

### **“The Things They Carried”**

1. “They carried all they could bear, and then some, including a silent awe for the terrible power of the things they carried” (7).
2. “Smooth to the touch, it was a milky white color with flecks of orange and violet, oval-shaped, like a miniature egg.... Marth wrote that she had found the pebble on the Jersey shoreline, precisely where the land touched water at high tide, where things came together but also separated. It was this separate-but-together quality, she wrote, that had inspired her to pick up the pebble and to carry it in her breast pocket for several days, where it seemed weightless, and then to send it through the mail...as a token of her truest feelings for him” (8).
3. “In some respects, though not many, the waiting was worse than the tunnel itself. Imagination was a killer”(11)
4. “He was just a kid at war, in love. He was twenty-four years old. He couldn’t help it”(12).
5. “You want my opinion, Mitchell Sanders said, there’s a definite moral here...Henry Dobbins thought about it.  
  
Yeah, well, he finally said. I don’t see no moral.  
  
There it is, man” (13-14).
6. “It was very sad, he thought. The things men carried inside. The things men did or felt they had to do” (25).

### **“Love”**

7. ““It doesn’t matter,’ he finally said. ‘I love her’” (28).

### **“Spin”**

8. “On occasions, the war was like a Ping-Pong ball. You could put a fancy spin on it, you could make it dance” (32).
9. “The pieces were out on the board, the enemy was visible, you could watch the tactics unfolding into larger strategies. There was a winner and a loser. There were rules” (32).
10. “I’m forty-three years old, and a writer now, and the war has been over for a long while. Much of it is hard to remember. I sit at this typewriter and stare through my words and watch Kiowa sinking into the deep muck of a shit field, or Curt Lemon hanging in pieces from a tree, and as I write about these things, the remembering is turned into a kind of rehappening” (32).
11. “But the thing about remembering is that you don’t forget. You take your material where you find it, which is in your life, and at the intersection of past and present. The memory-traffic feeds into a rotary up on your head, where it goes in circles for a while, then pretty soon imagination flows in and the traffic merges and shoots off down a thousand different streets. As a writer, all you can do is pick a street and go for the ride...” (34-35).

### **“On the Rainy River”**

12. “the American War in Vietnam seemed to me wrong. Certain blood was being shed for uncertain reasons. I saw no unity of purpose, no consensus on matters of philosophy history or law” (40).
13. “in my head I could hear people screaming at me. Traitor! They yelled. Turncoat! Pussy! I felt myself blush...I couldn’t endure the mockery, or the disgrace, or the patriotic ridicule...I couldn’t make myself be brave. It had nothing to do with morality. Embarrassment, that’s all it was” (59).
14. “I was a coward. I went to the war” (61).

### **“How to Tell a True War Story”**

15. “A true war story is never moral. It does not instruct, nor encourage virtue, nor suggest models of proper human behavior, nor restrain men from doing the things men have always done” (68).
16. “As a first rule of thumb, therefore, you can tell a true war story by its absolute and uncompromising allegiance to obscenity and evil” (69).
17. “Sharp gray eyes, lean and narrow-waisted, and when he died it was almost beautiful, the way the sunlight came around him and lifted him up and sucked him high into a tree full of moss and vines and white blossoms” (70).
18. Mitchell Sanders: “I had to make up a few things...Yeah, but listen, it’s still all true” (77).
19. “In a true war story, if there’s a moral at all, it’s like the thread that makes the cloth. You can’t tease it out. You can’t extract the meaning without unraveling the deeper meaning” (77).
20. “‘Well, that’s Nam,’ [Mitchel Sanders] said. ‘Garden of Evil. Over here, man, every sin’s real fresh and original’” (80).
21. “To generalize about war is like generalizing about peace. Almost everything is true. Almost nothing is true” (81).
22. “Though it’s odd, you’re never more alive than when you’re almost dead” (81)
23. “For the common soldier, at least, war has the feel –the spiritual texture—of a great ghostly fog, thick and permanent. There is no clarity” (82).
24. “A thing may happen and be a total lie; another thing may not happen and be truer than the truth” (83)

### **“Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong”**

25. “If Rat told you, for example, that he’d slept with four girls one night, you could figure it was about a girl and a half. 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” (89).
26. “ ‘She *wasn’t* dumb,’ [Ray Kiley would] snap. ‘I never said that. Young, that’s all I said. Like you and me. A *girl*, that’s the only difference...I mean, when we first got here—all

of us—we were real young and innocent, full of romantic bullshit, but we learned pretty damn quick. And so did May Anne’ “ (97)

27. “ ‘You don’t believe it?’ [Rat would] say. ‘Fine with me. But you don’t know human nature. You don’t know Nam’ ” (97).
28. “At first, he didn’t recognize her—a small, soft shadow among six other shadows. There was no sound. No real substance either. The seven silhouettes seemed to float across the surface of the earth, like spirits, vaporous and unreal” (105).
29. “if it was a guy, everybody’d say, Hey, no big deal, he got caught up in the Nam shit, he got seduced by the Greenies... You got these blinders on about women. How gentle and peaceful they are... You got to get rid of that sexist attitude” (107).
30. “The girl joined the zoo. One more animal—end of story” (107).
31. “At the girl’s throat was a necklace of human tongues. Elongated and narrow, like pieces of blackened leather, the tongues were threaded along a length of copper wire, one overlapping the next, the tips curled upward as if caught in a final shrill syllable” (110-111).
32. “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” (114).
33. “And then one morning, all alone, Mary Anne walked off into the mountains and did not come back... Mary Anne Bell joined the missing... 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” (115-116).

### **“Speaking of Courage”**

34. “ it was a shit field. The village toilet... I mean, we were camped in a goddamn *shit* field” (145).
35. “The shells made deep slushy craters, opening up all those years of waste, centuries worth, and the smell came bubbling out of the earth” (148).
36. “Circling the lake, Norman Bowker remembered how his friend Kiowa had disappeared under the waste and water” (150).
37. “but it was not a war for war stories, nor for talk of valor, and nobody in town wanted to know about the terrible stink” (150).
38. “[Kiowa] was folded in with the war; he was part of the waste” (153).

### **“Notes”**

39. [Norman Bowker’s letter] “It’s almost like I got killed over in Nam ... I sort of sank down into the sewage with him... Feels like I’m still in deep shit” (156).
40. Tim O’Brien (character/1<sup>st</sup> person narrator): “In ordinary conversation I never spoke much about the war... I had been talking about it virtually nonstop through my writing. Telling stories seemed a natural, inevitable process” (157).

41. “By telling stories, you objectify your own experience. You separate it from yourself” (158).

### **“In the Field”**

42. “ ‘Wasted in the waste,’ he said. ‘A shit field. You got to admit, it’s pure world-class irony’ ” (165).
43. “Bit it was a war, and [Lt. Cross] had his orders, so they’d set up a perimeter and crawled under their ponchos and tried to settle in for the night” (168).
44. “A stupid mistake. That’s all it was, a mistake, but it had killed Kiowa” (168).
45. “He remembered switching on his flashlight. A stupid thing to do, but he did it anyway” (170).
46. “But they also felt a kind of giddiness, a secret joy, because they were alive, and because even the rain was preferable to being sucked under a shit field, and because it was all a matter of luck and happenstance” (175).
47. “ ‘Nobody’s fault,’ [Norman Bowker] said. ‘Everybody’s’ ” (176).
48. “You could blame the war. You could blame the idiots who made the war. ... You could blame the enemy. ... You could blame people who were too lazy to read a newspaper, who were bored by the daily body counts, who switched channels at the mention of politics. ... You could blame God. You could blame the munitions makers or Karl Marx or a trick of fate or an old man in Omaha who forgot to vote” (177).

### **“Good Form”**

49. But it’s not a game. It’s a form. Right here, now, as I invent myself, I’m thinking of all I want to tell you about why this book is written as it is.” (179).
50. “What stories can do, I guess, is to make things present” (180).

### **“Field Trip”**

51. “There were birds and butterflies, the soft rustlings of rural-anywhere. Below, in the earth, the relics of our presence were no doubt still there, the canteens and bandoliers and mess kits” (184).
52. “This little field, I thought, had swallowed so much. My best friend. My pride. My belief in myself as a man of some small dignity and courage... For twenty years this field had embodied all the waste that was Vietnam, all the vulgarity and horror” (184-5).

### **“The Ghost Soldiers”**

53. “It was the fear, mostly, but I felt wobbly, and then I had a sinking sensation, ears all plugged up, as if I’d gone deep under water” (189).
54. “But the presence of death and danger has a way of bringing you fully awake. It makes things vivid” (192).

55. “For all my education, all my fine liberal values, I now felt a deep coldness inside me, something dark and beyond reason. It’s a hard thing to admit, even to myself, but I was capable of evil” (200).
56. “ ‘What’s real?’ [Azar] said. ‘Eight months in fantasy land, it tends to blur the line. Honest to God, I sometimes can’t remember what real is’ ” (204).
57. “I was down there with [Jorgenson], inside him. I was part of the night. I was the land itself...I was atrocity...I was the blind stare in the eyes of all those poor, dead, dumbfuck ex-pals of mine—all the pale young corpses...I was the beast on their lips—I was Nam—the horror, the war (209).

### **“Night Life”**

58. Always a lost sensation. They’d blunder along through the dark, willy-nilly, no sense of place for direction, probing for an enemy that nobody could see. ...and in the hours after midnight you’d swear you were walking through some kind of soft black protoplasm, Vietnam, the blood and the flesh” (221).

### **“The Lives of the Dead”**

59. “But this too is true: stories can save us” (225)
60. “And as a writer now, I want to save Linda’s life. Not her body—her life” (236).
61. “But in a story I can steal her soul. I can revive, at least briefly, that which is absolute and unchanging. In a story, miracles can happen” (236).
62. “In Vietnam, too, we had ways of making the dead seem not quite so dead. Shaking hands, that was one way. By slighting death, by acting, we pretended it was not the terrible thing it was” (238).
63. “We kept the dead alive with stories” (239).
64. “[Linda] was dead. I understood that. After all, I’d seen her body, and yet even as a nine-year-old I had begun to practice the magic of stories” (244).
65. “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” (246).