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The two authors have thus generated strikingly honest and unflinching narratives through firsthand experiences. In The Things They Carried, after Lavender is shot to death on his way back from peeing, O'Brien's platoon takes revenge on the village of Than Khe. Mentally traumatized soldiers can remain wholesome, unaffected, and youthful Describing a horrific battle with a unit from the ARVN (Army of the Republic of Việt Nam) Special Commandos, Kien remarks, "Rivers of blood; no winner, no loser, both battered" (N92). Which character - as performed by James Langton - was your favorite? O'Brien recognizes surreal beauty in "the way the sunlight came around him and lifted him up and sucked him high into a tree" (O67). She received her PhD from The University of Chicago. As he puts it, "Stories are for joining the past to the future" (O36). Mary Anne and Phuong are chillingly unmoved by their doomed romances. Ninh deploys a character called Hoa, a young female guide from the North. Dave Jensen loses his mind because there is "no safe ground," with "enemies everywhere" (O60). American troops, too, developed a passion for card games, because a deck of cards was easy to carry around and gave them an easy, carefree pastime. It takes nearly an hour for O'Brien and other platoon members to peel Lemon off and to throw down the parts. He portrays an American tunnel rat who infiltrates a Viet Cong (Vietnamese Communists) underground hideout. The answer is inextricably tied to what we make of the sorrow of the things they carried. The Asia-Pacific War, the Cold War in East Asia, and the nuclear age are just some of her many teaching interests. He is from a small town in Minnesota and feels like all eyes are on him, even on a cosmic scale. They sleep and eat by the corpse of a naked girl, at whom an angry soldier kicks and yells: "You fucking prostitute, lying there showing it for everyone to see" (N102). In the two novels, the tragic nature of the war is symbolically portrayed through the monstrous transformations of delicately pretty girls—Mary Anne Bell in The Things They Carried and Phuong in The Sorrow of War. Under the unbearable weight of guilt, Bowker seeks somebody to share this heart-wrenching story. Her tortured soul is a lamentable manifestation of beastly degradation and unspeakable obscenity. But his town, Des Moines, is "very prosperous, with neat houses and all the sanitary conveniences" (N144). For example, a "kicked bucket" is easier to handle than a corpse. "The general population didn't care about [the victorious North Vietnamese soldiers]," Ninh says of the "disrespect" shown to them (N79). Three prongs on its cone-shaped top were exposed above the ground and hidden in grassland vegetation. Ninh is irresistibly drawn to "legends and myths about the lives of . What was one of the most memorable moments of The Sorrow of War? Kien works in a unit that recovers soldiers' corpses. From the same page, O'Brien reads more than twenty lines, as if to give concrete expression to the unfathomable and ungraspable sorrow surrounding the war.2 Indicating the things combatants on both sides carried, the recited passage includes "each other, the wounded or weak" (O14), diseases (like malaria and dysentery), living things (such as lice, leeches, and paddy algae), the sky, the humidity, and Việt Nam itself. Exposing the hollowness of the Việt Nam War, Ninh observes: "The path of war seemed endless, desperate, and leading nowhere" (N15). Back to Top Visit other sites in the Penguin Random House Network Would you listen to The Sorrow of War again? Authored by former foot soldiers, these self-representational narratives present striking similarities in stressful combat situations, wartime traumas, and arduous postwar struggles. After his twelfth revolution, Norman gets out of the car, submerges himself in the warm waters of the lake without taking off his clothes, stands up, and watches evening fireworks. Originally published against government wishes in Vietnam because of its nonheroic, non-ideological tone, Ninh's now classic work has won worldwide acclaim and become an international bestseller. Garbage!" (N155). In O'Brien's novel, the heavy military equipment and supplies US ground forces carry are loaded with a high degree of pathos. Source: Screen capture from episode 9 of the documentary The Vietnam War by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick. Lemon, who is blasted into a tree and torn to pieces, is "still out there in the dark, naked and painted up, trick-or-treating, sliding from hootch to hootch in that crazy white ghost mask" (O227). Source: Screen capture from episode 10. Mary Anne is a cute blonde teen who wears white culottes and a pink sweater. The seller will arrange the return pick up for these items. On V-Day, Kien and his buddies do not experience uplifting joy. O'Brien served in Việt Nam as an infantryman from 1968 to 1970. Kien's group seeks refuge near Cambodia, "carrying the wounded" (N183), during their dangerous retreat after the Tet Offensive in 1968. Setting a village on fire was American soldiers' way of venting their fears and frustrations in the face of invisible and elusive Viet Cong guerrillas. The Sorrow of War is an award-winning international bestseller that children peddle on street corners in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.1 Ninh is a shaggy-haired writer from Hanoi who served in the Glorious 27th Youth Brigade and fought in the Central Highlands. Many things happen to the main character and his girlfriend -- mostly all bad. After eleven days of intense fighting, a platoon occupied Ap Bia Mountain (Hill 937) on May 20th, 1969, but the North Vietnamese recaptured it a month later. Appy, Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered from All Sides (New York: Viking, 2003), xvi. Note: For seller fulfilled items from Books, Movies & TV Shows categories, the sellers need to be informed of the damage/ defect within 14 days of delivery. Their works of fiction are truthful and compelling, embodying qualities that deserve to be called groundbreaking storytelling. The burning of a Vietnamese village suspected to aid the Viet Cong is famously portrayed in Oliver Stone's Platoon (1986). During the Vietnam War Bao Ninh served with the Glorious 27th Youth Brigade. Worthy of note is O'Brien's famous assertion that story-truth is truer than real-truth. Ninh recognizes "human bonds" as central to the effort to "overcome the thousand sufferings of the war" (N233). The stink of rotten meat on a busy street induces Kien to recall "walking over strewn corpses" (N46) there. Like tens of thousands of other American draft dodgers, he originally seeks exile in Canada. In both novels, soldier stories serve as a means of keeping the war dead alive. The domino theory has absolutely no relevance to their life-and-death situations. Source: Tackleberry Solutions at . He burns her letters and photographs, but it is mournfully impossible to "burn the blame" (O22). Source: Screen capture from Platoon (1986), directed by Oliver Stone. Call that civilization and progress? The train ride to the front line is haunting. Under the title of "The Things They Carried—Tim O'Brien," a video clip is available at . As time goes on, the forlorn reality of postwar peace becomes apparent. After all, they were still boys and could not stop thinking about girls. Hoa is unfamiliar with the Cambodian borderlands and mistakenly leads his unit to a lake full of crocodiles. O'Brien has derived such ennobling insights from oral storytelling among US servicemen. 4. In order to continue enjoying our site, we ask that you confirm your identity as a human. In Ninh's novel, Can, a good-hearted farmer who loves his mother more than anything else, becomes unhesitant in bashing skulls in with his rifle. Senseless and Purposeless From O'Brien's standpoint, the Việt Nam War was a futile war that did not have a clear purpose. In The Sorrow of War, Kien is tormented by the "dreaded whump-whump whump" (N46) sound of a ceiling fan in his bedroom, as it reminds him of the sound of helicopter rotor blades that brought terror to the Viet Cong in the field of battle. Dismiss Thanks! Something awesome is on its way. O'Brien denounces the war "for taking away the person I had once been" (O176). And go from well-read to best read with book recs, deals and more in your inbox every week. Kiowa is a devout Baptist who always carries his illustrated New Testament around with him, but he dies senselessly, swallowed in a thick, filthy muck. They destroy everything, including chickens, dogs, and the village well, and reduce the village to burned wreckage with artillery fire. Any additional comments? Among Kien's comrades is a combat driver who used to be a remarkable fighter and has become "a ragged, beggarly drunk" because he is assailed by his memories of a tank running over bodies" (N152) due to an unmistakable difference between mud and corpses. QUICK VIEW Add to bookshelf QUICK VIEW Add to VIEW Add to bookshelf QUICK VI your inbox every week. The negative impact of war is greatly underestimated. In our imagination, the violent deaths of such endearing characters as Lavender and Kiowa can be replaced with the vibrant lives that they might have lived without the war. In the Việt Nam War, ground troops were vulnerable adolescents. Believing in the power of stories both writers are most dedicated to transmitting stark realities—what it feels like to fight in Việt Nam and to live afterward. The flashlight, "a stupid mistake" (O161), tragically attracts mortar attacks by the enemy. Information used for caption taken from episode 10. Available on Amazon Prime at https://tinyurl.com/rct7xcv and on Netflix at . Despite the horrific human cost, this military attack turned out to be grievously senseless. Significant historical details are recounted through the eyes of common soldiers with refreshingly humane feelings. If you were to make a film of this book, what would the tag line be? He now has trouble with the locked-up memories of his friend Kiowa's death. Stanley Karnow, Vietnam: A History (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 49-50. Download PDF Bao Ninh's (b. Việt Nam is rendered as a godless land. What future is it, then, that these novels inspire us to envision? These lovely female characters are irrevocably changed by the war and manifest shockingly dark aspects of human nature. These two works are sorrowful lamentations about how people are callous about Việt Nam War stories. As O'Brien indicates, the gruesome reality of death had to be mitigated by unconventional word usage. Kien, a lone survivor from the Glorious 27th Youth brigade of the Vietcong, revisits the haunting sites of battles and relives a parade of horrors, as he grapples with his ghosts, his alcoholism and attempts to arrange his life in writing. Three years after O'Brien writes this poignant story, Bowker hangs himself in a locker room. Available on Amazon Prime at and on Netflix at . Lavender is a character who carries tranquilizers. On both sides, drugs, booze, and smoking were rampant to relieve stress and anxiety. YASUKO SATO is an Associate Professor of History at Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas, where she teaches upperdivision courses on East Asian History and introductory surveys in US and World History. Survivors "suffer the nightmares of white blasts which destroyed their souls and stripped their personalities bare" (N89). In a frenzied conversation at an obscure nightspot, Leather Jacket sneeringly exclaims: "Victory, shit! The victory we got was a victory for morons. It is profoundly sad and it is also a complex story. When shooting someone in the head, Kien sadistically watches his submachine gun bullet "hit him right in the mouth and his face exploded" (N120). 3. Similarly, O'Brien regards his platoonmates as his heroes. Available on Amazon Prime at w7pacam. Ninh originally published The Sorrow of War in 1987 in Vietnamese. While the gore is being removed, Dave Jensen sings "Lemon Tree," which wakes O'Brien up even twenty years later. Before he shoots himself, he proclaims that the whole war is "one big banquet" (O212) for those giant killer bugs. In contrast to such a relatively low explosive, the Bouncing Betty was a mine capable of inflicting serious wounds on its victim's lower body, jumping off the ground about three feet before its detonation. "So much blood, so many lives were sacrificed—for what?" (N42), a truckdriver asks plaintively. Revisiting the sites of battles raises emotional ghosts for him and the memory of war scenes are juxtaposed with dreams and remembrances of his childhood sweetheart. The Sorrow of War burns the tragedy of war in our minds. Why? Among those he murderously kills in revenge is a girl at the South Vietnamese police headquarters. Ninh reckons that ragged veterans are "destined to be forever lonely" because they have "lost not only the capacity to live happily with others but also the capacity to be in love" (N230). Kien's scout platoon smokes rosa canina, a wild rose species with a powerful scent, to forget the hellish reality of fighting a calamitous war. Kien's dedication to writing is profoundly aligned with his postwar MIA (missing in action) work of gathering remains in the jungles. Source: Screen capture from episode 8 of the documentary The Vietnam War by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick. Killing also leaves Kien with deep psychological scars. Foremost among them is the terrible weight of war memory. O'Brien tells a touching story of Norman Bowker's twelve seven-mile clockwise turns around the lake in his hometown in central Iowa. Speaking of saving lives with stories, O'Brien tacitly invites us to carry unforgettable, heart-rending war stories into the future. From the person of Phuong, Kien's beautiful lover, nightmares beyond any measure can disappear. Napalm, and incendiary weapon, turned the Vietnamese jungle into a hellish sea of fire. In reality, O'Brien's company was a tragedy emblematic of impulsive aggressive behaviors among enlisted men. On Victory Day, the triumphant troops' "greatest prize" at Saigon airport is sleep (N100). Central to their attention was romance. When spotting a dead old man who lies face up, with flies and gnats swarming around his face, Jensen shakes his hand and greets him, saying, "How-dee-doo" and "Gimme five" (O214). For the Vietnamese, rosa canina was functionally equivalent to marijuana. In the realm of fiction, those grievously affected by the war are allowed "to emerge unchanged from the war." The US government deployed combat troops to Việt Nam, afraid that Communist rule would spread to neighboring countries in Southeast Asia like a falling row of dominoes. The Redemptive Power of Storytelling Surviving his rotting wounds, including the one "between his legs" (N140), Kien asks why Heaven has allowed him to live. 1. These items are not eligible for self-return. He goes to great lengths to detail "the things they carried," including packets of Kool-Aid, C-rations, can openers, candy, mosquito repellants, cigarettes, lighters, steel helmets, jungle boots, ponchos, and dog tags. These two novels bring the reader into communion with the enormous weight of sorrow that resulted from fighting in a devastating war. Việt Nam War veterans are haunted by painful memories decades after the war's end. Flashbacks and nightmares occur as a result of triggers The craziness of Mary Anne is a kind of mystic fable arising from shared experiences. The breakup between Kien and Phuong, on the other hand, is full of strong and raw emotions, and is portrayed with stunningly penetrating psychological realism. 2. The Things They Carried, a semi-autobiographical novel that reads like a collection of short stories is one of the finest and most widely read books about the Việt Nam War. The daring and controversial novel that took the world by storm-a story of politics, selfhood, survival, and war. Heart-wrenching, fragmented, raw, former North Vietnamese solder Bao Ninh's The Sorrow of War provides a strikingly honest look at how the Vietnam War forever changed his life, his country, and the people who live there. When Kien flies into a fiery rage and starts a bloody fight one night, the police arrest him but release him the very next morning because "they'd seen enough of the veterans" (N156). The United States, one of the two Cold War superpowers, resorted to artillery bombardments, napalm bombings, and aerial attacks, while the North Vietnamese waged guerrilla warfare and made extensive use of low-tech but extraordinarily lethal weapons, such as booby traps and landmines. The Psychological Cost of Fighting in Việt Nam For numerous Việt Nam combat veterans, the end of the war is not a return to normalcy. Before a sudden outburst of rage and aggression, three of the platoon members are shockingly killed (two by a cunningly disguised explosive booby trap and one through torture and execution by unseen assailants). A wounded American GI supported by fellow soldiers. The line between life and death was extremely thin. Ninh and O'Brien are intent on inspiring empathy in others by opening themselves up "in a deeply personal way" (N50), even with their "absolute and uncompromising allegiance to obscenity and evil" (O66). Việt Nam was a proxy war during the Cold War (1945-1991), with North Việt Nam had anti-Communist allies like the United States. But Kien's wounded men, whose lives she heroically saves, show no concern for her, because "such sacrifices were now an everyday occurrence" (N192). Why Literature Matters There are advantages to comprehending war through literature, particularly through the words of those who served. Việt Nam Savagery It is a striking irony that radically different American and Vietnamese weapons caused equally soul-crushing dreads. The shit field explodes when a young soldier switches on his flashlight, shows Kiowa a picture of his girlfriend, and hears him say, "Hey, she's cute" (O163). He decides to enlist, however, for the sole purpose of avoiding "embarrassment" (O57). Both books are likely to elicit strong emotional responses in high school and lower-level undergraduate classes, because the soldiers who fought the war were in their late teens or early twenties. Thank you very much for your cooperation. Dangerously distracted, he is unable to prevent Ted Lavender from getting killed. Their stories are crafted in such a way as to maximize the feel of reality. A political commissar mercilessly bans Kien's regiment from having access to canina, because its use makes troops lethargic and dysfunctional. When American jets carried out deadly airstrikes, the Viet Cong were absolutely terrified. The fall of Saigon, the capital of South Việt Nam, on April 30, 1975, marked the end of the war. O'Brien's phrase "the weight of memory" (O14) in The Things They Carried is used to entitle and define the thematic crux of the last episode in The Vietnam War (2017), a landmark PBS documentary film series directed by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick. America's crusade against Communism, however, has no place in O'Brien's stories, as they focus on his fellow soldiers as precious friends. The battlefield whips Kien into a firing frenzy and almost impels him to commit a massacre. When he fulfills this harrowing mission and safely returns, it is as if he was "rising from the dead" (O12). The power of thought in the making of history is central to her academic pursuits. This brings O'Brien's novel close to Ninh's, whose main character, Kien, chooses to live after the war solely for the sake of not wasting the heartbreaking sacrifices made by others. O'Brien loathes the slime of the shit field as an embodiment of "all the waste that was Việt Nam, all the vulgarity and horror" (N176). In The Things They Carried, Curt Lemon, a handsome soldier laughing and playing catch with Rat Kiley, is turned into trillions of pieces hanging from a tree when a rigged 105 round blows him into it. Before the war, Bowker drove around the lake with his favorite girl and with his friends. For seller-fulfilled items from Sports collectibles and Entertainment collectibles categories, the sellers need to be informed of the damage / defect within 10 days of delivery. © MGM Home Entertainment, LLC. Phuong, a pure, sweet girl, is gang-raped during an air raid, becomes an appallingly heartless person, and descends into abominable promiscuity. Kiley hears billions of mutant bugs—those "chemically altered by napalm and defoliants and tear gas and DDT" (O209)—whispering his name all night long. Seeing fellow soldiers horrifically maimed by such hidden weapons was one of the major reasons for some retaliatory American atrocities in Việt Nam, including the My Lai Massacre on March 16, 1968. When Kiowa was swept away by a catastrophic avalanche of waste in a "shit field" during a torrential rain, Bowker grabbed Kiowa's boot and pulled hard, only to back off, overwhelmed by the terrible stink. In his book, O'Brien keeps remembering how he was unable to stop staring at the young Vietnamese man he killed, one of whose eyes was "a star-shaped hole" (O120). Learn more about returning seller fulfilled items. ordinary soldiers" (N89). For seller-fulfilled items for be informed of the damage / defect within 10 days of delivery. The return timelines for seller-fulfilled items sold on Amazon. Source: Screen capture from the last minutes of the film Hamburger Hill (1987). See Appy, 542-544. Such frightening consequences are horrors beyond imagination. They are eventually left only with "the torn, dirty set of cards" that is "fingerprinted by the dead ones" (N9). Bowker drives round and round slowly without a purpose, feeling safe in his father's Chevy 5. Exposing the thinness of the veneer of civilization, the insanity of the war is diametrically opposed to the tenderness of young love. © 2017 Vietnam Film Project, LLC. The Toe Popper was a bullet-shaped shell buried in the ground with its tip protruding. The relentless war savagely tortured the minds of fighting men. During the Việt Nam War, the Communist North Vietnamese forces extensively employed the German "S" mine, dubbed "Bouncing Betty" by American infantry in Europe during World War II, against US military forces. Her area of specialization is Japanese intellectual history and feminist thought in global contexts, especially the relevance of classical antiquity to the modern world. In a desperate attempt to atone for her mistakes, she decidedly lets herself get captured by rapacious American soldiers. O'Brien emphasizes that just the endless march, village to village, without purpose, nothing won or lost" (O14). For the same reason, a VC nurse burned by napalm is called a "crispy critter." "Just a crunchie munchie," Kiley murmurs as he steps over the body of a baby, a "roasted peanut" (O226). © RKO Pictures. This is a hard book to digest in just one hearing or reading. He also finds himself unable to shed his American identity when Canada is "just a boat ride away" (O47). The documentary The Vietnam War by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick ends with these words by Tim O'Brien. In 1969, one of the fiercest battles of the tremendous carnage. A twenty-eight-pound mine detector is carried "partly for the illusion of safety" (O9). We are able to quickly grasp and understand concrete historical phenomena without needing too much background knowledge. Langton does a great job of switching to a female/lighter voice that permits suspended disbelief when he portrays females and some of the younger or weaker soldiers. 1946) The Things They Carried (1990) are Viêt Nam classics that depict traumatic memories of war veterans. Designed to blow a foot off, the shell exploded when an enemy stepped on its camouflaged tip. Especially interesting for Americans to hear the North Vietnamese perspective. If you do not receive a response from the seller for your return request within two business days, you can submit an A-to-Z Guarantee claim. In Ninh's mind, intoxicating flagrant flowers are inseparable from the urge to fantasize about women. Both novelists are committed to sharing their sadness—infinite and boundless sadness that influences (rather than simply informs) the reader. Ninh portrays as "gamblers" (N8) North Vietnamese scouts who enthusiastically play cards together. After joining a squad of six Green Berets, she takes pleasure in conducting night operations and turns herself into a Greenie with a "necklace of human tongues" at her throat (O105). . Kien feels like "an antlike soldier, carrying the burden of every underling," because "the psychological scars of the war will remain forever" (N193). 1952) The Sorrow of War: A Novel of North Vietnam (1990) and Tim O'Brien's (b. In his daydreams, First Lieutenant Jimmy Cross walks lightheartedly with his beloved girl, Martha, "carrying nothing" (O8). Kien calls canina a "blood-loving flower" (N12), as it diabolically abounds in burial places. Impactful storytelling, which "makes the stomach believe" (074), takes precedence over factual reporting. See Christian G. Nihn, too, takes this position, pushing the boundaries of psychological authenticity in the art of fiction. Of the five hundred men who went to war with the brigade in 1969, he is one of only ten who survived. The Sorrow of War is his autobiographical novel. Ascribing meaning to the burden of survival, Kien, Ninh's semi-autobiographical protagonist, believes that he is entrusted with a special mission to finish his war novel. He flatly remarks, "I've killed so often it won't mean a thing if I kill myself" (N22). If you've received a seller-fulfilled product in a condition that is damaged, defective or different from its description on the product detail page on Amazon.in, returns are subject to the seller's approval of the return. Lieutenant Cross carries "the responsibility for the lives of his men" (O5) and, after Lavender's death, the acute sense of "shame" deriving from the fact that "he had loved Martha more than his men" (O16). Bao Ninh was the first NVA (North Vietnamese Army) soldier to release a novel about the war. The war was so destructive that it heavily traumatized both sides. In the realm of fiction, those grievously affected by the war are allowed "to emerge unchanged from the war" (N226). In the Jungle of Screaming Souls, "numerous souls of ghosts and devils," deceased members of his 27th Battalion, are "refusing to depart for the Other World" (N6). Since Vietnamese Communists valorized the war, Ninh went against the grain and "was reprimended by the regime for stressing the 'utterly tragic' aspect of the struggle rather than its glories." 5 He speaks of frontline soldiers, not so much in terms of valor, but in terms of their ordeals. They are relatively short (coincidentally, the same length—233 pages), but they are still highly informative. Historical fiction makes past occurrences accessible and relatable. This explanation is offered in "Tim O'Brien on 'The Things They Carried'" at . Bouncing Betties, along with booby traps, were used against US forces and inflicted serious psychological damage, because they were primarily designed to mutilate rather than kill. Meanwhile, US troops were fearful of Toe Poppers, Bouncing Betties, and booby-trapped artillery rounds. The mountain peak was dubbed "Hamburger Hill," because many GIs were ground up like hamburger meat. Both novels are engaging and powerfully written for a general audience. Mental stress was overwhelmingly high during the Việt Nam conflict. Deep down, he loves America so dearly that he cannot think of any other home.

