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Jump to ratings and reviewsA classic work of American literature that has not stopped changing minds and lives since it burst onto the literary scene, The Things They Carried is a ground-breaking meditation on war, memory, imagination, and the redemptive power of storytelling. The Things They Carried depicts the men of Alpha Company: Jimmy Cross, Henry Dobbins, Rat Kiley, Mitchell Sanders, Norman Bowker, Kiowa, and the character Tim O'Brien, who has survived his tour in Vietnam to become a father and writer at the age of forty-three. Taught everywhere—from high school classrooms to graduate seminars in creative writing—it has become required reading for any American and continues to challenge readers in their perceptions of fact and fiction, war and peace, courage and fear and longing. The Things They Carried won France's prestigious Prix du Meilleur Livre Etranger and the Chicago Tribune Heartland Prize; it was also a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award. 423 people are currently reading206805 people want to readTim O'Brien is an American novelist who served as a soldier in the Vietnam War. Much of his writing is about wartime Vietnam, and his work later in life often explores the postwar lives of its veterans.O'Brien is perhaps best known for his book The Things They Carried (1990), a collection of linked semi-autobiographical stories inspired by his wartime experiences. In 2010, The New York Times described it as "a classic of contemporary war fiction." O'Brien wrote the war novel, Going After Cacciato (1978), which was awarded the National Book Award.O'Brien taught creative writing, holding the endowed chair at the MFA program of Texas State University–San Marcos every other academic year from 2003 to 2012.Displaying 1 - 30 of 20,610 reviewsDecember 1, 2019It was in the spring of 2006 and I was on patrol in Kirkuk Iraq with a unit in the 101st Airborne. I had my full "battle rattle" on: helmet, body armor, vest with extra magazines, M4. We were in the Kurdish part of the city and it was a beautiful day in the bazaar. I came to love the Kurdish people, they were hardworking and resilient. Many people don't know this but a percentage of Kurdish folks are red headed. No kidding, fair skin like me and RED hair. It was the kind of day where in the back of our mind we were maybe more vigilant than necessary because the threat of anything bad seemed so far away – so therefore we needed to be more on the guard. But for the most part, it was a quiet day and people were out shopping and enjoying the day.I was on the sidewalk and looking at the goods on display. Huge bags of nuts and seeds, fabric, plastic toys, a little bit of everything. A mother was walking with her little boy, he looked about 2 or 3, with a cute brown outfit that was tailored to fit him, perhaps homemade. I noticed her looking at some goods and he saw something across the street and like little boys the world over, took off past me and headed into the street.I am a father of three boys and at that time they were 16, 13 and 6 and I thought about them everyday if not hourly. My wife and I had been chasing healthy and happy, mischievous boys for years and if I was hyper vigilant for bad guys, I was even more sensitive to children getting loose.As natural as if I were on the sidewalk in Middle Tennessee, I reached down and caught him, said something incomprehensible to him like "whoa little man, don't loose momma" and I smiled at his mother and she smiled at me and then in that moment, I was not an armed soldier occupying her city and we spoke the same language and we were neighbors keeping a little boy out of the street.That was years ago and so much happened over there, but I will always remember that moment because it was an instance of unconditional and timeless humanity during wartime. The reality was and is that labels like "soldier" and "enemy" and "foreign national" do little to assuage the inherent and complicated humanity that we all bring with us and share between us.What Tim O'Brien accomplished in The Things They Carried, his 1990 collection of short stories and essays about his experiences in Vietnam two decades earlier, is to demonstrate that even in the middle of a horrific war experience, that the soldiers and residents of that country were fundamentally and undeniably all human and capable of experiencing the wide scope of human emotion amidst wartime, and further that the very lethal nature of war made the emotions more vivid and alive.Whereas all of my brothers in arms and I volunteered, O'Brien and his fellow soldiers were mainly drafted and were thus accidental warriors because of conscription. Here were young men who did not want to be there, for the most part, but O'Brien takes an expansionist and objective stance and reveals that some people did find their place there and learned things about themselves they would not have otherwise discovered but for that martial experience.Poignant, touching, endearing, heartbreaking, terrifying, saddening, maddening, O'Brien has succinctly stated what so many have before tried to and failed. He has formed a voice from this wilderness of human experience and has documented for us all a glimpse into moments of humanity during wartime.March 8, 2011I first bought The Things They Carried at the Bruised Apple, a used bookstore and coffee shop in downtown Peekskill, New York, back in 1991 when I was fifteen years old. By the time I graduated from high school a few years later I'd read it so often that the pages, already brittle, were nearly worn through, entire sections underlined in pencil. Loaned out and lost to a college crush years ago, a dear friend bought me a replacement copy awhile back signed to me by Tim O'Brien himself. This new copy is not quite as loveworn, but still it is cherished.The beauty of this book lies not necessarily in the war stories at its center, but rather in the undulating, overlapping entanglements that are people's lives, in the act of using storytelling as a means of recapturing our histories, bringing the many facets of our so often fragmented selves forward into the present day. The lyrical poetry of O'Brien's writing combined with the brutality of Vietnam imagery is truly a shock, traumatizing yet powerfully beautiful in its way, and the force of language itself is a revelation.As O'Brien writes, "The thing about a story is that you dream it as you tell it, hoping that others might then dream along with you, and in this way memory and imagination and language combine to make spirits in the head."February 8, 2022[Edited for typos and spoilers 2/7/22]About 20 connected short stories from an author who has become the main literary spokesperson for the story of Americans in the Vietnam War. The book is highly rated on GR (4.1 with almost a quarter-million ratings). How often do you see the front pages with 40 blurbs praising the work from every recognized source you can think of: from the NT Times (which listed it as a Book of the Century) and The Wall Street Journal to Booklist and Publishers Weekly.The author warns us that he is an unreliable narrator. He frequently talks to the reader and writes that this or that story may or may not be true. It's as if we are in the war zone and guys are telling us stories of "things they heard." The time frame ranges from before the war to twenty years after. Several stories are only two or three pages. The title story, first in the book, tells us how much we can tell about the personalities of the men in the field by the extra items they carry with them at all times: love letters; a Bible; dope; condoms; a dried human thumb; a slingshot (a weapon of last resort); a rabbit's foot; vitamins; tanning lotion; a girlfriend's pantyhose around the neck. In "How to Tell a True War Story," the author sets the tone: "If a story seems moral, do not believe it. If at the end of a war story you feel uplifted, or if you feel that some small bit of rectitude has been salvaged from the larger waste, then you have been made the victim of a very old and terrible lie. There is no rectitude whatsoever. There is no virtue." "I should forget it. But the thing about remembering is that you don't forget."In "On the Rainy River," the author spends a week at a deserted summer camp in far northern Minnesota. He works for an elderly man, trying to work up the courage to flee to Canada to avoid the draft. "I was a coward. I went to the war." Of a medic who worked on a base where wounded were flown in by helicopter to be stabilized before being flown again to a real hospital: "It was gory work, Rat said, but predictable. Amputations, mostly – legs and feet.…For a medic, though, it was ideal duty, and Rat counted himself lucky." "Notes" looks at the toll on men after they returned home. One man lives with his parents and drives the several miles around a lake in his hometown for hours every night. " 'The thing is' he wrote, 'there's no place to go. Not just in this lousy little town. In general. My life, I mean. It's almost like I got killed over in Nam.' " A young man's mother writes to the author telling him of his friend's suicide (her son). "He'd been playing pick-up basketball at the Y; after two hours he went off for a drink of water; he used a jump rope; his friends found him hanging from a water pipe. There was no suicide note, no message of any kind. 'Norman was a quiet boy, his mother wrote, 'and I don't suppose he wanted to bother anybody.' "Powerful writing. The author is also famous for his other books about the Vietnam War, including Going After Cacciato, which was made into a movie. Many of the stories in Carried were made into episodes of a TV series 'This is Us.'I recently read and reviewed a counterpart to this novel - the view of the war from a troop of North Vietnamese soldiers. It is Novel Without a Name by Duong Thu Huong. In it, an old woman picks up bodies of soldiers from battlefields, buries them, and recounts the personal items she save from them - a lot like 'the things they carried.' Top photo from Britannica.comA Vietnam landscape in Cao Bang province from dailymail.co.ukThe author from pmcdeadline2.files.wordpress.comamerican-authors guerrilla-warfare short-stories August 2, 2024"It's time to be blunt. I'm forty-three years old, true, and I'm a writer now, and a long time ago I walked through Quang Ngai Province as a foot soldier. Almost everything else is invented…I want you to feel what I felt. I want you to know why story-truth is truer sometimes than happening truth."- Tim O'Brien, The Things They Carried Tim O'Brien's The Things They Carried has sat on my bookshelf for years. Maybe since high school, meaning that it has sat on various shelves, in various rooms, in various states, for almost twenty years. I have no excuse for this. No good excuse, anyway. The other day, one of my (grossly overloaded) bookcases collapsed. While sifting through the debris, I found a copy of the novelization of the movie Independence Day. Yes, that movie. The one with Randy Quaid "acting" crazy. Not only did I have it, but I remembered reading it. But not The Things They Carried. Until now. Spurred on by Ken Burns' The Vietnam War, which features O'Brien as a contributor, I finally tore through this thin volume. I'm glad I did. ***The Things They Carried is one of the most well-known – if not the most well-known – war novel in the English language. In case you're like me, though, and you haven't gotten around to this yet, it is an interlocking series of short stories. Many of the stories appeared at different times and in different venues, but they are meant to go together, flowing one from the next. Each story informs, amplifies, and sometimes even critiques the others. All the stories revolve around the men of Alpha Company. This is a fictional unit, but O'Brien toys with the idea of truth and fiction a great deal. This begins before the book even starts, when O'Brien dedicates The Things They Carried to Alpha. That might be the most surprising thing to me. I expected a hardcore look at Vietnam. Instead, it is a powerful piece of metafiction that happens to be set in Vietnam.***The Things They Carried started off pretty much as expected, opening with the famous eponymous tale detailing what the men of Alpha Company carried into war, from firearms and claymores to love letters and charms. It is good stuff, yet not entirely unique. Growing up in the shadow of Vietnam, I used to read a good deal of Vietnam war fiction, many of the titles borrowed from the bookshelves of veterans. Most of these books – from the great to the good to the pulpy to the terrible – are oriented at the platoon or company level, following small groups of disparate men in the jungle. For a while, I recognized O'Brien's novel as a familiar species, even if its sensitivity was different. Soon enough, it starts to separate itself from the pack. ***The next two paragraphs may – or may not – constitute spoilers. Out of an abundance of caution, you may want to skip them. Partway through the The Things They Carried, O'Brien moves in an unexpected direction. He begins interjecting more of himself into his writing. He caps this off by telling two stories in succession, the latter story explaining that the former had been fictionalized, that names had been changed, that events had been elided. At first, O'Brien's manipulation of the artificiality of the novel as a form took me out of things. Good fiction forces you to suspend your disbelief. But when you point out literary tropes, it's no longer possible to harbor that suspension. Eventually, though, O'Brien's technique started to pay off. It hit me that his musings on his own inventions and story-making decisions gave his tales an unexpected authenticity. I began to believe, wholeheartedly, in an underlying realness, despite the fact that everything – including O'Brien's meta-commentary – is make believe. ***Of course, none of the literary experimentation found here would mean a thing if it lacked substance. The Things They Carried packs a lot of memorable moments into less than 250 paperback pages. There is a darkly hilarious sequence in which a soldier at a thinly-regulated medical detachment invites his girlfriend in from stateside to spend time with him in-country. The premise is gonzo, and only gets better as the girlfriend rapidly transforms into Colonel Kurtz. She starts visiting nearby villages, hangs out with the Green Berets, and eventually participates in patrols and ambushes.Another section, haunting and mournful, sees the O'Brien character deciding whether to run to Canada in order to avoid Vietnam. He drives up to the Rainy River, where he spends a week with an old man at an otherwise-empty resort. The old man takes him fishing, right next to the international border:I remember staring at the old man, then at my hands, then at Canada. The shoreline was dense with brush and timber. I could see tiny red berries in the bushes. I could see a squirrel up on one of the birch trees, a big crow looking at me from a boulder along the river. That close – twenty yards – and I could see the delicate latticework of the leaves, the texture of the soil, the browned needles beneath the pines, the configurations of geology and human history. Twenty yards. I could've done it. I could've jumped and started swimming for my life. Inside me, in my chest, I felt a terrible squeezing pressure. Even now, as I write this, I can still feel the tightness. And I want you to feel it – the wind coming off the river, the waves, the silence, the wooded frontier. You're at the bow of a boat on the Rainy River. You're twenty-one years old, you're scared, and there's a hard squeezing pressure in your chest.The Things They Carried is filled with such moments of beauty, sadness, perceptiveness, and power. It should be said, though, that it is a very narrow viewpoint into the Vietnam experience. The fictionalized O'Brien writes from the perspective of a well-educated young white man, which makes him a familiar Virgil of Vietnam. There is not much separating the O'Brien-narrator from Charlie Sheen's Taylor in Platoon, or Matthew Modine's Joker in Full Metal Jacket. There is nothing inherently wrong with this. It is – after all – the distillation of his experiences. He's not going for the final, comprehensive word on decades of fighting in Southeast Asia. I mention this only because limits the novel's breadth. Topics you might expect, such as politics or race, are barely mentioned, if at all. ***Really, there's not much for me to add, only repeat. The Things They Carried is as good as advertised. The biggest surprise is that it had as much to say about writing and story structure as it did about the most controversial war in American history.classic-novels vietnam-warNovember 10, 2018These connected stories are about young men in their late teens and early twenties doing their best to carry the weight of a brutal war on their shoulders, along with dozens of pounds of field kit and weaponry. They carry so much weight it is hard to even imagine how they could walk the miles they did, crossing rivers, muddy streams, up hills and down into valleys, somehow placing one foot in front of the other while their eyes and ears scan for danger.The equipment is not all they carry. Some carry guilt, some carry cowardice, some carry aggression, some carry courage, some carry fear, some carry righteousness, some carry hatred, and some carry doubt. Of all the feelings they carry, the weight of futility has to be the hardest to bear. Maybe futility isn't the right word. They carry with them the knowledge that where they are and what they are doing is all the choice they have. Short of doing damage to themselves to be airlifted out of there, they all carry the weight of being stuck.These stories don't stop with the horror and macabre humour of being part of a platoon of young men in war. There is also a story about what one of them experienced after the war. His need to talk about it and his inability to do so. His recognition that he needs purposeful work versus his doubt that any such thing exists any more.Tim O'Brien's writing is exceptional. With one sentence he can cut to the heart of an event. Occasionally he uses repetition of a scene or sequence that made me feel I was there, living it, then re-living the shock of it, trying to find the sense in it.This book does not go into the politics of war and does not mention the hawks sitting behind huge desks with lovely scenery outside their windows, busy directing traffic regardless of what the cost in human lives may be. So, I won't go into it, either.This book is about being in the thick of the traffic – driving blind in a night so dark there is no difference between eyes-open and eyes-closed. It is about not knowing – if you have enough gas, if a tire will blow, if the vehicle will overheat, if it will be blown up into the trees or bogged down and sunk in a field of sewage. It is about being one of many little vehicles with two legs and heavy burdens to carry and not knowing if you will ever see home again.This was a Traveling Sisters Group read with Brenda, Diane, JanB, Marialyce, and Nikki. This was a great choice for a Group read and discussion and I enjoyed it a lot. For more reviews of this book as well as many others, visit the Sisters blog at xx2018-completedJuly 2, 2013The Things They Carried reads like a confession, which, I suppose, in many ways it is. War is a theme in so many books, be they historical fiction, memoirs, alternate histories... and I've certainly read my fair share of them. But stretching my mind back over the years right now, I struggle to recall one that has affected me quite so much. Perhaps I would put it on equal footing with Drakulic's "S" - a heartbreakng novel about the treatment of women in the female war camps during the Bosnian war. But the main difference between the two is that this one is autobiographical. However, unlike a lot of non-fiction I've read, it is also written beautifully, lyrically and powerfully. Telling the horrors, the friendship, the fear and the shame of the Vietnam war with brutal honesty. This is one read that I may never have found without the 1001 book list and it is one I believe fully deserves its place on the list.The book is split into what some may call short stories but are really all episodes of the same story. A sad story that encompasses the many different aspects of soldier life during the Vietnam war. But it's also about the befores and the afters. How did a young, blood-quesy liberal, who had taken a stand against the war while at university become a soldier who carried out brutal orders and killed without thinking? There is an awfully bleak sadness to this tale that lingers in the very existence of the novel - the fact that O'Brien still finds himself writing war stories long after the war is over. That there are memories and confessions tied up inside him, begging to be told. Despite the stunning prose and vivid re-imagining of these stories, reading The Things They Carried is a little bit like watching someone break down. The author talks at one point how embarrassing confessions are for the people who have to hear them and yet he admits his stories must be told, anyway.But this also isn't a difficult book. You might expect it to take some effort but O'Brien knows exactly what he's doing as a writer. It's easy to get caught up in the frightening world he is sharing and realise you've read half the book when you only sat down to read a chapter. The stories seemed to fly by in an array of horrifying colour, I was utterly mesmerised from start to finish. And I want to stress something about that: this is not a gratuitous torturefest. Which is perhaps why this story feels so real and powerful. If O'Brien merely wanted to inflict upon us a book that was like a car crash, he could have painted more gory pictures of disemboweled soldiers but the real battle for O'Brien has always been a psychological one. And the things they really carried weren't the ammunition, the pictures and letters from loved ones, or lucky talismans, it was the fear, the guilt and the tremendous loss of innocence.When it comes to the Vietnam war, things like blame and pity and accusation are thrown all over the place in a million pointing fingers. One minute it's the evil Vietcong setting booby traps to slice up teenage American boys, the next it's evil American soldiers massacring villages and pouring napalm on screaming children. This book is about neither of those. O'Brien sees both US soldiers and Vietcong as young men thrown into something they didn't understand, both victims of a war that was out of control. If anyone gets the blame, it's the highers ups, the politicians and state leaders, people who sit in an office and order teen boys to go out to fight and die. The citizens who shake their heads at the cowardice of a young man who refuses to fight for his country, even when they have no idea why he's fighting. A surprisingly powerful book that will stay with me for a long time.Adina (notifications back, log out, clear cache) August 22, 2023Audiobook narrated by Bryan CarsonI've never thought I would give 5* to a collection of stories about War even if it deals with the Vietnam conflict, the one that interests me the most. However, here I am, lost for words in front of this masterpiece. The book is a collection of related short stories about the author's time as a soldier in Vietnam. It is a memoir of sorts, definitely antiwar. The author informs us from the beginning that he is unreliable, that the events in the stories might of might not have happened. I learned from many other books that memory is unreliable so I always read books inspired from real life with that aspect in mind. All the stories are powerful and well written, heart wrenching, mostly sad, some angry, some melancholic. The narrator is the famous actor, Bryan Carson. He has a similar voice to Titus Welliver, the actor from Bosch. I listened to Titus reading the 1st volume of the series where there are quite a few flashbacks from Bosch's time in Vietnam. For me it was a bit surreal, the too books melted into one due to the similar voices, it was an interesting experience. 1001 classics historical-fiction May 21, 2013Awestruck may be the best way to describe how I felt upon reading this book the first time. So how did I feel upon reading it the second time? I just want to bow at Tim O'Brien's feet while muttering a Wayne's World style "I'm not worthy, I'm not worthy." Using non-linear narrative and stringing together seemingly unrelated stories into one ultimately cohesive work, O'Brien achieves something that traditional narrative never could: his work reflects the emotional truth of what it was like to be a soldier in Vietnam and to be a veteran still living with memories that, when triggered, seem as real and visceral as if they were happening in the present. This is memoir, metafiction, magical realism, and a whole grab bag of other literary genres rolled into one. O'Brien himself admits that we as readers may not know which of the stories are "happening-truth" (what objectively happened) and which of the stories are "story-truth" (stories that may not have happened but because they strike the right emotional chord are more valid than what really happened). However, the reader should not feel manipulated by this storytelling technique as it seeks to forge a connection between those who were there and those who were not; it does not seek to tell what happened, but to make you feel what it was like to be there. The book is nothing short of a masterpiece. Cross posted at This Insignificant Cinderblog kick-ass vietnam January 23, 2014It'd be a bad idea to challenge Tim O'Brien to a round of Truth-Or-Dare because he'd find a way to pick Truth, launch into a story, recant it, then make you think he really chose Dare, but in the end, you'll be pretty sure he actually told you the Truth after all. Maybe...That's kind of the point about this account of his time Vietnam as an infantry soldier that warns us that war stories are tricky. The ones that sound true are probably lies and the ones that seem outlandish probably have a healthy dose of truth in them. By telling us some fact and some fiction, then revealing which is which (Allegedly.), O'Brien shows that sometimes a well told lie based on fact has more power than a real story accurately told. Taken together, O'Brien's stories make it clear that he spent the decades after the war mulling over the various things he took away from it. This isn't the memoir of a guy who obtained some kind of closure by writing it, it's the story of the fear, doubt and confusion he still wrestled with decades later. In order to convey that experience, he had to tell the reader some war stories and let us decide just how true they were.2014 military non-fiction May 13, 2022"The thing about a story is that you dream it as you tell it, hoping that others might then dream along with you, and in this way memory and imagination and language combine to make spirits in the head."I've admired Tim O'Brien's writing since I first read Going after Cacciato several years ago; that book has long been one of my favorites. The Things They Carried is a different kind of book, but it shares with Going after Cacciato a powerful sense of how it feels for a soldier to be at war. O'Brien doesn't debate the merits of the Vietnam War, but thoughtfully speaks about the burdens, hopes and fears the soldiers in Alpha Company bore (thus the title of the book). In many cases, these burdens didn't end when soldiers returned. Writes O'Brien, "You don't have to be in Nam to be in Nam." There are no pitched battles described, but O'Brien still makes you feel the connection to his fellow soldiers and their unenviable situation. Tough to describe, but there is something about how O'Brien writes and thinks which makes you know that there is a person with a conscience writing this book. I had the opportunity to meet O'Brien at a conference in July and got the same feeling from him. The Things They Carried is a book I recommend! 4.5 starsFebruary 24, 2024"I'll carry that," I hear every day. My husband carries the things I can't. Things too heavy for me. He's good that way. Good at carrying things. Two wars and he hasn't forgotten. Like Tim O'Brien, he can tell you what he packed, what it weighed, and what extra he took with him. There are other things, too, memories that don't go away. Some good. Some terrible. How much any soldier says can depend on the listener as much as the war. The vignette form works perfectly here. Piece by piece, each is a fragment of a larger picture which gives a human face to soldiering. Darkly humorous at times. Jarring. The Things They Carried is based on O'Brien's experience of the Vietnam War. But, much of it has relevance beyond its time.For me, this book is a reminder to say "Thanks" to a husband not just for carrying those groceries into the house.April 6, 2022IL GIARDINO DEL MALE "Casualties of War-Vittime di guerra", di Brian De Palma, 1989.Adesso ho quarantatre anni e faccio lo scrittore, e la guerra è finita da un pezzo. In gran parte è difficile ricordare. Siedo a questa macchina da scrivere e fisso oltre le mie parole e guardo...Se non avessi letto "Dispacci" di Michael Herr, direi che questo è il più bel libro che ho letto sulla guerra del Vietnam. Siccome ho letto "Dispacci" di Michael Herr, non posso dire che questo sia il più bel libro che ho letto sulla guerra del Vietnam. Ma ci va vicino. Molto vicino.Questa è una raccolta di racconti, "Dispacci" era una raccolta di reportage. Allora, posso dire che questo è il più bel libro di racconti sulla guerra del vietnam che abbia mai letto."Dispacci" era per così dire in presa diretta. Questi racconti sono scritti vent'anni dopo i fatti. E nel frattempo O'Brien è diventato uno scrittore di professione, riconosciuto (vincitore del National Book Award nel 1979 col romanzo "Inseguendo Cacciato", generalmente considerato il più bel romanzo sella guerra del Vietnam)."Hamburger Hill", di John Irvin, 1987.Qualche volta mi sento in colpa. Quarantatre anni e ancora scrivo racconti di guerra. Mia figlia Kathleen dice che è un'ossessione… In un certo senso penso che abbia ragione: dovrei dimenticare. Ma il problema di ricordare è che non si dimentica. Prendi il materiale dove lo trovi, cioè nella tua vita, all'intersezione tra passato e presente… Quarantatre anni, e la guerra è accaduta una mezza vita fa, eppure il ricordare la rende presente. E qualche volta ricordare porta a una storia, e questo la rende eterna. Ecco a cosa servono le storie. Le storie servono a unire il passato al futuro…Le storie servono per l'eternità, quando ogni memoria è cancellata, quando non c'è più niente da ricordare tranne la storia.La compagnia Alfa è composta da una ventina uomini che ritornano più o meno in tutti i racconti, che infatti si susseguono come fossero i capitoli di una specie di romanzo. Forse era composta da più uomini, ma O'Brien ne seleziona una ventina circa, e di questi scrive e racconta. Sempre gli stessi, a volte semplici spettatori, comparse, a volte interpreti, protagonisti. A volte vivi, a volte morti. Ma anche da morti ritornano nel racconto di Tim O'Brien, nella sua memoria sono presenti, ancora vivi."Platoon", di Oliver Stone, 1986.Nonostante tutto il suo orrore, non si può fare a meno di restare a bocca aperta di fronte alla tremenda maestà del combattimento. Fissi i proiettili traccianti che si snodano nell'oscurità come nastri rosso brillante. Ti acquatti per l'imboscata mentre una luna fredda e impassibile si leva nel cielo notturno sopra le risaie. Ammiri la fluida simmetria delle truppe in movimento, le armonie di suono, forma e proporzione, i torrenti di fuoco e metallo che grondano da un elicottero da combattimento, i proiettili illuminanti, il fosforo bianco, il bagliore porpora del napalm, la luce accecante dei razzi. Non si può propriamente chiamare bello. È stupefacente. Riempie lo sguardo. Si impossessa di te. Tu lo trovi orribile, ma i tuoi occhi no."Tigerland", di Joel Schumacher, 2000.Potrebbe essere la sceneggiatura di uno dei film più belli sul Vietnam, lo script di quel capolavoro intitolato "Apocalypse Now".Pagine indimenticabili, che raccontano quella guerra (forse non la guerra in assoluto, ma quella del Vietnam) davvero in tutte le sue sfaccettature, nell'orrore e nel male, così come nello stupore e nel suo fascino perverso. La guerra è indecente; la guerra è divertente. La guerra è emozionante; la guerra è una sfacchinata. La guerra ti rende uomo; la guerra ti rende morto.Il soldato di fanteria Tim O'Brien.americana racconti vietnamJanuary 31, 2018 I've read reviews of this seen this book pass me by at the library, but for some reason was always reluctant to read. Why? Maybe just hits a little to close to home, knew many of my friends brothers who served, some lived, some of course did not. My own husband was in the Air Force at this time, not sent to Vietnam, and not yet my husband, still just a friend. He did though unload the bodies of returning soldiers who did not make it through their service. It was thankfully near the end of the war.Years have passed, and the Sisters group decided to read and discuss this, so I decided now was the time, it was now or never. We had a great discussion, for some reason I was under the misapprehension that this was non fiction. It is not though it is written as if it was, which caused a bit of confusion as to how we perceived what we were reading. Was what we were reading true or not? In fact the author discussed this in one of the stories, if it is not true but could have been true how does that change how one feels about the book. That did bother me a bit.In the end I decided it didn't really matter because these stories in all their grimness, terrible situations, and yes occasionally humor, were an unfortunate and very unfair set of circumstances that these extremely young men found themselves shouldering. It made their experiences personal, gave these soldiers names, and detailed all the guilt they felt when they survived, or made a wrong decision that cost lives. A beyond terrible situation for me in their late teens or early twenties to have to handle. All wars are terrible but the way these soldiers were treated when they returned was surely criminal. At least as a nation, if we have learned nothing else, we have learned to treat our returning soldiers with the respect they deserve, and as the heroes they surely are.February 2, 2020See But wait ... way down below ... and sometimes I can see Timmy skating with Linda under the yellow floodlights. I'm young and happy. I'll never die. I'm skimming across the surface of my own history, moving fast, riding the melt beneath the blades, doing loops and spins, and when I take a high leap into the dark and come down thirty years later, I realize it is as Tim trying to save Timmy's life with a story.That's the last 71 words of Tim O'Brien's The Things They Carried. Timmy is Tim O'Brien (or maybe "Tim O'Brien", or maybe both or neither). Linda is a girl who he was in love with when he was nine years old - maybe, unless she's made up. But even if so, the story, the last one in the book, could be "true". Linda died of cancer a few months after Timmy fell in love with her. How much of this story is true? Does it matter? Read on.I bet a ton of papers and reports have been written for high school and college English courses on this book. It's so different from anything I've read before. I was not able to underline in the book as I read, because I read my daughter's copy of the book. She probably read it in college. She read it in college. That's my story. Whether it's true I don't know, but it should be.So, since I couldn't underline, I have nothing to base an analysis of the book on. So that's a story I don't have to write.Asides, almostO'Brien has become not only the premier writer on the American Vietnam experience, he has become something of a meta-writer on the concept of truth in "fiction". The fact that this book has that stuff in it is why, against all my habits, after starting to read the book last night after dinner, I finished it before going to bed (at 4:30 am). There are only two other writers who generally lift me away from all other books I am reading and won't let me back to them until they put me down – George Pelecanos and Patrick O'Brian (hmm – O'Brian, O'Brien).In case you don't know, this is not a novel. It's a collection of short stories. It's novel-like because most of the stories take place in Vietnam, within a platoon of men fighting there in the late 60s, and the same characters slide from one story to the next. But the stories aren't in any particular time-order, though the later stories in the book generally happen later than the earlier ones. And some of the stories are less connected to the others.Who is "Tim O'Brien"?There are really two Tim O'Briens here, a character and a writer, and they aren't the same.I didn't realize for a long time that the book's narrator, "Tim O'Brien", who is telling these stories is a fictional character. He shares a lot of unlikely details with Tim O'Brien the writer, who wrote the stories. But they aren't the same!Or at least we can't be sure where they are the same, and where they're distinct. (Actually, "Tim O'Brien" sometimes talks about writing some of the stories – but maybe that's the other Tim O'Brien, the writer. You do understand where all those English assignments come from, don't you?) Both the Tim O'Briens grew up in Worthington Minnesota. They both graduated from Macalester College in 1968. They both got drafted soon after college, they both served in Vietnam in 1969-70, they both were involved in combat for about a year. They both came home and became writers. But, did I mention that they aren't the same? Get your hands around that.How O'Brien dances with the truth.This ambiguity about the O'Briens is part of a larger ambiguity that O'Brien (let's just use the same name for both of them from now on) writes/talks about throughout the novel – an ambiguity about what is true and what isn't. There's even a story in the book about this: "How to Tell a True War Story". O'Brien says that if someone tells you a war story, "You'd feel cheated if it never happened … Yet even if it did happen – and maybe it did, anything's possible – even then you know it can't be true, because a true war story does not depend upon that kind of truth. Absolute occurrence is irrelevant. A thing may happen and be a total lie; another thing may not happen and be truer than the truth." What he's implying is that a story about something that never happened can affect the listener, can impart to him a truth about an overall situation, "reality", that is not imparted by a mere recounting of what actually happened. O'Brien is reported as once answering the question "Can someone who's been in war teach us anything about war?", by saying "No. All he can do is tell us stories about war."Fiction and reality can blur; and in war they can't not blur.The two stories that nailed Tim O'Brien.There are two stories in the book which wend their way through multiple other stories, and ultimately illustrate the ambiguous nature of O'Brien's reality. The first one is the story of a Vietnamese he killed. Or at least he may have killed. The main description is in The Man I Killed. Other stories that deal with it in depth are Ambush and finally Good Form. But the episode is also mentioned in several other stores.The second of these extended, and very ambiguous, tales is a story about the death of his closest friend in the platoon. See Speaking of Courage, Notes, In the Field, and finally Field Trip. These four stories could be analyzed from now to next Christmas without coming to a certain conclusion as to what actually happened, and what the two Tim O'Briens had to do with any of it.The two stories that nailed me.(2) Sweetheart of the Song Tra BongThe second of these stories was a mind-blowing story called Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong. Tim O'Brien the character plays no part in it, except to introduce it. Vietnam was full of strange stories, some improbable, some well beyond that, but the stories that will last forever are those that swirl back and forth across the border between trivia and bedlam, the mad and the mundane. This one keeps returning to me. The actual story is told by one of the platoon characters, Rat; it's about an assignment that Rat previously had on a remote mountain top near a village ("ville"). It was sort of a Mash-type assignment, where wounded would be brought in by local choppers for emergency and trauma care, then shipped out by chopper to rear areas. Mostly they played volleyball and sat around, probably smoking weed. No officers, no discipline. One day they're shooting the shit, and someone says hey you know we could fly a broad in here. A few weeks later, a "tall, big-boned blond" steps out of the supply chopper one morning, and is introduced by their young medic as Mary Anne, his seventeen year old girlfriend from Cleveland Heights Senior High, by way of LA, Bangkok, and Saigon.Well, skipping a whole lot of the story, the girl takes to 'Nam like a bee to a flower. She starts dressing like the guys, learns how to fire a rifle, goes down into the ville to check out the locals, and finally starts going out on patrols with six Greenies (Berets) that have their own little station in an enclosed area near the medic place (thus sort of leaving her boy friend). Again I'm not going to go into the details, but the story takes a very strange twist, and we find this seventeen year old morphing into a female Apocalypse Now style Brando character, wearing a necklace made out of human tongues and hanging out with the Greenies in their hootch. Across the room a dozen candles were burning on the floor near the open window. The place seemed to echo with a weird deep-wilderness sound – tribal music – bamboo flutes and drums and chimes. But what hit you first was … two kinds of smells. There was a topmost scent of joss sticks and incense, like the fumes of some exotic smokehouse, but beneath the smoke lay a deeper more powerful stench … Thick and numbing, like an animal's den, a mix of blood and scorched hair and excrement and the sweet-sour odor of moldering flesh – the stink of the kill … On a post at the rear of the hooch was the decayed head of a large black leopard … Off in the gloom a few dim figures lounged in hammocks … The music came from a tape deck, but the high voice was Mary Anne's … she stepped out of the shadows … barefoot. She wore her pink sweater and a white blouse and a cotton skirt.And that necklace.Well Rat draws the story out nicely, then finally ends it with And then one morning, all alone, Mary Anne walked off into the mountains and did not come back. … But the story did not end there. If you believed the Greenies, Rat said, Mary Anne was still somewhere out there in the dark. Odd movements, odd shapes. Late at night, when the Greenies were out on ambush, the whole rain forest seemed to stare in at them – a watched feeling – and a couple times they almost saw her sliding through the shadows. Not quite, but almost. She had crossed to the other side. She was part of the land. She was wearing her culottes, her pink sweater, and a necklace of human tongues. She was dangerous. She was ready for the kill. Worth the price of admission, that one.(1) On the Rainy RiverBut the first of the stories that nailed me, maybe not as flamboyant, not as good a movie script, was On the Rainy River. I don't need to really tell this story. Actually I do. But only one spoiler two spoilers. The introduction is simply "This is one story I've never told before." It's about "Tim's" and/or Tim's summer of '68, after graduating from Macalester; after receiving within a couple weeks a draft notice; after working in a pig slaughterhouse in Worthington for several weeks; anguishing over what he should do about this war that he doesn't believe in, that's he's being called to; finally leaving a note to his parents, taking off, driving north up through Duluth, International Falls, then to the west along the Rainy River. Just across from Canada. Where he stops at a run-down fishing resort called the Tip Top Lodge, and stays for a few days, the only customer of the eighty-one year old owner, Elroy Berdahl.Elroy Berdahl: "The hero of my life … the man saved me. He offered exactly what I needed, without questions, without any words at all. He took me in. He was there at the critical time – a silent, watchful presence."Tim lays it all on the table, all the things that were urging him to flee to Canada, all the things that were holding him back. (He tells us the readers, that is, not Elroy. He and Elroy only make small talk, but as Tim realizes later, Elroy knows what's going on, yet never says anything.) The last day at the Lodge, Elroy takes him out fishing on a sunny, cold afternoon. He turns the boat north, guns the motor, and steers all the way across the river, cutting the motor to drift twenty feet off the Canadian shore. Baits his hook, says nothing, starts fishing. Tim sits in the bow, looking at the forest, looking at an invisible boundary that, if crossed, will change his life forever.I think he meant to bring me up against the realities, to guide me across the river and to take me to the edge and to stand a kind of vigil as I chose a life for myself … You're twenty-one years old, you're scared, and there's a hard squeezing pressure in your chest.What would you do?Would you jump? Would you feel pity for yourself? Would you think about your family and your childhood and your dreams and all you're leaving behind? Would it hurt? Would it feel like dying? Would you cry, as I did? He can't jump. "I did try. It just wasn't possible." I couldn't risk the embarrassment.He drives home. The day was cloudy. I passed through towns with familiar names, through the pine forests and down to the prairie, and then to Vietnam, where I was a soldier, and then home again. I survived, but it's not a happy ending. I was a coward. I went to the war.This story affected me deeply. Of course I cried. You have to know that it's early in the book, before I realized that "Tim" maybe wasn't Tim, and that the story was probably not actually true. And although I now think its truth is not the truth of happening, it still is true, but its truth is the truth of story.For it could have been my story. I was less than two years older than Tim. Both my future wife and I had graduated from college in '66. (She had graduated from Macalester for godsakes.) And I had received my draft notice just a few weeks after graduating, had even driven to Ft. Holabird in Baltimore for my pre-induction physical that summer. I wasn't working in a slaughterhouse, but at the Dept. of Health Education and Welfare (HEW) that summer, programming some primitive desk top computer with paper tape. And then out of the blue, I can't even remember how it happened, I wound up going to a job interview at the Naval Research Laboratory, and was hired, and given a deferment. That was the first really momentous occurrence in my life that taught me that I had no real control over my fate. Things just happen.A couple years ago my wife and I went to our fiftieth HS reunion in the small town in Minnesota where we grew up. I met a classmate who I hadn't known very well in school. He was from the country, didn't go to my church, so we just didn't know each other real well, despite being in a class of only about a hundred. He said that it was the first reunion he had come to. The reason was, he had skipped to Canada when he was drafted. But ever since, he had been too embarrassed to return to see his old classmates. I told him that I was really glad he had come. I'm also pretty sure I said something to him like "Joe, you were one of the brave ones". At least I hope I did. I think Tim would have said that. But wait ... an Epilogue Here's where I've decided to override the end of my prior narrative. It's 13 August 2016. Today my wife and I drove to

of deconstructing narratives. He frequently has characters chime in to interrupt the story saying it shouldn't be told that way. He blurs reality as Tim O'Brien is himself a character in the book, but his history is admittedly different than the author's own. He flat out lies to you, then explains why this is better than the truth. It's chaos… it's kind of beautiful. It works.Typically on books of short stories I try to do a mini-review for each story. I won't be doing that here. They are all so connected, that even if they could stand alone, they really are all one tale. I'll make note that my favorite was "Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong," but overall they all get the same rating. A solid 4/5 stars“A thing may happen and be a total lie; another thing may not happen and be truer than the truth.”1990s read-2021 reviewed September 3, 2023"[Death is] like being inside a book that nobody's reading."This is a pretty damn good book, which got me thinking. I'm thinking if I read two or three books every month until my great granddaughter is born, there will still be hundreds of great books I haven't read. Now, I don't know if I should find that fact encouraging or discouraging. Don't get me wrong! I'm not expecting a great granddaughter anytime soon! No siree. If my current estimate is correct, I don't expect to get a great grandchild for a couple of decades. Now that there is a motivational thought! It motivates me to keep myself and my wife alive for a good while. In a couple of decades, we'll both be 95 years young. (95 going on a hundred.)My wife has survived cancer, and I've survived a stroke, so I figure living to the age of 95 will be a piece of cake. (In my case, make it a slice of pumpkin pie.)By now, you're probably wondering how do I know that my first great-grandchild will be a girl. I know because I've read that the past is prologue. (Remember I read Sparknotes for the Tempest here on Goodreads.) Shakespeare also said, "What must be shall be." (I think I remember Rita Moreno singing about that in West Side Story.) More to my point, Shakespeare said, "It is a wise [great grand] father that knows his own [great grand] child."Now, I don't have any great wisdom, but I do know a little about my family genealogy. Specifically, I know quite a bit about the direct descendants of my great great grandfather Levi Null (1794-1875). I know quite a lot about Levi's descendants going from him all the way to my granddaughter. I know that in all those seven generations of Nulls, every single firstborn child has been a girl. (What are the odds?)To be honest, there is one possible exception. My grandfather Thomas Levi Null (1863-1913) was a fraternal twin. (He's the Okie who had a farm near Roosevelt, OK who died a week after a mule kicked him in the head.) Anyway, one of his letters has survived. In his letter, Thomas Levi seemed to be a courteous sort of guy, so we have every reason to believe he let his sister, Lillian Mae, go first.December 10, 2016The Things They Carried is so full of microburst storytelling that its shortcomings as a fully formed narrative are overcome. Tim O'Brien first published many of these chapters as short stories: Speaking of Courage (1976) appeared in Massachusetts Review and won an O. Henry Award in 1978; The Ghost Soldiers (1981), The Things They Carried (1986), How To Tell a True War Story (1987), The Lives of the Dead (1987) and Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong (1989) appeared in Esquire; In the Field (1989) in Gentleman's Quarterly and On the Rainy River (1990) in Playboy.The Vietnam War became heavily dramatized in the years leading up to the publication of The Things They Carried, in film (Apocalypse Now, Platoon and Full Metal Jacket being the standard bearers), on TV (Tour of Duty on CBS, China Beach on ABC and Vietnam War Story on HBO) and even a Top 40 pop tune ("19" by Paul Hardcastle) which used period newsreels as lyrics. The triumph of the book is the way O'Brien--sometimes using violence, sometimes not--is able to strike like lightning on a clear day, searing details across my imagination that I won't be able to get out anytime soon:-- On ambush, or other night missions, they carried peculiar little odds and ends. Kiowa always took along his New Testament and a pair of moccasins for silence. Dave Jensen carried night-vision vitamins high in carotene. Lee Strunk carried his slingshot; ammo, he claimed, would never be a problem. Rat Kiley carried brandy and M&M's candy. Until he was shot, Ted Lavender carried the starlight scope, which weighed 6.3 pounds with its aluminum carrying case. Henry Dobbins carried his girlfriend's pantyhose wrapped around his neck as a comforter. They all carried ghosts. When dark came, they would move out single file across the meadows and paddies to their ambush coordinates, where they would quietly set up the Claymores and lie down and spend the night waiting.-- If you weren't humping, you were waiting. I remember the monotony. Digging foxholes. Slapping mosquitoes. The sun and the heat and the endless paddies. Even in the deep bush, where you could die any number of ways, the war was nakedly and aggressively boring. But it was a strange boredom. It was boredom with a twist, the kind of boredom that caused stomach disorders. You'd be sitting at the top of a high hill, the flat paddies stretching out below, and the day would be calm and hot and utterly vacant, and you'd feel the boredom dripping inside you like a leaky faucet, except it wasn't water, it was a sort of acid, and with each little droplet you'd feel the stuff eating away at the important organs. You'd try to relax. You'd uncurl your fists and let your thoughts go. Well, you'd think, this isn't so bad. And right then you'd hear gunfire behind you and your nuts would fly up into your throat and you'd be squealing pig squeals. That kind of boredom.-- Often in a true war story there is not even a point, or else the point doesn't hit you until twenty years later, in your sleep, and you wake up and shake your wife and start telling the story to her, except when you get to the end you've forgotten the point again. And then for a long time you lie there watching the story happen in your head. You listen to your wife's breathing. The war's over. You close your eyes. You take a feeble swipe at the dark and think, Christ, what's the point?-- What happened to her, Rat said, was what happened to all of them. You come over clean and you get dirty and then afterward it's never the same. A question of degree. Some make it intact, some don't make it at all. For Mary Anne Bell, it seemed, Vietnam had the effect of a powerful drug: that mix of unnamed terror and unnamed pleasure that comes as the needle slips in and you know you're risking something. The endorphins start to flow, and the adrenaline, and you hold your breath and creep quietly through the moonlit nightscapes; you become intimate with danger; you're in touch with the far side of yourself, as though it's another hemisphere, and you want to string it out and go wherever the trip takes you and be host to all the possibilities inside yourself.-- The countryside itself seemed spooky--shadows and tunnels and incense burning in the dark. The land was haunted. We were fighting forces that did not obey the laws of twentieth-century science. Late at night, on guard, it seemed that all of Vietnam was alive and shimmering--odd shapes swaying in the paddies, boogiemen in sandals, and Charlie Cong was the main ghost. The way he came out at night. How you never really saw him, just thought you did. Almost magical--appearing, disappearing. He could blend with the land, changing form, becoming trees and grass. He could fly. He could pass through barbed wire and melt away like ice and creep up on you without sound or footsteps. He was scary. In the daylight, maybe, you didn't believe in this stuff. You laughed it off. You made jokes. But at night you turned into a believer: no skeptics in foxholes.O'Brien's command of prose, the marriage of the literary with the journalistic, is the chief reason to read The Things They Carried. The focus is not placed on battles or events or what happened in the war, but on how a wide variety of stimuli in Vietnam made O'Brien feel about the war. As he points out after an encounter with a dear little old lady leaving one of his book readings, this is not a war story, it's a love story. The approach seems righteous and much of the material is drawn from that well. And many of the stories he tells are unforgettable, playing with truth to the point the author has to address the subjective nature of truth at one point, but hard to put out of my mind.As drunken as I was on O'Brien's command of prose and his storytelling, there are three reasons why The Things They Carried stopped short of total satisfaction for me. The first is that instead of one chapter leading into the next and so on, these are vignettes, some masterful, others pedestrian, each self-contained for the most part. Second, there's an anticlimactic quality in this jumping around that took me out of the novel, something that was not a problem as long as these vignettes were published in magazines or literary journals. Third, and also no fault of O'Brien's, I felt that so much of his material had been strip mined by film and television, by 2016, I'd seen a lot of it already.It's difficult for me to imagine that Full Metal Jacket and other movies didn't draw inspiration from O'Brien or use him as a war correspondent--the adrenaline kick of combat mixed with the absolute terror of being killed being a recurring theme in the Stanley Kubrick film in particular. O'Brien addresses the ritualistic joking the grunts utilized to avoid dealing with death, the scripted nature of which became a criticism of Full Metal Jacket. Still, I can see why the book has become a staple of high school and college English curriculum. O'Brien used his experiences to mold a deeply felt and powerful document of a time that history might otherwise soon forget.anthology fiction-generalJanuary 22, 2020I have read many descriptions of war - WWI. WWII, the Spanish Revolution, Viet Nam. No writer has ever taken me into the head of a soldier the way Tim O'Brien did. His writing is poignant, hauntingly powerful, and poetic. It is brilliant as only a gifted writer can convey.November 20, 2017What makes a good war story? How much needs to be true for it to feel real? Tim O'Brien's "The Things They Carried" is a powerful, heartbreaking and gut-wrenching book about the Vietnam war. I had previously read the title story, which is excellent on its own, but I can thank the Ken Burns & Lynn Novick documentary for pushing me to read the entire book. O'Brien was interviewed in their TV series, and his wartime experiences fueled his writing. "The Things They Carried" isn't really a novel or memoir, it's more a collection of linked short stories, each one looking at a different aspect of the war or of Tim's life. He remembers and mourns his friends who died, and he tries to reckon with what the war really meant. One of my favorite stories was when he considered running away to Canada to escape the military draft, and how he finally decided to return home and report for duty. He realized he would rather fight in a war he didn't believe in than risk being ostracized by his family and hometown.The day was cloudy. I passed through towns with familiar names, through the pine forests and down to the prairie, and then to Vietnam, where I was a soldier, and then home again. I survived, but it's not a happy ending. I was a coward. I went to the war.I listened to this on audio, which was narrated by the actor Bryan Cranston, and he was a great choice. His gravelly voice handled both the grim and the bizarre elements of the war, and he has the warmth of character to make it feel like we were sitting around a campfire, sharing our deep, dark stories. Five stars to Mr. O'Brien for working through a lot of angst and for writing so well, and five stars to Mr. Cranston for conveying it so beautifully.Meaningful Quotes"To generalize about war is like generalizing about peace. Almost everything is true. Almost nothing is true. At its core, perhaps, war is just another name for death, and yet any soldier will tell you, if he tells the truth, that proximity to death brings with it a corresponding proximity to life. After a firefight, there is always the immense pleasure of aliveness. The trees are alive. The grass, the soil -- everything. All around you things are purely living, and you among them, and the aliveness makes you tremble.""For the most part they carried themselves with poise, a kind of dignity. Now and then, however, there were times of panic, when they squealed or wanted to squeal but couldn't, when they twitched and made moaning sounds and covered their heads and said Dear Jesus and flopped around on the earth and fired their weapons blindly and cringed and sobbed and begged for the noise to stop and went wild and made stupid promises to themselves and to God and to their mothers and fathers, hoping not to die. In different ways, it happened to all of them. Afterward, when the firing ended, they would blink and peek up. They would touch their bodies, feeling shame, then quickly hiding it. They would force themselves to stand. As if in slow motion, frame by frame, the world would take on the old logic -- absolute silence, then the wind, then sunlight, then voices. It was the burden of being alive.""We kept the dead alive with stories. When Ted Lavender was shot in the head, the men talked about how they'd never seen him so mellow, how tranquil he was, how it wasn't the bullet but the tranquilizers that blew his mind. He wasn't dead, just laid-back. There were Christians among us, like Kiowa, who believed in the New Testament stories of life after death. Other stories were passed down like legends from old-timer to newcomer. Mostly though, we had to make up our own. Often they were exaggerated, or blatant lies, but it was a way of bringing body and soul back together, or a way of making new bodies for the souls to inhabit.""There were occasions, I believed, when a nation was justified in using military force to achieve its ends, to stop a Hitler or some comparable evil, and I told myself that in such circumstances I would've willingly marched off to battle. The problem, though, was that a draft board did not let you choose your war."May 7, 2021this is one of those books that every semi-young male high school english teacher that everyone has a crush on, not because he's hot particularly but just because it's a desperate times / desperate measures scenario, is invariably obsessed with.but in this case, that aging 6 with slightly too long hair is correct. because this book is so good.i have been assigned this book in either 2 or 3 classes and definitely read it at least 1.5 of those times, which is saying a lot, since i ascribe to the belief that if i read a book once in school it stays permanently in my brain forever and i am a genius from then on, never needing to so much as think about it again. this one actually is memorable to me, even though i read it 6 years ago when i was seventeen years old and waking up at 6 a.m. on a regular basis, a lifestyle i find unimaginable now.anyway. this is both a standout in the War genre (not my favorite) and in the radical-and-somewhat-experimental-look-how-cool-literature-can-be genre (which i just made up and is my favorite).long way of saying this is good stuff.this is part of a project i am doing sometimes, as in three times every two years or so, where i review a book i read a long time ago. how fun for us all.4-stars historical literary-fiction Displaying 1 - 30 of 20,610 reviewsGet help and learn more about the design. Quote 1: "Whenever he looked at the photographs, he thought of new things he should have done." Chapter 1, pg. 5 Quote 2: "Oh shit, the guy's dead." Chapter 1, pg. 13 Quote 3: "there it is." Chapter 1, pg. 14 Quote 4: "By daylight they took sniper fire, at night they were mortared, but it was not battle, it was just the endless march, village to village, without purpose, nothing won or lost." Chapter 1, pg. 15 Quote 5: "On occasions the war was like a Ping-Pong ball. You could put a fancy spin on it, you could make it dance." Chapter 3, pg. 32 Quote 6: "Mellow, man. We got ourselves a nice mellow war today." Chapter 3, pg. 33 Quote 7: "All that peace, man, it felt so good it hurt. I want to hurt it back." Chapter 3, pg. 35 Quote 8: "My conscience told me to run, but some irrational and powerful force was resisting, like a weight pushing me toward the war. What it came down to, stupidly, was a sense of shame." Chapter 4, pg. 52 Quote 9: "Right then, with the shore so close, I understood that I would not do what I should do." Chapter 4, pg. 57 Quote 10: "I survived, but it's not a happy ending. I was a coward. I went to the war." Chapter 4, pg. 61 Quote 11: "If at the end of a war story you feel uplifted, or if you feel that some small bit of rectitude has been salvaged from the larger waste, then you have been made the victim of a very old and terrible lie." Chapter 6, pg. 68 Quote 12: "[A]nd the whole war is right there in that stare. It says everything you can't ever say." Chapter 7, pg. 75 Quote 13: "Well, that's Nam. Garden of Evil. Over here, man, every sin's fresh and original." Chapter 7, pg. 80 Quote 14: "It's safe to say that in a true war story nothing is ever absolutely true." Chapter 7, pg. 82 Quote 15: "It wasn't a question of deceit. Just the opposite; he wanted to heat up the truth, to make it burn so hot that you would feel exactly what he felt." Chapter 9, pg. 89 Quote 16: "Tone? I didn't know it was all that complicated. The girl joined the zoo. One more animal--end of story." Chapter 9, pg. 107 Quote 17: , "When I'm out there at night, I feel close to my own body, I can feel my blood moving, my skin and my fingernails, everything, it's like I'm full of electricity and I'm glowing in the dark--I'm on fire almost--I'm burning away to nothing--but it doesn't matter because I know exactly where I am." Chapter 9, pg. 111 Quote 18: "No sweat. The magic doesn't go away." Chapter 10, pg. 118 Quote 19: "Oh man, you fuckin' trashed the fucker. You scrambled his sorry self, look at that, you did, you laid him out like fuckin' Shredded Wheat." Chapter 12, pg. 125 Quote 20: "All right then, dance right." Chapter 14, pg. 136 Quote 21: "[The town] had no memory, therefore no guilt....It did not know shit about shit, and did not care to know." Chapter 15, pg. 143 Quote 22: "That night when Kiowa got wasted, I sort of sank down into the sewage with him" Chapter 16, pg. 156 Quote 23: "He'd lost Kiowa and his weapon and his flashlight and his girlfriend's picture. He remembered this. He remembered wondering if he could lose himself." Chapter 17, pg. 171 Quote 24: "I want you to feel what I felt. I want you to know why story-truth is truer sometimes than happening-truth." Chapter 18, pg. 179 Quote 25: "You're a shadow. You slip out of your own skin, like molting, shedding your own history and your own future, leaving behind everything you ever were or wanted or believed in." Chapter 20, pg. 211 Quote 26: "It had all the shadings and complexities of mature adult love, and maybe more, because there were not yet words for it, and because it was not yet fixed to comparisons or chronologies or the ways by which adults measure such things. I just loved her." Chapter 22, pg. 228 Quote 27: "I should've stepped in; fourth grade is no excuse. Besides, it doesn't get easier with time, and twelve years later, when Vietnam presented much harder choices, some practice at being brave might've helped." Chapter 22, pg. 234 Quote 28: "It lasted only a moment, but I had the feeling that a whole conversation was happening between us. Well? She was saying, and I was saying, Sure, okay." Chapter 22, pg. 235 Quote 29: "And as a writer now, I want to save Linda's life. Not her body--her life." Chapter 22, pg. 236 Quote 30: "Once you're alive, you can't ever be dead." Chapter 22, pg. 244 Quote 31: "I'm skimming across the surface of my own history, moving fast, riding the melt beneath the blades, doing loops and spins, and when I take a high leap into the dark and come down thirty years later, I realize it is as Tim trying to save Timmy's life with a story." Chapter 22, pg. 246