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Military Drug Use in the Literature of the Vietnam War

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Abstract:

Popular historiography of the Vietnam War often focuses on the apparently rampant drug use which characterized many American servicemen stationed in Vietnam. Indeed, historical commentators have suggested that Vietnam marked the first war where drug abuse constituted a serious threat to the American military effort. What accounted for this widespread use of drugs in Vietnam? While statistics and historical accounts can provide a sense of the breadth of this problem, fictional accounts written by Vietnam War veterans and accomplished authors such as Larry Heinemann, Tim O'Brien, and Gustav Hasford can provide narrative weight, from a soldier's perspective, as to just how compelling illicit drugs could be to beleaguered American servicemen. From these works we can observe how 1) the rapidly commercialized culture and markets of South Vietnam – built to cater to every conceivable GI want or need; 2) the young, disillusioned soldier's need for an escape from the psychological horrors of a guerilla war; and 3) the inability and reluctance of military authorities to crack down on illicit drug use, all contributed to a conducive environment where drug abuse among soldiers could, and indeed, did, flourish.

Introduction

Today, the ever-worsening "quagmire" in Iraq is routinely analogized to the Vietnam conflict, which is often viewed as the paradigm of a war gone wrong. Indeed, the Vietnam War has been called "the antithesis of the promise of American life," and is largely remembered as a tragic operation which helped divide an increasingly radicalized American population, while eventually failing in its stated objective of "protecting" South Vietnam from communist control.[1] If World War II can be symbolized by the famous image of U.S. Marines erecting an American flag on the sands of Iwo Jima, the Vietnam War may be most accurately summarized by Dutch photographer Hubert Van Es's famous shot of frantic South Vietnamese civilians boarding an evacuation helicopter at the Saigon Embassy.

Popular perception of the war in Vietnam, moreover, is often characterized by unsavory anecdotes which recount the torture and mutilation of soldiers, the wanton slaughter and rape of civilians, the indiscriminate destruction of the Vietnamese livelihood and ecosystem, and, of course, the gratuitous abuse of drugs by American servicemen. It is this last aspect of the war which is the subject of this paper, which looks to explain and contextualize the rampant drug use which plagued the U.S. military in Vietnam to sights unseen in any American wars before or since.

Drug use indeed presented a serious problem for the military effort in Vietnam. As one historian has noted, "[a]lthough drugs had certainly been available and used in previous wars, Vietnam was the first time drug use became so prevalent that it threatened

[1] Peter C. Rollins, *The Vietnam War: Perceptions through Literature, Film, and Television,* 36 AMERICAN QUARTERLY 419, 420 (1984).

to break the U.S. military."[2] Use of drugs such as marijuana by troops in Vietnam began as early as 1963, but as career servicemen and volunteers – as opposed to draftees –made up the bulk of the U.S. troop presence in Vietnam during these earlier years, drug use did not present as serious a problem. However, by 1967 or 1968, "the increasing reliance upon draftees to supply troops in Vietnam…altered the drug landscape," and drug usage had increased dramatically.[3] For instance, during 1966, only 1.8 percent of personnel in Vietnam came under investigation by military authorities for marijuana usage. By 1968, 1969, and 1970, however, this figure had jumped drastically, to 7.99, 14.77, and 20.27 percent, respectively.[4] Rates of heroin usage, meanwhile, also increased rapidly starting in 1970, leading to a "GI heroin epidemic" as technical advancements in local refinement processes led to the drastically increased availability of high quality heroin.[5] Indeed, a study of enlisted men discharged from 12-month tours in September 1971 suggested that 80 percent of these GIs had tried marijuana, as had 38 percent opium, 34 percent heroin, and 20 percent amphetamines or barbiturates. Furthermore, a full 20 percent of these soldiers testified that they were addicted to opiates, and most of these had experienced withdrawal symptoms.[6] By 1971, this plague of drug use, compounded by other malaises such as widespread dissent among troops, refusals to enter combat, "fraggings" (murder by fragmentation grenade) of commissioned or non-commissioned officers (NCOs) in the field, purposeful evasions of enemy troops (tactics known as "search and evade," a glib

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[2] WILLIAM THOMAS ALLISON, MILITARY JUSTICE IN VIETNAM: THE RULE OF LAW IN AN AMERICAN WAR 121 (University Press of Kansas 2007).
[3] *Id.* at 121-22.
[4] *See infra* Appendix.
[5] ALFRED MCCOY, THE POLITICS OF HEROIN: CIA COMPLICITY IN THE GLOBAL DRUG Trade 224 (Lawrence Hill Books 1991).
[6] GRIFFITH EDWARDS, MATTERS OF SUBSTANCE DRUGS – AND WHY EVERYONE'S A USER 125 (Thomas Dunne Books 2004).

variation on "search and destroy"), and outright desertions "all pointed to a military on the verge of collapse."[7]

However, statistics cannot tell the whole story, as this drug epidemic in Vietnam "cannot be comprehended without an awareness of what it felt like to be an American caught up in that war."[8] While historical accounts help to illuminate the extent of drug use among American troops in Vietnam, they do not serve as well to indicate why drugs were so widely used in the first place. The literary canon of novels which are set in Vietnam during the war can provide narrative weight which may help to discern deeper, more probing answers to this question. As author Tim O'Brien explains in his novel *The Things They Carried*:

> In any war story, but especially a true one, it's difficult to separate what happened from what seemed to happen. What seems to happen becomes its own happening and has to be told that way. The angles of vision are skewed. When a booby trap explodes, you close your eyes and duck and float outside yourself. When a guy dies…you look away and then look back for a moment and then look away again. The pictures get jumbled; you tend to miss a lot. And then afterward, when you go to tell about it, there is always that surreal seemingness, which makes the story seem untrue, but which in fact represents the hard and exact truth as it seemed.[9]

The significance of these novels, then, as opposed to, perhaps, histories of the war, is that they may better describe, from the soldiers' perspective, the strange environment which they perceived as they came to Vietnam. This was an exotic milieu which not only allowed servicemen to easily obtain illicit drugs, but also, because of the day-to-day horrors and exigencies of its war, encouraged them to abuse them, and allowed them to do so without substantial fear of discipline.

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[7] ALLISON, *supra* note 2, at 67.
[8] EDWARDS, *supra* note 6, at 124.
[9] TIM O'BRIEN, THE THINGS THEY CARRIED 71 (Broadway Books 1998) (1990)[hereinafter THINGS].

The authenticity of the literary accounts chosen for this paper, moreover, is heightened by the fact that all three authors whose works are analyzed served as front-line soldiers, or "grunts," in Vietnam, and that their works are based to a certain extent on their own experiences. For example, Larry Heinemann, the author of *Close Quarters* and *Paco's Story*, ran mechanized reconnaissance missions as an armored personnel carrier driver with the Army's 25th (Tropic Lightning) Infantry Division at Cu Chi and Dau Tieng from March 1967 to March 1968.[10] Meanwhile, Tim O'Brien, author of *Going After Cacciato* and *The Things They Carried*, served as an infantryman with the 23rd (Americal) Division (a platoon of which infamously carried out the massacre of Vietnamese civilians at My Lai) from January 1969 to March 1970.[11] And finally, Gustav Hasford, author of *The Short-Timers*, served as a Marine combat correspondent with the 1st Marine Division, and fought in the brutal Battle of the Hue during the Tet Offensive.[12] These experiences help account for the harrowing realism which characterizes the narration of these works. As Heinemann once suggested in an interview: "How else to represent the authenticity of story – especially the war story – than through the perception of the individual?"[13]

Finally, the fact that the works examined in this paper have merited widespread critical success, moreover, helps legitimate the genuineness of their accounts as subjects for study. Heinemann's harshly poetic novel *Paco's Story*,[14] which chronicles the

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[10] Julia Keller, *The Wound that Won't Heal: The Vietnamese long ago Put the War behind Them, but Americans Still Argue over What Went Wrong*, CHI. TRIB., April 10, 2005, § Magazine, at 10.
[11] Jesse Leavenworth, *Vietnam Imbues Tim O'Brien and his Books*, THE HARTFORD COURANT, January 22, 2006, at G2.
[12] Hal Lipper, *The Pen Behind Kubrick's Vision: Writer Gustav Hasford's Vietnam is Different from that of Recent Films*, ST. PETERSBURG TIMES, July 12, 1987, at 1F.
[13] *A Conversation with Larry Heinemann,* June 25, 1997, *available at* http://www.theatlantic.com/unbound/factfict/heinint.htm.
[14] LARRY HEINEMANN, PACO'S STORY (Penguin Books 1987) (1986)[hereinafter PACO'S].

haunted, nomadic existence of the lone G.I. survivor of a massacre, won the 1987 National Book Award for fiction, beating out Nobel Prize winner Toni Morrison's best known work, *Beloved*.[15] *Paco's Story* had followed, in turn, on the heels of Heinemann's well-received first novel, *Close Quarters*, which recounted a draftee's experience as a soldier in a front-line armored cavalry company.[16] O'Brien, for his part, won the National Book Award for fiction in 1979 for his novel *Going After Cacciato*, the story of a squad of soldiers who set off on a whimsical search for a deserter – a fantastic voyage which takes them overland to Paris.[17] In addition, *The Things They Carried*,[18] another O'Brien novel which delves introspectively into the minds of a squad of "grunts," was a finalist for both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award.[19] And finally, the last novel which will be examined in this paper includes Hasford's *The Short-Timers*,[20] which tells the odyssey of a Private Joker as he is transformed from a green Marine recruit into a hardened killer. Hasford eventually helped develop this novel into the Academy Award-nominated screenplay for legendary director Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*.[21]

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[15] The decision to award Heinemann, a relatively unknown author, was a controversial decision at the time. After this award was announced, and after *Beloved* failed to win the National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction as well, forty-eight prominent African American critics and writers wrote an open letter to the *New York Times Book Review*, protesting what they saw as "oversight and harmful whimsy." A few months later, *Beloved* won the Pulitzer Prize. Louis Menand, *All that Glitters,* THE NEW YORKER, December 26, 2005, at 136.

[16] LARRY HEINEMANN, CLOSE QUARTERS (Vintage Contemporaries 2005) (1977)[hereinafter QUARTERS].

[17] TIM O'BRIEN, GOING AFTER CACCIATO (Broadway Books 1999) (1978)[hereinafter CACCIATO].

[18] THINGS, *supra* note 9.

[19] *The Things They Carried* received multiple votes in a recent *New York Times Book Review* survey which asked leading writers, critics, and editors to name the "single best work of American fiction published in the last 25 years." Incidentally, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* topped this list. *What is the Best Work of American Fiction of the Last 25 Years?,* N.Y. TIMES, May 21, 2006, §7, at 16.

[20] GUSTAV HASFORD, THE SHORT-TIMERS (1979)[hereinafter SHORT-TIMERS], http://www.gustavhasford.com/ST2.htm. [citations are to author's free online version, as the novel has long been out of print]

[21] FULL METAL JACKET (Warner Brothers Pictures 1987).

The discussion section of this paper is divided into three parts, each of which provides a brief historical description of the topic at hand before delving into literary analysis of the works at hand. Part I provides historical background of the French colonial drug trade and subsequent tacit American support of the flourishing black market in Vietnam, and examines how American soldiers were faced with a veritable cornucopia of drugs and other services offered by a rapidly commercializing Vietnamese society. Part II presents a description of the unique characteristics of draftees and military tactics in Vietnam, and describes how factors such as civil war, guerilla warfare, and hellish jungle terrain made drug use all the more appealing as an escape route for disillusioned American troops. Finally, Part III provides an account of the limited nature of military enforcement against drug abuse, and also examines how informal laws of the "field" may have superseded formal military procedure amidst the exigencies and practicalities of waging the brutal war in Vietnam.

Discussion

I. Availability of Drugs in Vietnam

A. Historical Background

Prior to the arrival of Europeans, the people in Southeast Asia had used opium – a product of the central highlands, or "Golden Triangle" of Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, and Thailand – for primarily medical purposes, as habitual use of the drug was stigmatized within Vietnamese culture.[22] However, the introduction of tobacco and the tobacco pipe by Portuguese and Spanish traders resulted in the practice of mixing tobacco with opium and the subsequent proliferation of recreational use within China and among Chinese

[22] ALLISON, *supra* note 2, at 118.

living in Southeast Asia.[23] By the late nineteenth century, profits from opium-related trade, smokehouses, and "related corruption" had come to account for over 40 percent of colonial revenues in the region, and, as international demand grew, so too did illicit markets and corresponding government corruption.[24] Furthermore, as the French came to dominate Southeast Asia, they set up their own lucrative opium monopoly and processed shipments of opium in and around Saigon.[25] These practices significantly increased endemic use of the drug in Indochina, which began "to backfire on the French colonial administration" as it enflamed Vietnamese nationalists, hurt the work force, and helped the proliferation of corruption.[26] Nevertheless, during the French-Indochina War in the mid-twentieth century, the French intelligence service, finding itself short of funds, took control of the black market in opium.[27]

As the Americans gradually took over the French anti-communist sphere in Indochina, they too, despite initial idealistic assessments of Vietnamese democratic reform, brought with them eventual clandestine support of the opium trade.[28] For instance, during the early 1960s, the CIA came to support highland agrarian tribes such as the Meo (i.e. Hmongs), as allies against communism, and permitted their opium production to flourish.[29] It even seems likely that CIA "Air America" planes helped to transport opium and heroin from the landlocked Golden Triangle region to the urban center of Saigon.[30]

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[23] ALLISON, *supra* note 2, at 118.
[24] ALLISON, *supra* note 2, at 118.
[25] *Id.*
[26] *Id.* at 119.
[27] MCCOY, *supra* note 5, at 131.
[28] ALLISON, *supra* note 2, at 120.
[29] MCCOY, *supra* note 5, at 195-96.
[30] *Id.* at 96. Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair, WHITEOUT: THE CIA, DRUGS AND THE PRESS 245 (Verso 1998).

In 1963, with the South Vietnamese police state apparatus thrown asunder following the murder of formerly U.S.-backed President Ngo Dinh Diem, Saigon disintegrated into a series of coups and counter-coups, as communist guerrillas surrounded the city. These guerillas managed to bomb the U.S. Officer's Club in Saigon in late 1964, along with the U.S. Embassy the following year.[31] Amidst this chaos, the U.S. turned to strongman Premier Nguyen Cao Ky and his "power broker," General Nguyen Ngoc Loan. With American approval, Loan re-instituted Diem's ruthless police tactics, which depended on paid informants whose payments stemmed, of course, from the lucrative opium trade.[32] This system – which continued with successive American-backed and financed South Vietnamese governments – led to the ironic result that "[p]eriodic attempts by American agents to smash the elaborate smuggling network were thwarted by their superiors in the U.S. mission,"[33] as any successful crackdown "would have exposed nearly every prominent member of the Saigon regime."[34] By late 1969 and early 1970, moreover, laboratories in the Golden Triangle region came to perfect the heroin refining process, thereby drastically increasing the available supply of heroin in Vietnam.[35]

This heroin, highly refined and virtually government-protected, easily found its way into the hands of American soldiers, as American military installations were often staffed by numbers of Vietnamese, and American troops would invariably come to be surrounded by civilians trying to sell them any manner of goods or services. One byproduct of the American military strategy known as "pacification" – which essentially

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[31] MCCOY, *supra* note 5, at 208.
[32] MCCOY, *supra* note 5, at 211.
[33] STANLEY KARNOW, VIETNAM: A HISTORY 455 (Penguin Books 1997).
[34] *Id.*
[35] MCCOY, *supra* note 5, at 222.

called for the wanton destruction of Vietnamese farms and villages in order to deny food to guerrilla forces – was the tragic destruction of rural subsistence farming and traditionally strong ties among Vietnamese families. Accordingly, Vietnamese youths often sought to escape this poverty by flocking to urban centers or military installations crowded with affluent American troops or their support personnel.[36] These Vietnamese might work officially, for instance, in U.S. military clubs, laundries, barbershops, and so on, or they might cater unofficially to somewhat baser needs, as prostitutes or drug dealers.[37] As a result, items such as potent marijuana – which grew naturally in the warm and humid Vietnamese countryside – could be easily purchased from street vendors, barkeeps, and taxi drivers for less than $1 per pack of prepackaged "joints."[38] Similarly, an addiction to nearly pure heroin (incredibly expensive in the U.S.) could be financed for as little as $6 a day.[39] All in all, as the great American military machine came to Vietnam, it brought with it not only American luxuries but also true laissez-faire American commercialism, and this "great American cornucopia inevitably spilled its wares into the local economy and the streets of Saigon and other South Vietnamese cities."[40] Within such a thriving black market economy, drugs could be found and purchased easily by the relatively wealthy American servicemen.

B. *Literary Analysis*

This theme of the American-driven commercialization and corruption of traditional Vietnamese society, which results in the ubiquitous availability of every manner of goods and services for curious servicemen, seems to permeate these novels.

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[36] KARNOW, *supra* note 33, at 454.
[37] *Id.* at 455.
[38] ALLISON, *supra* note 2, at 122.
[39] EDWARDS, *supra* note 6, at 126.
[40] KARNOW, *supra* note 33, at 453.

For example, in one scene in *The Short-Timers*, Corporal Joker and his fellow Marine correspondent and "new guy" Rafter Man, come across a group of South Vietnamese troops looting a mansion. Debunking the rumor that all "Arvins" (members of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam) are cowards who fear fighting, Joker explains: "They were drafted by the Saigon government, which was drafted by the lifers who drafted us, who were drafted by the lifers who think that they can buy the war. And Arvins are not stupid."[41] As such, Joker seems to imply, the Arvins are merely being pragmatic, and joining – just as their corrupt leaders are – the mad rush for cash caused by the massive influx of funds and materiel from the U.S. military machine. When Rafter Man asks Joker whether the Arvins get paid by their government, Joker sardonically replies that "money is their government."[42] In a similar sequence, Joker interprets the elusive smile of a Vietnamese woman selling them overpriced bottles of Coca Cola: "Oh well, the Americans may be assholes but they are very rich."[43]

In this Vietnamese milieu of no-nonsense capitalism, the relatively wealthy soldiers in these works seem empowered and able to purchase anything, ranging from necessary goods or services to ridiculous trivialities – with either category perhaps including illicit drugs, depending on the soldier concerned. In *Paco's Story*, an unnamed narrator – a ghost of a soldier in Alpha Company, of which Paco is the lone survivor – vividly describes the Phuc Luc base camp:

> Now, the Viets worked the PX checkout counters (good-looking women who had to put out right smart and regular to keep their jobs), the PX barbershop (where the Viet barbers could run a thirty-five-cent haircut into $6.50 in fifteen minutes, and the stylishly thatched souvenir shack (where a bandy-legged ARVN cripple sold flimsy beer coolers and zip-a-dee-doo-

[41] SHORT-TIMERS, *supra* note 20, at 30.
[42] *Id.*
[43] *Id.* at 28.

> dah housecat ashtrays, and athletic-style jackets that had a map embroidered on the back with the scrolled legend *Hot damn – Vietnam* sewn in underneath.[44]

This juxtaposition of coerced sex workers, shifty barbers, and a crippled veteran hawking absurdly campy "Vietnam" jackets eloquently captures a sense of the tragic culture of consumption made available to the American war machine in Vietnam. The effects of this socially disruptive phenomenon seem to spread far into the countryside, and extend to Vietnamese of all ages, as wherever the rich Americans went, sellers were soon to follow. When the armored cavalry in *Close Quarters* takes a break on the road near a village called Suoi Dai, immediately "the Coke and beer and dope and [pimps] arrive…[coming] in small groups, like a parade, stretching out…and hawking to the crews."[45] Dosier, a driver, narrates how some of his comrades go off toward a creek embankment with "the platoon [prostitute]," while "small girls not even into puberty yet" try to sell them Coca-Cola, beer, and marijuana.[46] One of the girls calls out: "Hey Sebbo-twee [Seven-three, one of the driver's call signs]! Gaa-damma, you wann Coke? You wann bee-a! Got dope, too."[47] The poignant sight of this "barefoot" and "filthy" girl – whose American nickname is "No-Tits" – hawking illicit drugs in pidgin, curse-laden English highlights just how extensively illicit trade had taken over a newly capitalistic South Vietnam, which catered to the vast needs of the American military by offering the young men anything they wanted, and at the right price. Indeed, in one telling instance,

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[44] PACO'S, *supra* note 14, at 8.
[45] QUARTERS, *supra* note 16, at 65.
[46] *Id.*
[47] *Id.*

Dosier seems legitimately surprised that he cannot, after many occasions, convince a Vietnamese laundry girl to sleep with him for a hefty sum of money.[48]

Furthermore, aside from obtaining drugs from Vietnamese civilians, servicemen in these works often resort to numerous, less conventional sources as well. Troops in the field could develop talents as "scroungers," soldiers who would be able to hustle supply personnel for more desirable rations such as "eggs and bacon and No. 10 cans of fruit, and real ground coffee."[49] Not surprisingly, then, resourceful servicemen in these works seem able to scrounge government-issued drugs, such as the barbiturate Darvon, from the platoon medics. Medics themselves might themselves be addicted,[50] or they could benefit from their access by making "deals" with soldiers. In *Close Quarters*, for instance, Dosier makes "a deal" with his troop medic, Stepik, for Darvons, which he proceeds to abuse liberally on a daily basis.[51] Furthermore, the commonplace process of looting fallen enemy corpses – whose belongings would transfer "by rights" to the serviceman who killed him – could yield desirable items such as greasy pouches of marijuana,[52] though the quality of these drugs might be wanting. As Dosier describes the enemy dope, it was "some real garbage"[53] compared to his usual fare of "Cambodie [sic] dope."[54] All in all, should drugs be desired by troops, they could easily be obtained, whether by purchase, agreement, or even looting within the helter-skelter commercialized culture of Vietnam.

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[48] QUARTERS, *supra* note 16, at 272.
[49] *Id.* at 240.
[50] THINGS, *supra* note 9, at 91.
[51] QUARTERS, *supra* note 16, at 254.
[52] QUARTERS, *supra* note 16, at 76.
[53] *Id.* at 254.
[54] *Id.* at 66.

II. Appeal of Drug Use to Military Personnel in Vietnam

A. Historical Background

Vietnam not only offered a widespread availability of drugs, but also presented an environment with multiple risk factors which made drug abuse appealing to many servicemen. Perhaps the most "obvious" risk factor was that the war "removed young men," the demographic most amenable to drug experimentation, "from the restraints of home and put them together in a predominantly male society."[55] In this environment, with "peers to encourage and support such use," drug abuse could become a "shared social activity" which was not considered deviant, but rather, the norm.[56] Furthermore, drug use among soldiers prior to their arrival in Vietnam was certainly not unheard of, especially given that "less privileged" young men were more likely to be drafted than those better educated. Military studies demonstrated that earlier drug use or delinquency prior to service were "strong predictors" of drug use in Vietnam.[57]

However, given that these characteristics of youth aggregation and prior delinquency were presumably present in all modern American wars to at least some extent, it is imperative to consider factors particular to Vietnam which might account for its disproportionate rates of drug abuse. In his seminal work, *Vietnam: A History*, Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Stanley Karnow noted that

> Vietnam was unique among American wars in at least two respects: under a rotation schedule, draftees were committed for only a year – which meant, for many that survival became their main occupation; but in a war without front lines, few could feel safe anywhere.[58]

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[55] EDWARDS, *supra* note 6, at 128.
[56] *Id.* at 127.
[57] *Id.* at 126.
[58] KARNOW, *supra* note 33, at 479.

This characterization helps to highlight why American troops in Vietnam may have faced consistent psychological trauma more severe than anything encountered by servicemen in previous wars. As a result, drug usage in Vietnam would have proved particularly appealing as a means of "psychological solace" from the stress of a guerilla war, during a soldier's year-long countdown until the end of his tour.[59]

Indeed, true "battle lines" could not be delineated in Vietnam, and as such, "safety [was] never guaranteed."[60] Despite the ostensible justification that the American intervention in Vietnam (and, a decade earlier, in Korea) was intended to "save" the South Vietnamese people from communist aggression, neither South nor North Vietnam even existed as separate state entities until the beginning of the Cold War. As such, the Vietnam War was of course a civil war, and, accordingly, enemy troops could easily blend in with South Vietnamese civilians (many of whom were sympathetic to their cause) or into Vietnam's dense tropical environment. Indeed, North Vietnamese or National Liberation Front (NLF, known colloquially as Vietcong or VC) forces traditionally avoided large-scale combat operations, and instead preferred small-scale, hit-and-run attacks which provided them with an element of surprise and control of the terrain.[61] In this environment, "Vietnam confused and confounded innocent young Americans…they were also chronically apprehensive and rightly suspected that any Vietnamese might be hostile."[62]

The American response to these tactics included the "daily ordeal" of exhausting, small-scale, "search-and-destroy" patrols against hidden enemy units, which meant

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[59] EDWARDS, *supra* note 6, at 127.
[60] *Id.*
[61] KARNOW, *supra* note 33, at 475.
[62] *Id.* at 481.

slogging through thick jungles and rice paddies.[63] During these operations, American troops might be killed in any number of ways by the "unseen enemy" – whether by mines, booby traps, or mortars.[64] Or, perhaps, servicemen might go on "cordon-and-search" missions, which involved surrounding villages, searching for hidden guerillas, and destroying homes or rice caches which might prove useful to the enemy. Ironically, such tactics assured that if these villagers "weren't pro-Vietcong before [Americans] got there, they sure as hell were by the time [they] left."[65] Also, as Karnow explains, it was the "enemy's ability to return to villages that had supposedly been cleaned out" which proved particularly frustrating, as American troops "could never 'liberate' territory but found themselves going back again and again to fight the same battles in the same areas with the same unsatisfactory results."[66]

Finally, no matter the efficacy of their military tactics, at the end of the day, servicemen still found themselves amidst circumstances where drugs might prove quite appealing. For one thing, there was of course the "heat and rain and insects," which "were almost worse than the enemy."[67] Meanwhile, for soldiers who were lucky enough to serve outside forward areas and within the comparative luxury of the "wire" of rear echelon bases, they still had to cope with the "everyday boredom of rear echelon duty."[68] Toward the later years of the war, with Richard Nixon's avowed policy of "Vietnamization" (the gradual withdrawal of American forces, enabled by the build-up of South Vietnamese military capabilities) in full effect, more and more Americans were

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[63] *Id.* at 484-85.
[64] *Id.* at 485.
[65] *Id.* at 482.
[66] *Id.* at 483
[67] *Id.* at 484.
[68] ALLISON, *supra* note 2, at 122.

removed from combat operations. This development helped contribute to the "feeling of lost purpose" and "malaise that rapidly spread through U.S. Forces."[69] Within this reality, the mind-numbing effects of widely available illicit drugs could provide a GI a much-needed escape, and it is perhaps in illuminating the very desperation of this need where the narrative weight of novels at hand can prove the most effective.

II. Literary Analysis

The aforementioned themes of youth, fear, and disillusion set amidst the confines of a uniquely horrible and frustrating war prove nearly universal throughout these novels. For example, in *Going After Cacciato,* Private Paul Berlin of the Americal Division, operating in I Corps, undergoes an unusual orientation session during his second day at Chu Lai Command Center:

> In the morning the fifty new men were marched to a wooden set of bleachers facing the sea. A small, sad-faced corporal in a black cadre helmet waited until they settled down, looking at the recruits as if searching for a lost friend in a crowd. Then the corporal sat down in the sand. He turned and gazed out to sea. He did not speak. Time passed slowly, ten minutes, twenty, but still the sad-faced corporal did not turn or nod or speak. He simply gazed out at the blue sea. Everything was clean. The sea was clean, and the sand and the wind.
>
> They sat in the bleachers for a full hour.
>
> Then at last the corporal sighed and stood up. He checked his wristwatch. Again he searched the rows of new faces.
>
> "All right," he said softly. "That completes your first lecture on how to survive this shit. I hope you paid attention."[70]

This wistful sequence in *Going After Cacciato* hints at the madness to come for many of these youthful servicemen – and perhaps, at the coping mechanisms, such as drug abuse, which these soldiers would soon develop in response. Berlin, like many of his peers, is

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[69] *Id.*
[70] CACCIATO, *supra* note 17, at 37.

young and naïve, having arrived straight out of high school; he "was lost" and "had never heard of I Corps, or the Americal, or Chu Lai."[71] Yet within weeks, Berlin finds himself armed in the field, ordered to kill an elusive enemy who for whatever reason is trying to kill him. Similarly, in *The Short-Timers*, Joker describes his best friend Cowboy (an accomplished Marine and squad leader), as someone who "does not look like a killer, but like a reporter for a high school newspaper, which he was, less than a year ago."[72] The absurdity of what these youths, straight out of high school, are expected to do day-in, and day-out, is well captured in a disturbing scene from *The Things They Carried*, where the sociopath Azar blows up a squad mate's adopted puppy on a whim. When the squad reacts in horror, Azar indignantly replies, "'[w]hat's everybody so upset about…I mean, Christ, I'm just a *boy*.'"[73] In another instance in that novel, one of Azar's comrades likens Vietnam to the "Garden of Evil,"[74] and explains, "[o]ver here, man, every sin's real fresh and original."[75] Indeed, this theme regarding the corruption of innocence, perhaps first introduced in *Genesis,* permeates many of these works.

Compounding this feeling of youthful naiveté is the sense of uncertainty among many of these servicemen – who are mostly draftees – as to why they are in Vietnam in the first place. Some of the soldiers view the American presence in Vietnam as simply the whim of high-ranking officers ignorant of the day-to-day muck of combat, or of far-off civilian strategists in Washington. For example, Joker, the sardonic narrator of *The Short-Timers*, has a confrontation with a ludicrous colonel who berates him for wearing a peace symbol pin. The colonel lets known his doubts regarding Joker's patriotism, and

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[71] *Id.* at 36,
[72] SHORT-TIMERS, *supra* note 20, at 55.
[73] THINGS, *supra* note 9, at 37.
[74] *Id.* at 80.
[75] THINGS, *supra* note 9, at 80.

wants to know whether Joker treasonously believes "that the United States should allow the Vietnamese to invade Viet Nam just because they live here?"[76] The irony implicit in the colonel's absurd question highlights the lack of a sense of unified purpose among many of these soldiers. As one of Joker's companions rationalizes his indifference to the Marines' mission:

> No Victor Charlie [i.e. Vietcong] ever raped my sister. Ho Chi Minh never bombed Pearl Harbor. We're prisoners here. We're prisoners of the war. They've taken away our freedom and they've given it to the gooks, but the gooks don't want it. They'd rather be alive than free.[77]

Thrust into this uncertain milieu, the young grunts come to conclude that only one thing is truly important: survival. In *The Things They Carried*, O'Brien narrates a conversation he has with his young daughter many years after the war:

> "This whole war," she said, 'why was everybody so mad at everybody else?"
>
> I shook my head. "They weren't mad, exactly. Some people wanted one thing, other people wanted another thing."
>
> "What did you want?"
>
> "Nothing," I said. "To stay alive."[78]

However, even this stripped down goal of mere survival becomes seemingly futile in the horrific settings of these works, where guerilla tactics and the dense Vietnamese environment provide the constant possibility of death and a sheer inability to feel safe. Sniper[79] or mortar[80] fire might come at any time of the night, for instance, and trip-

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[76] SHORT-TIMERS, *supra* note 20, at 50.
[77] *Id.* at 24.
[78] THINGS, *supra* note 9, at 183.
[79] SHORT-TIMERS, *supra* note 20, at 56.
[80] QUARTERS, *supra* note 16, at 124.

mines[81] or remote-detonated mines[82] could be blown on any trail. Even live grenades, the soldiers are told, can be surreptitiously inserted into a soldier's pockets by Vietnamese civilians. In *The Short-Timers,* the distaste which the men have for this type of warfare is well pronounced. For instance, Donlon, the platoon radioman, expresses his fondness for the urban warfare he encounters in the Hue: "I hope we stay here. This street fighting is decent duty. We can see them here."[83] Even in the rear areas, moreover, the troops do not find themselves necessarily able to relax. In *Paco's Story*, the narrator recounts how the Vietnamese who worked as clerks or barbers "during the day" at Phuc Luc base camp, were "zips [i.e. guerrillas] at night" – and how "one zip [they] body-counted one time couldn't booby-trap a shithouse any better than he could cut hair."[84] This everyday potential for betrayal leads to much frustration among the troops. As Lieutenant Corson of *Going After Cacciato* recalls better days at war in Korea, he notes: "[I]t was a decent war. Regular battle lines, no backstabbing crap. You won some, you lost some, but what the heck, it was a war."[85]

Thus, the soldiers endure constant psychological strain because of this unconventional nature of the war in Vietnam. In *Going After Cacciato,* for instance, the squad becomes more and more tense as they wait for the inevitable, conventional surprise attack, which, for some reason, never comes. For two months the enemy lays in wait, and seems to be playing a perverse joke on the squad. Berlin is the first to experience a sense of uneasiness: "He couldn't quite place it. A milky film clouding the hot days.

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[81] CACCIATO, *supra* note 17, at 110.
[82] QUARTERS, *supra* note 16, at 218.
[83] SHORT-TIMERS, *supra* note 20, at 32.
[84] PACO'S, *supra* note 14, at 8.
[85] CACCIATO, *supra* note 17, at 150.

Lapping motions at night. Artificiality, a sense of imposed peace."[86] Soon, the rest of the squad beings to feel it as well – the squad goes on a rampage, destroying tunnels, hooches, wells, fences, paddies, while killing water buffalo and chickens – "[b]ut they could not drive the enemy into showing himself, and the silence was exhausting."[87] They are "sluggish and edgy," and various soldiers break out with "psychosomatic" problems – such as boils, ulcers, back pain, numbness.[88] To the chagrin of his flustered squad mates, the erudite medic, Doc Peret, continually and smugly rationalizes what is going on around them: "It's basic psychology – silence. Gets you feeling edgy, and then *bang*…That's what it is, the gook version of Psy-Ops [psychological operations]."[89]

Furthermore, on top of this constant psychological strain inflicted by the enemy guerrillas, the authors describe the constant myriad of nuisances the troops are subject to in the jungle, where the oppressive heat and crabs, fungus, mosquitoes, and leeches seem to take over. As noted above, the radioman in *The Short-Timers,* Donlon, preferred the urban warfare in the Hue to that in the jungle. The Hue, by comparison, offers "cover, resupply, even some areas where you can cut a few Z's without digging a hole." Furthermore, unlike in the jungle, there were no "rice paddies full of slope shit to swim in...immersion foot….jungle rot…[nor] leeches falling from trees."[90] Similarly, on his final night in-country, Dosier in *Close Quarters* reflects on how he has changed from being in the field for an entire year: "I am filthy all the time. I feel that grit, that crawl of the skin, something itching all the time, and greasy….The taste in my mouth has gone

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[86] *Id.* at 102.
[87] *Id.* at 105.
[88] *Id.*
[89] *Id.* at 104-105. Darvon was a mild barbiturate which could be easily obtained by medics. QUARTERS, *supra* note 16, at 340.
[90] SHORT-TIMERS, *supra* note 20, at 32.

fallow….Everything tastes like chalk on my tongue….I have lost the simple rhythm of breathing. It must be due to the humidity."[91]

Accordingly, the authors of these novels seem to stress how the use of drugs provides an easy way for these young soldiers to detach themselves from this horrible reality. Drugs such as marijuana and Darvon, it seems, are viewed as the wonder drugs for all sorts of ailments. They are used to "mellow down" after patrols or marches.[92] They are used for celebrations, such as to celebrate Christmas.[93] And they are used to simply be able to sleep at night.[94] Most poignantly, moreover, they are used to cope with the death of a comrade,[95] or even to come to terms with the killing of an enemy. In *Paco's Story,* for instance, after a gruesomely intimate knifing of an enemy soldier, Paco returns to his bunker, "his concentration deep…his whole body skittish – Paco always able to recall the tears in the guy's eyes while he whispered clearly and plainly. '*Vinh biet. Vinh biet. Vinh Biet*.' ('I will never see forever.')." That night, Paco "drank every canteen in sight and smoked dope until he was high out of his mind."[96] Similarly, in *Close Quarters*, after killing his first enemy – by strangulation – the new arrival Dosier is dispensed a liberal "handful" of Darvons and smokes marijuana – which his lieutenant pointedly ignores, perhaps out of empathy.[97] Mercifully soon after, "the Darvons finally come and [Dosier's] breathing eases."[98] Indeed, with so many reasons or excuses for these troops to turn to drug abuse, the authors describe some soldiers who seem willing to permanently detach themselves from reality. In *The Things They Carried*, for instance,

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[91] QUARTERS, *supra* note 16, at 281.
[92] PACO'S, *supra* note 14, at 191.
[93] QUARTERS, *supra* note 16, at 210
[94] *Id.* at 281.
[95] SHORT-TIMERS, *supra* note 20, at 39.
[96] PACO'S, *supra* note 14, at 196.
[97] QUARTERS, *supra* note 16, at 76.
[98] *Id.*

the neurotic "Ted Lavender, who was scared, carried tranquilizers…[and] 6 or 7 ounces of premium dope, which for him was a necessity."[99] On some occasions, when Lavender "went too heavy" on his drugs, he would "give a soft, spacey smile and say…'We got ourselves a nice mellow war today.'"[100] Similarly, Dosier eventually makes a deal with the platoon medic for Darvon, after which he would on a daily basis "pop a couple Darvons with [his] morning coffee, do a smoke, then…mount up," patrolling hostile territory as "happy-go-lucky Deadeye ('a dozen smiles to the mile')."[101] Indeed, in the unique environment of Vietnam, an artificial feeling of "happy-go-lucky" might prove preferable to the alternative of facing a terrible reality.

III. Enforcement of Military Prohibitions on Illicit Drug Use

A. Historical Background

The general official response of the military toward drug use among troops, at least early in the war, was court-martial and discharge – often dishonorably[102] and perhaps with a hard labor sentence added on.[103] However, prosecuting troops for such offenses could prove quite difficult and conviction would certainly not be a forgone conclusion. For instance, in the circumstance where an incident involved Vietnamese civilians, as was common, judge advocates might find the Vietnamese police to be unreliable or have trouble bringing Vietnamese civilians into court.[104] And rarely would a soldier ever find himself facing charges in a Vietnamese court.[105] In the case *United*

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[99] THINGS, *supra* note 9, at 2-3.
[100] *Id.* at 33
[101] QUARTERS, *supra* note 16, at 254-55.
[102] Wilfred D. Bennett, *Legal Rights of the Suspected Military Drug User*, 25 STAN. L. REV. 740 (1973).
[103] ALLISON, *supra* note 2, at 125.
[104] *Id.* at 123-25.
[105] *Id.* at 125.

States v. Beeker,[106] the Court of Military Appeals broadly held that "both wrongful use and wrongful possession of marijuana or narcotics on or off base, has a singular military significance." As such, any drug-related cases, if they were brought at all, would be handled strictly in military courts,[107] where rigid search-and-seizure procedures and strict rules of evidence led to complications unless a suspect were caught (unlikely) in the actual act of abusing, buying, or dealing drugs. These procedural and evidentiary problems "perhaps challenged military lawyers most in their struggle against drugs."[108]

Furthermore, the military judicial system was severely taxed by the sheer number of drug cases which arose in Vietnam. As Henry Aronson, a civil rights lawyer and a member of the Lawyers Defense Committee (which provided free civilian counsel for troops in Vietnam)[109] noted, "'drug cases have become to the judicial system here [in Vietnam] what automobile accidents have become to the civil courts at home.'"[110] In this context, "there barely seemed to be enough judge advocates to handle massive caseloads."[111] As a result, officers in Vietnam generally might opt for lesser (but more easily obtained) punishments than outright discharge, such as Article 15 non-judicial punishments, which could be handed down speedily and with less paperwork.[112] Summary court-martials (with less procedural protections for the accused and involving only one officer as the convening authority) were similarly expedited, but the authority

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[106] *United States v. Beeker*, 18 C.M.A. 564 (C.M.A. 1969).
[107] Michael Caudell-Feagan, Daniel Warshawsky, *Service-Connection and Drug-Related Offenses: The Military Courts' Ever-Expanding Jurisdiction*, 54 GEO. WASH. L. REV. 118, 131 (1985).
[108] ALLISON, *supra* note 2, at 124.
[109] *At War with the Army*, TIME MAGAZINE, February 8, 1971, *available at* http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,909821-1,00.html.
[110] N.Y. TIMES, May 16, 1971 at 20, col. 6
[111] ALLISON, *supra* note 2, at 69.
[112] *Id.*

could not impose severe punishments such as dishonorable or bad conduct discharges, longer confinements, or hard labor sentences.[113]

Beyond these logistical, procedural, or evidentiary problems which hindered the by-the-book prosecution of drug offenses among troops in Vietnam was the understandable unwillingness of officers to discharge otherwise capable soldiers during time of war for drug-related crimes. Furthermore, officers would not want to "bring attention to any blight infesting their command."[114] Vietnam was also notorious for its high incidence of murders of unpopular officers or NCOs by "fragging." Soldiers might frag superiors who were "incompetent or too 'gung ho' or as a way to evade combat patrol duty or to get rid of an officer…who was getting too close to a black-market operation or an illicit drug ring."[115] Understandably, then, young officers could prove unwilling to strictly enforce laws regarding drug use, thus "diluting the deterrent effect on potential drug users."[116] Finally, of course, it seems true that in all wars, practical exigencies will inevitably lead to the failure to observe all strict formalities, unimportant as they might seem in the wider context of constant battles for life among death.

B. Literary Analysis

A powerful theme which emerges in these works is the development of "informal" standards in the field, where strict formalities can lose their allure and significance amid the day-to-day struggle for survival. Indeed, these informal standards may end up taking precedence over military regulations. By stressing the contempt

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[113] http://www.military.com/benefits/legal-matters/courts-martial. Special and general court-martials empowered the accused with rights to counsel, trial by judge or jury, all of which could tax the military justice machinery. *Id.*
[114] ALLISON, *supra* note 2, at 68.
[115] ALLISON, *supra* note 2, at 78.
[116] Bennett, *supra* note 102, at 741.

which most enlisted men had for the latter formalities, moreover, the authors make quite real the threat of dissent or even murder which could emerge if officers did not ease up on these soldiers amid the day-to-day horror and grit of Vietnam. As such, one can understand how illicit drugs might come to be abused with impunity.

With survival at the forefront of the minds of the men, the green soldiers in these works quickly adapt to the new codes of conduct which dominate in the field. For instance, when Dosier first reports for duty in *Close Quarters*, his particularly obnoxious sergeant gives him a customary "Teamwork, fight like hell, and sleep on your own time" speech, while demanding that Dosier unfailingly address him as "Platoon Sergeant Surtees."[117] Dosier nods and complies, and notes: "I didn't know any different. I was still garrison. I had just come from Fort Knox…where I called *everybody* sir or sergeant."[118] However, these "garrison" formalities quickly come to a dramatic end for Dosier. During one of his first ambushes, Dosier's platoon captures a wounded enemy soldier, who proceeds to wail in pain – potentially surrendering their location to surrounding communist forces. Consequently, Dosier's experienced comrade, Cross, tells the medic to inject the prisoner with a deadly dose of morphine. As Dosier protests, Cross offers him powerful advice: "You give gooks a break like that and you ain't gonna last…the only thing more fucked up than being here, is getting killed here."[119]

In this context, a distinction arises between what O'Brien terms "formal" and "informal" Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), and these latter SOPs "were more important than the Code of Conduct."[120] O'Brien notes that the soldiers' informal

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[117] QUARTERS, *supra* note 16, at 10.
[118] *Id.* at 11.
[119] QUARTERS, *supra* note 16, at 63.
[120] CACCIATO, *supra* note 17, at 44.

"routinization of the war…helped make it tolerable," and extended to the most trivial facets of life in the field – such as what one could talk about and when or when to rest or march or keep guard. Tellingly, O'Brien notes, these informal SOPs covered even "when to send out ambushes and when to fake them [i.e. to higher military authorities]."[121] In a similar spirit of self-preservation, the soldiers in these novels follow another informal SOP by making liberal use of mechanical ambushes, or "booby traps" – the use of which qualifies as a war crime under the Geneva Convention. As the narrator in *Paco's Story* explains, "the zips used booby traps…and since what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, everyone used them."[122] Other apparent informal SOPs include the "right" to "souvenir"[123] (i.e. take) any items found on one's victim, such as cash, AK-47s (a Russian-made assault rifle superior to the standard issue M-16), or, as mentioned above, drugs.[124] And the common allowance for the *use* of such illegal drugs is, of course, the informal SOP which is at the heart of this paper.

Indeed, in all of these novels, drug use seems to be done quite casually, without much fear of discipline. The soldiers, for instance, smoke marijuana anytime and anywhere, the motto being, "smoke 'em if you got 'em."[125] Servicemen might "party" in the rear, where "[i]t was one of the rituals" and "you did it on principle."[126] Or, soldiers might even use drugs in the most extreme battle situations, such as during helicopter rides on the way to being dropped off in "hot" landing zones.[127] The only exception to this general rule seems to be when the soldiers find themselves confronted by comfortably

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[121] *Id.*
[122] PACO'S, *supra* note 14, at 193.
[123] SHORT-TIMERS, *supra* note 20, at 44.
[124] QUARTERS, *supra* note 16, at 76.
[125] CACCIATO, *supra* note 17, at 32.
[126] THINGS, *supra* note 9, at 193.
[127] CACCIATO, *supra* note 17, at 128.

rear-echelon career officers or NCOs – derisively referred to as "lifers," "housecats," or "poges." For instance, when Dosier and his friend, Quinn, need to desperately get away from their normal surroundings in order to clear their minds after learning of the deaths of some close comrades, they walk far through the camp into a makeshift bar situated among the more permanent "housecat hooches"[128] Here, as they proceed to smoke as usual, the bartender pleads with them, noting that "there's officers around here that don't dig it."[129] From the perspective of the "grunts," these "housecat" officers not only play war games – from afar – with the lives of their soldiers for the sake of mere medals,[130] but also demonstrate ignorance of the grunt's daily plight by dogmatically insisting on adherence to military procedure. Encounters with these officers prove enervating and hate-inspiring. After committing his first kill, for instance, a "dirty, unshaven, and dead tired" Joker is met on the road by a jeep-driving colonel.[131] The colonel – whose "jungle utilities are razor-creased," berates Joker for his failure to salute him, and immediately, Joker wishes he "was back in the shit," for at least "[i]n battle there are no police, only people who want to shoot you." In battle, he note wryly, "there are no poges….[who] try to kill you on the inside."[132]

The more respected officers in the field, however, look past strict military procedure out of empathy for their troops. The most telling contrast between a respected officer and a hated officer arises in *Going After Cacciato*. The platoon's first commander, Lieutenant Martin, continually insists that his men follow formal SOPs and search enemy tunnels, rather than merely destroying them without risking his soldiers' lives. As such,

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[128] *Id.* at 138.
[129] *Id.* at 141.
[130] *Id.* at 241.
[131] SHORT-TIMERS, *supra* note 20, at 49.
[132] *Id.*

"Martin, who had trained at the Point [i.e. West Point], violated the informal SOPs, and the men hated him."[133] In contrast, Martin's beloved replacement, Lieutenant Corson, "simply ordered the tunnels blown, or blew them himself, and he saw no incompatibility between this and his mission as a soldier."[134] Similarly, while he "had been trained to treat [his men]…as interchangeable units of command,"[135] the well-respected Lieutenant Cross in *The Things They Carried* instead "preferred to view his men not as units but as human beings."[136] This attitude is exemplified when Rat Kiley, the platoon's dependable and brave medic, eventually has a nervous breakdown and shoots himself in the foot in order to be sent home. Pointedly, Cross "went over and said he'd vouch for him that it was an accident."[137] Such empathy or tolerance extends, of course, to drug use as well. When Lieutenant Brian joins Dosier's platoon in *Close Quarters*, "one of the first things he did" was to promote this heavy drug user to Specialist Fourth Class, and soon enough, to Sergeant.[138] Perhaps unsurprisingly, Brian is also a drug user,[139] as is Corson in *Going After Cacciato*,[140] and the dependable Lieutenant Shortround in *The Short-Timers.*[141] Furthermore, in these novels, even when officers are not actual participants in forbidden activities such as drug use, they might walk away – as Lieutenant Brian does while an enraged Quinn mutilates a fallen enemy soldier in *Close Quarters* – "so he could say, in truth, that he had seen nothing, in case he was ever asked."[142]

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[133] CACCIATO, *supra* note 17, at 44.
[134] CACCIATO, *supra* note 17, at 144.
[135] THINGS, *supra* note 9, at 163.
[136] *Id.* at 164.
[137] *Id.* at 224.
[138] QUARTERS, *supra* note 16, at 101.
[139] *Id.*
[140] CACCIATO, *supra* note 17, at 3.
[141] SHORT-TIMERS, *supra* note 20, at 35.
[142] QUARTERS, *supra* note 16, at 263.

A darker motivation (aside from genuine empathy) which also may motivate these well-liked officers, of course, is the threat of "fragging." Indeed, *Going After Cacciato*'s Martin, who continually insists that his men search tunnels – even after two are killed below ground – eventually meets his end in this manner, after the members of his squad express their unanimous assent to his murder by symbolically "touching" the grenade which is to be used.[143] Similarly, in *The Short-Timers*, Shortround is killed after he threatens to discipline a soldier who attempts to rape a Vietnamese civilian.[144] The vulnerability of these officers is starkly expressed in *Close Quarters*, when the hated Sergeant Surtees – alone – comes across Dosier and Quinn smoking marijuana in the base camp chapel. After Surtees (an African American) threatens to have them put in prison, Quinn threateningly asks Surtees what he "sees" around him. Before he can answer, Quinn says, "I see Deadeye fucken Dosier and my humble self and a coal-black n*gger, and a clear field of fire for a hundred meters around."[145] Soon after receiving this threat from two of the platoon's most respected killers, Surtees disappears.[146] Furthermore, the awareness of such danger certainly seems to be on the minds of the officers, such as that of Lieutenant Cross. Particularly guilt-ridden after the death of one of his men by sniper fire – which he blames on his own inattentiveness – Cross becomes determined to "impose strict field discipline," which includes confiscating marijuana.[147] He knows, however, that "[a]mong the men there would be grumbling, of course, and maybe worse…"[148]

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[143] CACCIATO, *supra* note 17, at 241.
[144] SHORT-TIMERS, *supra* note 20, at 39.
[145] QUARTERS, *supra* note 16, at 155.
[146] SHORT-TIMERS, *supra* note 20, at 44.
[147] THINGS, *supra* note 9, at 25.
[148] *Id.* at 26.

These threats seem particularly real in the Vietnam environment; where brutal one-on-one killing becomes part of the daily routine, rank and strict military rules can simply "cut no shit."[149] The soldiers' easy willingness to kill is cogently demonstrated, for instance, in one scene in *The Short-Timers*. When an MP sergeant "lifer" confronts Joker, a corporal, and orders him onto a working party to fill sandbags, an argument arises, and Joker feels "[a]n explosion building up inside."[150] Immediately, Joker chambers a round into his rifle, jams the barrel into the MP's stomach, and watches him back slowly away, whereupon Joker's astonished "new guy" companion, Rafter Man, notes: "You weren't bluffing. You would have killed that guy. For nothing."[151] Succinctly, Joker explains:

> It's not the kind of thing you can talk about. There's no way to explain stuff like that. After you've been in the shit, after you've got your first confirmed kill, you'll understand…Don't kid yourself, Rafter Man, this is a slaughter. In this world of shit you won't have time to understand. What you do, you become.[152]

Sardonically, Joker surmises that this uncontrollable murderous instinct may have been the intent of his Marine training as a means of creating more effective, uncontrollable killers. As Joker narrates of his boot-camp experience, "The drill instructors are proud to see that we are growing beyond their control. The Marine Corps does not want robots. The Marine Corps wants killers.[153] Surrounded by these uncontrollable killers, the more pragmatic of the officers in these works seem disinclined to impose strict military discipline to the point of prohibiting drug use among their troops.

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[149] SHORT-TIMERS, *supra* note 20, at 44.
[150] *Id.* at 20.
[151] *Id.*
[152] *Id.*
[153] SHORT-TIMERS, *supra* note 20, at 8.

Conclusion

As seen through the eyes of the "grunts" in these works, the widespread usage of illicit drugs by American military personnel in Vietnam can be understood in view of the widespread availability of the drugs, the allure of them as coping mechanisms to deal with a uniquely terrible war, and the inability or unwillingness of authorities to strictly enforce prohibitions against them.

However, despite the widespread use of drugs described in the historical and literary accounts discussed above, it is clear that no drug epidemic or resulting crime wave broke out once these soldiers returned home, a fearsome scenario which indeed was one of the government's greatest concerns with regard to drug abuse in Vietnam.[154] Starting in late 1969, the armed services started a "rehabilitation" program which would allow drug abusers to clean themselves up and return to service as newly useful soldiers.[155] Through this program, a soldier desiring rehabilitation could voluntarily come forward to an authority figure, without fear of discipline under a promise of "amnesty," and be placed in a recovery program. Soldiers who cheated while on the program could be discharged unfavorably – as any drug abuser without amnesty would – but soldiers who completed the program successfully might be returned to duty or given an administrative discharge, which would allow the soldier to obtain future treatment in Veterans Administration facilities as a civilian.[156] In addition, starting in June 1971, after the advent of the "heroin epidemic," a mass urine-testing program was implemented in order to screen all enlisted men prior to discharge into the U.S. In the event of a positive test, servicemen would be required to detoxify for two weeks before being allowed

[154] Bennett, *supra* note 102, at 742.
[155] ALLISON, *supra* note 2, at 125.
[156] *Id.* at 126.

home.[157] The idea behind this program, propagated by Dr. Jerome Jaffe, was to get servicemen "off opiates before they embarked for home, [so that] home would be a place which for most of them had no association with drugs, and an environment which would therefore not trigger a craving for drugs."[158] Under this behavioral paradigm, then, the military authorities sought to keep the U.S. free of the abuse-inducing environmental cues which had presumably riddled the Vietnam milieu.[159]

Unsurprisingly, then, servicemen often cleared themselves, on their own initiative, of opiates, desperate as they were to get home as quickly as possible. Indeed, only about 11 percent of these subjects tested positive (in comparison to a 45 percent estimate for usage).[160] Moreover, studies attained by repeated interviews of servicemen for up to three years after discharge indicated only a 6 percent relapse rate among those addicted to heroin while serving in Vietnam.[161] This relatively low rate may be attributed, at least in part, to environmental differences between the U.S. and Vietnam, such as the low quality and high price of heroin in the U.S. (as opposed to its cheap and widespread availability in Vietnam); the need to restart personal lives and careers (as opposed to doing anything to "survive" a short-term stint in a psychologically taxing war); and the legal deviance and social stigma attached to drug abuse (as opposed to tacit if not outright acceptance of it by certain military authorities).[162]

Yet while these optimistic statistical figures demonstrate that returning servicemen from Vietnam did not constitute the flood of "drug-hungry and gun-happy

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[157] EDWARDS, *supra* note 6, at 129.
[158] *Id*. at 28.
[159] *Id.* at 129.
[160] *Id.*
[161] *Id.* at 130.
[162] *Id.* at 130-31.

addicts" of Congress's nightmares, they do not necessarily imply that these men returned to the U.S. completely whole. Indeed, a common theme running through the novels studied in this paper is that while these soldiers may return home alive, and perhaps even healthy, they come nevertheless missing an irreplaceable part of their youth and humanity. Even those who "survive to be short-timers," Joker notes, will make it home to America, but "home won't be there anymore and [they] won't be there either," as "the war has lodged itself" on their brains as "a black crab feeding."[163] In *Close Quarters,* Dosier echoes a similar, perhaps more wistful sentiment as he reminisces about the past year during his last night in Vietnam:

> The war has swallowed me, it has clamped off all the veins, and I'm high on dope and Darvon and mo-gas and sick and tired of the fucking footrace, so I jump down in front of the track, with the bowie knife between my teeth, and snarl….I can never go home. I just want to see it. I won't say a thing, cross my heart. I just want to see it one more time. I want to smell it, touch it ever so lightly, put my ear to it and hear it….so now, only the ritual remains. I have not been getting closer, only farther away.[164]

[163] SHORT-TIMERS, *supra* note 20, at 65.
[164] QUARTERS, *supra* note 16, at 279.

Appendix

Table 1: "Cases Investigated"[165]

Calendar Year	World-Wide	Continental U.S.	Vietnam
Hard Narcotics			
1966	521	275	39
1967	573	274	89
1968	940	608	132
1969	1,871	1,479	243
1970	3,401	2,368	716
1971 (Q1)	1,909	807	822
Marijuana			
1966	3,096	1,892	503
1967	5,536	3,493	1,267
1968	11,507	6,335	3,225
1969	19,139	8,809	6,490
1970	26,902	13,999	6,955
1971 (Q1)	10,261	4,888	2,071
Dangerous Drugs			
1966	917	648	20
1967	1,532	1,144	34
1968	1,594	1,078	103
1969	3,357	1,849	833
1970	7,541	2,695	1,374
1971 (Q1)	2,861	1,782	436

Note: "Hard Narcotics" refers to heroin while "Dangerous Drugs" refers to amphetamines and barbiturates.[166]

[165] *Military Drug Abuse: Hearing Before the Subcomm. on Alcoholism and Narcotics of the S. Committee on Labor and Public Welfare*, 92nd Cong. 121 (1971) (Attachment #1: Comparison by Military Service of Drug Abuse Offense Statistics for Calendar Year 1970).
[166] ALLISON, *supra* note 2, at 126-27.

Table 2: "Rates Per 1,000 of Military Individuals Investigated"[167]

Calendar Year	World-Wide	Continental U.S.	Vietnam
Hard Narcotics			
1966	.16	.13	.14
1967	.17	.13	.19
1968	.32	.41	.32
1969	.67	.89	.59
1970	1.29	1.57	2.06
Marijuana			
1966	.98	.89	1.80
1967	1.63	1.62	2.69
1968	4.84	4.65	7.99
1969	7.60	6.21	14.77
1970	10.56	9.20	20.27
Dangerous Drugs			
1966	.29	.31	.07
1967	.45	.54	.07
1968	.50	.69	.20
1969	1.21	1.21	.78
1970	2.55	2.62	3.73

Note: "Hard Narcotics" refers to heroin while "Dangerous Drugs" refers to amphetamines and barbiturates.[168]

[167] *Military Drug Abuse* at 122.
[168] ALLISON, *supra* note 2, at 126-27.