

Redeployment Study Guide

Redeployment by Phil Klay

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Plot Summary

“Redeployment” by Phil Klay is a series of twelve short stories all of which involved the Iraq War which was launched with the U.S. invasion in 2003. There is also one story that takes place in Afghanistan around the same time period. Although the stories are told by different characters – sometimes unnamed -- in different roles, the specter of fear and anger and doubt and often an awe and astonishment of the absurdity of where they find themselves comes across loud and clear.

Klay has drawn on his own experience and those of close family and friends who went to war in Iraq. Klay is careful, as evidenced by the vast resources he used as references, to depict these fictional events with pinpoint accuracy. He has gone to great lengths to write these stories in an authentic way that is largely free of demagoguery. Demagoguery would demand exaggeration and even hyperbole. Neither is necessary; the facts are jarring enough to get the attention of the reader.

There are undoubtedly some problem areas of the war and some specific situations that are not included in these stories by Phil Klay. However, the author touches on the demands and horrors of war in a dozen fictional tales that are eerily realistic and that feature the agony of defeat and the agony of victory. The subplot of this story is the transition the Marines must make when they return home. They struggle with misunderstandings and misconceptions from the home front and fight off the demons that still dance in their heads from the tour of duty.

“Bodies” is told by a Marine who is a member of the Mortuary Affairs unit at a Navy base in Iraq. The “affairs” part of the unit’s title translates to the macabre duty of collecting dead bodies. The unit only collects the corpses of U.S. military. The Iraqis are responsible for their own “clean-up.” When he returns to the states, he doesn’t tell anyone he was in Iraq. For those who know he had served, he doesn’t tell them what he did, or if he does he exaggerates and makes it more horrific than it was – if that was possible.

In “OIF” the author purposely uses many military acronyms to put the reader there. A Marine who receives the Purple Heart and other awards for bravery places them on his mantel back at home. He’d rather his fallen friends were still around. The medals don’t erase the horrors and the fact that many peers had died and he’s still alive.

In “Prayer in the Furnace” PFC Rodriguez is obsessed with whether stopping someone from being killed is as big a sin as murdering someone. He takes his problem to a priest who does his best to assuage the Marine’s worries. The priest tells him that the cross had been a mechanism of torture at one time and that, “In this world, He only promises that we don’t suffer alone.” Rodriguez already knew that. On top of the dangers of a war zone, one story is devoted to the inherent bureaucratic red tape that exists in a major conflict which men and women fighting for their country and their very lives should never have to deal with.

The trauma of injury, physical, emotional and mental, looms ever-present in the stories. The war is truly a life-and-death experience. Here today and gone tomorrow is not just a throwaway slogan in Iraq.



Redeployment

Summary

The Marines shoot dogs... on purpose. They lap up blood, not American blood, but blood. The men are thinking about who's in the houses and killing them. When deployment is up, the men are sent to a logistics base in the desert to decompress. Marine Sergeant Price tries to think about home and his wife, Cheryl, and not what he did on the battlefield or all the horrors that he'd seen including the slaughter of his fellow Marines. Shooting the dogs made him think of Vicar his dog at home. He was trained to kill people not dogs.

After deployment, their plane first lands in Cherry Point. No one is there to greet them. The families are waiting to reunite with them at Camp Lejeune which is an hour away. When they arrive Price spots the waiting families. He turns his rifle in and doesn't know what to do with his hands. As they proceed, they can hear cheering from the families. There were TV cameras and American flags. He begins to see signs welcoming back the Marines. He finally spots his name, Sergeant Price, on a sign. Cheryl is holding it. They are nervous when they kiss and embrace. It's been a long time. Cheryl cries. He's forgotten how good it was to hold her. She lets him drive the car home.

At home, Vicar rises slowly from the couch when he sees Price. Vicar is skinny and gray. Cheryl says he hasn't been able to keep food down. The next week at work, it's half-days, medical and dental appointments. Price starts thinking about going back. Every evening, he and Vicar are on the couch waiting for Cheryl to come home from the late shift. Vicar has tumors. Price feeds him snacks that he shouldn't have but he deserves a treat. He hacks up a lot of it. It's hard for Price to look at Vicar.

When they go to the mall in Wilmington, Price recalls walking down the street in Fallujah with his unit, scanning the rooftops for snipers. He doesn't have a weapon now or a battle buddy. Lots of guys go to "orange" which is spotting every possible danger. Guys in "orange" could spot a dime on the street at twenty yards. It's hard to go from "orange" back down to "white" in Wilmington.

They decide that Vicar has to be put down. Price takes Vicar to a remote dirt road at sunset. As he carries Vicar down to the stream he thinks about finding an insurgent that everyone in his unit surrounded and shot to death expect Price. Price lays Vicar down and picks up his AR-15, trains it on Vicar and fires. It's a gray blur. Price doesn't know what to do with his body.

Analysis

Irony is interspersed throughout this first story entitled, "Redeployment." Sergeant Price shoots dogs in Iraq. The shootings are not by accident; they are intentional. The dogs are lapping human blood – that of the Iraqis it is presumed – and it's too much for Price



and his men to take. Shooting the dogs is symbolic of ridding the Marines of the whole Iraqi mess.

The irony comes into play when Price returns home from deployment. His beloved dog, Vicar, is very ill and obviously dying. Price was not able to leave Iraq behind with its death and destruction and fear and blood-lapping dogs. After he turns in his equipment, he feels lost without his rifle. After all, it had been his personal bodyguard for a year. He comments that he doesn't know what to do with his hands. His hands are empty just as his heart and mind are. He is bereft of feelings beyond flight or fight. When he visits the local mall, he can't restrain himself from scanning the rooftops for snipers. But his hands are empty. He has no way to protect himself. Perhaps he'd be safer in Iraq. At least he'd have his rifle and he wouldn't feel as empty. He could shoot feral dogs over there.

When Vicar is at the last stages of life, Price tells his wife that he will handle it. He takes the dog and a rifle to a remote area outside of town. His hands are no longer empty but it doesn't sate the void within. Those dogs he shot in Iraq still haunt him. Now he has the chance to try again. He shoots and kills Vicar putting him out of his misery. Will it keep the dogs of the Iraq war from stealing away his sleep and causing him nightmarish days?

Discussion Question 1

Why did the Marines shoot the dogs? How did Price make a connection between the dogs and back home?

Discussion Question 2

What did being "orange" mean? What did Price mean when he referred to it being difficult to go from "orange" to "white?"

Discussion Question 3

Was Price "orange" or "white" when he walked through the mall in Wilmington? Where was Price psychologically when he shot Vicar?

Vocabulary

decompress, logistics, insurgents, firefight, deployment, guidon, IED

Frago

Summary

The Lieutenant has ordered the unit to “drop” the house. The squad leader orders Cpl Sweet’s 2nd Fire Team to be behind the main effort with 1st Fire Team in support. Cpl Moore is in charge of 1st Fire and thinks it should always go first. The narrator orders 3rd Fire Team as the reserve unit. When they arrive at a house, they tear down the back door using M870 with lockbuster shells. The kitchen is clear. In the next room there is fire from AK-47s. The Marines take out two hajjis. No injuries among the Marines. Cpl Sweet gets caught in the thigh as he enters a bedroom. The other Marines take the enemy down. Sweet is bleeding profusely. Doc in Sweet’s unit orders Dyer to tend to the wound in the face of one of the hajjis.

Several more rooms and the deck are clear. They drop a flashbang down into the basement where there are three enemies. One is al-Qaeda; he’s scared and young. They cuff him. The other two present no threat. They’ve been tied to chairs and beaten; blood is dripping to the floor. The Marines spot a video camera. Everything is being videotaped presumably for al-Qaeda upper echelon. The camera is out of film. One of the torturers probably went out to get film so they could tape the killing. 1st Team unties the two guys and gives them first aid. The wire that held the men was dug into their skin making releasing them difficult and painful. They find a weapons cache – Aks, RPGs, homemade explosives.

Dyer is staring out a window, looking lost. Blood covers his flight suit. The narrator gives him his flight suit and finds another for himself. Doc is treating Sweet with QuikClot. It burns but Sweet forces a grin and displays a thumbs-up. Half the jaw is gone on the hajji. A medical copter swoops down and takes Sweet and the hajji away. Doc says the hajjis have lacerations all over their bodies; probably beaten with hoses. They each took a power drill through their ankles. Not life-threatening but messed up for life. It’s the Lieutenant’s first deployment. He’s never seen anything like it before; he’s shaken.

The narrator thinks about the tortured hajjis. The Marines saved their lives. He thinks of the look in their eyes; they didn’t want to be saved. They had to sit and wait for the guy to come back with film, contemplating their own end. He feels like getting drunk on Listerine to deal with it all. At least Sweet’s alive.

They travel to the hospital at the military airbase. Sweet is awake and on an IV drip, happy to still have his leg. The hajji with the face injury was flown to a high-security hospital. The two torture victims were drugged up and out. Everybody heads for the cafeteria. The narrator is not hungry but he eats. He forces Dyer to get some cherry cobbler. Dyer looks down at it, still lost. The narrator puts a spoon in his hand.



Analysis

PFC Dyer is a Marine trained in combat skilled and presumably battle-ready. He is traumatized by the killing and injuries sustained in a real battle. He stares out the window with his flight suit covered in blood. He wants to take himself out of his present circumstances. He looks out the window for a way to escape, something to distract him from this harsh reality. The cruelty of man has thrown him. Two Iraqis were being tortured in the basement of the house they took down; their al-Qaeda captors had drilled holes through their ankles. Where has Dyer landed? Is he in hell or Iraq? Is there a difference?

It is ironic that the Marines saved the two Iraqi men who may well have planted IEDs in the area to kill or maim them. Even more ironic, once the men are free again they will probably plant more booby-traps for their occupiers.

The confusion and chaos of this assault by the Marines is symbolic of the entire war. War is not black and white as many would claim. The death of the enemy is still the death of a human. The innocent who is saved one day may be the enemy who kills his rescuer the next.

Discussion Question 1

Why was Doc concerned about the wound to the enemy? What values drive him?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Dyer seem lost? Explain why the narrator changes flight suits with Dyer. Why is the Lieutenant shaken but the incident?

Discussion Question 3

Why does the narrator tell Sweet that he'll be okay even though he isn't at all sure that he will survive?

Vocabulary

cordon, hajji, femoral, flashbang, cache, adrenaline



After Action Report

Summary

Lance Cpl Ozzie Suba and his unit are riding in their MRAP vehicle when there is an explosion beneath them. Had they been in any other vehicle, they would have died. The 32,000 pound MRAP lifted off the ground and buckled in the air. The men emerge from the badly damaged vehicle. Timhead stands guard at the rear while Garza examines the damage.

Suba and Timhead spot a group of Iraqis. Suba figures that one of them is the bomber. Suddenly, there is gunfire. Timhead and Suba fire in the direction of the shots. A woman starts screaming. A young boy is lying on the ground bleeding. Timhead shot him but claims he didn't. Suba will tell everyone he killed the kid. Suba tells the story and feels better with each time. He begins to own the story. When Timhead's around he stays quiet, just nods.

A week later MacClelland who had been injured in the blast dies. A memorial is held for him at the Camp Fallujah chapel. First Sergeant calls out the name of all the men who answer, "Here." When after several calls for Lance Cpl MacClelland there is no answer, taps is played. Afterward, Jobrani tells Suba that he got one for MacClelland. But the kid was killed before MacClelland died.

Suba wants to talk about the incident but Timehead doesn't. Others call Suba "killer" and "hero." Timehead seems annoyed. Both men are having trouble sleeping. Timehead tells Suba that he has a younger brother who's in juvie for setting fires. He wonders how old the kid was that he shot. He sees the kid's face in his mind and the mother's face.

Suba tells the Staff Sergeant everything Timehead said about the kid pretending it was his thoughts. Chaplain Vega comes to him and asks if he wants to talk about the kid he shot. Vega tells him he did his job and to pray. Suba tells him it's not just the kid. Every time he hears an explosion, he thinks somebody in his unit might have been hurt or killed. Vega tells him that prayer won't protect him but it will help his soul.

Suba continues on his duties at the turret, firing into the night. It's not bad. He can't see the people; they're far away and only shadows. The trigger is always there longing to be pushed. Timhead admits that the killing bothered him because the family – parents, sisters and brothers – were all there. He's got a nine-year-old sister. Suba relays this to the Staff Sergeant as if it's his thoughts. The sergeant tells him that the little girl probably has seen a lot worse. The next day Timhead says he's over it.

Harvey gets shot in the neck a week later. He says he'll get a Purple Heart which will go over with the girls. Later, Timhead tells Suba that Harvey is full of it. Suba defends Harvey. What else could he say?! Timhead says it doesn't matter. Suba agrees.



Analysis

Timhead is unable to handle the aftermath of a shooting in which he killed an innocent young Iraqi boy. The anguish on the mother's face has made an indelible mark in his mind. Since he cannot accept that he killed a boy, he claims that it wasn't his gunfire that killed the boy. Suba sensing that Timhead could go over the edge, tells Timhead that he will take the blame, or credit, for the kill. The lie may convince others but Timhead knows the truth and the truth is ripping him apart.

Timhead admits that what was most difficult for him was that his sisters and brothers watched as their brother died. He makes a link between the one of the young girls and his own young sister. He can imagine what the boy's siblings feel – what his own sister would feel. The killing is personal for him. The Marines try to distract themselves from reality. The sergeant tells Timhead that the little girl has probably seen a lot worse. Really? What could be worse than seeing your brother murdered? The author has juxtaposed the vulnerability of the young boy with the innocence of his own young sister.

The death of the Iraqi boy is symbolic of all the innocents killed in the Iraq war. The media focuses on the thousands of American troops who have been killed in action for whom the nation mourns. But they gloss over the tens of thousands of innocent women and children killed as collateral damage – killed by both U.S. troops and by their enemies.

Discussion Question 1

When Suba talks to the staff sergeant and the chaplain what is the subtext of his remarks? What is he going through psychologically when he shoots at shadowy people who are far away?

Discussion Question 2

What connections does Timhead make to the little boy he shot? What did the siblings of the boy of watched as their brother was killed represent to Timhead?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Suba volunteer to claim that he killed the little boy? Why did he say he came to "own" the story and what did he get out of it? Why did Timhead resent the attention Suba was getting for the killing?

Vocabulary

turret, potshot, trajectories, profanity, martyr



Bodies

Summary

The narrator is an unnamed Marine. He is angry. He doesn't tell people he was in Iraq. If they know he lies about it – usually horrific ones about the death and suffering in the country. He finds it surprising that many people want to hear more. He exaggerates the horror of the dead. Guys think some of it is funny; girls think it's sad. He embellishes the story even further by saying a lieutenant colonel stopped by to help him with a body bag one occasion. The lieutenant colonel mussed his pressed uniform when blood and guts poured out of the bag. Sometimes he'd add that the colonel "screamed like a bitch." In reality, no one talked about dead bodies this way.

Some of the Mortuary Affairs Marines swear the spirits hover over the bodies. Later, guys swear that they could feel the spirits everywhere – Sunni, Shi'a, Kurd and Christian. This Marine never had that problem. If a body was left out in the oppressive sun, the top skin would slide around. Everything swells when a body is left in water.

Maybe things would have been different if Rachel had stayed with him. Being in Mortuary Affairs wasn't a good fit for him. The smell permeates the clothes; it's hard to eat at first. The men are sleep deprived. They're the unit that reminds everyone about death and things they don't want to talk about. He'd known Rachel since high school. She was a pacifist and their relationship declined when he signed up. He had wanted to get out of Callaway; a small town wasn't for him. She'd never leave. She would have preferred he join the Air Force. But he was tired of being weak. He'd be a Marine. She stayed with him through boot camp.

He saw her the next time at her parents after boot camp. Rachel didn't think she could stay with him. He asked her to give him time. Ten months later he was deployed to Iraq with Mortuary Affairs. She saw him off but told him they were done. But he was okay. He was going off to become a man.

But Iraq is awful and doesn't make him a man. His first weekend back he and Cpl G go to Vegas. He didn't like G but he knew which girls to hit on. Cpl G lined the narrator up with a 38-year-old woman; he hadn't been with anyone since Rachel.

When the narrator returns home everyone thanks him for his service. He is sure no one knows what he did. He visits Rachel. He wants her but he knows she doesn't want him. He tries to think of the woman's name in Las Vegas. He goes to a bar where a guy tells him that his cousin died in Iraq. The Marine thinks to himself that he might have processed the guy's body. He never sees Rachel again. She got married while he was on his third deployment. She had her first child when he was on his fourth.



Analysis

The Marine who had worked as a corpse collector for the Marine's Mortuary Affairs unit symbolizes the bitterness and anger that active and returning Marines held for the Iraq war. The Marine's vengeance for his horrific experience is exaggerating the horrors to those who have the gall to ask him about his duties. He wants to transfer the horror and angst that he felt to them.

His true hand is shown by his refusal to tell people he was in Iraq at all. This denial is symbolic of deeply held wishes that he'd never been there. However, denying does not make it so and he is left with the images and memories of that horrific time.

The main character transfers his feelings of guilt for his involvement in the war to his girlfriend who left him because of her own anti-war stand. It's ironic that the Marine, in essence, agrees with his girlfriend at least on some level – perhaps at a level he doesn't fully realize. How staying with him would have changed things is not clear. He is engaging in a fantasy in an attempt to keep his focus from the death and horror that is now part of his memories forever.

Discussion Question 1

Why does the Marine “lie” about what he does? Why does he exaggerate the horrors of war?

Discussion Question 2

Describe ways in which the Marine's assignment impact him. Why do some of the Marines feel the spirits of the dead? Why doesn't the main character have any such feelings?

Discussion Question 3

What were the real feelings that the narrator had for Rachel? Why does the Marine think of the woman in Las Vegas after he leaves Rachel?

Vocabulary

Sunni, Shi'a, Kurd, gaunt, pacifist, melancholy, goth, contraband, trapezoid

OIF

Summary

The EOD handled bombs; SSTP treated injuries; PRP processed bodies. The Marine just wants to work in the office and be a POG then go to college. Instead he becomes a 3400 and is sent on twenty-four missions and is promoted to E4. During the mission, he and his unit scan for IEDs that al-Qaeda in Iraq plants for them. Some are even implanted in the bodies of dead camels while others are daisy-chained together for more impact. The first blast is designed to make the Marines stop and take notice; the next blast kills them where they stand.

An IED hits the vehicle that the Marine's riding in. He and Sgt Green get out. The driver is unconscious. The Marine runs back for the PFC who was on the side where the blast hit. It's too late. The PFC's Eye Prop is warped by the heat of the fire; the snaps on his PPE melt. One Marine leaves his legs behind as he is transported by copter to the base hospital. He dies in surgery.

The Marine is awarded a NAM with a V. Not many 3400s have such an honor. The Marine has it sitting on his mantel by side his CAR and Purple Heart and other awards. The medals don't erase the fact that he's still breathing.

In boot camp, the DIs tell the recruits Medal of Honor stories. Most of the recipients were killed in action. Their families are sent to Dover to see their loved ones' remains lifted out of transports in closed caskets. Their closed because IEDs don't make for pretty corpses. The Marine decides he wants to stay in. He tells his girlfriend to leave him. He wishes it would have been him who was killed but he really doesn't mean it. He is assigned to OEF as a 3400, a POG with experience. He'll hunt for more IEDs and will be terrified. He'll remember the PFC; he loved him.

Analysis

The author's cacophony of acronyms creates a harsh background for this story. Medals given to Marines for valorous acts on the battlefield are symbols of their nation's gratitude for them and their dedication and selfless acts of courage. In this story, the recipient of medals for bravery does not accept their symbolism. He has developed his own symbolism. As he stares at the medals and citations on his mantel, they are symbolic of the death of fellow Marines that he was unable to save. On a larger perspective, they represent the deaths of all fellow Marines and soldiers. They also represent his failure. Worst of all, the medals remind him that he is alive and fellow Marines are dead. He does not believe the lies of the medals. He decides that he will return to duty. He'll hunt for EIDs. Maybe he'll find one that will make him feel he earned his medals.



Discussion Question 1

What is the author's point in using military-speak to tell the story? What impact does he expect this approach to have on the reader?

Discussion Question 2

Even though the Marine had some horrifying experiences, why does he want to redeploy? Why does he say that he wishes it had been him?

Discussion Question 3

What does the Marine feel about all the medals and awards he is given after deployment? What do they symbolize to him?

Vocabulary

sheikh, consolation, daisy-chained, expeditionary, peroxide



Money as a Weapons System

Summary

When Nathan arrives in 2008, the 82nd Airborne is building greenhouses near Tikrit. He's apprehensive about the danger. He isn't pro-war but he does believe in government service and his career will be helped by his service in Iraq. He is leading his team in Iraq but doesn't have much experience in reconstruction. He feels he's a fraud and a war tourist.

At the office Bob introduces Nathan to Cindy, a frail woman in her fifties. She is working on an agricultural project and a health clinic. He's told he can take Steve's desk. When Steve got off the helicopter at Taji, he had to run through machine gun fire and was badly injured. Nathan thinks to himself that this is a war zone and anyone can get hurt.

Bob tells Nathan that if he wants to succeed he shouldn't think too big. A water treatment plant is big; teaching Iraqi widows to raise bees is not. Giving people jobs is boost to the economy, especially widows. Nathan wants to focus on getting the water treatment plant up and running. Bob will get him to one of the companies at Istalquaal – which means “freedom.”

Cindy's health clinic takes off. It's difficult for women to see a doctor in Iraq. Najdah, a social worker, interviews the women to learn what other services they need – divorces, help with domestic abuse or compensation for relatives killed in the war. A 14-year-old girl had been raped and is no longer able to marry. Her family wants to sell her to a brothel which is better than honor killing. Nathan meets with Chief Engineer Kazemi who insists the water treatment plant have machine gun towers for protection. Nathan tells Kazemi to figure out what is needed to get the plant running.

Major Zima drops off several boxes of baseball uniforms for the local Iraqi boys. Per Chris Roper, his former boss, “sports” diplomacy could lead to democracy. Nathan tells Zima that the current water pipelines had been constructed with the incorrect water pressure. Flushing a toilet could blow out the whole system.

Nathan contacts Chris about the baseball team. Chris wants to cut the clinic but keep the Women's Business Association. Women's empowerment is a mission of the embassy. Nathan points out that the clinic is helping women. He suggests teaching Iraqi widows beekeeping. Nathan receives an email from Gene Goodwin encouraging him to start a baseball league. It could be a step toward democracy. Nathan responds that the kids may make use of the uniforms but he can't promise they'll play baseball. His message is followed by a series of angry email messages from a congressman and military officers. Finally, Major Zima writes that he found a school teacher who will take the uniforms and teach the kids baseball.



Later Zima tells Nathan that he can have the funds he needs to start repairs on the water plant. The original \$1.5 million is gone. Where it went he doesn't know; he wasn't there then. He passed on the water pressure problem. They don't want to destroy a Sunni village with a toilet. Nathan needs to have a pressure reducer installed. He hasn't told the Sunnis about the water pressure problem but has a note reminding him to tell Sheikh Abu Bakr. Nathan needs to see the Sheikh about a beekeeping campaign. The Sheikh promises that he can get the widows for the aviary project. Zima promises to deliver the bats and balls that arrive to the school teacher.

Nathan visits the women's clinic for what he fears will be the last time. Najdah is used to being disappointed. She's an Iraqi. When Nathan travels to the plant again to meet with Kazemi, he is shaken when he learns that Kazemi was killed by a suicide bomber. A desolate Nathan talks with Zima who tells him that things have actually gotten better in the two years he's been there. Nathan catches a glimpse of sadness on Zima's face.

Zima comes into the office one day and writes a letter about the women's business association. He reads aloud to Nathan as he writes. He blames its failure on the lack of child care and medical care for the women. He is asking that the association not be shut down. He places a baseball helmet on Nathan's desk. Gene Goodwin wants a photo of the kids playing baseball. Nathan convinces Chris Roper to keep the clinic open. He comes across two boys with baseball uniforms and gets a photograph of them.

Analysis

Conflict is front and center in this story. Although there is conflict in every story that of the warfare variety, this story is about the bureaucratic conflicts that prevent the help that the Iraqis need and that will make real progress in Iraqi society.

Nathan emerges as the unintended hero in this story. Although when he first arrives his motivation for coming to Iraq is to further his own career. He feels that a year in Iraq as a Foreign Service Officer will be a good mark on his resume. But Nathan's conscious is showing when he says he feels like a fraud, like a war tourist. That comment exposes his guilt over not contributing to the war in what he considers in a real way on the battlefield. But he does his best to repress that guilt because it is a false specter. That's not what he signed up for.

Nathan is given quite an impressive character arc. He begins his deployment in a self-centered mindset. However, he is soon drawn by the needs of the Iraqi people, especially the women. They need a clinic because they are not allowed to see doctors. A fellow Foreign Service officer tempts him to take the easy road and ignore his mission to restore the water treatment plant but Nathan recognizes the fundamental human need of clean water that others somehow ignore. A bureaucrat in Washington tries to force the shutdown of the women's clinic but he fights for it.

Nathan is sent a box of baseball uniforms to be distributed to local kids in the area. The thinking in Washington is that this "sports diplomacy" would be the first step toward true



democracy in Iraq. The author juxtaposes this inane strategy against Nathan's goal to provide good water and medical care for the Iraqis. Nathan thinks the way to a democracy is through real help for the people as opposed to a superficial token of democracy.

The baseball uniforms are a symbol of failed U.S. policies in the Middle East. By putting a sheen on the devastation and destruction and the loss that the Iraqi people have suffered, the real steps that could lead to a more advanced society are ignored. In the end perhaps Nathan should feel better about his contribution and should no longer consider himself a war visitor.

Discussion Question 1

What are Nathan's personal motivations for taking the assignment as Foreign Service Officer in Tikrit? What is his mission there and what obstacles does he face in achieving success.

Discussion Question 2

Why does Nathan feel he is a "war tourist" and a fraud? How does he stand up to the bureaucracy that exists within the system while on assignment in Iraq?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Chris Roper want to close down the women's clinic and keep the women's business association open? Describe the pros and cons of each organization and your argument for which one should stay open.

Vocabulary

perspective, embedded, colleague, theoretically, cavalierly, existential, apiary, ostensibly, terse, laconic, encompass, holistic, entrepreneurship, disenfranchised



In Vietnam They Had Whores

Summary

The Marine's father tells him about Vietnam when he is deployed to Iraq. His father drinks swigs of whiskey alternating with sips of beer. He tells his son about the unbearable humidity, the jungle rot, the monsoons and the ineffectiveness of their weapons. When he really gets drunk, he talks about the whores.

At first there were monthly trips into town. Later the brothels moved close to the camp and the Marines sneak through the wire at night or had the girls over during the day. There were different brothels for white Marines and black Marines. If a girl from the white brothel was caught servicing a black man, she'd be severely beaten or murdered.

His father is too drunk to go on with his stories. When the Marine helps him to his bed, his father mumbles and gives him a metal cross. He had it during his Vietnam deployment. The Marine tells his father's story to Old Man when he gets to Iraq. Old Man had joined the Corps late in life. He had age and wisdom. There are no whores in Haditha. In training, the Marine was taught to look for the unusual. A very tall woman never seen in town before suddenly appears. A man walks the same route every day circumventing a particular street. Kids stop playing near a roadside where they always played. He spends a lot of time looking at women.

First Platoon gets herpes all at once. Everyone is sure they found a brothel. Turns out there isn't a brothel. The first female he sees after that is at a chow hall in Al Asad. He and another Marine share what they want to do with her. West, their team leader who later died, tells them that the girls at home like war heroes. He doesn't feel like a hero at Camp Lajeune for the memorial service for West and two other Marines. He and Old Man go to the Pink Pussycat afterwards. The girls treat men well there because they're not that attractive. They go inside and sit at the bar where naked women are dancing. Old Man tells the Marine that he's going to buy him a lap dance, and then he can take her to a VIP room in another trailer. Back in the main trailer, the Marine has a few drinks while Old Man, has a lap dance, and then takes the girl to a VIP room.

Analysis

The Marine's father is hiding his concern for his son's deployment to the Iraq war zone by getting drunk. He's never been able to share his experiences in Vietnam with his son. But the time is crucial now. Perhaps he can provide his son with some piece of information that can help him. The man has repressed emotion for so long that he doesn't know how to show it without the help of alcohol. Instead of telling his son that he loves him and wants him to be safe, he gets drunks and tells him war stories. The whores that he talks about when he is really drunk is his father's pathetic attempt to give his son something to distract him from fears of death and injury.



Once deployed, the Marine is told that the girls like war heroes. When he returns to the States for a memorial service for fallen Marines, he feels nothing like a hero. Another Marine who is called Old Man takes the Marine to a strip joint that fronts as a brothel. It is not by accident that author named the veteran Marine “Old Man” which is a term often used for one’s father. The empty sex is symbolic of the emptiness that returning Marines feel about their experience in Iraq.

Discussion Question 1

Why does the Marine’s father have to drink when he tells his son about Vietnam? What benefit does his son get from his father’s stories?

Discussion Question 2

Why would the Marines be trained to look for “a very tall woman” they had never seen in the streets before or a man who seems to avoid a certain street every day or children who avoid playing on the side of a road?

Discussion Question 3

Why doesn’t the Marine who is narrating the story feel like a hero at Camp Lajeune? Why does the Marine associate with Old Man even though he doesn’t like him?

Vocabulary

sweatbox, monsoons, herpes, epidemic, mortar, cowered



Prayer in the Furnace

Summary

Rodriguez is smeared with blood. He wants to talk to the chaplain. The priest had been a light-heavyweight boxer. He knows how the joy of fighting turns to rage. He sees rage on Rodriguez's bloody face. They are standing outside Charlie Medical where Denton Fujita had just been pronounced dead – the battalion's twelfth in just four months. Another Marine is having a leg amputation. The priest leaves to check on the amputee. When he returns, Rodriguez is gone.

Later, Rodriguez comes to see the priest. Fujita, the newest member of the squad, had been made to strip and do naked jumping jacks on top of a roof – something Charlie Company did routinely to draw fire. He was shot by a sniper. Rodriguez asks if a person goes to hell for not stopping a murder – murders out there among the civilians. The priest presses him for more but Rodriguez clams up.

The priest tries to convey his concerns up the chain of command but he is rebuffed. Another Marine from Rodriguez's platoon wants to get out of Iraq on Combat Stress. All he wants to do is kill Iraqis. They're all insurgents. He talks about wanting to kill little kids who plant IEDs. The priest recalls Rodriguez saying that they were all the enemy. The priest learns from Sergeant Hauptert that the Marine had been diagnosed with combat stress but performs his duties efficiently. Every soldier with combat stress can't be sent home. The priest put his concerns in writing in an email to all commanders but got no response. Rodriguez tells the priest that he didn't believe in war and killing any more. He doesn't sleep any more.

The priest reaches out to his former mentor, Father Connelly, who tells the priest that it's natural for men to lose faith under the circumstances of war. He urges him not to lose his empathy for human frailty. The priest asks a group of Marines if they'd trade places with any of the Iraqis. The Iraqis feel that their suffering justifies the suffering of the Americans. A Christian cannot look at another and say that, "He is not my brother." (156)

By the end of deployment over one hundred men had been injured with sixteen killed. Over the years, Marines die from accidents and violence. Some get into crime and drug abuse. Several commit suicide. One Marine gets involved with an anti-war group. The priest is serving as chaplain at Camp Lejeune. One of the suicide victims is Rodriguez's squad leader. Rodriguez comes to see the priest. Rodriguez blames himself for not doing anything. The priest grasps the cross on his collar and reminds Rodriguez that the cross had been a torture mechanism. "In this world, He only promises that we don't suffer alone," the priest tells Rodriguez.



Analysis

The character Rodriguez represents the guilt that young unseasoned Marines feel when they are out of training and into a real theater of war. His angst over whether he committed a sin by not stopping a killing is symbolic of the frustration, conflicted feelings and desperation that military personnel experience on the battlefield over the death and destruction that they are part of.

Rodriguez seeks comfort from the Priest who is sympathetic and understanding but has no words to take away the killing that is haunting Rodriguez. The encounters conflict and obstacles when he seeks psychological help for Rodriguez and other men but is thwarted in his attempts.

If Marines and soldiers like Rodriguez were treated during their deployment, perhaps many of them would not suffer from PTSD when they return. And if early steps were taken the amount of suicides would no doubt be reduced. Many military personnel, particularly Marines who are by reputation the toughest branch of the armed forces, are reluctant to speak out with their worries and emotional pain because it would be conceived as a sign of weakness. The military command prefers to slough off the warning signs and attribute it to a natural reaction and part of the evolution of a warrior that will go away by itself.

Discussion Question 1

How is the Priest able to relate to Rodriguez's anger? What is there about Rodriguez that frightens the Priest?

Discussion Question 2

What does Rodriguez feel guilty about? Make the case that Rodriguez's feelings of responsibility for a killing are either justified or unjustified.

Discussion Question 3

Describe the frustration that the Priest is attempting to get help for Rodriguez? Was the Priest able to bring comfort to Rodriguez? Why or why not.

Vocabulary

contortions, hospice, berating, hagiographic, buttressed, inconspicuous, pogue, retrospect, banal, haranguing, theodicy



Psychological Operations

Summary

Waguih first meets Zara Davies at Amherst where they are both students. Everyone in the class is white except him and Zara. He wants to play the world-weary vet in contrast to his naïve idealistic fellow students. What he has over these kids is his realization that humans can treat each other horribly. Zara makes the decision to convert to Islam. Thoughts of the Iraq war had been bothering her. She asks him how he could kill his own people. He tells her that he's Egyptian and a member of the Coptic Orthodox Church. He kiddingly says he could kill all the Muslims he wants. She reports him to school for making a threat to her. He is not punished and promise to watch his words in the future.

Waguih seeks Zara out. As part of PsyOps, Waguih's task was to counter the message that the Americans were bringing the Jews to steal Iraq's oil and wealth. The Americans rode through the streets with their loudspeakers spewing promises, threats and a phone number to report insurgents. He spoke Egyptian Arabic and taught himself Iraqi. They used him on the loudspeaker.

Waguih had joined the military to get help with college costs and to make his father proud. He felt the bias after joining the military but the jabs were more direct. Some of the Marines openly hated him but ironically they would have fought to save his life. Zara points out that he had to watch the men who hated him kill people who looked like him.

Waguih tells Zara that he told her the entire truth. He did kill people; not with guns but he was responsible for death. The last person he told that to was his father; it got him kicked out of the house. He tells her about how the Marines and other Marines slung the dirtiest insults they could think of and played loud rap music over loudspeakers to rile the people up. Angry insurgents running out of mosques would be mowed down.

When Waguih returned home he felt better for having done something bigger than himself. But he also felt less because what he was involved in was a very ugly experience. Waguih braces himself to tell Zara about the conversation with his father. He had the name of a terrorist leader named Laith al-Tawhid. The plan was to call him out by name in Iraqi Arabic and tell him that they had his wife and daughters who were whoring themselves to the Marines. He stayed on the loudspeaker for an hour with a blow-by-blow description of the rape and abuse of the women. Laith al-Tawhid went on the attack and he was mowed down.

Waguih's father was shaken and ashamed of his son. Waguih can see that Zara is upset with what he had done but she doesn't have the angry outburst he anticipated. She leaves and tells him that perhaps they'll talk again.



Analysis

The character Waguih represents the shame and guilt that many military personnel feel about the specter of death that is a prominent part of their world after deployment. Since Waguih could speak Arabic, he was snatched up by PsyOps because he could talk to the Iraqis, both friend and enemy. Waguih is symbolic of the exploitation by the military of its personnel. No one asked him if he wanted to propagandize the Iraqis with lies and degradation. Because he was fluent in Arabic they decided that he would perform a role for the Marines that he had no desire to have. Topping off the exploitative manner in which he was used, his words led to the death of another human being.

Waguih is symbolic of the guilt that a nation feels for the deaths that its armed forces are responsible for. He tells Zara that he did not pull the trigger yet he was responsible for the loss of another human's life. The Americans as a whole do not pull the trigger either yet it's their military that represents them that does.

Zara represents forgiveness. She recently converted to Islam. Waguih tells her the story about how he was used to lure a man from his house who was then shot and killed by Waguih's squad. Zara is hurt that he killed a Muslim but, ironically, she offers her forgiveness by saying she understood. Perhaps she was speaking for thousands of Muslims who lost loved ones in the war.

Discussion Question 1

How does Waguih perceive himself in comparison to his fellow Amherst students? What about Zara draws Waguih to her?

Discussion Question 2

What does Waguih mean when he says he didn't kill anyone in Iraq but was responsible for someone's death? Describe the feelings that Waguih has over an incident in Iraq.

Discussion Question 3

How does Waguih's father react to his admission about the incident in Iraq? Why does his father react the way he does? Draw a comparison between his father's reaction and that of Zara.

Vocabulary

mystique, unvarnished, sojourn, academia, imperialism, inartfully, hookah, voyeurism, ambient, imam, propaganda, lethality, mosques



War Stories

Summary

Wilson is tired of telling war stories. Not with Jenks so much. Jenks was severely injured. His face is a combination of scar tissue and wrinkles. He has no hair or ears. It's still hard not to stare at him. Two girls, Jessie and Sarah, will be joining them at the bar. Wilson and Jenks joined the Marine Corps at the same time. They're a lot alike except that Wilson's luckier than Jenks. The girls usually eat up the war stories. They had spent most of their deployments building and repairing roads, so they had to fabricate war stories for the girls. Wilson asks Jenks if he ever thought of getting a prostitute. Jenks says there's plenty of guys like him. He knows of one who got married and had a kid. He plans to give his sperm to a sperm bank. His line is not going to die with him.

Jessie and Sarah arrive. The guys know Jessie; Sarah is Jessie's actor friend and she's beautiful. Jessie is slightly disabled; she is missing one finger. Jessie is just this side of ugly. Jenks fell hard for her when he met her at a gathering of disabled veterans. Jessie had brought Sarah so that she could learn about IEDs for a play she's writing with the New York veterans' community. Wilson is there to protect Jenks. The play isn't political; the writers just want to present the facts.

Sarah asks Jenks for an account of his injury and its aftermath. Jenks says there was lots of pain for a long time. Jenks has been trying for a long time to remember everything; it's in bits and pieces in his mind. His head injury caused memory loss. His first thought when he came to was his family. His family didn't know if he'd survive. He remembers a bright light and a flash and the smell of sulfur. Then everything went black. Like a punch-out. He was awake but frozen. His eardrums had burst; he couldn't hear. Two Marines he was with died. When he woke he wondered where they were. He remembers screaming. Nightmares and reactions to smells and sounds plague him.

Jenks couldn't move and couldn't see. Red hot shrapnel was burning embedded in every part of his body. He was given the drug, Versed, which kills memory. He was being power transfused with blood because he'd lost so much. His pulse was lost several times. His life was saved repeatedly. So many people helped him through it. He passes his notes to Wilson who reads Jenks' written words. He was lucky to be alive. Some had given more than he had. He has his limbs, brain and soul.

Jenks underwent 54 surgeries during his recovery. He'd rather look like he does than go through another surgery. The changing of the bandages after surgery was particularly painful. Wilson and Jessie go outside for a smoke break. She tells him he's too protective of Jenks. She thinks the interview will be good for him.

Wilson tells Sarah that Jenks was just like him. Not worthy to be the subject of a play. Good thing he caught on fire.



Analysis

In “War Stories,” one Marine, Wilson, came home from duty in Iraq ostensibly free of injury – although he is scarred psychologically. But there isn’t a scratch on him. The other Marine, his friend Jenks, was terribly disfigured in an IED explosion. He’ll never be the same. The girls don’t like him – he’s scary looking without hair and ears and skin that makes him look like he’s melting. It is difficult for Wilson to look at Jenks. They had been so much alike. They were the same age, grew up in the same kind of neighborhoods, joined the Marines at the same time and both planned to live in New York City when they returned. One was the doppelganger of the other.

Although Jenks is horribly scarred, he is thankful to be alive and that he didn’t lose a limb. Wilson, who is in perfect physical shape, is struggling with the guilt he feels over Jenks’ disfigurement. He can’t look at Jenks because it’s like looking at himself, at what could have so easily happened to him instead of Jenks. Wilson knows that he is fortunate that it wasn’t him but with the pain and guilt he’s bearing it kind of was him. They are still doppelgangers.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Wilson feel protective of Jenks? What is the basis of the guilt he feels about Jenks?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Jenks want to donate his sperm to a sperm bank? Does Jenks have the chance of a normal life? Why or why not.

Discussion Question 3

After the serious injuries Jenks received, what positive feelings does he have about life? Describe the difficulties in living with Jenks’ injuries and pain.

Vocabulary

precarious, indulgent, shrapnel, orthopedics, plasma, epinephrine

Unless It's A Sucking Chest Wound

Summary

He wakes to the ringing phone. Kevin Boylan is calling. He's afraid it's actually Vockler calling. But that couldn't be; Vockler's dead. Boylan was a captain in the Marines. Boylan's back from Afghanistan. He tells Boylan that he got a job. The pay is \$160,000 plus bonuses. Most of his fellow law students at NYU are heading to similar positions. Boylan's voice reminds him of Iraq. He doesn't miss it. His duties consisted of spreadsheets and stacks of paper. He feels guilty that he didn't have the real Iraq experience. Sergeant Julian Deme was a hero, good and brave and dead. He didn't answer Boylan's call because of Deme; he answered it because of James Vockler.

He had been his platoon's adjutant on his second deployment to Fallujah. Boylan had been his favorite lieutenant. He never looked down on him because he was an office jockey. Boylan had written a citation when Deme died. He asked him to rewrite it for him. The citation that Boylan wrote is biographical rather than about a specific act of bravery. He tells Boylan they don't give citations out for being a great guy. He agrees to rewrite the citation.

Deme had saved James Vockler in the incident in which he lost his life. Deme lost his life trying to pull the injured Vockler to safety. The award that the citation was seeking was the Medal of Honor. He had to interview the guys in Deme's squad. He does his best in rewriting the citation to make a case that Deme should be awarded the Medal. Boylan felt terrible about the incident. He had sent the battalion into a dangerous area that they had been told to avoid.

Deme was awarded the Navy Cross. It was the same week that he got his acceptance letter from NYU. The last time he saw Vockler was when he left for redeployment in Afghanistan. Three weeks later he was out of the Corps and off to New York. He felt more like a Marine out of the Corps than in it. His friends called him "the Marine." His college friends knew little about the Marines. Many didn't understand why anyone would join up. NYU law students were encouraged to take public service jobs so that their loans would be forgiven.

He read on the Internet that 21-year-old Vockler had been killed in action. He was shaken and grief-stricken. He spent hours watching YouTube clips and reading articles about the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines – Vockler's unit. He didn't make any friends at NYU that first year. During his second year he became involved with a female law student who survived childhood abuse which she equated with PTSD.

Boylan tells him that he had a DUI which ruins any chance he had for promotion to major. He fills Boylan in on his civilian life and his struggles with what career to pursue. He asks Boylan if America won the Iraq war. Boylan is evasive in his response. He has a Bronze Star but refuses to say how he got it only commenting that it was an ugly day.



Analysis

Guilt has a dominant presence and is a motivator in this story. Guilt plagues the young lawyer who was an adjutant in the Iraq war failing to serve on the battlefield. He is symbolic of those who served and survived the war but felt guilt and shame that they lived. He also feels guilty that he encouraged Vockler, a young Marine, to transfer to Afghanistan where he later was killed in action. Vockler felt guilty because Sergeant Deme lost his life pulling him to safety during a firefight.

Lieutenant Boylan felt guilty that Sergeant Deme lost his life because he had been instrumental in ordering the squad into the dangerous location where Deme was killed. To assuage his guilt, Boylan wrote up a citation recommending that Deme receive the Medal of Honor. Deme received the Navy Cross posthumously. But no matter what medal or citation he received, he was still dead and Boylan still felt guilty.

Once the adjutant returned to New York he got word that Vockler died in action. He was shaken with grief and guilt. Boylan refused to tell the adjutant why he received the Bronze Cross. He would only say that it was an ugly day. Perhaps the adjutant is better off not knowing. It must have been ugly because soon after Boylan was charged with DUI which eliminated any chance he had for promotion. Ironically, neither the adjutant or Boylan could say definitively if the U.S. had won the war. Neither one felt like winners.

Discussion Question 1

Why did the narrator feel guilty about the position he had with the Marines? Why is he haunted by Vockler's death?

Discussion Question 2

What was wrong with the citation that Boylan wrote for Deme to receive the Medal of Honor? What approach did the narrator of the story take in rewriting it? What medal was awarded to Deme?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Boylan reluctant to take about the circumstances that led to his receiving a Bronze Star? Why is he evasive when the narrator asks him if the U.S. had won the war? Did the U.S. win the war?

Vocabulary

idiosyncrasies, mammalian, nostalgic, adjutant, platitude, reciprocating, euphoria, maudlin



Ten Kliks South

Summary

A group of insurgents is taken out by heavy artillery on a checkpoint ten kliks to the south. At the chow hall the Marines are giddy and still excited about the assault. Sanchez says that after two months it was about time they killed someone. They hadn't needed the whole battery but it was fun. The men are guessing at how many they killed. Someone suggests as much as 40 or 6.6 people per gun. Divided by the nine Marines on the guns, each man killed .7 people – a torso and a head or a torso and a leg. Another battalion hit first and may have killed the insurgents. But some may have still been alive. Their artillery may have killed some who were dying.

Jewett says he doesn't feel like he killed anyone. Sanchez and Voorstadt says it was good. They killed really bad guys. What they did would be murder in the states. Sergeant Deetz points out that the weapon was crew-served. No one is a murderer. Others point out that the factory workers that made the ammo and the taxpayers that paid for it are culpable. And the lieutenant gave the order.

The narrator had gotten married to his wife, Jessie, just a week before he was deployed so she'd get benefits if he died. He doesn't feel married. He feels guilty that he hasn't seen much action to tell her about. He recalls how he had loaded the rounds that morning for the assault and how the operation proceeded. The sound of the heavy artillery had vibrated through their bodies. He tasted the gunpowder that was in the air. Their assault was the most powerful in ground warfare. When it was over, they were surrounded in smoke. They knew that ten kliks south was riddled with shrapnel and twisted corpses.

Images of a corpse who'd been a living, breathing human being a few hours before flashes in his mind. The narrator asks Sergeant Deetz if they should have a patrol out for possible survivors. But shouldn't they clean up the bodies, he asks. Deetz responds that they create the corpses; they don't clean them up. He calls him "killer." He recalls that PRP, personal retrieval and processing, cleans up the bodies.

He wonders where PRP is and walks around the base to find it. He tells the desk sergeant about the assault ten kliks south of the base. He'd never killed anyone before he tells the sergeant. He thought PRP would go out and inspect the area. The sergeant responds that they only take care of U.S. casualties. Iraqis take care of their own. He tells the lance corporal to take his wedding band off and put it around his neck with his dog tags. It'll make his job easier. The lance corporal puts his ring on the dog tag chain as requested.

He passes by Fallujah Surgical. He recalls a few days before when Deetz saluted and called his men to attention. A stretcher covered in an American flag was being taken out.



He thinks of all the Marines that the stretcher will pass and how they will all salute and honor him.

Analysis

A squad of Marines that had never carried off a major assault finally does so. The kill number is great. To avoid focusing on the reality that they had taken the lives of actual human beings, several of the Marines begin a macabre mathematics game in which they decide how many enemies each of the men killed. They figure the total number dead and divide by the number of men in the squad.

Jewett is one of the Marines and he finds no utility or humor in this game. His guilt and shame compels him to believe that he actually didn't kill anyone. No one pays much attention to him and his need for absolution. His difficulty in struggling with the mass murder that just occurred causes him to risk insubordination by confronting the sergeant with his view that they didn't need to use as much fire power as they employed. Despite his disclaimers, Jewett was part of the squad and, therefore, part of the murder.

The calculating nature of the desk sergeant is jarring when he asks the Marine to place his wedding ring on his dog tag chain because it will make his job easier in case the Marine dies.

This story represents the callousness and cynicism that military personnel acquire when dealing with death and dying. They have seen so much killing that human life has become meaningless to them. Perhaps it helps them through their tours of duty but it undoubtedly catches up with them later when they return to the lives they led before their war experience.

Discussion Question 1

Why do the men in the squad that just launched its first successful attack take the killings so lightly? Describe how they disparage the dead enemies.

Discussion Question 2

Why is Jewett insistent that he didn't kill anyone? Why does he keep insisting that the battalion had used too much firepower? Why responses does he receive from his sergeant?

Discussion Question 3

Why does the desk sergeant in PRP tell the Marine to put his wedding ring on his dog tags chain? How does death loom eerily in this story?

Vocabulary

collateral, cynic, quadrant, lanyard, howitzer, pristine



Characters

Sergeant Price

Sergeant Price is a character in “Redeployment,” the first short story in the book. Price and his unit shot dogs in Iraq – on purpose. They were often seen lapping up blood, not American blood, but human blood and it was too ghastly to witness. It was comparatively so minor for Price and his unit. They were in the midst of war with strong possibilities that there would be victims among them – killed in action or wounded beyond recognition.

When Sergeant Price is nearing the end of his deployment, many images from his experience run through his mind. The dogs, the pretty little Iraqi girls who become prostitutes seemingly overnight, the dead Iraqis many - innocent women and children, and worse his fallen brothers in arms. As he contemplates going home he thinks of his wife Cheryl and his dog Vicar. They're waiting for him to return. Vicar isn't like the Iraqi dogs. He's well cared for; no blood-lapping for him.

Price's return is not easy; he's a smart fellow and he knew it wouldn't be. But there were surprises. After he turned in his rifle, he felt lost. He didn't know what to do with his hands. He had become so accustomed to his rifle. He missed it. He had been conditioned to have it to need it. What if he needed it at home? When he walked down the mall street in his hometown, he couldn't help but check the roofs for snipers.

Vicar was glad to see Price but he was sick and dying. Price pampered and stayed with him as long as he could but he knew all about life and death. The dog was dying. He told his wife he would deal with it. He took Vicar to a remote area and took out his shot gun and put him out of his misery. He'd had experience with that.

Waguiah

Waguiah is the main character in “Psychological Operations.” As the story unfolds, he is currently a student at Amherst. He is an Iraq war veteran. He is drawn to Zara Davies who he has a class with. She is obviously very bright, assertive and not afraid to join the debate even though she's a freshman. Waguiah and Zara are the only non-whites in their class.

The two become acquainted and a friendship begins to grow. At first he doesn't mention much about Iraq but he begins to trust Zara and wants to tell her about his experience, some of which he is not very proud of. They lose contact after the semester ends but meet up again. Waguiah is shocked to learn that the former Afro-haired, mini-skirt wearing Zara has converted to Islam. She is dressed in long baggy clothes and is wearing a scarf on her hair. After the initial shock, he finds the same Zara he knew although it's a more demure version of herself. He still feels trust in her.



Waguhih was born in Egypt and raised as a Coptic Christian. The family moved to North Carolina where he learned first-hand what discrimination and bias was all about. He joined the service so that he could get financial help after his deployment. Due to his fluency in Arabic he was recruited for PsyOps. He tells Zara of a deep shame he had associated with his service. When he told her father, he threw him out of the house. Waguhih used his Arabic to lure a potential terrorist out of his house. He was wanted by the Military. He shouted derogatory and cruel things about the man's wife and daughters to lure him out. He used a loudspeaker to spew his comments so that people all around heard the deluge of insults. The man ran out and got shot.

Zara is jarred by her friend's story. At first she seems to reject him but she digs deep and finds the ability within her new religion to stand by him. She leaves for school but tells him that she will see him soon.

Cheryl Price

Cheryl Price is Sergeant Price's wife. On his return from Iraq, she greets him with a large sign that reads, "Sgt Price, now that you're home you can do some chores. Here's your to-do list. 1) Me. 2) Repeat Number 1." Cheryl works a late shift at a restaurant and leaves Price alone with his dog to think about his experiences. She is kind and understanding and realizes he has to adjust to life back home. She also understands that he must deal with their dying dog.

PFC Dyer

PFC Dyer is traumatized by the injuries sustained by his fellow squad members. He is ordered to treat the serious wound of a fellow Marine until they can get him to the hospital. After he finishes tending to the fellow, Dyer's flight suit is drenched in blood. His squad leaders finds him staring out of the window obviously shaken and lost. His squad leader takes off his flight suit and gives it to Dyer to wear in an attempt to ease his anguish.

CPL Sweets

CPL Sweet is badly injured in an assault. He is bleeding profusely. The Doc in Sweets' unit orders PFC Dyer to tend to him to try to stem the bleeding. Doc treats Sweet's thigh wound with QuikClot which is extremely painful. But Sweets smiles through it and gives the thumbs up. Finally, Sweet is taken by a helicopter that swoops down to take him to a base hospital.

Lance CPL Ozzie Suba and PFC Timhead

Lance CPL Ozzie Suba sees the trauma that young, green PFC Timhead experiences when he shoots and kills a young Iraqi boy. Timhead fears being questioned by the



others about the killing which he feels horrible about. To calm Timhead, Suba volunteers to take ownership of the shooting. While it takes some pressure off him, Timhead is haunted by the images of the dead boy and his grieving mother and siblings.

CPL G

In “Bodies” CPL G is credited with fabricating a story up about a lieutenant colonel who stopped to help Mortuary Affairs Marines move a body. The bag ripped and the officer is deluged with rotting blood and guts that slide through a cut in the bag. The colonel “screamed like a bitch.” Mortuary Affairs Marines weren’t on the battlefield risking their lives and typically exaggerated the horrors of their assignments when people asked them what they did for the war effort.

Cindy

Cindy was a true believer. In “Money As a Weapons System,” Cindy is a dedicated civilian worker who has devoted herself to setting up a women’s clinic in Tikrit for the Iraqi women who aren’t allowed to see doctors and are in dire need of care. The clinic also serves as a way for women to seek help when they are trapped in a domestic violence situation.

The Professor

The Professor is a short, pudgy Sunni Muslim who everyone called the Professor. He was assigned to be the translator for the Foreign Service Officer in “Money As a Weapons System.” When the officers asks him why people call him the Professor, he responds that he was a professor “before you came and destroyed the country.” Although the Professor is bitter and hates the Americans, he does his job as a translator since there is no longer an opportunity to be a professor and he must take what he can get.

Kazemi

Kazemi is an Iraqi and is the Chief Engineer for the water treatment plant on the outskirts of Tikrit. He works with the U.S. Foreign Service Officer through a translator. He shows the officer a model of the new treatment plant. He insists that the plant be designed with security towers where guards can be stationed in the event of attack. The officer is scheduled for a second meeting with Kazemi but he doesn’t show up. Later, the officer learns that Kazemi had been assassinated.



Rodriguez

In “Prayer in the Furnace” Rodriguez seeks the counsel of the base Priest in hopes of alleviating the guilt and shame he feels for not stopping the killing of an innocent Iraqi man. He did not pull the trigger of the gun that sent the bullet that killed the man but he had time to stop that man who did. He asks the Priest if he is as guilty as the Marine who shot the man. He wants to know if he is a killer. The priest fails to ease his mind. Rodriguez continues as best he can with the guilt that plagues him.

The Priest

The Priest in “Prayer in the Furnace” is frustrated when he cannot get anyone to intercede on behalf of Rodriguez who is suffering so much from his guilt and confusion. The Priest is rebuffed by the CO and other commanders and team leaders who assert that Rodriguez did nothing wrong. The Priest contacts his former mentor, Father Connelly, about getting help for Rodriguez and other young Marines who were suffering psychologically from their experiences. The old priest doesn't give him any advice he can act on, only telling him that the feelings the men are having natural given the circumstances. The priest wants to help the men but is given no support. He tells Rodriguez to basically keep the faith but perhaps it was too late... he'd already lost his.

Zara Davies

Zara Davies was a fellow student and friend of Waguih. During their friendship she becomes a Muslim which throws him but he trusts and accepts her. He confesses to a shameful anti-Muslim incident that he was involved in during his deployment in Iraq. She is stunned by his admission but is able use her new religion to understand and forgive him.

Wilson and Jenks

Wilson and Jenks in “War Stories” were very much alike before their deployments to Iraq. Jenks returns horrible disfigured for life while Wilson returns virtually unscathed. He can hardly look at his friend and he feels guilty that it was Jenks instead of him, although he's happy it wasn't him. His tortured conflict and guilt for not being scarred for life leads him to be overly protective of his friend.

Captain Kevin Boylan

When Boylan was a lieutenant he wrote a citation recommending Sergeant Deme, who died in a valorous act, for the Medal of Honor award. Deme eventually received the Navy Cross posthumously instead. Boylan was unable to tell why he received the

Bronze Cross. He would only say it was an ugly day. He did not respond when asked if the U.S. had won or lost the war.

PFC Jewett

In “Ten Kliks South,” PFC Jewett is a young Marine who is traumatized by a large assault and killing carried out by his unit. While the others are counting how many enemies each man killed, he is insisting that he didn’t kill anyone. Risking insubordination, he continually repeats to his sergeant that they used unnecessary force. Jewett cannot contend with being called a killer.



Symbols and Symbolism

IED

The single most terrifying aspect of deployment to Iraq was the IED – the improvised explosive device. Just as the name suggests, the device is an improvised or non-conventional militaristic bomb and was placed randomly about the Iraqi terrain during the 2003 Iraq War. These explosives are either triggered remotely or set off when someone steps on them or otherwise disturbs them. They are referred to as “improvised” because there is no set way in which they are designed or constructed. It is deadly because of its close proximity to its target. There is no pre-warning of the explosive and they are typically buried so that there is no visible sign of the device. The Marines feared the IEDs because of their stealth and deadly nature and because they saw what they did to the victims. Death was always a possible result and the loss of limbs was a probable one. The IED was the most dominant purveyor of fear in the entirety of the war.

Daisy Chain

At first blush it would seem impossible to come up with a device more frightening than the IED. However, since “improvisation” is a given in the mix, a particularly macabre device with an innocent sounding name filled that bill. The Daisy Chain was an IED with a one-two punch. The first explosion was a short distance away from advancing Marines, terrifying and immobilizing them, literally making them stop in their tracks. Immediately following was the second blast that was linked to the first which went off closer to the area where the enemies surmised the Marines would stop in horror at the first blast.

Flashbang

The flashbang was a U.S. Military device. It was used when Marines were tasked with bringing a house or other building down. If an entry or door was blocked or chained shut, the flashbang was activated and thrown against the door or down the shaft. It was fast and powerful and would quickly blast an opening allowing the Marines to have quick access. The device gave assurance to the Marines that they could enter a dwelling quickly without being delayed outside and vulnerable to sniper fire.

Hajjis

“Hajjis” is the term that the Marines used for Iraqis and other Muslims. Although the word itself was one of honor and referred to a Muslim who had made the journey to Mecca, the Marines and other U.S. military used it as a pejorative.



Power Drill

In the short story, “Frago,” two Iraqi men are found in a house that had been commandeered by al-Qaeda. The two men were being videotaped as they were being tortured. Their ankles had been severely wounded – beyond repair – by power drills that had been drilled through them. This was one of many examples of Muslim-on-Muslim torture.

MRAP

Making an effort to reduce the death and injury from IEDs, the Marines were equipped with 32,000 pound MRAP or Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles. The thinking was that the heavy vehicle could withstand the blasts at least to some degree and thus protect the Marines riding in them. In the short story, “After Action Report,” the MRAP did not put up much resistance to an IED that actually lifted off the ground and buckled in the air. Several men were killed in this story and several other were severely injured. So much for the ambush protected vehicle.

Beekeeping

Bob a veteran in the Foreign Service Office advises Nathan, the newly arriving Foreign Service Officer, that if he wants to succeed he should forget the water treatment plant renovation and focus on a smaller goal – beekeeping. The project would be much less costly and training Iraqi widows in the beekeeping craft would be a plus for the Foreign Service Department. It would give the women incomes and would be a boost to the economy.

Sports Diplomacy

Nathan received a large box of baseball uniforms. The Foreign Service Department wanted him to distribute the uniforms to the local kids and teach them how to play baseball – what could be more American? Their thinking was that this “sports diplomacy” could be the first step toward democracy for Iraq.

Medal of Honor

The Medal of Honor is the top citation that can be given to any member of the U.S. military. In the short story, “Unless It’s a Sucking Wound of the Chest,” Captain Boylan submits a citation recommending that Sergeant Deme, who died in action, receive the Medal of Honor. The Medal of Honor recipients are revered and considered the saints of the Corp. Most of the recipients are dead. Not all dead candidates receive the medal. In Deme’s case he received the Navy Cross instead of the Medal of Honor.



Propaganda

Waguih in “Psychological Operations” felt guilt and shame for calling out a man to his death. He was recruited by PsyOps because he could speak Iraq Arabic and therefore was valuable because he could communicate with friend and foe alike in Iraq. He was ordered to get on the loud speaker and spew degrading remarks about a man’s wife and daughters. The man was suspected of being a terrorist and the Marines wanted to capture or kill him. Waguih screamed the insults at the man for an hour on the loud speaker for all to hear. The man couldn’t take it and rushed out of his house and met his death in a barrage of artillery from Waguih’s fellow Marines. Waguih’s felt shame for humiliating the man and his family before he led him to his death.

Settings

Iraq

Iraq is the scene of the majority of the stories in “Redeployment.” The stories take place during the Iraq war that was launched with the American invasion in 2003. The terrain of Iraq is mainly desert. It is a hot and oppressive region. The reference to Iraq in the story entitled, “Prayer in the Furnace” captures the unbearable temperatures that the Marines were made to deal with. The Marines not only had to deal with the rugged desert and sweltering temperatures, buried everywhere in the terrain were the deadly IEDs that everyone feared.

Fallujah

The city of Fallujah, Iraq, was one of the hotspots of the Iraq war. Sergeant Price of the short story, “Redeployment” had been assigned there. When he returned to this hometown, flashes of Fallujah came to mind when he walked down the mall in town. He was compelled to check the rooftops for snipers as he did in Fallujah. It was on a crowded street in Fallujah that a huge MRAP was lifted into the air by the powerful blast from an IED.

In “Psychological Operations,” Waguih lovingly refers to a section north of Fallujah as East Manhattan. He confesses to Zara, a fellow Amherst student that in Fallujah he was tasked with luring out a known terrorist by defaming his wife and daughters. Since he could speak Iraq Arabic, he was on a loudspeaker for an hour spewing derogatory remarks about the man’s wives and daughters “whoring” themselves to Marines. The man was outraged by the barrage of insults and rushed out of his house and shot to death by Marines in Waguih’s battalion.

Tikrit Water Treatment Plant

Nathan was the Foreign Service Officer in, “Money As a Weapons System,” who was assigned to Tikrit to get the water treatment plant up and running. Tikrit was the hometown of Saddam Hussein. When Nathan first arrived, the 82nd Airborne was building greenhouses near Tikrit. The water treatment plant that Nathan was to give new life to was outside the city in a remote and desolate area. The Iraqi Chief Engineer presented a model of the renovated plant insisting that guard towers be erected to protect the plant against attack.

Amherst

In “Psychological Operations,” Waguih tells his story about his tour of duty in Iraq from the perspective of a returning veteran who is a student at Amherst. He becomes friendly



with a fellow student, Zara, after meeting her in Clark House in the “Punishment, Politics, and Culture” class. Waguih was originally from Egypt and only joined the Marines so he could get a college scholarship.

Dover

Dover, Delaware, is the U.S. location where the bodies of all fallen Marines who had died in Iraq were sent. In “Ten Klinks South” a reference is made to the bodies of deceased Marines being greeted with silent honor as they are delivered to Dover Air Force Base upon their return home. The families are invited to attend the removal of their loved ones’ remains as they are taken off the transports.



Themes and Motifs

Fear

Fear is a theme that emerges throughout the twelve short stories in “Redeployment” by Phil Klay. When Sergeant Price returns home, he is struck with fear when he walks down the mall in his hometown. But it’s not a fear in the present and now. He flashes back to Fallujah where he and his fellow Marines routinely scoured the rooftops looking for snipers. Fear struck him in his hometown setting that was similar to a street in Fallujah. He feared the snipers that were not there and feared how he could protect himself. His hands bore no weapons. He didn’t know what to do with his hands; he missed holding his rifle. He had lived in fear for his own life for so long that it wasn’t easy to turn off.

“Frago” tells the story of a young PFC who is traumatized by the wounds suffered by his fellow Marines. In “After Action Report” fear of being ambushed drives a young Marine to fire into a group of Iraqi civilians, killing a young boy. In “OIF” and in many of the stories there is focus on the deadly IEDs that are planted everywhere throughout the Iraqi terrain. The Marines are charged with trying to hunt them down but fearful that they’ll find them in a very wrong way.

It is only natural for a human being to fear for his own life - especially in the circumstance of war where life and death is part of the bargain. While being alive and living with this fear, many of their fellow Marines have fallen. They ask themselves why they were spared... many wish that it had been them. There is a machismo associated with being a soldier which is intensified when becoming a Marine. Marines have the reputation of being the first deployed into danger and tougher and more valorous than the soldiers of other military organizations. Feeling fearful does not correlate to that image. Therefore, when the Marines are gripped with fear, they tend to repress it. An outward show of fear by a Marine is certain to bring harsh criticism from his peers and leaders alike. There is an internal mechanism that is triggered by fear and produces quite another emotion. Surviving Marines feel shame because they are alive and the fear they are experiencing whether hidden or overt is a dishonor to their fellow fallen Marines.

Guilt

The characters in “Redeployment” share many of the same reactions to the experience of being in a brutal and unrelenting war. There are the natural and expected feelings of fear, anger, bitterness, regret and even fight or flight. Deeper and more profound and therefore longer-lasting emotions also emerged during the deployments of these men. Female soldiers undoubtedly experienced many of the same reactions and emotions but there are no military women who are focused upon as main characters in these stories. The author may feel guilty about that if he stops and thinks about it.



Guilt causes one of the more serious forms of damage to returning soldiers. It plays with the mind and turns triumph into defeat and the titles of PFC and CPL to killer. The sources of guilt in war-torn Iraq are plentiful. A little boy is shot to death in front of his mother's eyes. His siblings are present confused and fearful that they might be next. The Marine who pulled the trigger tells himself that it wasn't his bullet. He can't face the questions about the incident and he can't rid his mind of the horror and devastation of the mother's face.

A brave Marine earns a distinguished medal and other awards. He is cited for bravery above and beyond. Yet he is torn up with guilt because the medals don't take away the fact that he lives while his battle buddies died. A private seeks the comfort of a priest. He thinks he could have stopped a needless killing yet didn't act. He asks the priest if it's as bad to not stop a murder as it is to murder someone. The priest has no answer that soothes the private's soul. How long will he be in the clutches of a guilt for an action that in reality he may not have been able to stop – but don't tell him that.

Two Marines who signed up at the same time were so much alike, they even looked alike. But one was luckier than the other. One Marine emerged unscathed at least ostensibly. His doppelganger was the victim of an IED explosion. He lost memory cells, his ears and was left with burned and wrinkled skin that was an improvement over his initial appearance but only after 54 surgeries. The Marine who remained intact feels guilty because he still is uncomfortable looking at his friend... it's too much like looking at himself. The guilt has caused the Marine to be overly protective of his friend which won't change anything but perhaps will ease his guilt.

The Aftermath

Returning back home from a war zone would sound to most people like a joyful and jubilant experience. The Marine returned and lived. He served his country valiantly, stayed alive and came home. The deployment was such a brief part of the Marine's life. Many of the images and experiences would surely diminish and quickly fade. But that wasn't the case in most returns. The Marines returned with a lot more baggage than they went over there with.

When Sergeant Price turns his rifle in, he feels lost without it. He literally doesn't know what to do with his hands. That rifle had been his personal bodyguard for a year. When he walked down the main street in Wilmington, he couldn't stop himself from checking the rooftops for snipers. When the narrator of "War Stories" returned from active duty, he grows tired of telling war stories. He doesn't want to talk about what he observed and what he had to do yet it was always there, lingering in his mind.

The guilt that Rodriguez felt in, "Prayer in a Furnace" for not stopping a killing, couldn't be resolved even after seeing a priest. The priest tells him that the Lord assures his followers that they will not suffer alone. Boy does Rodriguez know that. The PsyOps Marine, Waguih, is shamed when he confesses to his friend after his return that he lured a man from his house by shouting disparaging words, all lies, about the man's wife and



daughters. The man angered by the verbal assault rushed out and was taken down by a barrage of artillery from other members of Waguih's unit. He didn't officially kill anyone during his tour of duty but he felt as responsible as if he'd pulled the trigger.

The Marines in the stories of "Redeployment" who return to the states are fortunate that they lived. But that relatively short deployment in Iraq changed them forever. They are wiser and tougher and older way beyond their years.

Recovery

The recovery that the Marines returning from Iraq undergo in a word is slow. Some will recover very little; some not at all. Jenks was badly injured in an IED explosion. As a result of the explosion, Jenks he has no ears. There is no recovering ears. His young face is pulled and wrinkled; his smile looks like a grimace. He's had 54 surgeries and doesn't want another. The bandage changes after an operation have been unbearable. He says that the pain is beyond what anyone could imagine. He doesn't give voice to exactly how badly he feels and how life has sent him an outrageous curve ball. However, he does want to donate his sperm to a sperm bank. He doesn't want his line to die with him. By making these plans, it is obvious that he has no hope in finding a wife and having a family. He's given up on a large portion of his life.

Rodriguez, Timhead, Dyer and others were all traumatized by the specter of death. They had all gone through training and passed marksmanship. They probably figured taking down a few Arabs a day wouldn't be bad and certainly not difficult considering their above-average shooting skills as a Marine. But in each case, these young men were completely immobilized. Timhead had panicked and shot and killed a young Iraqi boy. The look on the mother's face will stay with him forever. Can he truly recover from that?

Rodriguez did not pull the trigger but he could have stopped the fellow Marine who did. He didn't act. Perhaps it was out of fear of being ridiculed or looking weak, but he allowed a fellow Marine to kill an innocent Iraqi. He is haunted by his sin. Even a priest could not alleviate his angst. Perhaps time will blunt the vividness of the event but it will never be erased entirely and his recovery from it will be slow and never complete. Dyer was nervous and trigger happy when he shot into a crowd of innocent Iraqis and killed a man. He publicly denied he shot the man but privately he was enduring profound psychological suffering. The horror of the moment will never truly go away.

Victory or Defeat

The flashpoint of a war and the headline that comes out of it in the end is victory or defeat. It's a simple premise where no gray areas could exist. However, that simplistic view of warfare does not apply to many wars including the Iraq war of 2003. The stories of the Marines contained in "Redeployment" are bereft of defined victories and feelings of triumph.



Sergeant Price came home but didn't feel at home. He'd forever left part of himself behind in Fallujah. He missed his rifle. It had become part of his life. He wasn't proud of his deployment. He even shot dogs over there. He wasn't trained to shoot dogs. But the experience came in handy when he had to shoot his own ailing dog. Sergeant Price returned home a sadder and wiser man who did not feel victorious on any level.

When Waguih returned home he felt he had risked his life for something bigger than himself. Yet he felt less of a man. What he was part of was worthy. They had been fighting very bad people. Yet it was an ugly thing. Waguih could not reconcile with the shame he felt for debasing innocent women in the pursuit of a suspected terrorist. He felt more confusion and conflict than victory.

Where was the victory for Dyer who publicly denied he shot a man but couldn't sleep at night? What triumph could Timhead ever have felt after shooting and killing an innocent young boy because he was spooked? Wilson returned in one peace at least outwardly. But he could barely look at his friend who suffered disfiguring wounds from which he could never recover.

A scene in "Unless It's a Sucking Chest Wound" captures the entire question of victory. Captain Boylan refuses to tell how he earned the Bronze Cross. He would only say that it was a very ugly day. When asked by his friend who had served with him if they had won or lost, Boylan avoided a response.

Styles

Point of View

“Redeployment” by Phil Klay is a series of 12 short stories about the experiences of members of the United States Marine Corps who were deployed to Iraq during the war that began in 2003. The book is dedicated to Klay’s mother and father who had “three sons join the military in a time of war.” The vast knowledge and detail of a Marine’s experience in a war zone that the author provides is confirmation that he was one of those sons. Presumably those who the author thanks for their feedback have expertise in warfare and combat duty and were relied upon to ensure that the stories possessed authenticity and “rang true.” Along with these experts, Klay consulted many other resources to make sure he was presenting accurate depictions of Marines in war time.

Each of the 12 stories are told from the perspective of a Marine, most of which are infantrymen who are in the thick of things. Here are a few examples:

In “Redeployment” Sergeant Price tells his story that begins with shooting dogs in Iraq to having to make a tough decision about his own ailing dog when he returns home. It is obvious that there is a psychological connection between the dogs in Iraq and his own beloved Vicar.

In “Frago” an unnamed squad leader narrates the story of the injuries that his battalion sustains as they “drop” a house per the LT’s orders. Lance Cpl Suba narrates the story in “After Action Report.” He takes the responsibility for shooting a young Iraqi boy although it was a young, traumatized Marine who actually killed him. A Marine assigned to Mortuary Affairs in “Bodies” tells the story of the dirty job of disposing of corpses -- those of Marines and the enemy.

Selecting the stories to be told in the first person brings credibility to the stories. From this perspective, the author is able to bring to the stories in a credible manner the conflict, fear, anger and real emotion that is experienced on the battlefield.

Language and Meaning

“Redeployment” by Phil Klay is a collection of short stories that all focus on the experiences of Marines during the Iraq War that began in 2003. With that premise, there are naturally numerous military references and a multitude of military jargon. Many of the divisions, equipment and assignments are referred to in acronyms.

The biggest on-going threat that the Marines face on a constant basis is from IEDs, improvised explosive devices. The deadly bombs can be hidden anywhere and are designed to explode when the victim is literally right on top of the device. To combat the devastation of the IEDs, the Marines are provided with MRAP (Mine-Resistant Ambush



Protected) vehicles that are designed to provide the maximum protection to Marines driving over and exploding an IED.

The story entitled, “OIF” is rife with military jargon and acronyms. OIF stands for Operation Enduring Freedom (in Afghanistan). The author purposely fills the story with military acronyms to put the reader in the moment while at the same time separating them from the private and secret club that is the USMC. The experiences can be read about and studied but only those who were there fully understand what the war was. This brief excerpt from “OIF” captures the mystique that surrounded the war and its warriors: “EOD handled the bombs. SSTP treated the wounds. PRP processed the bodies. The 08s fired DPICM. The MAW provided CAS. The 03s patrolled the MSR.”

The author also used metaphors to place emphasis on certain events in the stories. In “Unless It’s A Sucking Chest Wound,” the author compares the frustration of the Marines in conducting their duties to two termites in a patch of dirt. “They’ll roll it into little balls, move it from place to place. But they don’t accomplish anything.” In that same story he uses the metaphor of a wounded bee happily drinking nectar that falls through a wound in its body, doesn’t nourish it and eventually leads to its death. Just like the Marines in Iraq that were enthralled and stimulated in a combat that led nowhere.

Structure

“Redeployment” by Phil Klay is a series of short stories that all focus on Marines who served deployments in Iraq during the Iraq war that was sparked with the invasion of U.S. forces in 2003. Although the characters in each of the stories are different, there are strong similarities of theme and substance that undeniably links the stories at their very heart and soul.

Although the 12 stories are distinct and separate, together they tell another story – the tale of an unpopular war with many Marines psychologically and emotionally ill-prepared for war even though they were highly trained in sharpshooting and combat skills. As the reader advances more deeply into the book, the lines between the stories begin to blur.

There’s a specter of sadness that looms over the collection. At the work’s conclusion, the reader recognizes that the characters will never be the same and that their brief deployment in Iraq will stain the rest of their lives, the choices they make and the dreams they have. Despite the fact that the stories are fictional accounts the realism that is brought to the stories give them credibility and the surety that the incidents written about probably actually happened over and over again in the war.

Each story’s premise builds to its own dramatic conclusion while each tale moves the entire work along to build to its grand finale.



Quotes

In Wilmington, you don't have a squad, you don't have a battle buddy, you don't even have a weapon. You startle ten times checking for it and it's not there. You're safe, so your alertness should be at white, but it's not.

-- Sergeant Price (Redeployment paragraph Page 15)

Importance: When Sergeant Price returns home after a deployment, he is still in battle mode. Shopping in Wilmington, it's difficult for him not to look for snipers. He's battle-ready, every movement shakes him. But he has no gun in Wilmington. He refers to being off the battlefield as being at "white." But the transition is not easy.

I tell him we won't let him die. I don't know if I'm lying or not.

-- Sergeant Price (Frago paragraph Page 23)

Importance: This quote captures the life and death reality of war and the uncertainty in which the men and women who are in the fight live under.

Somebody said combat is 99 percent sheer boredom and 1 percent pure terror. They weren't an MP in Iraq. On the roads I was scared all the time. Maybe not pure terror. That's for when the IED actually goes off. But a kind of low-grade terror that mixes with the boredom.

-- Paul "Ozzie" Suba (After Action Report paragraph Page 43)

Importance: Suba captures the atmosphere in the Iraq War. The men were constantly afraid of IEDs going off and killing or maiming them. They were afraid more than they were bored. The Marines knew they could die at any moment.

For a long time I was angry. I didn't want to talk about Iraq, so I wouldn't tell anybody I'd been. And if people knew, if they pressed, I'd tell them lies.

-- Narrator (Bodies paragraph Page 53)

Importance: This Marine's feelings are an example of the blend of anger, guilt, shame, resentment and fear that the men and women who served in Iraq felt when they returned. This reaction is common to returning Marines especially when they served in an unpopular war that the country wasn't behind.

IEDs in drainage ditches or dug into the middle of the road. Some in the bodies of dead camels. Other's daisy-chained together – one in the open to make you stop, another to kill you where you stand.

-- Narrator (OIF paragraph Page 73)

Importance: This quote captures the constant threat of improvised explosive devices or IEDs that the Marines had to contend with on a daily basis. The IEDs were secreted everywhere. Without warning, a Marine could trip one of these bombs off accidentally or it could be exploded remotely and the Marine was either killed or seriously wounded.



The IEDs are responsible for most of the limb amputations that Iraq war veterans have been plagued with.

As I exited the helicopter and headed toward a heavy set man holding a piece of paper with my name scrawled on it, I had the nagging impression that he would see through me to what I fear I was – a fraud and a war tourist.

-- Nathan (In Vietnam They Had Whores paragraph Page 81)

Importance: The Foreign Service Officer has been deployed to Tikrit to get the water treatment plant up and running. This private thought reveals that since he won't be engaged in combat he feels like a fraud and just a visitor to the war zone. It's part of the guilt that soldiers with non-combat jobs have during major conflicts.

You have baked Iraq like a cake and given it to Iran to eat.

-- The Professor (Money as a Weapons System paragraph Page 84)

Importance: The Foreign Officer's translator is called the professor because he was a professor before as he tells him "you came and destroyed the country." The professor is obviously bitter about the destruction of his country and the loss of his professional career.

Rage is good for amping you up before a fight, but something different happens once the fighting begins. There's a kind of joy to it. A surrender. It's not a particularly Christian feeling, but it's a powerful one. Physical aggression has a logic and emotion of its own... That's what I was seeing on Rodriguez's face. The space between when rage ends and violence begins.

-- The Priest (Prayer in the Furnace paragraph Page 127)

Importance: The priest captures the emotion that is involved in war – joy that gives way to rage. Rodriguez had come to him for help. The priest recognized the rage on his face.

And I saw Saddam.' I took a breath. 'I mean, my dad, too. But everybody, my platoon, the DIs, they all knew what he looked like.' Zara blew smoke. 'You saw him through their eyes.' 'Through my own.' 'But how they saw him,' she said. 'Maybe part of how they saw you, too?'

-- Waguih/Zara (Psychological Operations paragraph Page 196)

Importance: Waguih is explaining how he felt as a recruit in Fort Benning preparing to go to Iraq seeing the images of his father and Saddam who he closely resembled on TV. Zara is pointing out the bias that the other Marines felt. They were preparing to fight with Iraqis who looked just like Waguih's father and in fact looked just like Waguih.

The corporal told the little Marine he did good, while I stared into the scope and tried to see the life going out of him. Or the heat, I guess. It happens so slow. Sometimes I'd ask the little Marine if he wanted to look, but he never did. He was an unusual sort of Marine. The adrenaline was fading and he was just left with this thing he'd done, and



didn't want to watch.

-- Waguih (Psychological Operations paragraph Page 166)

Importance: Waguih takes the rifle with the thermal scope from the Marine who just killed an Iraqi. Waguih watches through the scope which registers life by heat. Once the heat disperses and there is no halo around the Iraqi he will be dead. The Marine who shot the man does not want to watch him die which indicates the depth of feeling he has about killing and the conflict he has about his duties.

Black hitting you, like a knockout punch to the head, no gloves, but the knuckle is bigger than you are, it hits your whole body all at once, and it's on fire. It killed the two other guys in the vehicle... And then there are scraps of memories and then waking up in another country, wondering where my battle buddies are, and at the same time knowing they're dead, but not being able to ask because I couldn't move or talk and had a tube in my throat.

-- Jenks (War Stories paragraph Page 224)

Importance: This quote captures Jenks' first memories of the EID that exploded under his vehicle. The words are rife with pain, fear, chaos and confusion.

Platoon-sized is like, forty. Figure six guns so divide and you got six. We killed exactly 6.6 people. Divide it by nine Marines on the gun and you, personally, you've killed zero point seven something people today. That's like a torso and a head. Or maybe a torso and a leg.

-- Marines (Ten Kliks South paragraph Page 269)

Importance: A squad of Marines who just waged a major assault on the enemy have a macabre discussion on how they should share the credit for their achievement. The Marines weren't that heartless. It was just a way of distracting themselves from what they are charged with doing in the name of their country.