

# **Fortunate Son Study Guide**

**Fortunate Son by Lewis Burwell Puller Jr.**

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## Plot Summary

This Pulitzer Prize winning autobiography recounts the tragic life of its author, a former Marine who lost both legs and most of both hands while serving his country in Vietnam. It was written by Lewis B. Puller, Jr., son of Lewis Burwell "Chesty" Puller, a famous military strategist admired the world over for his strong leadership and victorious battle tactics. From the time he was a young boy, there were a lot of unspoken assumptions about the course Lewis Junior's life should take, given that he was an only son and heir to the Puller legacy. As a very young man, Lewis joined the Marine Corps and was sent to Vietnam to defend his country against the Red tide, which his father had warned him about so urgently. Within three months time, young Lieutenant Lewis Puller, Jr. returned home to the states missing two legs and most of the fingers from both hands.

His staunch wife Toddy stayed by his side through the seemingly endless agony of physical recovery. The birth of their infant son, Lewis Puller III, and the support of his fellow veterans inspired Lewis to fight to regain purpose to his life. Miraculously, he overcame all odds, survived his wounds, and earned a law degree at the prestigious William and Mary College. But Lewis was also embittered by the country's disgraceful reception of its Vietnam warriors and he came to believe that his great sacrifice was meaningless to his country. In an attempt to restore meaning to his war service, and to the service of countless other Vietnam veterans, Lewis entered the political arena. His passionate hopes to become a political leader and to safeguard the next generation from suffering as he had, were cut short by a decisive loss to his opponent, Paul Trible. Paul Trible was a man who, to Lewis' disgust, was elected on the strength of his pro-military stance, even though Trible had avoided serving in Vietnam.

But even though his hopes and dreams were squashed a second time with this loss, Lewis Puller still contributed a great deal to the world. His courage and determination touched the lives of many, especially the thousands of young men who had dodged the Vietnam draft, for whom Lewis helped secure clemency in his official capacity as a Clemency Board member under President Ford's administration. Lewis made powerful friends during the many years he served as an attorney in the Department of Defense, but always felt the closest fellowship with the other men of his generation who had put their lives on the line for an unpopular war. Lewis' autobiography inspired thousands of his fellow veterans by giving voice to their despair, courage, and hardship. His story will be remembered for years to come, and the contrast between his father's military experience and his own teaches a lesson about the value of human life, and the insanity of sacrificing lives for the wrong cause.



# Part 1, Chapter 1

## Part 1, Chapter 1 Summary

The author begins recounting his life from the summer of 1951, when he was six years old. In the summer of that year, his father, Lewis "Chesty" Puller, made a concerted effort to spend time with his son, after returning from his most recent war service. Chesty Puller had earned a promotion to the rank of brigadier general the previous Christmas for his heroic leadership in the Korean conflict, and by the summer of '51 he had spent over thirty of his fifty-three years serving his country as a highly decorated Marine. His young son, the narrator, quickly learned that his father's exploits had become famous in the annals of American military warfare. Even at the tender age of six, young Lewis knew he had a large legend to live up to.

For his birthday that year, his father bought him a .22-caliber single-shot rifle, formally engraved with his name, "Lewis B. Puller, Jr.," with which the boy was expected to go rabbit hunting with his father. Young Lewis did not live up to his father's expectations in the field; his short little legs could scarcely keep up with his father's long strides as they paced the hills around Camp Pendleton looking for rabbits. Around this time, Chesty and his driver, Sergeant Orville Jones, took Lewis to the firing range, where the boy's eye was blackened by the recoil of a .45-caliber pistol. That day young Lewis learned that boys do not cry in front of grown men; his father merely placed the .45 back in his hands, and together they had squeezed off a shot at the target.

At Camp Pendleton, the author's father commanded the Third Marine Brigade which was responsible for training troops to send to Korea. Young Lewis was a frequent spectator at the war games and field exercises which made up the training, and the little boy was naturally captivated by the, "thunder of mock warfare." (pg. 5) His father set up a pup tent for him at home. Lewis used the tent as headquarters for his own war games, which he played with his twin sister, Martha. Unfortunately for Lewis, it was Martha, not he, who became the superior athlete, posing a challenge for the boy who wished to live up to his heroic father. But by 1952, Lewis had become aware of the benefits of his father's rank and heroism, which came in the form of superior housing and deferential, preferential treatment.

After his father's transfer to the Marine Recruit Depot in San Diego in 1952, the boy's language took on some of the more colorful words used by the drill instructors, and Chesty became cautious about allowing Lewis to mingle with the marines. But when Lewis and Martha swam at the base pool, the impressionable boy was fascinated by the bulging, tattooed muscles of the marines. Another big influence entered Lewis' life in the form of a cocker spaniel named Fidget, who his father acquired on one of his many public speaking trips. On these trips, Chesty became known for making inflammatory remarks about the Marine Corps' training methods.



In August of 1953, at the close of the Korean War, Chesty was promoted to major general and the tenor of their lives improved as he acclimated to life outside the Korean War zone. Chesty even ceased making inflammatory speeches. Lewis' father then took a special interest in his family, and they enjoyed many outings to the zoo, the movies, and games of catch. Chesty's attempts to teach Lewis to march; however, went nowhere.

In July of 1954, the family moved to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, where Chesty took command of the Second Marine Division. As with their house in San Diego, their new home came supplied with a butler, a cook, yard workers, a military aide, and a driver. Lewis was sometimes beaten up by the other boys on base who were jealous of his privileged life as Chesty Puller's son. Chesty arranged boxing lessons for Lewis, an effort which failed miserably. And then, a few months later, something happened which threatened their privileged lives; Chesty succumbed to a stroke. Cards and letters from well-wishers throughout the country arrived daily in the mail. But despite Chesty's popular support, the doctors at the Bethesda Naval Hospital in Maryland, where Chesty was sent for further observation, declared him unfit for duty and he was retired from the service.

The family moved to rustic Saluda, Virginia, where Lewis' grandmother lived. For the first time in their lives, Martha and Lewis were faced with performing household chores. Initially resentful, Lewis came to take pride in caring for himself and his home. With time on his hands, Chesty grew closer to his two youngest children. (An older sister, Virginia, had moved out of the house years before.) During this time, supporters and admirers of Chesty frequently traveled out their way to stop by the house and shake his hand. The Marines' dismissal of Chesty also prompted some favorable national media coverage for the national hero.

Six months after Chesty's retirement, a deadly accident during a training exercise brought national attention and criticism to the Marines' training methods. Chesty was recalled to active duty to appear as witness in the trial of the officer designated to be the Marines' sacrificial lamb. Chesty Puller, a formerly outspoken critic of these training methods, quickly came to the defense of the Marine Corpse. Chesty loyally defended both the methods and the officer. His loyalty earned him even more admirers and the cards, letters, and telegrams again poured in. Lewis explains that it's not a surprise that he came to share all of his father's wise opinions, including the need to stem the Red tide of Communism which would otherwise sweep the globe.

After three years in Saluda, the now eleven year old Lewis could easily keep up with his father's long strides on hunting trips. Lewis learned hunting etiquette from his father, and when he killed his first deer, Chesty bragged to everyone who would listen. The family attended an Episcopal church on Sundays, and Lewis' parents ensured that he learned good manners as well. Lewis became a day student at a boarding school, when he entered the eighth grade, and he began to mingle with sophisticated older boys from the nearby big cities. Lewis excelled academically, but he also played football, basketball, and baseball. Chesty always came to Lewis' games and was treated like a national



celebrity. A sad note in his first year at boarding school came when his dog, Fidget, died. His father broke the news and Lewis turned his face away to hide his tears.

In high school, Lewis began to see his father more as a fallible human being. He resented the way his father lazed around the house instead of finding meaningful work or finding a hobby, and Lewis grew big enough to inflict damage on the older man when they would roughhouse together. But his father's vulnerability also brought them closer together. After his father's emergency prostate surgery in his junior year, the two men would stay up late into the night, talking. Chesty expressed his fear of aging and made clear his ardent desire to see his son succeed him in a military role, to carry on the Puller name.

## Part 1, Chapter 1 Analysis

As we will learn later in the book, one of the questions most asked of Lewis Puller, Jr. later in life was, *what was it like to be Chesty Puller's son?* Whenever asked, Lewis would change the subject or make a joke; he never made a direct reply. This chapter, however, is his answer to that question. Here he documents his formative years in which he learned to admire his father because of the admiration and respect heaped upon "old man Puller" by his men and supporters. But Lewis also learned that that privilege came with a price. The internal politics and petty jealousies of life on the base could and did interfere with Lewis' appreciation of his privileged life. It seems that he was often reminded that he enjoyed such privilege only because of who his father was, but that he himself did not deserve it which instilled in Lewis a powerful urge to earn the same level of privilege and respect for himself as he'd seen showered on his father.



# Part 1, Chapter 2

## Part 1, Chapter 2 Summary

In the autumn of 1967, the Vietnam War was spreading its long shadow across America, just as Lewis left behind the carefree college life at William and Mary to join the U.S. Marine Corps. When Lewis was traveling from the tiny town of Saluda to nearby Richmond to enlist, the war still seemed a distant conflict. At school he and his fraternity brothers had whiled away their free hours in pursuit of food, drink, and pickup bridge games. Lewis was not unaware of the young men fleeing to the safety of Canada or seeking an additional college deferment, but he was more worried about the impact his last name would have on his Marine recruiter. He was granted a waiver for his poor vision and accepted at Officer Candidate School.

His older sister Virginia's husband was already serving a tour in Vietnam as a marine infantry company commander. Lewis could not relate to Virginia's worry over her husband's safety because he believed there was no other option than to serve one's country in wartime. Lewis' view of war was based on John Wayne movies and his father's successful career. Determined to make an impact as a Puller, Lewis put himself through tough physical training before reporting to OCS, and when he did report, he was in the best physical shape of his life. Lewis interrupted his training; however, to return to William and Mary for weekend party binges with his old frat brothers. But already Lewis felt that he'd moved beyond such youthful pursuits, and that he was ready to take on a more meaningful future. This meaningful future began to include a young lady named Toddy, his sister Martha's college roommate. Meanwhile, Chesty was every bit as proud of his son's enlistment as expected.

Upon reporting to OCS, Lewis immediately found himself in his father's shadow. Captain Gretter, Staff Sergeant Brown, and Sergeant Sorg all made a point of informing "Candidate Puller" that he would receive no special treatment on account of his father. Lewis renewed his determination to live up to his family name. Lewis describes the various challenges he endured, particularly an excruciatingly tough hill which the recruits were forced to climb at the end of a long march carrying heavy gear. With Sergeant Sorg's help, Lewis conquered the hill, and by the end of his days at OCS had gained a newfound confidence and strength. Lewis had also gained a steady girlfriend as he spent his free time with Toddy at the nearby apartment that she shared with Martha.

Upon being commissioned as an officer, Lewis outranked Sergeant Sorg and Staff Sergeant Brown and the men expressed their pride in his development. However, it was not for Lewis' achievements, but for his father's, that his locker was raided for souvenir name tags bearing the Puller name. At the commissioning ceremony, Jimmy Stewart's stepson was amongst the new officers and the famous actor had come for the ceremony. The *New York Times* ran a photo of Chesty and Stewart which caused Lewis to once again feel eclipsed by his famous father.



Lewis started Basic School immediately, and here he began to receive the first privileges of being an officer. The accommodations were much improved and even included a bar for the young officers. But the reality of Vietnam became manifest as well, by the accelerated pace of their training due to the need to replace the lieutenants returning from the war in body bags or on medevacs. But as the intensity of the Vietnam conflict increased, so did the intensity of Lewis' relationship with Toddy, as he continued to spend all his free time with her during Basic School.

In January of 1968 the Tet offensive was launched, which further escalated the conflict as well as the media coverage of Vietnam. Some members of Lewis' class sought alternate postings to avoid the conflict, but there would not be options for long as every available officer was needed in Vietnam. Lewis had joined up the military with the intention of becoming a combat platoon leader and his determination remained unaltered. Lewis enjoyed the field exercises he led during Basic School and gained pride in his emerging professionalism. His time with Toddy was made even more precious by the war and one weekend he decided to take her first to William and Mary to meet his old friends. On his way back from the school Lewis took Toddy to Saluda to meet his parents.

Although the young couple enjoyed the carefree respite from the realities of wartime, the William and Mary trip also highlighted how far Lewis had come as a young man and he could no longer relate to the superficial concerns of his old friends. The next day at his parents' house, Lewis' mother kept Toddy at arm's length. Chesty, however, approved of her immediately and quickly transformed Toddy into yet another of his fans. But while Lewis was settling down, others in his class were acting bizarrely in response to their impending war service. One young lieutenant, Ken Shelleman, bought an expensive red convertible and used to disappear for weekend-long, random drives with a case of Lancer's wine. Lt. Shelleman, Lewis would later learn, lost his life in Vietnam.

Toddy, meanwhile, shared the news with Lewis that she was pregnant. That weekend they went to her parents where Lewis had the unenviable job of explaining to her mother and her army colonel father, "that [he] not only had gotten their daughter pregnant but was going to marry her and then go off to war, leaving them to care for her while I was gone. After the initial shock, both sets of parents took it well, particularly Chesty, who warmed to his new daughter-in-law immediately. The lone exception was Lewis' mother, who disapproved of premarital sex, and therefore, disapproved of both Toddy and her condition. The marriage was small and quick, with no time for the elaborate ceremony both young people had looked forward to. They moved into a tiny newlywed apartment and Lewis got to know his new in-laws, the Todds, quite well over some excellent dinners prepared by Toddy. Toddy continued her teaching job until the end of the school year, and Lewis picked up his deployment orders.

He was assigned to lead combat troops in Vietnam within a month's time. He and his new wife broke the lease on their apartment and stored their meager possessions in the Todd's house, where Toddy would be staying while Lewis was gone. By this time, Toddy was waking Lewis up in the middle of the night to feel the baby kick. Chesty was thrilled with the impending birth and Lewis recalls the signed copy of his autobiography which





Chesty had once given him, inscribed with Chesty's request that Lewis carry on the family name and produce at least two grandsons. But Lewis' joy was tempered by his need to prepare a will and the impending separation from his wife. They spent their last two weeks leave traveling to boisterous Virginia Beach, followed by a more sedate military wedding in Hampton with a friend of Lewis'. The pressure on the couple was building, and Lewis and Toddy were sobered to see a young captain at the wedding whose leg was severely deformed by a war wound.

Afterward, they drove to the Puller residence to spend time with Lewis's parents and sisters, Martha and Virginia. Lewis' mother still disapproved of Toddy's pregnancy, and the time together was further marred by the family's fears for Lewis' safety. The first time Lewis ever saw his father cry was the day he and Toddy left; it would also be the last time Lewis could stand on his own two feet and look his father in the eye. Back home with the Todds, Lewis and Toddy spent a miserable final night together, too depressed to provide each other physical or emotional solace. Toddy saw him off at the airport gate the next morning and after a series of interminable flights, Lewis arrived at Camp Hanson, the final holding station before the flight to Vietnam. Scrupulously avoiding the available massage parlors and their inexpensive whores, Lew pumped his last few soon to be worthless dollars into a one-armed bandit. Hours later, Lewis was greeted in Da Nang by the intense tropical heat of Vietnam.

## Part 1, Chapter 2 Analysis

Officer Candidate School and Basic School were critically important to the development of Lewis' character. The brief time he spent there enabled him to gain the courage, confidence, and competence he would need to fulfill his father's legacy. Lewis had spent his entire life to this point planning and dreaming of the time when he could prove himself as worthy of the Puller name. Unfortunately, Lewis' coming of age *and* his romance with Toddy are both, by necessity, compressed into these few but intense months. It is on the strength of this quickly laid foundation that Lewis Puller will command his troops, and even more, it is on the strength of this whirlwind courtship that Lewis' future marriage will have to rely. When Lewis returns, a few short months after leaving for Vietnam, he will be returning to Toddy with the immense burdens of a prolonged recuperation and subsequent life in a wheelchair. Thus the importance of this Chapter 1s that it shows how Lewis quickly, but seriously, crafted a solid foundation for his future life, before going off to war.



# Part 1, Chapter 3

## Part 1, Chapter 3 Summary

"Welcome to Vietnam,' the stewardesses called after us as we left the plane and boarded trucks for the short trip to the main terminal. They were the last attractive round-eyed women I saw until my odyssey was completed and I was headed in the other direction." (pg. 66) From Da Nang, Lewis is transferred to his unit Lewis makes a brief stop at division where he gets a final opportunity to frequent the officer's club bar and then he goes on to regimental headquarters, where he runs into Ken Shelleman, his Basic School friend with the red convertible. Even in Vietnam Lewis runs into his father's legacy, and as a fresh, green young officer, he hardly feels up to the comparison. Eventually, Lewis must say goodbye to Shelleman after the last flight hop to join his unit, the Second Battalion of the First Marine Regiment of the First Marine Division, which is deployed in a semi-circle aligning the Cua Viet River.

Lewis spends his first night listening to situation reports. To his chagrin, he learns that his predecessor, another green lieutenant, had been relieved of command after accidentally shooting his own radio operator in the back while cleaning his pistol. Fortunately, the radio operator had been wearing a flak jacket, but Lewis knows he's going to have to work extra hard to earn his men's respect. Lewis also finds out that one of his men had been killed only three nights earlier and despite Staff Sergeant Phil Leslie's quick response, they had found no trace of enemy soldiers to fire back on.

Sergeant Leslie had been running the platoon and it was now Lewis' job to relieve him of his command. Wisely, Lewis decides to wait a day before doing so, allowing him a chance to watch Leslie interact with the troops. His first impression of the troops is that they were a bunch of surly teenagers who didn't seem too impressed with him, either. But the fire power carried by the platoon was impressive. Lewis first gets to know the other platoon leaders and officers: Corporal Turner, the platoon guide; Corporal Watson, the (new) radio operator; and Doc Ellis, the senior corpsman. Ellis was a dedicated, skilled professional, and Watson turned out to be an excellent radioman, but it was Turner that made the biggest impression. Corporal Turner was a large black man who despite regulations wore a single gold earring, counterbalanced by a shrapnel lump in his neck underneath the other ear. Turner is a born leader and his constant stream of jokes made him popular with the men. Turner asks Lewis point blank what it was like to be Chesty Puller's son. Lewis breaks the ice with his new officers by replying that Turner should be more worried about what it was going to be like to be commanded by the greenest lieutenant in all of Vietnam.

Lewis describes in detail the platoon's formation on his first march and his first taste of C rations much later that day after a grinding march in the heat. Lewis marveled that first night at how quickly his men could drop off to sleep after being relieved of watch duty. Only later would he too become exhausted enough to sleep at the drop of a hat. That night Lewis gets his first of countless mosquito bites and upon returning to camp



the next day, Captains Woods officially gives Lewis command of the third platoon. Lewis' first move is to assemble the entire platoon, two or three men at a time, for a rifle inspection to allow him a chance to evaluate his men informally. Lewis is pleased with the results, and it is clear to him Sergeant Leslie had done a good job running the platoon.

That night, Lewis gets his first experience of the torrential Vietnam rains and he writes home to Toddy, to please send him a water poncho to help him endure the worst of it. Lewis adjusts to his command over the next week during a series of short range patrols. Since Lewis projects confidence, the only thing which betrays his nerves is his consumption of several packs of cigarettes a day. Lewis had quit smoking when he enlisted, but in Vietnam he became less concerned about the long term effects of smoking when death was more likely to come suddenly. Lewis' primary mission is to help protect the vulnerable city of Dong Ha. The patrols performed by his platoon are both physically and psychologically exhausting as they move through difficult, foreign terrain with the ever present possibility of attack. A few weeks of patrol go by without incident and lull Lewis into the belief that the enemy had moved on and the war had left his platoon behind.

Over the course of these weeks Lewis sees his first enemy corpse in an NVA uniform, and he has to restrain his men from urinating on it. He has not yet reached that level of insensitivity or hatred, but Lewis fears that he will. The next enemy they encountered was a wild pig, which startled his men into opening fire. Otherwise, the most significant incident was the return of two men from convalescent leave. Cowboy was the former radio operator, and for his pains, Lewis and Leslie decided to make him squad leader. Although it is still an important position, the position of squad leader involved less risk of injury. The second man, nicknamed Ski, was a valuable asset when it came to walking point on patrols. But unfortunately, a third man, Corporal Hitch, arrived with these men. Hitch was being punished with combat duty for smarting off to an officer. The overweight, former supply sergeant was out of shape and had no field experience. Lewis attempted to send him back, considering him a danger to their safety, but was denied permission from headquarters for political reasons.

Shortly thereafter, the third platoon was assigned a two day patrol across the Cua Viet River to a friendly local village; their mission was to check out enemy activity in the region and provide medical assistance for the villagers. Lewis looked forward to this friendly mission and his men were well received by the village chief, who insisted they stay to dinner after the medical call was complete. Lewis is advised that it would be rude to refuse so Lewis and his officers accept a meal consisting of watered down gruel flavored with chicken blood. At the end of the meal, Lewis is infuriated to be presented with a bill which he and his men had no choice but to pay. It is his first of many experiences of being taken advantage of by the locals.

A day or two later, to Lewis' relief, Captain Woods promises his platoon some real action: they were to be heli-lifted into the demilitarized zone (DMZ) for a surprise assault. The green lieutenant isn't the only one worried by the assignment; none of the men had been to the DMZ. Even Lieutenant John Zier, Lewis' new friend from the



second platoon, is nervous, despite his six months experience in Vietnam. Lewis commands his platoon safely in and back out of the DMZ, despite having his mission nearly compromised by an hour's delay due to Corporal Hitch's heat exhaustion. Still, the third platoon secures its objective, shoots some retreating enemy soldiers, and choppers out faster than most of the other units. The worst enemy his platoon encounters is the powerful, debilitating sun. Despite orders to shoot anything that moves in the DMZ, Lewis couldn't help but regret that they had killed retreating soldiers.

Captain Woods advised Lewis that he and his men were headed south by truck to relieve a battalion posted outside of Da Nang, at a place called Camp 413. The trip is uneventful. Da Nang is a hastily constructed armed camp, with everything made out of plywood and canvas. The men do; however, have access to the luxury of showers and in Da Nang there are several bars and clubs to service the men. After an evening of liberty, a hung over third platoon reports to Camp 413 the next day. The patrolling at Da Nang is much more dangerous than it had been at Dong Ha. Enemy booby traps abound, and Lewis is warned to carry the long probe sticks used to check the ground ahead for hidden explosives. The patrols consist of rotation duties over three different sites: the easiest is bridge patrol duty at the Tu Cau River, which is considered a holiday by the men; but the most dangerous patrol area, called the Riviera, is accessible only through enemy villages or by crossing a huge rice paddy in which enemy snipers have already picked off countless Marines.

Lewis' first trip across the rice paddy and into the Riviera was successful and he and Leslie work hard to keep the enemy guessing about the route they will take each time. But it is here that Lewis begins to get angry with the Vietnam villagers he is supposed to protect. Routinely, after leaving a friendly village to which the platoon had provided medical care, food, and cigarettes, the platoon would find themselves being shot at from behind by enemy snipers taking refuge in the village. Lewis platoon escapes the enemy fire without incident, but upon crossing the rice paddy on the way back to Camp 413 on that very first patrol, the point man, Barton, is nearly killed. The entire platoon all make it back to camp safely and Lewis thanks Barton for the quick action which saved his life.

## Part 1, Chapter 3 Analysis

Given that Puller's war experience is overall quite brief, and yet has a major impact on his life, he describes this period of time in minute detail. For anyone who has ever wondered what the Vietnam War was like, this autobiography offers a minute by minute, step by step accounting of Puller's experience as a lieutenant assuming command of a ground troop platoon. His first hand account gives the reader an exciting window and we find ourselves as anxious as Lewis Puller to find out for ourselves what a tour of duty in Vietnam will be like. The reader; however, has the benefit of hindsight and distance as we watch Lewis enter the theater of war. We are free to satisfy our curiosity through his experiences without risking life or limb, or even the comforts of modern daily life.

Puller comes off as a likeable officer who makes a good first impression on both his men and the reader. His father's respect for the enlisted man causes Puller to treat his



charges with respect, too. He wisely works with Sergeant Leslie in commanding the platoon, demonstrating a confidence in his leadership abilities and that he is not too proud to learn from the experience of his talented men. Puller's warm description of Corporal Turner, who lacks officer training but displays an inbred talent for leading men, underscores the author's respect for the achievements of enlisted men who've worked their way up through sheer skill and experience.



# Part 1, Chapter 4

## Part 1, Chapter 4 Summary

Their next patrol was to be bridge duty at the Tu Cau Bridge, an hour's march from Camp 413. But to the relief of the troops, the company gunny arranged truck transport, and the entire platoon looks forward to relatively light duty and a day at the river shore before rotating to one of the more dangerous patrols again. Lt. Puller and Sergeant Leslie find the command bunker at the bridge already occupied by a young engineer corporal who had been fortunate to pull bridge duty as a long-term assignment. Puller and Leslie grab the driest part of the bunker, but grudgingly allow the young man to stay. The bridge is on a major road so the platoon has frequent contact with civilians, especially the vendors who ply their wares amongst the men. Puller allows the commerce, but restricts it to an open area away from the bridge, and he draws the line when the locals offer the men "party girls." (pg. 106)

As the platoon enjoys two days of respite at the bridge, Puller finds himself writing long letters to his father. After having experienced live combat, Lewis feels closer to his father than ever and he pours out his heart in a way he had never done before. While on bridge duty, he receives his first packet of letters from his wife and she has included the rain gear he requested. Lewis shares the news from home with Sergeant Leslie and they both have a good laugh at the incongruity of life continuing as usual in the States while they hunker, dripping wet, under a bridge which is an enemy target.

After returning to Camp 413, the platoon is scheduled for the third patrol rotation which is in an area northwest of the compound. The territory is unfamiliar to all the men, although the topography, dotted with rice paddies, hedgerows, and small villages, resembles the terrain of the dangerous Riviera section. That night they are fired on by AK-47s from snipers in tree lines. The platoon forms up in a V-shaped draw for the night and digs into the high sides of the two hills forming the V. Puller sends his men on short patrols all night to ward off a Vietcong attack. The next morning as they exited the V through the narrow end, they discover a booby trap blocking their path. Puller is amazed at his luck; if they had proceeded through the V instead of making camp the night before, they would have lost several men to the trap. The trap is grenade contained in a discarded C-ration can, with a trip wire at knee level. Puller orders his demolition man to rig a time charge to dispose of the booby trap safely after they're gone.

As planned, the charge explodes harmlessly, but the sound immediately draws fire from hidden snipers in the trees. The platoon returns fire while hightailing it out of there. Just as they get out of range and the enemy breaks off fire contact, a new explosion sounds from the front of the line. The point man had run straight into another booby trap. The medical corpsman goes right to work on the two men injured by the blast and Doc Ellis advises Puller that the men would recover, but needed to be choppered to the hospital. When the choppers finally arrives, Puller marks the landing zone with a smoke grenade and his men talk the pilot down on the right spot. As usual, the chopper landed only for



a period of seconds and as soon as the wounded men were boarded, it heads off to Da Nang. Leslie prods Puller to get the platoon moving right away since the chopper had given away their location to every enemy soldier around. Puller gets the rest of the platoon back safely to camp, but he is deeply bothered by the injury to his men, for whom he felt responsible to protect. The men, are frustrated and angry by the loss, especially when they hear upon their return that another platoon had lost a man to a sniper in the rice paddy at the Riviera.

The next morning Puller's platoon heads back to patrol the dangerous Riviera. Leslie and Puller worked out a strategic route to minimize their risk, but no amount of strategy could change the fact that they had to cross that rice paddy. Under cover of darkness, the platoon crosses safely and enters the Riviera. The patrol proceeds without incident until late afternoon, when they spot two Vietcong men rigging a booby trap on a nearby hill. Their shots fall short of the target, and they move on to avoid becoming targets themselves. The platoon makes camp for the night and, after dinner, carefully buries their garbage so the Vietcong won't be able to make booby traps with it. And that's when the first mortar rounds hits their camp. Before it could occur to Puller to order return mortar fire, his men send out several mortar rounds, which ends the enemy attack. Leslie tells Puller not to waste thought on what could have happened had the men not returned fire, "but [he] knew that [his] butt had been saved by some fast-thinking kids for whom [his] respect had just taken a quantum leap." (pg. 115)

Headed back to Camp 413 the next day, the platoon runs into Lt. Zier's patrol; the two platoons stop for a smoke break and to exchange intelligence. By the time Puller's men return to base camp, Zier's patrol had walked into a mine field and five men, including Zier, were injured. Depressed and frustrated by the injury to Zier, a man Puller thought of as invincible, Lewis spends the rest of the day writing Toddy and drinking warm beer with Leslie. Fortunately, Captain Woods, assigns Puller's platoon a two-week change of duty, at the end of the week, to Marble Mountain. Although there were no details on the new duty, and they still had two more days of patrolling the northwest area, it was still welcome news, because anything seemed better than returning to the dangerous Riviera.

Morale improved with the news, but before the platoon left for their assignment they were had several armed confrontations with hostile villagers and they lost another man to a serious injury caused by a booby trap, which also left a piece of shrapnel in Lt. Puller's hand. The night before they deployed to Marble Mountain, Lewis spent writing a letter to Toddy, advising her of the minor injury which earned him his first Purple Heart medal. Ironically, Puller wrote in his letter that he wanted Toddy to hear about his minor injury first-hand from him before some rumormonger blew the story out of proportion and made it sound like Puller had had both his legs blown off. Before they left for Marble Mountain, the platoon spent one final day blockading a road near the Tu Cau Bridge. A firefight broke out and the company was credited with ten enemy kills, but they were also responsible for the gunfire which accidentally blew an eight-year old girl's arm off.

As a reward for the ten kills, the platoon was given vehicular transportation to Marble Mountain the next day where they joined up with an ARVN company to guard the



compound which they would all inhabit. The Vietnamese ARVN captain was Captain Thanh, a man Lewis quickly came to respect and admire. This compound duty was luxurious to the men, because it was off the battle front, and allowed them access to a nearby Seabee compound which boasted showers and gourmet food at the PX. Meanwhile, Captain Thanh's men lived off the land. On his final night before leaving the compound in Puller's men's hands, Captain Thanh provided them a sumptuous meal of crab and what was hopefully beef in a brown sauce. Puller contributed a pint of scotch, sent by Toddy and the two men discussed the war:

"I told him that part of my motivation in coming to Vietnam was to help his people have a choice of governments. I could see a smile play across his lips by the glow from his cigarette, but he did not respond for several minutes. Finally he told me that the Vietnamese people would outlast whatever government happened to be imposed on them and that he and I were powerless to affect the Vietnamese destiny. He thanked me for caring and told me to think occasionally of him and of his people when the war was no longer a concern of mine. I felt for a moment as if I were in the presence of a very old man instead of someone in his late twenties." (pg. 135)

Lewis is not a fan of Captain Thanh's replacement, Lieutenant Doan. Doan beats his Vietnamese troops with a bamboo truncheon for even the smallest infractions and he makes most of his decisions out of fear. The camp is in a relatively safe area and the biggest danger is for the men selected for nightly patrol. During the day, the men have leisure time to read, play cards, and write letters home. They have it easy and made no complaints about the boredom of guarding such a forlorn spot. To break the monotony, the men are granted a day's leave at nearby China Beach, which they all make the most of, including a man who tries to swim off into the ocean towards home. That night at the beachside canteen, the men all raise a glass to the exploits of Chesty Puller, which moves Lewis nearly to tears. However, the mood quickly lifts as the men begin making up tall tales about Chesty's exploits and Lewis solemnly confirms every one. Hung over, the men are late reporting to duty that night and Lewis cancels their night patrol, which angers Lt. Doan.

But Doan soon calls in the favor Puller owes him for the canceled patrol, when his men returned from an all day patrol with heavy casualties. That night, Lewis' men patrol alone, despite a recent increase in enemy activity in the area. Cowboy is on point, and everything goes smoothly until he brings the men back to camp. When Cowboy sees naked corpses in the barbed wire surrounding the camp, he goes to investigate and the corpses began shooting at him. Puller's men quickly return fire and a few minutes later Puller himself follows the blood trail of an injured Vietnamese soldier who had tried to sneak into the camp, most likely to kill the commanding officers. Puller shoots him dead, and they take the body into the camp. The corpse is decorated with an empty beer can and a cigarette in its mouth, until Doan's men complain of the insensitivity to a dead Vietnamese soldier. Puller takes stock of his own reactions, and acknowledged that his heart has turned icy and that such behavior no longer bothers him, as it had when he first arrived in Vietnam.





When the platoon finally return to Camp 413, Puller learned that the Tu Cau Bridge had been blown up in his absence and that the VC had stepped up its activity in the Riviera. With the prospect of returning to such dangerous ground, several men begin manufacturing ailments and excuses to sit it out. Lewis deals harshly with these men, knowing he can't afford to excuse even one of his men or he could lose all of them. Captain Woods gives Puller the news that his platoon is scheduled to patrol the Riviera the next day. The only good news upon returning to Camp 413 is that two other platoons will be escorting them into the Riviera and that Lt. Zier is recovering well enough to return to the company within a few weeks. During that first joint patrol of the Riviera, Sergeant Leslie is injured by a booby trap just outside the rice paddy and is forced to leave the company for at least four weeks.

Puller elevates Corporal Turner to acting platoon sergeant during Leslie's absence, and despite a certain amount of attitude from the men who accused Turner of selling out, the new sergeant performs his duties quite admirably. Barton, the man who had been on point and had saved Puller's life the first time through the rice paddy at the Riviera, begins complaining of mysterious symptoms, which Puller attributed to malingering. Not until hours after Barton died in his arms did Puller realize that he hadn't been faking, "I knew only that I had not been there when Barton needed me most, and I loathed myself almost as much as I loathed the war and the Marine Corps that were forcing me to serve in an increasingly repugnant role. We never did find out the cause of Barton's death." (pg. 153) Frustration mounted in the platoon as they continued to take enemy sniper fire almost daily, but rarely got a clear target upon which to return fire or take revenge.

Finally, Captain Woods devises an operation designed to settle the score in the Riviera. The village of Viem Dong was a known Vietcong stronghold, but politically it was unacceptable for the Americans to attack the village. So Woods designs a joint attack in which the American troops will surround the village, and then their allied South Korean troops will enter and rout the enemy into the waiting arms of the armed Marines. It is part of the plan for the South Korean troops to rape and pillage within the village to ensure that the villagers will not cooperate with the enemy in the future. The men patrolled as usual in the pouring rain that night, to avoid arousing enemy suspicion, and set out in the middle of the night to get in position for the operation.

Shortly after dawn, the choppers arrive to transport the men to a position outside village. But the roar of the choppers panic the Vietcong into fleeing the village, and seven of them run towards Lewis moments after he got off the chopper and put his men into position. The nearest men are twenty meters away from Lewis, out of hearing range due to the noise and confusion of the surprise attack. All alone, Lewis is the only obstacle to the approaching enemies' freedom. He fires his rifle once and then it jams. But the enemy soldiers veered away which allows Puller to run for the safety of the command post atop a nearby hill. Only a few steps away from his objective, Lewis runs into a booby trap that launches him into the air for what seems like eternity. He has no idea then that the pink mist in the air around him was what remained of his vaporized legs. Through his shock, Lewis can only think of returning home to his wife and unborn child. Lewis can not understand the urgency in his fellow soldiers who scream at him to,



"'Pray, Lieutenant, for God's sake, pray.' I could not see the jagged shards of flesh and bone that had only moments before been my legs, and I did not realize until much later that I had been forever set apart from the rest of humanity." (pg. 157)

With the help of Doc Ellis, the men get him stabilized enough to survive the chopper lift to a hospital in Da Nang. When Puller wakes up in the hospital, his hands are bandaged, and he knew that he'd lost his thumb and the little finger on his right hand, and that he had his thumb and forefinger on the left hand. But Lewis was not yet consciously aware of the loss of his legs. Miraculously, his face had been spared. As the son of a war hero, his injury is reported by Walter Cronkite on the evening news, which Toddy watches at home with a double shot of bourbon in hand. Lewis is transported stateside through a series of arduous trips, and on his stopover in Japan he develops a stress ulcer from the shock of the injury and he has to have part of his stomach removed. To everyone's surprise he survives the operation. When his plane touches down at Andrews Air Force Base outside Washington, D.C., there is no brass band to meet him.

## Part 1, Chapter 4 Analysis

It took only a short time in 'Nam to season and age the formerly green lieutenant. This chapter completes the author's detailed recounting of his experiences in Vietnam, culminating with the injury which forever set him, "apart from the rest of humanity." Reliving this with Lewis, before the shock of his injury fades, we can share his exquisite pain and frustration at being pulled from the field at the very beginning of an operation which would have at last given him a chance to revenge his fallen comrades. Lewis is pulled from the field mere months into his duty, knowing he'll now never have a chance to matching his father's war deeds.

These are the thoughts which haunt him initially. In the ensuing chapters he recounts a recovery so grueling and lengthy that he doesn't have the luxury for such thoughts for some time to come. But in the end, these regrets are where his mind returns time and again, to explore the painful finality of a sacrifice he will ultimately come to see as useless.



# Part 1, Chapter 5

## Part 1, Chapter 5 Summary

His father was the first visitor allowed in to see him. For the second time in his life, Lewis saw his father weep. Toddy was the next visitor, after which the entire family joined them. His mother could not bear to look at him, but Lewis used the situation to extract from her permission to give Toddy his grandmother's diamond engagement ring. Martha visited the next morning and later told him that her initial response upon seeing him had been to pray for his death. Lewis was so doped up with morphine that he has little recall of the next several weeks and only learned later of the difficulty for his family since the military made no provisions for temporary lodging for them. Toddy would later volunteer to put up other family members with wounded men in the hospital to help them avoid the costly expense of motels.

For the moment, Lewis was completely helpless. The hospital assigned three corpsmen to watch him round the clock. The first two were unreliable, Lewis realized after he'd regained his wits, but the third man, McMonagle, proved to be a much needed lifeline in Lewis' recovery. Before anyone was yet sure Lewis would survive, he was operated on to skin graft the deep wounds in his buttocks and to close the gaping hole where his right leg had once connected to his torso. During the first month of his hospitalization, he was confined to an electric bed which rotated him every few hours in hopes of minimizing bedsores. After weeks of complete dependency on McMonagle, Lewis' hands were unbandaged and he was able to manage small chores like scratching his own itches.

In November of 1968, he was transferred to the sick officers' quarters (SOQ) on the twelfth floor. SOQ 12 was filled with seriously wounded officers, including Lewis' new roommate, Paul Barents, a double leg amputee. Barents astounded Lewis by getting around on prosthetic limbs and a cane, but Lewis was too emotionally wounded to even speak to his friendly new roommate for quite some time. When Lewis saw Paul with his wife Kathy, he began to take on hope that he might have a normal relationship with Toddy. Up until that point Lewis had been considering asking Toddy for a divorce to free her from his situation. Lewis realized he had to change his attitude or else he would up a lonely and bitter freak.

Lewis soon meets Dr. Cabot, who examines him with all the tenderness of a hundred pound gorilla. Lewis' treatment will consist of surgery to close his stump and the vital femoral artery which protrudes from the opening. Dr. Cabot sneers at the special treatment Chesty Puller's son is getting and arranges to cut off Lewis' morphine without mentioning it to Lewis. Without morphine, Lewis gets to endure a tortuous skin stretching device to prepare his leg for surgery because Dr. Cabot wants the skin stretched as far as possible so he'll need to take less skin from elsewhere on Lewis' body to close the stump. One memorable day a corpsman rotated the bed without first unhooking Lewis from the weights attached to his skin, and both Lewis and Paul



Barents screamed out at him. Lewis gradually gains the ability to sit up in a wheelchair for brief periods, and McMonagle helps him with the tough job of building his endurance for the chair.

Lewis' life at this point is largely a living hell as he sees the extent of his injuries reflected in the eyes of every person he meets. He spends much time in pain, or brooding about his injuries and wondering why Toddy was still with him. But then, a week before Thanksgiving, Toddy gives birth to Lewis Burwell Puller III, whom she is affectionately calling Lewpy. Lewis feels a surge of love and renewed hope that they were meant to be a family. He also learns that Toddy had actually lost fifteen pounds during her pregnancy, and he begins to become more sensitive to what those around him were going through, too. He offers a cigar to his roommate in honor of the occasion, which is the first time he'd spoken civilly to Paul. Chesty cried again when he heard the news, but this time they were tears of joy.

It would be a few weeks before Lewis got to see his son. Toddy and her parents made the trip to see him and they met in one of the spare hospital rooms. Lewis is surprised at the intense feeling of protectiveness he feels towards his wife and son and also by the stirrings of lust Toddy inspired in him for the first time since his injury, which had ruptured his scrotum on top of everything else. The stump closing required two operations and nearly finished off Lewis, but again he miraculously pulled through. Upon his recovery, McMonagle is no longer needed and Puller reluctantly says goodbye to the man who'd helped him survive. Paul Barents is ready to be released as well but in parting, he gives Lewis the gift of independence by teaching him to transfer his own body out of his wheelchair. After Paul leaves, word gets around that Lewis could do it on his own and the staff was instructed to quit helping him. Lewis pouted for a few days, but then emerged into the corridors and made his way around them.

His physical therapy begins around Christmas and Lewis met Commander Shaughnessey, a woman who pushed him exceptionally hard to overcome his new limitations. He gets news of his former platoon, which would be spending Christmas in the Riviera. Lewis feels both guilty at having abandoned them and sickened by their blood lust, which he had until recently come to share. Toddy spends Christmas Day with her husband, and despite his feelings of jealousy about Lewpy taking all her attention, they share for the first time the easy rapport they'd had before the war. Lewpy's Santa suit is a hit, and Lewis manages to throw a New Year's Eve party for his wife, which McMonagle attends, too. Just before the party, Lewis and Toddy made love for the first time since his injury. Until he got a new roommate a month later, the couple had enough privacy for such intimacy whenever Toddy was able to drive the two hundred miles to visit. Toddy had made friends back home with Lt. Zier's wife, Linda, and she brought up a case of scotch for Lewis courtesy of Linda.

Lewis' days consist of physical and occupational rehabilitation on a grueling schedule led by Shaughnessey. Lewis sees that the average patient stays four to six months, but Lewis' determination to be out within ten months was optimistic given his wounds. Before his recovery could go any further Lewis had to address his impending hand surgeries. Lewis had a brilliant young surgeon who promised him he'd be able to do



everything he used to do with his wife once the surgeries were over, but that it would take a year to eighteen months. The surgeries would delay him in PT because he wouldn't be able to hold crutches. With this good news in hand, Lewis meets his new roommate, Lt. Jim Crotty. Crotty was as uncommunicative as Lewis had been at first and Lewis better understood what it had been like for Paul Barents to live with him.

The good news is that Toddy has moved up to Philadelphia to be nearer the base hospital where Lewis is to be stuck for another eighteen months, and even better, she'd gotten an apartment two floors below his hospital room. Toddy had to do everything herself but on the day she and Lewpy moved in, Lewis was visited by two former fraternity brothers who carried him down to the apartment and then moved all the furniture in for them. Years later Lewis would learn that his two friends had broken down and cried upon seeing the extent of his injuries. But for the moment, the young couple did their best to establish a semi-normal routine. Lewis, who was now an outpatient, was living in his own home with his new family, even though he did need to be carried down the stairs by a neighbor each day so he could report for physical therapy at the hospital.

In late February, a frantic Linda Zier called their home to report that John had been caught in a land mine explosion, and was being medevacked to the Philadelphia Naval Hospital. John had lost one leg and might still lose the other. Toddy invited Linda to stay with them and Lewis suspected that the invincible Lt. Zier had received his injury while crossing the Riviera. While waiting for John to arrive at the hospital, Lewis met Eddie, a double amputee who would custom-make Lewis' artificial legs. While waiting for the custom legs, Lewis was issued "stubbies," which were shorter legs used for training. Since Lewis had no remaining stub on his right side, the right stubbie would be attached by means of a stiff corset surrounding his waist with a hinge to hold the leg. His impending mobility cheered him as did the doctor's approval for him to attend his sister Martha's wedding, which would be his first outing from the hospital.

The rehearsal dinner at the officers' club, an intimate affair, went off well. One of the groomsmen prompted Lew over dinner to run for political office. Both he and Toddy were interested in the idea, which promised hope for their future. But at the wedding reception, Lewis felt overwhelmed and learned that two of his companions from Basic School, including the convertible-driving Shelleman, had been killed in combat. He got drunk and left the reception in tears.

He returned to the hospital to find a depressed John Zier and a completed pair of stubbies. He commenced "stump rounds" with the other hospital amputees, led as usual by the hard-driving Commander Shaughnessey. Lewis commenced a rehabilitation routine and he, Toddy, and Lewpy were able to move into the apartment on the first floor so that his neighbor no longer had to carry him in and out of the house. Jim Crotty was assigned a new roommate, who would become Puller's friend, by the name of Bob Kerrey. Kerrey was a navy Seal team leader who was being recommended for the Medal of Honor. Jim and Lewis were amazed at Bob's refusal to take pain medication despite the surgery which amputated his leg. Meanwhile, John Zier was also beginning



to mend, after besting a bout of malaria. Linda continued to live with the Pullers, which was helpful to all of them.

These positive strides were counterbalanced by the round of hand surgeries which Lewis began. Toddy knew it was easier for Lewis to accept her help than the help of strangers on the hospital staff, so she always brought him home as quickly as possible after a surgery, where the little family could recuperate together. The first surgery on the left hand went well, resulting in more strength to the straightened finger bones and a better cosmetic appearance. Zier meanwhile was having a difficult time recuperating. Lewis had a bittersweet reunion with Phil Leslie. Back in the States, Phil and his wife Sally joined the Pullers for dinner. Phil was taken aback by Lewis' condition and after a few drinks; Phil confessed to Lewis that he felt guilt and sense of responsibility for Lewis' injury. Lewis tried his best to show Phil that he and Toddy were doing fine, but the effort exacted an emotional toll.

## Part 1, Chapter 5 Analysis

Phil Leslie's visit ends the chapter and marks the beginning of a pattern which will eventually wear Lewis Puller out. Leslie is the first of many people who care deeply about Lewis and demonstrably have a hard time bearing what's become of him. Lewis is a caring soul who was always empathetic to his friends so he takes on the role of comforter to them. Lewis develops a need to project a happy and hopeful image which he does not at heart feel, just so that his friends and loved ones will not grieve too greatly for him. But Lewis actually feels that he has been forever separated from his fellow human beings. He uses that phrase to describe his injury twenty-four years after it happened. This is not an injury he could ever really get over, and yet, he made it his mission to show others that he could and would. He kept up a very brave front for everyone, which perhaps in the end contributed to his retreat into alcoholism. Only Toddy was allowed to console Lewis, and for her he has remarkably less empathy. She functions as a single mother to their infant son and full-time nurse to her helpless husband. Lewis is understandably too preoccupied with his own loss to fully appreciate her efforts, although Lewis does have many moments where he keenly regrets his inability to support his wife through this juncture.



# Part 1, Chapter 6

## Part 1, Chapter 6 Summary

In early June of 1969 Lewis checks back into the hospital for his second hand surgery, this time on his right hand. Both the thumb and little finger of this hand are useless stubs, and Dr. Sandzen decides to remove what was left of the little finger and reattach it to the end of the thumb stub to hopefully give Lewis a longer and more useful thumb. He warned Lewis that this type of operation wasn't always successful, but as the two digits were already useless at this point, Lewis had nothing to lose.

Dr. Sandzen then took Lewis aside in confidence and showed him a letter. It was written by the navy surgeon general in Washington advising his subordinate commands to retire as quickly as possible all active-duty Vietnam vets who had been injured beyond the point of being able to perform their duties. The letter suggested the injured servicemen could be better cared for by the Veterans Administration. Under this new policy, Dr. Sandzen would be restricted from performing many reconstructive surgeries, such as the one on Lewis' hand. Although Lewis understood that the military had finite resources and needed to deploy those resources in the field, he felt, upon reading the letter, like garbage which the military was throwing away. He promised Dr. Sandzen he would send a copy to the Marine Corps Headquarters and then the two men prepared for the surgery.

The surgery complete, Lewis returned to SOQ 12 to recuperate. He barely noticed Toddy's presence due to the combination of pain and morphine and his hand had to be elevated to encourage the transplanted finger to take hold. Two days out of surgery, the thumb began to darken. Soon it was apparent the surgery had been a failure. Dr. Sandzen apologized and sent Lewis home to recover for several weeks before operating to remove the now-dead digit. Lewis' despair was exacerbated by the fact that all the patients who had checked into the hospital after him; Zier, Crotty, and Kerrey, were all walking already, and Kerrey had been discharged. "I understood that my wounds were more extensive than those of any other officer I had encountered on SOQ 12 and that I would never again be a whole man, but it was still demoralizing to see arrive on the ward men who were sicker than I yet who were recovering more quickly." (pg. 214)

Kerrey received the Medal of Honor from President Nixon at the White House and, although he was a bit jealous, Lewis agreed to Toddy's suggestion that they throw a party for Kerrey afterwards at their apartment. Meanwhile, even the events in the news seemed to mock Lewis' condition. Neil Armstrong took his small step for man and giant leap for mankind at a time when Lewis couldn't get out of his wheelchair. Nixon's weak rationale for pulling out of Vietnam angered Lewis, who could tell that the President's double-talk covered up the country's desire to cut its losses. By the time Ted Kennedy drove Mary Jo Kopechne off a bridge on Chappaquiddick, Lewis had already lost faith in the country's leaders.



To further his independence, Lewis wanted hand controls installed in his new car. He wrote to the local newspaper and obtained help from the local American Legion post to foot the bill. Lewis was uncomfortable posing for the media as a recipient of their charity, but the new hand controls were worth it. Lewis felt more like a man once he was able to drive his own car again. Meanwhile, Bob Kerrey returned from being honored at the White House and the Pullers hosted their first party as a married couple to honor him. During the party, Lewis overheard Kerrey speak in support of the war protesters and was surprised by his radical views. But Lewis, too, had begun to seriously question the country's leadership.

When his hand healed enough for him to resume physical therapy walking on his stubbies, he was allowed to place an order for a permanent set of full-length legs. By October, Lewis was hard at work training to use the new legs. Dr. Sandzen left to practice medicine as a civilian practice and Lewis learned that Shaughnessey would also be leaving for reassignment. She and Lewis worked double-time with his new legs, but it soon became apparent that sixty feet was the furthest he could walk on them, and he could only walk on flat surfaces. Because Lewis had lost his right leg right at the torso, there was no stump for him to maneuver, which made walking on his artificial legs nearly impossible. But Lewpy was walking now, and during a Christmas visit with his family, Lewis was able to stand up, look his father in the eye, and walk across the room. "For my part, I felt that even if I never walked again, I had gotten sufficient payoff for the months of physical therapy that had led up to that one moment when my father and I stood together on Christmas Day of 1969." (pg. 233)

In 1970, the Vietnam soldiers and prisoners of war returned and to Lewis' dismay, they were reviled by society. He was grateful that the carnage of Vietnam was ending and that fewer patients were admitted to the hospital, but he was also afraid of what life outside of the hospital would be like. Shaughnessey introduced Lewis to her replacement, Lt. Bill Smithers, and said a tearful goodbye to Lewis in which she thanked him for giving meaning to her work. Meanwhile Dr. Sandzen's replacement, Dr. Willett, officially broke the news to Lewis that, given the degree of his injuries, walking on artificial legs was never going to be a reality. Accepting the truth which he had already suspected, Lewis agreed to one final hand operation: since lengthening the thumb hadn't worked, Dr. Willett was going to split the tissue between Lewis' thumb and forefinger to increase his grasping ability. Afterwards, Lewis' hand would be sewn to his side for several weeks to allow the skin graft to heal.

While recuperating from this final operation, Lewis received a frantic call from his older sister Virginia. His father had another stroke and was demonstrating mental confusion. The doctor had advised Chesty to stay at home where the familiar surroundings might ease the confusion. Lewis discussed the matter with Dr. Willett, hoping for advice, and Dr. Willett offered to communicate with Chesty's doctors directly. However, Willett also told Lewis that it was most likely only a matter of time before his father "stroked out." Dr. Willett advised Lewis that he was in no shape to visit his father. Lewis would have to undergo general anesthesia to unsew his hand from his side, and a month later, he would have a final procedure to pare away any excess skin from the grafting. Then, Dr. Willett told him, he could figure out what he was going to do with the rest of his life.





So Lewis had a month to prepare himself for the transition to civilian life. He learned that the government would pay for all of his schooling and so he applied to the College of William and Mary law school. Lewis was accepted as a new member of the class of '73. On the day of his final surgical procedure when Nixon announced the attack on Cambodia, Lewis had mixed feelings. As a small-unit commander, he recognized the strategic value of attacking the enemy stronghold. However, Lewis was afraid that the attack would escalate what he had come to believe was a meaningless war. Lewis had come to the realization, which he would never overcome, that he had lost both his legs and several good friends for nothing, in a useless war. The student killings at Kent State University in Ohio appalled Lewis since those students had been protesting a war he had also come to see as worthless. Lewis was; however, bitter that the nation seemed to care more about those few dead students than about the fifty thousand Americans killed in Vietnam. By midsummer Lewis was ready to be discharged from the hospital. He quickly said his goodbyes to patients and staff, and he, Toddy, and Lewpy headed back home to Virginia.

## Part 1, Chapter 6 Analysis

Part 1 ends with Lewis ready to rejoin the world after all his hard work in rehabilitation. Unfortunately, the gains he's made have been minimal and he is hardly better equipped to deal with civilian life now than he had been upon admission to the hospital. This chapter ends a bittersweet Chapter 1n his life. Back from the war, with law school on the horizon, Lewis can't help but feel cheated as he watches his son take his first steps towards walking which is something Lewis will never do again. Amazingly, the young family has stayed together and survived this antiseptic hospital life. For Toddy, certainly, the move forward into the future must have been welcome. But Lewis knows that he will not find the understanding and acceptance of his condition in the outside world that he found inside the base hospital. His political views have begun a deep transformation, and it remains to be seen how he will express his new belief system in the future.

## Part 2, Chapter 7

### Part 2, Chapter 7 Summary

Upon arriving at their rented bungalow in Williamsburg, Lewis realized he needs some time to adjust to life outside the hospital before starting law school. He arranged to delay his admission to the school until the following January. For the first few months, he was a virtual prisoner in his own home, unable to navigate the obstacles which most people handle routinely. His drinking habits increased and he fell into black moods which would only improve after he began his classes. In the meantime, Lewis ordered a new pair of artificial legs with the latest advances in hydraulic knees, hoping against hope the new technology would work for him. For five months he attended therapy in a VA hospital in Richmond, only to realize the new legs were as useless to him as the old. This time when he gave them up, he knew he would spend the rest of his life in a wheelchair.

Toddy becomes pregnant again, and Chesty suffers another, this time massive, stroke. Chesty survives the stroke, but was hospitalized for several months and required round-the-clock care when he returned home. Lewis is amazed by his mother's determination to provide it, and he is guilt-ridden by his inability to help. During these first months out in the world, Lewis is deeply offended by the public trial of Lt. Calley, a man charged with atrocities against civilians in Vietnam. Public opinion seemed to believe that all 'Nam veterans had committed such atrocities routinely, and Lewis is disheartened by society's rejection of his service and sacrifice.

When he begins law school, he feels light years removed from the kids on campus whose views about war and military service were unrealistic and shallow. Lewis found himself resenting the men in his generation who had dodged the draft. Being on a college campus, he was exposed to the liberal view that the war itself had been an atrocity, and he began to hate the Marine Corps and everything it stood for. He let his hair and sideburns grow out, and bought John Lennon-style granny glasses. Lewis found ways to handle his disability with grace, and helped his classmates feel comfortable in his presence.

A couple of months into his law school experience, Toddy gave birth to baby Maggie. Lewis' parents were able to come for a visit, and Chesty tried hard to discuss the war with Lewis. Chesty, although barely able to communicate after his stroke, seemed to understand the pain his son was feeling for having sacrificed everything to a losing cause. Lewis; however, was not ready to discuss his feelings, and later he would look back with regret at missing opportunity to talk them over with Chesty.

In April of 1971, the Vietnam veterans gathered in Washington to symbolically dispose of their hard-won combat medals. Lewis was moved by this display, and pulled out his own medals to contemplate joining his comrades. But, in the end, Lewis couldn't bear to give away the precious metals for which he had traded his life's blood. Ultimately, he still



took much pride in his country and couldn't completely renounce his service. But, when Lewis was interviewed by a newspaper, he spoke freely of his contradictory feelings. Lewis was lambasted by the press for regretting his service and he received a lot of hate mail in response to the article.

By October of 1971, Chesty's condition was critical. Lewis was at his side when he died, and Chesty was buried with full military honors in front of an over-flowing crowd of mourners. Lewis was touched by the presence of his father's many friends, and even Phil Leslie came to pay his respects. Following Chesty's death, Lewis made an effort to disassociate himself from the military community completely, throwing himself into his studies, his family life, and an, "almost compulsive social agenda with [his] classmates." (pg. 274) As 1972 began, President Nixon continued to withdraw American troops from the Vietnam war arena. Lewis received the shocking news that his friend John Zier had died of cancer. Meanwhile Lewis' classmates were encouraging him to run for class office, and although Lewis consistently refused, he began to consider the possibility of running for political office in the future.

That November, Lewis voted in his first Presidential election. Contrary to his upbringing, Lewis voted Democrat. Lewis then began working on the successful Democratic congressional re-election campaign of Tom Downing. But Nixon's re-election and the subsequent Watergate scandal rekindled Lewis' depression. He began seeing a psychiatrist to work out some of his anger about the war. It was then that Lewis finally realized he'd been working so hard to convince others that he was well, that he hadn't put any of that energy into actually becoming well. The sessions with the psychiatrist didn't heal Lewis' trauma, but it did teach him that it is possible to hold contradictory opinions in both heart and mind and that lesson greatly helped him in overcoming his depression. Lewis completed law school and began studying for the bar. Meanwhile, a well connected friend of Lewis' asked him to consider running for Tom Downing's congressional seat a few years hence, when Downing decided to retire.

President Ford announced the formation of a clemency board to be headed by former Senator Charles E. Goodell, which would grant provisional clemency to Vietnam deserters and draft dodgers. Now a full-fledged lawyer, Lewis was determined to be a part of it and, as a result, he was offered a position on the staff. Lewis' job entailed researching applicants backgrounds and presenting their cases to the board members. Seven months later, so many applications for clemency had poured in that the board needed to be doubled in size, and Lewis successfully lobbied to become a board member. He spent five months poring over case histories. Lewis voted for clemency in virtually every case. Some of the board members were hard line military types, including General Walt who had been a protégé of Chesty Pullers. To General Walt's dismay, Chesty's son Lewis was far too liberal in granting clemency. The two men were often at odds and it pained Lewis to realize that his views had become so different from his father's views, as represented by General Walt. But by the time the board was decommissioned, Lewis felt he had gained General Walt's respect as an adversary, if nothing else. The committee prepared its final report to the president in the luxurious environs of Camp David. Lewis left his board service feeling he'd done some good. Lewis also believed that the board should have been judging America's leadership



which had gotten the country into Vietnam, instead of judging individuals who were forced into bad situations by arrogant leadership.

## Part 2, Chapter 7 Analysis

This chapter highlights the author's shifting views on the war. At the outset of the chapter, Lewis' deepest resentment is reserved for draft dodgers. He can not forgive them for avoiding the sacrifice which he made so willingly. Ironically, Lewis is to become their strongest advocate before the Chapter 1s over, through his service on the clemency board. The protest which the author mentions, in which the servicemen threw away their medals, is still today viewed with disapproval by many voters. John Kerry's 2004 Presidential bid suffered from accusations that he had joined these men in their protest. It's appalling to read an account such as this, by Lewis Puller which makes plain why the veterans were disillusioned, and yet realize that much of the country still lacks respect for the opinions and feelings of our Vietnam veterans. The cruelty of society's illogical double standard against these veterans is incomprehensible. Most of them were forced to serve in the war because of the draft and yet those who regret their service are further punished by public opinion.



## Part 2, Chapter 8

### Part 2, Chapter 8 Summary

After the clemency board was disbanded in the summer of 1975, Lewis returned to his former job at the Office of General Counsel of the Veterans Administration, where he had begun working first as an intern during law school. He found his co-workers were mostly hard-liners who, despite their complete lack of military experience, disapproved of him for granting clemency to draft dodgers. Lewis held his tongue and kept his temper but he realized that he didn't want to continue working for the VA. At the same time, Tom Downing unexpectedly announced that he wouldn't seek re-election. Downing's announcement is made years before it was expected and Lewis and his supporters thought it was too soon for him to run for Downing's seat. Lewis would have to sit it out for another two years, and in the mean time, watch helplessly as a Republican named Paul Trible won his seat.

Lewis disliked Trible from the start and Trible would soon become his nemesis. Lewis hated Trible's hypocrisy. Having dodged the draft himself, Trible had the nerve to run on a military platform, insisting on beefing up national defense and proclaiming the same hard line against communism which landed America in Vietnam in the first place. Lewis felt Trible's drum beating and Red-baiting were extremely dangerous practices which could lead the country into additional danger.

In August of 1976, Lewis received a job offer which allowed him to leave job at the VA. Jim Maye, head of the Paralyzed Veterans of America, had been on the clemency board with Lewis and he recruited Lewis for the PVA at nearly double Lewis' current salary. Lewis threw himself into his new job, working with paralyzed veterans to distract himself from his burning anger at Trible's successful run for office. The more contact Lewis had with disabled vets, the more strongly he felt that men like himself should be represented in government. Seeking entrance into the political world, Lewis took a six week leave of absence after his first year at the PVA to work on the Charles S. Robb campaign for lieutenant governor of Virginia. Lewis obtained a high-ranking position in the campaign, which allowed him to practice stumping politically and also afforded him the opportunity to introduce himself to the political movers and shakers whose backing he would need to run his own future campaign. Robb won the election easily and Lewis learned that he loved being on the campaign trail.

Lewis decided to oppose Trible in his re-election bid so he left the PVA for good. In January of 1978, Lewis began planning the logistics of his campaign. Virginia's First Congressional District consisted of seventeen rural counties, plus the more populous counties in the Hampton, Newport News, and Williamsburg areas. Trible had already staked out Newport News as his own turf, and apparently had their local *Daily Press* in his pocket. Throughout his campaign, the *Daily Press* consistently refused to give Lewis publicity or even fair and impartial coverage because the editor's niece, had gone to



school with Paul Tribble's wife, Rosemary. Lewis had supporters in his camp and Toddy and he selected a talented man named Dennis Lieberman to manage his campaign.

Lewis very quickly learned that his war record would be both an asset and a liability to his campaign, but Lewis' passionate speeches won him many supporters as he explained that he "burned with passion to lead not where [he] had been led but to some safer haven." (pg. 303) Lewis encountered both frustration and exhilaration on the campaign circuit, where he acquitted himself well, but found his wheelchair to be an obstacle. Regardless, he and Dennis traveled the length of Virginia making public appearances. Tribble's camp engaged in some dirty politicking and outright lies, but Lewis had no luck convincing the *Daily Press* to publish the truth. Throughout the campaign, Lewis spent very little time with his family, although Toddy did her part by campaigning hard for her husband. Tribble bested Lewis during their first two public appearances together, but Dennis came up with a strategy which carried the day for Lewis the third time the two candidates met and won Lewis some of the swing votes which Tribble had garnered in his previous election.

All in all, Lt. Puller treated the campaign as a game of strategy, which he based on strong moral values. Here at last he had found a non-violent use for the military stratagems he had so conscientiously learned years before. Lewis' passion for politics blossomed even as the polls reported the increasingly unlikely possibility of a win. As a Democratic nominee, he enjoyed meeting President Carter and Vice President Mondale. Lewis also made a good impression on House Majority Leader Jim Wright, who presented him with a sizeable check to put towards his campaign fund. However, despite all his passion and hard work, Tribble quickly took the lead on election night, and within twenty minutes the outcome was assured. At Dennis' behest, Lewis gave his concession speech at Tribble headquarters, and he and Toddy went home together.

## Part 2, Chapter 8 Analysis

Lewis Puller's campaign most likely suffered from the guilt and confusion America was feeling toward its Vietnam veterans in the early 1970's. Even today, some thirty years after Vietnam, no one has come up with an adequate explanation of why the veterans were spat upon when they returned home to American shores. The soldiers seemed to represent, to the American public, the government's decision to send our youth to be slaughtered in a meaningless war. And yet, to treat those same young people as enemies made no logical sense. Emotion ran so high at the time that reactions such as these were commonplace. Even Lewis was subject to conflicting and illogical emotions. Throughout his life he resented the soldiers who were stationed safely in the rear, just as he would resent draft evaders like Paul Tribble. And yet, when he served on the clemency board, Lewis voted to give clemency to every petitioner who had dodged the draft and was constantly at odds with the "hard-liners" on the board who held men accountable for not wanting to serve in a useless war. Perhaps Lewis sums up his feelings on the matter best when he tells the reader that his psychiatrist taught him that human beings are often forced come to terms with two completely opposite points of

view. Paradox is part of life, and on the campaign trail, Lewis learned a great deal about seeing both sides of an issue.



## Part 2, Chapter 9

### Part 2, Chapter 9 Summary

The next morning, Lewis woke up with a hangover after drowning his election night sorrows. Lewis reports that the party had been awkward and he had not felt like being a good host. Toddy had gone to bed, leaving him alone with his misery. When his hangover finally clears up, Lewis begins to think beyond Election Day for the first time. Well-wishers who called to offer their consolations seemed to be disturbed that the Lewis had no plans on his agenda other than spending more time with his family. After three days of moping, Toddy dragged Lewis with her to the grocery store. But all the attention from strangers, which he had liked so much during the campaign, now deeply irritated Lewis. Toddy and Lewis decide move their family back to their home in northern Virginia, where they could all blend back into their normal lives.

### Part 2, Chapter 9 Analysis

This chapter spans two pages, but takes up less than one page of actual type. Every other Chapter 1n the book, except the Epilogue, is significantly longer. That the author chose to set aside these two brief pages as their own separate chapter signifies the depth of his disappointment over losing the political race. And yet, by ending the chapter so quickly, Lewis Puller also signifies his commitment to getting on with his life.



## Part 2, Chapter 10

### Part 2, Chapter 10 Summary

Stunned at having been beaten two to one by Tribble, Lewis finds himself with twenty-five thousand dollars of campaign debt and quite a few other loose ends to manage. Toddy and one of his former staff members, Margaret, take care of everything except the debt, which Lewis handles by drafting a letter to his supporters seeking their help. He and Toddy throw themselves into making their old home habitable after away from it. The kids are happy to be back at home with their friends, but Lewis is still ten thousand dollars in debt and grieving over his loss. Out of work and feeling worthless, Lewis begins drinking his lunches. Lewis' contempt for Tribble blooms, and Lewis projects his hatred of his adversary onto all the men of his generation who'd avoided serving in Vietnam. Lewis wants nothing more than to forget about the failed election so he is horrified to learn that Paul Tribble has purchased a house around the corner from the Puller homestead.

Lewis begins isolating himself from everyone outside his immediate family. His obsession with Vietnam grows to immense proportions, and more often than not, he finds himself staring at the bottom of a liquor bottle. Then, a job offer comes his way that lifts his spirits tremendous. Lewis is offered the position of attorney on the House Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee. Thrilled at the possibility of gaining Capitol Hill experience, Lewis' hopes for his political future are revived. But his hope is short-lived, because Paul Tribble manages to veto Puller's appointment to the committee. After nearly a year of unemployment, Lewis lands a job with the Office of the General Counsel at the Department of Defense. Lewis is pleased to have gainful employment again, but he isn't thrilled by the job itself because it is a bureaucratic position which will not allow him to contribute much to the world.

Lewis' drinking increases so much that his entire goal every day becomes just to get through work so that he can come home and resume drinking. Within six months, his despair and his drinking are so out of control that Lewis attempts suicide, but he passes out drunk before he can carry out the plan. Toddy has him admitted to the psychiatric ward of a nearby hospital, where Lewis is diagnosed with clinical depression. The psychiatrist in charge of his care, Dr. Kearney, had never served in the military, and Lewis doesn't feel that the man can understand him or relate to him. The one ray of hope during this time is a project initiated by a veteran named Jan Scruggs, who hoped to build a Vietnam Memorial for all his fallen comrades. Toddy and Lewis are invited to the White House along with Scruggs and many other veterans in honor of the nation's first Vietnam Veterans Week. Lewis is uplifted by the attention, but skeptical about the sincerity behind his country's recognition of his service, which is coming after so many years of neglect.

A month later, Lewis' former hospital roommate, Jim Crotty, gets married, and the Pullers are invited to attend. The occasion is also be a reunion, as Paul and Kathy



Barents attend along with Bob Kerrey. Lewis celebrates the nuptials by getting completely drunk and making a huge scene at the wedding. When Lewis returns home afterwards, he ends his therapy sessions with Dr. Kearney. At a subsequent White House function, Lewis once again gets overly drunk and behaves poorly. But Toddy, alert to the signs now, manages to get him home before too much damage is done. Lewis is not deterred by any of this and his drinking increases in intensity. In January of 1981 when the American hostages return home from Iran, Lewis takes their heroes welcome as another affront to the Vietnam veterans. Lewis begins drinking not only at work, but during the night as well, when he is supposed to be sleeping. By May of '81, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial design has been officially selected. Lewis wanted to help in the fund-raising efforts, but he was too drunk and incapacitated to do so.

Lewis' drinking fuels his obsession with Vietnam and the obsession in turn fuels his drinking. Lewis begins spending his lunch hours in the Pentagon library, reading accounts of battles fought in Vietnam. Lewis' obsession brings him no solace and no answers. Finally, Toddy decides that a vacation might help Lewis and so they spend ten days with Martha and her husband in Holland and then they fly to London. In London Lewis is unable to locate sufficient alcohol to satisfy his demons and he is relieved to return home where he could drink from his own supply. Lewis is now drunk around-the-clock so Toddy calls the psychiatric unit at Bethesda Naval Hospital, where Lewis had undergone his lengthy post-war recuperation.

In the hospital, Lewis dries listens to a colonel who tells Lewis about his own recovery from alcoholism. Lewis hadn't thought of alcoholism as a disease before, and this thought gave him hope that he could conquer it after all. Lewis is transferred to the Psychiatric Institute of Washington for a more prolonged stay, and Toddy drives him there herself. At the hospital, Lewis begins his first round of Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. From AA he gains even more hope that he might conquer his demons. During his month-long stay, he throws himself into the program, committed to making it work for him. But Lewis' disability may have hurt him in AA as well as in life. Lewis tells a story about the "hot seat" exercise, in which each member of the group takes turns sitting on the hot seat and having to answer questions and justify their behavior to the other group members. Lewis saw several sessions get pretty nasty, but his own time on the hot seat was limited to five minutes during which he received only favorable or neutral comments. Lewis believes that his group members took it easy on him because of his handicap and Lewis doesn't think they did him any favors by letting him off the hook so easily.

Upon returning home, Lewis is ebullient about AA and his new state of sobriety. He meets his goal of attending ninety AA meetings in the first ninety days out of treatment, and he is even able to attend two meetings a week at the Pentagon. As Lewis recovers, the Vietnam Memorial is being built. In his mind, Lewis links his own healing with the healing brought about by the memorial's erection. From his AA meetings Lewis has learned a powerful piece of wisdom which seems to fly in the face of everything the military had ever taught him: "Victory is only possible through surrender." (pg. 360) Lewis makes a resolve to heal himself physically, mentally, and spiritually. Lewis also



begins to realize that he can not change the past, so, in order to heal, he will have to change his reaction to his past.

When offered the opportunity to read at the Candlelight Vigil of Names prior to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial dedication service, Lewis jumps at the chance. Aware that the names on the memorial walls would only all be read aloud this once, he studied the pronunciation of his assigned names very carefully. The reading turned out to be both spiritual and cathartic and Lewis added at the end of his list the names of his own friends who had died in the war. The next day, thousands of veterans gathered for the dedication in a moving ceremony of shared brotherhood. When Lewis arrives at the wall, no one asks any questions of him, he is simply pulled in and accepted by a sea of hands and a chorus of voices telling him, "Welcome home, brother." (pg. 367) As always, Toddy is by his side for the entire experience, including the after party at the Hotel Washington. Lewis refrains from drinking, but he can not get enough of the brotherhood and camaraderie he was enjoying for the first time since stepping on that booby trap in the Riviera.

"As we were leaving, Toddy, who was by now feeling comfortable with the group, turned to one of the marines and told him I was Chesty Puller's son. 'Yes, ma'am,' he replied without batting an eye, 'and I'm John Wayne.'" (pg. 369)

## Part 2, Chapter 10 Analysis

In this chapter, Lewis has fallen into the trap of obsession. It is his obsession with the past that keeps him from enjoying the present or creating a better future for himself or for his country. However, Lewis must continue to revisit the ghosts of Vietnam. Instead of laying those ghosts to rest, Lewis uses his newfound sobriety to contemplate the war more deeply, believing that with a clear mind he can force it to make sense. At the core of Lewis' alcoholism is his inability to accept what happened to him in Vietnam. And who can blame him? What happened to Lewis and to so many others was unacceptable. The Catch-22 in Lewis' situation is that the past can not be changed and the only way Lewis can hope to beat his demons was by accepting the unacceptable.



## Part 2, Epilogue

### Part 2, Epilogue Summary

On May 24, 1989, an event takes place which holds great meaning for Lt. Lewis B. Puller, Jr. A dozen Soviet veterans of the war in Afghanistan come to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to pay respect to the American war dead. In his capacity as attorney and adviser to the office of the secretary of defense, Lewis is asked to receive the Soviet veterans at the memorial. This is not Lewis' first trip back to the memorial. Lewis had visited the wall every Memorial Day and Veterans Day since its opening, to honor his comrades and to seek out the company of other surviving veterans.

Lewis awaits the Soviet veterans with mixed emotions. Lewis has regarded the Soviets as enemies his entire life and he had been strongly indoctrinated against the evils of Communism; however, Lewis is excited to meet the men, nonetheless. Lewis sees similarities between America's failure in Vietnam and the Soviet Union's failure in Afghanistan. Lewis regarded the Soviet veterans in the same way he saw himself and his comrades; as men who made the ultimate sacrifices for their country in a pointless war. When the men arrive, one of them, a man named Nicolai Knerick, asks through a translator, if Lewis was a veteran of Vietnam. The translator, Sasha Karpenko, is a veteran of Afghanistan who had sustained horrible burn damage to his face and hands. When Nicolai and Sasha find out Lewis is indeed a 'Nam vet, they both embrace him. Nicolai then pins one of his own Soviet medals onto Lewis' lapel.

The men fall deep into conversation about their respective war experiences and Lewis is touched by their similarity. The veterans of the conflict in Afghanistan feel similarly shunned by their countrymen and they were fighting to have a war memorial built for their fallen friends. Their meeting at the wall gained media attention and later that night, at a dinner reception for the Soviets, Lewis enters the room wearing the medal Nicolai had given him. He is immediately pulled aside by a young Soviet officer who wanted to shake the hand of the great Chesty Puller's son. Lewis accepts the young man's praise with both pride and resignation. When he sees his two friends from the wall, Lewis gives Sasha and Nicolai each replicas of the Silver Star and Purple Heart medals which he'd sacrificed so much to earn. As he hands over the medals, he recalls some advice he'd heard often during his time in AA: "Often the only way to keep that which we hold most dear is to give it away." (pg. 373)

### Part 2, Epilogue Analysis

This final epilogue gives context to Puller's life. He learned from the Soviet veterans that the tragedy of war transcends all nationalities. Lewis is also able to see his country's emotional wounds in a larger context, as a part of the healing process that all undergo after losing a war. Lewis sees that his country is several steps ahead of the Soviet Union in the healing process as they have still not been able to put together national



support for a war memorial. Lewis is able to offer some comfort to the Soviet veterans; however, because he knows that the feelings of the countrymen will change with time, as they did in America. Ironically, his father's long shadow follows him to this reception, and this final haunting mention of his father from a man born many miles away serves to underscore the powerful, and often negative, impact which Chesty Puller's legend had on his son.



# Characters

## Lewis Puller, Jr.

On May 11, 1994, Lewis Puller, Jr. committed suicide, and by that act became another casualty of the Vietnam War. But in reality, Lewis was lost to the war many years before when; he lost both his legs; part of both hands; and most of his self-respect, in the conflict that divided two nations. Lewis was to spend most of his adult years mired in a bitterness that destroyed his every effort to reclaim his life. But how is a man to react who has lost his hopes, his dreams, his future, and half of his body to a war which his fellow countrymen later deemed a mistake? Vietnam destroyed many lives beyond the lives lost in action. Many of the grisly physical and traumatic emotional injuries sustained by the survivors were too large to be overcome in a single lifetime. Lewis' autobiography provides a voice for many less prominent men who were deeply wounded and lost to society.

Lewis dedicated his life to overcoming his injuries, but never achieved his goal. His obsession with his injuries and his inability to accept the past prevented him from achieving any lasting emotional recovery. His resentment and deep bitterness are textbook obstacles to mental health. And although the book largely focuses on Vietnam as the source of his pain, there were actually two reasons for his inability to overcome his injuries. The first reason is obvious. Lewis' injuries were so unspeakably awful that his own twin sister Martha prayed for his death when she first saw his mangled body. For years after his physical 'recovery' strangers, friends, and acquaintances continued to display reactions similar to Martha's upon seeing the remains of Lewis' body. Imagine the emotional devastation of being considered unfit to live. And to compound his physical condition, the honorable sacrifice Lewis made by going to war for his country was written off as meaningless by anti-war activists. Lewis had to live with the fact that he had paid a high price for a worthless cause. His entire life Lewis had been taught that defending one's country was the ultimate honor and, when Americans disavowed our involvement in Vietnam, Lewis understandably felt that he'd been tricked into throwing his life away for an uncaring country.

The second reason for Lewis' unconquerable emotional pain stemmed from being raised as the "fortunate son" of a legendary hero. Like so many men, Lewis admired his father deeply. Given the admiration showered on Chesty by the public, young Lewis naturally believed in and admired his father's point of view about politics, the Marines, and of the evils of Communism. Chesty saw the defeat of Communism as a goal so important to world safety that he thought his son would one day have to join the military to help defend the world against Communism. Chesty didn't consider whether his son would want to join the military any more than Lewis did. Chesty's generation of World War II veterans had had a very different experience of war. World War II was perceived to be a good cause, in which good had triumphed over evil. After WW II, America and its veterans were rewarded with prosperity, peace, and progress. It would never have occurred to Chesty that his son *wouldn't* join the service if needed by his country. But



that was Lewis' perception; one wonders if Chesty might have accepted his son taking a different path in life.

It certainly didn't seem as if there were any other options to Lewis since he always intended to follow in his footsteps. Lewis desired above all to prove his own worth, independent of his father's, in the military. Grown up with the privileges of being a general's son, Lewis had a burning need to prove himself worthy of the family name. When Lewis' tragically brief military career was cut short by that Howitzer round, he forever lost his chance to live up his father. Lewis would have to find another route to the top that could provide him with a success on a par with his father's. Politics could have been Lewis' answer as he had the passion for it, but his injuries and war experiences proved a detriment to his campaign and Lewis gave up his dream after one election. Perhaps if Lewis hadn't overreached himself by running for such a prestigious office the first time, he might have worked his way up. One certainly empathizes with him for desperately wanting something valuable from life in return for what he'd lost.

Once he'd given up on politics, Lewis' last chance to prove himself a Puller was gone, at least in his own mind. Lewis was haunted to the end by the legacy of his father and the unfairness of life for depriving him of the chance to earn his own glory. Ironically, at heart, Lewis never seemed cut out to be a warrior. Had he been fortunate enough to grow up in peacetime, Lewis might have chosen a different career. Vietnam came upon Lewis at a young age, before he had really had a chance to figure who he was or wanted to be. Lewis always resented the men who avoided the war, but had Lewis been able to avoid it, he might have discovered that combat was not his calling after all. Lewis chose a career that didn't suit him because he thought he was making a valuable contribution to his country. When the war machine chewed up his contribution and spit it out, Lewis must have, on some level, been angry with himself for voluntarily handing over his life. Perhaps, in the end, that fact was the one thing Lewis could not forgive.

## Toddy Puller

Toddy is an ever-present and reliable person in Lewis' life. This book does not tell her story and refers to her, usually briefly, only in passing. Although *Fortunate Son* is an autobiography of Lewis' life, not Toddy's, the reader is still struck by how much Lewis doesn't say about his wife. One can only imagine what a tough, courageous woman Toddy was to have supported her husband and family through Lewis' prolonged hospital stays, his crippling disability, his black depressions, and his alcoholic anger. Toddy's feelings about all of this are not discussed in any detail in the book and it seems that Lewis largely takes his wife for granted, despite his occasional efforts to compliment her strength of character. At no point in the book does he ever even give us her full name, although he takes the time to list in full the names of all of his fallen comrades.

The book ends in 1989, two years before Linda T. "Toddy" Puller was elected to the Virginia House of Delegates, where she served for eight years before she was elected to the senate. Senator Puller was re-elected in 2003, and at the time of this writing is a public servant actively involved in her community, with a passion for the support of



education. (Source: <http://www.toddy.org/abouttoddy.html>) Senator Puller is considered to be solidly liberal in her voting record, which is an interesting counterpoint to the once strongly conservative views of her late husband. Shortly before Lewis committed suicide in 1994, he and Toddy had separated due to his relapse into alcoholism. One can only wonder what made Toddy stay with her husband through so many trials, only to leave him in the end.

Perhaps his alcoholism affected her political career as it certainly affected her peace of mind. The woman who never gave up on Lewis just couldn't take it after he gave up on himself. We know so little of Toddy through Lewis' account that we can only guess at her motives and feelings. It certainly didn't hurt her political career to be Chesty Puller's daughter-in-law. Or was she always motivated by pure love for Lewis? Maybe the truth was some combination of both factors. Whatever her motives, there is no denying that she was a supportive wife to Lewis throughout all his trials. The Puller name lives on through their children, and one hopes that Lewpy - Lewis B. Puller III -escapes the shadow of his grandfather's legacy and becomes his own man.

## **Lewis "Chesty" Puller, Sr.**

Lewis B. Puller, Sr. was a highly decorated Marine who practically wrote the textbook on wartime strategy. In fact, in later years Chesty became heavily involved in training young officers execute his strategies. Chesty, so nicknamed for his proud way of walking with his chest jutting out, was a veteran of several wars and had earned some of his most celebrated victories in Korea in the 1950's. Chesty was deeply loved and admired by the troops for his support of the enlisted men. Chesty knew how to command and he cared about his men. By all accounts, he cared about his son too and he was, to the end, a doting father. If Chesty was ever disappointed that his only son didn't show the same athletic prowess he himself had shown, he never showed it. In later years, after several strokes, Chesty's tough emotional exterior softened, and the man who taught Lewis that boys don't cry learned to show his own emotions through tears.

## **Staff Sergeant Phil Leslie**

Staff Sergeant of the Second Battalion of the First Marine Regiment of the First Marine Division, Leslie was in charge before Lewis Puller, Jr. joined the platoon. After assuming command, Puller relied heavily on Leslie's wisdom, experience, and friendship. The two men formed an extremely strong bond. However, after the war, Lewis' injury put a wall between them that they could never fully surmount. The two men remained fond of each other, but they did not spend much time together.

## **Lieutenant John Zier**

Commander of the second platoon of the Second Battalion, he and Lewis became friends serving together in Vietnam. Lewis described him as having a, "bull-in-the-china-shop approach to life," which Lewis greatly admired. John Zier unexpectedly died of





cancer at a very young age, a few years after having overcome the loss of a leg during the war.

## **Linda Zier**

John Zier's wife; Linda became a friend of Toddy's while John and Lewis were still in Vietnam. The two couples became especially close after John lost his leg and wound up recuperating at the same hospital where Lewis was. Toddy invited Linda to stay with them while her husband recuperated to help her avoid racking up large hotel bills.

## **Lieutenant Paul Barents**

Lewis first met his friend Paul while convalescing in the hospital after his injury. Another double amputee like himself, Paul's experience gave Lewis hope for a decent future with a job, a wife, and a degree of mobility, at a time when Lewis was most in need of such hope. The two men remained friends after the war and they often socialized with their spouses. But sadly, Lewis' injury was much worse than Paul's, and Lewis was never able to walk on his prosthetic limbs. Lewis' wheelchair was a barrier in the relationship between the two men, which became somewhat awkward over time.

## **Kathy Barents**

Paul's wife. She often came to visit him in the hospital while Lewis and Paul were roommates. She and Toddy later became friends as the couples socialized together.

## **Commander Shaughnessey**

The tough woman in charge of physical therapy at the hospital where Lewis underwent rehabilitation. Her high expectations of her charges at first caused Lewis to channel his anger towards her, but Lewis eventually came to admire her and appreciate the brand of tough love she used to encourage her patients to excel.

## **McMonagle**

The rebellious corpsman who helped Lewis through the tough, early days at the hospital when Lewis was completely helpless. McMonagle's irreverence for authority, while quite unlike Lewis' own personality, was probably just the attitude Lewis needed to be around while learning to cope with his injuries.

## **Objects/Places**

### **Silver Star & Purple Heart**

The two types of combat related medals which the author earned during the Vietnam conflict. He actually earned two Purple Hearts; the first for a minor wound to his hand, and the second for the life-changing injuries he received from a land mine explosion.

### **The Riviera**

The name of a dangerous stretch of swamp ground in Vietnam where most of Puller's men were injured picked off by; enemy snipers, booby traps, and land mines.

### **Stubbies**

The foreshortened artificial limbs which Lewis Puller, Jr. was taught to use while convalescing in the hospital, before he was given a permanent, custom-made set.

### **The Vietnam Veterans Memorial**

A large, compelling black granite structure which lists the names of every American killed in combat during Vietnam. Completed in 1982, it provided hope and a long overdue sense of appreciation to many Vietnam vets, Lewis Puller included.



# Themes

## Father / Son Relationships

The father/son relationship between Lewis and Chesty dominates Lewis' life. Nearly every major decision Lewis makes is either consciously or subconsciously in reaction to his father's legacy. Like many sons, Lewis wants only to make his father proud. Lewis was cursed with a very famous and successful father and Lewis believed that in order to make his father proud, he would have to be successful too. Given Chesty's amazing accomplishments, it would never have been enough, in Lewis' mind, to have simply been a good husband, father, and provider. Lewis felt he had to achieve lasting fame and fortune in order to live up to the old man. His entire life, Lewis was held up to his father and measured against his legacy. With so much external pressure, it is small wonder that Lewis felt such a burning need to prove himself.

Many men feel similarly about their own fathers, and they put a lot of emphasis on living up to their family names. Some men succeed at this game, but just as many men fail to achieve what their fathers achieved. However, this issue was further complicated for Lewis because, by losing his legs only a few months after graduating from officer school, he was never given the opportunity to surpass his father. Lewis was pulled from the game before he had a chance to play. Perhaps if Lewis had tried and failed, he could've lived with his failure. What Lewis couldn't live with was the fact that he hadn't been able to try. Ironically, it is doubtful that Chesty felt the same way. In fact, as is often the case, Lewis did not have to live up to his father's reputation. In all likelihood, Chesty would have been proud of Lewis no matter what he did in life.

## Value of Human Life

*Fortunate Son's* greatest contribution to literature is its exploration of the value of a human life. How much can we lose before our life loses its value? This is a question considered by virtually every human being at some point. We can all handle a certain amount of loss, financial, romantic, or physical, but there comes a point when the losses stack up and we wonder if our value can be recovered. For some people, losing a beloved spouse might be enough to make their lives seem worthless. Others might survive such a loss, but what if they also lost their children, parents, best friend, home, job, car and dog all at the same time? That might be too much and life could lose its meaning.

But there is another way to measure the value of our lives besides measuring their value to us personally. We attribute value to our lives if our life benefits another. Take Stephen Hawking, for example. Diagnosed with Lou Gherig's disease, he gradually succumbed to complete muscular paralysis. But his brilliant scientific mind has such value to society that he not only found the will to live; he thrives as one of the twenty-first century's most respected scientists. His physical loss did not diminish the value of



his life to society. It was partly for this reason that Lewis entered politics. Had he been able to prevent what happened to him from happening to another young man, Lewis might have felt his life had value. Ironically, Lewis did secure the futures of thousands of fugitive young men while he served on the clemency board, but due to some malicious political maneuverings, this work lost its value in Lewis' mind, and he failed to see its very positive impact on society.

There is no loss more poignant or more personal to a human being than to lose a piece of one's physical self. We have deep instincts which cause even the most savage among us to shrink from the sight of bloodshed and death. Seeing our own blood causes many of us to faint. We identify our bodies as being the sum of who we are, and although many of us take our bodies for granted, losing a piece of ourselves leaves us grief-stricken. People felt uncomfortable in Lewis' presence because they felt horrified by his loss. To be confronted with the possibility that his injury *could happen to me* is frightening for the average person. We wonder, in Lewis' place, would we have wanted to go on, or would we have prayed for death as so many of his friends did? Lewis Puller had tremendous courage to go on in the face of his loss. Lewis lived life with losses that many people would find impossible to handle. But despite the book's upbeat ending and the reader's respect for the author, it does not provide a satisfactory answer as to the value of human life. No one but Lewis could answer that question, and his answer, it seems, was to take his own life. Given that unhappy ending, one can't help but wonder if his sister Martha had been right to pray for his death. The cruelty of that thought is as horrifying to the reader as it was to Martha.

## Sacrifice

Sacrifice can be considered one of the noblest human actions. Whether parents sacrifice their time and energy to raise a child or for a child sacrifices the few pennies in his piggybank to help someone in need, acts of sacrifice are considered to be beautiful, worthy acts. Almost any form of sacrifice is considered valuable, assuming the sacrifice is made for a worthy cause. When we, as human beings, make a sacrifice for a cause we later find out was unworthy, we feel cheated. If we donate money to a place of worship or a charity which turns out to be a scam, we suddenly feel the loss of the money we had sacrificed. Had the cause been worthy, we would not have regretted the loss of what we had sacrificed.

Lewis' situation, then, becomes intolerable, not only because he sacrificed the use of his legs, feet, and hands, but because he came to believe that his sacrifice was worthless. Of all the psychological pain of the Vietnam War, this may be the wound which cuts Lewis the deepest, because it is an insult to the value of the life sacrificed. If we as a nation regard our most precious resources cheaply, we are more likely to squander them easily. Lewis felt betrayed by the country which asked him to lay down his life for a war of dubious value. Lewis' sacrifice was not meant to be unconditional. As the privileged son of a war hero, Lewis fully expected the respect which he had been raised to believe were his due as a veteran and a hero.

# Style

## Point of View

*Fortunate Son* is an autobiography written by author Lewis Puller, Jr. While the narrative remains in the first person throughout, the point of view actually changes frequently, as the author's personal viewpoint on the war shifts in response to the circumstance. Puller documents his indoctrination as a child, into the military mindset. From his father, a devoted and eminently successful Marine officer, Puller learns a conservative, militaristic view of the world, as well as a blind faith in authority.

After his devastating injury, Puller returns to an America which rejects the Vietnam War and its participants, and his point of view begins to mirror the shifting viewpoint of the American public. Puller feels betrayed by the authorities who enmeshed his country in a war which he came to see as pointless. Not only does his point of view on the war shift, but his new viewpoint is at the root of Puller's battle with depression. If the war was pointless, then so was his sacrifice. This is a tough pill to swallow for a man raised to believe in the nobility of sacrificing one's life and limbs for one's country.

The book primarily deals with the author's search to find a new point of view which supports his life and the sacrifices he has made. The effort is a valiant one, and indeed, finding such a viewpoint seems to be critical to Puller's survival. But, ultimately, Lewis Puller can not find one coherent philosophy or viewpoint that encompasses both the events of his life, and the larger events of the Vietnam War. The closest Puller gets to achieving one overriding philosophy is through his realization, learned from his participation in Alcoholics Anonymous, that life is paradoxical and that human beings must often learn to live with two totally contrasting viewpoints.

## Setting

Although most of the book takes place in Virginia, the central setting is the jungles of Vietnam. Lewis Puller's time in this steamy tropical morass of war and discontent shapes the remainder of his days on the planet. Two months is all it took to strip him of his illusions, his dreams, his limbs, and his hope of ever matching or surpassing the amazing accomplishments of his father. Vietnam is more than a physical location. The Vietnam War encompasses our nation's internal struggle for peace, which led to civilian casualties on our own soil. This time in history sparked a revolution for the children of the sixties, who expressed their distrust of the authorities through a grass roots movement which gave birth to the distinctive music, language, style, and attitude of the anti-war movement. We owe much of our civil liberties today to the internal socio-political revolution led by so-called radical elements from within our society. But this radicalism had a hard edge, as the returning Vietnam veterans discovered when they were spat upon by their own countrymen for serving in the war. The Vietnam War experience so deeply marked our country that even today we are still healing from it.



## Language and Meaning

Lewis B. Puller, Jr.'s training as an officer comes through loud and clear in his prose. His manner of writing is similar to the military reports for which he, as an officer, was responsible for creating on a regular basis. His prose is succinct, accurate, and precise. Even the direst situations are described with clarity and exactness in the book, allowing readers to form their own opinions based on the facts the author so faithfully records.

However, Puller transcends the pithiness of combat reporting with his personal voice, which is both engaging and interesting. The reader is privileged with a view of Vietnam from inside the mind of an intelligent and caring author. Lewis Puller's personal thoughts are recorded with the same clarity and accuracy that the author uses to document events. His reporting style makes a difficult subject easier to absorb because it gives us the sense (which is perhaps an illusion) of an objective perspective. Puller does not cringe from documenting the actions of his life as well as the reasoning behind his actions, even the parts of which he is not proud. This unflinching honesty lends the book an authenticity and credibility which exceeds that of most autobiographies and military memoirs.

## Structure

*Fortunate Son* is divided into two Parts, containing a total of ten Chapters and an Epilogue. Part 1 carries the author through his childhood, coming of age, and entrance into combat in the Vietnam War. The Vietnam experience comprises the central part of Part 1 which culminates with Lewis Puller, Jr.'s life-altering injury. The end of Part 1 covers Puller's long journey out of Vietnam and his recovery to health and physical independence.

Part 2 opens with Puller's entry into civilian life after several years of rehabilitation in the hospital. Lewis and his family move to Williamsburg, Virginia where he attends law school. Life after his injury is far different and far more challenging for Puller than life before the injury. Where Part 1 covers Puller's physical recovery, Part 2 delves into his mental and emotional healing. Puller struggles with the pain of lost possibilities and alcoholism, but finds hope and reason to live in his family and in his newly discovered appetite for politics. Part 2 carries his post-war journey through his political struggles, which he loses, and through his struggle with alcoholism, over which he triumphs. Symbolically, it ends with the erection of the Vietnam Memorial, which provides a sense of hope and purpose to the author and his comrades at arms.

## Quotes

"I listened in on my father's conversations with his colleagues and acquaintances while I was growing up, and I unconsciously adopted his politics and philosophy as my own. Most of the admirers who came to share his wisdom were already predisposed to accept his words as gospel; Father's personality was so strong and his delivery so forceful that I saw very few people who ever seemed to express disagreement with his stands on issues." Chapter 1, pg. 21

"My mother withheld any sign of approval of Toddy's and my relationship, but I was thrilled that Father proffered his so readily. Later, as we prepared to leave, he walked us out to the car and made a point of telling Toddy that she was always welcome in his home with or without any of his children, and I knew that he had gained another fan for life." Chapter 2, pg. 51

"The colonel pointed out that my father had commanded the First Marine Division seventeen years earlier during the retreat from the Chosin Reservoir and that it was fitting that I now serve in the same division." Chapter 3, pg. 69

"I realized as we continued our patrol that I, at least, was becoming calloused and indifferent toward the very people we were supposedly trying to liberate, but it seemed to be the only way to assure our own survival." Chapter 4, pg. 118

"I had tried in my letters to shelter her from the more alarming experiences I was undergoing, but since she was the only emotional outlet I had available, my moods occasionally darkened the letters home. In this particular missive I told her that I had lost only a few drops of blood but that I wanted her to hear the news from me before she heard from some other well-meaning source that both of my legs had been blown off." Chapter 4, pg. 128

"Later she confessed to me that her initial impulse on seeing me was to pray for my death and that she was ridden with guilt over that reaction." Chapter 5, pg. 163

"'I want you to know, Lieutenant,' she said, 'that even if you never make it out of a wheelchair, you have come farther than any of us expected, and you have given meaning to my work.'" Chapter 6, pg. 235

"My father lay bare-chested on his back in the middle of a sterile field of starched white sheets, and his hands were secured to the chrome rails of his bed by restraining straps. He was struggling hard against the straps, but his movements were convulsive, and he seemed unaware of his condition." Chapter 7, pg. 256

"'Don't try to run on your war record, Lewis,' Catesby Jones had advised me, 'because it will probably wind up hurting you more than helping you.'" Chapter 8, pg. 301



"Most of the callers, including Lieutenant Governor Robb, offered their condolences and a few words of encouragement and then sought a polite way to end the conversation. A few, however, wanted to know what was next on my agenda, and I could sense that my lack of focus was disturbing to supporters who had admired me for decisiveness."

Chapter 9, pg. 328

"I now began to isolate myself from meaningful contact with all but my immediate family. I avoided social occasions and seized on any pretext to maintain my self-imposed exile. I also became *more* obsessed with the Vietnam War, and I dwelt endlessly on the unfair treatment and lack of respect that my fellow veterans and I received from the media, from society, and from our government." Chapter 10, pg. 332

"As I proffered my Silver Star and Purple Heart to my newfound friends, a lesson I had learned in my fellowship meetings came to mind: 'Often the only way to keep that which we hold most dear is to give it away.'" Epilogue, pg. 373





## Topics for Discussion

The author mentions several times in the book that some people believed, at least initially, that death would have been more merciful for Puller than having to live on in his condition. What are your feelings regarding these comments?

Given the political climate of the time, do you believe that Puller's status as a Vietnam vet helped him or hurt him in his run for office? Explain your position.

Had Puller lost his legs in a war which had more public acceptance, such as World War II, do you think it would have been easier for him to come to terms with his injuries?

Do you believe the harshness of life in a wheelchair would have been any easier for Puller to accept if he had managed to outshine his father's military prowess prior to being disabled? Why or why not?

How much impact do you think Chesty Puller's legend had on his son's depression?

At no time in the story did Toddy's loyalty to her husband come into question. Had you been she, would you have considered leaving Puller because of his injuries?

Chesty Puller was by all accounts a devoted family man and an exceptional Marine, and yet his long shadow cast a pall over his son's life. Do you imagine there was anything he could have done to help his son overcome the burden of having a larger than life father?