
The Things They Carried: The Theme of War and Conflict

War and Conflict Essay

War and Conflict have both affected many lives. Conflicts have caused arguments, fights, and, usually, has ended great relationships. While War may be about the same thing, it has ended lives instead of relationships. War gives paranoia, instead of relief. Sometimes it even gives insanity. They both cause trouble, but only one gives satisfaction to someone.

The conflict in "The Things They Carried" by Tim O'Brien, in the chapter called "On The Rainy River", he has one conflict that has changed his perspective on his life. "In June of 1968, a month after graduating from Macalester College, I was drafted to fight a war I hated" (O'Brien 34). He knew about the war, but he does not know what was the reason for it anymore. He knew in the beginning that it was for Communism, but now it's just to win, win, win.

He has no idea what to do. Leave and fight in a war he will most likely die in, or to go onto Canada and live as a fugitive. "A moral freeze: I couldn't decide, I couldn't act, I couldn't comport myself with even a pretense of modest human dignity. All I could do was cry" (O'Brien 45). He had the chance to leave the U.S. but he could not bring himself to do it. He told himself that he was too embarrassed to leave. He thought of himself as a coward for going to the war, instead of leaving it.

The war in Vietnam gives a different ending. Many soldiers change once they go in. They come back paranoid or sometimes just plain insane. "They sneered at sick call. They spoke bitterly about guys who had found release by shooting off their own toes or fingers" (O'Brien 24). Many of the soldiers gave themselves self-injuries, and just shot off the least important body part, like a toe. They could not find any other way to leave. The only way to leave is to get shot. Many took that shot or just blew themselves away.

The insanity went far though. "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" (O'Brien 81). No matter who or how nice, mean, perverted, sincere, they were, they will come out changed. They will become someone their friends have never known, someone their family wishes was gone. Rarely will they commit suicide, but it depends what they have seen, or if they could have handled it. Like Mary Anne, she came in the beginning as a sweet little girl, not capable of anything dangerous. Her curiosity defied her, as she wanted learn more about combat, medicine, surgery, and the Greenies. She knew the land well and that is what motivated her to leave. How her sweetheart, Mark Fossie, does not know how it is out in the forest, how hellish it is.

In the end, War and Conflict are different but somehow the same. They both have trouble involved, but only one can have one victor without any scars. War causes a sort of paranoia, while conflict causes only disagreements.