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The things they carried

*The Things They Carried* is a collection of stories by *Tim O’Brien* that seems autobiographical but the author states that most of them are factious. Vietnam is the central conflict and other conflicts exist among the members of Alpha Company. This paper will explore the internal and external conflicts of the members of Alpha company faced during the war of the Vietnam War in “*The things they carried*” by *Tim O’Brien*.

The writer showed his internal struggle with truth as he was facing difficulties in wartime. Throughout the book, he described stories about what happened to him and his fellows and he changed the versions of these stories multiple times. He wanted his readers to understand that sometimes fiction is truer than the actual reality.

“They carried all the emotional baggage of men who might die.” (O'Brien, 11). The quotation is taken from the first story of longer passage in which they were afraid of dying of embarrassment. The writer of the story negates the notion that people who go to war are heroes. They also fear death and if they die, the only purpose behind their death is that they do not want to appear as a coward who could not fight with his enemy and ran back. “They carried the common secret of cowardice barely restrained.” (O'Brien, 11). He also clarifies that men go to war because they are forced to go and their refusal is considered as their incompetence. “They carried their reputations” (O'Brien, 12).

In war, there is an obvious enemy but conflicts within a platoon also forced people to live close to each other during high-stress situations.

In wars, we learned that it is difficult to distinguish between an ally and an enemy. Lee Strunk and Dave Jensen got into a fight. The reason was minor but the fight was vicious. Jensen broke Strunk’s nose by hitting him without mercy. Afterward, Jensen was nervous that strunk would avenge himself. At last, Jensen became so anxious that he took a pistol and used it to break his own nose to settle the score with Strunk. The next day, in the morning, Strunk was shocked to hear the news and admitted that he had stolen his knife. Later on, they learned to trust each other and made a promise to one and others that if one gets wounded, the other would kill him to end his misery. In October, Strunk’s leg was badly injured by mortar round. He begged Jensen that he did not want to die. Strunk was loaded to helicopter later on that day. But he could not survive the journey. Jensen felt relieved about the news of Strunk's death.

Jorgenson was an experienced medic. When O’Brien was shot in rear, Jorgensen took too long to treat him. But he did a bad job and gangrene set in. When the wound healed, O’Brien thought of taking revenge. But Jorgensen realized his mistake and apologized to O’Brien but it was not enough for him. He scared Jorgenson by setting off flares when Jorgenson was on night duty and afterward, they both became friends.

The characters of the story were repeatedly shown that they had no understanding that why they were sent to war. They could not comprehend how their actions were valuable in bringing the change in the current situation. The sober men were corrupted by war and they were indulging in immoral activities. The war carried on and the men either died or survived it. When one man shoot his feet to be sent home, no one judged him because they all knew that the war is pointless.

The theme of friendship is important in the story. The members of the platoon tease and irritate each other but at the time of need, they also provide support to each other as well. When Tim killed a man who seemed to be harmless, he felt bad afterward. But his friend consoled him and understood his feelings of guilt. He helped him in overcoming the pain of killing an innocent man.

The author had used a few literary devices to help the reader connect to the story. He used imagery to describe people, places and various events in the story. For instance, “Henry Dobbins, who was a big man carried extra rations” (O'Brien). When the writer killed the man, he used imagery “…his forehead was freckled, his fingernails were clean…” (O'Brien). The detailed account of the dead man’s body gives the reader an insight into the horror of wars and also tell about the enemy’s humanity.

The writer used the first-person point of view to describe in detail what he had experienced during the time of war. When he used the first person in his narration, it seemed like the autobiography but he also used a fictional character Tim O’Brien as a narrator. This switch between narrators made it difficult to distinguish the story on the basis of fiction and autobiography. The author claimed that this story is fictional but some of the events were experienced by himself. He used third-person narratives in his story to tell the stories of other fellows who were with him in the war. Also. Repetition is used in the story as a development tool for the story. In this way, a reader can keep the profile of the characters in his mind in the entire story.

In conclusion, this story accounts for the horrific events of the Vietnam War. Most of the soldiers were paranoid and their sense of justice and morality was challenged and developed into anger. The outstanding imagery made the story an outstanding literary piece.

# **Works Cited:**

O'Brien, Tim. *The Things They carried* . Houghton Mifflin Harcourt , 1990 .