back and forth. After they were playing Curt stepped on a rigged 105 round and got blown up. Rat took it so badly that he shot a stray buffalo to bits.

Rat dealt with the guilt that he could have been killed instead of his friend by shooting the buffalo. Rat felt the anger that Curt died and that Curt died instead of him. The guilt of Rat Kiley is one that almost every soldier goes through by having someone die instead of yourself. Everyone feels the same about what they are guilty of in *The Things They Carried*, yet they feel guilt in different ways. The way guilt affected the men of Alpha Company is that

when they felt guilty they did something drastic no matter what to make them feel right with themselves.

I think they made some good and some bad emotional decisions based on their guilt. A bad decision was that of Norman Broker taking his life; and a good decision was Tim O'Brien's writing his feelings. I think for each man guilt can make you a monster or a perfect person based on how you react to it. If you react and make yourself better you learn and live your life better, if you don't you can become a nonemotional person. Lastly guilt makes every man in Alpha Company experience something that most people can't handle mentally.