Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans Study Guide

Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans by Wallace Terry

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Plot Summary

In Bloods, Wallace Terry has compiled the stories of twenty black Vietnam veterans. The stories range in experience from the gruesome to the heart wrenching to the idealized Vietnam of Hollywood. Terry does not interject his voice into any of the stories so that the reader often feels as if they are having coffee with the person relating the story. The language of the soldiers varies from illiterate to well educated and Terry makes no attempt to polish the veterans' words. The book is open, honest, raw, and truthful in its depiction of Vietnam, civil rights, and war in general.

While there is no apparent order to the stories, the reader still gets a sense of cohesiveness. Wallace Terry introduces Reginald "Malik" Edwards first. Malik's experience could be considered a typical war story. He is young, scared and confused. Although he has been trained to kill, the first time he shoots an enemy soldier at close range Malik is shaken and feels guilty. The racism that Malik experiences in the military fuels his anger until he becomes a leading member of the Black Panthers. Malik never gets away from Vietnam or the evil that he witnessed there.

Some of the soldiers have intense religious experiences while in Vietnam. Shortly before an attack on his bunker sends Luther Benton into the sky from a rocket blast, he receives orders from God to preach to the people. Luther does not immediately realize that he is saved from the rocket blast in order to fulfill God's command. Instead his whole personality changes from laid back to ready to kill. Luther does not follow God's call until he is back in the States and removed from the pressures of Vietnam. Other soldiers lose their faith after what they witness in Vietnam. Many of the soldiers report that their lives before the war are greatly affected after their tours. The men are so affected by what they are forced to take part in that they cannot help but be different men. Most of the men state that they feel betrayed by their country. They gave the best part of themselves to serve the United States only to be forgotten about or treated disrespectfully when they return home. Edgar Huff serves in the military for thirty years only to be the target of racism following his retirement. Some soldiers report no difference between the treatment of whites and blacks in the war. The consensus appears to be that those in the field were too concerned with staying alive to segregate themselves, while those in the back had more free time to fight white soldiers.

The last two stories in the book create the biggest contrast with each other and in comparison to the rest of the experiences presented. Dwyte Brown is one of the few men who can say they enjoyed their war experience. Fred Cherry has perhaps the worst war experience imaginable. Up until these final chapters most of the stories have had common themes and outcomes. Dwyte and Fred provide evidence that often it is the individual who structures his experience no matter what the environment. Dwyte and Fred have vastly different experiences in Vietnam but both walk away with similar feelings toward the war and Vietnam. The entire book presents an interesting study on war, individuals, and race relations.



Introduction; Private First Class Reginald Edwards; Specialist 5 Harold Bryant

Introduction; Private First Class Reginald Edwards; Specialist 5 Harold Bryant Summary and Analysis

In 1967, Wallace Terry is working for TIME magazine when he receives an assignment to go to Vietnam to cover the role black soldiers are playing in the war. At the time, the type of black soldiers is changing. The career soldiers have been used up and draftees are coming to Vietnam fresh from the Civil Rights movement in the United States. The new soldiers do not tolerate discrimination and call for unity among black soldiers. They name themselves "Bloods." The story of black veterans is unique. They fought in Vietnam while many close to them were fighting at home for the rights soldiers were dying to defend.

Reginald, often called Malik, is sent into Cam Ne with orders to level the village. Malik is trained in guerrilla warfare and can shoot the head off a snake but misses an old man running past him. He is constantly in trouble and is put on point as punishment for his behavior. Malik likes being on point because he can see what is coming at him. He finds Vietnam confusing. Malik's outfit once shoots forty members of Bravo company because the Viet Cong positioned themselves in such a way as to make Bravo company look like the enemy. After his first up close kill, Malik realizes he has killed a human being and feels guilty. Malik re-enlists for a second tour and works illustrating training aids. The position gives him access to a lot of intelligence information and time to think. Malik becomes more involved with civil rights but his temper gets him thrown in jail for fighting with a white Marine. Malik is thrown out of the Marines even though he knows a white soldier would not have been treated the same way. On the outside Malik joins the Black Panthers. He feels that fighting with the Black Panthers is just like fighting in Vietnam. The only difference is that now he is fighting against the country he once fought for. Even though Malik rises through the Black Panther ranks to head the DC chapter, the organization falls apart due to poor planning. Malik never really gets away from Vietnam.

As a kid Harold is nicknamed Light Bulb because of his ability to think on the spot. In the Army he trains as a combat engineer. He is frequently called upon to defuse bombs and mines. One day he is summoned to disarm a mine that a soldier stepped on but has not detonated. Light Bulb realizes the mine is a Bouncin' Betty that will explode no matter what. He ties a rope around the guy's waist and the rest of the company pulls him free. The only harm the man suffers is losing a boot. Light Bulb thought he was coming to help develop a nation but soon realizes that Vietnam is in the middle of a civil war. No one ever knows what is going on and lots of men get killed by making dumb mistakes.



To relieve tension the soldiers go to a place called Sin City where they find a soul bar buy some gin and a girl. Once his tour ends Light Bulb cannot stop thinking about the war. He goes back to school and works as a counselor for black veterans. At the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Light Bulb looks up the name of James Plummer. They were close friends but James was killed when an ammo dumb he was standing near blew up. Light Bulb helped pull pieces of James from the rubble to be shipped home for burial. James' death caused Light Bulb to lose his faith. Every year he reads the Bible hoping to find an explanation for everything that has happened, but he never does.

Malik and Light Bulb have similar experiences in Vietnam. They both experience a great deal of confusion and neither one understands why he is there or why there is a war. Both men dutifully perform their jobs and return home. However, neither one returns to the States free of scars. Malik's frustration with the treatment of blacks in Vietnam only continues while at home. His guerrilla training turns him into a militant Black Panther desiring to force change. Malik does not seem to realize that the war in Vietnam was also trying to force change and ultimately proved futile. Light Bulb recognizes the flaws in Vietnam and works to help others cope with the confusion. Light Bulb does not understand why many things happened and his continual search for answers in the Bible show the depth of his scars.



Specialist 4 Richard J. Ford III; Specialist 4 Charles Strong

Specialist 4 Richard J. Ford III; Specialist 4 Charles Strong Summary and Analysis

Richard feels insecure leaving Vietnam without a weapon and buys a .38 and a .22 at home. However, he has not completely left Vietnam behind and he flies into a rage when another car cuts him off. Richard was a member of Special Forces even though the doctors at basic training told him they would find him a desk job because of his bad knees. Richard thinks he is a tough soldier but his two Bronze Stars are awarded because of accidents. He shoots at an animal in the grass and ends up killing two gooks. The second star comes when he shoots a water buffalo and kills several hidden NVA. Richard and his best friend Davis capture an NVA sergeant and lieutenant. After the prisoners are interrogated the lieutenant is shot trying to escape but the company play a game of guts with the sergeant. They tie the prisoner to a tree and each man in the company, about 200, get a chance to torture him any way they choose. Richard thinks nothing of the game until he sees three American GIs dead from being tortured in the same manner. Back at home Richard joins the police department. He is very successful as an undercover narcotics agent and brings in twenty dealers. Richard then becomes a federal narcotics agent. He is shot in the head by a police lieutenant suspected of selling evidence drugs back onto the street. After that Richard retires on disability and does private security on the side. Richard and his brother-in-law speak at the Veterans Memorial. As he stands there crying, people tell him that the war was worthless. Rick feels used, manipulated, and violated.

Charles feels that the war was fought for money. No one really wanted it to stop despite the protests because it made the rich richer. Charles sees caches of US food hidden by the NVA and knows that the US is secretly helping sustain the enemy. Many soldiers begin to like killing. Charles is glad to see gooks lying dead. He is part of the Americal Division, Alpha Company, 1st of the 96th. Many of the men in the company are city boys who do not understand surviving in the jungle. Charles is used to scavenging and does not find gook food, rice, beneath him to eat after starving for four days. Charles begins taking drugs and soon becomes numb to all the death and killing. He eventually gets to a point where every fight is one to the death. Once out of Vietnam Charles refrains from all fighting out of fear he will kill someone. Charles reenlists for three years in order to avoid going back into the field. He trains as a welder and is stationed in Frankfurt, Germany. In December 1972, Charles finishes his commitment to the military and returns home to marry his long-time girlfriend. Charles has constant flashbacks of the war. For safety purposes he turns his .22 pistol into the police department, but then uses an ice pick to demolish his house after an argument with his wife. After a short stay in a psychiatric hospital, Charles leaves his wife and takes classes for computer programming. Charles finds the Lord and begins to live for the experience of life. He



learns to value all humans equally as he traces his ancestry back before slavery. All of Charles' dreams are gone except one. The remaining dream is about a "rabbit" in a tunnel who knew he was surrounded but refused to give himself up. The NVA soldier died for what he believed in and Charles feels this is the definition of a real man. Charles refuses to fight in another country again. He will fight on American soil but would rather die than go to war in another country again.

Both Richard and Charles become numb to killing and even find some enjoyment to their duty. Neither one immediately sees the impact of what they are doing. The Vietnamese, whether soldier or civilian, are to be destroyed. The men do not view the people as humans and so their treatment of those they kill is shockingly inhumane. Charles is numbed by the effects of drugs and does not confront his actions until after his return to the States. In many ways the NVA "rabbit" who refused to come out of his hole represents the kind of soldier Richard and Charles wanted to be. It is interesting that Charles does not view the man as a coward but as a heroic figure. Richard's tears in response to being told the war was worthless may also point out some long held regrets over the way he treated the Vietnamese. These men were told to act in a certain manner in order to achieve an objective but are then ridiculed for following orders. The Vietnamese man did not give up his beliefs or lower his military standards in order to survive.



HM2 Luther C. Benton III; Specialist 5 Emmanuel J. Holloman

HM2 Luther C. Benton III; Specialist 5 Emmanuel J. Holloman Summary and Analysis

Luther does not have to go to Vietnam because he is an only child but he accepts his orders just to see what the war is about. Luther is a sailor's sailor and regularly goes above and beyond the call of duty. He is assigned to a hospital in Hoi An that treats wounded Viet Cong. Luther is in charge of the pharmacy and dispensing medicine to local Vietnamese villages. Whatever the village chief wants Luther orders from America with no questions asked. Luther does not associate with the other soldiers because he does not want to get close to them and then have them die. Instead he takes the time to get to know the local Vietnamese. He learns that the Vietnamese oppose the war and think the Americans are crazy because they have nothing to gain by being involved. One evening he is sitting on his bunker when he hears the voice of God telling him to teach God's people. Luther tells God that he will follow orders when he returns home.

One early morning the hospital is attacked. Luther manages to escape because he looks more like the Vietnamese. Outside he engages the enemy praying that God will let him die quickly rather than suffering. He is blown into the sky by a rocket blast but when he lands he keeps on fighting. Luther is awarded the Bronze Star for his actions and re-stationed at an Army compound as the medical supply adviser. When Luther gets back to the States he forgets his promise to God until a naval officer walks into his room and tells him that God wants him to get started. Luther gets his degree and becomes a minister. He knows that God saved him in Vietnam so he could minister to others like him. Luther knows he saw the power of God when he was saved from the rocket blast while the guy behind him received many severe wounds.

Emmanuel is trained as an interpreter even though he never finished high school. He gets branded as a traitor and a gook lover because he makes sure that the Vietnamese receive compensation for accidental deaths and destruction. Emmanuel chooses to reenlist four times and refuses promotions in order to continue helping the Vietnamese. Even though the money paid to the Vietnamese is mere pennies, it is better than having nothing at all. Most of the Vietnamese take the money and only once is he ambushed while making a payment. Emmanuel has the ability to move around like most Americans cannot without being killed. Emmanuel notices that a lot of the soldiers are angry about being in Vietnam and take their anger out on the people. They shoot at locals with BB guns, drop tear gas into market squares and take personal items for no reason. He notices that blacks seem to get along better with the Vietnamese. The blacks understand the Vietnamese hardships because they live a similar life. Blacks pay for the things they get from the Vietnamese and take the time to learn a few customs and common phrases.



Emmanuel marries a Vietnamese girl name Tran Thi Saly. However, their Vietnamese ceremony is not recognized by America and the paper work for an American ceremony comes after he is shipped home. When he is shipped back to Vietnam he finds Saly but the son she gave birth to has died of pneumonia. Emmanuel is called home when his brother becomes ill and he is once again unable to bring Saly home with him. Saly gives birth to Emmanuel's second son and names him Tran Noc Tuan. Emmanuel is never able to return to Saly and eventually marries a Korean girl. They have a daughter named Goldie after his mother. Emmanuel chooses to remain on the Guard but does not let people come up behind him. His only physical wounds are some shrapnel that still comes out through his skin and a skin disease that makes his facial skin fall off.

Luther and Emmanuel find empathy for the Vietnamese people. Their military training did not involve, or they managed to stay immune to, the indoctrination that all Vietnamese are the enemy and must be destroyed. Luther and Emmanuel's stories show the war from the other side of the gun barrel. The Vietnamese villagers are innocents placed into a war they did not ask for and know will not provide them with a better life. The reader can see parallels with the blacks' struggle for civil rights in America and understand why the blacks and Vietnamese were able to form tentative friendships.



Specialist 4 Haywood T. Kirkland

Specialist 4 Haywood T. Kirkland Summary and Analysis

At the age of twelve Haywood has a vision of himself in the Vietnam War and then in prison for five years. It is 1960 and he has never even heard of Vietnam before. He is drafted on November 22, 1966. At boot camp the killer instinct is driven into him. He is a replacement in a division known as The Cacti Green who go anywhere there is trouble. Haywood volunteers for a small recon group where he can have a say in their actions instead of being just another blown up on the line. The most fearful times are when something is about to happen. In the heat of battle you do not think about what is going on but just act. When there is time to think then fear creeps in. Haywood spends a night sleeping in a rice paddy with water up to his chest during monsoon season. NVA are coming in their direction and he spends the whole night full of fear. His squad also performs search and destroy missions. They do not have the man power to hold captives so they just take out whole villages thought to be VC or VC friendlies. Out of maybe fifty villages destroyed, only twelve are found to house Viet Cong.

When Haywood returns to the States he plays crazy to keep from finishing his tour at Fort Carson in Colorado. Haywood becomes more and more militant. He thinks about all the old money coming through the post office he worked at that was just going to be burnt and sets up a heist. He and several other guys decide to hijack a mail truck as it makes a stop behind the biggest police precinct in Washington DC. They manage to steal over \$300,000. The use the money to buy food, clothes, toys and medicine for people living in the poorest neighborhoods. One of the guys is caught by the FBI and squeals on the others. Haywood is put in jail but the other inmates consider him a hero for what he did. While in jail Haywood becomes interested in Egyptian history and legally changes his name to an Egyptian one. He becomes a jail house activist bringing some measure of black equality to the prison. He also starts a Veteran's Affairs for inmates. His work in jail and an error in sentencing get Haywood's sentence reduce to six years. Because of time served he is eligible for parole and by noon the same day is a free man. On August 25, 1975, five and a half years after entering prison Haywood is released. On the outside Haywood continues working for Veteran's Affairs and the poorer black communities. He marries and has a little girl. Haywood eventually realizes that Vietnam was a power struggle the United States didn't know how to pull out of.

Haywood's vision is interesting in light of the fact that everything prophesied comes true. However, the question of self-fulfilling prophecy comes into question. Haywood could have been astute enough to understand the political climate of 1960 and heard his family discussing the events that lead up to Vietnam. Whatever information gave rise to Haywood's vision about Vietnam, there is little he could do to avoid the draft. More interesting is his decision to rob the post office. Haywood gives into his vision rather than trying to change it. However, if Haywood had not robbed the post office and been



thrown in jail his life may have turned out worse. Jail brought Haywood a purpose and definition to his life.



First Lieutenant Archie Joe Biggers; Specialist 4 Stephen A. Howard

First Lieutenant Archie Joe Biggers; Specialist 4 Stephen A. Howard Summary and Analysis

As a commander of blacks, Joe admits that the race often blames things on the color of skin rather than what actually went wrong. Blacks are a part of America and have a duty to the country because of that. Joe feels that blacks are not owed anything just because their ancestors were slaves. The whole time Joe is in Vietnam he only loses two soldiers. One is a headstrong boy named Cripes who refuses to follow orders and gets himself shot. The other is a kid named Oliver who always volunteers to walk point. Hobo is a dog in the company said to sniff out Vietnamese. After eight months Hobo is treated just like one of the guys. The men even give him shades to wear. Hobo alerts the men to an attack but no one pays attention to him. They are ambushed by NVA with snipers and a tank. The men try to defend themselves but are being badly beaten. Joe is hit by a grenade and then an RPG. His men let loose on the enemy until all are dead and the guns are captured. The men lift Joe into the air and hold him there until the chopper comes for him. Joe is awarded a Silver Star and his time in Vietnam is over. Hobo survives the ambush but is destroyed by the Air Force like all the other military dogs. The Air Force is afraid that the dogs will not be able to interact in civilian life after being trained for war. Joe wishes he could have kept Hobo and given him a good life. At home Joe is considered part of the establishment because he is an officer. The blacks figure he sucked up to the white man to get his position. Joe continues to work as a recruiter but black boys just make fun of him. Women do not respond to Joe either. He begins to feel cold and out of it.

Stephen is 19 when he is drafted. He has been raised by his mother to have a sense of duty and told that he must work hard to be as good as the whites. Stephen's mother sees Vietnam as an opportunity. Stephen works as a photographer recording all the maneuvers. The Viet Cong blow up the ammo dump at Long Binh which is the largest supply depot anywhere. The attack is really the Americans fault because they have Vietnamese as servants. The workers bring in bits of explosive every day over a long period in preparation for the attack. When the ammo dump is hit people who thought they would never fire a weapon find themselves armed with M-60s. In order to stay alive you looked for the nastiest grunt around and followed his lead. Stephen is shot down three times. The third time the helicopter comes down in the trees in hostile territory. The pilot is bleeding from the mouth and his back is blown apart but he is alive. Steven has shrapnel that went in his intestines and blood and waste are leaking out of him. Stephen pulls the pilot to safety and blows the chopper up to destroy any important information. After thirteen hours hiding in the jungle they are finally rescued.



Stephen is told he cannot get disability because he is fit for service. However, he must follow a strict diet and exercise regime to keep his intestines clear and his stomach muscles together. Stephen does not have flashbacks or nightmares but suffers from depression. The psychological wounds are worse than being shot in the head. They eat away at a person's inner being. Stephen feels that Vietnam produced a bunch of liars. The United States were not there for democracy or protecting America from Communism. They dropped water buffaloes from helicopters to prove they were mighty. His mother is still patriotic and believes her son served their country. Stephen does not hold his mother's belief.

Joe and Stephen have similar experiences once they return home from the war. Each man is wounded serving their country in a courageous battle but their wounds mean little to that country once the duty is performed. Stephen states that the psychological wounds are worse than the physical. Joe and Stephen's stories certainly appear to provide evidence for this statement. Interestingly the psychological wounds come after their return home. The way each man is treated by the country he has just given up so much for now refuses to acknowledge their service. The confusion of the actual war is now compounded by the failure to understand how following orders was wrong.



Captain Norman Alexander McDaniel; Sergeant Major Edgar A. Huff; Staff Sergeant Don F. Browne

Captain Norman Alexander McDaniel; Sergeant Major Edgar A. Huff; Staff Sergeant Don F. Browne Summary and Analysis

Norman is captured by the Vietnamese on July 20, 1966. He is an electronics warfare officer assigned to fly reconnaissance missions. Most of his missions are flown at night and without weapons. One early morning just before returning to base, Norman's plane is hit by a surface to air missile. The plane's fuel tanks catch fire. Norman is the first crew member to eject but is the least injured because he went up while the others ejected down toward land. He lands in an open field surrounded by Vietnamese. He is first taken to a prison camp called the Hilton and then moved to one called the Zoo. At the Zoo he is thrown into a six foot by nine foot concrete cell. Prisoners are fed twice a day but the food does not sustain them and Norman loses thirty-five pounds. The Vietnamese subject Norman to regular interrogation and torture but he refuses to give out more information than his name, rank and serial number. After the death of Ho Chi Minh, the prisoners are able to receive mail. Norman receives packages from his wife, Carol. Carol did not know her husband flew combat missions and she is shocked to learn he has been shot down. Carol has worked hard to keep the thought of Norman alive for their three children. After six and a half years as a POW, Norman is released and sent home to his family. The strong faith in God he had before going to Vietnam is challenged in the prison camps but made stronger because of his experiences.

Edgar retires from the Marine Corps in October 1972 with the rank of sergeant major. At the time he is the senior enlisted man in the entire military. Edgar receives congratulations from President Nixon, high ranking military officials, and the governor of his home state of Alabama. Twelve years pass before another black man achieves the rank of sergeant major. Edgar's family is extremely poor. He quit school in the eighth grade to work and provide for his mother. Edgar chose to join the Marine Corps after a man at work told him they were the best in the military. He is part of the first fifty blacks accepted into the Corps. Many men in the Marines do not know that blacks are now part of the outfit and Edgar is harassed by other soldiers who see him in uniform. Edgar moves up in rank quickly and is the first trainer of black recruits. He is also the first person to lead a black troop onto Chinese soil. Edgar does not let the prejudice affect his ability to command. He treats all his men equally and even runs into the middle of a fire fight to save one of his white soldiers. A few weeks after his retirement party, Edgar and his wife are entertaining guests when a car with four white Marines pulls into his driveway. The soldiers throw phosphorous grenades at Edgar's house and cars. The



men are identified but they receive no punishment. Edgar is mad that after serving the Marines for more than thirty years they do not care about him.

Don is career military by the time he reaches Vietnam. He is a member of the Air Force Special Elements Activity where he escorts VIPs at the American Embassy. Don wanted to be a pilot but bad eyes kept him from being accepted to the program and he opted for security instead. Don and his men live in a villa where a mama san takes care of them. They are given a bonus check each month just for living under the radar and are allowed to carry any weapon they want. When he arrives in Saigon in 1968 they begin receiving information that something big is going to happen. After a long time passes and nothing happens the men relax. One day a call comes for them to report to the Embassy and bring the Beast. The Embassy is under attack by Viet Cong. Don's team searches the building for any hidden VC. The mission is nerve wracking but they only uncover one enemy soldier. Don feels it is their own fault that the Embassy was attacked. The soldiers follow very set routines and are lax in their guard duties. It is easy for the Vietnamese to track their movements and know when to strike. Don is placed in a secret company that searches for particular Viet Cong and then destroys them. His involvement with the secret police does not allow him to collect any commendations or medals. He is awarded the Vietnam Campaign Medal which is given to anyone who even visits Vietnam during the war. After returning home and learning about the cowardly way the troops left Saigon, he feels let down and betrayed. Not only that but he is not recognized for his part in the Embassy battle because of his undercover position.

Don, Norman, and Edgar are exceptions to the rest of the stories in Bloods. These men are older by the time their military careers take them into Vietnam and most of them have a strong life at home that helps to sustain them. Each of these men serve their country strongly and without engaging in the atrocious behavior that leads most veterans to be scorned when they return home. Norman does not comment on the reaction he receives from the public upon his return to the States. His focus is on his family and the outside world's opinion matters little to him. Edgar is proud of his military career and assumes that his country feels he has served them well. However, neither Don nor Edgar receives the acclaim due them for their war efforts. Edgar is targeted by the very men he commanded and made to feel like a slave from the deep South. Don's actions in Vietnam were covert and therefore not able to be acknowledged by the government. His only medal is the same one that even celebrities received just for stopping in Vietnam. The United States is all too willing to call Vietnam veterans murders but perhaps if some of the truth were allowed to be known the proper respect would be given.



Specialist 4 Robert L. Mountain; Lieutenant Commander William S. Norman; Specialist 4 Robert E. Holcomb

Specialist 4 Robert L. Mountain; Lieutenant Commander William S. Norman; Specialist 4 Robert E. Holcomb Summary and Analysis

Robert is sleeping outside of the bunker because of the heat even though it is December 23rd. At 3 in the morning the bunker is struck by incoming mortars. Robert is hit and blood streams down his right leg, his left leg is on fire with pain and he is missing the ring and little fingers on his right hand. At the battalion aid station he is given morphine and then medevaced to Cu Chi for surgery. Doctors amputate his left foot and sew up the gash in his right leg that extends from his groin to his knee. They also tend to the four inch gash in his penis. Once he is able to travel Robert is sent home to his mother in Georgia. Robert originally joined the Army because he wants to play in their band. He tries to get out of boot camp but his mother tells him he must stay. After being drilled about killing Robert wants to go to Vietnam just to shoot someone and see them die. In Vietnam he works as a forward observer carrying a radio for a sergeant. In the Iron Triangle the action is always rough. Robert has never rebelled in his life but when a sergeant tells him to walk point Robert refuses. His actions get him moved into the field as a mortar man. Robert feels nothing for the Vietnamese and has no problems killing them. When Robert returns to the United States he gets married and has three children. He also graduates school and works as a counselor at Veterans Affairs. With the aid of a prosthesis, Robert takes up running. He participates in the first national track meet for amputees and sets several records. He gives his mother the medal for his first World Record and she keeps it next to his Purple Heart.

William is tired of the institutional racism he is subjected to and decides to get out of the Navy. Instead of writing a regular letter of resignation he details ways for improving the treatment of minorities in the military. William's letter is read by the new Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Elmo Zumwalt. The Admiral is eager for change and insists that William come work for him. When William first joined the Navy he qualifies for Aviation Officers Training and is the only black in his class. William does not experience overt racism but he is often slighted by his classmates. Upon arrival in the South China Sea William has no concept of the impact of the war and believes his missions are simply to destroy supply roads. The missions increase in intensity as the bombs become heavier, he begins carrying napalm, and more missions are ordered. William's third tour in 1969 is all out war. He is an electronics warfare officer in charge of relaying orders to fire, pursue, or change the rules of engagement. The new position gives him the opportunity to consider the war from an academic standpoint. William also has more access to intelligence information. After reading and thinking about all he has experienced he is



not sure the war is worth the number of casualties or that the United States government should be involved. William agrees to suspend his resignation to work with the Admiral even though he is not confident they will accomplish much change. Together Zumwalt and William implement over 200 programs in three years. Ships are named after black heroes, a black man is made admiral, blacks are on decision making boards, and women are encouraged to join the Navy. William finally resigns in 1973. He feels sad and disgraced when Saigon falls. The soldiers fought for honor but the policy makers did not understand the concept. William feels that Vietnam left a bitter scar on blacks who were there to kill and be killed. The war made blacks aggressive because the situation was compounded by racism.

Robert is drafted into the Army but tries to evade taking the oath for duty. He is finally brought in by the FBI and forced to take the oath in manacles. Robert asks to be sent to the field because he is bored being behind the lines in Pleiku. He is placed on a patrol on Highway 19 from Cambodia to Oui Nhen. While walking the Cambodian border William often thinks he will be killed. Once he is last in the line when the company is attacked. He turns to spray enemies in the rear with his M-60 machine gun and turns around only to find the rest of his company vanished. Robert locates them in some high grass but was positive they had left without him. Robert does not agree with taking pictures of dead Vietnamese or abusing prisoners for sport. Instead he gives out food, blankets, boots and anything else he has extra to villagers. The villagers come to trust him and supply him with information. Toward the end of the war drugs begin to play a big role. Soldiers are able to obtain more than just pot and will take several drugs in lethal combination and doses. The drugs make soldiers giddy or hostile and lives are lost due to stupid mistakes. Robert returns home the day after Christmas. He sleeps in a corner of his parents basement because he cannot handle sleeping in a bed on the second floor. He often has nightmares that he is still in Vietnam and almost kills his girlfriend in their sleep. Robert learns that he has an eleven year old son from a girlfriend he knew before the war. Robert goes to visit him but has a difficult time connecting with his son, Christian. Christian is impressed by Robert's medals but does not understand the meaning behind them. Robert returns to Vietnam with the Vietnam Veteran's Association to work reuniting fathers and children. He is disgusted to learn that the Vietnamese are no better off. The Communist government will not let the people initiate the changes they desire.

The three men in these stories are changed physically and emotionally after their tours in Vietnam. Robert Mountain is in country a short time before an explosion takes him home with an amputated leg. His decision to take up running not only helps him physically but gives him an emotional outlet for his experiences as well. In some ways Robert could be seen as running away from Vietnam toward a better future. William is almost forced to work for changes that will make the military more equal. While he originally does not feel that change is possible, the work William achieves with Zumwalt alters the future of the military. William's Vietnam tours are productive in a sense that many of the other men are not. Robert comes into Vietnam with strong feelings about the war. He does not wish to kill or be killed and his attitude gains him access to information that many others do not have. Robert maintains his opinions about Vietnam



and the United States' involvement long after his duty is served. His tours worked to reinforce his original stance.



Captain Joseph B. Anderson, Jr.; Sergeant Robert L. Daniels; Specialist 4 Arthur E. Woodley, Jr.

Captain Joseph B. Anderson, Jr.; Sergeant Robert L. Daniels; Specialist 4 Arthur E. Woodley, Jr. Summary and Analysis

Almost as soon as Joseph arrives in Vietnam his company is sent to search for a platoon wiped out by a surprise Viet Cong attack. As head of the company Joseph learns very quickly how to call in artillery. He has no time to think about his own survival or to be scared. The company recovers eight of the missing platoon and only one of Joseph's men are injured. Joseph receives the Silver Star but more importantly gains the respect of his men. Joseph's platoon is picked by a French movie maker to be the subject of a film called The Anderson Platoon. The film crew follows Joseph and his men everywhere. When Joseph's platoon is called upon to aid a down helicopter, his men execute the plan to near perfection. Joseph chastises the platoon for firing at shadows in the night but in the morning the find 200 dead Viet Cong in the grass surrounding them. Joseph always rides his men hard making them take the jungle rather than the open paths where they could be attacked. The men grumble but it keeps the men alive and he loses only one man during his first tour. On his second tour Joseph is stationed in Cambodia. His outfit searches for food and weapon caches. On the first night they engage the NVA in a fire fight. Usually the NVA do not stay and fight but on this night they do. Joseph's men later uncover a large weapon cache with ten tons of food and fifty tons of weapons and ammunition. It is the largest cache brought in by the Cavalry during the war. As the war enters the 1970s, the men begin to change. They feel that the United States is no longer supportive of them and they become more concerned with personal defense and going home. At home Joseph realizes that the US does not care about winning the war. He feels no remorse for his actions in Vietnam. His tours helped to enhance his career but he chooses to resign rather than sit around waiting to be made a general. Joseph's Vietnam experience becomes shaped by The Anderson Platoon and his true memories fade.

Robert has never been away from home before and the entire time he is in the military he is full of fear. Robert does not trust any Vietnamese and stays out of the villages for seven months after arriving in country. When Robert has only a month left to go in Vietnam he is assigned to drive an Amtrac in the field. He is fourth in line when a missed mine explodes and blows him into the air. Robert is trapped under the track. He manages to dig his legs out but is covered in third degree burns. Skin grafts are taken from his leg to put on his head, forehead and arm. Robert loses his right hand to gangrene and undergoes numerous operations. He returns home to live with his mother and goes back to school for accounting. No one will hire him because of his scars so he



goes on disability. After six years the government tells him he is not eligible for anymore benefits because he is fit to work. Robert is amazed that the Vietnamese immigrants get lots of help but he gets nothing. He fought for his country but his country will not help him. Robert wishes he had come back the same as he went over because he lost a body part but gave his whole life.

Gene is a naive 18 year old when he arrives in Vietnam but he guickly becomes an animal. Gene does so well as pointman on his first mission that he gets assigned there permanently. Gene made the decision to join the Army as a lifer and trained in jump school, the Rangers and Special Forces. He is trained in all areas of martial arts and knows a thousand different ways to kill a man. As a LURP Gene is sent into an area where he is attacked by friendly fire. The knowledge that his own countrymen shot at him starts to turn him into an animal. One one mission Gene is dropped into an area to search for the wreckage of a downed plane. The wreck happened three days ago but he finds a man staked to the ground with his skin peeled off but still alive. Gene has no resources to care for the man and headquarters tell him he must decide what to do. The man begs Gene to kill him. After asking the rest of his team to move off, Gene asks the man one more time if he really wants to die and then shoots him in the head. The killing is especially difficult because the man is a fellow soldier and not one of the enemy. His men call him Cyclops because of a bad eye but the Vietnamese call him Mantagnard because of the way he dresses. Instead of wearing his military uniform, Gene wears a loin cloth, bandanna, face paint, grenades and ammo. He also wears the ears and fingers of men he kills as a necklace. All of the killing begins to bother Gene. He sees all the soldiers as animals but he is the biggest one because he does not care. When he leaves Vietnam his hair is matted, he has a full beard, has not bathed in six months and is wearing jungle fatigues.

At home he remains an animal until his mother makes him confront the things he did in Vietnam. Once he calms down he encounters a Vietnamese store owner who recognizes Gene as the Mantagnard Man. Gene is angry that America helped this Vietnamese immigrant but will not help him find a job or get an education. He realizes that America fought the war for money, not democracy, and had no interest in winning. Gene still cries for the soldier he shot. He often dreams it was himself staked to the ground. Gene always pleads for someone to pull the trigger but he wakes up before they do.

Joseph, Robert and Gene come into Vietnam very young. They do not understand what they are getting into or exactly why the war is being fought. Vietnam forces each man to grow up quickly in order to survive and alters their boyhood views of the world. Joe conducts himself as a strict military man who takes his duty very seriously. However, his experience is buffered by the camera crew constantly following him and his men. What is portrayed in the film overshadows Joe's real memories of Vietnam perhaps making the ordeal easier for him to bear. Robert's experience is slightly comical. He spends the first part of his tour living very cautiously so as not to get hurt or lose a good friend. Robert does a very good job avoiding direct combat or danger until a month before his tour ends. The fact that Robert has avoided injury thus far indicates his strong instincts. Perhaps the most interesting part of Robert's story is that his experience illustrates that



no one is safe in Vietnam and the conclusion of one's tour does not signify safety. Gene's transformation from naive boy to militant man is perhaps what many people think of when they consider Vietnam. The brutalities made young men ferocious killers. The only way many of these young men can cope is to go off the deep end in their actions. Gene's dream about pleading for someone to pull the trigger and put him out of his misery could be one experienced by all veterans. The memories rarely disappear completely and the traces of what are left are still too horrible to face.



Radarman Second Class Dwyte A. Brown; Colonel Fred V. Cherry

Radarman Second Class Dwyte A. Brown; Colonel Fred V. Cherry Summary and Analysis

Dwyte spends his tour in Cam Ranh Bay the R and R spot. He never sees the real war and actually enjoys Vietnam so much that he considers staving permanently. As a member of the Navy Dwyte has access to the best of everything: Vietnamese cooks, lobster, steak, luxury rooms, women and drugs. Instead of fighting the enemy the black and white soldiers fight each other. Dwyte works as a radarman for Captain Hoffman. His position affords him a lot of freedom that the other blacks do not enjoy. He can take the officer's jeep, refuse to salute, and he does not work when the Captain is gone. Along with several other blacks who work security, Dwyte runs a prostitution ring. The blacks also have a cave where they hang out. A generator provides light, the blacks from the commissary bring food, there are plenty of women and even a swimming hole. The cave is shut down when the executive officer orders them to share the hang out with the white soldiers. The blacks refuse and close up the cave. Dwyte never kills anyone in Vietnam. He is a Vietnam veteran but because he is not an ex-addict or ex-Vietnamese people in the State view him as a regular Joe. He has trouble finding work and finally takes a job as an elevator mechanic. When the Communists take over Vietnam, he feels bad for the Vietnamese. Dwyte always felt bad for the Vietnamese and was nice to them during his tour in country.

From the time he is a little boy, Fred knows he wants to be a fighter pilot. By the time Fred is sent into Vietnam he has already flown 53 missions in the Korean War. In October 1965, Fred is sent out in bad weather on a missile installation mission. Just as he reaches the target he is hit. The plane begins to explode and Fred ejects even though he does not know if the plane is right side up or not. The speed and altitude at which Fred is flying cause his equipment to malfunction and he lands still strapped into his seat. A group of Vietnamese militia immediately surround him and relieve him of his weapons. They take him to Hoa Lo Prison or the Hanoi Hilton as Americans call it. Fred is interrogated all night but he gives up no information despite being tortured and suffering intense pain from the wounds he suffered during the plane crash. Fred is moved to Cu Loc Prison in November where he meets Porter Halyburton. Haly is a white Navy lieutenant but after several weeks of testing each other the two become close friends.

It takes several months before the prison guards provide medical attention for Fred's crash wounds. The care they provide is way below standard and he becomes delirious from infection. When Fred is operated on the doctors do not use anesthetic and they even put in non-dissolvable stitches to keep his wound from healing properly. Even though Fred is barely alive the guards still subject him to interrogation and torture. He is



beaten so severely that one of his ribs break and punctures a lung. Fred receives surgery to remove the rib and patch the lung but is then thrown into solitary confinement for 53 weeks. This is not the only time Fred is placed in solitary but it is the longest sentence he endures. While in solitary the guards make try to brainwash him and force him to make tapes denouncing the war and America. Fred manages to remain strong enough to resist. Fred never considers suicide or gives up on the thought of rescue. He prays everyday and spends most of his time thinking of other places, people, his family, movies and sex. In November 1972, the prisoners begin receiving letters from home and learn that negotiations are underway. A letter from his sister tells him that his wife has left him and told his children that he is dead. When Fred is finally released from the prison camp he is flown to Andrews Air Force Base. His children and wife come to see him in the hospital. Fred tells his wife he wants a divorce but she refuses because she has been living off of Fred's government money. Fred sues the Air Force for allowing his wife to take his money and wins the case. In 1981 after thirty years of service, Fred retires from the Air Force. He does not dream about Vietnam and feels no hate for the Vietnamese in general. Fred reconnects with Hally and his children. Fred continues to speak for the Tuskegee Airmen Association encouraging children to pursue engineering. science and technology and hopes that one of them will become a fighter pilot one day.

Dwyte and Fred's stories stand in stark contrast to one another. Dwyte has the easiest time in the war of all the accounts in the book. Fred has guite possibly the worst experience and definitely the longest time subjected to atrocities. Up until this point the stories have been gruesome and sometimes hard to comprehend but the contrasting accounts of Dwyte and Fred completely muddle the reader's mind. It is difficult to understand how one soldier can enjoy a war where another soldier is brutally tortured and barely kept alive. Many of the other soldiers mention the amount of confusion they encountered in Vietnam and here the reader gets to see the culminating effects of that confusion. Dwyte barely realizes that there is a war being fought where innocent people are brutally murdered and soldiers on both sides are subjected to intense torture. Fred hardly has enough food to keep him alive while Dwyte eats lobster and steak. What is the most astounding is the differing outcomes for these two soldiers. Fred endured unimaginable torture and near death but was able to keep his mind strong in order to survive. Fred's faith prevented him from succumbing to hatred. Dwyte spent his war tour enjoying himself and not thinking toward his future. Dwyte enjoyed the war but was forced to make do with a life he did not anticipate when he returned home. Fred was able to grow as a man and a soldier and continues to believe in his country.



Characters

Private First Class Reginald Edwards

Reginald is better known as Malik. He comes from a poor family but he is the first in his family to finish high school. At the age of seventeen Malik joins the Marines because he is too small to be a worker and the Marines promise to make him a man. Because of his age Malik's mother must help him enlist. Malik is a tough kid who likes to mouth off and he is often in trouble. He mouths off to his drill instructor and gets into fights with other Marines. Malik's behavior earns him a permanent position as point man. He learns to enjoy the post because he is always out in front and can see the enemy coming.

When Malik arrives in Vietnam he is naive, scared and confused. After his first time killing a man at close range he feels guilty. When Malik comes very close to destroying a hut full of women and children, he almost cries at the thought of what he could have done. Malik's anger grows the longer he is in Vietnam. He spends time reading intelligence information about the war and becomes frustrated with the way black soldiers are treated. When his tour ends and he returns home, Malik becomes a member of the Black Panthers. He eventually becomes the leader of the DC chapter but the Black Panthers are not well organized. They fail to plan for the future and the organization deteriorates. Malik liked being a member of the Black Panthers because fighting with them was just like fighting in Vietnam. Vietnam never really leaves Malik. He still dreams about the people he killed.

Specialist 5 Harold Bryant

Harold Bryant is nicknamed Light Bulb as a kid because he is always inventing things. Light Bulb decided to join the military so that he could help Vietnam develop into a nation. As soon as he arrives in country Harold realizes that he has stepped into the middle of a civil war. Light Bulb is surprised to realize that the white men are a lot like the blacks. They are all scared and confused.

Light Bulb does not approve of the practice of mutilating dead bodies but since everyone does it there is not much he can do. Light Bulb goes along with all the other soldiers. He spends time in soul bars drinking and buying women. His best friend James Plummer is killed when an ammunition dump explodes. Light Bulb pulls pieces of James out of the rubble to send home to his family. Light Bulb was always very religious but the things he witnessed in the war make him question his faith. James' death makes Light Bulb lose his faith altogether. Light Bulb reads his Bible cover to cover every year looking for answers but he never finds any. In an effort to find peace for himself, Light Bulb goes back to school to become a counselor. He then works with black veterans helping them find jobs and lead normal lives after the war.



Specialist 4 Richard J. Ford III

Richard is drafted directly from high school. He has bad knees that the doctors say will keep him from being placed on the front lines. However, Richard's medical records are conveniently lost and he is made infantry. Richard joins a Special Forces unit with five or six other black guys who all think they are tough. Richard learns that the white soldiers in Special Forces are stationed at the rear and do not carry weapons. His unit is always sent into the field and on search and destroy missions. There is no racism in his unit because they all have to trust one another. They do not have time to discuss who is a member of the Klan and who is not.

Richard's closest friend is a little guy named Davis. Davis is always in trouble and never achieves a higher rank because of his behavior. Davis keeps the rest of the unit motivated and he seems fearless. Once out of Vietnam Richard has trouble feeling secure. He buys two guns that he carries with him all the time. When he shoots at a car full of drunk white men, he gives up his guns and seeks treatment at Walter Reed. Richard also works as an undercover narcotics officer. He is very successful in bringing down over twenty dealers. Richard retires on disability after being shot in the head during an operation that went wrong. He works private security on the side. Richard appears proud of his role in Vietnam but when he speaks at the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial, people tell him the war was worthless. Richard feels used, manipulated and violated by his own country.

Specialist 4 Charles Strong

Charles is drafted just before his twentieth birthday. He figures he might as well go serve his country since he has been living free and clear for nineteen years. When he gets drafted Charles' nineteen year old girlfriend is pregnant and gives birth while he is in basic training. As the son of migrant workers Charles knows how to fend for himself and take the opportunity to eat whatever is offered whenever he can. Charles becomes numb to the killing due to the amount of drugs he takes during the war. Even in the present day he refuses to fight someone for fear he will be unable to control himself and will kill the other person.

After the war Charles has flashbacks. He turns in his pistol to the police department, but takes an ice pick to his house following a dispute with his wife. Charles spends some time in a psychiatric hospital but the never talk to him about Vietnam. Charles makes the decision to leave his wife and take classes for computer programming. He finds the Lord and starts living a more positive life style. All of Charles' dreams stop except one. He continues to dream about a NVA soldier who refused to come out of a hole. Charles' unit eventually threw grenades into the hole and killed the man, but Charles views the man as a strong character. The soldier believed in what he was doing and refused to surrender. Charles feels this is the definition of a real man. While Charles will fight to defend America again, he refuses to do it on foreign soil.



HM2 Luther C. Benton III

Luther is an only child and does not have to accept his orders to go to Vietnam. However, he wants to see what war is about and figures that if the United States is involved it must be the right thing to do. Luther is assigned to work at a hospital in Hoi An treating Viet Cong. He works in the pharmacy dispensing supplies to village chiefs. Instead of becoming close with the men in his unit, Luther takes the time to get to know the Vietnamese locals. He learns a lot about the people and their feelings about the war.

Luther is given a command by God to go out and preach to the people. Luther promises to obey once he returns to the United States. Luther forgets his promise after being in the middle of a fierce fire fight. His entire personality changes from a mild mannered sailor to a hardened man. Luther will shoot someone rather than talk to him and is often in arguments. Once Luther arrives back in the States, a naval officer reminds him of his promise to God. Luther realizes that he was saved during the fire fight in order to do God's will. He returns to school and gets his degree to be a minister. Luther understands that the power of God chose to save him while the man seated behind him received severe wounds when their bunker exploded.

Specialist 5 Emmanuel J. Holloman

Emmanuel never finished high school but he is trained as an interpreter. The other men in his unit call him a gook lover and a traitor because it is his job to ensure that the Vietnamese are paid for deaths and damages. Emmanuel enjoys his work so much that he turns down promotions and re-enlists four times to continue helping the Vietnamese. He feels that the blacks understand the position of the Vietnamese because they both lead hard lives. The black soldiers will pay the Vietnamese for things instead of stealing them. The blacks also take the time to learn a few Vietnamese phrases and customs. The white soldiers think both the blacks and Vietnamese are poor and stupid.

Emmanuel becomes so close with the Vietnamese people that he falls in love with and marries a Vietnamese girl named Tran Thi Saly. Their marriage is not recognized by the American government and when Emmanuel is shipped home he must leave Saly behind. Their first son is born while Emmanuel is in the States but by the time he gets back to find them, the boy has died of pneumonia. Emmanuel is sent back to America again without Saly when his brother becomes ill. Saly gives birth to another son but Emmanuel is never able to return to Vietnam to find them. He eventually marries a Korean girl and they have a daughter named Goldie. Emmanuel wants to be a missionary so he can return to Vietnam and find Saly and his son. His wife understands his desire but he is never able to locate his first family.

Specialist 4 Haywood T. Kirkland

When Haywood is twelve he has a vision that he will go to Vietnam and then spend five years in prison. He is one of eleven children and his family is very poor. Haywood is



drafted in 1966, six years after his vision. Haywood is part of a division known as the Cacti Green who go into the worst areas to perform recon and search and destroy missions. Most of their missions turn up nothing of value but they still have orders to kill anyone they discover. One of the men in Haywood's unit is Studs Armstrong. Armstrong is a crazy militant who takes the ears from dead Viet Cong to wear as a necklace. Another man in his division is Richard Streeter. Haywood and Streeter are close but Streeter loses his mind in the middle of battle and is shipped home. Years later when Haywood sees Streeter on the street his speech is slow and he has lost his family. Haywood is very shaken by seeing a top soldier lose it like that and never recover.

When Haywood returns home he is frustrated by the lack of opportunity for him. He works for a short time at a post office. Haywood has a militant attitude and gathers together several guys to rob the post office. The post office has been processing old money that is to be burned. Haywood and the others manage to get away with about \$300,000. Haywood uses his portion to provide food and medicine for the poor families in the area. However, they are all caught when one of the men squeals. In jail Haywood works to start a VA program for veteran inmates. He is so successful that he meets with President Carter, speaks before Congress and starts VA programs in several other prisons. After five and a half years in prison, Haywood is released on parole. His vision has come full circle. He never tried to resist it but accepted his fate. Haywood continues to work for Veteran's Affairs, gets married and has a little girl. After many years away from Vietnam he realizes the war was a power struggle and that the United States did not know how to pull out of it.

First Lieutenant Archie Blggers

Archie is nicknamed Joe. Joe thinks that the Vietnamese are crazy. They will walk through minefields, strap bombs to babies, and tie themselves to trees knowing they will die. Joe thinks the United States could have won the war if the soldiers would have been allowed to fight instead of constantly changing orders and commanders. Joe also refuses to accept that the color of his skin caused things to go wrong. He does not agree that blacks are owed anything because their ancestors were slaves. Joe feels that blacks owe it to America to fight for their freedoms.

Joe is a commander of a black company. During his time in Vietnam he only loses two soldiers. His favorite soldier was a dog named Hobo who was used to sniff out Vietnamese. Hobo is put down after the war because the Air Force is afraid he will not be a suitable dog for a regular family. Joe wishes he could have saved Hobo and brought him home to live out his days in relaxation. Joe's time in Vietnam ends when he is hit by a grenade and then an RPG. His men carry him on their shoulders to the medevac chopper. He is well loved by his men and thinks of them all as his kids. At home Joe is seen as part of the establishment because he is a black officer. He works as a recruiter but the black boys make fun of him. Joe is disillusioned and feels cold and out of it. His time in the war was honorable but his country does not recognize him for his effort.



Specialist 4 Stephen A. Howard

Stephen is 19 when he is drafted. His mother tells him it is his duty and that he will have to work hard because he is black. Stephen works as a photographer recording maneuvers. Most of his missions are simple but Stephen realizes that the VC are not stupid. The VC watch the American soldiers who follow routines. By observing the American routines the Viet Cong are able to blow up an ammo dump at Long Binh. Stephen finds the nastiest grunt he can and follows him instead of listening to the officers. The officers do not understand what is going on and will get people killed.

Stephen flies a lot of missions in a helicopter. The third time he is shot down he suffers severe injuries to his intestines. Although the injury gets him out of Vietnam, he is unable to collect disability because the government says he is fit for duty. Stephen must follow a strict diet and exercise regularly in order to keep his intestines functioning properly. Stephen does not have flashbacks or nightmares but he suffers from depression. He feels that the psychological wounds are worse than being shot. The depression eats away at him. Stephen went into Vietnam naive but now he knows that Vietnam was not about democracy or protecting America from Vietnam. Stephen's Mother is still patriotic and thinks her son served his country. Stephen does not share her opinions.

Captain Norman Alexander McDaniel

Norman grew up in North Carolina where he walked five miles just to catch the bus to school. His parents were sharecroppers and he was determined to get a good education. Several of Norman's high school teachers help him get into North Carolina A & T where he works in the cafeteria to pay for school. He passes the test for officer's training and becomes an electronics warfare officer.

Norman is shot down and captured by the Vietnamese. They try to interrogate him but he refuses to give them any information. Norman is imprisoned in a camp called the Zoo where he is housed in a 6 foot by 9 foot cell. There is no hope of escape, food is scarce, and he loses 35 pounds. Norman never told his wife that he flew combat missions so she is shocked to learn he has been captured. She works hard to keep his memory alive in their children. The faith of the family keeps all of them strong. Norman's faith is challenged while a POW but he does not lose it completely. In the end his faith has grown stronger because of his experience as a prisoner.

Sergeant Major Edgar A. Huff

Edgar joined the Marines after a man tells him they are the best military outfit. He is part of the first fifty blacks to be accepted into the Corps. When Edgar arrives for boot camp he has a quarter in his pocket and cardboard mending the holes in his shoes. He has been working since the eighth grade when he had to drop out of school so his Mama could have an operation. Edgar's father left the family when Edgar was six.



Edgar is the target of a lot of racism in the beginning because the white Marines do not believe he is really a member of the Corps. However, Edgar is a good solider and moves up in rank quickly. He becomes the first trainer of black recruits. Edgar does not let prejudice affect his ability to command. He treats the black and white soldiers the same. After serving the Marines for thirty years, Edgar retires. At his retirement he is congratulated by other high ranking military officials, the governor of his home state of Alabama, and President Nixon. Edgar is the highest ranking black man in the military and it is twelve years after his retirement before another black man is made Sergeant Major. Edgar has achieved a great deal for himself and served his country well. That is why he is shocked when his house is attacked by four white Marines and nothing is done to punish them. Edgar wishes he could get back the fire power he had in Vietnam and blow them all away.

Staf Sergeant Don. F. Browne

Don is already career military by the time he is sent to Vietnam. He joined the Air Force after flunking out of Howard University. Don wanted to be a pilot but bad eyes and failure to pass the written test kept him from qualifying. Instead Don works as an escort for VIPs at the American Embassy in Vietnam.

Don finds the white soldiers to be extremely lax in their duties at the Embassy and blames them for the attack by the Vietnamese. He also takes offense that his unit which is mostly black is asked to search the bombed embassy for hidden enemy instead of the mostly white Army. When Don learns that Martin Luther King, Jr. has been killed he and another black soldier take their anger out on a white soldier who called King a "nigger." Don's actions in Vietnam are not acknowledge by the United States government because he is a member of a secret operation. He is not even listed as being at the Embassy battle. The fall of Saigon leaves Don feeling betrayed and let down by his own country.

Specialist 4 Robert L. Mountain

Robert's mother is a guidance counselor at his home town high school. He loved music and played in the school band and was never any good at sports. Robert wants to play in the Army band but cannot handle boot camp and wants to come home. Vietnam turns Robert into a drinking, cursing, and smoking man. He begins to like shooting people just to see how they look dying. Robert feels nothing for the Vietnamese and does not have any problem killing them.

Robert receives severe wounds in an attack on his bunker. He loses part of a leg and several fingers. In the States Robert does not let his disability prevent him from leading a normal life. He marries and has three children. Robert returns to school and works for a degree in counseling like his mother. He works as a counselor for Veteran's Affairs helping other veterans lead a normal life. Robert also trains with a professional coach and runs track. He sets several world records for amputees.



Lieutenant Commander William S. Norman

William grows up in Norfolk, Virginia in a neighborhood that abides by the separate but equal policy. He refuses to be bullied or the target of racism although he is not actively involved in civil rights. William goes to college and earns degrees in math and chemistry. He is working as a teacher when he is drafted in 1961. William chooses to go into the Navy.

William does not experience blatant racism but is treated differently because he is a black man. He plays in the naval band but they leave him behind when playing certain engagements. William is the only black member of his class for Aviation Officer's Training. On his third tour William works as an electronics warfare officer which gives him access to intelligence information and time to think. He decides that he has had enough of the institutionalized racism and wants out of the Navy. However, his letter of resignation which outlines a system for racial equality is noticed by the new Admiral. William works with Admiral Zumwalt to change naval policy regarding the treatment of blacks and other minorities. For all the positive work William achieves, he feels disgraced and deceived when Saigon falls. He feels that foreign policy makers did not conduct themselves with honor and let down the Vietnam soldiers. Vietnam left scars on black soldiers and William has not thought about Vietnam for five years.

Specialist 4 Robert E. Holcomb

Robert holds strong beliefs about civil rights and the war. When he is drafted Robert tries to evade taking the oath for over a year. He is finally caught by the FBI and forced to take the oath of induction into the Army in manacles. Robert was raised in a middle class family but does not agree with his family's values. He moves away to Tennessee where he is active in the political movement at Tennessee State. Robert joins a militant group that believes in guerrilla tactics and prepares to move into the countryside if they feel threatened by the government. Robert is expelled from school for his militant actions. He moves to New York City but he is unable to get a job or leave the country because he has been dodging the draft.

In Vietnam Robert makes friends with the Vietnamese villagers. He gives them food, blankets, boots, and anything else he does not need in exchange for information. When Robert returns home from the war he cannot handle living in his parents' home. He has nightmares that he is still in Vietnam and almost kills his girlfriend in her sleep. Robert is asked to return to Hanoi with the Vietnam Veteran's Association to work at reuniting American soldiers with their children. Robert is shocked to find out that Hanoi and Saigon have not advanced since the war. He realizes that the fighting did no good and the people are no better off than before the war.



Captain Joseph B. Anderson, Jr.

Joe is a black West Point graduate. He is serious about being career military and a year after graduating is commanding troops. His platoon in Vietnam is chosen to be the subject of a French documentary movie titled The Anderson Platoon. Joe is very tough on his men but his tactics keep them alive and he loses only one man during his first tour. On his second tour he is stationed on the Cambodian border searching for weapon caches. His unit uncovers the largest cache brought in by the Calvary.

When Joe returns to the United States he does not experience the same negativity as other soldiers because he is a career officer. Joe feels no remorse for his actions in Vietnam. He knows that his tours in Vietnam helped to advance his career but he chooses to resign rather than wait to be made general. Joe's memories of the war are shaped by The Anderson Platoon and his real memories of the war fade.

Sergeant Robert L. Daniels

Robert is very poor and is raised by his grandparents on the south side of Chicago. He lives with fourteen other children and does not have his first real birthday party until he turns 19 and goes into the service. Robert has never been away from home and is scared the entire time he is in the military. In Vietnam Robert does not trust any of the Vietnamese and stays out of the villages for the first seven months of his tour. With only a month left to go on his tour Robert is asked to drive an Amtrac into the field because he is the only available sergeant. The track hits a mine and Robert is blown into the air. Robert undergoes several surgeries but the scars are so massive that no one will hire him back at home. He is frustrated that the country he fought for helps the Vietnamese immigrants but will not give him disability benefits. Robert feels that he gave part of his body to Vietnam but lost his whole life.

Specialist 4 Arthur E. Woodley, Jr.

Arthur is nicknamed Gene and goes to Vietnam a naive 18 year old who turns into an animal. Gene grew up in an area of Baltimore known as the Bottom and spent his life fighting in self defense. There is no other choice for someone like Gene except to join the Army and he trains in jump school, Rangers, and Special Forces. Because of a bad eye the men in his company call him Cyclops. The Vietnamese call him Montagnard Man because of the way he dresses. Gene does not wear a regulation uniform. Instead he wears a loin cloth, face paint, his boots, and ropes of ammo and grenades across his chest. Gene also wears the fingers and ears of men he has killed on a necklace. For a long time Gene appears to take pleasure in killing. He plays Vietnamese Roulette with prisoners by pushing them out of helicopters and rapes and kills Vietnamese women. After a while the killing begins to bother Gene and while he does not participate in all the incidents, he does not stop them either. He returns to the States wearing jungle fatigues, a full beard, matted hair, and smelling because he has not showered in six months.



At home his mother makes him clean up his act. At a store he is recognized by the Vietnamese owner who remembers Gene as the Montagnard Man. Gene is angry because the American government helps the Vietnamese immigrants but not their own veterans. He feels that America gave up on the war and only wanted to make money in Vietnam. Gene says that the blacks fight a war at home because no one will hire or educate them and they are branded as killers.

Radarman Second Class Dwyte A. Brown

Dwyte joins the Navy after graduation because his three older brothers are also in the military and he wants to learn a trade. As a radarman and plotter he is stationed in Cam Ranh Bay where the war seems very far away and the soldiers spend their time relaxing. Dwyte is lucky as a black officer because he is able to enjoy luxuries that most black soldiers do not. Back in the States Dwyte does not enjoy the same freedoms as in Vietnam. Because he does not have any battle scars or disability he is viewed as a regular Joe. Dwyte feels bad for the Vietnamese when Saigon falls. He always felt bad for the local people and did what he could to help them.

Colonel Fred V. Cherry

Fred grows up in Virginia with seven brothers and sisters. His parents are laborers who teach their children to respect whites and know the Bible. When Fred is in elementary school he sees planes flying over the neighborhood and decides that he will someday be a fighter pilot. In college Fred majors in biology because his parents want him to be a doctor but he eventually joins the Air Force. Fred achieves the highest test score in his aviation training group and he is the only black man in his class. By the time Fred is sent into Vietnam he is already a seasoned pilot having flown 53 missions in Korea.

Fred is shot down and lands in the middle of a field surrounded by militia. The Vietnamese put him in several prisoner camps where he is tortured and interrogated regularly. Fred suffered a broken ankle, a wounded shoulder, and other wounds from the crash. It takes the prison guards months before they operate or give Fred any medicine. Another prisoner called Hally takes care of Fred making sure he is fed and bathed. Even though there is no hope of escape Fred remains positive and concentrates on his family during his imprisonment. Fred is in prison for seven years before he receives any communication from home. He learns that his wife has told his children that their father is dead and she has run off with another man but is living off Fred's government pay. When Fred is finally released he is sent to Andrews Air Force Base where his wife comes to visit him. He tells he wants a divorce and then sues the Air Force for illegally giving his wife money. After thirty years of military service Fred retires with only seventy percent disability. He never dreams about Vietnam or has flashbacks about his imprisonment. Fred maintains his friendship with Hally and works with the Tuskegee Airmen as a recruiter.



Objects/Places

Vietnam

Vietnam is situated in the South China Sea and shares borders with China, Laos, and Cambodia. The Chinese and the French fought for control of the country and divided the nation into North Vietnam and South Vietnam. The fighting lead to the Vietnam War and ended with communism emerging victorious.

Cam Ranh Bay

Cam Ranh Bay is located on an inlet in Southern Vietnam. It served as a large military base during the war but conditions in Cam Ranh were more like a resort. Soldiers in the field often visited Cam Ranh Bay for R & R. Those stationed there never saw real action in the war and did not experience the atrocities of being in the field.

The Hanoi Hilton and The Zoo

The Hanoi Hilton is another name for the Hoa Lo Prison in Vietnam where American POWs were taken during the war. Cu Loc Prison is nicknamed the Zoo by prisoners.

Tet Offensive

The Tet Offensive was conducted by the Viet Cong and NVA against the South Vietnamese and American military during the Vietnam War. The goal of the operation was to spur an uprising among the people that would overthrow those opposing communism and bring about an end to the war.

An Khe

An Khe is a town in Vietnam where soldiers were often stationed.

LURPs

LURP stands for long range reconnaissance patrol. They are often the first into dangerous situations.

Tuskegee Airmen

The Tuskegee Airmen are a group of distinguished black pilots. The group was formed in World War II.



Viet Cong

The Viet Cong refers to the communist soldiers from South Vietnam. They often engaged in guerrilla warfare and were very ruthless. The Viet Cong are also called VC or Charlie.

NVA

NVA stands for the North Vietnamese Army. These were trained soldiers similar to the United States military.

Rabbits

Rabbits is a term given to white soldiers by black soldiers. However, one story tells of a rabbit who refused to come out of his hole and died when the soldiers threw grenades into the hole. This account does not clarify but the reader assumes the rabbit refers to a Vietnamese soldier.



Themes

Confusion

Nearly every man mentions the confusion of Vietnam. War is understandably confusing but for the black Veterans there are layers of confusion. Battle itself is confusing even in the best planned war. Soldiers must navigate the field amidst a barrage of shooting, explosions, minefields, and fallen men. This type of confusion is expected in battle, but the soldiers in Bloods report a lack of communication and structured command. Officers change regularly and orders for reconnaissance one day may change to seek and destroy the next. The lack of clearly defined objectives in the field often results in troops firing on other American companies or air attacks falling on the division that requested support.

To compound the confusion of battle soldiers often are unsure who they are fighting. Vietnamese villagers are bold in their battle strategies and will strap bombs to small children and babies hoping to kill the soldier who picks the child up. Women and elderly can double as snipers. The soldiers are constantly on guard because they do not know where the next enemy is hidden. Enemies are also found within the same troop. White soldiers who do not like the idea of blacks in the military target their comrades with racism. Black soldiers must constantly be on the lookout for attacks both across and behind enemy lines.

All the soldiers in Vietnam are confronted by confusion surrounding the reasons for being involved in the war at all. Most of the men come into the war thinking that they will be fighting for democracy and improving the Vietnamese way of life. However, the men soon realize that no one seems to have a clear understanding of why the United States chose to become involved in the war. The Americans sustain a great loss of life and money that does not appear to be worth their effort. The longer the war drags on the less concerned the United States seems to be with victory and the more support for the troops decreases at home. Soldiers return from Vietnam after a brutal and life-changing tour only to be told they are baby killers and animals. Vietnam veterans are confused at every step of the war. For many of them the confusion creates psychological scars that cannot be repaired. Some are able to move beyond Vietnam to live normal lives, but even these men are haunted occasionally by the confusion that ruled their lives during the war.

Skin Color and Battle Lines

Blacks are not accepted by white soldiers in the military simply because of the color of their skin. When Edgar Huff joins the Marines he is thrown in jail for impersonating an officer because a group of white men do not believe that the Corps admitted a black man. Some of the white soldiers view the black men in their company as the enemy just



as if they were Viet Cong. Black soldiers are subjected to racism both overt and subtle by white soldiers, officers and the American government.

Black soldiers are made to walk point and used as grunts because they are viewed as expendable. The Vietnamese do not shoot at the black soldiers as heavily as they shoot at white troops. Because of this distinction officers will send out a company of black soldiers to clear an area for the white troops to move through. The Vietnamese and blacks appeared to have an understanding of one another. Their lives were similarly difficult and oppressed. The blacks were there to kill the Vietnamese but many of them found themselves making tentative friendships with the villagers. The black soldiers took the time to learn a bit of the language and a few customs. They did not look down on the Vietnamese but empathized with their situation. For the soldiers who chose to understand the Vietnamese people the battle was fought not against the villagers but against their own countrymen.

At home the battle of skin color continued as black veterans were denied jobs, education, and government assistance. Men, like Edgar Huff, who had served their country for a entire career were targeted by white soldiers who still could not accept blacks in the military. Black soldiers who committed crimes during and after war were sentenced to harsher punishments than whites. Whites who committed a crime against a black soldier were not punished at all. Further complicating the struggle was the realization by black veterans that the Vietnamese they were sent to kill were successfully immigrating to the United States where they received all the benefits denied black veterans. Skin color restructured battle lines and created new wars during an already confusing time.

Same Experience, Different Outcomes

The men in Bloods all experience the same war, the same killing, the same disrespect at home, the same confusion about what is happening and why, but they do not all have the same response to their experience in Vietnam. Different backgrounds and belief systems can account for their different experiences joining the war and serving in Vietnam. However, some of the men have harder experiences than others and come out better for it, while those who have an easier time suffer more when the experience ends.

Fred Cherry immediately comes to mind when thinking of the worst experience in Vietnam. He spends eight years in prison camps and nearly dies as a result of inadequate medical care, poor treatment, and brutal torture. However, Fred never chose to give up or give in. Fred's faith kept him strong and motivated, as did the aide of fellow prisoner Hally. Fred was isolated, physically and emotionally beaten, and returned home to a wife who left him and broken relationships with his children. Despite all the hardship Fred faced he feels little hatred toward the Vietnamese or the United States government. He accepts his experience for what it is and chooses to move forward with his life. Fred is the man who should have the worst nightmares, the most psychological



problems but of all the men in Bloods he appears to come through the most well adjusted.

Other men suffer less or at least not for as long a time period but come home more psychologically or physically damaged. Gene is a young man when he sets foot in Vietnam but he goes home a wild animal trained to enjoy killing. His wounds take a long time to heal and he never forgets Vietnam. Dwyte has perhaps the easiest time in Vietnam. He is stationed in a resort location and has the best of everything at his disposal. At home though Dwyte's lack of combat experience is looked down upon. He is not a "real" veteran because he was not wounded and did not kill. Robert Mountain loses his leg, Robert Daniels is scarred so badly no one wants to hire him, and many others bear psychological scars that cannot be seen or easily treated. The men went to the same country to fight in the same war, but the war as not the same in each location or at each time period. These differences in intensity of the war, personal strength, and treatment at home combine to dictate the personal outcome for each man. That is why each story must be read as a part of the whole. The reader needs the entire book in order to gain a complete sense of what the experience of Vietnam really was for veterans.



Style

Perspective

Each story is told in the first person point of view. The reader imagines that they are speaking directly to the speaker or that a personal letter has been sent directly from the man relating his experiences. Each story is written in the dialect and speech patterns of the man who experienced it. Wallace Terry does not function as author who finesses the stories or interjects his own comments. Instead Terry is merely the man who was able to gather twenty stories that give a well-rounded glimpse into the Vietnam War and the role blacks played in the conflict.

The story of Vietnam has been told by many people and in many formats, but the story of black Vietnam soldiers has not been given the same publicity. Black soldiers in Vietnam experienced a different war than white soldiers. They were forced to fight against the enemy on the outside and within their own ranks. Only in the heat of battle did the division of color lessen. Blacks who attained high rank were treated no better than those in the trenches. Many of the soldiers state that they felt compassion for the Vietnamese because they could understand the hardships faced by the people. It is interesting to realize that in the midst of a war understanding could be found with the enemy but not with comrades. For black soldiers the war only compounded the struggle back at home. Not only were they looked down upon for their skin color but their participation in an unpopular war did little to further the black cause in the States. Readers find themselves considering the Vietnam War from a new perspective and discovering previously uncovered layers to already confusing events.

Tone

The tone of the book is predominantly subjective. Each veteran relates his experience, his feelings, his thoughts, and his conclusions about the war. Although many of the soldiers reach similar conclusions about the war no two have identical experiences. The reader often realizes fairly quickly how the particular speaker feels about his service in Vietnam. Many of the men are vehement in their speech making it obvious that the war produced deep wounds that have shaped their entire lives.

With each chapter the reader's perception of Vietnam, of civil rights, and of the United States shifts. The stories compiled by Wallace Terry portray the intense struggles faced by Vietnam soldiers. Not only did the black soldiers have to wage war against communism, but they were also fighting for their own civil rights at home and abroad. These issues come through in the words of the soldiers who called themselves Bloods. Men like Edgar Huff have an excellent military career only to be subjected to blatant racism at retirement. Others like Malik are subjected to such racism in Vietnam that it structures their life once back in the United States. Still others like Fred Cherry endure incomprehensible hardships in Vietnam that appear to have less to do with the fact that



he is black than the fact that he is an American. The stories of these twenty men tell the story of a time period full of misunderstanding, confusion, search for belonging, and power struggles. Each man has a different experience that he shares with the reader. The telling may be therapeutic for the speaker but is certainly educational for the reader. The reader cannot miss the passion with which these men speak.

Structure

The book contains twenty chapters, an introduction, chronology of the Vietnam War, and a glossary. Each chapter relates the story of a black Vietnam Veteran. Each chapter is titled by the name and rank of the soldier, his home town, his job or position in the military, the unit he was part of and which branch of military, where in Vietnam he served, and the dates of his tour.

Some of the chapters are shorter than others. Each veteran is given as much space as he desired to tell his story. Some men have very strong, vivid memories of their time in Vietnam and expansive experiences to share; while others state the basic facts of their tour and are finished. Although the stories are all individual and are not arranged in chronological order, their is a movement to the book. Wallace Terry structures the placement of each account so that the reader is not confronted with a series of atrocities or short narratives. The stories work together to create a whole picture of the Vietnam War not only for black veterans but for the Vietnamese as well.



Quotes

"The residue of hate is a horrible thing to leave behind. The residue of nuclear holocaust is far worse." Malik, pg. 15

"When you watch someone pretend to live life, you wasting your time." Charles, pg. 63

"I'll fight anyone here in America. But if they come and get me to send to some other country, I'm going to have my gun ready for them." Charles, pg. 65

"It became real when the first pilot didn't come back." William, pg. 199

"I was sworn into the Army in manacles." Robert, pg. 206

"Except you s'posed to fight for your country. And you come home. But where is my country when I come home?" Joseph, pg. 241

"I thought, my God, if I stay here, I'm going to get us all wiped out." Archie, pg. 119

"This time there was no anesthetic. They just took a scalpel and cut away the dead flesh, scraped at the infection on the bones." Fred, pg. 287-8

"It freaked me out. I mean that here I saw him, and five minutes later he's instantaneously dead." Harold, pg. 31

"Armstrong immediately started cutting off ears and put them in his rucksack. Then he cut one man's neck off, and stuck the whole head inside." Haywood, pg. 100

"That's where they had the torture room and can put the screws to you." Norman, pg. 139

"I enjoyed the war 'cause I was at Cam Ranh Bay. Cam Ranh Bay was paradise, man." Dwyte, pg. 266



Topics for Discussion

Choose several stories to compare and contrast. Do these stories create a complete picture of the experience of blacks in Vietnam?

Charles Strong says that he would fight an enemy on American soil but refuses to go to war in another country again. Consider Charles' experiences and his sentiment about war, then consider how soldiers currently fighting overseas feel about their own situation. Can you draw any similarities or conclusions?

The last two stories in the book, those of Dwyte Brown and Fred Cherry, are vastly different. Why do you think that Wallace Terry chose to conclude his book with these two accounts? Why do you think Terry chose to relate Dwyte's story before Fred's?

Think of some of the movies you may have seen about Vietnam (Apocalypse Now; Good Morning, Vietnam; Platoon; Born on the Fourth of July, etc.) and discuss whether these films are accurate in their portrayals compared to Bloods.

Rent The Anderson Platoon and compare Captain Joseph B. Anderson's written account in Bloods with the portrayal in the film. Joseph mentions that his Vietnam memories are overshadowed by the film. Do you think the film had an impact on the story he told Wallace Terry?

Fred Cherry mentions that his wife never tried to contact him, ran off with another man, and took his government money. This is in contrast to Norman McDaniel's wife who made sure his children retained a memory of their father. Discuss the impact of the Vietnam war on the spouses and family of the soldiers.

Did the Vietnam War treat black soldiers differently from white soldiers? Was the Vietnam War similar to the Civil Rights Movement happening at the same time in America?