

Fields of Fire Study Guide

Fields of Fire by James Webb

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Plot Summary

It is the year 1969, and young men are becoming soldiers for different reasons. The Vietnam War was something hard to understand for most people. The men who fought in the war were either drafted or they signed up on their own accord. Snake, Hodges, and Senator are the three main characters of the story. There are several other characters throughout the story that they each encounter in one way or another.

Before enlisting in the service, Senator lived with his mother and father and attended Harvard. His father is a lawyer and his mother is a homemaker. When the draft swept through and took the young men to war, his friends found ways to dodge the draft, whether it was fleeing to Canada or taking pills to fail the draft physical. They all found ways, but Senator did not. He faced his future head on and took it like a man. He had no idea what he would be facing in Vietnam. His parents were very proud of him.

Snake enlisted in the service on his own accord. He lived with his mother and stepfather in a bad part of town. His life was never simple. He went from job to job after quitting high school and never knew what his future held for him. He was always fighting and getting into drugs. The one thing he was always good at was fighting. His mother told him that one day his temper would get him into trouble. One day he walked into a tattoo parlor and got another tattoo. His most recent tattoo had the words, "Death Before Dishonor". Right after getting the tattoo, he walked straight into the recruitment office and signed up for the Marines. He went to boot camp shortly after enlisting and was a big success. This was partly due to his rough upbringing and lack of showing emotion. The other men looked up to him for guidance. He thought he had finally found the career meant for him.

Hodges's reasons for enlisting were largely due to his ancestors, who had fought in every battle and war that came along. His father had died in a war before he was born and his mother kept his memories tucked away in a locker. The locker was kept in the barn outside of the house and Hodges learned early on how to crack it open and rummage through his father's memories. Hodges mother remarried and had two more children, but Hodges was the last of his line. His grandmother (his father's mother) lived nearby and he visited her every Sunday. They would sit and talk about the wars of yesterday and how brave his father was. She talked about all of the Hodges before him and how they also fought in battles for the betterment of America. This made him proud and also reminded him of what was in his blood. He was meant to fight in the battles, just as his ancestors before him.

Each of these men had their reasons to enlist. Each one had a different background and came together during the height of the Vietnam War. They go through a tremendous challenge together that brings them closer than any of them thought they could be. They are like a band of brothers and stick together through thick and thin. Their stomachs ache from seeing bloody, torn apart bodies at the light of each day, and they throw up at the sight. The barbed wire that surrounds the compound is filled with body fragments of



the enemy. The Medevac comes for the wounded, but leaves the dead for the truck the next morning, which they fill with dead bodies for mass burials.

Each day they spend in the bush of Vietnam feels like an eternity. They have to wade through chest deep water crawling with leeches to get to their next destination. Once they arrive they cannot dry off, because of the constant rain. They eat cold C-rations and smoke cigarettes while they dig their holes for the night's battle. Once night comes, the battle ensues with the enemy firing all around them. They are in a strange land and the war is not like any other war. It's kill or be killed.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Snake (Ronnie) roams the tough streets of his neighborhood in February of 1968. He is a high school dropout and his mother reminds him of this from time to time. His most recent job is a janitor for a movie theater. He's mopping up in the ladies room at the movie theater when he encounters a black man, high on drugs. The man is oblivious to anything around him. Snake kicks him in the face, knocks him out, and starts to search his pockets. He finds two ten dollar bills in the man's pocket, so he takes them. After finding nothing else of particular interest, he goes to tell his boss, Mr. Baum, what had happened. A few minutes later he finds himself out of yet another job.

Back on the street, he walks toward his mother's place. As he walks he is careful to watch passing cars and alleyways so he's not mugged while en route. It's a rough neighborhood that he lives in and at any given time he could be attacked. Once at his mother's place, he finds his mother dressing for the day and his father having left for work. Apparently, his father had found another job. He sits and has coffee with his mother. He wants a beer, not coffee, but there is none. He remembered seeing two six packs of beer when he left for work, but his mother informs him that his father took the beer to work with him. She knows already that Snake has lost another job since he doesn't show up during the day unless he's unemployed, and presses him for the whole story.

He tells her the sordid story and she listens intently while smoking a cigarette. She tells him he should have finished school. She doesn't understand why he fights so much and carries such hatred in his heart. He doesn't understand it either, but doesn't quite know what to do about it.

A man arrives a few minutes later, and Snake knows it's his mother's lover. He has come to spend time with her and it's Snake's cue to leave so they can have time together. Snake doesn't care for the man and doesn't understand his mother wanting to be with this man, but respects her and leaves, telling her he'll be back later.

As he walks the streets again, he finds himself entering the tattoo parlor where he gets a tattoo with a skull entwined by two snakes and the words, "Death Before Dishonor" at the bottom. He decides that with his temper and urge to fight, there is no better place for him than the Marines. He goes to the recruiting office and enlists himself. During boot camp he realizes this has been a wise career choice for him, considering his rough upbringing. He's not easily broken and finds that the other men enlisted look to him for guidance.



Chapter 1 Analysis

The book begins by informing the reader that it is February of 1968. Snake is the first character introduced. He is a mean, fighting young man who continuously gets fired from his jobs due to his angry behavior. His mother and father still live together, yet when his father goes to work, his mother entertains her lover. Sometimes his father gets drunk after work and doesn't come home at night. This dysfunctional lifestyle sets the stage for the reason Snake enlists himself in the Marines. It's his one chance to use his anger and fighting skills in a career very well suited for him.

The reader feels somewhat for Snake's situation and hopes that something good must come from his choice in becoming a Marine. He does well in boot camp and finds his peers looking up to him. Although the instructor tries to break him, it just makes Snake that much more determined.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Bobby (Robert E. Lee Hodges, Jr.) is about to leave for Vietnam. He hadn't yet been born when his father passed away. Robert E. Lee Hodges, Sr. was a soldier, fighting the Germans in France when he was killed. Bobby never got to know his father, but his grandmother made sure she knew about the family history. He visits her every Sunday for lunch, and they reminisce about the old days.

This particular Sunday, before Bobby visits his Grandmother, he opens an old locker that's been stored in an outdoor shed. It has memorabilia of his late father. Bobby looks at the old uniforms and badges his father once wore. He feels a sense of pride that he is going off to war as his father had done many years ago. He is carrying on his family tradition of wearing a uniform and fighting for his country.

After he's finished with the contents in the old locker, he heads into the house, puts on his uniform, and fills a locker of his own with memorabilia. When he's satisfied with the contents, he locks the locker and heads to his grandmother's house for a last luncheon before he's sent to Vietnam. He walks down the dirt road toward his grandmother's home. He is all that she has left of the Hodges family. His brothers and sisters are children born of his stepfather, so he is the only one left to carry on the family name.

Once at his grandmother's home, there is a feeling of sadness. She knows he has to go to war and hugs him tighter than normal. She also offers him more fried chicken than he has ever eaten before. He senses her uneasiness about his journey to Vietnam. Before he leaves, she tells him the story of how Robert E. Lee personally thanked his ancestors in the years that passed for their service to him in the war. That is why he and his late father had been named after him.

Before long, Bobby is in Okinawa waiting for his paperwork to clear so he can enter Vietnam. He drinks at the bar with his new friends, as there isn't much else to do while awaiting the inevitable. He meets a girl named Mitsuko, who waits tables at the bar he frequents. She tells him in her broken English that she doesn't date Marines. Through his persistence he convinces her to go dancing with him the next day. They have an okay time and end up back at her place at the end of the night. He has fallen for her and though the communication barrier exists between them, they make love that night and both are no longer virgins.

They make love three more times before he has to leave for Vietnam. He doesn't shower, wanting to leave her scent on him as long as possible. As he leaves, he wonders if he will ever see her again.



Chapter 2 Analysis

Robert E. Lee Hodges, Jr. is the second character introduced. It is February of 1969 and he's about to leave for Vietnam. He is the last in the line of Hodges and hopes to fill his late father's shoes in the line of men that had gone off to war. His grandmother is very proud of him, yet she is afraid none the less.

This chapter reveals this young man's upbringing without his genetic father and the closeness he shares with his grandmother, who pours her years of knowledge into him. He is all that she has left of her own son, who fell in the German war against the French. Bobby has the utmost respect for the older men who hang around in town discussing their old battles and showing off war scars. He hopes to be one of them someday.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Hodges is processed and briefed in Da Nang the next day. He spends the night on a smelly cot in a small tent while a machine gun fires all night long. The next morning, Hodges and two others take a convoy from Da Nang to An Hoa. There, Hodges is given his jungle utilities and combat gear. He sleeps that night in a tent with three other Lieutenants and awakes to the sound of bombs. One had gone off not fifty feet from where he lay. At first he is excited about actually being in a war, but when a man's hand plummets through the air and lands near him and he hears shouts that the First Sergeant is dead, he's not so excited anymore.

The second night Hodges is awakened by a company clerk to watch the battle taking place in what they called Arizona Valley. It is a field that lay between An Hoa and the mountains. The mountains are filled with the enemy. As Hodges watches his own men being killed, he realizes that tomorrow he would be in the Arizona Valley.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Hodges's excitement at finally participating in a war is short-lived. As he enters Vietnam just outside of the Arizona Valley and sees the death and devastation, he quickly realizes this is serious business. He is given his gear and tries to sleep while bombs continuously go off nearby. His boots and jacket are sparkly clean and not at all worn in like the other Lieutenants gear. However, he feels more at home now that he looks like the others.

He's not even in An Hoa for a day when the First Sergeant is killed and the bloodbath begins in the Arizona Valley.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Snake is hiding in a hole watching Ogre crawl toward him. Ogre is bleeding and keeps yelling, "Where's Baby Cakes?" Another hole close by is filled with the enemy opening fire on them. Snake hurriedly jumps out of his hole and heads for Phony's hole. He asks Phony to throw a few grenades in the enemy hole, but to be careful as their LP (listening post) is close by also. Phony takes the enemy out with two grenades as Snake makes his way back to Ogre. Snake pulls Ogre into his hole and notices that his leg is bleeding pretty badly, so he calls for Doc Rabbit.

Doc makes his way over to Snake's hole. He is followed by Baby Cakes, who heard Ogre calling for him. Ogre tells Doc to worry more about Vitelli, since he's hurt a lot worse than Ogre. Baby Cakes hears from Ogre that Vitelli wants him, so he takes off in the middle of the firing and heads toward where Vitelli was last seen. Ogre gets a shot of morphine and yells for Baby Cakes to be careful.

A plane flies overhead and illuminates the area. The men are in their enemy's vision now and scurry deeper into their holes. Cat Man's hole is nearby and Snake makes his way over to it. Marston, a newcomer, pulls a stupid stunt and goes into the open fire. He gets his in the lung and screams. Snake tells him it was a stupid thing to do and goes to get help for him. He makes it back to his hole and retrieves a poncho to bring to Marston.

Snake calls out loud for Doc, but there's no answer. He covers Marston with the poncho and forces him to lie on his hurt side, so he won't choke to death from the punctured lung. He sees Baby Cakes coming toward them, carrying Vitelli. He yells, "Marine coming in!" The Doc comes over to inspect Vitelli and finds a hole in his chest. He's unconscious, so he can't give him any morphine. He gives Baby Cakes a shot of morphine once he notices he's been shot also. Baby Cakes tells Snake that Homicide and Bagger are alright and they'll be coming back when the sun comes up.

Snake makes his way back to the platoon command post and through the battered and wrapped bodies of his fellow marines. Kerlovic is inside and Snake greets him. Kerlovic is the only one that's been in Vietnam longer than Snake (ten months). Corky sits nearby, missing one leg. Snake tries to talk to him, but all he thinks about is his manly body parts and if they are still intact. He asks Snake to check them, so Snake does so, but hesitantly. Corky's manliness is still intact. Kerlovic and Snake discuss the wounded and when the Medevacs will be able to take them. Flaky had disappeared early in the fighting and is hiding in a nearby hole. Snake yells for him and he comes out slowly. Ordered by Snake to take a count of the wounded and summarize the situation, he does so immediately.



The seriously injured are transported by helicopter out of the danger zone, and Snake lights a cigarette under his helmet to conceal the ash and smoke. He tries to wait until the sun came up, but can't resist. Homicide and Bagger make their way back toward Snake and the others at the first sight of daylight and Snake tells them that Vitelli didn't make it.

Chapter 4 Analysis

This chapter opens with Snake, Ogre, Doc Rabbit, Cat Man, Phony, and Baby Cakes. Some of the men have been there only six weeks and are the only ones left in their unit, where others had been there ten months. Snake has been in for seven months and has seen it all. He's tough on the others, but has no choice if he wants to ensure that they to make it out alive.

His years of fighting and his unstable upbringing have really paid off. Half of the men that Snake came in with are now dead. Many others were wounded and already sent home via Medevac. The realization of the seriousness of the situation is clear to the reader. The men have different ways in which they handle the situation. Flaky hides by himself and avoids any type of contact, where Marston (a new guy) runs directly into the line of fire. Snake, Ogre, Phony, and Baby Cakes fight the battle head on and know very well that they may be next to die.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Hodges stands before Major Otto, the executive officer, who asks if he's ready for "the bush" (a term for the Arizona Valley in the thick of the fighting). Hodges tells him he's ready, but the Major is not confident of that fact. He tells Hodges that after a month or two in the bush he won't be a marine any longer, he won't even be a person. He continues telling him that there's no hot food, no clean clothes. He'll wallow in his own smelliness after months of no showers. He'll see blood and guts every day and cry when a comrade falls. He paints a pretty morbid picture for Hodges, yet he still needs Hodges and the other new marines to go into battle. They are losing men left and right and need all the help they can get.

The Major finally sends him on his way, and Hodges boards a helicopter for the bush. He lands with six other new marines and makes his way over to what he believes to be the commander's hootch (station).

Chapter 5 Analysis

Major Otto tries to explain as clearly as possible what Hodges is in for when he reaches the bush. Even though Hodges doesn't know what awaits him and he has never been to the bush, he tries to understand what the Major is trying to tell him.

It is a rude awakening when Hodges watched the fighting over the hill the night before. He knows the bush will soon be his own Vietnam. He will stay in the bush with the others for weeks, even months. There is nothing in the world that can prepare him for what he's about to experience.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Hodges sees dead bodies all over the place, but slowly makes his way over to where Flaky is. Flaky starts talking right away and asks Hodges where he's from. Hodges tells him he's from Kentucky, and Flaky starts naming all the guys from the South. Hodges doesn't like Flaky, he can tell right away. Flaky pulls a camera out of his pocket and asks Hodges to take his picture with a dead Vietnamese soldier.

After taking a few photos for Flaky, he hands the camera back and asks Flaky for a burn call (where they gather the pieces of bloody clothing, battle dressings, and garbage lying around to burn). Flaky looks at him and he grows more impatient by the moment. A few yards away, Snake is sizing up the new recruits, giving them nicknames, and telling them which unit they'll be with.

Goodrich is sent to Speedy's hole. Snake nicknames him Senator because he went to Harvard. Senator watches from the hole as Speedy and Burgie start wrestling in the grass. He doesn't know what to think until he hears them laugh, then realizes they are playing.

Hodges meets the men one by one to get to know them and get a feel for who he's responsible for. He sizes them up and they size him up. Pierson's squad seems okay to Hodges and Rabbit is alright, but he still doesn't like Flaky. He feels that Snake will be the toughest to get close to and that they all have their own unique language. By the time Hodges meets all the guys, the sun has started to go down. They all sit four to a hole and heat up c-rations (canned food) for dinner.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Upon Hodges arrival in the bush he realizes there is nothing that could have prepared him for what he sees. Dead men lay sprawled all over the ground, some missing legs and feet, while others are missing half of their heads. He is in charge now and knows he has to do his best to keep the men alive.

As Snake sizes up the new recruits, he tells them which hole they will be stationed at and Hodges meets all the men that he is now responsible for. The reality of the situation starts to sink in as it gets dark and the men know they are in for a long night of fighting.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Hodges surveys the Valley and starts to set up for the evening battle. He notices two holes that have been dug very well and asks Snake where they came from. Snake informs him that the "gooks" (slang for the Vietnamese enemy) dug them. Hodges says they've done a great job of engineering the holes. Snake agrees, and gives Hodges a hard time about having Flaky burn a foot along with the clothing, battle dressings, and garbage earlier with his burn call. Senator threw up from the stench, he proceeds to tell him. Hodges tells him that the place needed to be cleaned up. He asks Snake why he didn't take care of it earlier, as he was the highest ranking officer at the time. He tells Hodges that he doesn't like dead things.

Snake finds Hodges to be amusing, and teases him about chewing the tobacco given out with their supplies. Hodges tells him it's not that bad and chews some. Snake tells him that they've been using it to feed to the gooks and they hate it, so it makes them talk. Hodges smiles at this and Snake hands him a cigarette. He takes the cigarette and spits the tobacco out. He tells Snake he'll keep the rest of his chewing tobacco for the gooks.

Hodges tells Snake they are supposed to ambush Nam An Two, so they both look at their maps and decide to set up in a cemetery just off the speed trail. They figure they'll shoot first, before the gooks.

A few feet away, Speedy and Senator are using water from a village well to wash their faces and quench their thirst. Senator feels sorry for the local children, who are staring at them. Speedy tells him not to feel sorry, as they are mean little bastards who will steal every piece of ammunition if they turn their backs for a minute. Senator still feels sorry for them and Speedy tells him he had better get over it quick.

The men start for the treeline and Senator trips over Ottenburger. Senator is a nervous wreck and points his gun in the direction of some movement. Ottenburger pulls the gun away and tells him it's only Cat Man, who comes over to tell Snake that the treeline is full of movement. If they proceed, they will all be killed. Hodges agrees with Snake, so he sends Cat Man and his crew in another direction, while he and his crew proceed to the cemetery. Once positioned, Hodges notices a light flicker. Considering that the villagers know not to have lights on after dark, he questions Snake about it. Snake orders an "open fire".

In the midst of the open fire, Hodges can see gooks all around. They are right where they are supposed to be. Hodges calls for Flaky to bring him the radio. Flaky is being a coward again and is hiding behind them. Flaky obeys orders, and Hodges calls to report their position. More machine guns fire, and Snake tells Hodges they'd better lay low as not to give away their position to the gooks. He agrees.



More gunshots fly into the night sky. Hodges has other men positioned at Nam An One. It's nearing three o'clock and Snake tells Hodges he's done a great job at positioning the artillery units, as the gooks will have to pull back soon. He tells Snake, "You ain't seen nothing yet". The sun is starting to come up and Hodges can see the gooks more clearly. Flaky radios for Cat Man's crew to fire on Hodges's command.

Senator sees something moving ahead of him and opens fire, not stopping. Snake makes his way over to Senator and looks for whatever it is that Senator fired on. It's a mamasan (Vietnamese woman). Senator feels terrible about shooting her in the shoulder and the others tell him he needs to get over it, as she knows the rules and should not have left her bunker. They tell Senator that he'll be carried out in a straightjacket if he keeps up his sobbing and remorse.

Hodges orders the villagers out of their bunkers and tells the men to throw grenades in them to make sure there are no enemies hiding within. Bagger notices a pair of men's underpants in the mamasan's bunker and wonders if the man who owns them was part of the enemy tonight. He asks her where her man is and she tells him she doesn't know, so he tries to take the underpants, but Snake tells him to give them back.

Phony compliments Hodges on the great job while he questions an old man about his can cuoc (identification card). Snake fills Hodges in on the story. The villagers are all supposed to carry them, but it's a joke because half of them don't have them. They tell the Marines that the bombs blew up their can cuoc, but the boys don't believe them.

Hodges looks over the damage: two hootches (villager's home) on fire, one blood trail, but no bodies. He's not very happy with the outcome, as he was hoping for dead gooks. Another unit joins them and starts discussing the previous night's action. One man named Dan questions the mamasan as to why she was not in her bunker, and she tells him she needed to have a bowel movement and couldn't wait any longer. He tells her in Vietnamese that she needs to do that in her bunker from now on, so she'll be safe.

As the Marines settle in for the daylight hours, the mail is delivered. Senator gets a letter from an old college roommate named Mark, who tells him of the burning villages he sees on television. He can't believe Senator is in the thick of it. This saddens Senator and makes him depressed, so he asks about resigning from the Marines. Speedy hears him and says he'll give him a grenade in tonight's battle so he can kill himself and be done with it.

Chapter 7 Analysis

The first night's battle for Hodges is a success. The new Marines now have a sense for what is to come (night after night) and the veteran Marines like the way Hodges handled things through the night. Snake is warming up to Hodges and a friendship is forming. This makes Hodges happy.

Senator, on the other hand, is depressed already, and it's only his first night. Speedy feels as if Senator will go crazy and end up in a straightjacket for feeling sorry for the



children and villagers. He tries to explain to him that you cannot trust anyone, as they will kill you and steal from you when you turn your back, but this doesn't seem to sink in with Senator. The letter he gets from his friend Mark makes him stoop into a deeper depression. As the sun comes up, Hodges prepares for the next night of battle.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Senator's friends from college find ways out of being sent to Vietnam. John Wilkins Grimsley locked himself away from society for days prior to his examination, refusing to speak to anyone, then he went crazy during the examination. He was given a psychological deferment and will become a doctor after his schooling. Another friend threw his urine into the examiner's face and was ruled too aggressive. His friend Mark avoided the exam altogether by going to Canada, and another friend took a pill to make his blood pressure rise just in time for the exam.

Senator didn't try to avoid the exam at all, hence he ended up in Vietnam. He is the youngest child in his family and fourteen years younger than his elder brother. He attended Harvard because his father had and because he wasn't good at meeting girls. He quit Harvard and decided to sign up for the Marines. His intention, of course, was to perform with the Marine Band, not fight in battle. The recruiter told him that he could not guarantee he'd play in the band, but his chances were okay. His family and friends never understood why he enlisted, but it was solely his choice.

Chapter 8 Analysis

This chapter sheds light on Senator's background and why he enlisted in the Marines. The reader feels sorry that Senator signed up for the sole reason to perform in the Marine Band and yet he is sent to Vietnam to fight. His college buddies of Harvard all find ways to avoid being drafted, yet Senator embraced it with false pretenses, which were partly the fault of the recruiter.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Angus Austin arrives as the unit's new Papa Sierra (Platoon Sergeant). He reported to Hodges and is questioned thoroughly about his background. He tells Hodges he was the Police Sergeant at the airbase the year before. Hodges chuckles and asks him if he did anything more than trash duty. Angus is embarrassed, but tells him he did do other things as well. Hodges continues by filling him in on the previous night's events.

Angus tries to reassure Hodges that he'll have the men treating him right in no time. Hodges is surprised by this, but tells him the men are treating him right and he's very happy with the way things are going. Angus continues by explaining that he takes great pride in being a Marine, and to see a man out of uniform or unshaven would bother him. Hodges wonders about this situation, knowing that his men are in the bush. He doesn't care if they are unshaven or out of uniform (it's hot and men are killed constantly). He's not sure what he'll do, considering Angus may go straight to the top with the fact that Hodges is not running a strict Marine outfit.

Hodges tries to explain that this Corps is different. The men have been there fifty days and can't have certain luxuries like getting a regular hair cut. Austin still persists, so Hodges gives up and figures he'll either realize the way things are in the bush, or maybe Hodges would learn his way. It doesn't much matter to him either way.

Austin, feeling satisfied with his discussion with Hodges, leaves to inspect the perimeters. He approaches Snake and Phony as they dig their hole. He asks what they are doing, to which they reply with sarcastic comments, such as that they'd rather be doing anything else. Austin tells them they should be cleaning up trash at the Da Nang brig. They both laugh and ask how they are supposed to get there. The other men howl with laughter at his comment.

Austin is angry and turns to Cannonball to ask where his PDF (principle direction of fire is). Cannonball is stunned and says, "Say wha-a-at?" Snake tries to motion to Cannonball to silence him, but he waves Snake off and continues with, "We don't shoot no principle direction man, we shoot gooks". Snake steps in between Cannonball and Austin and asks Austin who he is. He tells him he's the new Staff Sergeant and he's not very happy. He asks Phony to remove his skivvy shirt, which is covered in a peace sign. It's Phony's favorite shirt, so he doesn't want to remove it. He tells Austin he doesn't have another one. Austin gets a brand new one out of his own gear and proceeds to rip Phony's right off his back. Austin faces all of the men and tells them things will be straightening up around the bush while he's under command of Hodges.



Chapter 9 Analysis

Hodges finds the new Staff Sergeant, Austin, to be unrealistic, considering he wants the men to be freshly shaven and clothed in army uniforms while fighting in the bush. These men are barely hanging on during their nightly battles and it's blistering hot during the day. The men like to walk around the bush in shorts and tee shirts during the daytime, but Austin assures them that things will be different under his command.

Even though Hodges is the upper rank, he's not quite sure what to do with Austin. He feels that after a night in the bush he may think differently. Then again, maybe Hodges will see things differently after Austin tries to make his changes. Only time will tell.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

That night the men head toward Liberty Bridge. The other men had referred to Liberty Bridge as Skate City, meaning it was a piece of cake compared to the bush. There was hot food, they could bathe in the river, and it had toilets you could sit down on to use. The bridge was nonfunctioning now, but the French had built it years ago to reach An Hoa from Da Nang. Since the bridge is not functioning, the men have to cross on foot and the vehicles are pulled by barges one at a time.

Hodges and his men cross the second bridge, which is concrete, and head toward the southern compound. It is referred to as the Bridge compound and is the focal point for the infantry battalion. The men get settled in to the tents assigned to them and later go to the chapel to pay tribute to the men who had fallen just nights before their arrival.

The Chaplain leads a ceremony in memory of the fallen men, as Hodges and the others watch as quietly as they can. Senator, Bagger, and Ottenburger can't seem to keep quiet as they make snide comments about how the Chaplain has no idea what these men have been through. The Colonel shows up and offers a few encouraging words to the men and tells them they are up for a Meritorious Unit Command.

Later that day, Waterbull returns and enters Snake's tent and wakes him up. They greet each other like old buddies. Waterbull tells Snake he and a few other guys caught a ride with the Colonel on his plane. He continues by telling Snake he should get used to Colonels as he's going to be a "lifer". Snake knows he's kidding and chuckles. Waterbull lights up a joint and offers it to Snake. Snake tells him he never smokes in the bush, but Waterbull reminds him that he's at the Bridge and not the bush, so Snake takes it. He likes it so much Waterbull gives him his own joint to smoke. Snake tells Waterbull about Hodges and the burn unit, in which Flaky had to burn Lieutenant Corky's boot with his foot still in it and it made Senator throw up. He tells Waterbull that Hodges is okay though.

Snake asks where Waterbull has been, so he tells him he had the clap and had to be given shots for two weeks to get rid of it. Snake tells him now that he's back he'll be taking over for Bagger, who wasn't really into running a unit anyway. He also fills him in on the new guys that arrived a few days ago as they enjoy their buzz together.

Austin enters the tent later to inspect the men. He tells them all to get shaved and get haircuts. He sees that Phony's flak jacket is scribbled with F*** You and tells him to get rid of it, so Phony tosses the jacket toward the entrance of the tent. This pisses Austin off and he yells at him to get rid of the nasty words on the jacket, not the actual jacket. The men burst into laughter. Austin yells at the other men who have writing on their jackets and tells them they should be treating their gear respectfully as military gear and not defacing them with profanities.



As Austin leaves the tent, he motions for Snake to follow him out. Snake does and Austin points to a tree line over one hundred meters across the barbed wire fence that protects the Bridge. He tells Snake to set his firing men up at the tree line for LP (listening post). Snake cannot believe his ears, so he asks what he's supposed to do if any of his men get hurt, as they can't fly over the barbed wire to get back into the Bridge. Austin tells him he has no choice but to do as he says. Snake tells him there's no way he and his men are doing LP along that tree line. Austin yells at Snake and tells him he's on report, and Snake tells him he demands to see Hodges.

After an argument Austin knows he's going to lose, he tells Snake to go ahead and talk to Hodges. The three men sit together and Hodges tells Austin he's not sure about it, but if Austin will take the night's LP exactly where he told Snake to take it, he can report back the next morning with a report and let Hodges know if his plan worked. Austin asks to talk with Hodges alone and Snake leaves. Austin proceeds to tell Hodges what a cheap shot that was, telling him to do the LP when he clearly ordered Snake to do it. Hodges reminds Austin that these are his men, not Austin's, and he calls the shots. Austin tells Hodges the order came from the Colonel, so Hodges and Snake go to talk to the Colonel and are stuck talking to First Lieutenant Kersey, who says he'll take the suggestion to the Colonel. Snake and Hodges both know it will never be taken to the Colonel, but they let the matter go and hope to hear from the First Lieutenant with an answer.

As Snake and Hodges walk away, Snake tells Hodges that Kersey was in his unit before and would sneak up on the other men, trying to catch them smoking a cigarette or listening to the radio on LP, and turn them in. One night he walked up on Wild Man number one and got both of his legs shot. No one knows it was Wild Man, because Kersey never said anything to the Colonel. The men know and that bothers Kersey. Everyone else believes he was shot by a gook in battle.

Later, the men bathe in the cool water near the Bridge. As they shave they discuss how to get out of LP duty outside of the wire if they have no choice. Bagger suggests they go, but when everyone goes to sleep they hide quietly in a ditch and sleep. Phony suggests taking Kersey out. Snake is not sure what to think. They ask for Senator's opinion and Waterbull steps in saying they should just do it and shut up. He says it's a piece of cake. The others chime in and agree with him, as several other units have done it before them. They all agree, even Snake. When Hodges asks him about it he tells him that his men are okay with doing it.

Hodges tells Snake that some reporters will be coming in the next day to talk to men who served on Go Noi Island about six months back. Snake and Phony are the only men left who were there. Hodges also tells Snake that nothing bad can be said, so Snake tells him he better use Phony, as he has nothing good to say about it. Phony does the interview as best he can, and Austin comes up to him afterwards and tells him he's a dead man. Phony is not worried about it.



Chapter 10 Analysis

The men are overwhelmed with excitement at being at the Bridge instead of in the bush. They are able to take baths in the river and drink cool water. They have hot meals and can use the bathroom in actual toilets instead of squatting in the bush. They call the Bridge Skate City because it's such a breeze compared to where they have been.

Austin is still trying to pull rank by telling Snake that his boys need to be on the tree line doing LP when he knows if any of them get hurt there is no way for them to get back across the barbed wire for safety. Snake and the other men come to the realization that since other units have done the same LP in the same spot, they will have no choice.

The reader feels the intensity of the situation for all of the men involved and everything that they have to endure in a "normal" day in the trenches of Vietnam.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Speedy, Smitty, Senator, and Burgie make their way beyond the barbed wire fence for the first LP. Smitty gets first watch. They all settle in on their ponchos lying side by side, awaiting what the night will bring. Senator takes advantage of the time and falls asleep. A few hours later, Speedy wakes Smitty and Ottenburger, because there is movement along the tree line about seventy-five yards from them. Senator wakes up on his own when he hears the movement. Twenty minutes go by as the men sit deadly silent. There are gooks coming their way, laughing as they pass. The men don't move or make a sound, so they won't be heard by the enemy. The handset is also turned down to a whisper. A voice comes over the handset, asking the men to press once if they are in trouble, so they do.

The enemy opens fire on the northern compound with big explosions. The line tries to fight back. Speedy, Smitty, Senator, and Burgie sit in silence, knowing that the enemy is approaching the southern compound. They cannot cry out to warn their men, as they will be dead almost immediately. Senator cries in the dark silently as the enemy opens fire on the southern compound. They take out the first two bunkers, then the chapel. Their plan is to take over the entire compound.

Inside the compound, Austin runs then crawls over to one of the bunkers where Cat Man, Phony, Cannonball, and Big Mac (a new guy) are. He asks if they are alright, to which Phony says they are. Austin leaves the men to check on the other bunkers. He gets about five feet away, dives to the ground, and Phony launches a grenade close to him. It explodes and Austin screams in pain. The looks from Snake and the other men in the bunker across from Phony are in full agreement with what he did. Big Mac asks Phony why he threw the grenade and he simply answers, "What you mean, man? That was a mortar". Hodges isn't around to see it happen, but all the men look at each other in approval.

Once Hodges notices that Austin is down, he yells for someone to go help him. No one volunteers, so Hodges crawls toward him. Austin has shrapnel along his forehead and left side. As Hodges pulls him to the bunker, Austin tells him he'll have to get another Pap Sierra, as he knows he won't be back.

Speedy yells for a cease fire, as the mortars are too close to him and his men on the tree line, but he hears Kersey on the other end telling him it's for their own good. Speedy knows by his tone that they have no choice. If they don't fire, the enemy will take them all down. Suddenly Speedy hears the word "Move" from the radio. He wonders where they are supposed to move to. There's no place for them to go. The compound is about to launch an eight incher, and if the men don't move, they'll all be dead. Speedy tells the men to move toward the left and over the radio asks for fifteen minutes so his men can get out of reach. They all start to crawl.



The gun goes off from the southern compound and Speedy and Smitty are killed instantly. They didn't get far enough away. Ottenburger crawls over to Senator and tells him he can't feel either of his legs. Senator notices that the nails went right through the lower half of his body and he is a bloody mess. He leaves Ottenburger and crawls to Speedy to get the radio. It's all smashed, so he heads back to Ottenburger, who pleads with him to patch him up. Burgie is only nineteen years old and he dies in Senator's reach.

At sunlight, Hodges, Snake, and Wild Man head toward the tree line to check on the LP unit. They see the mass of dead bodies and spot Senator, who is still laying next to Burgie. Senator vomits again, then runs to the water, pulls his pants down, and goes to the bathroom. Snake attempts to help him up, but he wants to be left alone. He tells Snake he'll be alright. He stands and shakes uncontrollably. When he finally gets ahold of himself, he walks back to the compound, sobbing the whole way there. He repeats, "I'm in hell" over and over again. He's the only one that survives the night's LP.

Hodges contemplates what he's going to say in the letters he has to write to the parents of the fallen Marines, "Dear Mrs. Ottenburger. We got a hundred gooks and three Marines. Sorry about that". He decides he cannot write the letters, so Snake puts his arm on Hodges's shoulder and tells him he will take care of it. Phony sees them approaching the compound and tells them that Kersey is getting a Silver Star for last night. When Snake sees Kersey, he teases him about it and tells Hodges that if he had the chance he would kill Kersey.

Chapter 11 Analysis

The harsh reality of the war is revealed in this chapter. The manner in which new Sergeants come into the mix with the long time veterans of this war and have no idea what they are walking in to is astounding. Senator is cracking up and cannot control himself as he keeps asking to be dismissed from the war. The others tend to laugh at him and tell him they'll give him a grenade so he can end his life, as it's the only way he's getting out.

The men are like bands of brothers, and stick together through thick and thin. Their stomachs ache from seeing bloody, torn apart bodies at the light of each day as they throw up at the sight. The barbed wire that surrounds the compound is filled with body fragments of the enemy and they fill trucks with dead bodies for a mass burial.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Phony lived a hard life as a child. When he was ten years old he started stealing from people and holding them up on the street. By the time he was thirteen he started selling drugs and spending time in Juvenile Detention. He was passed around from foster home to foster home and taught to smile all the time. Once people turned their back, he would run away, but always kept that smile when he was face to face with the adults.

By the time he turned sixteen he was serving time on a Federal narcotics farm. He was the youngest kid there and learned to act scared and innocent. This was where his nickname came from, "Phony". His civilian record was incredibly long, so the probation officer gave him a fresh start by writing letters in hopes that he could get in the service. The Marines took him. If he came out with a clean record and an honorable discharge, his slate would be wiped clean.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Under the circumstances, Phony's one and only chance at having a clean slate is to join the armed forces. His probation officer knew this and Phony knew this too. He knew the inside of juvenile detention centers and they felt like jail. If he didn't get this opportunity, he would most definitely end up in prison or dead on the street.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Hodges knows that when water buffalo disappear from the fields it is a sign that the enemy is very near. The men are making their way through another village and it is very quiet. Hodges makes a mental note of the piles of human poop along the village perimeter and thinks it's too much for such a small village. He also notices freshly dug bunkers and empty food cans everywhere. He believes the enemy has been there, feasting the night before and getting ready for a battle. He doesn't feel good about the situation at all. The village lay unpopulated.

Hodges leaves a four man gun unit to trail behind him to protect them from the rear. He hears gunfire, turns around, and sees dozens of fleeing villagers. They are carrying long sacks of their belongings. He is happy for his decision to have the men at his rear, but he's mad at the fact that the enemy is running away from him and not fighting back. He tells Senator to pick up his gun and start shooting. Senator tries to protest by telling Hodges that they are women and children, but Hodges knows better. Senator knows he must obey and starts firing, but doesn't really care where he fires. He's being non-caring and a very bad shot.

Hodges knows that since most of the villagers escaped the attack there would be trouble ahead. He leaves half of his men in the village with Gilliland (who replaced Austin) and takes the other half toward a ridge with no name, so he calls it No Name Ridge. Hodges knows well that he and his men on the Ridge are about to be shot at by the enemy, and just as they approach the Ridge, the enemy opens fire. Flaky screams from behind, as he's been shot. Hodges and Doc Rabbit crawl toward Flaky. Doc wraps his hand. The radio was knocked to the side and Hodges retrieves it.

Up ahead some men appear to have captured an enemy soldier. Upon further inspection, it is a mamasan and her pouch carries an AK-47. No sooner than they discover this that a bomb explodes and Boomer loses both of his legs. Another new Marine loses his fingers on both hands. The Doc wraps both Marines and Hodges knows he's been defeated by the enemy. He's saddened that he didn't beat them instead. The Medevac is on its way because Flaky had called it as soon as he was shot in the hand. The chopper comes and takes away the wounded while Hodges hides under a tree, pounding the ground in anger. He's furious at the upper level command who sit in the air conditioning and give orders but have no idea what it's like being him or his men.

Chapter 13 Analysis

The heaviness that Hodges is feeling is all too real in this chapter. He's smart and on top of things as he brings his men to Checkpoint Four. He's making his way through the



village as he notices it's eerily empty. There's a problem and he knows it all too well. The villagers have already fled toward the tree line. Thank God Hodges positioned a firing unit at the tree line, but they don't kill all of the gooks, as many run away.

It angers Hodges that many have escaped. As the men finally see life on the outskirts of the village, it's only women and children. Hodges knows the men of each family are the ones killing his men, so he hates the women and children for this. They are traitors and phonies and he is protecting them. He knows they hate him too, but there's nothing he can do as he takes orders from the top from men who have no idea what is going on in the trenches.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Hodges sits with Doc Rabbit and Gilliland for the last radio watch. Doc opens a can of C-rations and eats it while Hodges wakes Gilliland up because he's snoring so loud. It's daylight now and Hodges teases Gilliland about his R&R (rest and relaxation). Today is the day and he tells Gilliland he'll be back, but Gilliland says he's never coming back to the bush.

Gilliland has served ten years and is really looking forward to his R&R. Doc teases him a little more, then grabs some toilet paper and heads toward the Ridge. The men from Waterbull's team are just coming in from the night's LP and run into Doc. They tell Doc that they almost shot him not knowing who he is, and Doc laughs.

As the men arrive from their night's LP they all start teasing Bagger and telling the others how when a certain song comes on the radio Bagger sits down and looks at the pictures of his wife. They say it doesn't matter if they are in the middle of a battle, he does this anyway. Bagger pulls out his wallet and reveals the pictures to the men. He tells them she's a cheerleader and reveals another picture of his two-month-old son. They are all impressed because he's so young and already a father.

A mamasan sits nearby, panning some rice while the men walk by her. One of them tosses a cigarette to her, which she grabs once she thinks the men are out of sight. Dan, the Kit Carson Scout, walks by her and gives her three cans of C-ration meat. She tells him they don't eat meat, but he doesn't believe her. He tells her to take the meat for her children, so she does. He gets her to do this by telling her that his wife and children were killed by the VC. He asks where her husband is, and pushes it further by asking if he's VC (the enemy). She says she's spent many months in the mountains and could bring them to every enemy village. He tells her he does not seek death and it would not do any good. He gives her a pack of cigarettes and she's grateful. Senator comes by and beckons to the children to bath with him at the well. They are filthy and he's going to wash anyway. As he does this, Dan takes the mamasan into her thatch and has sex with her. She's not really into it, but does it anyway.

Chapter 14 Analysis

This chapter reveals a little in the social lives of the Marines as they come off a night of fighting. Gilliland is about to have R&R, to which he is really looking forward to. The men all tease him, but he doesn't care. They say he'll be back, because he's a ten year veteran, but he's not sure he'll be back and it's not up to him.

Dan is newly introduced and immediately attaches himself to a mamasan, who is sifting rice. He kneels beside her and talks to her. He gives her cigarettes and C-rations. It is obvious to the reader that her husband is in the mountains as part of the VC, but she

will not say. Dan takes advantage of her friendship by following her into her hatch and having sex with her. She knows she cannot say no, so she simply does what he says while her children have baths at the well.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Dan had a wife and five children at one time and they lived in the village of My Le. The eldest was a girl and very beautiful. His brother fought for the VC and was killed one day. Dan knew he would die and believed he should have stayed home and taken care of his family. One day two soldiers come to Dan's hootch and give him his brother's gun. They tell him he needs to come and fight, taking his brother's place in the war. Dan tells them he needs to take care of his family and that he had just planted rice. The men do not care. They tell him to say goodbye to his wife. He had no choice.

Once he starts fighting, he becomes good at firing the gun. The soldiers see that he is good with the people in the villages. He tells them stories about how the war is almost over. The villagers feed the soldiers rice and feel protected by them. Dan visits his own village later with the soldiers and sees his wife. She tells him that their youngest child, only a few months old, died because he would not eat. She had very little breast milk, but still he would not eat. They all look very bad and she says they will all die while he's fighting in the war.

He asks his wife if she's willing to leave the village and she agrees. There are pamphlets given out by the Marines which offer safe-conduct passes to those who surrender. Dan's wife had never left the village, but agreed to go with him to Tan Phouc. He would escape his unit in the morning and she would join him in mid-afternoon with the children.

So, it is done. He sneaks away from his unit as they walk the narrow road, but his family never makes it. He hears gunfire in his village a few minutes later, and instead of staying in the mud hole where he hides, he walks back to the village. He finds his entire family killed from gunshot wounds in their hootch. He is very saddened by this and knows he will have to surrender to the Marines in order to live.

He throws his gun in the stream and proceeds toward the Marines to surrender. The Marines see him coming and send a unit to meet him with an interpreter. Dan tells the interpreter he's tired of the VC. He is taken into their compound and notices that the Marines are big and thinks it's because they eat so well. They offer him cans of C-ration meat. It's been a year since he'd eaten meat. He meets another Vietnamese man named Hai, who tells him he's a Kit Carson Scout. He urges Dan to join them, as they really should have two Kit Carson Scouts. Dan ponders this and decides he has nothing better to do.

Chapter 15 Analysis

The cold reality of the VC comes clear in this chapter. Dan lives with his wife and five children, who are starving to death in the village of Hy Le. The soldiers do not care, and

they make him go to war in his brother's place. He does not believe in fighting. It seems senseless to him, and he just wants to farm and raise his family.

It's a hard choice, but he prepares his family to surrender to the Marines so they can eat and get out of the war. No sooner does he sneak away from his unit than they kill his entire family, including the infant his wife holds in her arms. The bullet goes through the baby and into her. Dan does not know what to do except turn himself in to the Marines and make the most of his situation. They like him right away and make him feel comfortable.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

An Hoa combat base is home to the Twenty-Fifth Marines. Bagger and Cannonball arrive and enter the tent of the First Commander. They are being given R&R, but the Commander tells them to shower, shave, and get haircuts first, to which they are glad to do. They make their way to the transient tent first, which is occupied by new guys, guys coming back from R&R, and other guys who work at the Twenty-Fifth.

Bagger is approached by an old friend, Stretch, who has just returning from Japan. He had hookworm and Bagger thought it was just a stomachache. Bagger laughs at him. Stretch tells Cannonball that Homicide is back, to which Cannonball smiles. Apparently he got out of the hospital, but instead of coming back to the bush, he shacked up with a whore and was caught. He's back for court marshaling, and Stretch tells them he's in the "Black Shack". They look at each other, wondering what he's talking about, but go to see Homicide anyway. Stretch says that Bagger shouldn't go because he's white, but he ignores him.

Bagger and Cannonball arrive at the Black Shack. Rap Jones is the head honcho of the place. It's where the black guys get together and discuss racism and the unjust world. A big sign on the front says, "No Chuck Dudes Allowed: This Means You". Jones meets them at the door and tells Bagger to get lost. Bagger yells into the tent for Homicide to come out, and Jones invites Cannonball in, because he's black. Cannonball, feeling trapped between the whites and the blacks, yells into the tent for Homicide to come out. When Homicide comes out it's apparent that he's doped up, because when asked what he's been up to, he replies, "Been bleedin' Whitey's war. Killin' brown folks, ain' no reason. Been dyin' fo' the Beast". Cannonball can't believe the words coming out of his friend's mouth.

Jones gets angry and tells Cannonball to either come in and talk or leave. Bagger looks at Jones in disbelief. They are not going to let him in, only Cannonball. Jones pulls out a stick with a dagger inside and Bagger pulls out a grenade. Cannonball knows he had better do something or his dear friend, Bagger, could be killed. He also feels responsible for not acting sooner so this whole thing could have been avoided. The only thing he can do is go inside the tent and dismiss Bagger so they both don't end up dead. Bagger feels abandoned by Cannonball and walks away in wonderment of what just happened. He feels like Cannonball took their side over his.

Chapter 16 Analysis

Even though Cannonball goes inside the Black Shack and leaves Bagger outside, the reader knows he did it for his friend's own good. Bagger, however, feels very different about the situation and feels betrayed by his good friend.

The Black Shack is a symbol of hatred and the war. The black men feel as though they are fighting a white man's war and are able to express themselves inside their own tent. The only problem is that it's fueling hatred for men who don't necessarily feel the same way. The war is not about black and white.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Senator stands in a new hole he just dug eating a can of C-ration meat for dinner. He and his unit will spend the next two days in this village until they move on. Senator sits and rethinks the things he has been through. He remembers Ottenburger telling him to stay with him while he dies. His memories are filled with sadness and painful remembrances.

Night starts to fill the sky and Snake arrives. He tells Senator they are definitely going to get hit tonight. Senator is sarcastic and says, "Good. Did you arrange it?" Snake tells him to shut up and get in his hole. He further tells him that no one wants to be in the war and he should stop being a crybaby.

As the firing lights up the sky, Senator cries and makes it back to his hold. He notices Snake holding his leg, curled up into a ball. As he contemplates rescuing him, Waterbull crawls out, picks Snake up, and carries him back near Senator's hole. After the firing stops, Senator crawls out to the field and gets Snake's helmet for him because he needs the battle dressing. Snake takes his boot off and realizes that the bullet went between his toes. There's no blood at all. He can't believe it. Senator tells him that he was about to get him, but Waterbull beat him there. Snake shakes his head and tells him the day he waits for Senator, he may as well quit the Marines. Senator spends the rest of the night reminiscing the old times and chatting with the ghosts of his past.

Chapter 17 Analysis

Senator is feeling scared about the night's battle ahead of him. He digs his hole unceremoniously, remembering what the veteran Marines told him about digging a fresh hole every night. If he uses an old hole, the enemy will surely find him and shoot him.

He watches as the bullets fly and Snake goes down, holding his leg. Senator knows he must go get him, but he's frozen in his hole from fear. Waterbull gets Snake while Senator watches. The reader feels for the men during battle, seeing how some endure it better than others.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

That morning, Gilliland shows up and Hodges is shocked to see him. Gilliland tells him he's only back for two weeks, then he'll be a civilian. Hodges can't believe it. Gilliland looks around the perimeter and compliments Hodges on his positioning of the men. Hodges asks what Gilliland will do on the outside. He tells him that it doesn't matter. He says it doesn't matter being a Marine anymore either. Vietnam ruined that for him. Hodges nods his understanding. Gilliland tells him about 1965, when he and the other volunteer soldiers invaded Vietnam. They were nothing like the guys now. They did stupid things like setting the tree line on fire to draw the gooks out and the wind blew the fire back at them. Hodges laughs and listens to his stories.

Gilliland tells Hodges that back home things are different. They are forgotten about by society. The college students go to school, businessmen build their businesses, and everything goes on like normal. It's like they are lost in Vietnam and nobody cares about them. He tells Hodges that when he returns home wearing his uniform, the civilians look at him like he's some kind of animal. He used to be very proud of wearing his uniform.

Gilliland continues by telling Hodges that when he reported that he was only coming back to Vietnam for two weeks, the Sergeant Major called him a coward. Gilliland told him that he wanted his rations that had been held back from him (a beer and a soda every day) or he'd report the Sergeant. The Sergeant gave him three cases of beer, which he brought with him. He points to the truck and tells Hodges they can retrieve them later. Hodges laughs out loud.

While Hodges sits in his hootch feeling like he's been in Vietnam forever, Senator opens a can of C-ration jelly and rubs it into his gook sores in hopes that it will get infected and he can leave for a while. Cornbread, a new guy, watches him in disgust.

Chapter 18 Analysis

Gilliland's story is enlightening to the reader. He'd come into Vietnam with one of the first units, and the men had no idea what they were getting into. They did stupid things like setting the tree line on fire to drive out the enemy, only to have the fire come back on their own line. They were proud to be fighting in the war and the people back home made them feel good.

Things had drastically changed, as he explains to Hodges. The people back home don't care about the troops fighting now. When the Marines come home now, they are spat on by civilians and called animals. He doesn't understand it and neither does Hodges. It is the cold hard truth though, and there is no changing it.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

Hodges sits in the grass and watches as some villagers approach. He tells Dan to come over and greet them. Hodges has seen this so many times before that he is almost numb to it. The women wear flour sacks for shirts and black pajama pants. The women's teeth are blackened from chewing on betel nut. There are old men and children also. They are carrying three stretchers. On one is a young girl with a stomach wound, another carries an old lady with a swollen face, and a third holds a young child with a head wound.

Doc comes over and goes to the small child first. There is no hope for him, so he moves on to the young girl. The mother of the small child tries to bargain for a case of C-ration. She says it's for her child. Hodges cannot believe his ears. He tells Dan to interpret and tell her no. He knows the food will only go to the VC. The woman continues to plead, so Hodges gets frustrated and tells them to go to the resettlement village. They say the VC stands between them and the settlement village, so they'll just go back home. He calls their bluff and tells them he'll transport them to the resettlement village in a Medevac. To his surprise, they say yes.

Doc comes over and tells Hodges that the small child is dead, the young girl probably won't make it, but that the old woman will pull through. Gilliland also walks over to Hodges and asks what he's doing. He tells Gilliland of his plan to get the villagers to the resettlement village, but Gilliland tells him the village is full. He explains that it's not really full, but the Sergeants that run the village have two hundred people and report on paper that they have five hundred. Therefore, they get rice for five hundred, feed two hundred, and sell the rest on the black market. Hodges is pissed. He radios his request in for the villagers, but is told that the village is full. He has Dan translate to the villagers that they have to walk, and they proceed with sullen faces.

Chapter 19 Analysis

What goes on behind closed doors in the war comes out in this chapter. The Sergeants that sit behind desks, doing paperwork and never entering the bush, have control over Hodges and the other men. It's frustrating for Hodges, as he has to face his men and the surrounding villages on a daily basis. He cannot understand how a village can be full when he was just there a few months ago and it was only one quarter full. Gilliland knows, because he's been there before and watched what these Sergeants do. They are manipulative and non-caring when it comes to the Vietnamese villagers. Every day Hodges learns more about the way things really are.



Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

It's Gilliland's day to depart the Marines and return to civilization. He wears his nice, clean uniform and stands outside the gate waiting to hitch a ride. An old man picks him up and Gilliland recognizes his appearance as an ex-Marine. He thanks the man for the ride and calls him "Tops", which is what ex-Marines are called. The old man smiles at him, glad he's recognized as such.

Gilliland is headed for Pismo Beach, which is where his wife waits for him. The three children stayed behind with her mother. The two men drive for miles in the car, talking about each other's experiences in the war, and Gilliland starts to feel really close to the old man. He also realizes that he's not sure he can talk about his experiences with someone who has not experienced them firsthand themselves. He's afraid to talk to civilians, because they won't understand him.

The old man isn't going all the way to Pismo Beach, so he drops Gilliland off by the freeway and tells him which way to go. As soon as the old man pulls away, Gilliland feels lost. A truck hauling lumber picks him up next and carries him a little further. After the truck lets him off, he sits by the highway again and a couple pick him up in a yellow Volkswagen. They take him on the ride of his life as they drink and party all the way to Hollywood. Gilliland is relieved to get out of the car.

A trucker picks him up next and takes him all the way to Pismo Beach. He feels a little afraid of seeing his wife again after such a long time. After arriving at Pismo Beach, he walks to the Shore Cliff Lodge to see which room his wife is in. He's home, but it sure doesn't feel like it to Gilliland.

Chapter 20 Analysis

Gilliland's first feel for being a civilian is pretty much what he expected. He's thumbing for a ride, planning to meet his wife in Pismo Beach. He's picked up by a few civilians, but he's also bombarded by bottles flying out of car windows and people yelling obscenities at him.

He feels very uncomfortable and wonders why these people have little respect for him, as he had gone to war for their freedom. It continues to baffle him and he wonders how he will ever hold a conversation with anyone who hasn't experienced what he'd experienced. He knows he's got a long road ahead of him to fit in to society again.



Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

Senator watches as Bagger and Cannonball return. They are accompanied by two other men who he doesn't know. They are fighting with one another also, and look around for familiar faces. One of them asks Senator where Snake is and he points to Snake's tent. It's Ogre and Baby Cakes. Snake is elated to see them both.

They tell Snake the story of how Baby Cakes had a job sorting mail and Ogre comes in telling him about getting hookers in Da Nang. Baby Cakes leaves his mail job and follows Ogre to a warehouse that has the ugliest girls he's ever seen. They both get caught and end up back in the bush. The other men all crowd around to listen to the two men bicker. When it's all over, Baby Cakes feels a little better about getting it off his chest.

Snake fills Baby Cakes in on Hodges and how cool he has been. He tells him about Austin and how Hodges stood up for him. Snake tells Baby Cakes he needs to report to Hodges and take Ogre into his unit. He tells Snake he doesn't want Ogre with him, as he almost got him shot earlier. He also tells him he's got Senator. Baby Cakes knows he's the kid from Harvard, and says he's not sure how to talk to him. Snake tells him to talk straight and if he resists to tell him he's got point. Point scares him to death, so he'll do anything else. Snake says he let Burgie die on the field, that he didn't even both dressing Burgie's legs in a tourniquet, so he bled to death. Baby Cakes just looks at Snake in disbelief.

After a while, Baby Cake's unit heads for the field. They all wear tiger shorts and boots, due to the intense heat. Ogre wears a peace symbol around his neck that he made from an empty C-ration can. He used to make similar things when he was a civilian.

Cannonball talks to Bagger and hopes to gain his friendship back after the Black Shack incident. Bagger is still a little upset about it. Cannonball asks about his R&R and he tells him he changed a whole lot of diapers because his wife said it would be good for the baby to get to know him. It is sad to admit, but he actually feels more comfortable in the bush. He can't believe it himself.

Cannonball, Wild Man, and Bagger try to talk to Senator, who's in his poncho tent, reading a book on philosophy. Senator tries not to be rude, and talks back. Cannonball can't understand a thing he's saying and neither can the other two men. They assume he's talking about school and let it drop.

Chapter 21 Analysis

Baby Cakes and Ogre return in this chapter. They are scarred from their wounds, but are back and ready to go into the bush again. They shoot the breeze with Cannonball,



Bagger, and Snake. Snake fills Baby Cakes in on Hodges and how cool he's been. Baby Cakes seems happy about it.

He fills Baby Cakes in on Senator too. He tells him that although Senator is from Harvard and is not a senator yet, he needs to be watched. He's afraid of everything and doesn't want to do anything to help his fellow troops. Baby Cakes takes in all the information and sets off for the bush. He can't believe he's back in the bush.



Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

Bagger signed up for the Marines with his entire football team (the Bowman Rebels). The recruiter couldn't believe his eyes. They filled up two cars to get to the recruiting office. He was in love with a cheerleader and gets her pregnant before he goes off to war.

Chapter 22 Analysis

This is a very short chapter explaining how Bagger (Jerry Dean) and his entire football team drive to Athens and enlist in the Marines together.



Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary

Cat Man eyes the nearby banana trees and Hodges notices. Hodges remembers what he's been taught. The North Vietnamese lay under the banana trees for shade and eat the small stalks. Cat Man points to the missing stalk and Hodges nods his understanding. The entire troop sets in motion to check it out and when they are fifty yards away the enemy opens fire on them. No one is hit, and Hodges orders them to head for the river bank. They immediately obey.

Big Mac approaches the banana tree and sets off a booby trap. He's dead at once. Phony yells from behind Big Mac. His arm has been torn off. Snake runs over and makes him lay down while Doc comes to bandage the wounded arm. The gunfire continues and two more men are hit. Snake runs over near Hodges and helps him up, as he's been hit too. Snake calls in for the Medevac. There are two emergencies, two regulars and two dead men. Hodges asks Snake who has been hit and he says, "You are, sir. Phony, Stork and Big Mac too".

The Medevac arrives and takes the wounded men. Baby Cakes tells Snake that Hodges will be back. He's hurt about as bad as Ogre had been. Snake doesn't think he'll come back to the same platoon though, because he's only got four months in the bush. He likes Hodges and hopes he'll come back to them.

The men reach the villages of Henderson Hill and are greeted by smiling children with broken English. One child asks where Phony is and Wild Man tells him what happened. The child seems very sad. Senator notices that Snake and Cat Man are depressed about Phony, Hodges, and the other men. Snake goes into a hootch as soon as they arrive at the village and doesn't come out. Word comes to the troop that they would spend the next month wandering through the flat lands. Senator is scared to death and has heard the stories, which were not good.

Chapter 23 Analysis

Death comes to Hodges's troop while making their way to the Henderson Hill villages. Two men are dead, two wounded, and two near fatal. Hodges is one of the men hit and Snake wonders if he will be back. The reader feels the closeness that Snake feels toward Hodges and Phony. Snake has never been this close to anyone. He likes reporting to Hodges.

The troop is now alone and is told they will wander the flat fields for the next month. Senator feels like it's a death sentence. He's heard the stories from the other men that had to do the same thing and a lot of men die.



Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary

Cat Man (Tacio) came from Mexico with his family. They lived with his uncle and his large family. Cat Man worked the fields for twelve hours to make ten dollars. His uncle and the rest of the family were proud of them. After a short while, his family made him leave the fields and go to school to learn English. He attends a special education class and does as he is told.

He experiences sex for the first time in a shed outside of the school when he's thirteen years old. The girl is fifteen. He quits school when he's sixteen and goes back to work in the fields. He's meant for the Marines. As soon as he enlists he knows this is what he's meant to do.

Chapter 24 Analysis

This chapter reveals how Cat Man came to be in the Marines. He came from Mexico not knowing how to speak or write English. Here he is in the bush after working the fields and going to school to learn English.



Chapter 25

Chapter 25 Summary

The men walk from Henderson Hill to Go Noi Island. A lot of the Marines call Go Noi the Mile Wide Killer Fields. They are actually searching for the Phu Thuan (black market sellers). They creep into villages and sell goods to the VC. Senator knows there's no way of finding them without inside intelligence and they certainly don't have that. He feels like bait dangling from a hook. The men walk through chest high water filled with leeches and elephant grass that stands taller than them. They march on blindly.

Suddenly, shots are fired. It's the point patrol ahead of them. They know they are on point patrol next, as the Marines share this responsibility. Two hours later they are on point patrol. Rounds are fired and Bagger and Wild Man go down. Wild Man is hit, so Snake instructs the others to wait until they hear the enemy, throw a grenade, then ambush them. They agree and a few moments later five grenades are thrown, killing the enemy. Wild Man is still down. Sadler, the new Staff Sergeant, congratulates Snake on a job well done.

Before nightfall, the mail comes via re-supply chopper, and Baby Cakes reads about the first man on the moon from a two-day-old paper. They are all excited to hear bits and pieces of the world they had left behind. Later, Waterbull is sitting under his hootch while it rains, thinking about his Vietnamese whore. As he looks at her picture, he is approached by the enemy. The little man had been watching him for several minutes. Waterbull is hit three times by the enemy rifle. Snake and the others hear the gunfire and ready themselves for battle. A dozen more enemies run past them in the tall grass. The men fear to make a noise, as they will be killed by the enemy.

For three hours the enemy creeps around them, firing in the dark. They leave on their own and the men slowly come out to see who's hurt. Waterbull is unconscious as Baby Cakes makes his way over to him, and Bagger goes to find Doc. The Medevac comes in to take the wounded. The next morning the chopper comes for the dead.

Bagger is losing his mind and Senator feels bad for him. He feels like he's somewhat like Bagger, so he asks to be put on his team. Baby Cakes would rather do without Senator anyway, so he tells Snake it's okay with him. Snake tells him to go ahead, so Senator grabs his things and heads over to Bagger's hole.

Cornbread talks to Cannonball while they are in the hole together. Both black, Cornbread tells Cannonball that he's afraid to help ole' Chuck (the white man). He's been talking to Rap Jones and says that no Chuck dude would help him if he were injured. Cannonball tells him that's not the truth and that they are a team in the fields looking out for everyone in the troop. Cornbread says that Homicide wasn't helped when he got hit. Cannonball was there when that happened, so he tells Cornbread that's a flat lie and that Jones is lying through his teeth. Cornbread is still unconvinced.



Bagger awakens as Senator approaches his hole. He tells Senator that in order to be on his team he needs to be team leader. Senator thinks he's kidding at first, but he's dead serious, so Senator agrees. A few minutes later they hear a boom and Cornbread comes running up to Snake, holding his butt. He's got fragments from the grenade in the flesh of his butt. Snake knows he did it himself to get a Medevac out, but can't say anything more about it.

Chapter 25 Analysis

This chapter brings out more of the harsh reality of the fields of battle. The men are young, naïve, and are thrown into situations they would never experience anywhere else. Senator knows by being sent to locate the black market, they are on a wild goose chase. They will never find it, but it's something for the men to do, as the men in the air conditioned offices make all the calls.

Cannonball can't believe his ears when he hears Cornbread talking about the white man and how they will turn on him at any given moment. Cannonball tries to tell him that's not the truth, but he won't hear any of it. These men who are on the brink of a break down will do most anything to get out of the bush, and that's proven when Cornbread lights his own grenade and blows his own butt full of shrapnel.



Chapter 26

Chapter 26 Summary

Cannonball's brother had gone into the Army three years before he had enlisted in the Marines. His mother said the Army had ruined his brother, but he would never talk about his early discharge. Neither his mother nor Cannonball (Roland) had any idea what happened to him. A month after he returned, he moved away and never wrote or called. Cannonball was drafted when he was eighteen years old and went to his Reverend for advice. He told Cannonball he didn't have to go into the Army, so he joined the Marines.

Chapter 26 Analysis

This is a short chapter that sheds light on Cannonball's years prior to enlisting in the Marines. His brother had gone into the Army and came out different. He was filled with hate for the white man. Cannonball didn't want to end up like his brother, so he joined the Marines in hope that things would be different for him.



Chapter 27

Chapter 27 Summary

The men continue walking through villages after the elephant grass ambush. After three weeks of walking, Cat Man spots a piece of green metal at the end of one of the villages. It's unnatural looking to him. He'd been dubbed the name Cat Man for his cat eyes that saw everything. It's a bomb, and Sergeant Sadler knows that the enemy uses old abandoned bombs for ammunition. They will have to detonate it, so he calls in for a bomb engineer, who arrives within a few minutes.

Baby Cakes and Ogre stay with the engineer and help him dig under the bomb. They need it to be higher so they can light it from below. The rest of the men are ordered out of the danger zone. Once they are out of range, they hear a great big boom. Snake looks for Ogre and Baby Cakes, but after ten minutes they haven't appeared. He fears for the worst. The men all start running up the trail toward the bomb. When they arrive, they discover that the bomb has not been detonated at all. It must have been the gooks, but they can see no dead bodies and still no Ogre and Baby Cakes. They find the engineer in bad shape nearby in the grass, but the others had simply disappeared. Snake believes them to be POW (prisoners of war).

The next morning, others arrive to help the troop search for Ogre and Baby Cakes. They find nothing. Snake and four others sit in his hootch, contemplating what to do next. Snake proposes that the five of them (six including Dan, who will go as interpreter) should go together to find Baby Cakes and Ogre. Each man agrees, one by one. It's Snake, Cannonball, Senator, Bagger, and Cat Man. Snake clears it with the Sergeant, and they are set to go.

They approach the next village and Dan questions an older man sitting on his porch. He says he saw nothing, but Dan knows better. He's VC. They question him further and Snake hits him in the face, but they get nowhere. They leave and decide to double back and take the man as their prisoner. As they approach the older man, they notice a mamasan too. She's got very clean hands and her teeth are not black from betel nut. They know there's something wrong with this picture. She must be a VC nurse or something, so they take her hostage also.

Cat Man notices freshly dug ground behind the older man's hut. He says to get a shovel, and the men start to dig. They discover the bodies of Ogre and Baby Cakes, both killed by a single bullet between the eyes. Snake is furious with the older man and the woman. She seems to have no remorse whatsoever, but the older man tells them he was made to bury the men and did not kill them. They make the man and woman lay in the graves that had once held Ogre and Baby Cakes, then they carry the two dead men back to their troop on stretchers. Senator kicks up such a fuss that they make him leave and wait by a hootch until they are done. They tell him not to say a word.



Chapter 27 Analysis

The men are like a team, they bonded like brothers. Cat Man, with his strength in seeing things that are out of place, notices a bomb. They stop to ignite it, so the enemy doesn't take pieces of it for their booby traps. It turns out to be a deadly encounter, as the engineer is dead from an attack of the VC and Baby Cakes and Ogre are simply missing.

There are only four of them left from their team, but they all agree that if Ogre and Baby Cakes are POW, they must find them. They agree unanimously, yet Senator gets flaky in the middle of the rescue. These men have been thrown into something no civilian could possibly understand and they must stand together and fight as one. When they discover Ogre and Baby Cakes buried in a nearby village, it brings some closer together and others further apart.



Chapter 28

Chapter 28 Summary

Hodges is on his way back to Vietnam after spending a month in a Japanese hospital. He can't believe it. He's got to get used to the fierce wind and heat again. He sits at the transition point of Okinawa, hoping he will be able to see Mitsuko again. He drinks four bourbons sitting at the bar before she arrives. He asks her to meet him later that night, but she says she has a boyfriend now. She's angry that he hadn't returned sooner, and he shows her his scars, telling her that he couldn't because he was hit.

She says maybe tomorrow she can meet him, but that's too late for him. She still says no, so he leaves and waits for her to come home later. She arrives at home and sees him on her doorstep. She says her boyfriend is coming over and he should come back later. He comes back at ten thirty, knocks on her door, and she lets him in. They are both desperate for one another. The futon is in the next room, but they don't make it that far. Instead, they make love on the kitchen floor. Afterwards, they sit together on the futon and try to communicate with each other. He understands little Vietnamese and she understands little English.

She mentions something about her boyfriend and he tells her to forget him. Hodges will marry her, but she says no. He needs to have a family tomb first. It's her people's way of preserving the memory of the dead after they have gone. If she married a person with no tomb, she would spend her afterlife lonely. Her parents would not approve. He remembers his grandmother mentioning Camp Hansen, so he tells her that's his family tomb. She smiles, not sure if he's serious or not. Then, they make love again.

They meet the next day and Hodges is determined to win her parents over. He will ask for their blessing to marry her. She leads him down back alleys and narrow streets. They come to a shop where her father sits, smokes, and watches television. He sees their hands joined and starts scolding his daughter. Hodges doesn't understand a word they are saying. Her mother comes out a minute later and he asks her to translate to her parents that he loves her very much and wants to marry her. Her father says he doesn't even know him, so how can he possibly give his blessing?

Mitsuko talks with her mother with Hodges beside her. She takes her daughter and Hodges into her arms and smiles at them. She approves, even though her husband does not. Hodges and Mitsuko spend the rest of the day in the taxi exploring Okinawa as Mitsuko explains everything about the city to him.

The next day Hodges reports for duty at the field office as he waits to get a flight back into Vietnam. He will spend the evening with Mitsuko after she gets off of work. He labels sea bags, which are sent when a soldier is wounded or dies in battle. They are too heavy for the men to carry, so they are transported to the field office for labeling. The Major calls Hodges into his office and makes him an offer he could never fathom in



a million years. He says there is a position open in Okinawa, and if he wants it he can have it. This means the end of fighting for Hodges. He can spend every day with Mitsuko and away from the bush. He thinks about Snake and the others and turns it down. He knows this opportunity will never present itself to him again.

Chapter 28 Analysis

This chapter portrays the true man that Hodges really is. He's been in the bush for months with his men, comes out wounded, and ends up in a Japanese hospital. He stays there for a month, then returns to Okinawa where he waits for his flight back into Vietnam. He sees Mitsuko again, and they have a beautiful time together. He decides he wants to marry her and seeks her parent's blessing. Her mother is easier than her father, but he knows her father will come around eventually.

He remembers the men every waking moment of his days, and knows he needs to return and help them fight in the bush. His loyalty to them is so strong that when presented with the opportunity to spend the rest of his time safe in Okinawa, he simply cannot. He needs to be with the men and he believes they need him too. He's definitely right.



Chapter 29

Chapter 29 Summary

Hodges waits patiently at the troop tent until he sees Snake and the other men slowly making their way toward him. He yells toward them and they all smile and walk faster toward him. They greet each other like brothers. Hodges takes his shirt off, showing his scars to the men. He tells them that he turned down the job in Okinawa to be back with them and Snake looks at him in shock.

Hodges tells them that the hot water has been turned on, so they should take advantage of the showers. They haven't showered in months, so they are happy about the hot water. They have to head back to the Arizona, so they enjoy their time at the troop tent, eating freeze dried burgers and hot dogs and drinking lots of beer.

A few black Marines gather around a radio and dance to disco music. Senator strums a guitar as others gather around him. They didn't know he could play and sing so well. He plays every anti-war song he can remember. The men are all stumbling around drunk. Senator starts to sing another song and tells the men he's dedicating it to Hodges who came back to the bush when he could have stayed away. Snake is getting angry, telling Senator to watch himself. He sings the song anyway and Bagger yanks the guitar out of his hands. He tells him he's a jerk for singing such a song. The men all walk away from Senator and the party comes to an end.

Chapter 29 Analysis

Hodges's homecoming at the troop tent was great. The men are truly excited to see his face again. They can't believe he turned down Okinawa to come back to them. Snake feels as though he's been honored by Hodges' presence. Senator can't help but feel awkward still and an outcast to the other men. He proves this when everyone gets drunk and he belts out anti-war songs and one that insults his Lieutenant. However, Hodges is not offended. He knows the men have different ways of blowing off steam. He's happy to be back and that's all that really matters to him.



Chapter 30

Chapter 30 Summary

The next morning Sadler wakes Snake up and tells him to get his men on the line. Snake is confused, but Sadler tells him they discussed everything last night. Snake doesn't remember having a conversation with Sadler the night before. He gets up anyway and lines his men up. There are twelve in total and a lot of new guys that need nicknames. Snake feels that something heavy is going down. He's not sure and no one will tell him, but he knows. Sadler tells them all that they will be getting clean new uniforms and flak jackets. The General is giving them a Meritorious Union Citation and medals. They are all excited. Hodges tells Bagger that the Meritorious Union Citation is for something that happened before he and the other men even arrived in Vietnam. It takes a while for these things to happen. He tells Bagger they are also giving the Sergeant Major a Commendation Medal and were going to give Baby Cakes the Navy Cross. Bagger looks sad.

The next day the men stand on the air strip in solid lines, all freshly decked out in new uniforms as they are addressed by a three star General. Bagger is in awe. The General pins the medal on the Sergeant Major, says a few more words, and departs on the helicopter as quickly as he arrived. Bagger can't believe a three star General came all the way out to the bush for them. He feels very proud. As the helicopter departs, Sadler tells the men to turn their helmets and uniforms back in as soon as they report back for duty. They don't need brand new uniforms to fight in the bush.

Waterbull sends a letter to the troop and says that he really misses them, and they know he really means it. He's back in civilization and says nobody understands him. He says it's hell and wishes he was back in the bush with them. They all pass the letter around so everyone has a chance to read it. They know his address now and send him letters in return. Some of the men make a cassette tape of jokes for him.

The men climb into the back of a truck the next day bound, for sand bag duty. As they pull away, Bagger notices the sign is missing on the Black Shack. He asks Cannonball about it and he hesitantly answers that he "heard" Sadler made them take the sign down. Homicide is in another troop and Jones is in the World (back home in the States). Bagger presses for more information, wondering how Jones ended up back in the World. He thinks he's killed someone or he's insane. Cannonball tells him it's due to hemorrhoids. Bagger laughs out loud.

They arrive at location and start filling sand bags. Bagger gives the driver a hard time because he gets to sit in the truck and sleep while they work, so every five minutes or so he wakes the guy up or kicks the side of the truck. The driver just ignores him. A young Vietnamese girl shows up later and the men want to have sex with her. She only charges five dollars, so Cannonball is the first one to go with her into the weeds. Bagger



doesn't want to be sloppy seconds, but he is about to burst, so he takes the young girl after Cannonball, for he knows it will be a very long time before he has sex again.

Chapter 30 Analysis

It is quite an honor to have a three star General fly all the way to the bush to present medals to the men. He doesn't stay very long, but the fact that he came at all means the world to the men. It makes them want to fight again. They all seem awestruck as they stand in brand new clean uniforms and helmets. They know they will have to return them immediately after the ceremony, but for the moment they feel proud.

The men are feeling very lonely also. Some are married and others are still single, but the presence of the young Vietnamese women still tempt them and they have gone month after month with no affection and no sexual contact with a woman. The young women only charge five dollars for sex, so the men indulge themselves because of their loneliness and also because they have no idea if they will be alive tomorrow.



Chapter 31

Chapter 31 Summary

Snake makes his way to the company officers tent and greets the clerk, Bugs. Bugs tells him that the Top is out but will be back soon, and offers him a cigarette. Snake tells him that he's got forty-seven days left in his term and wants to extend. Bugs can't believe his ears. He thinks Snake is crazy. Snake tells him simply to draw up the paperwork so that when the Top gets back it will be ready for him. Within an hour it is signed and done.

Chapter 31 Analysis

This chapter demonstrates the sheer intensity of the enlisted men of Vietnam who have nothing at all to return home for. Snake is a man (barely, at age twenty) who has come from such a broken home that the only sense of home for him now are the men in his unit. They are his family, his brothers, and he will die for them if necessary.



Chapter 32

Chapter 32 Summary

A helicopter mission passes over the men with eight men attached to a net. Four are alive and the other four are dead. The men are saddened, but continue walking. Senator looks up in dismay at the vision before him. He had recently read another letter from his friend, Mark, and it quoted the headliner in a recent newspaper that the Americans were killing innocent villagers. Senator can't take this much longer. He feels that what he and the other men are doing is wrong. They are not God and cannot justify killing gooks for no reason.

Senator goes to the Regimental Legal Officers tent and says he needs to talk to the Legal Officer. The clerk asks him if it's important. He says it's very important, so he gestures him in. He tells the officer all about the killing of Baby Cakes and Ogre and how he and the other men killed the two VC's in rebuttal (they were thought to be VC's by Dan). Senator wants more than anything for the Legal Officer to tell him it was not murder. The Officer probes his statement and determines that Senator was sent away by the men to sit on a nearby porch so he didn't actually see a murder or anything. For all he knows it could have been the VC firing first and the men merely protecting themselves. Senator is baffled by this, but accepts it nevertheless.

The Officer asks Senator what he wants him to do and Senator doesn't know what to say. The Officer continues by telling him to write up a report and hand it in to him. He'll get him out of the troop like he does for his other CID's. Senator hears the word CID and feels terrible, as the guys initially busted his chops about being CID and he had no idea what it meant. He walks away ready to write up his report.

Chapter 32 Analysis

Senator never meant to turn on his troop. He just couldn't let the incident go that happened when they found Baby Cakes and Ogre dead. He knows Snake initiated the killing of the woman and older man, thinking they were VC. However, the fact that he never actually saw the incident makes no case for the Legal Officer. Senator also knows that the Officer doesn't want to make a big deal out of things, considering that two Marines were killed hatefully and intentionally by a single bullet between the eyes. Still, Senator feels he's a traitor by being termed a CID by the Officer.



Chapter 33

Chapter 33 Summary

Hodges runs into an old classmate while he's waiting to be sent to the Arizona for another time. His classmate was never someone he really knew, nor was really a good friend. However, he's happy to see him and looks at him like he's seeing himself when he had first arrived. This classmate reiterates the information he has read about the number of Marines dead and in what length of time. He reiterates what he's read and makes it sound so sensible.

Chapter 33 Analysis

Hodges has been in for long enough to not understand anything about Vietnam any longer. He looks at his friend and listens to someone he doesn't even know any more. This feeling solidifies the fact that he's now closer to his buddies, who actually know what he's been through. His past feels lost to him.



Chapter 34

Chapter 34 Summary

Sergeant Sadler makes his way through the Platoon Troop Tent, telling the men to get going. They have a war to fight. He looks for Snake and finds him. He tells him the enemy will probably attack An Hoa, so Snake's men should move in around midnight. There will be other troops joining them to hone in on the enemy.

Later, the men are dropped in the fields with eight hours to go until the fighting would begin. Hodges points to a clearing and tells Snake to get Sadler to take his men in that direction. Hodges makes his way over to the combat base bunker where Kersey sits inside, keeping dry while it rains outside. Hodges asks if there's any place his men can go for the next eight hours while waiting for their battle. Kersey tells him curtly that he has no place for them. They can stay out in the rain, he doesn't care.

Hodges gets mad, so he makes snide remarks regarding Kersey's Silver Star and purple heart. The radiomen sitting near Kersey chuckle. When Hodges feels he's done enough damage, he makes his way back to his men and they all huddle together under ponchos, trying to keep dry until they can depart for battle.

Chapter 34 Analysis

The men are headed back into the Arizona and the tension is thick in the air. Hodges knows what's ahead for him and his men, and it's not pleasant. Snake feels comfort in knowing Hodges will be with him this time. Even though the men know they will be in the rain for days and will have to walk through chest deep water, it's no comfort to have to wait in the rain for the next eight hours until they can depart to the battle site.



Chapter 35

Chapter 35 Summary

The men make their way through the chest deep water across the Arizona. They know the enemy is out there just waiting for them. They carry their guns over their heads as not to get them wet and hold their cigarette packs in their mouths. Two hours later they reach the northern ridge. The men wait patiently in mud holes along the perimeter, some falling asleep while others just listen. A few hours later, the bombs start. Hodges recognizes the sound of tanks and machine guns.

Hodges peeks over the ridge and sees hundreds of enemy soldiers. They are coming toward him and his men and on the other side of them are more Marines. They have the enemy surrounded. Hodges and the other men feel victorious as they shoot them down one by one. They flee, and a lot of enemy soldiers make it out of the area, but it's a victory nonetheless.

The men gather around the dead enemy soldiers and take their rifles and anything useful. Cannonball walks toward a soldier that he thinks is dead, but is rather pointing a rifle at him. The soldier is too afraid to fire his weapon and just stares at Cannonball. Bagger walks up and shoots the man. Turns out, the soldier is out of ammo. Bagger takes a letter from the dead soldier back to Hodges, who calls the interpreter in to read it. The letter is written to his superior officer and says that he's served enough time and has five children. He wants to be relieved of duty from the war.

A supply chopper flies overhead, dropping its supplies, and First Lieutenant Kersey jumps out and onto the muddy ridge. Hodges is surprised to see him in the bush.

Chapter 35 Analysis

There are some men made for war and Hodges is one of them. His father before him and grandfather had fought in wars and it is in his blood. He watches with the troops as the enemy comes dangerously close to them. This time they have planned correctly and have the enemy cornered. They are surrounded on both sides by Marines. Hodges and the men open fire and send them fleeing away. They take down as many as they can and feel very proud of their accomplishment. When the supply chopper arrives, Hodges is stunned to see Kersey step out and onto the bush.



Chapter 36

Chapter 26 Summary

Kersey orders Snake to move his platoon. Snake had already set his men up in the best spot, but Kersey insists it's not the right spot for him. He wants Snake in the paddy, which is crazy. Snake persists, thinking back to when he worked under Kersey before and it was an everyday battle with him. He's a jerk and Snake would love to tell him where to go. He tells Kersey the only way he's moving his men is if he hears it from his Lieutenant. He tells Snake to go get his Lieutenant, but before he does that, he first needs to find three gooks along the tree line. He agrees and sends Senator's group to the tree line to check it out.

Senator and his men decide to go through the cemetery as it's safer and they see a child playing. New Mac holds his rifle in place, preparing to fire. Before he has a chance, Senator pushes his gun down. The child jumps into a hole and the enemy surrounds her, opens fire and shoot Mac right in the head. Senator realizes he's made a terrible mistake by pushing Mac's gun away. The enemy opens fire on the rest of the men.

Senator is hit in the leg, but manages to crawl into an old crater. JoJo and Rodeo are caught in the middle of the firing. Senator peeks outside of his crater to see his leg laying in the grass in front of him.

Chapter 26 Analysis

Kersey is back and crazier than every. Snake doesn't want to have to deal with him all over again. He had already put that chapter of his life in the past. Kersey seems to be a man on a power mission and wants the men to understand his rank.

If it weren't for Kersey giving the order to look for three enemy soldiers on the tree line, Senator would still have his leg and Snake wouldn't have to call Hodges into the mix of things.



Chapter 37

Chapter 37 Summary

Cat Man and Cannonball's teams hear the fire in the cemetery and realize its Senator's team that's being hit. They go to the rescue and split the perimeter. Bagger and Snake follow. Bagger's pack is erupted, setting off a smoke bomb that ends up in everyone's eyes. Snake finds Senator and climbs in the hole with him, helping him out of his shock. The Medevac will be there soon, he tells Senator. Senator tells him they are all going to die because they are the bait for whatever operation Kersey had set up.

Chapter 37 Analysis

The irony of the war is clear in this chapter. Some men say there are hundreds of tiny wars going on within Vietnam. This seems to be a clear indication that, for some reason, Kersey wanted Snake to chase down three lone soldiers on the tree line and also move his team to the middle of the paddy. If he does that he and his men would be sitting ducks. They are all sitting ducks now, because all of the teams have gone in to help Senator and are being shot at now too.



Chapter 38

Summary

Hodges hears the gunfire. His radioman runs over to him, telling him the OP is under attack. Hodges quickly assembles the rest of the men and looks harshly at Kersey as he passes by him to rescue the men. He yells to JoJo and Rodeo and they tell him Snake and Bagger are with them. Bagger's been shot in the leg. Hodges yells for Snake, who tells him Senator is in bad shape. Snake hoists Senator over his shoulder and tells Hodges he's coming out. They try to provide cover fire, but the enemy has a machine gun. The man who's supposed to catch Senator is killed by the fire. Senator falls and Snake trips over him. Snake is in the open and the machine gun rips through his body, killing him right before Hodges's eyes.

Hodges doesn't know what else to do, so he grabs the radio and calls Sadler for an artillery mission. The rounds are too close and one hits Hodges right in the face. He doesn't know what hit him, he just knows he can't move his jaw. The chopper lands and takes him, Cannonball, Bagger, and Senator. Hodges thinks he's dead.

Analysis

The reader is in awe of the realness of the situation these men just faced. Knowing they could die at any given moment, they risk their lives for their fallen brothers in the middle of the bush. The determination and loyalty they share for one another is truly amazing.

In remembering, Hodges turned down a job in Okinawa to return to his brothers in the bush and Snake extended his stay so he was also able to continue being with his brothers.



Chapter 39

Chapter 39 Summary

Later, Operation Lam Son 719 takes place and Dan is told they must attack Laos. Since the Marines had gone, this is the new task at hand. Dan doesn't understand this, as he thinks they should be where the Marines were. He argues with the Sergeant and the Sergeant tells him he's nothing but VC. The Sergeant slaps Dan in the face and walks away. Dan knows, however, that the enemy will just wait and attack them on the road to Laos. He thinks it's a very stupid plan.

The men are made to move anyway, and just as Dan suspected, they are ambushed on the road. Dan's troop moves into the tree line and tries to defend themselves to stay alive. A helicopter arrives to take the wounded, and the other men try to hang on to the outside in fear for their lives. They are overrun by the enemy, who have tanks and machine guns. The superior officer for the enemy is on a loudspeaker, telling them to surrender and that they will not be harmed.

Chapter 39 Analysis

Dan tells the other men about his time spent with the Marines. He misses them and wonders why they left. The Sergeant for the Army doesn't like Dan and Dan doesn't particularly like him either. Dan knows they will be ambushed, yet the Sergeant does not seem to hear him. They go anyway, as ordered, and half of the men end up dead or wounded, and the other half are now POW's.



Chapter 40

Chapter 40 Summary

It's two years later and Snake's mother misses him dearly. She reads the letters he sent her while in the bush over and over again. She also reads the letter written by his commanding officer, stating that he would be recommended for a medal of honor. She wonders when the medal will come. She imagines the suit she will wear and what she will say when the President hands it to her. She is so proud of him.

There was investigation that she was aware of, though. In addition, the medal will never come. According to the reports on the investigation, they had read a letter the Senator had written regarding the deaths of Ogre and Baby Cakes. It stated that Snake and the other men killed two Vietnamese civilians in cold blood. Since Snake is already dead, the investigation was over. There was no need to carry it on any further.

Chapter 40 Analysis

Considering the fact that Snake extends his term in Vietnam and all of the brave things he does while serving, one would think he would be highly decorated. This is not the case though, as the letter found in Senator's pocket implicates him in an internal investigation. To no avail, his mother waits patiently for a medal which will never come.



Chapter 41

Chapter 41 Summary

Hodges's mother receives a flag and a gold medal, which she places in the locker he prepared before his departure to Vietnam. She can't bring herself to reopen the locker after she places the items inside.

Mitsuko has a baby boy, which belongs to Hodges. It is too bad he never got to know his own child. It's seven years later and she has married and had two more children after Hitoshi. When he's seven, she takes him to Kin to see his father's monument. This is where they will pay their respects to him. She thinks this is the only thing she can do to ease her child's mind. He's half American. Her people consider Hitoshi to be an American if he's half American. The other children tease him and she doesn't know what else to do for him. Therefore, she takes her smaller children to her mother and takes Hitoshi to Kin. She tells him his father was a very brave man and a warrior, so Hitoshi tells her he will also become a warrior to honor his father.

Chapter 41 Analysis

Mitsuko's people have very strong values and it shows in this chapter through the eyes of a seven-year-old child. Hitoshi is sad that he is an American and his father is dead. He does not know where he belongs. In showing him Kin and his father's family tomb, this enables the child to have a sense of belonging. He will honor his father and become a warrior.



Chapter 42

Chapter 42 Summary

Senator's homecoming is quite a shock for his mother and father, as he has a terrible taste in his mouth for the war and his mechanical leg that he now has to live with. They invite friends and family to welcome him home, and within five minutes they all depart due to his nasty speech that he delivers, telling them he should have brought a vial of morphine so they could watch him shoot up.

He apologizes to his parents for running everyone off and tells them he's all messed up and needs a few days to rest. They try to understand. Over the next week, Senator stays alone in his bedroom in the dark. His father brings a television into his room so he can watch it instead of doing nothing.

A few days later his friend Mark knocks on his bedroom window. It's almost time to go to bed, but Senator lets him in through the kitchen. They sit in his bedroom and Mark stares at Senator's false leg. They talk a bit about Mark's trip to Canada. He knows if the police catch Mark, they will take him to jail for avoiding the draft. He had taken quite a chance coming back to town. He heard Senator was back, so he said he wanted to come back.

Senator's mother brings them tea and a few minutes later his father tells Mark he needs to see him in the living room. Turns out, Senator's father called the police and they came to arrest Mark and take him to jail. Senator can't believe his father would do such a thing. Knowing his father is a lawyer, Senator is not all that surprised. Mark is not all that surprised either.

A month later, Senator returns to school. He feels weird being at Harvard. The other students look upon him as a real live wounded Vietnam Veteran. He hates the stares and sometimes skips class to return to his apartment to pop pills and avoid reality. He no longer needs the pills for pain, but uses them as an escape. Two men come to his door late one night and ask him to speak at a rally against the war. He's surprised, but gives them his full and distorted opinion on how the war really was for him. He goes on to tell them the story of the little girl that ultimately caused the loss of his leg and tells them that if he could, he would find her and kill her. They stare in disbelief. One of the men tells him to get lost, while the other thinks he will still make a good speaker. He finally agrees to speak.

Senator takes the stage without his leg, as the two men suggested. He looks into the crowd and thinks of Snake, Bagger, Hodges, and the others. He's angry that the crowd took down the American flag and replaced it with a blue and red flag with a gold circle in the middle. He takes the microphone and tells them, "You want to end the war? I didn't see any of your faces in Vietnam. Where were you? Flunking your draft physicals? What has the war cost any of you?" One of the men grabs the microphone from



Senator's hand and tells him to get lost. He walks to his car as the crowd stares at him in disbelief. Senator knows Snake would be very proud of him for speaking his mind.

Chapter 42 Analysis

The reader realizes the degree to which Senator has been affected by the war. He takes pain pills even though there is no physical pain any longer. The pills are for his emotional pain now. He takes them to escape. He walks the halls of Harvard wondering what the war was even for. Why did so many men lose their lives for these Harvard brats that he goes to school with now? He simply doesn't get it. His friends all dodged the draft by failing their physicals or running away. They know nothing of what he has been through. Now they stand before him waiting for a speech. What's he supposed to tell them? He can't communicate with them. They don't understand anything as far as he's concerned. He's an outcast, a loner with no one to talk to. The only people who can understand him are the ones he served with. They are all dead now. He has nowhere to turn and will have to deal with the memories for the rest of his life.



Characters

Hodges

Robert E. Lee Hodges, Jr. (Hodges) had reasons for enlisting that were largely due to his ancestors, who had fought in every battle and war that came along. He is the last in the line of Hodges and hopes to fill his late father's shoes in the line of men that had gone off to war. His grandmother is very proud of him, yet she is afraid nonetheless.

His father had died in a war before he was born and his mother kept his memories tucked away in a locker. The locker was kept in the barn outside of the house, and Hodges learned early on how to crack it open and rummage through his father's memories. Hodges mother remarried and had two more children, but Hodges was the last of his line.

His grandmother (his father's mother) lived nearby, and he visited her every Sunday. They would sit and talk about the wars of yesterday and how brave his father was. She talked about all of the Hodges before him and how they also fought in battles for the betterment of America. This made him proud and also reminded him of what was in his blood. He was meant to fight in the battles, just as his ancestors before him.

Snake

Snake enlisted in the service on his own accord. He is a mean, fighting young man who continuously got fired from his jobs due to angry behavior. His mother and father still lived together, and when his father went to work, his mother would entertain her lover. Sometimes his father gets drunk after work and wouldn't come home at night. This dysfunctional lifestyle sets the stage for the reason that Snake enlisted himself in the Marines. It was his one chance to use his anger and fighting skills in a career very well suited for him. His life was never simple. He was always fighting and getting into drugs.

The one thing he was always good at was fighting. His mother told him that one day his temper would get him into trouble. One day he walked into a tattoo parlor and got another tattoo. His most recent tattoo had the words, "Death Before Dishonor". Right after getting the tattoo, he walked straight into the recruitment office and signed up for the Marines. He went to boot camp shortly thereafter enlisting and was a big success. This was partly due to his rough upbringing and his lack of showing emotion. The other men looked up to him for guidance. He thought he had finally found the career meant for him.

Phony

Phony lived a hard life as a child. When he was ten years old he started stealing from people and holding them up on the street. By the time he was thirteen, he started selling



drugs and spending time in Juvenile Detention. He was passed around from foster home to foster home and taught to smile all the time. Once people turned their back, he would run away, but always kept that smile when he was face to face with the adults.

By the time he turned sixteen he was serving time on a Federal narcotics farm. He was the youngest kid there and learned to act scared and innocent. This is where his nickname came from, "Phony". His civilian record was incredibly long, so the probation officer gave him a fresh start by writing letters in hopes that he could get in the service. The Marines took him. If he came out with a clean record and an honorable discharge, his slate would be wiped clean.

Dan

Dan had a wife and five children at one time, and they lived in the village of My Le. The eldest was a girl and was very beautiful. His brother fought for the VC and was killed one day. Dan knew he would die and believed he should have stayed home and taken care of his family. Two soldiers came to Dan's hootch and gave him his brother's gun. They told him he needed to come and fight taking his brother's place in the war. Dan told them he needed to take care of his family and that he had just planted rice. The men did not care. They told him to say goodbye to his wife. He had no choice.

Once he started fighting, he became good at firing the gun. The soldiers saw that he was good with the people in the villages. He told them stories about how the war was almost over. The villagers fed the soldiers rice and felt protected by them. Dan visited his own village later with the soldiers, and saw his wife. She told him that their youngest child, only a few months old, died because he would not eat. She had very little breast milk, but still he would not eat. They all looked very bad, and she told Dan that they would all die while he was fighting in the war.

He asked his wife if she was willing to leave the village, and she agreed. There were pamphlets given out by the Marines, which offered safe-conduct passes to those who surrendered. Dan's wife had never left the village, but agreed to go with him to Tan Phouc. He would escape his unit in the morning and she would join him in mid-afternoon with the children.

He snuck away from his unit as they walked the narrow road, but his family never made it. He heard gunfire in his village a few minutes later, and instead of staying in the mud hole where he hid, he walked back to the village. He found his entire family in their hootch, killed from gunshot wounds. He was very saddened by this and knew he would have to surrender to the Marines in order to live.

Senator

Before enlisting in the service, Senator lived with his mother and father and attended Harvard. His father was a lawyer and his mother a homemaker. Senator's friends from college found ways out of being sent to Vietnam. John Wilkins Grimsley locked himself



away from society for days prior to his examination, refusing to speak to anyone, then he went crazy during the examination. He was given a psychological deferment and would become a doctor after his schooling. Another friend threw his urine in the examiner's face and was ruled too aggressive. His friend Mark avoided the exam altogether by going to Canada, and another friend took a pill to make his blood pressure rise just in time for the exam.

Senator didn't try to avoid the exam at all, hence he ended up in Vietnam. He was the youngest child in his family, and fourteen years younger than his elder brother. He attended Harvard because his father had and because he wasn't good at meeting girls. He quit Harvard and decided to sign up for the Marines. His intention, of course, was to perform with the Marine Band, not fight in battle. The recruiter told him that he could not guarantee he'd play in the band, but his chances were okay. His family and friends never understood why he enlisted, but it was solely his choice.

Angus Austin

Angus Austin arrived as the unit's new Papa Sierra (Platoon Sergeant). He reported to Hodges. Before serving in Vietnam, he was a Police Sergeant at the airbase. Angus felt that the men in Vietnam did not treat their superiors the way they should be treated. Hodges found him to be a little annoying.

Angus took great pride in being a Marine, and when he saw the men in the bush out of uniform, it angered him. He wanted the men cleanly shaven, with short haircuts and always in full uniform. The men took offense to him as they were hot and tired and would go months with no bath. They felt there were more important things than a clean shave (like staying alive). Hodges found the new Staff Sergeant, Austin, to be unrealistic, considering he wanted the men to be freshly shaven and clothed in army uniforms while fighting in the bush. These men were barely hanging on during their nightly battles and the blistering hot days. The men liked to walk around the bush in shorts and tee shirts during the daytime, but Austin just didn't see things the same way.

Gilliland

Gilliland had come into Vietnam with one of the first units and the men had no idea what they were getting into. They did stupid things like setting the tree line on fire to drive out the enemy, only to have the fire come back on their own line. They were proud to be fighting in the war and the people back home would make them feel good. Gilliland's family back home was very proud of him also. Back in the day when the war first started, these men thought this war would be like the wars before and that they would fight regular combat war. This was not the case for Vietnam, and he soon realizes this.

Things had drastically changed, as he explained to Hodges. The people back home didn't care about the troops fighting now. When the Marines came home they were spat on by civilians and called animals. He didn't understand it. It was the cold hard truth though, and there was no changing it.



Bagger

Jerry Dean (Bagger) signed up for the Marines with his entire football team (the Bowman Rebels). They played a football game one day and sat around afterwards, contemplating what they would do with the rest of their lives. Bagger was in love with a cheerleader and was young, wild, and free. The entire football team decided together, on a whim, that enlisting in the service would be a good thing to do. It was probably a good thing at the moment, but they would contemplate their decision later.

They filled up two cars and headed for Athens; straight for the recruiters office. The recruiter couldn't believe his eyes. Bagger signed up with the other men, then headed off to see his cheerleader. When he left for Vietnam, he was married to her and she was pregnant.

Cat Man

Cat Man (Tacio) came from Mexico, along with his family. They lived with his uncle and his large family. Cat Man worked the fields for twelve hours to make ten dollars. His uncle and the rest of the family were proud of him. After a short while, his family made him leave the fields and go to school to learn English. He attended a special education class and did as he was told. It was hard for him at first, because he didn't understand a thing the teacher was saying. Slowly, he learned to read and write in English. He quit school when he turned sixteen to work the fields again with his family.

He had extremely good senses. He noticed the slightest movement in the fields, and how the grass was bent in some patches and not in others. While serving in Vietnam, he noticed things of this nature, and it helped the troops. While walking the bush, he noticed that if there was an abundance of feces on the perimeter and not many villagers, then there must have been soldiers visiting the night before. In addition, if there was movement along the tree line, he was the first to notice it and would bring it to the Sergeant's attention. They named him Cat Man for this reason.

Cannonball

Cannonball's brother had gone into the Army three years before Cannonball enlisted in the Marines. His mother said the Army had ruined his brother, but he would never talk about his early discharge. Neither his mother nor Cannonball (Roland) had any idea what happened to him. A month after he returned, he moved away and never wrote or called. Cannonball was drafted when he was eighteen years old. His mother was terrified that he would come out of the service and end up like his brother.

Cannonball went to see his Reverend for advice. The Reverend told Cannonball that he could do anything he put his mind to. He tells Cannonball that he didn't have to enlist in the Army, and could enlist in another part of the service. He took the Reverend's advise and joined the Marines.



Objects/Places

Okinawa

Okinawa was where Hodges stayed during his waiting period to be sent to Vietnam. It was in the southern section of Japan and was surrounded by islands. Hodges waited there, along with the other Marines, at Camp Hansen. The streets of Okinawa were packed with people, buses, cars, and bicycles. As Hodges traveled through the city, he noticed the closely built stores, steambaths, and bars. He spent most of his time in the bar with the other Marines before his departure. If wounded in the war, the men were sent to the hospitals in Japan then back to Okinawa to await departure again for Vietnam.

The Bush

The bush (the valley) was where all the action happened. It started in the middle of the night and continued until daylight. Bomb craters scattered the ground, which was covered in yellowish sawgrass. It was a barren land, with nothing more than holes that the men had dug the night before to hide in once the fighting started and mud. The heat was intense, so the men rested under their hootches made of ponchos, trying to avoid the scorching sun. Surrounding the bush were ridges near the tree line with villages beyond that point.

When the sun fell from the sky it fell into the western mountains. The men would all gather into their manholes. There were four men inside each hole. They would make dinner from their C-rations, smoke cigarettes, and prepare for another night of battle. When they were in the bush they felt as if they were in hell. The surroundings were barren, so they never knew where the enemy would be coming from.

Da Nang

Da Nang is a major port city in the South Central Coast of Vietnam. This was where Hodges and the others began processing into Vietnam. The Division Headquarters was stationed here and Division Commanders and Colonels produced maps of the surrounding areas where the men were to be dropped. They would go over missions and discuss tactics to use while in the bush.

Phu Phong

Phu Phong was one of the perimeters used by the Marines in their random treks across the valley floor (the bush). It was four hundred meters across at its widest point, sitting on a high, kidney shaped mound, covered with trees and shrubs and high weeds. There were bomb craters everywhere from years of bombing, and it had rough looking straw



thatched hootches everywhere. From the highest point of Phu Phone, one could see the Arizona Valley clearly. To the west, beyond three other similar mounds, was the Razorback Ridge.

Phu Phong was also the highest village in the valley, so it was an excellent fighting perimeter for the Marines. It had many hedges and holes which provided good cover, and the open paddies could provide good cover if they were attacked.

Liberty Bridge

Along the eastern banks of the Arizona where the two rivers meet lies Liberty Bridge. The Bridge had hot food and hot water. The men would get daily baths and be able to actually sit on a toilet instead of squatting in the bush to use the bathroom. The men called the Bridge "Skate City", because it was nothing compared to what they had to deal with in the bush. They were excited to go there and felt a sense of safety.

The bridge was low, made of concrete, and supported the convoys that crossed it. It was a complete combat base and sat on top of a large hill that was eight hundred meters long and four hundred meters wide. It was the focal point for the operation of an entire infantry battalion. The men found security there, as it was surrounded by reams of barbed wire. There were tents instead of hootches, and the men were all assigned to specific tents. There was a mess hall where they would eat hot food and drink cold beer while they waited for their next assignment.

Hanoi

Mitsuko's mother and father resided in Hanoi. Hanoi sits on the banks of the Red River, about sixty miles from the river's mouth. Many of the buildings double as both store fronts and homes. The buildings are narrow and long, with residential areas toward the rear and commercial areas in the front. Hanoi is also greener than most Asian cities. Hoan Kiem, in the center of the city, is thought of by city residents as the city's garden spot. Ngoc Son Temple rests on the small island in the middle of the Hoan Kiem.

Go Noi Island

Go Noi Island is not really an island. Villages survived on Go Noi. Scattered hootches surrounded the land. The bunkers that the locals hid in were made of stone. The trees surrounding the villages were uprooted and there were massive holes from where bombs had gone off during the frequent fighting between the VC and the Marines.

The terrain was flat with clear fields, and the locals were familiar with every aspect of the area, so it was an easy spot for the VC to open fire on the Marines.



Que Son Valley

The Que Son lay in the southern part of South Vietnam's Military Region. This land was rich with rice so the Marines valued it and wanted to control it. The Que Son Valley was also positioned well, so they could utilize it to help the South Vietnamese. The Marines were assigned to the valley several times with different tactical and artillery teams. They fought long and hard to keep this land. They thought that if they captured the rice the enemy could not feast on it. Without rice, they had no means of nutrition. This would help in their capture.

An Hoa Basin

In the An Hoa Basin southwest of Da Nang, the Marines fought several combat operations. An Hoa was severely battered due to the constant battles fought there. The ground was covered with craters from the bombing. The mountains were to the west, and the VC owned the mountains. They hid in every hole and behind every tree, waiting to kill the Marines.

In the valleys of the Basin, VC battalions would wait patiently for nightfall. They would open fire on the Marines daily. This is also where the snipers would hide and pick off the Americans one at a time. The tree lines were inundated with booby traps and bombs, just waiting for a Marine to take one wrong step.

Vietnam Generation

The young men who came of age during the Vietnam war were subject to a war like no other. Everyone seemed to have different opinions concerning the reason for the war and the outcome. Opinions were pretty much black and white when it came to the topic of the war. Numerous people rallied behind the symbol of peace and spat at the men who fought in the war. There were others who supported the troops and stood behind them in this time of need.

Many of the men actually volunteered to go to war, feeling proud to serve, as their ancestors before them did. Others were honorable men who respected the draft and did what they had to do. None of these men, however, expected to return to the divided America they encountered after such a mentally and physically taxing war.



Themes

The Men of the Vietnam War

The Vietnam war became a physical and mental part of the men who fought side by side every day in the bush. It was part of their blood. They had no idea what they were getting into, but faced the challenges like men. They were strong and proud to be part of it.

None really understood what they were fighting for, or why this war even existed, but they didn't question it. They would talk among themselves regarding the things they were doing and the rules that were passed down to them from their superior officers, but they stuck together. These men became intertwined with one another, regardless of race or religion. They had each other's backs and would go into the deepest of trenches in the middle of open fire from the enemy to retrieve a fallen brother. Their skill, bravery, and sheer determination are to be commended.

A Misunderstood War

The Vietnam War has been said to be the longest military conflict in US history. The majority of the men volunteered or were drafted into the war. They were very young, most right out of high school, and wanted to serve their country. The ones who volunteered had various reasons for this. Some had a long family history of their ancestors serving in war before them. Others were just lost in society and thought this would be a way to gain control over their lives.

Once in the war, they were not sure what they were fighting for. The North Vietnamese and the South Vietnamese looked the same. Sometimes they were not sure they were firing on the right people. There were mothers and children setting traps that they would fall into. In America, women and children never fight in wars, so this was astonishing to the men. They were just fighting in every direction, hoping to escape alive.

Upon coming home from the war, they were spat on by Americans and protesters who heard bits and pieces of information regarding the women and children who lost their lives in Vietnam. They called the soldiers baby killers, but they had no idea that some of these children were part of the battle. Senator was lured by a little girl straight to the VC, which is how he lost his entire troop of men. These people just didn't understand, and sometimes neither did the Marines.

Two Vietnams

The South Vietnamese were allies of the United States. The North Vietnamese were the enemy. The Marines were told to support the villages and the South Vietnamese, yet they would enter villages and see only women and children. They would ask where the



men were and would get no answer. The Marines knew that the men of the village were fighting with the VC. It didn't make sense to them that they were to protect these families who's men were fighting against them.

It was the way of the war. The women and children were put into bunkers to protect them from the night's fighting. Yet, the US was fighting with another part of their families while they hid securely. It was infuriating to the men. Two separate Vietnams, yet only one war.



Style

Point of View

This story is told from the point of view of Hodges, Snake, and Senator. They speak in third person throughout the novel, commenting on their feelings toward each other and each subject, the characters, and development of the people in their story. One knows that these men are bound together as brothers and will stop at nothing to protect one another. Hodges, Snake, and Senator find ways to survive throughout their battles and are sympathetic to the wounded men. They do their best to help the wounded and fight for the non-wounded.

This story is fiction, a work in which one time frame continues throughout the entire story. It begins in 1968 and ends approximately one year later. The last two chapters are the aftermath of the war, and Senator is the lone survivor. His continuation with his schooling at Harvard is touched upon, as is the friendships he once had prior to entering the service. The friends from his pre-Vietnam days are depicted as ignorant and not having the capacity to hold a normal conversation with Senator. This is solely due to what he had undergone during his days in battle. In the end, Senator finds his own way to deal with the pain of what he's gone through.

Setting

The novel opens in 1968 and continues until mid 1969. It starts with the enlisting of the three men and their diverse backgrounds. The story continues once the men are in Vietnam and the fighting begins. They wander aimlessly throughout the villages and flat lands from one assignment to another. When one man gets hurt, he is flown to a hospital in Japan. He is patched up and sent back into the fields with the other men.

The surroundings are meek and poor. The villagers live on rice and are thin. They have sores on their bodies caused by the continuous rain and holes filled with water. There are leeches and mosquitoes and their living arrangements are very poor. They live in small hootches made from the ponchos of the Marines and the children run around barely clothed and with no shoes on.

Language and Meaning

This story was written in 1978. There is a distinct knowledge the author portrays when writing about the Marines and the surrounding villagers. For the most part, the language is simple and easy to read and the story is told in the same manner. There are parts of the book where the Marines communicate with heavy war slang, so the author provided a source section in the back of the book that explains each slang word used.



The story is filled with history of Vietnam and its surrounding villages and rivers. The descriptions are rich and fully explanatory in the ways of the people of Vietnam.

Structure

The story is told in forty-two chapters, starting with a prologue. There is also a glossary at the end. The progress of the story is linear, but the last two chapters jump ahead in time by a few years to portray the aftermath of the three main characters. It starts in 1968 and ends in 1969.



Quotes

"That's after a month. Or two. But Lieutenant. When you do it for six, or nine, or even longer, by Christ, you'll never shake it." Chap. 5, p. 75

"The bush gets in your blood and you hate anyone who hasn't fermented in his own stench for months, or stood inside a dirt hole all night, waiting to kill a man who's trying to kill you first." Chap. 5, p. 75

"We don't shoot no principle direction man, we shoot gooks." Chap. 9, p. 123

"Well, I'm Staff Sergeant, Austin, your new Platoon Sergeant, and you piss me off." Chap. 9, p. 125

"Yeah, but what can you say. "Dear Mrs. Ottenburger. We got a hundred gooks and three Marines. Sorry about that."" Chap. 11, p. 166

"Been bleedin' Whitey's war. Killin' brown folks, ain' no reason. Been dyin' fo' the Beast." Chap. 16, p. 215

"Cause you're a pissant crybaby. And you don't carry your own weight. When's the last time you did something for somebody besides yourself, Senator?" Chap. 17, p. 221

"I'll bet you a bottle of booze you lose. Jack in the Black." Chap. 19, p. 243

"Make Hanoi a parking lot. I mean it. How can you fight a war with your hands tied behind your back is what I want to know, Sergeant." Chap. 20, p. 255

"Ah, Lieutenant. Peep this out. Peep that out. We could find old Ho hi Minh hisself back there and it wouldn't make no never-mind." Chap. 22, p. 270

"Hope they don't bring us up there. We'll never make it. We'll get lost in the grass. They'll hear us coming and do the hell outa us." Chap. 25, p. 285

"If they want to keep 'em alive, they'll take 'em to the mountains. If they don't well——" Chap. 27, p. 310



Topics for Discussion

How would things have been different for Senator if he had dodged the draft like his friends?

Do you think you could have done what Hodges did when offered a job in Okinawa?

Do you think he did the right thing by turning down the job and returning to battle?

Why do you think the Vietnam War is so misunderstood?

Would you have liked to live through the Vietnam War?

If there was no war for Snake to enlist in, what do you think his life would have turned out like?

When it comes to the commanding officers in their air conditioned offices, do you believe as the men in the bush, that they have no idea what they are doing when it comes to the bush?

Would you have liked to see Hodges survive to see his son?

How could Hodges and Mitsuko raise their son considering he's labeled an American?

How do you think the book would be different if Snake did not extend his stay in Vietnam?