

Ivette G

Winds of War

Period 1

December 18, 2014

## **Part I. Formal Written Analysis**

Gunshots from every direction. Bombs falling from the sky. Houses of civilians burning down. Wake up. He has just had a nightmare. He is back in his hometown, far, far away from the war. He goes back to sleep, gets ready for his new job. He hears people complaining about how hot their coffee was this morning, complain about how little sleep they had. This annoys him because he was in the war where complaining was not acceptable. Rejoining society is not a piece of cake. *All Quiet on the Western Front* by Erich Maria Remarque, *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien, and *A Long Way Gone* by Ishmael Beah all depict what it is like to rejoin society.

*All Quiet on the Western Front* by Erich Maria Remarque focuses on Paul Baumer who is fighting on the German side during World War I. In *All Quiet on the Western Front* young men enlist into the army, when they were just starting to become young adults. Like other young adults, Paul never knew about love, never knew what it was to go to college, or to have to worry about moving out. Paul did not enjoy being in the front line but he felt disappointed at home when he left for his leave. "I imagined leave would be different from this... But now I see that I have been crushed without knowing it. I find that I did not belong here anymore, it is a foreign world... Now I feel no contact here." (Remarque, 168) Paul did not have an easy time rejoining society for that short amount of time on his leave. Everyone would try to convince him that soldiers had it better when he knew it was really all a lie and Paul wanted to be part of society

even though it was hard for him to rejoin. “When I see them here, in their rooms, in their offices, about their occupations, I feel an irresistible attraction in it, I would like to be here too and forget about the war... how can they do it, while out at the front the splinters are whining over the shell-holes and star- shells go up, the wounded are carried back on waterproof sheets and comrades crouch in the trenches.- They are different here, men I cannot properly understand, who, I envy and despise.” (Remarque, 169)

*The Things They Carried* by Tim O’Brien is written from O’Brien’s perspective during the Vietnam War. The men were drafted into the Vietnam War. This book has a lot of characters who come from all different backgrounds but the one who stood out the most was Norman Bowker. During the Vietnam War, Bowker won all metals except one, the Silver Star. He never really spoke to his father who was always watching baseball games on television. The girl he liked before he went off to the war was now married. Bowker had no one. “Through the windows, as if in a stop- motion photograph, the place looked as if it had been hit by the nerve gas, everything still and lifeless, even the people. The town could not talk, and would not listen... It was a brisk, polite town. It did not know shit about shit, and did not care to know.” (O’Brien, 137) All Bowker wants is for someone to listen, someone to tell him that it was okay that he did not win the Silver Star Award that it was not his fault, and it was okay. No one, not even his dad was there for him. Bowker was stuck on a rut and was not getting anywhere in life. “...Norman Bowker, who three years later hung himself in the locker of a YMCA in his hometown in central Iowa.” (O’Brien, 149)

*A Long Way Gone* by Ishmael Beah is a memoir of Beah during the Sierra Leone rebellion/ war. The boys in *A Long Way Gone* did not enlist or were drafted, they were forced to fight with the army or they would be killed. Beah’s book was different from *All Quiet on the*

*Western Front* and *The Things They Carried* because their equipment was not all that great, they were only boys, and they were drugged to go around killing people and burning villages down. Unlike many other young soldiers, Beah was lucky to be rescued by UNICEF, but at the moment he had not realized how good of a thing that was. “It was infuriating to be told what to do by civilians. Their voices, even when they called us for breakfast, enraged me so much that I would punch the wall, my locker, or anything that I was standing next to... We were unhappy because we needed our guns and drugs.” (Beah, 138) Apart from just having to rejoin society, away from the war Beah had to get used to not taking any more drugs which is another battle he had to struggle with. At the Benin Home he was able to get treated and consoled for help. They found his uncle who his father never spoke about. “Two weeks earlier, Leslie had told me that I was to be ‘repatriated’ and reinstated into normal society. I was to live with my uncle... I was worried about living with a family. I had been on my own for years and had taken care of myself without any guidance from anyone. I was afraid that I might look ungrateful to my uncle, who didn’t have to take me in, if I distanced myself from the family unit. I was worried about what to do when my nightmares and migraines took hold of me. How was I going to explain my sadness, which I am unable to hide as it takes over my face, to my new family, especially the children? I didn’t have answers to these questions...” (Beah, 179)

The gunshots have died out. There is no sound of bombs anywhere. There is no sign of any house existing anywhere near. He knew that this was just a dream. He knew that he was far away from the war. He knew that now he had to adjust to society and that he was not the only one who was having trouble rejoining society. *All Quiet on the Western Front* by Erich Maria Remarque, *The Things They Carried* by Tim O’Brien, and *A Long Way Gone* by Ishmael Beah all depicted what it was like to rejoin society.

## **Part II. Narrative- Style Reflection**

Before Winds of War, I knew that for a soldier it was difficult to rejoin society. My uncle is an Iraq and Afghanistan combat veteran who never speaks about the war, he came back more quiet and pensive. It has been difficult for him to get used to the way things were before he left for the war. Just three years ago he had a seizure that paralyzed the left side of his body and he still does not speak about the war. This course has made me understand more clearly what it is like for combat veterans to rejoin society from their perspective.

Reading *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *The Things They Carried*, and *A Long Way Gone* all conveyed what it was like for soldiers to rejoin society. Specifically *The Things They Carried* really shocked me when Norman Bowker's father did not really talk much to him. Rejoining society sounds hard enough so I cannot picture what it would be like to be Norman Bowker and have no one to talk to. In *All Quiet on the Western Front* I found it really depressing how Paul found it difficult to rejoin society because everyone seemed to be getting by decently and he did not want to leave his sick mother.

I feel as if rejoining society is a very important topic because these are our veterans who have been oversea fighting for months or even years for our country, so we should at least be grateful and make them feel welcomed. My cousin who fought in Iraq did mention that he felt that people were greedy and self- centered once he came back. I remember that last year my American Studies teacher told us that after the Korean and Vietnam Wars the American people were not so welcoming to the soldiers. I find that very disrespectful and ignorant for people to do.

### Part III. Images



Image found at <http://freedomnews.org.uk/world-war-one-and-100-years-of-counter-revolution/>

*Stormtroopers Advance Under Cover of Gas* was done by Otto Dix in 1924 during the World War I era. This piece of artwork relates specifically to *All Quiet on the Western Front* because during World War I, men would be running towards the front line to kill the enemy. To me this picture symbolizes as if a soldier is having a nightmare and the enemy are coming towards to attack them. From the pictures I have seen of WWI you can tell it is from that war because men actually wore gas masks.

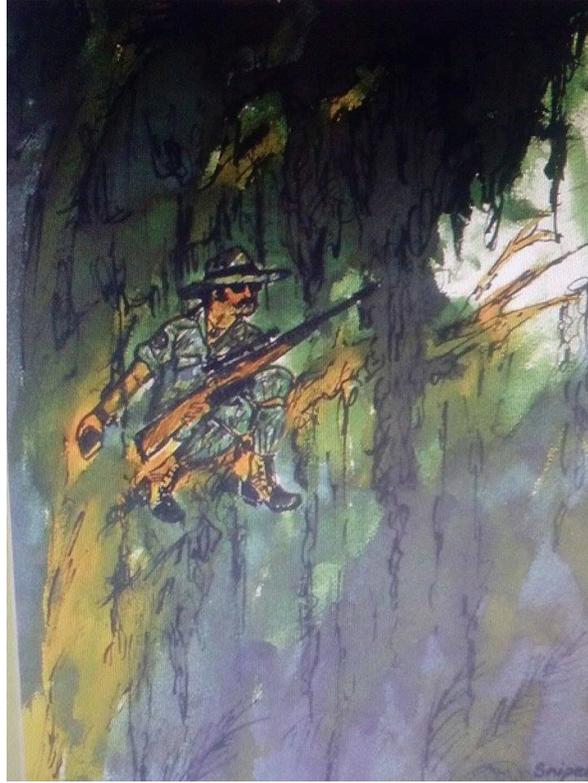


Image found at <http://www.nvam.org/collection-online/index.php?artist=Irish%2C+Tom>

Sniper- Vietnam created by Tom Irish in 1970. I chose this image because when I saw this image I right away pictured Tim O'Brien and the time that he killed the Vietnamese boy. Although I picture as if this is from the enemies perspective because the painted soldier looks American so perhaps the sniper was looking at the American soldier.



Images found at <http://www.nvam.org/collection-online/index.php?artist=Vasquez%2C+Regina>

Regina Vasquez displayed her gallery *Overlooked Looked/ Looked Over* and named the pieces of art *Fatigues Clothesline* on March 2012. It is a different type of art but it is not any less powerful. *Fatigues Clothesline* is art therapy to any female who has been abuse while serving in the military. Clothes are worn to raise awareness that rape is not something that just happens in our communities but also within military bases. Clothes are also worn to cover the body and Vasquez chose clothes as a way of showing people that when a women gets abused she feels naked, and ashamed. I really love it, not that I like that these women have been sexually abused but the way they put it into art is really creative.

I specifically chose the image to the right named Fatigues Clothesline (Detail 3) because it is three arms which each read something. One of the arms has silenced, one died, and another shamed and they are all touching a girl. Then on the sleeves there is an arm that reads nightmares and another terrorized. Around the circle reads Foreign Hands of Rape. I feel like this is an important image because it is not only art therapy but sending out a message to the public that even in within the military such thing can happen.

#### **Part IV: Veteran Interview**

I interviewed my cousin Anthony Gonzalez, who was a rifleman in the Marines, in Afghanistan. My cousin was a wild child growing up, or so my mother always says. He had a contract from 2007- 2011 and from 2010 to 2011 he was at Helmand District Sangin Valley in Afghanistan. I started off asking him what stood out from boot camp/ training experiences. He said it broke people down and from what I have seen in military movies that did not really surprise me. What did surprise me was that he told me that boot camp started off with 500 people and only 70 actually stayed. The training evolution was never the same, and always unexpected. He told me, “When anything and everything goes wrong you just learn to go with it... in the infantry there’s a saying ‘Embrace the suck.’” He felt confidence, doubt, excitement, and worried all at the same time during his first few days. I found it really interesting that he described Afghanistan as a hell hole, “... if there was a hell that’s where I would end up. It was a constant adrenaline rush and you were mentally and physically pushed to your limit, someone was constantly testing you. Everyone and everything was always trying to kill you. You felt super human and detached.”

I loved how he described how close his platoon was. "... nothing else in the world mattered more than your brother to your left or right, people from different races, religions, and characters became brothers and formed bonds in the heat of the battle. It's crazy how when you're put through hell you put your differences aside... Don't get me wrong we still had our disagreements and fought each other but in the end of the day we just laughed it off and looked after each other." To this day they are still close. I think my favorite thing that he said was "You become a family, there's no black or white. We just see red, we all bleed it." I found it really cool how they could all communicate without even saying anything at all, whether it was good or bad. Maybe they knew each other too well because he told me that they could tell who was who by looking at the way they walked.

The Thanksgiving Battle, he described was a firefight and non-stop bombs everywhere that lasted an entire day. They lost a lieutenant and the other squad was pinned so his squad had to go and bail the other lieutenant's squad out. At the time my cousin had not seen one of his brothers (comrade) for a few days and when they finally made it to the patrol base he was relieved to see him.

"Everyone is only about themselves greedy, careless, sensitive, and backstabbers. They only look at how they can come up, there's no cohesiveness, no trust. I come from the infantry and even within the military it differs, There's a saying 'If you're not in infantry, you're a P.O.G.'" I found that pretty interesting. But when he finally did come back he did admit to feeling really detached. He only noticed the laziness, greediness, and self-centeredness in everyone. He said that nowadays everyone isolates themselves, no one goes out of their way to help anyone else or show respect towards others. "I don't know how to describe it but after having been through one of the deadliest battles where we took over 200 casualties and 25 KIFA (killed in

flight accident), I would still go back in a heartbeat and without a doubt. In my mind I miss the hell out of the Valley. It never really leaves you.” The thing I found the coolest was that *One Million Steps* by Bing West is about my cousin’s platoon and deployment and what they went through. He told me he’s worried to read it for himself but he is surprised someone actually wrote a book about their experience through the Valley. I can honestly say I cannot wait to read it.