

Going After Cacciato Study Guide

Going After Cacciato by Tim O'Brien

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Plot Summary

Paul Berlin is an average American boy from the Midwest, who is been sent to Vietnam in 1968, and on his first day, a man in his platoon dies of fright. Paul Berlin begins to use his imagination to deal with the horrors of war, and a major split from reality begins when another platoon member, Cacciato, deserts and a squad is sent out to capture him.

The story jumps from present to past, and from Paul Berlin's imaginary observation post to Paul Berlin's imaginary trip to Paris. The timelines diverge in September, when the squad is chasing Cacciato before he makes it into Laos. At that point, Paul Berlin's imagination takes the squad on a long journey to Paris to chase Cacciato.

In reality, Paul Berlin's experience in the war begins on his first day when Billy Boy Watkins steps on a land mine and dies of fright. The platoon experiences a series of increasingly horrific deaths. Frenchie Tucker and Bernie Lynn die in a tunnel, because of Lt. Sidney Martin's choice to enforce regulations. Rudy Chassler steps on a landmine, Buff's head is blown off, Pederson is shot by the helicopter door gunners who place them at the battle, and two other men are sent home because of self-inflicted wounds and a nasty skin infection. Ready Mix, a sergeant, is killed after only twelve days, and Lt. Sidney Martin is eliminated by the squad because he is seen as a threat to their survival. The platoon spends the time between June and August traveling along the River Song Tra Bong looking for the enemy, and on an annihilated mountain top removing the bodies of the dead enemy and searching tunnels for survivors.

By the time the men camp out in the ruined pagoda where Cacciato's desertion is discovered, they are exhausted, jaded and numb from all the death and destruction. Lt. Corson clearly does not want to pursue Cacciato, but leads Third Squad to find the man and bring him back. The squad pursues Cacciato for several days, but when their attempt to apprehend him before he enters Laos fails, the squad turns back.

In the Paris chase timeline, the squad finds a Chinese refugee girl in Laos, and falls into a tunnel, where they meet a Vietcong who has been sentenced to live in the tunnels for ten years on a treason charge. The men are led out of the tunnels by Sarkin Aung Wan, and come out of the tunnels in Mandalay. They continue to chase Cacciato into India, where Lt. Corson falls in love with a lady hotel owner, and they must kidnap him to continue the pursuit.

The train from India goes into Afghanistan, where the men meet a friendly mayor who tells their histories. Afghanistan is very cold, a distinct contrast to the humid jungle of Vietnam.

The squad next stops in Tehran, where they are eventually arrested and condemned to death for desertion. Cacciato helps them escape so they can continue their pursuit of him. Next stop is Athens, and just before the boat docks, Stink Harris jumps off the boat.



From Athens, the men make their way to Germany, to Luxemburg, and finally to Paris. In Paris, the men are exhausted, and begin to behave more like civilians than soldiers. Paul Berlin and Sarkin Aung Wan get an apartment together and Paul Berlin begins to forget about the mission. Oscar reminds everyone, and the chase is back on when someone raises questions about the reason the squad is in Paris.

There is a mock meeting between Paul Berlin and Sarkin Aung Wan at the conference table chosen for the Paris Peace Talks. Sarkin Aung Wan is asking Paul Berlin to leave the war and enjoy his life, but Paul Berlin responds that his fear of the war is outweighed by his fear of failing his country and his family.

Paul Berlin finds Cacciato and the squad goes to capture him. At the moment they enter the room, Paul Berlin is yanked back to reality and it is actually the day they try to capture Cacciato in Vietnam. Because Paul Berlin shoots too soon, then falls down and soils himself in fear, Cacciato escapes and it is the end of the story.



Chapter One, Going After Cacciato

Chapter One, Going After Cacciato Summary

Paul Berlin is an average American boy from the Midwest, who has been sent to Vietnam in 1968, and on his first day, a man in his platoon dies of fright. Paul Berlin begins to use his imagination to deal with the horrors of war, and a major split from reality begins when another platoon member, Cacciato, deserts and a squad is sent out to capture him.

It is October, 1968, in the Quang Vietnam, and Cacciato, a soldier in Paul Berlin's platoon, has gone AWOL. The squad is staying at a deserted pagoda, Lt. Corson is suffering from dysentery. Doc Peret comes into the pagoda and tells Lt. Corson that Cacciato has told Paul Berlin he is going to walk to Paris. Lt. Corson does not comprehend the message right away, partly because he is sick and partly because he has been smoking a joint. The rest of the squad agrees that Cacciato is a very dumb soldier because he is always grinning, whistling, and chewing gum. Lt. Corson decides that he and the squad will pursue Cacciato and bring him back.

Berlin remembers how Cacciato spent hours looking through an old atlas, asking questions about mountains, planning out his trip. He would go through Laos, Burma, India, Iran, Turkey and Greece. The squad sets out to retrieve Cacciato.

The next day, Berlin sights Cacciato, and later that afternoon they rest at the spot where he Cacciato had spent the previous night. Doc Peret and Harold Murphy suggest that they give up and return to their camp. Lt. Corson decides to continue the pursuit. Later, Cacciato is seen flapping his arms like he is flying, and when the squad trains its binoculars on him, they can see Cacciato mouthing "goodbye."

Lt. Corson communicates with headquarters, telling HQ the squad is pursuing the enemy. HQ wants to send gunships and bombs, but Lt. Corson says no. That night, the men discuss Cacciato and Berlin wonders what it would be like to be in Paris.

The next day, they climb further into the high country. Berlin is always the last in the column because the men follow certain rituals in their behavior in this war. They continue to see signs that Cacciato has passed before them. On the morning of the sixth day of the pursuit, they see Cacciato on a hill ahead of them. The squad suddenly trips a wire and they all drop, thinking they have tripped a bomb. It was a smoke bomb, set by Cacciato, and the squad becomes angry. They send Oscar Johnson under a white flag to ask Cacciato to come back. Cacciato declines and the squad beds down for the night.

Berlin thinks about the walk to Paris and imagines it happening. He wishes he had the courage to do it. It begins raining and when the rain is over, the squad can see the stars. Berlin remembers camping with his father in Wisconsin.



The next morning the squad sees Cacciato's breakfast fire and decides to take action. They fire a red flare over the hill. Berlin is instructed to fire a green flare and the squad moves in to capture Cacciato.

Chapter One, Going After Cacciato Analysis

It is the rainy season in Vietnam, at the height of the war. The men are so jaded they joke about their lost comrades, discussing the best way to incur self-inflicted wounds, and forming tight unspoken bonds amongst their squads. Their lives are filled with rituals involving rest times, smoking joints, watching after their lieutenant and listening to philosophical discussions by Doc Peret.

When Doc Peret discovers that Cacciato is gone, the squad would have been willing to let him go; however, Lt. Corson makes the decision to go, so they do. This illustrates the devotion the men have formed to the lieutenant., and the reader knows the squad would follow him to the ends of the earth.

Cacciato has never really been a part of the squad but is tolerated by the men. They don't understand him so they don't like him. The squad thinks he is stupid but Cacciato's research for his trip, planning, and even setting the trip wire, indicate that the man has some sense.



Chapter Two, The Observation Post, Chapter Three, The Road to Paris, Chapter Four, How They Were Organized, Chapter Five, The Observation Post

Chapter Two, The Observation Post, Chapter Three, The Road to Paris, Chapter Four, How They Were Organized, Chapter Five, The Observation Post Summary

Berlin is back at the observation post, a tower with the South China Sea at his back and his face toward the Quang Ngai province. Berlin is on watch in the night and wonders about the immense powers of his own imagination. The rest of the squad is asleep. He wonders what part of the pursuit of Cacciato was real. How did the pursuit end? Doc had said the best way to know the truth was to think through the facts carefully, and Berlin is attempting to do that. Doc says that Berlin suffers from an excess of bile. Berlin concentrates as he is on guard duty. He believes that it is not dreaming and it is not pretending. It is not crazy. It was a way of asking questions.

The squad is in pursuit of Cacciato through the jungle. They march steadily and look at a map that shows them close to Laos. Harold Murphy wants to return to the camp. The lieutenant listens to Harold, then begins walking again towards Laos. The squad marches another six days, then Lt. Corson collapses in a river. Harold Murphy says if they don't turn back it is desertion. The squad votes, and only Harold Murphy and Eddie vote to turn back. The next morning Harold Murphy and the big gun are gone. The squad continues their pursuit of Cacciato without him.

It is June, 1968, and Private First Class Paul Berlin has been assigned to a combat center at Chu Lai in Vietnam. He is sorting out what is expected of him, where he is geographically, and what will happen to him. He is in training for a war, but it seems to be a joke, a game. Berlin is amazed at how he is treated and begins to develop a healthy fear of what will happen to him. He is assigned to his squad, reaches the encampment, and when he reaches his platoon, discovers there are no training officers, no fire teams, nothing he had been told to expect. His leader, Lieutenant Sidney Martin inspires no confidence in Berlin at all. The squad is organized around what the different personalities think they do best, trust of each other, and informal standard operating procedures.



He tries to keep track of time by remembering when his fellow squad members died. He thinks that when the war is over he will go to Europe. He wishes he could show his father some medals that he had won. Berlin wants to go to Paris, see the sights, look for the things Cacciato would have looked for.

Berlin begins his time at the war.

It is the same night as in Chapter Two, just after midnight. Berlin is still on watch and he watches the sea and Oscar's raft bobbing in the moonlight. He thinks it is November of 1968. He thinks of the raft, and how the men would get bored and take it out to the deeper water to fish after swimming. Berlin thinks of filling up the raft with provisions, pushing beyond the breakers and escaping.

Chapter Two, The Observation Post, Chapter Three, The Road to Paris, Chapter Four, How They Were Organized, Chapter Five, The Observation Post Analysis

The author presents a puzzle to the reader. What happened when the squad went after Cacciato? What happened and what might have happened? Paul Berlin does not seem to know the answer. When are they at the observation post? It is after the chase, but how long after?

Harold Murphy wonders out loud whether this is a pursuit or actual desertion. His is the voice of reality, and with Lt. Corson out of it for the moment, the men vote to go on with the pursuit.

It is unclear why the men continue, except that Lt. Corson told them to continue, and has not changed that order. Oscar Johnson refers to the pursuit of Cacciato as their mission.

The men who have been in Vietnam for some time have developed their own opinions and own rules about how to survive in the war, and the new arrivals are treated in a very unorthodox fashion. Berlin is not only lost geographically, he does not know where he is on any level in this strange war. The author does not reveal which is reality - the night watch of November in Vietnam or the pursuit of Cacciato that continues into Laos in the previous chapters. Berlin is again thinking of escape, this time on a raft. There is no mention of a mission.



Chapter Six, Detours on the Road to Paris, Chapter Seven, Riding the Road to Paris, Chapter Eight, The Observation Post, Chapter Nine, How Bernie Lynn Died After Frenchie Tucker

Chapter Six, Detours on the Road to Paris, Chapter Seven, Riding the Road to Paris, Chapter Eight, The Observation Post, Chapter Nine, How Bernie Lynn Died After Frenchie Tucker Summary

The pursuit of Cacciato continues and twice the men find the remains of his fires. The jungle ends and the squad walks among a field of grasses. The men smell smoke and suddenly Stink Harris fires a shot and kills a water buffalo that is pulling a cart of three refugees. There are two old women and a young woman. The men talk to the young woman, Sarkin Aung Wan, who speaks English. She explains that the family has left its home in Cholon and are headed west. The dead water buffalo was a longtime family pet. The men adjust the cart to be pulled by the remaining water buffalo. The men climb aboard the cart and continue their mission to find Cacciato, taking the women with them because the squad is responsible for their misfortune.

The squad rides for ten hours a day, seeing no villages, following a hard, dusty road. Berlin is attracted to Sarkin Aung Wan. Doc Peret says the war is over; Lt. Corson says the war is still a war. At night, the two old women continue to mourn their lost water buffalo. Berlin tells Sarkin Aung Wan they are following another soldier to Paris. She becomes enamored with the idea and tries to convince Berlin to take her with them. Lt. Corson says the trip is no place for a woman. Sarkin Aung Wan calls Paul Berlin Spec Four. As they travel through this beautiful country, they sometimes see smoke on a distant hill and M&M's scattered along a fork in the road. Then one night Stink captures Cacciato.

It is almost one in the morning at the observation post and Berlin decides not to wake Doc Peret and end his watch. Berlin leaves his post and goes down to the seashore where he gazes at the observation tower and reflects that it does not observe villages, roads, the enemy, bridges, or even a cat. Berlin feels in control and able to concentrate. He thinks of how things might have happened on the road to Paris.

It is the day that Bernie Lynn and Frenchie Tucker both die by going into a tunnel as directed by Lieutenant Sidney Martin. Lt. Martin insisted the men go into the tunnel and clear it as required by SOP. The other squads are clearing the tunnels by blowing a



charge in them first and then checking for occupants. Lt. Martin is trying to call for a chopper to take the wounded men to the hospital and is using the codes as prescribed by HQ. Oscar Johnson is impatient, telling the Lieutenant that he needs to just give the coordinates.

Chapter Six, Detours on the Road to Paris, Chapter Seven, Riding the Road to Paris, Chapter Eight, The Observation Post, Chapter Nine, How Bernie Lynn Died After Frenchie Tucker Analysis

Stink Harris shoots without permission, without thinking, without even clarifying the target. He shoots fast and the men are left to deal with his actions. His comments after the incident don't make any sense. In the fog of war, unexplainable events occur. The conversation between the lieutenant and the refugees is ambiguous because there is no real destination, just far west.

This ride is hypnotic with the squad falling into an easy time of riding rather than walking, all the while Berlin becoming enchanted with Sarkin Aung Wan. Symbolically, the aunts who are wrenched from their homes face backwards on the cart, unable to face the future. Just as the thought of their mission to find Cacciato seems lost in the daze, Stink Harris captures Cacciato.

The Observation Post is further described here as a rickety tower on the edge of the sea and the squad's mission is unclear.

The squad faces the consequences of Lt. Martin's strict adherence to the rules and two squad members die. Berlin's actions and thoughts are not mentioned but he is part of the squad and spends much of his time observing. Oscar's rage at Lt. Martin is intense and Doc is the calm one telling the rest of the men what to do.



Chapter Ten, A Hole in the Road to Paris, Chapter Eleven, Fire in the Hole, Chapter Twelve, The Observation Post, Chapter Thirteen, Falling Through A Hole in the Road to Paris, Chapter Fourteen, Upon Almost Winning the Silver Star , Chapter Fifteen, Tunnel

Chapter Ten, A Hole in the Road to Paris, Chapter Eleven, Fire in the Hole, Chapter Twelve, The Observation Post, Chapter Thirteen, Falling Through A Hole in the Road to Paris, Chapter Fourteen, Upon Almost Winning the Silver Star , Chapter Fifteen, Tunneling Toward Paris, Chapter 16, Pickup Games Summary

That evening after supper, the lieutenant looks at the maps and decides they will need to get ahead of Cacciato on the road to Mandalay to cut him off. To do this, they must leave the cart, leave the women, and head out through the jungle. At dawn the next morning, the squad says its goodbyes to the women when there is an earthquake and a hole opens up in the road. Berlin grabs the hand of Sarkin Aung Wan and everyone falls down the hole.

This is the day Pederson dies. He is killed in a paddy and the men do not talk about it. They have one towel among all of them and they take turns cleaning their clothes, their weapons and the radio. While they wait for the chopper to come for the dead man, there are no birds, only incredible heat and silence. The lieutenant calls in an air strike on the village nearby and the men watch emotionless from a nearby hill. That night they bathe in a river, make camp and talk about Pederson.

It is 2:15 in the morning and Berlin is still on guard. He thinks about courage and whether to flee, or fight or seek an accommodation. He decides that after the war he will stop smoking but right now he smokes one cigarette after another. He thinks of how he almost won the Silver Star but he did not have the willpower to defeat fear.



Somehow Stink Harris loses his hold on Cacciato and is left with a serious bite mark on his elbow. The squad looks for its man all night long but does not locate him. Later along the trail, the men find another one of Cacciato's maps and it is marked with a warning: Look out, there's a hole in the road."

The squad falls down a very deep hole and Paul watches as everything drops down below and beside him. He manages to hang onto Sarkin Aung Wan's hand and she smiles during the entire fall. She remarks to him that she knew he would find a way to take her to Paris with him. They hit the ground softly and the squad is fine, only the cart and the buffalo and the women are missing. The squad follows a tunnel lit by torches every fifty meters and they find a small man named Li Van Hgoc who is a major in the Viet Cong Army. He brings them to a table topped with pots of rice, meats, fish and fresh fruit and then serves them brandy.

Berlin feels like he is in the tunnel yet at the observation tower at the same time. Berlin asks the Viet Cong Major questions about how the Viet Cong hide and the secrets of the provinces. The Major answers in riddles. While the others in the squad are sleeping, the Major takes Berlin on a tour of the tunnels and shows him a periscope that goes from the tunnel to the top of the land.

It is the day that Bernie Lynn and Frenchie Tucker are killed in the tunnel, just as in Chapter Nine, but now it is the time before they enter the tunnel. Oscar is arguing with Lieutenant Sidney Martin, and none of the squad wants to enter the tunnel before blowing it. Lieutenant Martin tells Frenchie he must go down the hole or get court martialed. When Frenchie goes down and gets killed, the Lieutenant wants to send another man down the hole to get Frenchie. Berlin could have gone and he would have received the Silver Star instead of Bernie Lynn. Bernie Lynn has not even completely entered the hole when he is shot and the men pull him out by his feet.

The Major shows Lt. Corson all around the fortress and the two officers discuss military matters. After the tour, they sit down to a cigar and Lt. Corson explains to the Major that they must be moving on to finish their mission. The Major explains that they are prisoners now. The lieutenant points out that the Major is clearly outgunned and outmanned and they are leaving as soon as they destroy the tunnel and its fortifications.

The squad begins destroying machinery and supplies and the Major suddenly says there is no escape. He had been tried for desertion and placed into these tunnels for his punishment. His sentence is ten years with no possible way out. The Major says the tunnels are a maze with no entrance or exit. Sarkin Aung Wan says she knows how to get out because the way in is the way out. The squad follows Sarkin Aung Wan and the Major chooses to stay behind.

It is July and the platoon is moving along the Song Tra Bong River, searching villages and sometimes burning them down. They are given a basketball by a chopper door-gunner and the squads becomes consumed with playing basketball, diagramming plays, talking about the pickup games they have been playing in the evenings and reliving the games. They do not encounter the enemy for days and the lull continues. Berlin begins



to feel uneasy. Cacciato develops an annoying habit of bouncing the basketball endlessly. The men become anxious and nervous and they continue burning tunnels, blowing bridges and shooting animals. The men begin to have physical ailments, argue with each other and complain about everything.

In August they find a new village and Lt. Sidney Martin says they will search the tunnels there according to Standard Operation Procedure: check the tunnels, then blow them. Oscar Johnson says Lt. Sidney Martin is a man looking for trouble. Berlin cannot sleep, and as the men move into the village in the morning, Rudy Chassler steps on a mine.

Chapter Ten, A Hole in the Road to Paris, Chapter Eleven, Fire in the Hole, Chapter Twelve, The Observation Post, Chapter Thirteen, Falling Through A Hole in the Road to Paris, Chapter Fourteen, Upon Almost Winning the Silver Star , Chapter Fifteen, Tunneling Toward Paris, Chapter 16, Pickup Games Analysis

Cacciato has inserted himself into their lives again, almost getting captured by Stink Harris, then leaving the squad valuable maps and a cryptic warning. He says there is a hole in the road, and soon the squad, the women, the cart and even the water buffalo fall into a giant hole in the road.

The squad feels helpless while another comrade dies. The nearby village is deemed to be responsible for the death so it is bombed and melted and then Harold Murphy shoots hundreds of rounds into it.

Courage is always on a soldier's mind and it is defined by each soldier according to his own experiences and beliefs. Berlin believes he has courage and it is just waiting for the spark to ignite it.

When the squad falls down the hole, the novel takes on a dreamlike quality. The two old women, the cart and the water buffalo simply disappear, and when all the men land, no one is injured. Cacciato was somehow too smart to fall in the hole and warned the others of the problem. Berlin finally gets to meet the enemy and ask the questions that have plagued him from the moment he landed in Vietnam.

Just before this chapter, Berlin looks into the periscope and the scene described on the surface is very similar to the scene of several months previous when Bernie Lynn and Frenchie Tucker got shot. Berlin reviews the event again, looking for other ways to see what happened.

At first, the conversation with the Viet Cong is civilized and the two officers are cordial but when the VC Major informs them they are prisoners, the squad rallies and even



begins talking pidgin English to the previously well-spoken Major. Vietnam must have seemed like a horrible nightmare to the American soldiers and this episode represents one scenario of them meeting the enemy, not killing them, and talking like civilized men.

This is what the war was like for this platoon. Long days in the jungle, constantly on alert for an ambush, keyed up and taking out their frustration on villages, villagers and the countryside. The basketball is a desperately welcome relief, a piece of home, and the men absorb themselves in it. However, the reality of the war is still there and the lull is broken by Oscar Johnson threatening the Lieutenant and by one of the squad members getting killed.



Chapter Seventeen, Light at the End of the Tunnel to Paris, Chapter Eighteen, Prayers on the Road to Paris, Chapter Nineteen, The Observation Post, Chapter Twenty, Landing Zone Bravo, Chapter Twenty-One, The Railroad to Paris, Chapter Twenty-Two, Who They W

Chapter Seventeen, Light at the End of the Tunnel to Paris, Chapter Eighteen, Prayers on the Road to Paris, Chapter Nineteen, The Observation Post, Chapter Twenty, Landing Zone Bravo, Chapter Twenty-One, The Railroad to Paris, Chapter Twenty-Two, Who They Were, or Claimed to Be Summary

Sarkin Aung Wan leads the men back through the tunnels and they climb a steel rung ladder to find themselves in the streets of Mandalay. The squad gets a hotel room at the Hotel Minneapolis.

Sarkin Aung Wan is cutting Berlin's toenails. She does not call him Paul Berlin, she calls him Spec Four. They are sharing a room in Mandalay and she asks him to take her to Paris. Berlin explains that they must first catch Cacciato.

The search for Cacciato continues and Sarkin Aung Wan helps Berlin pick out some new clothes. Berlin finds happiness in the order of the streets, harmony, commerce, and an ordinary life. He believes what he is seeing.

The men are eating dinner in Mandalay and discussing the procedure to search for Cacciato. Doc Peret toasts peace then toasts the Lieutenant. Berlin asks what happens when they find Cacciato and not even the Lieutenant can answer. Every day, the men go out in the streets of Mandalay to search for Cacciato. Berlin wonders about the man, what drives him and how could this big, dumb man elude them.

Sarkin Aung Wan and Berlin are at an outside café when Berlin spots Cacciato and begins chasing him. Cacciato, dressed like a monk, is with a group of monks in their most sacred prayer time. When Berlin tries to capture him, the monks beat up Berlin.



When Berlin wakes, Sarkin Aung Wan tells him Cacciato escaped by way of the rail station.

It is three o'clock a.m. at the observation post. Berlin is still on guard and decides not to rouse Stink for his turn. Berlin concentrates on the trek to Paris and thinks about his future and the war stories he will tell. He realizes there will be skeptics over the story about going to Paris but he will explain step-by-step.

The next chapter opens with the squad in a chopper heading for a new mission. The door gunners are firing constantly. It is not a smooth landing and Berlin has a bad feeling. Oscar lights up a joint and passes it down to all the men. It is the day Pederson dies.

The door gunners continue to fire as the men line up to get out of the chopper. The door opens and the gunners fire at everything, without aim, becoming part of their guns. The platoon bails out into the muddy paddies but Pederson will not get out. Finally, the crew throws him out. As the chopper is lifting up, the gunners strafe the paddies and Pederson, who stays where he was thrown, gets shot. Pederson continues to lie still but reaches lazily for his rifle and starts shooting at the chopper. The door gunners keep shooting but suddenly they are gone and the guns fire on their own.

It is December and the squad is on the Delhi Express headed away from Mandalay. Berlin wakes up and the lieutenant tells Berlin they have been kidnapped. Berlin asks him if Cacciato is behind it and the lieutenant says there are bigger fish behind this operation. Berlin thinks about confessing but is afraid about losing his buddies and his romance with Sarkin Aung Wan. The men plan their attack on Cacciato by searching the train for him. Berlin remembers the agony of searching kids, old men and women as they marched down the Song Tra Bong. Here on the train, the conductor screams at them, saying it is shame and dishonor to treat people this way. During the search, the men find Cacciato's empty AWOL bag.

Eddie Lazzuti is a singer, and the platoon loves to listen to him. Oscar Johnson is a big Black man who has a remoteness that keeps many men from being close to him. Jim Pederson was a gentle man who handed out Jesus Christ cards. Stink Harris is a live wire, always tinkering with his rifle. Lieutenant Corson was on his way to being a captain but was busted for drinking and fighting. Doc Peret is a tall man who is a chain smoker and believes in science.

Soldiers in Vietnam are given nicknames, some earned or some at the insistence of each man. No one really cares what another soldier's name is and some are known only by their rank. It makes it easier to forget what happens to someone.



Chapter Seventeen, Light at the End of the Tunnel to Paris, Chapter Eighteen, Prayers on the Road to Paris, Chapter Nineteen, The Observation Post, Chapter Twenty, Landing Zone Bravo, Chapter Twenty-One, The Railroad to Paris, Chapter Twenty-Two, Who They Were, or Claimed to Be Analysis

Escaping the tunnels, the men return to the mission of finding Cacciato. Sarkin Aung Wan begins her project of luring Berlin away from the others but he is firm in his belief that he must stay with his squad.

Just as the men begin a comfortable routine in a peaceful beautiful place, Berlin sees Cacciato and it is time to move on. Perhaps this constant movement by Cacciato is necessary to move the dream along and keep the story viable in Berlin's mind.

Some explanations about the Paris trip are offered here: how the squad has money, passports and clothing, and how they really are not deserters. Berlin thinks of the trip to Paris as an actual event with colors, tastes and feelings. Was it real?

The war is full of unexplained, unrelated events and Berlin watches one of his squad members get shot by his own troops. He witnesses the callousness of the door gunners, who, like their massive weapons, do not feel anything.

The search of the train represents Paul Berlin's search of innocent civilians in Vietnam. He is ashamed, but it is his duty. The conductor on the train represents reality, what Berlin believes should have happened when he was searching the villagers.

The culture of the soldiers is demonstrated here, where a man's name and his actual identity are reduced to a nickname, a rank or anything to help remove the horror of their deaths. It is the only way the survivors can endure the constant loss of comrades.



Chapter Twenty-Three Asylum on the Road to Paris, Chapter Twenty-Four, Calling Home, Chapter Twenty-Five, The Way It Mostly Was

Chapter Twenty-Three Asylum on the Road to Paris, Chapter Twenty-Four, Calling Home, Chapter Twenty-Five, The Way It Mostly Was Summary

The squad arrives in Delhi and checks into the Hotel Phoenix where Lt. Corson falls in love with the proprietor's wife, Jolly Chand. They have dinner and drinks and the next morning, the Lt. and Jolly do not come down for breakfast. Berlin writes postcards to his family and friends and then goes walking around Delhi taking photographs.

It is August 1968, and the platoon returns to Chu Lai for rest. The men get homesick and one day Oscar, Eddie, Doc and Berlin go the communications detachment to use the MARS equipment to call home. Eddie calls his mother, Doc calls home and then Oscar calls his father. When it is Berlin's turn, he thinks of his mother and father and his is very nervous but excited. The phone rings at his parents' house but no one answers it.

The platoon goes to the mountains and Berlin is at the last of the column, his traditional spot. He does not think; he just concentrates on putting one foot in front of the other.

Lt. Sidney Martin is watching his men climb the mountain. He is anticipating the battle, deciding whether to stay on the road and risk land mines or go off road and therefore slower. Lt. Martin watches Berlin and feels a wave of pride towards him and acknowledges that he loves all of his men although they will never know that. He is not comfortable with this war, its absence of a common purpose.

Chapter Twenty-Three Asylum on the Road to Paris, Chapter Twenty-Four, Calling Home, Chapter Twenty-Five, The Way It Mostly Was Analysis

Berlin's fantasy world now extends to a beautiful hotel, a romance for his beloved lieutenant, bus tours for his squad, and a walk around an exotic city for himself, but reality tugs at him as he sees the poverty behind the opulence.

Berlin's life in the States is portrayed as a normal young man with a mother who smokes, a father who tinkers with small appliances, kitchen counters with pink Formica,



a black dial telephone; all the details that come back to him as he waits for someone to answer. Berlin's loneliness and fear are accentuated by the fact that he is the only one in the group who does not get to speak to his family that day.

The author revisits the theme of this war through the eyes of Lt. Sidney Martin and shows it as being different from earlier American wars. The Lieutenant has been trained in military warfare but even he feels uncomfortable in this war. He sees his soldiers not as buddies, but instruments of war. He does not enjoy war but as leader he recognizes that battles must be fought.



Chapter Twenty-Six, Repose on the Road to Paris, Chapter Twenty-Seven, Flights of Imagination, Chapter Twenty-Eight, The Observation Post

Chapter Twenty-Six, Repose on the Road to Paris, Chapter Twenty-Seven, Flights of Imagination, Chapter Twenty-Eight, The Observation Post Summary

The squad is in Delhi, and the Lt. Corson spends all his time with Jolly Chand. Sarkin Aung Wan and Paul Berlin share a room and spend all their time shopping, eating, and playing cards. The men see the Lieutenant at night for dinner but not the rest of the time. Oscar suggests it is time to move on and Lt. Corson just laughs. The squad continues to look for Cacciato but Paul Berlin is beginning to feel the guilt of a deserter.

In the morning, Doc Peret has a newspaper with Cacciato's face on it. The squad realizes his photo has been taken as he is boarding the train to leave Delhi. The men inform the Lieutenant that it is time to move on. The Lieutenant tells his men that he is officially retiring from the war. That night the men acknowledge that the lieutenant is "walking wounded" and they cannot leave their wounded behind so after he passes out from drinking, the men carry him with them to the train station.

The squad is on a train headed for Kabul. The lieutenant wakes up and claims the squad has been kidnapped. The train is in the mountains and it reminds Berlin about marching in the mountains with Lt. Sidney Martin. Berlin had felt he would not fight well and he had been correct. He had dug a small hole and stayed in it while the mountains were bombed by airplanes. When Lt. Sidney Martin called for an advance, they did advance and took the mountains. Ready Mix was shot during the battle. After the battle, the platoon found all the dead enemy soldiers. The bomb craters full of dead men, fill up with water from three days of rain. Doc names the place "World's Greatest Lake Country," and the men are required to pull out the dead bodies and pile them up to be taken away. The men found a huge series of tunnels and Lt. Martin says the tunnels must be searched before they are blown.

The story returns to the train on its way to Kabul, Afghanistan, with the squad chasing Cacciato. They are spending the night at the mayor's house in Ovissil. The land is frozen and there is a fierce storm raging outside. The Mayor tells histories, even those of the men he has just met. When Berlin asks the Mayor to tell his history, the Mayor says Berlin has to make a real history for himself before he can tell it. The men board the train and continue their journey.



Berlin is back at the Observation Post thinking of his own history, however short it is. He thinks about his childhood, getting lost in the Wisconsin woods, and the summer he worked for his father building strong, solid houses.

Chapter Twenty-Six, Repose on the Road to Paris, Chapter Twenty-Seven, Flights of Imagination, Chapter Twenty-Eight, The Observation Post Analysis

The pattern continues with the men becoming complacent and happy somewhere when the specter of desertion rises. When Cacciato is sighted, the chase is back on. There is strong detail in the descriptions of Delhi and the interaction between Berlin and Sarkin Aung Wan. The romance is increasing, the author says they kiss and Berlin pretends they make love. The road to Paris story seems like a figment of Berlin's imagination but just a few pages later, the guilt Berlin feels about not chasing Cacciato is very real.

The mountains remind Berlin of the battle and he is not proud of his participation. His fear is increased a thousand fold in the aftermath when the men are surrounded by dead and one of their own, Ready Mix, also dies. As usual, someone makes a joke about the land resembling lake country and this is one of the ways the men cope with the horror.

When Berlin is at the observation post again, he is defending himself against the Mayor's comments about having no history. Berlin's character is fleshed out as a basic American kid growing up in the Midwest with some things to be proud of as well as some areas of shame. This illustrates just how different his life is now as opposed to how and where he was raised.



Chapter Twenty-Nine, Atrocities on the Road to Paris, Chapter Thirty, The Observation Post

Chapter Twenty-Nine, Atrocities on the Road to Paris, Chapter Thirty, The Observation Post Summary

The squad is in Tehran where they celebrate Christmas. The lieutenant is sick again and remains ill through January of 1969. The squad wants to get a doctor but Doc Peret says it is an illness that cannot be cured with medicine; the lieutenant has nostalgia and just needs time. The squad continues to search for Cacciato but they stay close to the boardinghouse they rented.

One day the men happen to be in an audience at a hanging and are arrested afterwards when they are searching for a restaurant. Their interrogator is a polite captain in His Majesty's Royal Fusiliers and his assignment is with Internal Security. The squad insists it is comprised of touring soldiers on a special mission which is the reason they have no paperwork and no passports. Captain Fahyi Rhallon is embarrassed that he does not know the rules and regulations regarding touring soldiers so he releases them until that ignorance can be rectified. They all go for dinner and drinks and discuss the role of soldiers, the purpose and feeling of war and the obligations. The discussion returns to why some soldiers stay and why others run from the battle. The lieutenant tells the Captain about the mission to catch Cacciato the deserter.

Back at the Observation Post, it is now four o'clock in the morning and it is getting cold. Berlin is thinking about what happened and what might have happened. He is questioning what is remembered and concentrating on the order of things.

Chapter Twenty-Nine, Atrocities on the Road to Paris, Chapter Thirty, The Observation Post Analysis

The squad watches a beheading, a traditional form of punishment in Iran, and the men remark about how civilized the procedure is. There is a stark contrast between this event and the bombing and burning of the mountain in Vietnam where heads were detached from bodies violently and without any ceremony. The arrest symbolizes the danger the squad is constantly facing because of this chase. Instead of being jailed, the squad has a civilized and polite conversation with the captors, released and then taken out for dinner and drinks. Their treatment as detainees again contrasts with the cruel and inhuman way the squad is forced to behave with its own prisoners. The chapter is named "Atrocities on the Road to Paris," but the true atrocities were committed in Vietnam.



The conversations between the Iranian Captain and the squad are another form of Berlin working out the duties and commitments of a soldier. These issues are foremost in Berlin's mind as he continues to create this elaborate world where he and his squad are chasing a deserter.

Berlin's thoughts at the Observation Post are muddled and he drifts from his normal recitation of the platoon's deaths to Cacciato's escape route. As he attempts to perform his duties as a soldier on guard duty, he is also attempting to clarify what has happened to him since his first day at war.



Chapter Thirty-One, Night March, Chapter Thirty-Two, The Observation Post

Chapter Thirty-One, Night March, Chapter Thirty-Two, The Observation Post Summary

It is Paul Berlin's first day at the war and the platoon of thirty-soldiers is on a night maneuver. Lt. Sidney Martin is in charge of the platoon and Private First Class Berlin is at his customary spot at the rear of the column where he pretends he is camping with his father. Berlin is following Cacciato on the trail and thinking about Billy Boy Watkins who died that day of fright. Berlin decides that he must keep his real self separate and aloof in order to survive. He counts his steps and they number eight thousand, six hundred.

On a break in the march, Berlin sits next to Cacciato who is whistling without realizing it. Cacciato talks too much, constantly chews gun and whistles all the time. Cacciato and Berlin talk about Billy Boy's death and about how Doc says it was a heart attack. Billy Boy had tripped a mine, lost his foot and died from fear. Berlin begins giggling uncontrollably and Cacciato finally makes him stop, telling Berlin he has a great sense of humor.

It is four-thirty in the morning and Berlin is at the Observation Post on guard duty. He has established in his mind that Billy Boy Watkins is indeed dead, now he is trying to unravel what happened next.

Chapter Thirty-One, Night March, Chapter Thirty-Two, The Observation Post Analysis

Berlin's first day at war involves a casualty of one of his platoon members and he begins pretending in order to help himself cope. This is the beginning of Berlin's inability to distinguish reality from imagination.

At the observation post, the only thing Berlin is sure of is that Billy Boy Watkins is dead. Since this happened on his very first day of the war, it is clear this is the point where reality and imagination began to separate for Berlin.



Chapter Thirty-Three, Outlawed on the Road to Paris, Chapter Thirty-Four, Lake Country, Chapter Thirty-Five, World's Greatest Lake Country

Chapter Thirty-Three, Outlawed on the Road to Paris, Chapter Thirty-Four, Lake Country, Chapter Thirty-Five, World's Greatest Lake Country Summary

The squad is arrested again in Tehran in February and jailed for over a week. Berlin is awakened on the eighth day, blindfolded and his neck is shaved just as the boy who was beheaded. Then he is placed in a room with the squad. The Captain arrives and informs them there is no such thing as touring soldiers. The squad explains that it is chasing a deserter but they themselves are not deserters.

Berlin is becoming confused. He has always had an active imagination and he thinks of how he would work things out in his mind as a kid with elaborate plans that always came out happy.

The squad is taken to another cell, they are shaved and told that the time for excuses and negotiations is over. The Captain leaves the cell and another officer comes in and yells at them to say they are deserters which they do.

The squad is back in Vietnam on the mountain that has been bombed sometime before August. Oscar Johnson and Lt. Sidney Martin are arguing about the tunnels. Oscar Johnson says to blow the tunnels first, then search them; Lt. Martin says to search them, then blow the tunnel. The last time these men had this conversation, Oscar Johnson implied the Lieutenant was looking for trouble. Lt. Martin commands the men to go into the tunnel, the men refuse, the Lieutenant writes down their names, then he goes into the tunnel himself. Oscar pulls a grenade out from his belt and tells the platoon that it is self-preservation and they must do something about the Lieutenant.

The men are waiting for Lt. Martin to emerge from the tunnel but Oscar Johnson wants to toss the grenade into the tunnel. Oscar Johnson says all the men have to touch the grenade, symbolic of them agreeing that this is the course of action to take. All of the men touch the grenade except Cacciato who has been fishing in the water-filled bomb craters. Berlin is assigned to take the grenade to Cacciato for his touch.

Berlin tells Cacciato there are no fish but Cacciato continues fishing as he has all day long. Cacciato has used his string and homemade fishing rig so much he has cut his fingers and stopped eating. Berlin presents the grenade to Cacciato and explains that



he must touch it. Paul Berlin pulls one of Cacciato's fingers toward the grenade and puts the grenade into Cacciato's hand. Then Berlin sits next to Cacciato, watching him fish and thinking of when he camped with his father. It is dark when Berlin returns to the camp and gives the grenade back to Oscar Johnson.

Chapter Thirty-Three, Outlawed on the Road to Paris, Chapter Thirty-Four, Lake Country, Chapter Thirty-Five, World's Greatest Lake Country Analysis

As in Vietnam, events are out of control in Tehran for the squad. The officer who screams at them represents Berlin's conscience berating him for deserting.

The confrontation between the squad's belief in surviving and Lt. Sidney Martin's belief in the regulations reaches a critical juncture. The men have separated themselves from the leader as a whole, symbolically touching the grenade that will be used to kill the Lieutenant. Berlin allows himself to escape temporarily with memories of camping with his father but he returns to the camp with the grenade. Cacciato has escaped mentally by pretending that the craters filled with water are actually little lakes full of fish.

This episode marks a point where Berlin is still somewhat rooted in the present, dealing with the war and going along with his squad. He frequently escapes into his imagination but he comes back.



Chapter Thirty-Six, Flights of Imagination, Chapter Thirty-Seven, How the Land Was, Chapter Thirty-Eight, On the Lam to Paris, Chapter Thirty-Nine, The Things They Didn't Know

Chapter Thirty-Six, Flights of Imagination, Chapter Thirty-Seven, How the Land Was, Chapter Thirty-Eight, On the Lam to Paris, Chapter Thirty-Nine, The Things They Didn't Know Summary

The squad is in Tehran and their necks are shaved for the final time as the men will be executed the next morning. In the middle of the night, Cacciato breaks them out of jail. Cacciato has provided a 1964 Impala and an M16 for their escape, then disappears. There is a mad chase through the streets of Tehran, followed by police, helicopters and tanks. The squad escapes into the night with everyone sleeping while Berlin drives. His mind drifts from the observation tower, to the present, to Cacciato fishing in Lake Country and to Lt. Sidney Martin dying soon thereafter. The squad crosses into Turkey and Berlin keeps driving right to the sea.

Berlin thinks of the land of Vietnam. He compares it to the Midwestern U.S.A. where he spent his youth. He thinks of the Vietnam paddies, the hedgerows and the red earth. He thinks of his feet and legs, the maneuvers of war along the jungle trails, the ambushes. He thinks of the poverty of the land. Berlin decides he likes the sea the best because the beaches are clean and beautiful.

The squad goes from Turkey to Athens and just before they land in Athens, Stink jumps off the boat, thinking they will be captured at Customs. He is never seen again.

Berlin remembers trying to communicate with the Vietnam villagers. Stink Harris became the most agitated in frustration, screaming and pointing his gun at them. Without the ability to communicate, the men could not learn the people and began to think of them as something less than human.

Berlin remembers when he was up for promotion to Spec Four. The interview did not make sense and it was a combination of ridicule, serious questions and jokes.



Chapter Thirty-Six, Flights of Imagination, Chapter Thirty-Seven, How the Land Was, Chapter Thirty-Eight, On the Lam to Paris, Chapter Thirty-Nine, The Things They Didn't Know Analysis

The flight from Tehran is similar to the event where the squad falls down the hole. It is unrealistic but necessary to extract the squad from the execution Berlin's imagination has scheduled. Cacciato frees them, gives them a car and disappears conveniently. The squad all escapes without harm into the country without pursuit. It is unbelievable but as he gazes at the sea, Berlin decides that it is possible to walk to Paris.

Another lull in the action occurs with the sea crossing and ends with the loss of one of the squad. Stink Harris has always been the squad member who is most out of control and Berlin doesn't want him on the rest of this imaginary trip. Stink has gone through so much with the squad but being caught at customs is more than he can endure. So close to the goal, tension must be created by the loss of one of the lesser characters in the story in order to keep the reader on edge.

Berlin already feels distant from the land and his comrades and the inability to communicate with the people he is tasked with defending causes another level of alienation. Stink Harris thinks he is communicating but he is only causing fear and hatred from the villagers.

Berlin wonders if the Vietnamese people are really human and he wants to tell him they are not his enemy. He struggles with trying to make sense of what is happening to America, to Vietnam, to the villagers, but most especially to himself.

Berlin's promotion is like everything else in Vietnam: a combination of deadly serious situations treated like a joke.



Chapter Forty, By a Stretch of the Imagination

Chapter Forty, By a Stretch of the Imagination Summary

Berlin is at the observation tower thinking about the chase to Paris. He is still trying to decide what happened and what did not. He concludes that their trip could not have finished by them getting caught by customs agents so they did not. The remaining squad members, Berlin, Eddie, Doc Peret, Oscar Johnson, the Lieutenant and Sarkin Aung Wan, stay in Athens for a few days. They wait for Stink Harris to show up but then decide to move on in their chase of Cacciato. The squad boards a bus to Zagreb and spend the night. The next morning they are picked up by a California girl in a VW van. She lectures them all on doom, then says she admires them for walking away from the evil war. Oscar puts the rifle to her head and forces her to pull over. They leave her on the side of the road and continue on their journey in her van.

The van breaks down in Germany and the squad hikes to a train depot. As the train passes through the German countryside, Berlin soaks it in: the return to civilization, decency, higher education, low mortality. He wonders if this is what he was fighting for. Were the aims justified by the atrocities he has experienced? As the train goes through Germany and then Luxemburg, Berlin feels strong and full of desire to restore justice and harmony to the world.

Chapter Forty, By a Stretch of the Imagination Analysis

Berlin is using the trip to Paris to sort out his feelings. He enlisted in the war because he believed his country was right, but since being in Vietnam, his personal view of himself and of the world has altered. His trip through old world Germany is making him feel better, encouraging him to continue the chase of Cacciato.



Chapter Forty-One, Getting Shot, Chapter Forty-Two, The Observation Post

Chapter Forty-One, Getting Shot, Chapter Forty-Two, The Observation Post Summary

Berlin is thinking of the day Buff was killed. The platoon was in a battle that took them through the paddies and into a village where Buff's head was blown off in a ditch. After a helicopter takes the body away, the men smoke a joint and argue about who should carry the big gun now. Cacciato goes into the ditch and gets the big gun and the helmet with Buff's head still in it. Harold Murphy starts carrying the big gun and Cacciato tosses the helmet and Buff's head into the tall grass surrounding the village. Oscar Johnson said the lesson with this is to never get shot.

Berlin is back at the observation post, and he has survived the deaths of eight men in his platoon: Frenchie, Bernie Lynn, Pederson, Buff, Billy Boy, Rudy Chassler, Lt. Sidney Martin, and Ready Mix. In between the six months of deaths were boredom, heat, long marches and war stories. It is five o'clock in the morning on his guard watch and dawn is coming. A new day will soon start and Berlin has not decided how far Cacciato will take him. He feels the need to hurry.

Chapter Forty-One, Getting Shot, Chapter Forty-Two, The Observation Post Analysis

Buff is yet another of the platoon members who dies horribly in the first six months of Berlin's war experience. While Buff's headless body lies next to them, the men smoke a joint, eat a can of peaches and pretend it is business as usual. Berlin struggles to pay attention to facts, not war stories, and to find meaning in what has happened to him.



Chapter Forty-Three, The Peace of Paris, Chapter Forty-Four, The End of the Road to Paris, Chapter Forty-Five, The Observation Post

Chapter Forty-Three, The Peace of Paris, Chapter Forty-Four, The End of the Road to Paris, Chapter Forty-Five, The Observation Post Summary

The squad is in Luxemburg, on April 1, 1969, and boards the train for Paris. The men travel through the French countryside and see some evidence of the World War II battles still there. The train stops in Paris and the men march through the depot and take rooms at a small hotel.

The men decide that if they do not bring in Cacciato as proof of their reason for being in Paris, they truly will be deserters. Berlin finds it difficult to think of anything except the atmosphere of Paris and peace. He and Sarkin Aung Wan spend all their time together and are falling in love. They find an apartment and she tells Berlin that he needs to stop looking for Cacciato.

Berlin tells the Lieutenant about getting the apartment with Sarkin Aung Wan. The lieutenant says he doesn't know if it makes any difference if Berlin stays with his buddies or with a pretty girl. Lt. Corson tells Berlin to do what he thinks is the best. Berlin tells Sarkin Aung Wan and they go shopping. When they return to the hotel, Oscar tells them that the good times are over and everyone needs to pack quickly.

The men sleep in the park and the lieutenant's cough is getting worse so they decide to go to Berlin's apartment. Oscar has taken over the leadership role and he says they can't go to Sweden and they must find Cacciato. The next morning, the men begin the search for Cacciato in earnest.

Sarkin Aung Wan is upset, saying Berlin is full of promises. She pulls away from him. The next day, Berlin finds Cacciato and follows him to an old hotel. He goes into the room.

Berlin informs the squad he has found Cacciato.

Berlin is in a conference room at The Majestic Hotel. He sits at one end of the conference table and Sarkin Aung Wan sits at the other end. She reads from a prepared document. She asks for a break from violence and asks for a positive commitment from



Berlin to build houses and to live a decent life. She urges him to act, to step boldly from his dream and to live it.

Berlin responds that he has a personal obligation to stay with his squad. He acknowledges that he is very afraid of the war but he fears the loss of self respect, the possibility of exile and shame even more.

Berlin and Sarkin Aung Wan have stated their positions and they leave the conference table.

At the observation post, the war is still a war and Berlin is still a soldier. It is six o'clock in the morning. Berlin believes the deaths of each man in the platoon to be an undisputed fact. Another fact is that Cacciato, even as dumb as everyone believed him to be, had left the war, planning to walk to Paris. Everything else for Berlin is confusing. He realizes that the last known fact is when the squad had surrounded the hill where Cacciato hunkered down throughout the night, had fired flares and Berlin shouts "Go!"

Chapter Forty-Three, The Peace of Paris, Chapter Forty-Four, The End of the Road to Paris, Chapter Forty-Five, The Observation Post Analysis

Berlin's time of sorting the truth from imagination is growing short. In his Paris story, his romance and life with Sarkin Aung Wan is cut short by the necessity to catch Cacciato before the squad is arrested for desertion. Memories of all the deaths of his platoon weigh heavily on Paul Berlin and the question of whether a soldier should run or stay is paramount on his mind.

The scene in the conference room is where Berlin finally sorts out his thoughts. Sarkin Aung Wan's speech represents his desire to escape and the justification for that escape but Berlin has made the decision to stay and fight because his fear of the war is outweighed by the fear of shame and exile if he deserts.



Chapter Forty-Six, Going After Cacciato

Chapter Forty-Six, Going After Cacciato Summary

Lt. Corson and Sarkin Aung Wan have left and taken everything from the apartment. They leave a note saying they are headed east. Berlin is not surprised that Sarkin Aung Wan has left. Oscar Johnson assumes command. They plan to take Cacciato in a surprise attack in his hotel room.

The men approach the room, following perfect military maneuvers. At the last minute, Oscar Johnson gives Berlin the M16 and tells him to "go!" Berlin is suddenly overcome with fear and begins firing blindly. Everything goes black and he wonders what has gone so horribly wrong.

When Berlin awakens, Doc Peret is telling him everything is all right. Berlin is shaking and cannot stand. Finally he regains his strength and stands. He apologizes for losing control, finds his gun and cleans it, finds his rucksack and puts on a clean pair of pants.

Berlin asks what happened to Cacciato and the squad tells him they did not find him. They all wonder if Cacciato can make it to Paris. The Lieutenant shakes his head in wonder and says it could happen.

Chapter Forty-Six, Going After Cacciato Analysis

Berlin is reaching the end of his guard duty, the end of the trip to Paris and the end of his confusion. He has worked it all out and realizes that he has avoided the truth because it is painful and confusing. Because of his fear and noise, Cacciato evaded capture. Berlin, the average American kid from the Midwest, has dealt with the atrocities of war by creating an alternate timeline, but now that he has sorted out fact from fiction, he is facing realities.



Characters

Paul Berlin

Paul Berlin is a twenty-year-old man who was raised in Fort Dodge, Wisconsin, and joined the Army. He is sent to Vietnam in June of 1968. The differences between the geography, climate, people and language of Vietnam compared to where Paul Berlin came from are so vast and so incomprehensible that Berlin chooses to escape into his imagination rather than deal with this reality.

Berlin has an unusually vivid imagination and it is not readily apparent to the reader that the story has deviated from reality. Berlin's story shifts from his memories of Wisconsin, his memories of stark horror when his fellow squad members are killed, memories of an escape to an Observation Post that observes and protects nothing, and a detailed trip to Paris in pursuit of a deserting squad member.

Berlin represents the average American young man who is sent to fight a war he neither understands nor believes in. His desperate desire to comprehend the land and its people, his yearning to be a good soldier and his confusion about what everything means causes a distinct rip in his mental state.

Paul Berlin arrives in Vietnam in June of 1968, and embarks on maneuvers that take him through the jungles of the country, searching villages and tunnels. His platoon is in the Quang Ngai Province, an area the world later knows is site of the My Lai massacre. The men move along the Song Tra Bong River throughout the months of June, July and August. At some point after August, Cacciato deserts the squad and Lt. Corson takes the Third Squad, including Paul Berlin, to chase him down. When the men have Cacciato surrounded and go in to capture him, Paul Berlin experiences the most severe rift in his thinking, and at that point, the story diverges from reality.

From September of 1968 to the spring of 1969, Paul Berlin and the squad goes from their camp in Vietnam to Mandalay, Afghanistan, Tehran, Athens, Germany and finally to Paris. Along the way, Paul Berlin encounters people and places that allow him to escape from the harsh reality of a war in Vietnam. By taking his trip in his imagination, Paul Berlin is able to develop an understanding of his role as a soldier and to reach a decision regarding staying or deserting himself.

Lt. Corson

Lt. Corson is older than the members of his platoon and is a veteran of the Korean War. He has blue eyes, he is an alcoholic, and though he says it is not his war, he will do his duty. He is the leader of the platoon, replacing Lieutenant Sidney Martin. He suffers from severe dysentery and the men are protective of him.



Lt. Corson represents authority in this novel. He represents the system, the procedure, the leadership and the purpose of this squad. The squad members refer to him as "the old man," and they would never consider removing him from the platoon the way they did Lt. Martin. Lt. Corson makes decisions that put survival before the regulations and this has endeared him to the men.

In Paul Berlin's creation of the squad's trip to Paris, Lt. Corson makes the decision to pursue Cacciato as far as necessary to bring him back. As the story continues, Lt. Corson becomes more human, falling in love with Jolly Chand, leaving the men to run off with Sarkin Aung Wan. However, in the military discussions with Captain Fahyi Rhallon and Li Van Hogg, Lt. Corson comes through as a military strategist, a philosopher and a gentleman.

The author shows many cases in the novel where war is war, no matter how strange Vietnam was to its participants. Lt. Corson is a man who has adjusted to these realities and knows how to command the respect of his men without killing them in the process. The personality he assumes in Paul Berlin's creation shows the respect and admiration the squad has for the Lieutenant. He has pulled the squad and the platoon together in the face of the war's horrors and they look to him for guidance. He may smoke a joint with them, he may be a very sick man, but he is the leader and these men will die for him.

In the novel, he takes over a platoon of men stationed in the province of Quang Lai. He is a seasoned war veteran who was on his way to becoming a captain but drinking and fighting resulted in demotions that ended his career path. He is resigned to fighting in this war that he claims is not his own. His leadership is unquestioned and he provides a needed calmness in the confusion of war. At the beginning of the story, he is in camp, suffering from another bout of dysentery when he is informed that one of his men, Cacciato, has deserted. He takes a squad out to find the deserter without informing headquarters of what is happening. It is his thought that they can bring Cacciato back after just a few days' chase and keep the incident quiet. When the attempt fails because Paul Berlin makes too much noise and Cacciato gets away, the Lieutenant decides to let him go.

In Paul Berlin's creation, Lt. Corson makes the decision to continue the pursuit of Cacciato all the way to Paris. Lt. Corson falls in love in Delhi and tries to "retire" from the war but the men consider him wounded and take him with them. Although he recovers well while in India, his health fails him again during the journey and he leans on the men for support. He is roused from the illness when necessary to escape, or to converse with his military equals in the tunnels or in Tehran, and comports himself honorably at every step. In Paris, though, Lt. Corson is increasingly ill and tired of the war, and when the opportunity to escape it all with Sarkin Aung Wan arises, he leaves his loyal squad.

The lieutenant's desertion from the squad symbolizes Paul Berlin's rationale that even the strongest soldiers contemplate walking away from the war.



Sarkin Aung Wan

Sarkin Aung Wan is a young woman of Chinese descent who is a refugee in Vietnam. She meets Paul Berlin when she is with her aunts in their flight to the west. Her father was shot by the VC and her mother died. She has smooth skin, eyes that are shy, yet bold and is determined and strong. She speaks French and keeps after Paul Berlin to continue to Paris.

Sarkin Aung Wan is the grown up and repaired version of the young girl with gold hoops in her ears that the squad finds during one of their village raids. Doc treats the girl's wounds and Berlin spends a lot of time watching her, wondering what she is thinking. This little girl makes such an impression on Berlin that he re-creates her for his flight of imagination to Paris, and in doing so, he makes up for the atrocities he and his men commit upon the people of Vietnam.

Doc Peret

Doc is the medic for the platoon but knows very little about medicine. He makes up ailments and remedies and the men believe him because they don't know better and they want to believe him. Doc is the man everyone turns to for advice, for philosophy and for methods of coping with the war. Doc is the exact opposite of Oscar Johnson; he is a well educated gentleman who cares for the men and has all the answers.

Stink Harris

Stink Harris is the kind of soldier who seems to enjoy being in war. He sees himself as brave, a good tracker, an excellent shot but in reality he yelps in fear all the time, shoots at anything that moves and his contributions to any conversations are nonsensical. When the men are facing customs at Athens, Stink is so scared he jumps off the ship.

Stink is the typical ugly American in a foreign land, calling the natives by racial slurs, believing he can talk the language, treating the people like animals. He is an unattractive man who cannot recover from a bad attack of ringworm.

Eddie Lazzuti

Eddie is with the squad from the beginning and throughout Paul Berlin's fantasy trip to Paris but his role is shadowy. He considers himself to have a good voice so he is the radio man when Ben Nystrom shoots himself in the foot. Eddie cries sometimes in the story but otherwise he is just another member of the group and his character does not get fleshed out.



Cacciato

Cacciato's first name is never given. He is childlike, chews gum, whistles endlessly and grins all the time. Paul Berlin describes him as open faced, naïve and plump. The squad calls him dumb and his behavior suggests he might possess a below level intelligence. However, when the squad begins chasing Cacciato, he nimbly avoids the squad, then engineers their escape from a Tehran jail.

Cacciato represents Paul Berlin's dream of escaping from the war in a legitimate manner. Cacciato's actual desertion triggers the elaborate fantasy for Paul Berlin.

Oscar Johnson

The only black member of the platoon, Sgt. Oscar Johnson claims to hail from the rough streets of Detroit. Oscar is a strong character who instigates most of the action for the squad and he is the one who decides to drop the grenade down the tunnel when Lt. Sidney Martin displayed too strict an adherence to the regulations. Oscar's counterpart in the squad is Doc Peret who is the voice of civilization and reason.

Harold Murphy

Harold Murphy is the member of the squad who is assigned to carry the big gun when Buff was killed. When the squad decides to continue looking for Cacciato, he returns to camp.

Lt. Sidney Martin

Lt. Sidney Martin is in charge of the platoon when Paul Berlin begins his time of duty at the war. He is a strong figure in the story representing the Army's regulations and full authority, yet he was unable to convert the squad to his way of thinking. Lt. Martin has been trained in warfare and has attended many classes on military strategy and managing men, unlike Paul Berlin who is struggling to work things out. Lt. Martin feels a special kinship towards Paul Berlin and loves all of his men but he is unsuccessful in relaying this compassion to them. In the story, Lt. Martin leads the men into a big battle and afterwards during the cleanup mission, his insistence on searching tunnels before blowing them eventually costs him his life.

Billy Boy Watkins

Billy Boy dies on the first day of Paul Berlin's war when he steps on a landmine. It blows his foot off and he dies of a heart attack. Paul Berlin thinks about Billy Boy's death and how useless it was. It is the beginning of a series of deaths that occurs in the platoon,



each of them mindless and horrible. Paul Berlin deals with Billy Boy's death by escaping into his mind and this marks the beginning of Paul Berlin's inability to deal with reality.

Pederson

Pederson is considered the most trusted in the squad and he is the most religious. He triggers ambushes for the squad. He is killed by the door gunners of a chopper that drops them into a battle zone, but before he dies, he shoots back at the chopper.

Buff

Buff's nickname is a shortened version of another nickname, Water Buffalo, because the man is big and burly. He plays poker with Vaught and Harold Murphy and carries the big gun until he is killed. Buff's helmet is blown off with part of his head still in it and Cacciato retrieves the helmet from the paddy.

Ready Mix

Ready Mix is a sergeant of the squad who is only with them twelve days before getting killed. The fact that no one knows his real first and last names is symbolic of how the men distance themselves from each other to make it easier to forget the horrible ways they die.

Rudy Chassler

Rudy is a minor character who is killed by a land mine. His character represents the constant horrible deaths that the squad suffers in such a short time.

Bernie Lynn

Bernie Lynn is a squad member who follows Lt. Sidney Martin's orders to go down into the tunnel and retrieve Frenchie Tucker. Bernie Lynn is shot through the throat but can still talk. Bernie Lynn does not survive.

Frenchie Tucker

Frenchie Tucker is a squad member who is very neat and tidy and obeys orders even though he knows they are wrong. Lt. Sidney Martin orders Frenchie to either go down the tunnel or face court martial so Frenchie goes and gets shot through the nose.



Jolly Chand

Jolly Chand is the woman hotel owner who enchants Lt. Corson in Delhi. She is married but loves Americans and lures Lt. Corson to her bed. Jolly represents civilization, rest, and happiness for the tortured Lt. Corson, and in her care, his dysentery disappears. Paul Berlin loves and respects his leader, so Jolly Chand is his imaginary present to the man.

Captain Fahyi Rhallon

Fahyi Rhallon is a Captain in His Majesty's Royal Fusiliers, who has recently been transferred to the Savak, the internal police for the Shah of Iran. He speaks perfect English and is polite to the extreme with his prisoners. He is well versed in military strategy and the philosophy of war versus peace. His opinion is that each soldier has his own version of war.

The introduction of this character into the story allows Paul Berlin to examine his own thoughts about desertion and about why he should stay in a war that doesn't make sense.

Li Van Hogg

Paul Berlin creates Van as the civilized and decent representation of the Viet Cong. Van speaks perfect English and turns out to be a victim of the war just as is Paul Berlin. Van is an excellent host, an educated man who represents a formidable enemy. Paul Berlin asks Van all the questions he has been saving up about the land, the people, the customs. Van does not answer directly because he cannot. The Lieutenant and Doc speak to Van as equals until he tells them they are prisoners. They then resort to calling him a gook, destroying his tidy cave and basically revert back to treating him like an animal again.

Ben Nystrom

One of the squad members, a radioman, who cries in the middle of the incident where Bernie Lynn and Frenchie Tucker die. Ben Nystrom decides to take himself out of the war by shooting himself in the foot.

Vaught

Vaught is the squad member closest to Cacciato. One day Vaught slices off part of the skin on his arm to show someone how the constant moisture is rotting their skin, and soon thereafter, he contracts an infection that eventually causes him to lose his arm but he does get to leave the war and go home.



Objects/Places

The Observation Post

Paul Berlin returns to this Observation Post in his mind frequently during the telling of the story. It is a post on the edge of the sea in the Quang Ngai province. It is a rickety old tower and at one point, Paul Berlin acknowledges that there is nothing to observe and no mission. In the story, Paul Berlin is on guard duty one night and each hour of the duty has its own flavor, its own emotions. The other men are asleep and he is protecting them. Paul Berlin's mind is not a stable place and the observation post is where he retreats from reality and even from his imaginary trip to Paris in order to sort things out. The post is a halfway point for Paul Berlin, not completely in the war but not completely out of it either.

Paris

Paris is the destination for Cacciato's flight and the site of the peace talks for Vietnam. The city represents old world civilization, a place where people go to resolve differences in an orderly fashion.

Quang Lai

This is the province in Vietnam where the platoon worked, and it is the one best known to Paul Berlin. It is where he chooses to place his imaginary observation post down by the sea. The province is a farm country and there is fishing along the coast. Each village and farm represents a community of people and the paddies give depth to the land. Paul Berlin can relate to the concept of farming because he is from Wisconsin, a land of corn. He respects the land, but as with everything else about Vietnam, he does not understand it, especially the hedgerows.

Vietnam

Vietnam is the site of the war between the Americans and the Viet Cong. It is actually a political and unpopular war between the Americans and Communists and is different from previous American wars in many ways. The country itself is in tropical southeast Asia and is divided into two parts: South Vietnam, controlled by the Americans, and North Vietnam, controlled by the Vietcong.

World's Greatest Lake Country

This is a nickname given by Doc Peret to a battlefield where the American bombs have created huge craters in the soil of the mountain top. Rain fills the craters soon after the



bombing and brings the many dead bodies to the surface of the water. This area is where the squad eliminates its leader and where both Cacciato and Paul Berlin begin to lose touch with reality

8600

This number appears three times in the story: It is said to be the number of miles from the squad's Vietnam camp to Paris; it is the number of American soldiers who die in the six months of the story ;and it is the number of steps Paul Berlin walks on one of the marches before the column stops.

The Hole in the Ground

On their way to Paris, while chasing Cacciato, the squad falls into a huge hole in the road that connects them to a maze of tunnels. This hole is symbolic of the deepening of the fantasy that Paul Berlin is experiencing. Ironically, Cacciato has warned them about the hole; he acted upon his fantasy first, and in his own way, tries to warn Paul Berlin about the madness that lies ahead.

Calling Home

At one point, the squad members are allowed to call home and re-connect with their families and their hometowns. The anticipation of the phone call brings on memories of their parents and their lives in America. Paul Berlin, the one who most needs that touch with reality, is unable to reach his family, and therefore is more able to slide into the fantasy of the chase.

World's Greatest Lake Country

Typical of the black humor of the squad, this is the term they use to describe the place where a large battle happens. The earth is scorched and there are no plants, animals or birds around. There are huge holes in the ground from bomb explosions with tunnels everywhere. All of the holes have been filled with water from the rain. Cacciato gets confused about the sarcasm and spends all of his waking moments fishing in the holes. This is symbolic of a world turned upside down where reality is so brutal none of the men can stay in its realm for long.

Vehicles/Transportation

The methods of travel for the squad on their fantasy trip to Paris vary with the tone of the book, going from reality-based hiking, to boarding trains to faraway places. When Cacciato rescues them in Iran, the getaway car he provides is a 1964 Impala with racing stripes and leopard skin upholstery. Usually the men use trains to travel and sometimes



a bus. The further they get from reality, the less hiking they do. Fantasies become mixed with realities and the concerns about how they will be received back in America, as a revolutionary American girl picks up the entire squad in her VW van in Germany. In the conversations with the girl, and how they ultimately reject her before she can reject them, Paul Berlin is working out how he will deal with normal people when he returns home.



Themes

War Is Hell

Going After Cacciato demonstrates that the war in Vietnam was horrific and brutal, as wars inherently are. Soldiers are required to follow leaders who are inadequate or ill-informed and are thrust into foreign environments without training of the land, the languages, or the culture. Their comrades die in battle, which is to be expected, but also die in innocuous situations such as clearing a village, walking along a jungle trail, and even by their own troops.

The war in Vietnam is famous for its unpopularity with the American public and its use of young underprivileged men as cannon fodder. Paul Berlin's platoon members are all inexperienced young men barely out of their teens from sleepy Midwestern towns, who are plunged into violence and brutality with little or no warning.

Although the author is referring specifically to Vietnam with the "war is hell" theme, he also nods towards the Korean War where Lt. Corson obtained his experience and World War II where the purpose and mission was clear.

The reader is told in detail of the deaths of each of the platoon members: Billy Boy Watkins dies of fear after losing a foot to a land mine; Frenchie Tucker goes into a dark tight tunnel and gets shot through the nose; Pederson is slow to disembark from a helicopter and the helicopter door gunners assassinate him. Buff dies and his face remains in his helmet. These are scenes that would be difficult to deal with even if the observer were an emergency room doctor, but to rookie soldiers, war truly became hell after only a few hours of involvement in it.

People Create Methods for Dealing with Diversity

In this novel, each character deals with the horrors of war in his own way. Paul Berlin creates an elaborate fantasy adventure, complete with sounds, smells, romance and intrigue. He uses minor events such as Doc Peret treating the wounds of a young girl to create that young girl as an older object of romance in his fantasy. He creates a girlfriend for his beloved lieutenant and empowers a young mentally deficient soldier, Cacciato, with the abilities to see the future, engineer an escape from an Iranian jail, and imitate a monk.

Lt. Corson escapes reality by repeatedly saying Vietnam is not his war. Doc Peret tries to analyze everything and where he lacks knowledge, he becomes the platoon shaman/counselor, dispensing remedies and advice, and making himself bigger and stronger in the process. Stink Harris goes on the offensive as his defensive reflex by terrorizing the villagers, shooting at shadows and making trite remarks.



Cacciato escapes figuratively and in actuality from the war. He covers his feelings of inadequacy and confusion with whistling, grinning, chewing gum and pretending he is fishing in the bomb craters. It is this method of dealing with adversity that allows the author to clearly define the thoughts and characteristics of the main characters. This theme is so well entrenched in the story, the reader is unsure whether the observation post is real, the trip to Paris is real, or the original pursuit of Cacciato is real or imagined until the last chapter.

A Soldier's Duty

Soldiers have wrestled with this concept from the beginning of warfare. Why stay and fight when you can escape and go back home? The answer to that is you cannot go home and resume life as it was because the act of leaving for war has changed everything. Your family would not understand your desertion because war is indescribable to those who have not experienced it. You cannot resume life because you made a commitment to your armed forces and your country and those entities will track you down and imprison you for leaving.

However, the horrors of war give cause to believing you can abandon your home and family and go to a neutral country just to escape the war. Why do soldiers stay in the face of the brutality of war? According to the author, the answer is a combination of believing in a purpose, no matter how badly the idea of the war is presented to the soldier; in the duty to your fellow soldiers, even though you don't even know their real names; and in the duty to yourself, your commitment, your ability to follow through even in the roughest situations.

Paul Berlin, the main character, escapes in his mind because this is the only way he can deal with what he has experienced. He has no problem-solving skills and no authority he can turn to for answers, so he withdraws to his own mind. His imagination saves him from deserting, saves him from self-inflicted wounds, and allows him to work out a method for dealing with reality until his turn to go home arrives.

Going After Cacciato is the story of one soldier, Paul Berlin, who faces his own inability to cope with the experience of war, and through an intricate imaginary trip, emerges from his isolation to accept and deal with reality.



Style

Point of View

The story is told in the third person from Paul Berlin's point of view. Paul Berlin's narrative jumps from his current situation to an imaginary observation post where he is on guard duty, to another imaginary trip from Vietnam to Paris, chasing a deserter named Cacciato.

The author rarely deviates from Paul Berlin's view of the story, but in one situation, the author takes the reader into the mind of Lt. Sidney Martin, who is the first leader of the platoon. Lt. Sidney Martin has been professionally trained as a soldier, and on the day before the mountain battle, Lt. Martin is watching the troops and thinking about the duties of a leader in war.

Setting

The story begins and ends in Vietnam during America's war with that country. In Paul Berlin's imagination, his squad travels several thousand miles, from Vietnam to Paris, with stops in Mandalay, Kabul, Delhi, Tehran, Athens, Germany, and Luxemburg before arriving in Paris. The time period covered is June through November of 1968 but the Paris trip extends until the summer of 1969.

When the men are in Vietnam, it is a tropical, humid setting during the day and chilly but wet at night. They are in a jungle and their skin rots and erupts with sores. The earth's red crust covers them and mud is part of their daily lives. They are constantly under attack or possibility of attack which wears on their nerves and courage.

While on the trip to Paris, they discard their uniforms and weapons, go shopping, eat fine food and have intelligent conversations with strangers. Paul Berlin is no longer a loner, he has an attractive Chinese girlfriend.

Language and Meaning

This story is told by a soldier, and in simple soldier's language. The language is meant to convey a time and place where an educated, thinking person is not appropriate; where fancy words and ideas had nothing to do with the simple survival of every moment. Doc is respected for his way with words and his advice but none of the men strives to speak like him or learn from him other than what is absolutely necessary to survive.

Structure

This book is 46 chapters long and each chapter is titled to assist the reader in identifying the setting as Paul Berlin shifts his thoughts between the reality of his experience in Vietnam, an imaginary observation post, and another imaginary trip to Paris.



Quotes

Chapter One, Page 10, Paul Berlin

"Paul Berlin sat alone, playing solitaire in the style of Las Vegas. Pretending ways to spend his earnings,. Travel, expensive hotels, tips for everyone. Wine and song on white terraces, fountains blowing colored water. Pretending was his best trick to forget the war."

Chapter Eight, Page 63, Paul Berlin's father:

"You'll see some terrible stuff, I guess. That's how it goes. But try to look for the good things, too. They'll be there if you look. So watch for them."

Chapter Twelve, The Observation Point, Page 81, Paul Berlin

"He believed, like Doc Peret, that somewhere inside each man is a biological center for the exercise of courage, a piece of tissue that might be touched and sparked and made to respond, a chemical maybe, or a lone chromosome that when made to fire would produce a blaze of valor that even the biles could not extinguish. A filament, a fuse, that if ignited would release the full energy of what might be. There was a Silver Star twinkling somewhere inside him."

Chapter Twenty-Two, Who They Were or Who They Claimed to Be, Page 145

"A few names were known in full, some in part, some not at all. No one cared. Except in clearly unreasonable cases, a soldier was generally called by the name he preferred, or by what he called himself, and no great effort was made to disentangle Christian names from surnames from nicknames."

Chapter Twenty-Five, Page 168, Paul Berlin

"But Paul Berlin had no sense of the lieutenant's sentiment. His eyes were down and he climbed the road dumbly. His steps matched his thoughts. He did not notice the heat, or the beauty of the country, or the lieutenant's raised hand. If he had noticed, he would not have understood. He was dull of mind, blunt of spirit, numb of history, and struck with wonder that he could not stop climbing the red road toward the mountains."

Chapter Twenty-Nine, Atrocities on the Road to Paris, Page 198, Doc Peret

"We're not talking about winning and losing. We're talking about how it feels. How it feels on the ground. And I'm saying the common grunt doesn't give a damn about purposes and justice. He doesn't even think about that shit. Not when he's out humping, getting his tail shot off. Purposes - bullshit! He's thinking about how to keep breathing. Or he wonders what it'll feel like when he hits that booby trap. Will he goes nuts? Will he puke all over himself, or will he cry, or pass out, or scream? What'll it look like - all bone and meat and pus? That's the stuff he thinks about, not purposes."



Chapter Twenty-Nine, Atrocities on the Road to Paris, Page 199, Captain Fahyi Rhallon
"Does not the absence of good purpose jeopardize the soldier's own ego, thus making him less likely to fight well and bravely? If a war is without justice, the soldier knows that his sacrifice of life, his own valued life, is demeaned, and therefore his self-respect must likewise be demeaned. Is that not so?"

Chapter Thirty-Three, Outlawed on the Road to Paris, Page 226, Paul Berlin
"Paul Berlin's motives, as shapeless as water, washed through his imagination: a briny, sodden pressure that weighted him like gravity, layers of inclination pressing him deeper and deeper. His brain had the bends. Things were out of control. Gone haywire. You could run, but you couldn't outrun the consequences of running. Not even in imagination."

Chapter Thirty-Three, Outlawed on the Road to Paris, Page 231, Savak Colonel
"Now tell me this...this mission, this so-called mission...tell me it is fiction. Tell me it is a made-up story. Tell me it is an alibi to cover cowardice.' And they said it loudly. They confessed."

Chapter Forty-Four, The End of the Road to Paris, Page 318, Sarkin Aung Wan
"This is not a plea for placidness of mind or feebleness of spirit. It is a plea for the opposite: that, like your father, you would build fine houses; that, like your town, you would endure and grow and produce good things that you would live well. For just as happiness is more than the absence of sadness, so is peace infinitely more than the absence of war."

Chapter Forty-Four, The End of the Road to Paris, Page 320, Paul Berlin
"Are these fears wrong? Are they stupid? Or are they healthy and right? I have been told to ignore my fear of censure and embarrassment and loss of reputation. But would it not be better to accept those fears? To yield to them? If inner peace is the true objective, would I win it in exile?"

Chapter Twenty-Three, Asylum on the Road to Paris, Page 150, Lt. Corson
"The trouble's this", he said slowly. "In Nam, you know what the real trouble is? You know? The trouble's this: Nobody likes nobody." Slowly shaking his head, he began wiping the spilt wine with a napkin. "That's the trouble, all right. In Nam, there's no respect for nothing. No heart. Nobody's got his heart in it, you know? Doves on their helmets. Faking ambushes. That's the real difference. No heart."



Topics for Discussion

How is Lt. Corson's style of leadership different from Lt. Sidney Martin's methods? Why is it more effective with the platoon?

At what point is it obvious that the pursuit of Cacciato beyond Laos is a product of Paul Berlin's imagination?

What role does Li Van Hgoc play in the flight to Paris? Does the author use his lifestyle to explain the mysteries of the many tunnels in Vietnam, at least to Paul Berlin's way of thinking?

What is the symbolism of emerging from the Laotian tunnel into civilization?

How does Doc Peret represent the philosophical side of Paul Berlin?

Why are the answers to all of Paul Berlin's questions so vague?

Why does Cacciato keep appearing in Paul Berlin's fantasy? Why does he behave so intelligently when his reputation with the squad is that of a confused, addled boy?

Why are there no specifically intimate scenes between Paul Berlin and Sarkin Aung Wan? Why does he consistently talk about them kissing, but then Paul Berlin says he "pretends they made love?"

What is the relationship between Lt. Corson and Sarkin Aung Wan? Why does Paul Berlin imagine this unlikely couple will leave the squad together in Paris?

Lt. Corson constantly comments that Vietnam is not his war. What does he mean by that?

Why do the men treat their comrades with such little compassion, even joking about their deaths?

Was the war in Vietnam different from other wars?