# Narrative Structure in Three Novels of the Vietnam War

by

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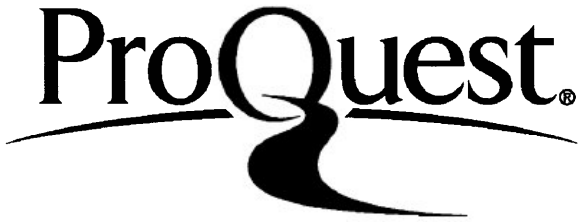

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes the process by which three American novels about the Vietnam War--David Halberstam's One Very Hot Day, Gustav Hasford's The Short-Timers, and Stephen Wright's Meditations in Green--attempt simultaneously to reveal the chaos of the war and to defuse its horror by containing it within artistic structures. Since chaos is by definition formless, the result of this process, paradoxically, is to underscore the intractable nature of Vietnam as a subject for fiction. Each author creates a double-layered structure for his novel which testifies to the chaos of Vietnam even as it imparts order to it. The larger structure provides a strict literary frame, which allows a limited but orderly expression of the Vietnam experience. Authorial control over subject and form is maintained on this level of structure through the development of revelatory fictions, closed texts, and the prudent application of specific narrative techniques adapted from cinema. In the sub-structure, contained within the larger frame, the protagonist mirrors the author's activity by imposing imaginative structures on the war in order to protect his psyche from its destructive might. To this end, the protagonist works to control his perception of the war through self-embedded retreats into memory, fantasy, or fiction. However, these escapist internal fictions and interior monologues are futile in that they cannot withstand the war's destabilizing effect. Thus, whereas the larger structure constitutes the imposition of form on chaos, the sub-structure depicts the overwhelming of form by the chaotic

destruction of the war. The sub-structure is thus an implicit comment on the inadequacy of artistic forms as a defense against the war. Yet, paradoxically, such artistic shaping is necessary to any fictional representation of the war. Therefore, this thesis argues that the tension between form and chaos--as represented by the two levels of structure--is vital to the success of these novels as honest, literary portrayals of the Vietnam War.

This thesis also contains a comprehensive glossary of terms and phrases which were used by American servicemen in Vietnam, and which frequently appear in the many novels of the war. For the layman unfamiliar with the jargon of the war or of the military, this glossary is, in itself, an introduction to the contrary impulses of order and chaos which worked on the Americans in Vietnam in that it demonstrates the extreme linguistic efforts made during that era to standardize, stabilize, and contain the essentially intractable experience of the war.

## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my sister, Rachel Wauhkonen, whose support, technical assistance, and welcome diversions made the final product possible.

## Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Dr. Rick Holmes, who at a very late hour willingly assumed the responsibility of seeing this thesis through to completion and who taught me a great deal along the way.

Contents

# Chapter I

## Introduction:

## Literary Containment of Vietnam's Chaos

Because the Vietnam War was a lengthy, chaotic, and essentially intractable event, efforts to translate it into fiction necessarily involve some distortion of the facts to fit it into the medium. This distortion creates a paradox of seemingly contradictory aims for the fiction: on the one hand, the war must be given some sort of artificial form so that it can be expressed at all; on the other, any attempt to order the war may belie its true nature as a horrifying chaos. Though various works approach this issue in different ways, three Vietnam War novels--Halberstam's One Very Hot Day, Hasford's The Short-Timers, and Wright's Meditations in Green--deal with the problem by developing a double-layered form of structure which divides the work into two levels of narrative containment. The first, or macrocosmic, structure encompasses the text as a whole and gives a coolly rational form to the war's chaos through strict control of the text and the narrative techniques used therein. The second level of structure, that of the main characters' subjective vision, may be called microcosmic for it parallels the larger structure in miniature. This connection between the two levels is heightened as the character-narrator attempts in his domain that which the author accomplishes in his.

To frame a fictional world in which they can deal with what must be disturbing revelations of Vietnam, the authors of these novels create highly structured, closed texts which begin and end at a pre-established point. By bringing the development of the novel full circle and including only those elements which are immediately relevant to the forms and materials at hand, the authors are able to dominate every aspect of the fiction. Further, because these closed texts are based on and grow out of the experience of the major characters, the novels also tend to be

examples of revelatory fiction. Seymour Chatman identifies this kind of fiction on the basis of plot and distinguishes it from "the traditional narrative of resolution" by the fact that "nothing changes" in revelatory fiction:

> In the traditional narrative of resolution, there is a sense of problem solving, of things being worked out in some way, a kind of ratiocinactive or emotional teleology . . . 'What will happen?' is the basic question. In the modern plot of revelation, however, the emphasis is elsewhere; the function of the discourse is not to answer that question nor even to pose it. Early on we gather that things will stay pretty much the same. It is not that events are resolved (happily or tragically), but rather that a state of affairs is revealed. Thus a strong sense of temporal order is more significant in resolved than in revealed plots. Development in the first instance is an unraveling; in the second, a displaying. Revelatory plots tend to be strongly character-oriented, concerned with the infinite detailing of existents, as events are reduced to a relatively minor, illustrative role. 1

By thus revealing or systematically showing what their protagonists are like from the beginning of the novels rather than developing complicated plots based on actions, these authors can easily stay within the confines of their closed texts and end the fictions when their characters fulfill the potential suggested early in the text.

This tendency to show rather than tell which is central to the larger structure of these novels also affects the specific narrative forms used to relate the various stories of the war. In these works, many of the narrative techniques are adapted from the field of cinema and are admirably suited to convey the various "visual" episodes--that is, scenes which consist primarily of the physical description of characters, setting, or action. Most common of the cinematic techniques applied in these works are the long shots which establish the settings, and close-ups which provide detailed studies of the characters' appearances.

Other cinematic techniques such as pans, tracking, or the cross-cutting of scenes are also used to establish setting, to follow a character through a series of different or changing scenes, and to present a broad context of mood or atmosphere for a particular character or event.

A "pan," by definition, is the viewpoint obtained when a camera is "turned horizontally on its stand or tripod through a part or a whole of a circle."[2] When this technique is adapted to fiction, a sweeping description of an expanse results which encompasses far more than could be viewed at one time from a single, stationary point of view. Besides its narrative function, panning also causes the author, the narrator, and reader to experience a sense of isolation or detachment because of the broad area surveyed at a distance. Likewise, tracking--a "shot taken with the camera moving sideways"[3]--allows a vast area to be covered quickly and fluidly so that its various details form one coherent impression for the reader. The emotional impact can vary depending on the sights viewed, but the sense of involved detachment, of being in the middle of something yet separate from it, is perhaps the most common effect.

While most of these narrative methods such as closed texts and revelatory fictions are restricted to the broad frames of the novels, the cinematic techniques also appear on the level of the sub-structure as the characters try to protect themselves from the war by shaping or manipulating it. That is, they will occasionally pan a scene or move in for a close-up of another character. However, most of the techniques used by the characters to create specific forms for their wars are more conventionally literary. On this level, their efforts at control are largely mental maneuvers of memory, thought, and fantasy as conveyed

through interior monologue.

When the characters' desire for control is manifested in their external worlds, though, it most frequently takes the form of self-embedding. In the strictest sense, "self-embedding" is a term from linguistics, but it has also been extended to literature and refers to the "story-within-the-story" effect common to many novels including the three under discussion.[4] Produced by minor frames of reference within the overall structure of the novel, self-embedding may take on a variety of forms including such things as Beaupre's memories of his other wars in _One Very Hot Day_, Joker's personal and Marine Corps realities created by Marine slang, technical jargon, and pidgin Vietnamese in _The Short-Timers_, and such features of _Meditations in Green_ as the "Meditation" sequences, the remembered "tales" of the "war back in the long ago time,"[5] as well as Griffin's many drug-induced hallucinations. In each case, self-embedding provides a method of dealing with the war and the world it imposes on the characters. As with their use of cinematic techniques and interior monologues, it is a method of ordering and apparently controlling the war, as well as a way to protect themselves from their experience of Vietnam. However, though the success of each protagonist's efforts varies, none endures for long.

Unfortunately for the central character, his efforts prove inadequate, and he is defeated and dehumanized. The author, however, is far more successful--in part, because of the very inability of the character to gain control. That is, the process by which the character is dehumanized becomes the structural principle according to which the text is given artistic form. Because the two structural levels work in harmony, then, the character's defeat does not signal the failure of the

text but rather provides the necessary counterpoint for the ultimate success of the work as a whole. By integrating the microcosm of war-caused failure into the larger structure of a truly ordered form, the author is able to satisfy the conflicting demands inherent in any artistic treatment of Vietnam. Consequently, in the three works specified, the authors effectively relate the chaos and destructive power of the war within a controlled literary environment precisely by maintaining the tension between subject and form instead of trying to avoid it. They, therefore, resolve the paradox of the material by creating a paradox of form which is comprehensive enough to incorporate the contrary demands of the war.

Because the lesser form is presented as the creation of the characters immersed in the war, it can only approximate control and eventually fails in its efforts. However, the larger framework, created by authors who had survived the war, successfully dominates the development of the novel. Therefore, by centering the work on the protagonist at the level of his subjective perceptions and embryonically prefiguring the end of his development in an early synoptic passage, each of these novels strictly adheres to the concept of closed texts. This concept is then complemented by a gradual revelation of the character's true substance as the novel progresses until the protagonist fulfills the promise of the early passage. Such reliance on closed texts and revelatory fictions ensures that the novels are self-contained. When these approaches are further supplemented by cinematic techniques--most notably montage--the result is a broad structure complete in itself which reveals some aspect of the war through a self-reflexive relationship with its minor or microcosmic structure. Thus, what is seen on the level of

character is often reflected in the novel as a whole--though the outcome is more successful in the textual macrocosm. Together, then, these two structural levels effectively convey the war--the macrocosmic giving the form necessary to express the chaos of Vietnam and the microcosmic providing the example of a single protagonist as he is affected by the war, as he attempts to control its influence on him, and as he is eventually undermined by it.

The problem of conveying the Vietnam War in fiction is directly related to its many historical peculiarities. It was simply too vast to be captured effectively. As conveyed by the title of Maclear's book, Vietnam: The Ten Thousand Day War, the war was almost too long even to be comprehended without the perspective of history--which does tend to make expression of it difficult. Fought by more than three million men over a period of roughly thirty years, the war involved so many people in such diverse assignments, actions, and geography that it allowed very few blanket statements about its nature. What can be said, though, is that the war as a whole was notorious for its confusion, complexity, and lack of order. In a considerable understatement, Halberstam summarizes it as "a less tidy war than Americans were used to," emphasizing that "almost nothing that happened in it fit the preconceptions of Westerners."[6] Though modestly stated, this is the truth. Vietnam was "untidy" from the first obscure government efforts to deal with the "Indochina Wars" in 1945 to the last American death in Southeast Asia in 1975. As well, nothing seemed to be clear-cut about that war politically, militarily, or socially. How the Americans first became involved with it, how the policies and strategies were applied once they were committed, even how

Americans reacted to it was unclear, unprecedented, and largely incomprehensible. However, certain manifestations of this disorder were more significant than others for the individuals who fought there.

For those who were in Vietnam, the historical realities of the war were viewed in strictly personal terms with the larger policies being significant only as they affected the men. On this human level, the strategies of the government could be reduced to a very few issues related to the unfathomable nature of the war. Most basic was the fact that the soldiers did not know why they were in Vietnam, either corporately or individually. That is, they did not understand the abstract and convoluted foreign policies which should have explained the national as well as their personal involvement in the war. Even when the effects of the political decisions did reach the practical level of the foot soldier, the result was not clarity and ready acceptance, but confusion and disbelief. To the infantrymen, the official guidelines for conduct were not just benign expressions of a government "unable to set its compass."[7] Rather, they were considered violent and unreasonable policies involving a contradiction of all that war was perceived to be. From the point of view of those fighting, attrition, "free-fire zones," non-linear combat,[8] and the surrender of territory for which men had died were completely preposterous tactics and served only to disconcert the men further.

Tim O'Brien considers the result of such policies to have been a total disorientation of the soldier in Vietnam:

> They did not know even the simple things: a sense of victory, or satisfaction, or necessary sacrifice. They did not know the feeling of taking a place and keeping it, securing a village and then raising the flag and calling it a victory. No sense of order and momentum. No front, no rear, no trenches laid out

> in neat parallels. No Patton rushing for the Rhine, no beachheads to storm and win and hold for the duration. They did not have targets. They did not have a cause. They did not know if it was a war of ideology or economics or hegemony or spite. . . . They did not know strategies. They did not know the terms of the war, its architecture, the rules of fair play . . . . They did not know how to feel. . . . Revenge? Loss? Peace of mind or anguish? They did not know. [9]

It was such personal uncertainty which provided the foundation for many of the soldiers' troubled emotional responses to the Vietnam War.

Despite the omnipresent ambiguity, though, many men did try to discover a reason for their presence in Vietnam and to that end went through a variety of mental exercises. First, they tried to apply "the Robin Hood ethic"[10] to the war, assuming that the Americans had come to save the poor South Vietnamese from the Communist aggressor. That, of course, quickly faded when the soldiers realized that most of their allies and certainly the indigenous population not only did not want their help, but often were helping the enemy by killing Americans and sabotaging U.S. efforts. For many, a common "second reaction . . . [became] 'Why am I getting so emotional about this? I mean it isn't my country, it isn't my responsibility'. . . ."[11] In response, they then began to pull away emotionally from the people and country they were supposedly sent to help. Eventually, not a few took the logical next step and mentally abdicated responsibility for the war and their role in it.

Consistent with this attitude of moral freedom concerning the war, a new focus resulted for the men: the primary area of interest became personal survival at all costs rather than involvement with the larger issues of Vietnam. Occurring precisely because there was no discernible larger purpose in the war and no real way for the men to make a

difference in the country or to the people, this new focus led to the most popular answer as to why American soldiers were in Vietnam: "they were trying to survive."[12] One soldier went so far as to state that during his time in Vietnam "[He] looked at [himself] as 'I'm dead now, and I have a year to work myself back to life.'"[13] For him as for so many others, the "war [had] turned suddenly [and] vividly personal," and would be fought with only "private war aims"[14] in mind. Having moved from the overly optimistic attitude that they were helping others to an egocentric focus on preserving the self, many soldiers opted for the private war aim not of winning the war, but rather of merely staying alive for the assigned 365 days in Vietnam.[15]

Though the military commanders would later criticize the men serving under them for a lack of commitment to larger goals as well as a lack of enthusiasm in combat, the soldiers were not wholly responsible for their attitudes. Thrust by national command into the "Indochina bush" where there "was nothing familiar . . . no churches, no police, no laws, no newspapers, or any of the restraining influences without which the earth's population of virtuous people would be reduced by ninety-five percent,"[16] the men were forced to cope as well as they could with the contrary demands of the war, their consciences, and the Rules of Engagement. Being thus in "an ethical as well as a geographical wilderness"[17] and receiving no guidance from either the government or the military, the men actually did well not to degenerate to animal-like states. Though the particular form of accommodation chosen by many men may have been costly to the war effort, it extracted an even greater price from the soldiers themselves as it compromised their integrity and subverted their sense of self.

The stress and intense isolation created by the war, as well as by the men's efforts to deal with it, led to other psychological problems which affected individuals in Vietnam. Most notable of these were personal detachment and a sense of the overall unreality of the war. Though the two concepts were closely related, they can be considered independently, for the first usually preceded and initiated the second. The first, personal detachment, began with a soldier's acute and too immediate awareness of his environment and was the product of psychological displacement.[18] Forced to remove himself emotionally from a situation because of circumstances too horrific to assimilate, the individual grew to view the entire environment around him as not only distant but as somehow illusory as well. As one soldier said, "It was like being in a movie but not being there."[19] Though his illusion was in fact reality, it was not seen as such. As a result, when a man undergoing such perceptual distortion was compelled to confront reality, he would often choose the simplest method of accommodation available, first removing himself from emotional proximity to the event and then dismissing it as unreal--a response which further reinforced the initial detachment.[20] When this psychological displacement was reflected back into Vietnam, its manifestation was a sense of unreality concerning everything connected with the war.[21] Because this notion was in turn bolstered by the continuously insane facts of the real world, the end result for those who succumbed to the lure of detachment was an almost inescapable cycle of terrible reality-detachment-unreality-terrible reality.

Such detachment was necessary because "[f]or troops in Vietnam, spiritual desolation and emotional despair could be as scarring as physical injuries."[22] As with physical injuries, emotional wounds require

time to heal away from the cause of the damage. Unfortunately, medical leave for psychological wounds was granted only in the most extreme cases and only after an onerous screening process. Even in Section 8 situations,[23] the process of getting relief to the men was painfully slow. Therefore, to accommodate this hidden wounding, many soldiers had to distance themselves from the war, often going "AWOL . . . from the Army and from time."[24] Though such evasive maneuvers did not solve the problem of the war, they did allow brief respites from it--periods during which soldiers could marshal their internal defenses and reserves before being compelled to confront the harsh reality again.[25] However, after frequent and often unconsciously motivated forays into this insulated emotional realm, a sense of disassociation often developed in which the clear partition between the reality of the war and the world of the mind broke down, allowing the two spheres to intermingle haphazardly so that Vietnam became in a sense "a fantasy war."[26] For those who had been consciously aware that their mental retreats were to a chimerical world of presumed safety and imaginary comfort, this collapse of clear separations was disconcerting. In the minds of the soldiers, each world assumed some of the characteristics of the other so that neither was purely real nor wholly illusory. Simultaneously experiencing an undeniable physical reality and a hallucinatory state caused some peculiar responses, such as that of Rob Riggan who wrote from Vietnam that "[he had] never felt more human in [his] life, nor more a part of a sea of fumbling mutants born of gods."[27] Though most men were eventually able to re-separate the two worlds of mind and reality, many did continue to experience at least a fleeting sense of the unreal. For others who needed an escape more, however, the effects of the merger were much longer lasting.

To separate oneself from the war was not in itself a difficult feat to accomplish. Having once already been torn from an established identity in Basic Training, a soldier could easily undergo a second separation--especially when prompted by specific, and very powerful, physical and psychological stimuli. The psychological forces have been touched on and include the lack of apparent meaning in the war, the lack of comprehensible strategies, and ultimately the lack of personal significance in the war as a whole. The physical forces--such as terrorism, mutilations, random killings, and atrocities--only complemented the impact of the mental pressures and, by doing so, emphasized the need for personal detachment if one's sanity was to be retained.

Of the many physical instigations to detachment, none was as significant as the type of weapons used and experienced by the men. These created a paradox for the foot soldier in which he could be physically and often emotionally removed from the death he caused while at the same time he was forced to be immediately aware of the dangers to himself posed by the enemy. For combat soldiers in Vietnam, the death or dismemberment which resulted from the enemy's frequent use of punji pits, mines, and booby traps were a much more dangerous reality than the injuries which the American troops caused with their M-16 rifles (which have a maximum range of 2350m), M-60 machine guns, and M-79 grenade launchers. Though the results in both cases could be death, the physical distance maintained by the Americans' weapons allowed U.S. forces to largely ignore the results of their own actions while inordinately concentrating on the casualties caused by the enemy. Compound the Americans' capacity for causing death by including the long range

artillery, the helicopter gunships, and the fighter-bombers such as the B-52s, and their potential reach of destruction increases to over one thousand miles. Yet, not only did the threats to their own lives remain most personal, but often they did not even think of what was occurring on the other side in the war.

This was not a totally unreasonable attitude given the experience most Americans had with death and the enemy in Vietnam. For them, any casualties suffered were not only vivid physically, but were emotionally moving as well since the maimed men would be acquaintances, friends, or even themselves. Day after day in Vietnam, they saw the damage that was done to living, breathing, American (and therefore "real") people right in front of them. The enemy, however, did not seem quite so real and was often considered as less than human--a common trend if the many derogatory terms for the Vietnamese are any indication. Certainly much of this was due to the strangeness of the North Vietnamese fighting style, which made the enemy seem vaguely eerie to the Americans. The Westerners were simply not emotionally equipped to deal with a People's War in which the enemy could and would quite willingly live in and fight from tunnels, hide right in front of them in the midst of the population, and be completely recalcitrant when interrogated regardless of the forms of coercion used. Enhancing this strangeness of tactics was the Viet Cong practice of not leaving their dead or wounded after a battle. As a result, Americans seldom found bodies but only the occasional thin trail of blood to indicate that they had hit anyone at all. It was hardly surprising, therefore, that U.S. forces often began to imagine that such people were invulnerable. Consequently, the enemy assumed preternatural dimensions. Contributing also to this concept of alienation from the

enemy's humanity was the fact that the North Vietnamese were not only the proverbial "enemy," but they were of a different, smaller, and therefore supposedly inferior race--"the kids" as Halberstam's American Colonel[28] refers to even allied Vietnamese (p. 28). In practical terms, the Americans' inability to see beyond themselves and their own injuries, as well as their consideration of the Vietnamese as either inhuman or inferior, meant that the soldier's disregard for the world beyond himself would again be heightened and his detachment from the war and its realities reinforced.

This aura of unreality was intensified by the fact that most of the men serving in Vietnam had no previous experience with war of any sort and therefore tended to perceive it through movies and television dramas--the only medium by which they had previously encountered war. This influence caused the interesting situation of young men arriving in Vietnam expecting a movie-like war, and then being so shocked by its horrific immediacy that they failed to apprehend the physical reality of the war and separated themselves emotionally from it, again considering war within a cinematic framework--though their final views had little to do with the John Wayne standard they had arrived with.[29] So strong were the illusions created by "comic books and television and movies"[30] that at first the men really expected the war to be like "the John Wayne flicks."[31] When it turned out, though, that it was not what they had expected,the whole "black-and-white image of the world became real gray and confused."[32]

This confusion dominated for at least a short time as the men sought for an alternate framework. Soon, however, it was resolved as the frame was again established through movie references. The primary distinction

between this new cinematic approach to war and the old was that the men were usually spectators rather than the heroes of the war. Since nothing in Vietnam could come close enough to hurt or destroy if it was just a bad film, the men therefore propagated the idea of the war as a movie to keep themselves separate from it.[33]

Though such efforts to escape the war reality were well-formed and conscientiously applied, the war remained undeniably too real. From the many ways one could be killed to the psychological horrors of terrorism, guerrilla warfare, and propaganda, every aspect of Vietnam seemed designed to destroy the men fighting there. The cumulative effect of these mental and physical strains was an experience of war which is almost indescribable--not only to outsiders but even to one's self immediately after the experience. Michael Herr, in describing his reaction to a post-battle scene, refers to the "obscuration" that occurred as he automatically and unconsciously distanced himself from what he saw before him:

> Even when the picture was sharp and cleanly defined, something wasn't clear at all, something repressed that monitored the images and withheld their essential information . . . I could have looked until my lamps went out and I still wouldn't have accepted the connection between a detached leg and the rest of the body, or the poses and positions that always happened . . . bodies wrenched too fast and violently into unbelievable contortion. 34

So overpowering was his experience in Vietnam that it was "translated outside of language, into chaos,"[35] and defied translation back. As with the young soldier who declared that Vietnam could not be described in a million words,[36] Herr recognized the basic problem with the Vietnam War and its fiction--in its pure, unadulterated form the war was simply too horrible for literary, or indeed any, expression.

However, despite this appalling immediacy of combat and the lack of meaning or significance in the war as a whole, many literary works attempt to convey the experience. In fact, the desire to do so may be related to the fundamental lack of organization in the war for there seems to be a powerful human need to protect the self by ordering horrific experiences. It is almost as if an event can be made less threatening if some system or method can be found within it--even if this system does not actually exist. By identifying some ordering principle--no matter how artificially construed it may be--individuals involved with a chaotic situation assume that they have gained control over it. Thus, though a fictional framework does not truly make the war any more comprehensible, it does allow an illusion of order and control to be maintained for the duration of the novel--much as the illusion of detachment and unreality allowed the soldier to function effectively.

The extensive efforts at control of the text which are put into this fiction may seem excessive if two details of background are neglected. The first is the essentially intractable nature of the war and the corresponding literary need to consider it within a highly structured text lest a more open-ended form appear to be a surrender to the war's chaotic nature. By containing at least some aspect of the war within the confines of literature, therefore, the authors demonstrate that Vietnam is not totally beyond human control despite the devastating effects it had on so many involved with it. Secondly, because the authors of _One Very Hot Day_, _The Short-Timers_, and _Meditations in Green_ have all been in Vietnam[37] and have seen the reality of the war, they face a conflict of interest between their experience of war and their need to convey it.

They attempt to resolve this difficulty through the strict ordering of their fictions. The problem arises from a conflict of intellect and emotion, or more accurately from the ex-soldiers' dual roles as "veterans" who as authors must attempt to write objectively about the deeply personal experience of Vietnam. That is, though Halberstam, Hasford, and Wright want to present the war objectively by revealing its true nature, they are hindered in their efforts to do so by the intense subjectivity of their time in Vietnam. Therefore, to resolve the conflict between intellectual goals and emotional motivation, the authors distance themselves through the formal mechanisms of the text.

Though the primary benefit of such stringent forms is that they allow the writers to contain and convey some small reality of Vietnam, these forms probably also have a personal value to the writers. Through the strictly controlled forms, the men can relive the war and any trauma it may have caused them from the safe distance of a literary context which they control. Thus, a secondary result of the careful structuring of these novels is that the forms might permit a cathartic purging of personal demons. Consequently, the authors are able to satisfy both their own needs as well as the artistic demands of their material by selecting the details of the war to be included and by determining the relationship of these details to the overall shape of the work. Therefore, the significance of the macrocosmic structure is that it provides a method of harmonizing the contrapuntal demands of subject and form, of the war and fiction--forces whose continuing contrariety maintains the creative tension necessary for the success of these works.

From such convoluted motivation, <u>One Very Hot Day</u>, <u>The Short-Timers</u>, and <u>Meditations in Green</u> emerge as coherent and unified texts which are

structured in a circular fashion to ensure that the novels will be closed, that the material will return to a pre-established point of origin, and most importantly that the authors will not lose control of their presentation of the war. Such closed texts based on circular models are possible because each work contains in its early passages an enigmatic synopsis of all that will occur in the remainder of the novel. Though the significance of these early sections is only recognizable in retrospect, they do indeed exist from the beginning and function throughout the works as a major structuring element. In fact, they ensure that the texts will be closed, beginning and ending at some pre-established point. This is consistent with Tomashevsky's understanding of "the principle of compositional motivation" as both a driving force and a controlling factor in the text. The effective use of it, he wrote, ensures that:

> Not a single property may remain unused in the telling and no episode may be without influence on the situation [described]. Chekhov referred to just such compositional motivation when he stated that if one speaks about a nail beaten into a wall at the beginning of a narrative, then at the end the hero must hang himself on that nail. 38

This compositional motivation is confirmed in each of these novels as the first paragraph or section serves not only to introduce the novels and establish their physical and psychological settings, but also to present a synopsis of the protagonist's development which is, has been, or will be occasioned by his time in Vietnam. This summary may be symbolically presented, as in <u>One Very Hot Day</u> in which the sign outside of the camp traces Beaupre's development of attitudes from World War II to Vietnam; it may be personified in a secondary character, as in <u>The Short-Timers</u> in which Sergeant Gerheim forewarns of what Joker, his

protégé, will become; or, it may be presented as fait accompli as in Meditations in Green, in which Griffin already is the vegetable-narrator who comments retrospectively on how the war reduced him to this state. However, regardless of the form by which it is presented, the first section of each novel epitomizes the material which is to follow. For this to be possible, the central character in each novel is presented from the first as containing the potential to realize the goal stated occultly in the early image.

Throughout the text, the protagonist works towards the fulfillment of his early, symbolically represented potential--though he does not so much grow as reveal aspects of himself which he possesses from the beginning of the novel. By the end of the novel, he has become what was first hinted at--the personification of W E T S U, another Sergeant Gerheim, or "a modest flower." These transformations follow different patterns and are expressed variously, but the final state of each is consistent: on the microcosmic level, it reveals the dehumanizing effect of the war; and, on the macrocosmic level, it returns the protagonist to his starting point. Thus, throughout One Very Hot Day, the sign outside of the Seminary is the controlling image. Consistently, Beaupre's understanding of the way he has degenerated as a soldier from World War II to Korea to Vietnam is expressed symbolically by the various parts of that sign. Thus, his World War II experiences are symbolized by the first lines of words on the sign: "Welcome. Eighth Infantry Division U.S. Advisory Group. Best There Is" (p.1). That is the war in which his "sense of total tension and tautness" (p. 92) had been fashioned and also the war in which he did not distrust people (p. 132)--the good war in which he truly was the "Best There Is." However, with Korea he begins to

distrust people and moves to the second part of the sign, the "caricature of an American officer with a huge grin" (p. 1). That war is less "a matter of fighting and killing" (p. 133) and more a matter of appearances, facades, and minimal efforts--all of which are part of the caricature.

Just as Beaupre is a culmination of his past wars, and the sign is a symbol of them, Vietnam fulfills the promise of the last part of the sign, the "W E T S U." Like the war itself, it resists translation into written language. More importantly, however, it is the perfect symbol for Beaupre's time in Vietnam--a fact fully recognized by the character. Though the relationship of the other parts of the sign with his personal experiences must be largely inferred, this last stage of Vietnam is made explicit by Beaupre's own assessment of his role in this war:

> . . . I'm tired of getting crapped on in this country . . . the more we take, the more we get. These goddamn Vietcong see it. They see when we walk in that here's an outfit that takes crap, and so they give us more, and we take more, and we'll take more tomorrow; . . . Why here they come again he thought bitterly, that nice government company; the one that took so much last time and they liked it so much, and now they're back for more, and they got that Beaupre with them. Sonny, go back in the hut and bring out that extra sack of it we've been saving. (p. 68)

With such an understanding of the war and his role in it, Beaupre leaves no doubt that, for him at least, Vietnam is nothing more than a huge acting out of "W E T S U."

Likewise, Joker's transformation from a humane individual who cares for and helps Leonard to the heartless, cold-blooded killer and leader of Marines is prefigured in the character of Sergeant Gerheim. From early in the novel, the Sergeant recognizes a kinship with Joker which leads him to promote Joker to squad leader and then to recommend him for

promotion to Private First Class. The relationship between the two characters is so strong that Gerheim even gives his "old PFC stripes" to Joker.[40] This identification is only strengthened when the drill sergeant is killed by Leonard and the torch of cold-blooded leadership is figuratively passed to Joker, who feels "cold and alone" (p. 32), who becomes one with his rifle, and who leads the other Marines in The Rifleman's Creed. Though full acceptance of this new role does not come until one hundred and forty-two pages later, the process has started with the death of Gerheim, and ultimately returns Joker to the state of United States Marine Corps perfection symbolized by Sergeant Gerheim, who "won the Navy cross on Iwo Jima . . . for teaching young Marines how to bleed . . . " (p. 20).

Griffin's transformation is far more obvious since the novel begins with him in a plant-like state. However, if his involvement with the war is considered in a chronological manner, the process which he undergoes is very similar to that of Beaupre and Joker, who arrive at their final state through several stages. Thus, Griffin begins as a grimy red-faced trainee" (p. 6) but through his use, first, of marijuana and then opium, through his assigned study of botany and the effects of it on bombing and defoliation, and through his later plant meditations and a return to drug use, he comes to identify himself with plants in progressively greater degrees. Eventually, he at last assumes himself to be one with "a modest flower" (p. 322). When he sets his life's goal as being part of the plant's propagation process, his identification is complete. In his mind, he is part of the plant world; in the text, he is the plant-narrator from the "Meditations." His transformation is complete, and he arrives finally at the point which opened the novel.

Through these very different processes, the protagonists become that which was prefigured in each text. By returning the novels to their points of origin, each process ensures that its novel is a closed text. In fact, since the endings are uniformly negative, it can be said that each protagonist figuratively "hang[s] himself on that nail" first presented in the novels.

While these circular patterns are important to the revelation of the characters, they are also essential to the author's control of each text. By having the characters' development conform to a tight structure, the authors are able effectively to deny Vietnam's completely pervasive influence. Though the war does act on the characters and does corrode their humanity, the authors ultimately manipulate the war's influence by making its effect on their protagonists a feature of the novels' aesthetic form.

This relationship of form and character creates a situation in which the characters try to create mental structures by which they can control the war and by which they can mirror the structures of the novels they inhabit. Though the characters are created, fictional entities, they appear to have certain control over the material they relate because of their double function as narrators (or sub-narrator in Beaupre's case) as well as characters. Through their roles as narrators, then, they seem to control much of the commentary, interior monologue, and subjective assessment of the actions, thoughts, and words, conveyed in the novels. Such influence is, in fact, an illusion as the authors ultimately have total control over the text, but it does provide the characters with the mechanisms necessary to create their mental worlds.

Designed to loosely resemble "real" soldiers and their experiences

in Vietnam, the protagonists in these novels (and the authors who created them) use a diverse combination of literary and cinematic techniques to relate their stories. Given the disordered nature of their subject (the Vietnam War), the historical reality of detachment as a common method of coping with the war, and the subsequent preference of many soldiers to view the entire experience as a bad movie, these authors--and subsequently their characters--logically turn to cinema for certain narrative techniques which are useful in presenting their objective, emotionally distanced, and highly formal frame for the chaos of the war.

Indeed, so significant is the movie image that Michael Herr, in his literary record of the war, summarizes the entire Vietnam experience as:

> Life-as-movie, war-as-(war)-movie, war-as-life: a complete process if you got to complete it, a distinct path to travel, but dark and hard, not any easier if you knew that you'd put your own foot on it yourself, deliberately and--most roughly speaking--consciously. 41

Though movie techniques have to be adapted to the medium of literature, they do provide the most comprehensive method of conveying the images of the new war. However, their influence is not sufficient if taken alone. Rather,

> The modern moments and experiences . . . are given depth, significance, and a strange quality of timelessness by continual weaving in of older and more familiar material . . . this background material from the historical and literary past serves to extend the present, to place the present in some relation to the past, to provide a richness and fullness of texture which the present moment continually lacks, falls short of, or openly mocks. 42

The "continual weaving in of older and more familiar material" is provided through such techniques as linear narrative, the use of narrators, and interior monologues. This background sets the stage for

"the [cinematically presented] present moment" which in this literature is the Vietnam War--a moment so ambiguous that any possible connection with a more stable and proven tradition is beneficial as a continual reference point.

Continuing his definition of "Life-as-movie," Herr goes on to delineate various possibilities for people in Vietnam as they travel the "distinct path" of the war:

> Some took a few steps along it and turned back, wised up, with and without regrets. Many walked on and just got blown off it. A lot went farther than they probably should have, and then lay down, falling into a bad sleep of pain and rage, waiting for release, for peace, any kind of peace that wasn't just the absence of war. And some kept going until they reached a place where an inversion of the expected order happened, a fabulous warp where you took the journey first and then made your departure. [43]

It is significant that though a number of novels have been written about characters from each of Herr's categories, One Very Hot Day, The Short-Timers, and Meditations in Green are all from the stage of the "fabulous warp." Such a "fabulous warp" of time and experience is not unprecedented in either war or war literature. In fact, Leed in No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I undertakes a study of this very phenomenon. Briefly stated, the "fabulous warp" is the overt manifestation of a particular form of psychic regression which effectively annuls the validity of reality for a given soldier or group of soldiers in a specific battle or war.[44] The resulting "disorientation in turn generate[s] a need for a coherent vision"[45] which "force[s] combatants to assume an observing relationship to themselves . . . [This then becomes] a habit of perspective . . . called 'stereoscopic' vision."[46] This "stereoscopic vision" leads to parallel processes of

thought in which a soldier (or in the fiction, a character) can be involved in an action, can observe that action, and can at the same time comprehend it from a variety of temporal-spatial poses. His record of the event may be as if he were a participant undergoing the experience, a correspondent reporting on it, or a member of a viewing audience watching the event unfold on a movie screen. The particular source of the narrative depends largely on the level of detachment caused by the event. Consequently, a soldier or a character-narrator may move freely among the parallel levels of thought, action, and record.

In the case of the three works under consideration, this movement allows the fates of the characters to be known from the beginning of the novels. In practice, then:

> Seen in toto, parallel processes lack any coherent sequence . . . . This distinction between parallel thought processes, which are multilevel, diffuse, and apparently chaotic, and sequential processes, which focus upon the ordered successive solution of problems, offers a framework for the interpretation of the change of conscious state suffered by those [at war]. 47

As well, it offers an explanation for the "fabulous warp" of Herr's categories in which the journey is perceived as being made before the departure ensues.

Cinematic techniques facilitate the presentation of experience as "multi-level, diffuse, and apparently chaotic," and therefore effectively relate the experiential inversion of Herr's "fabulous warp." Therefore, within the confines of closed texts based on revelatory principles, the techniques of cinema are used extensively to represent the details of the war. Relying heavily on the framing of individual episodes as independent units, the free-floating "camera" point of view as narrative source, and montage as organizing principle, the cinematic techniques

attempt to approximate the chaotic and disordered Vietnam experienced by the soldiers while paradoxically attempting to gain control over it as well. The specific techniques and application of them vary greatly with the different works, but these general concepts provide the fundamental similarities of method shared by One Very Hot Day, The Short-Timers, and Meditations in Green as each attempts to apprehend some aspect of the war through form and content.

In Film Form, Eisenstein stated that "montage is the most powerful compositional means of telling a story,"[48] and that it is "the mightiest means for a really important creative remolding of nature."[49] In effect, montage is simply a technique of "aligning images in such a way as to create a logic of images themselves."[50] Thus, through montage, a new and completely consistent scene can emerge from a careful juxtaposition of other scenes which are apparently contradictory or wholly unrelated. This is consistent with Herr's "fabulous warp" concept of Vietnam as well as Leed's understanding of war's effect on the psyche, for both assume a restricted, fragmented, and distorted view of events which ultimately leads to a new form of vision. Moreover, montage, which is essentially the piecing together of fragments, episodes, and scenes, is the most useful narrative technique--cinematic or literary--to present the true nature of Vietnam as fragmentary, fluid, and chaotic rather than as dramatically coherent.

Therefore, though the war is not nature in its best form, it does indeed exist external to fiction, and it is certainly a story which requires a compositional means of telling. Indeed, the war is so kaleidoscopic that as O'Brien's Captain Fahyi Rhallon says:

> Each soldier, he has a different war. Even if it is the same

> war it is a different war . . . . In battle, in a war, a soldier sees only a tiny fragment of what is available to be seen. The soldier is not a photographic machine. He is not a camera. He registers, so to speak, only those few items he is predisposed to register and not a thing more . . . . [Therefore,] after a battle each soldier will have different stories to tell, vastly different stories, and . . . when a war is ended it is as if there have been a million wars, or so many wars as there were soldiers. 51

Given what has already been established of the different wars or the different ways of perceiving that a single soldier could have in Vietnam, the composite framework becomes essential for even one man's story. As well, this variation in "perceptual set" [52] accounts for the vast differences in the individual fictional accounts of the war, differences which are readily apparent in even the three texts studied here: the style, pace, and war presented in One Very Hot Day is distinct from that of The Short-Timers, and both of these works are vastly dissimilar from Meditations in Green. Consequently, montage--the process of putting the various pieces together into some coherent form--is not only suitable for this literature, but offers one of the few possibilities for understanding the war as a whole.

However, to truly relate the nature of the war as it was experienced on a human level, substantial flexibility must exist in the method of telling the story as well as in the point of view on the action--a flexibility possible within the rigidly defined structure of these texts partly because of the introduction of cinematic techniques. For example, because disorder and uncertainty were characteristic of Vietnam, the narrative focus must be able to make frequent jumps from one character to another, one time to another, even one story line to another to show the disconcerting effects of the war on the individuals involved. These changes are evident in the One Very Hot Day as the center of narrative

consciousness frequently alters among the characters, being at times Beaupre, Anderson, Thuong, or the undramatized narrator. Similarly, in Meditations in Green, the narrative may suddenly move from Vietnam to a post-war slum dwelling or to a plant-like state. Even in The Short-Timers, which is set up in a primarily linear manner, shifts are apparent as the voice of narration moves from Joker as first-person narrator to an unmentioned external source of narration to second-person address which may or may not refer to the reader. Only by such violent shifts of perspective can the chaos of the war and its effects on the psyche be approximated--a situation requiring a return to both Herr's concept of the "fabulous warp" and the technique of montage.

An example of this is Joker's last recorded battle scene (p. 175) in which he suddenly begins laughing while his friend is being slowly murdered. Without the montage effect obtained by flashing from the sniper laughing, to the image of Sorry Charlie to Joker's sudden comprehension of the "joke," the laugh could be simply a manifestation of a war-induced insanity. However, because of the particular scenes juxtaposed against his laugh, the meaning of his laughter becomes much blacker and much more sinister than it would be alone. Against these images, it shows the depths to which Joker has sunk and the personal devastation occasioned by Vietnam. The idea is carried by montage, which places apparently incongruous images together to convey a new message. Though Joker explains his laugh, the explanation is made redundant by the emotional impact of the scene which precedes it. The juxtaposition of images has made the meaning of the laugh as clear and even more effective than any amount of explanation possibly could.

The state that Joker has achieved in this scene is not new to the

text. In fact, it is a simple fulfillment of the potential recognized by Gerheim when he "adopted" Joker as his protégé. What his arrival at such a state does indicate, however, is that in The Short-Timers as in the other texts to be studied, the character progression is not as purely linear as the character may wish it to be, but is both circular and fragmented: circular, paralleling the structure of the larger text; and fragmented, reflecting the disordered nature of the Vietnam War. The use of montage in depicting this scene, therefore, does not do away with the coherent linear structures of the texts, but simply supplements the other techniques used in framing the chaos of the war.

Similarly, though the larger structural level is designed as a circle to reflect the nature of the war and its influence and therefore does not develop from point A to point B, it also develops linearly in that it progresses step-by-step and returns the character-narrator to his earliest state when the story is over. The path that its development follows, then, is simply a circular line rather than a straight line. However, even within such a carefully structured form, the amorphous nature of the war must be taken into consideration and allowances made for its irregular aspects. Consequently, in this larger pattern as on the level of the individual characters, cinematic techniques such as montage are significant in that they allow the author to move quickly from one scene to another through flashbacks, juxtaposition, parallelisms, and swift changes in point of view or center of focus to supplement his more general methods of framing the text. Taken together, then, the circular frame and the cinematic techniques attempt to contain and approximate the nature of the war.

In these novels, the characters appear to be the central focus and

therefore ostensibly deserve more attention than other aspects of the works. However, while it is true that these novels are examples of revelatory fiction and therefore rely heavily upon the lives of the protagonists to develop the story line, the characters do not simply act out roles, but attempt to shape the war around them in efforts which parallel the authors' control of the textual macrocosm. In fact, each has the additional status and function of narrator (or sub-narrator) so that he may more effectively strive for control of the events he observes. Throughout, he remains the voice of subjectivity, balancing the author's pretense of objectivity even as they use similar methods. However, the principle function of the protagonists is to amplify the carefully defined sketch of the war which is presented in the first section of each novel. The methods selected by the respective protagonists to do so are quite varied, but they usually parallel the techniques used in the text as a whole so that the message of the novel and its intended effect are consistent. Thus, Beaupre in <u>One Very Hot Day</u> uses flashbacks, quick shifts in perspective as he moves from one scene or thought to another, and long shots and close-ups of the other characters to make the time seem to move more quickly. These techniques are mirrored in the text as the author--through the undramatized narrator--also provides background material on selected and occasionally minor characters, as he jumps from one scene and one point of view to another, and as he zooms in and out on the characters with physical, mental, and social description.

The techniques work effectively on both levels. On the level of overall structure the context is larger, encompassing the entire novel, all the characters in the work, and the war as experienced by them.

Conversely, on the level of the individual characters, the material dealt with is that of private experience. However, though the scope of the material dealt with differs on the two levels, the techniques used remain similar. As a result of this parallel use of techniques a double benefit is evident: first, it makes Beaupre appear more in control than he actually is since he mirrors the methods of the author; and second, it distances the author a step further from the action as it seems to be at least partially manipulated by the character. Thus, the techniques used by Beaupre draw attention to his actions, thought processes, and life while at the same time creating a greater awareness of the artifice itself--both that used by Beaupre and its parallel in the larger structure. Therefore, though the forms used superficially direct attention to the characters, the use of these same forms by the characters direct awareness to the artifice behind the work. The result is a focus both on the frame of the text as seen in the early synopsis of the war's effects as well as on the methods by which the specifics of this summary are developed. Though this necessarily involves a concentration on the details of character, character as an independent element is largely irrelevant. Rather, its purpose is to aid in the delineation of the Vietnam war and the presentation of the text as a reflection of that conflict.

The function of the protagonists as characters as opposed to their function as narrators is more vital. By developing a world which he finds congenial within the chaos of the war, each protagonist can exercise some personal prerogative within his carefully constructed and wholly artificial microcosm. By creating fantasy situations, conscientiously structured scenarios to be acted out, or protective

linguistic shells to inhabit, the protagonist can manipulate people and events to suit his wishes. Consequently, the actions which each undertakes in his private world provide the substance for the parallels with the larger narrative techniques. However, though each maintains this tenuous connection with the greater world of the text and the war, what each does in this distinct realm only appears to be independent of the confusions of the war. Though the character can engage in "anti-war" activities while in this synthetic mode of existence, he cannot separate himself from the war and its corrupting effect any more than the real soldiers in Vietnam could. The private worlds of both characters and soldiers remain only illusions.

When this effect is considered in relation to the entire worlds of the novels, it necessarily involves a recognition of the works themselves as illusions. As fictions, they are just as surely created and structured illusions as the characters' mental worlds are. As such, they reinforce the inadequacy of any forms to deal with the Vietnam War and emphasize the fact that only by altering the war, or by distorting its true essence, can it be expressed. When such distortion occurs, of course, the war expressed is not truly that of Vietnam, but an artifice or illusion. Thus, in the end, the very existence of these fictional forms stresses the inexpressible and intractable nature of the Vietnam War.

In the three novels considered here, the protagonists choose different methods of distancing, and the extents to which they attempt to sever connections with the real world of the war varies correspondingly. Beaupre, the old soldier in the new war, frequently retreats to his memories of other, better wars but remains largely present in the action

occurring around him. Joker, the Marine correspondent, hides behind his role as correspondent as well as his jokes and for much of the novel is quite removed from the action of the war. When he does encounter action, however, his contact has a far greater intensity than combat in either of the other works. Finally and most extremely, Griffin, the veteran, escapes his world almost completely. He evades his present through plant meditation and drugs and his past through a further fictional frame within the text--the "strange tales from the war back in the long ago time" (p. 6). For Griffin, this produces a paradoxical inversion in which the war for him has become a fiction which both explains and counteracts his depressing post-war existence. Each of these separate worlds provides a temporary refuge for the characters and furthers their illusions of themselves as isolated and untainted by the war. But such conceptions are just illusions and are destroyed when the war intervenes.

For the characters, the intrusion of the "real" Vietnam on their comfortable self-delusions means inevitable and radical change, a forced assimilation into the war they have been trying to avoid. Consistent with the particularly cruel nature of the war, each central character is eventually dehumanized by it--though the degree to which each changes and the particular form of the transformation varies with the text. As Thuong notes in One Very Hot Day, "what was really happening [was] that instead of changing Vietnam [as they seemed to be doing with their illusions], they [the Americans] were changing with it, and becoming part of it" (p. 47).

The transformation of character at the psychological level is but one manifestation of the underlying conflict which exists between the war and the fictional efforts to convey it. In fact, so strong is this

conflict that it eventually dehumanizes the protagonist in each of these works as his efforts to control his war and his role in it fail. This failure is a necessary and planned part of these texts for it reveals the war in all its chaos and destructive power. However, with the characters destroyed by the war and their efforts at positive development aborted, the authors have to go to extreme lengths to establish their ordered perceptions. These include extensive efforts to create the texts with an absolute structure which accounts for everything in the novels--including the war itself. Restrictions such as closed texts and revelatory fictions, however, do not resolve the tension between subject and form but, because the formal control seems excessive, instead heighten it. As a result, the texts suggest the desperation for a governing order inherent in the war through their very shapes.

In fact, the stringent efforts to control the texts suggest almost counter-productively the intensity of the disorder which the works are trying to convey. The qualification of "almost" is most telling, however, for the tension is neither arbitrarily imposed on the texts nor is it a simple manifestation of the chaotic war run wild in fiction. Rather, it is an exactly balanced tension between subject and form which might well be designed to serve the double function of truly relating the war while simultaneously protecting the authors from their memories of it. Even for the material alone, however, such severe forms are necessary lest it appear that the intractable nature of the war is dominating the structures of the texts.

Closer approximation to the true meaning of the war than that which is attained in these works may very well not be possible. Because Vietnam is such an elusive, ambiguous, and large subject, perhaps no

literature can effectively convey it. Given the inevitability of distortion--artistic or otherwise--inherent in it as an art form, perhaps any formal literature is handicapped by the very structures it brings to the material. If so, these works and those like them remain just

> war stories . . . a few stupid war stories, hackneyed and unprofound. Even the lessons [are] commonplace. It hurts to be shot. Dead men are heavy. Don't seek trouble, it'll find you soon enough. You hear the shot that gets you. Scared to death on the field of battle. Life after death. They [are] hard lessons, true, but they [are] lessons of ignorance; ignorant men, trite truths. What remain[s] [is] simple event. The facts, the physical things. A war like any war. No new messages. Stories that [begin] and [end] without transition. No developing drama or tension or direction. No order. 53

However, I do not believe that the formal techniques seriously handicap the fiction for though the characters who use them are dehumanized, the broader structures of the texts largely succeed through them. For example, because the authors are so aware of the disordered nature of the war, they revert to excessively strict forms to wrest some order from it. By doing so, they limit their characters' development and actually testify to the war's power to corrode their protagonists' humanity. In this way, the failure of the characters completes the message of the real Vietnam. Therefore, it is the forms which give meaning to the experience by reaffirming human control of the chaos represented by the war.

By a careful development of their structural levels, the authors allow chaos and control to exist simultaneously in parallel frames. By not allowing one to overpower the other, the authors maintain the tension between form and subject necessary to effectively relay this war. Thus, <u>One Very Hot Day</u>, <u>The Short-Timers</u>, and <u>Meditations in Green</u> succeed in revealing the chaotic intensity of the experience by their very inability

or rather unwillingness to wholly resolve the duality of form and content. By their artistic insistence on the necessary co-existence and co-presentation of form and chaos and their creation of carefully constructed structures which allow the mutual toleration of such antithetical forces, the novels expose the Vietnam War in counterpoint, showing what it was and is by what it refuses to be--ordered or controlled. To make such a paradox functional, montage is important for the accurate depiction of the war as well as for the main character's fictional realities. In the end, montage--the juxtaposition of contrary images or ideas--can be seen not only as an ordering principle for the literature of Vietnam, but perhaps also as a necessary symbol for the Vietnam War in all its actual craziness.

## Notes

1 Seymour Chatman, Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 48.

2 Ernest Lindgren, The Art of the Film (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963), p. 119.

3 Lindgren, p. 241.

4 Chatman, pp. 255-256.

5 Stephen Wright, Meditations in Green (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1984), p. 6. All other quotations from this novel are from this edition and are henceforth indicated only by page numbers.

6 David Halberstam, One Very Hot Day (New York: Warner Books, 1984), p. 228. All other quotations from this novel are from this edition and are henceforth indicated only by page numbers.

7 John Wheeler, Touched with Fire: The Future of the Vietnam Generation (New York: Avon Books, 1984), p. 29.

8 Non-linear combat refers to the type of fighting which took place in Vietnam in which there was no front, no real rear, no progressive form of combat. Therefore, there was also no place of absolute safety in Vietnam.

9 Tim O'Brien, Going After Cacciato. (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1975), p. 320.

10 Wallace Terry, Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans (New York: Ballantine Books, 1984), p. 4.

11 Kim Willenson, ed., The Bad War: An Oral History of the Vietnam War (New York: New American Library, 1987), p. 51.

12 Peter Goldman and Tony Fuller. Charlie Company: What Vietnam Did to Us (New York: Ballantine Books, 1983), p. 104.

13 Willenson, p. 55.

14
Goldman and Fuller, p. 64.

15
The usual "tour of duty"--the length of time a soldier was required to serve in Vietnam before being eligible for rotation home--was 365 days for soldiers with an extra month added for Marines. Hence, the term "war year."

16
Philip Caputo, A Rumor of War (New York: Ballantine Books, 1977), p. xx.

17
Caputo, p. xx.

18
Joel Osler Brende and Erwin Randolph Parson, Vietnam Veterans: The Road to Recovery (New York: New American Library, 1985), p. 94.

19
Willenson, p. 165.

20
Goldman and Fuller, p. 28. And, Eric J. Leed, No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 137.

21
Brende and Parson, p. 123.

22
Bernard Edelman, ed., Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam (New York: Pocket Books, 1985), p. 169.

23
Section 8 is the section of military regulations which make allowance for psychiatric discharges.

24
Goldman and Fuller, p. 38.

25
Goldman and Fuller, p. 148.

26
Goldman and Fuller, p. 118.

27
Edelman, p. 166.

28
Loren Baritz discusses a variety of sources and manifestations of a latent racism in Vietnam. See Loren Baritz, "God's Country and American Know-How," in Backfire: A History of How American Culture Led Us into Vietnam and Made Us Fight the Way We Did (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985), pp. 3-40.

29
Baritz, p. 37.

30
Edelman, p. 215.

31
Willenson, p. 61.

32
Willenson, p. 112.

33
Willenson, pp. 165, 241.

34
Michael Herr, Dispatches (New York: Avon Books, 1978), p. 18.

35
Herr, p. 58.

36
Edelman, p. 51.

37
Halberstam was a correspondent for the New York Times in Vietnam in the early 1960's; Hasford was a Marine correspondent with the 1st Marine Division in Vietnam in 1968; and Wright served with Army Intelligence through 1970.

38
William Luhr and Peter Lehman, Authorship and Narrative in the Cinema: Issues in Contemporary Aesthetics and Criticism (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1977), p. 181.

39
Halberstam, p. 1. "W E T S U" stands for "We Eat This Shit Up."

40
Gustav Hasford, The Short-Timers (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1983), p. 24. All other quotations from this novel are from this edition and are henceforth indicated only by page numbers.

41
Herr, p. 65.

42 Robert Richardson, Literature and Film (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969) p. 110.

43 Herr, p. 65.

44 Leed, p. 118f.

45 Leed, p. 123.

46 Leed, p. 137.

47 Leed, p. 129.

48 Sergei Eisenstein, Film Form: Essays in Film Theory, ed. and trans. by Jay Leyda (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), p. 111.

49 Eisenstein, p. 5.

50 Richardson, p. 26.

51 O'Brien, pp. 236-237.

52 O'Brien, p. 236.

53 O'Brien, p. 338.

# Chapter II

# David Halberstam's

# *One Very Hot Day*

Writing One Very Hot Day, Halberstam drew heavily on what he had observed as a correspondent in Vietnam from 1962-1964. During these years, there were no official combat soldiers in Vietnam, only military advisers who "had the unenviable task of shaping the ragtag, under-equipped, ill-led South Vietnamese armed forces into a viable, functioning military unit, capable of fighting the communist insurgency unaided."[1] Much of the tension between form and substance which was later to appear in Halberstam's novel was prefigured by these advisers, who found that the structures of their military codes were inadequate to deal with the chaos that was Vietnam. As a result, the advisers experienced great frustration as they, without formal authority over their counterparts, tried to train and lead unruly ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) troops. In fact, so restrictive were the formalities of American aid to Vietnam that even in the midst of combat, the advisers "could not make battlefield decisions, they could not discipline South Vietnamese troops, and they could not relieve incompetent commanders."[2] Like the character Beaupre in One Very Hot Day, the advisers realized that the forms of their world--the political agreements between the United States and Vietnam, the military organization, and their specific assignments--could not contain or order the chaos which was their Vietnam, yet they were helpless to change them.

Having observed such things, Halberstam realized the elusive, ambiguous nature of Vietnam and recognized that even after writing much non-fiction about the war, he had not truly captured the essence of the experience. In an effort to convey some honest sense of the war, therefore, to tell that "something more" (p. 228) which he felt was lacking in his previous accounts of the war, Halberstam turned to

fiction. Within the artificial forms of literary art, he concentrated on one small part of the war and attempted to portray what "the war felt like on a given day, . . . the frustrations, and the emptiness of this war" (p. 228). The result of these efforts was One Very Hot Day.[3] Looking back on this novel after eighteen years, Halberstam still viewed it as his favorite of the many books he had written on Vietnam for he considered it the most "true" (p. 230)--a paradoxical assessment of a book which is not literally "true" at all in that it is fiction, an entirely invented story within a carefully structured and synthetically created frame.

This paradox of the "truth" of the war's being captured in a fictional form is fundamental to the structure of Halberstam's novel as the entire work is a series of such frames built on a double-layered structure. The larger form encompasses the structure of the text as a whole, framing the plot which gradually reveals Beaupre's essential nature through specific narrative events and techniques. Contained within this broad frame is a sub-structure which focuses on Beaupre's attempts to avoid his true self. Finding the Vietnam War to be too chaotic and its effects on him too personally and professionally devastating, Beaupre creates a series of illusions from memory and fantasy in his effort to protect himself from conscious awareness of what the war has made him--a cynical old soldier whose conduct both on and off the battlefield is frequently less than professional. Though apparently antithetical, the two structural levels are not totally in opposition. Indeed, they share many technical similarities as the character uses imaginative strategies to avoid his essential self which are comparable to the artistic methods used by the author to handle the text. Both

structures, moreover, serve the single purpose of revealing Beaupre's true self: the larger structure doing so through its progressive disclosure of the character, and the sub-structure doing so through Beaupre's reluctance to accept his basic nature even when it is thrust upon him. The first reveals Beaupre's physical and professional stature as deteriorating; the second, his mental and moral condition as resisting deterioration but doing so futilely. Together, the two structural levels fully expose Beaupre's true nature, showing what he is both by the facts of his conduct and by his characteristic retreat from these facts into the realm of the mind.

This structural emphasis on exposure is consistent with One Very Hot Day as an example of revelatory fiction since the novel is typical of that kind of fiction in that there is little actual dramatic progression. As Chatman puts it, "Early on we gather that things will stay pretty much the same."[4] Because of this, the function of the text is simplified. The chief role which it must fulfill is to gradually uncover the state of Beaupre's character as it exists immediately prior to the commencement of the novel. To suggest that the novel demonstrates a deterioration of his character which is caused or at least certainly hastened by the Vietnam War, then, presupposes that his degeneration has already occurred before the novel opens.

In order for this to be a compelling argument, there must first be evidence that a deterioration has occurred, and that it is the peculiar product of Beaupre's contact with Vietnam. To this end, Halberstam uses flashbacks and the character's memories to include certain incidents from World War II and Korea as part of Beaupre's fictional history. These indicate which aspects of his character are the products of Vietnam

rather than of war in general. With this history as a background, the final changes occasioned by Vietnam become readily apparent through what Beaupre is in One Very Hot Day as opposed to what he was in his other wars. The active process of transformation thus remains largely extra-textual, for by the time the novel opens, Beaupre's transformation is complete--he has already become what Vietnam is going to make him. Consequently, the sole purpose of the novel is simply to show what he has become and offer it as an indictment of the Vietnam War.

Because the novel is designed to reveal Beaupre's character as it has been shaped by the war, the broad structure of the work develops through a series of dramatic incidents which gradually expose Beaupre's true nature. This revelation in stages constitutes the plot of the novel. Much like that of a classical drama, the plot of One Very Hot Day reveals Beaupre's character in what may be thought of as a five-act structure, one which in this case is focused on the single, self-contained event of the patrol. Within such a model, the pre-briefing description of Beaupre provides the introductory material; the briefing functions as the incitement to the rising action; the patrol itself is the rising action; Beaupre's collapse constitutes the turning point; the combat scene is the climax; and the brief, post-combat scenes provide the resolution. The five acts are formed by his early description, the briefing, the patrol, the battle, and the post-combat scenes. In this model, Beaupre's collapse and the combat scene provide the crisis points of the novel.

Though Beaupre does not actually change throughout this dramatic process, each major incident reveals something more of what he has already become before the novel opens. This gradual revelation of his

change--rather than a step-by-step report of it--draws the reader into the story, motivating him to continue in it by providing carefully spaced moments of truth and insight into the true nature of the character. By thus controlling the reader's awareness of the character, the author is able to extend his sphere of manipulation and by doing so appears to be more effectively in control over the pervasive chaos occasioned by the war.

This question of control is central to the novel, and in the larger structure it is manifested both in the extreme efforts made to guarantee a closed text and in the specific narrative techniques used to relate the events. Despite the fact that the novel is organically coherent and unified based on the five-act structure discussed above, Halberstam builds a further synoptic level of organization into the larger form of the novel. Apparently on the principle that awareness of a difficult situation is the first step to resolving it, Halberstam prefaces the work with a short prologue which symbolically summarizes the type of war that Vietnam was, the literary efforts made to contain the experience, and the five-act structure which One Very Hot Day follows. This synopsis of the novel's structure reveals that the author is aware of the intractable nature of the war and of the artistic problems involved in trying to contain Vietnam within the confines of literature. As well, the passage further demonstrates the author's consciousness of the forms he has used to contain his presentation of the war. Most significantly for the structure, however, this early section demonstrates that the end of the work is known from the beginning, that the author has taken into account the tendency of his subject to degenerate into chaos, and that he has taken appropriate artistic measures to counter that tendency. In short,

the early synoptic passage prefigures the total authorial control which will dominate the structure of this text. This control ensures that the novel will be complete, closed, and self-contained despite the nature of its subject.

Continuing his quest for total dominance of the text, Halberstam uses the specific narrative techniques of his structure to extend his control over individual elements in the novel. By adapting cinematic techniques to fiction and exploiting their peculiarities, Halberstam is able to use long shots, close-ups, and pans to control not only the scenes presented but his distance from them as well. Through these narrative devices, he can be in intimate contact with his text while at the same time maintaining a safe distance between himself and the incidents related therein. Further, by organizing his scenes according to an editing principle such as montage, Halberstam assumes control over space, time, and effect: over time in that he can call up memories at will; over space in that he can move a scene instantly from My Tho to Saigon or from Vietnam to the United States; and, over the effect his scenes will have on the reader, for by juxtaposing two contrary scenes, such as that of Beaupre with Kim Chi (pp. 114-118) and that of Anderson complimenting Beaupre on his sexual prowess (pp. 118-119), Halberstam can heighten the irony inherent in both. Relying on the versatility of montage, Halberstam can create other juxtapositions which lead to different emotions to serve his purposes as the author. In every case, though, Halberstam maintains a firm control on structure as well as on development.

Within this larger form of structure which establishes total artistic control over the work as a whole, there exists a sub-structure

which presents a further level of illusion within the already fictional reality of the novel. Complementing the revelatory function of the broad form of the novel, the sub-structure is designed to present the chaos of the war through the personal deterioration of one character who futilely tries to order his world and protect himself from the chaos of Vietnam through carefully created fantasies and illusions. As with the larger frame, this sub-structure is centered on the character of Beaupre and is under the strict control of the author so that only immediately relevant details and incidents will by related. However, unlike the larger structure, the sub-structure does not feature the implied author (to use Wayne Booth's term)[5] as a significant presence. Rather, two fictional elements--the undramatized narrator and Beaupre as sub-narrator--are allowed to relay much of the detail and many of the events which constitute the content of the novel.

By permitting Beaupre and the narrator narrative ascendancy in the sub-structure, the author continues the multilayered self-embedding process which makes up the novel as a whole. Just as Halberstam creates a triple leveled larger narrative structure in which the war as an experience is contained in the five-act form which is in turn contained in the early synoptic passage, so by giving ostensible control of the sub-structure to the narrator and Beaupre, he creates another form which in turn encompasses several levels of contained fictions. In fact, the sub-structure, which provides the content for the novel, is built up through a continuous interplay of facts and illusions. That is, illusory scenes are contained within apparent realities which themselves are invented since they are also contained within the larger fiction. Each realm--fact and illusion--alternately supersedes the hold the other has

on the material until finally the story as a whole is reduced to pure illusion. Such a result is, after all, Beaupre's goal in that he uses his self-created fictions to escape the horrible realities of the war. The fact that he fails miserably in these efforts to subdue his reality simply demonstrates once again the displacement of his fantasies by the facts of Vietnam.

By allowing the sub-structure to reduce itself to its most basic levels through these various internal fictions, Halberstam demonstrates the integral unity of the two structures since both ultimately deal with the same topic, which is the inability to effectively render the Vietnam War as illusory and therefore safe. Thus, the larger structure begins and the sub-structure ends with the undeniable fact that this literature which attempts to capture and convey that particular war through fiction must be only an illusion of the war--whether it is the enduring illusion of the fiction or the destroyed and self-defeating illusion of the character who tries to control the war--since any comprehensible, artistic shape given to the Vietnam experience necessarily invalidates its chaotic reality.

As a principal controlling feature of the larger structure, the opening paragraph of the novel accounts for the most succinct form of control exercised by Halberstam in this novel. He uses the six sentences of this passage almost as an abstract for his case against the war--a case made through the fiction which follows. Opening the paragraph--and the novel--in a most literary fashion, Halberstam's narrator frames the problem of Vietnam in metaphorical terms, enigmatically referring to the war through the symbol of the Seminary and the sign by its gate. These

two images work in conjunction and signify the major functions of the larger structure in the novel. Representing the novel as a whole and its efforts to encapsulate the absolutely intractable and uncontainable experience of the Vietnam War, the Seminary symbolically expounds the psychological value of a form which ostensibly contains the war in that the fortifications of the Seminary are analogous to the psychological states constructed by individuals to protect themselves from the terrible realities of the war. Even though such an organized experience of the war is completely fictitious, the illusion of control--evidenced in the novel by the Seminary and in the real world by the very existence of the novel itself--reduces the terror of the event by making the war appear controllable.

The sign by the gate further symbolizes the textual control of the synoptic passage and applies it to Halberstam's particular illusion of Vietnam which centers on Beaupre. By controlling the gradual revelation of this character--in effect dictating the stages by which he is exposed--the sign controls Beaupre and, as he is an expression of the chaos of Vietnam, the sign appears to control the war as well. Together, then, the Seminary and the sign, the two dominant images in Halberstam's early synoptic passage, symbolize the entire fiction of <u>One Very Hot Day</u> as well as the novel itself.

In his depiction of the Seminary, it is significant that Halberstam locates it "outside of the little town" and mentions specifically that "the priests are all gone now, gone back to Europe" (p. 1). This geographical location and the absence of the clergy immediately establishes the questionable legality of American intervention in Vietnam as well as the immorality, or at the very least amorality, of that

involvement. Locating the Seminary outside of the town insinuates that it and by extension its occupants are beyond the pale of civilization and therefore are beyond the control of conventional civil or legal authorities. Though the town is actually only a small peasant community populated by civilian South Vietnamese who would have no authority over the American troops even if the base were located in the center of their village, the important connotation of the image is the potential for unchecked lawlessness and impropriety that exists at the Seminary for those Americans stationed there.

Without the restraints of either Church or State as represented by the priests and the little town, there is a very real sense in which the Seminary and the men assigned to it exist in "an ethical wilderness" as Caputo puts it. There, "lacking restraints, sanctioned to kill, confronted by a hostile country and a relentless enemy,"[6] the men have a variety of moral--and immoral--activities open to them. Inevitably, far from being priestly paragons of virtue, the men at the Seminary are randy, rowdy, hard-drinking soldiers miles from even their own standard of command in Saigon. Despite these few indulgences, though, most of the advisers in Halberstam's <u>One Very Hot Day</u> conduct themselves with at least a modicum of restraint. However, the fact that in this novel American soldiers do not actually exploit the possibilities inherent in the war in no way lessens the potential for chaos suggested by the lack of religious or civil controls. The war remains essentially immoral (possibly amoral), chaotic and perhaps illegal--a final issue which is still being disputed in many quarters. The implications of this for literature are fairly obvious and can be reduced to one question: if the war is so completely chaotic and intractable, how can any fictional form

hope to contain it?

Having thus outlined the problematic nature of Vietnam as a fit subject for literature, Halberstam goes on to illustrate symbolically the various methods of containment which could be attempted to confine the experience. If it is conceded that the Seminary may represent the war and its intractable nature, the "massive fortifications" (p. 1) surrounding it can be seen as human efforts to isolate and contain the experience of Vietnam, either in memory or literature. In the novel, each of the fortifications around the Seminary--the barbed wire and the sand bags--are man-made. As such, they are highly artificial attempts to separate the Seminary from its surrounding environment, to protect its occupants from the dangers posed by the environment, and to contain the private war experiences of the advisers within a largely self-sufficient community. Each of these functions for the fortifications has a parallel in the literary world as the author tries through his particular medium to isolate the experience of Vietnam as a distinct phenomenon, to produce a product which will allow an emotional release for those who survived Vietnam (including the author himself), and to contain the experience within an expressible or describable form comparable to the self-contained unit of the Seminary.

From early in the novel, however, it is evident that the fortifications of the fictional Seminary will not be adequate to isolate the base, to keep out the enemy, or to protect its men. This is due to the fact that the war is far more than the military's carefully defined base camp at My Tho. Instead, the real war is one of danger, espionage, and brutal violence--and nothing can protect the individual from it. The futility of the Seminary's fortifications is seen in the fact that

despite American efforts to protect the camp, infiltrators can come and go freely (p. 16). As if this were not enough exposure to the war, the men of My Tho must frequently go out into the jungle to face the enemy without any of the Seminary's fortification. In these ways, the Vietnam War pervades every aspect of the fictional soldiers' lives and proves to be absolutely uncontainable. The Americans' obvious efforts to contain the war, or at least their section of it, are just part of the illusion of control in this war--an illusion known to be false even by the men propagating it. For example, Donovan knows that Viet Cong (VC) agents are in the camp, but he also knows that they cannot be detected and eliminated. Therefore, he calmly goes along with the illusion of security, all the time knowing it is false (p. 16). This ready acceptance of the easily breached fortifications as secure reveals the predominantly psychological rather than purely military value of the fortifications. In the end, the fortifications of the Seminary--as with any containing literary structure--truly cannot contain the war or provide protection from it. The best which can be expected, therefore, is an acceptable illusion of containment.

The second significant symbol within the early synoptic passage is the sign, which represents the five-act structure of the novel as well as the corresponding revelation of Beaupre's deterioration as it is manifested in the five sections of the sign: the three lines of print, each of which forms a separate section; the caricature of an American officer; and the final line of mysterious initials. Each section of the sign represents something more which the reader learns about Beaupre and as such represents a further movement towards his final exposure as well. Therefore, using the "huge sign" outside of the camp as a controlling

device for his fiction, Halberstam bases both his larger structure and the emotional deterioration of his protagonist contained by it on the sign's five sections. Thus, the introductory section of the novel in which the reader is first introduced to Beaupre, to his cynical nature, and to his mental maneuvers is roughly paralleled with the "Welcome" statement on the sign, for it receives the reader into the text and provides him with the necessary information so that he can orient himself to Halberstam's fictional world. The second phase of the sign is simply a statement of identification: "Eighth Infantry Division U.S. Advisory Group." This corresponds to the briefing provided on pages seven to fourteen. That scene provides an introduction to the base, to the secondary characters, and reveals more of Beaupre. In essence, it introduces the reader to the advisory group as he sees the Colonel, Redfern, Raulston and the others for the first time.

Further, it is during the briefing that the plot is actively begun as Beaupre begins to be revealed: his "professional tan" (p. 8) shows him to be an active combat soldier, his ability to "read" the Colonel's feelings shows him to be perceptive, and his reluctance to take the helicopter assignment shows him to be both fearful and thoughtful--fearful because he wants to live and thoughtful "because he ha[s] studied the war, and studied in particular its death, and ha[s] finally decided that the most dangerous part was the heliborne assault . . ." (p. 72). Having revealed this much about Beaupre, the briefing goes on to outline the intended plan for this particular very hot day and thus the form through which Beaupre will be more fully revealed.

The first and major section of the patrol until Beaupre collapses is an acting out of the third line of the sign, the "Best There Is," as both

an honest appraisal of Beaupre's former character and a sarcastic assessment of his present abilities. Though his former excellence still occasionally manifests itself under certain ideal circumstances--which for Beaupre means combat--his customary status in Vietnam is that of a cynical old man who, having abdicated responsibility for his own life, chooses to live in pleasant fantasies of the mind which have little to do with his actuality. As a result, while he still experiences flashes of his previous competence such as when the matter at hand is simply "sheer soldiering" (p. 33), usually he is a mockery of his former self, a shoddy imitation of what he once was, and an antiquated relic made all the more pathetic by his awareness of what he used to be. Thus, through the more sarcastic application of the phrase "Best There Is" Beaupre is revealed as a bitter, disillusioned character who has chosen to surrender his motivation, his self-discipline, and his self-respect to the peculiar demands of the Vietnam War.

As a result of this surrender, he considers himself to be a failure as a soldier. This sense is compounded by the fact that he was assigned to the Delta as "an average American Adviser" instead of being sent to the mountains as a Green Beret (p. 98). This disappointment is heightened in Beaupre's mind by his awareness of his "two enemies in the war" (p. 20)--the heat and the Viet Cong--so that he feels the war and all its elements are working against him. Each of these factors plays a significant role in his decision to take his purely military duties less seriously than he ought to, preferring "a more relaxed, more acclimated professionalism" (p. 92) to a passionate, one hundred per cent effort in the fight against the Viet Cong.

Finally, not taking either himself or his war very seriously, he

completely neglects the forms of self-discipline which could make his life and his war easier. He drinks too much whiskey and brandy on the night before patrols so he begins each day dehydrated (p. 18); he no longer effectively practises water discipline (p. 32); and he makes no effort to lose his extra weight so that patrols generally and crossing the narrow bridges specifically would be easier for him (p. 87). Until his collapse, though, Beaupre truly is the "Best There Is" in both senses of the term: a truly professional soldier, and a truly disillusioned and mentally deteriorating, cynical, old man.

With his collapse, Beaupre moves to the next stage of his revelation figured on the sign: that of him as "a caricature of an American officer" (p. 1). This stage also marks the turning point in the plot, since until his collapse, Beaupre has been conducting himself as an impertinent, self-righteous boor, making Anderson's life difficult for no other reason than for his own amusement and contributing little to the patrol other than snide comments. After his collapse, however, Beaupre makes less effort to keep himself separate from the war and therefore has less need for the distancing techniques of rudeness and manipulation. His sardonic comments become fewer, and he begins to pay more attention to himself and his body to ensure that he will survive. As well, even though he detests salt tablets, he takes one of those offered by Anderson (p. 157) and accepts both his Lieutenant's sun glasses (p. 158) and some of Dang's food (p. 182). Though he finds all three items personally repugnant, his desire for survival overrides these other considerations. Most significantly, though, Beaupre becomes preoccupied with the war, feeling a deep sense of survival awakening within him: "it was as if there were a great reservoir or survival instinct in him which was now

being tapped" (p. 163). It is this instinct which allows him to survive the later combat scene as well as the hot day generally.

Each of these changes in Beaupre's external character reflects the more significant process which occurs within him as he comes to accept what Vietnam has made him as well as his particular role in the war. However, with this acceptance does not come a simple and more military bearing. Rather, the description of Beaupre, of his heightened sensibilities, and his subsequent actions in combat are so exaggerated by Halberstam that Beaupre at some points becomes a prototypical fictional American Army officer in combat. At times, he assumes a heroic, an almost "G.I. Joe" pose. Consistent with this new image, Beaupre takes the point position in the patrol even though he is "sure now that they [are] in serious trouble" (p. 163). As well, it is he who figures out the Viet Cong's plan of ambush (p. 185). Moreover, it is he who rescues his patrol from the ambush by systematically analyzing the attack (p. 203), physically motivating the ARVN to fight (pp. 205, 206), instantly learning to handle a weapon he has never used before (p. 219), and almost single-handedly routing the enemy (pp. 220-222).

Because the plot of this novel is designed around the revelation of Beaupre's true character, each incident and each major stage of his development thus far in the novel has been essential to his gradual exposure. With this larger goal constantly in focus, the symbolism of the sign comprehensively incorporates the early scenes which reveal Beaupre's negative emotional state and thereby provides a sense of his frustration with the war and his role in it. As well, it encompasses the positive descriptions of his actions which show him to be a competent soldier whose deterioration is primarily limited to his internal,

emotional life. Though the deterioration of his character frequently manifests itself in his external actions, its effects are confined to his inner world as evidenced by the fact that he is able to perform professionally in the war at any given moment even though he does not always choose to. It is only his emotional reluctance to fully participate which holds him back in most situations. The final state of the revelation of his character, then, must bring his inner and outer together, uniting what he thinks he is with what he actually is physically.

After Beaupre is forced by combat into an awareness of what he truly is and he overcomes his reluctance to accept it, he reaches the last stage of his development in which he is plainly and totally revealed as what he is from the beginning of the novel--a personification of W E T S U. W E T S U, the last line of the "huge sign" outside of the Seminary, is an occult assessment of the Vietnam War which translates verbally as "We Eat This Shit Up" (p. 1). This masochistic message both accurately reflects the position of the American armed forces in Vietnam and is the most concise summary of Beaupre's character as it has been shaped by the war. As well, W E T S U is also the concept elaborated in the last section of the novel as Beaupre is finally revealed as what he has been all along--an unfortunate and ill-formed product of Vietnam whose only remaining function in the war is to humbly and quietly accept degrading and humiliating treatment at the hands of his superiors (pp. 68-69) and of the Vietnamese (p. 68). Such treatment with no hope to escape from it results in Beaupre's cynicism and his apathy.

Since Beaupre does not actually change in the course of the novel but simply comes to an acceptance of his self as it has been influenced

by Vietnam, it is quite reasonable to assume that he has been aware of his true nature and that of the war from early in the novel. In Chapter Three, for example, he launches into a tirade at Anderson about how the essence of the war is "sitting there having tea parties with the enemy, giving them medicine, being polite when they lied, [and] smiling when they rubbed crap in our faces" (p. 67). For Beaupre, the entire war is simply a process of "getting crapped on" (p. 68). In so far as he part of and a manifestation of this experience, he is also a manifestation of W E T S U.

Until Beaupre collapses while on patrol, he considers this disgusting and degrading aspect of the war as completely external to himself. He refuses to believe that he is part of it and it is a part of him. Though he is in the very midst of the war, he mentally projects himself beyond it so that he can appear to separate himself from its true nature. However, when the heat, the sun, and the walking overcome him and he "crap[s] out" (p. 156), he can no longer consider himself apart from the essence of the war, but must come to terms with it and accept it as part of himself.

It is quite remarkable that immediately following his physical failure, Beaupre is shown as almost the quintessential American combat hero. This suggests that his positive attributes are best expressed in war and that only when he ends his resistance against the claim of this most recent war has on him can he perform at his peak. Conversely, of course, it may also suggest merely a momentary redemption from the professional and personal nadir to which he has fallen. However, one may speculate that from this point on in the novel Beaupre achieves a more balanced status which, though not constituting a renewal, may in some

limited way represent a restoration of what he once was. Thus, through his highly competent performance during combat, Beaupre redeems himself and balances out the earlier negative portrayal of his character. What remains for him is a reintegration of mind and body, a unified and balanced exposure of his strengths and weaknesses. The result is a portrayal of Beaupre in the last few pages as a balanced, professional soldier.

While this final assessment of Beaupre may seem contrary to my contention that the intractable nature of the Vietnam War dehumanizes the protagonist in each of the novels under consideration, it is in fact not a contradiction at all, for the positive stature Beaupre achieves is very limited and defined solely by his role as a soldier. That is, Beaupre does succeed in so far as he becomes more positively aware of his potential and abilities as a soldier: he fights successfully in combat; he voluntarily re-assumes the responsibilities of an effective commanding officer, choosing to carry his Lieutenant's corpse out of the jungle even though "[b]y all rights the Viets should have carried Anderson out" (p. 225); and he begins to visualize the condolence letter he must write to Mrs. Anderson (p. 227). Despite these achievements, though, Beaupre must surrender a great deal of his active mental life in the process. To attain the balance, he must give up his illusions and his very fertile life of the mind--his only joke after combat fails miserably because Mrs. Anderson already knows about Ap Than Thoi (p. 227). He must take better care of himself and eschew the risk of being the first man in the patrol line because of his newly assumed responsibilities symbolized by Anderson's body (p. 226), and he must, ultimately, regress to what he is at the beginning of the novel. His heroism vanished and his illusions

destroyed, Beaupre at last fully manifests and finally accepts what he is at the beginning of the novel.

In the end, he is returned to his first condition as a cynical, overweight, out of shape soldier, who endures the war as an unpleasant necessity. His professional nature has not really changed--from page one he was ready to go to war even from a dead sleep. The real change for Beaupre has come in his attitude as he becomes more accommodating to the war. And, of course, this is not a change in any sense of the word, but rather it is simply a fuller exposure of what he was at the beginning. An example of his emotional consistency may be seen in his attitude toward specific ARVN soldiers. At the beginning of the novel, he feels "rare sympathy for the Viets" who are playing volleyball against the Americans (p. 3) and at the end of the work he consider Thuong "very good" (p. 226). Both assessments of the ARVN are positive, indicating that Beaupre as an emotional being is the same. The only difference is that by the end of his very hot day his defences have been stripped from him. When Beaupre finally accepts himself and what he has become, the novel comes full circle, closing both the five-act structure and the structure of the synoptic first paragraph.

Because the larger structure of the novel relies primarily on the external world of fictional events and actions to reveal the character of Beaupre, it is not surprising that the principal narrative forms used by Halberstam to depict this structural level are adapted from cinema. Because cinematic techniques permit the author a means of organizing, containing, and distancing the events of Vietnam as well as a method of showing the damage caused by the war in great detail, they are extremely useful to this type of fiction which requires a safe distance between

subject and form while at the same time accurately and specifically detailing horrible physical aspects of it. Consequently, for this fiction which must do both to succeed, narrative techniques similar to those of cinema are almost indispensable. Accordingly, to relay the surface events that determine this level of narrative structure, Halberstam relies on such "visual" techniques as long shots, close-ups, and pans.

For example, most frequently when Beaupre is depicted as suffering from the heat or the war, Halberstam presents him through a close-up, concentrating on his sweat, his physical discomfort, and those features which make him poorly suited to the war. The closeness of the depiction is designed to emphasize the solitude of his personal battle against his acceptance of self as well as the intensity of the struggle he undergoes. To this end, he is described as follows: "he was thirty-eight, looked older, heavy, almost fat; he was sweating without playing; he breathed and he sweated" (p. 2); "the man was a study in torture, his uniform black, the sweat rolling down his face . . . " (p. 54); and

> . . . it was as if he were surrounded and enclosed by the heat, a prisoner of it. The sweat rolled off his face and he could stick his tongue out and taste it; the sweat was in his eyes; and he felt under his hat, his hair soaked through . . . . The stains under his armpits were gone; simply the rest of his uniform had caught up with the stains, from a distance his uniform looked just slightly darker than all the others. In the process he had started with the stain under his armpits, then a stain on the backside of his ass, then a stain at his knees, and then a stain around the rim of his hat, until finally his whole uniform was soaked. (p. 70)

Each of these descriptions emphasizes two things: Beaupre's suffering and his solitude in it. The first is achieved by the detail allowed through close-ups and the second through the exclusiveness of his

description--that is, the close-up description is given to the exclusion of any characters other than Beaupre. Such close-ups effectively detail the suffering experienced by Beaupre as well as distancing the implied author from it. By permitting the implied author an intimate closeness with the character--so much so that even Beaupre's knees and armpits are given detailed description--while at the same time allowing the implied author the objective distance and control needed to move in and out on scenes, these narrative close-ups paradoxically and simultaneously allow him nearness and distance for any specific scene. Further, because the novel begins and ends with close-ups as well as reverting to them intermittently throughout the text, even this particular narrative technique demonstrates the unity of the text, its closed nature, and the total control which Halberstam maintains over every aspect of the structure.

Unlike close-ups, pans and long shots do not appear frequently in the text. When they do appear, however, they are also subservient to Halberstam's control of the text. For example, the pan which occurs on page twenty-seven not only provides a social context for the war, but also provides an instance when Beaupre's discipline holds, revealing his professional control over himself:

> Along the road there were the stirrings of the coming day, the highway markets were being set up, and the children were already selling the cut sticks of pineapple. They stopped at a bridge, and what seemed like hundreds of children poured from one little stand, waving pineapple sticks. The troops began to bargain, and laugh and shout at the children, one saying that he would buy the pineapple stick and the boy's sister for five piastres. They bought a lot of pineapple and Beaupre looked at it for a moment, lush and thick, translated its price to American currency, two cents, and then his discipline held him, but in the process he thought of the heat. (p. 27)

The emotional effect of such scenes can be heightened, negated or altered by the juxtaposition of them against other similar or contrasting scenes. Consistent with the ambiguity of the war they are relating, these narrative devices create an effect which can be interpreted variously. For example, the lengthy description of Beaupre's sweat-soaked uniform quoted above is set against a description of the ARVN, of whom "only a few . . . were touched by light dabs of sweat" (p. 71). The effect of this second scene juxtaposed against the description of Beaupre may be to harden the reader to his suffering as the American is quite obviously responsible for his own lack of tolerance of the heat, and as such may or may not merit sympathy. However, it may also be read as a heightening of the first scene by revealing how isolated Beaupre is in his suffering. This lack of a clearly appropriate response renders the entire scene ambiguous because the meaning of Beaupre's sweat-soaked uniform could support either a positive or a negative reading.

Since the description of Beaupre in the above scene could be either positive or negative in its impact, it is especially fitting in this part of the novel which falls in the "Best There Is" section, for just as that statement is double-edged, so also is Beaupre's suffering. Potentially, he could be interpreted as an excellent soldier valiantly doing his job despite grave personal distress. Conversely, though, he could also be interpreted as a poorly conditioned, overweight sluggard who has little regard for himself, for his job, or for his war. The ambiguity occasioned by the montage-like juxtaposition of the two descriptions keeps both readings equally viable and therefore supports the larger narrative structure and its representative, "Best There Is" section.

For Halberstam, then, these narrative techniques adapted from the

cinema allow him to control the significance of the protagonist in relation to the specific narrative sequence through the degree of visual restriction which he applies to his description of a scene as well as through the scenes he sets it against. These techniques further give the author great control over even such subtle aspects of the text as mood, tone, and atmosphere by allowing him to move extremely close in some descriptions to evoke sympathy or some other emotion from the reader while at the same time juxtaposing the first scene, or the close-up, against a contrary scene to heighten or alter the emotion evoked.

As Halberstam does with the larger structure, Beaupre uses the sub-structure to try to contain the experience of Vietnam within small fictions, but his motivation is more obviously personal than that of the author. Apparently, in his earlier wars, Beaupre felt little need for such protective fictions and, having already served in two wars, he considered himself "an old pro" (p. 24) and therefore fully expected that little would happen in Vietnam for which he was not prepared. However, this is but one of his earlier illusions and when the war, his allies, his superiors, and even the elements seem to conspire against him to create a new Beaupre who is more amenable to the particular demands of Vietnam, he is poorly equipped to resist.

Though he does make a few efforts against assimilation into the war early in his tour, resisting its efforts to demoralize him, by the time this particular very hot day opens, he has long since taken the path of least resistance and has passively submitted to the changes demanded of him by Vietnam. The result is a Beaupre who, reflecting the slower pace of the Vietnam War, is more flexible than he was in his other wars. Realizing that rigid professionalism such as that personified by Anderson

can only lead to madness or total destruction in this new kind of war, Beaupre therefore compromises with the war's demands and allows himself to be largely incorporated into it, allowing his professional abilities to become as sloppy and chaotic as the war he is fighting. By doing so, he hopes to avoid the total destruction of self such as that which comes to Anderson. The new, Vietnam-made Beaupre is evident in many aspects of his behaviour: his "5 per cent" effort and his "more relaxed, more acclimated professionalism" (p. 92); his diplomatic dealings with Dang (pp. 30-31); and his habitual surrender to the heat and sun by drinking too much water out on patrol. What occurs within the novel, then, is not an effort to resist assimilation--he has already been absorbed by the war before the novel opens--but rather a denial of his present condition.

To maintain this denial, Beaupre uses the internal fictions he creates to form a buffer of sorts between his conception of himself and his actuality in the war. To distance himself from the war, to make time pass faster, and even just to amuse himself to escape "the boredom which commanded so much of [his] time and [his] resources" (p. 85), Beaupre creates scenarios he can act out in the real world, such as when he manipulates Anderson and the Chaplain in the bar (p. 7); he imagines various ends for himself as in his visions of death (pp. 200-201); he recalls earlier and more honest experiences of war from World War II and Korea (pp. 67, 93, 200); he tells wholly fabricated stories of his own valor and of his allies' valor or cowardice (p. 58); and he makes up convoluted and ludicrous explanations for their various assignments (pp.54-55).

Though these creations are amusing diversions from reality for Beaupre, they are completely ineffectual at either containing the war or

distancing it from him. Therefore, his internal fictions inevitably collapse when they are confronted with something of the real war, whether the particular manifestation be combat, an interrogation, or simply a reassertion of his unbearable thirst. Ultimately, when his buffers fail and he is forced to confront what he is and reconcile himself to it, there are no more illusions; neither can there be, for that method of avoiding reality is no longer valid. As with his only effort at internal fiction after combat--a replay of the Ap Than Thoi joke--his illusions are now "no good" (p. 227). As Mrs. Anderson knows the meaning of the joke, so Beaupre knows his true nature and can never again deny it. He, at last, accepts what Vietnam has made him--a cynical and less than professional old soldier, who can only occasionally and briefly shine during the rare moments of actual combat.

Before he arrives at this final conclusion, however, Beaupre uses a variety of methods to distance himself from both the war and his true nature. By far the most common technique he uses is the creation of fantasies and alternative, imaginary worlds which permit him to escape from the war into his mind. These imaginary forms provide the substance of Halberstam's story-within-a-story structure, and do, in fact, generate the sub-structure of the novel as Beaupre places them between his reality of the war and his conception of self. Many of his distractions, and certainly his self-created fictions, are provided to the reader via interior monologue which is either reported directly by Beaupre or at second hand by the narrator as Beaupre assesses himself, other characters, or the war in general. Through interior monologue, the reader has access to Beaupre's mind and therefore to the alternate realities which exist there. Through this window on the self, the reader

can observe the creation and ultimate destruction of Beaupre's imaginary worlds.

Just as the sub-structure of the novel reflects the larger structure in its multilayered interweaving of illusion and fact and in its concentrated focus on the character of Beaupre, so also does it parallel the larger form in its use of cinematic techniques. That is, Beaupre in his internal fictions and the narrator in his depiction of events use such techniques as close-ups, long-shots, pans, and montage to add physical immediacy to their stories. As with the other parallels, this technical similarity is vital to the unity of the text as a whole, for with such a complex structure any formal aberration could cause the novel's structure to unravel. Any structural loose ends could interfere with the control that the author maintains in the novel as the essence of the work is precisely that order which Halberstam can establish in the text and over his particular illusion of the war. If the structural integrity were not maintained, the novel would collapse, and the war--the real war, not the illusion created by Halberstam--would dominate the text, reducing it to chaos, and making even the effort at fiction futile.

Unlike the larger structure of the novel, however, the sub-structure--created ostensibly by the narrator and largely sustained by Beaupre's internal fictions and mental flights--does not rely very heavily upon cinematic techniques for its method of narration. Though there are a few instances of montage, such as when Beaupre juxtaposes his memories of World War II or Korea with his present situation in Vietnam to cause both to be seen in a different light (pp. 30, 92, 119), most of his stories are either related verbally to an external audience such as Anderson or else made available to the reader through interior monologue.

However, both the narrator and Beaupre do make use of certain of the "visual" cinematic techniques in their stories of the war. Frequently, the narrator pans scenes such as that of Anderson approaching a village and scanning the terrain for cover (p. 39), and Beaupre pans his scene of a street in Saigon (p. 113) and the ARVN troops after the battle has begun (p. 205). These and other examples provide a reflection of the narrative techniques of the larger structure within the sub-structure to maintain the text's essential unity. Further examples of the techniques of long shots and close-ups are especially common in the brothel scenes in which Beaupre inspects and recalls minute details of Big William's friends (pp. 108-109), the various girls (pp. 114, 117), and the Australian (p. 113) he meets in a bar.

One of the best examples of a long shot followed by a close-up occurs in the all-black bar to which Big William takes Beaupre. Beaupre recalls his first impression of the bar in terms of a long shot:

> Beaupre was led into the bar by the Mammasan and was stunned: there was no one there but Negroes. The entire bar was Negro, tall ones and fat ones, Negroes who were obviously officers, and Negroes who were enlisted men. He had never seen anything like it before; it was like being in another world. The girls were all Vietnamese, running around in their antiseptic white costumes, looking somehow like they were nurses for these men. (p. 108)

Not only does this description capture the inclusive nature of a cinematic long shot, but the contrast of the black and white description adds to the depth and intensity in this scene by creating a sense of chiaroscuro even as the lighting itself remains neutral.

Within this group of Negroes, two men capture his attention, both of whom are described in a close-up to emphasize the impact they have on Beaupre as well as the way they command his total attention. The first

is "one of the Negroes, a tall thin one, elegant with a face like a black American Indian . . . " (p. 108), and the other is "another Negro, wearing an expensive sports coat which tapered out at the shoulders and in at the waist" (p. 109). Each, by speaking, draws Beaupre's attention to him, and by his appearance holds it.

However, despite these detailed descriptions which are similar to the cinematic techniques of narrative used in the larger fictional structure, these techniques are not the most common method of narrative in the sub-structure as the material presented therein does not primarily consist of external or physical details. Usually, the scenes Beaupre presents deal with internal or mental features and processes. Consequently, the more literary methods such as interior monologue better suit his purposes. In each case, though, the fictions thus created conform to Halberstam's larger need for control of structure.

Of all the fantasies which Beaupre concocts to protect himself from the war, none is more important than that of himself as a hero or great soldier. Though this belief is not made explicit by Beaupre in the novel, it is suggested by his aloofness from Anderson, by his tendency to lecture the Lieutenant on the ways of life and war, and by his insistence that he is "more of an authority on . . . a lot of subjects than [Anderson is]" (p. 69). As well, it is implied by Raulston's statement that "he [Beaupre] ain't shy about being a hero . . ." (p. 58), suggesting that Beaupre does tend to brag about his exploits.

This heroic pose is a significant and revealing internal fiction as much for the structural complications it engenders through its ambiguous implications about the impossibilities of actually achieving heroism as for its reflections of Beaupre. With each retelling or re-presentation

of this heroic pose in the novel, the sub-structure becomes increasingly convoluted as the pose is first presented honestly, is then mocked, is then reversed or countermanded, only to be offered as true once again before the novel concludes. So confusing is its path, that even when the story of Beaupre's heroism is finally and definitively proven true, he himself cannot believe it. The ultimate irony of this story is that though Beaupre has been propagating the illusion of himself as a great soldier, the final verification of it occurs much to his surprise. He does not accept it until at least the end of the novel, and even then considers it doubtful. Thus, of all the internal fictions created by Beaupre, this particular one has a more problematic connection than most do to the truth about Beaupre as it is defined by the novel, inasmuch as this specific internal fiction effectively and intricately combines fact and illusion as part of his history.

An examination of this story, then, with its convoluted origins and permutations will reveal the complexities possible within the various and alternating levels of reality and illusion in the substructure of the novel. Rooted in apparent fact, Beaupre's story of himself as a great soldier seems to have its basis in his experiences in World War II and Korea--wars in which he collected a number of ribbons including "the CIB twice [and] the Silver Star" (p. 97). Beaupre's story is based on fact and extends beyond it almost into a delusion of grandeur when the Army recalls him from his ROTC post and declares him "an expert in guerrilla war" (p. 96). The excessively generous assessment of him as a hero with a "Korean nose" (p. 96) is soon destroyed, however, by his assignment to Fort Bragg where the young men he is supposed to instruct are first amused by his physique and the disappointed by his lack of violent war

stories.

Beaupre's story of himself as a hero soon takes another rude turn in reality when Beaupre fails to meet the Special Forces standards and is relegated to the role of an ordinary adviser. This failure to win a coveted Green Beret (the symbol and distinctive headgear of the Special Forces) causes him to reassess himself and his abilities. Eventually, he accepts the Army's decision about him and even convinces himself that the decision is for the best: "the thought of climbing mountains at his age and slipping into Laos [the Special Forces assignment early in the war] . . . terrified him, and if he was thankful for anything in his life, it was that at least he was in the Delta" (p. 98).

At this point, his appreciation of himself as a great soldier is totally illusory. Even his first endeavors to fight well early in his tour are stifled by the order to be diplomatic with his counterparts. As a result, he settles into a pattern of a "5 per cent" effort (p. 92), all the time maintaining the illusion of himself as a great soldier through his stories. Even these internal fictions about his abilities are only half-serious, though, for he engages in mocking self-derision when he makes fun of Dang's regular greeting to the American warriors (p. 23).

In its larger significance, then, the complication of his concept of personal heroism indicates that there truly is no simple reality about Vietnam. Personified and expressed through Beaupre and his illusions, the essential subject of this fiction--the war--demonstrates itself as both intractable and ungraspable, showing that the truth of Vietnam is that it is fundamentally intangible even when it is most obviously and tangibly destructive. This, in turn, returns us to the paradox of Vietnam War literature and the concept of containing within literary

forms that which is essentially uncontainable. In this way, the paradox of Beaupre's heroic pose is the same as that of the war's fiction generally as it represents the ontologically unstable nature of the war. As a result, even though much of this history of Beaupre's pose as a hero precedes his experience of Vietnam, it almost perfectly illustrates that war and its effects on Beaupre through the complex interplay of illusion and reality.

Though few other stories within this novel--self-embedded or otherwise--have such a complicated history, an account of the story of Beaupre's heroism is vital because it provides a perfect example of the chaos of the war as it can be manifested even within strictly controlled structures. Further, it illustrates the continuous interplay of fact and fantasy, of reality and illusion, which makes up this sub-structure and which represents the intractable nature of the war being conveyed. Because of this, it has major structural value in that it illustrates the essence of the war through an incident which actually has relatively little to do with the Vietnam War itself, but has everything to do with its representative participant in One Very Hot Day.

Other self-embedded stories are more strictly under the control of Beaupre and serve the more mundane purposes of passing the time, manipulating other characters to demonstrate Beaupre's sense of control over circumstances and over the war, or simply amusing the protagonist. These stories may be quite lengthy and occur entirely within the mind of the character as with Beaupre's memories of his trips to Saigon, of his other wars, and of how he came to be in this particular conflict. His internal fictions also take the shape of various fantasies about death--his own in the various wars (pp. 200-201), and Dang's at his hands

(p. 189). Usually, even if these stories are sketched in just a few lines, the impact is tremendous. Subtly stated, each retreat from reality presents a new and possible reality which must then be recognized (often regretfully) as fiction. Such is the case with Beaupre's death vision for Dang:

> . . . he walked away from Dang. He wondered, not for the first time, what it would be like to be an adviser to the VC. All the advisers thought about it. Just for a week, he thought, even if it meant wearing black pajamas and walking all night. . . . Dang would be on the other side. There was a quality of luxury to his thoughts. (p. 189)

In these few lines, the retreat from reality has an almost tangible quality which shows the intensity of Beaupre's dissatisfaction with his actual role as Dang's advisor.

Each of these internal fictions has the added functions of complicating the basic narrative sequence, thereby suggesting the effect of the war's chaos on the text. As well, they compound the process of revelation which is so fundamental to this novel's structure. That is, each time that a major incident is approached, Beaupre attempts to avoid the confrontation and the inevitable exposure by retreating into a fantasy world. For instance, before the briefing, Beaupre sets up the artificial scenario in the bar in which he can manipulate Anderson and the Chaplain into an uncomfortable situation to "make the time pass faster for him [Beaupre]" (p.7); before the patrol, he retreats to his memory of his first day at My Tho (p. 20); and, before his collapse, he recalls the original Ap Than Thoi incident (pp. 148-152). Each retreat from exposure seems to be part of the character's efforts to continually deny what he is and has become because of Vietnam. As was seen above in the examination of the larger structure, such efforts are doomed to

failure. However, even failed fantasies compound the novel's narrative structure.

Most of Beaupre's illusions collapse in on themselves when they are confronted by some aspect of the Vietnam War. His dream of himself as a great soldier is first destroyed in Vietnam when his superiors dictate how he is allowed to regard his counterpart (p. 26), his scenario with Anderson and the Chaplain ends when they are "summoned for the briefing" (p. 7), and his memory of the one attempted night patrol is interrupted by the need to cross the canals (pp. 86-87). This systematic destruction of his illusions is essential to the total shape of the work which requires that the sub-structure be continually undermined by the realities of the war to represent its chaos. Once this chaos has been accurately represented through the destroyed reveries and the emotional mutilation of Beaupre, the sub-structure has fulfilled its purpose and is subsumed into the larger structure.

Since this novel is built on paradoxes of form and substance, it is not surprising that its final form should also be that of a paradox. Within the sub-structure of the novel, it is the war which ultimately destroys all of Beaupre's created worlds. As well, within the larger structure, it is the war which brings about Beaupre's emotional devastation and the revelation of his character as an integral part of the war. With the war as such a destructive agent on both levels of structure in this novel, the great irony of the work as a whole is that it exposes the war--or Halberstam's conception of it--as an illusion. This is the necessary end of the novel, of course, for as was outlined above, the war cannot be contained by fiction; neither can it actually affect the fiction written about it, as the Vietnam War ended for the

Americans in 1975. All that remains, therefore, are images of the war in the minds of those who experienced it--images which are also but illusions of the actual event. However, when these images are incorporated into a formal structure, they produce an entirely new and independent entity with the potential to express something of the real war.

Having created a novel designed to present what "the war felt like" [emphasis added] (p. 228), on a given day, Halberstam succeeds largely because of his control over both content and form. He seems to take the images of the war which remained in his mind from his time in Vietnam and, by creating an almost impossibly complex but logically ordered structure for it, to give it form. The result is not, by any means, a representation of the real war. Such an effort would be futile as it is impossible to provide any significant form for a truly intractable event. Rather, what Halberstam does create is a novel whose dominant and completely controlled structure contains a multileveled, artistic rendering of the chaos occasioned by the war. By exactly balancing the impulse to order and the reality of chaos, Halberstam creates in One Very Hot Day an almost tangible tension which does accurately reflect the feeling of the Vietnam War. In that he achieves his intended goal and reflects the experience of the Vietnam War as accurately as possible within his forms and his medium, Halberstam truly did create a "small and true" book of the war (p. 230).

## Notes

1 George Esper, The Eyewitness History of the Vietnam War: 1961-1975 (New York: Ballantine Books, 1983), p. 19.

2 Esper, p. 25.

3 One Very Hot Day was originally published in 1967, but was re-issued with the Afterword in 1984.

4 Seymour Chatman, Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 48.

5 Wayne Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 71-76.

6 Philip Caputo, A Rumor of War (New York: Ballantine Books, 1977), p. xx.

7 Halberstam, pp. 92-93. " . . . it was all very well to think as they suggested, no, demanded, at the indoctrination briefings--Vietcong to pop out from behind every single bush or jump up from every canal, or hide in every single hut . . . but if you thought like that, you would soon be exhausted. There were simply too many bushes, canals, huts in the country to fear and too few VC to hide there; one would have to be a raving maniac if he spent his first three operations chasing VC everywhere; by the fourth he would be in a state of physical and mental exhaustion and, of course, Charley would step out and zap him."

# Chapter III

# Gustav Hasford's

# The Short-Timers

Vietnam, as it is depicted in The Short-Timers, is a much faster paced, more brutal war than that of One Very Hot Day. This is in part due to the historical events that Hasford's novel is based on, but it is also due to the narrative peculiarities of this particular portrayal of the war. Largely "set in and around Hue during what is certainly the 1968 Tet offensive,"[1] The Short-Timers contains little of the maddening boredom which tormented Beaupre. Rather, it focuses on the violence, abuse, and insanity of both the infantrymen's experience in Vietnam and the Recruit Training which supposedly equips them for it. Narrated in the first person, present tense, The Short-Timers follows the military career of one James T. Davis, most commonly referred to as "Joker", and endows his time both on Parris Island and in Vietnam with a horrifying immediacy not even hinted at before the Tet Offensive. To deal with this intense chaos, Hasford creates a double-layered structure for his novel which is similar to that of One Very Hot Day. As with the earlier work, the larger structure of The Short-Timers encompasses the novel as a whole, tracing the development of the protagonist and ensuring that the author maintains total control over all aspects of his fiction--including its presentation of the war. The sub-structure contained within this larger form is created by the protagonist and is designed to shield him from the dangers of the war. In The Short-Timers, the internal frames used by Joker for this purpose of self-defense and emotional distancing from the war include the use of Marine slang, his tall tales, and his role as a correspondent--anything to keep him mentally remote from the actuality of Vietnam.

Because Hasford's war is so unmanageable, for him to capture the experience in the literature requires that he carefully plan and strictly

control the structural forms used, and that he base the entire work on an incontrovertible model of unity and wholeness. Therefore, using the number three as the symbolic principle of his text by dividing his novel and thus his depiction of Joker into three sections, Hasford is able to maintain complete control over his fiction and its presentation of the Vietnam War by ordering his entire novel on this number of perfection and wholeness. His efforts at unity are also advanced by his illumination of just one ideal character who fully embodies the motivation, the traditions, and the esprit de corps perpetuated by the Marine Corps (p. 13). To effectively express this ideal, Hasford uses literary techniques which are appropriate to his subject--the portrayal of a single character--and shapes his novel on the tenets of revelatory fictions and closed texts. He then draws on certain cinematic techniques adapted to fiction for many of his specific methods of narration to provide the painstakingly vivid detail necessary to an accurate depiction of the horrible events surrounding the Tet Offensive. Together, his forms and narrative techniques provide a more than adequate vehicle for the ideal representative of the Vietnam-era Marine Corps that Hasford wishes to display.

The need for such an ideal narrator-protagonist rather than simply a competent or typical one stems from to the specific event that Hasford uses for his historical background--the Tet Offensive. During one night, January 30, 1968,

> nearly seventy thousand Communist soldiers had launched a surprise offensive of extraordinary intensity and astonishing scope. Violating a truce that they themselves had pledged to observe during Tet, the lunar New Year, they surged into more than a hundred cities and towns, including Saigon, audaciously shifting the war for the first time from its rural setting to a new arena--South Vietnam's supposedly impregnable urban areas.2

The chaos of this offensive was so intense that only a quintessential Marine--a true member of the "Teufel-Hunden--'devil dogs'" (p. 13)--would not be sufficient to narrate the experience. When the novel opens, though, the only fully developed "devil dog" is Sergeant Gerheim and--though he is the symbol of Marine perfection--he is too old to go to Vietnam, and must be succeeded by a younger Marine. Therefore, Joker is targeted for the position and must, by the end of this novel, become Gerheim's successor. Though introduced as a mere recruit, he has the potential to fulfill this role and, as the novel unfolds, he is progressively revealed as the second-generation Gerheim-figure. Though Joker resists this revelation on the conscious level, attempting to hide from the harsh truth of his inner being, he does recognize his potential, acts on it, and eventually accepts it even though the cost to his own identity and humanity is high.

The Short-Timers as a revelatory fiction, then, focuses on revealing the quintessential Marine rather than simply exposing a single character's major traits. This need to present the ideal, therefore, accounts for the peculiar structure of the novel, which first outlines Gerheim's nature and then proceeds to elucidate Joker's development as if he were simply an extension of the old sergeant, for in effect that is what he is. Joker's development into Marine perfection is simply a tailoring of Gerheim's attitudes to the requirements of the Vietnam War. Thus, he carries on from where Gerheim is forced to quit, taking the standards shaped on Iwo Jima into Vietnam. The dehumanization that results from this development is seen as almost incidental from the point of view of the Marine Corps, which considers the sacrifice of Joker's compassion and imagination to be a reasonable price for another

incarnation of Sergeant Gerheim in the Corps. Intended to reveal the essence of this stereotype, The Short-Timers opens with Gerheim and closes with Joker as a Gerheim-like figure. This subordinates both Gerheim and Joker to the larger figure of a generic Marine. The dominant artistic strategy of the text maintains fidelity to the intentions of the Marine Corps' motto of "'Gung Ho' [which] is Chinese for 'working together'" (p. 18)--a policy in which the needs of the individual are most frequently subordinated to the needs of the corporate body. To represent the ideal Marine, therefore, Hasford must present him in this way.

Not only is the character to be presented in this novel more stereotypical than the protagonist of One Very Hot Day, but the chaos presented is also greater. Consequently, the forms used to contain it must also be more severe, more obvious, and more encompassing. To this end, Hasford organizes his larger structure--the form most overtly responsible for ordering the fictional presentation of the war--on a series of threes, three being the number of "intellectual and spiritual order, . . . the resolution of conflict, perfection, the beginning, middle, and end."[3] Accordingly, he breaks the novel into three sections which correspond to three stages of Joker's development and revelation. Further, he includes three similar principal events as catalysts to Joker's revelation in each of the three sections. Having thus strongly ordered his larger structure, Hasford attempts to approximate normal human responses in the sub-structure by allowing the protagonist some freedom to try and evade his necessary revelation through various linguistic and imaginative structures. The internal levels of fiction are formed by these unsuccessful efforts at evasion, which ultimately

succumb to the inevitably chaotic nature of Vietnam in that they fail both to contain the war experience and to protect Joker from it. Most significant of these internal levels are the distinctive type of language used by Joker as narrator and character, the jokes which he uses as diversions from reality, and his role as correspondent which allows him a respite from actual participation in the war as a soldier--though the first of these three is most prevalent. When, at the end of the novel, Joker is forced by the facts of the war to accept his true nature, he surrenders his various verbal methods of evasion. Once he does so, the text is able to reveal his character fully and return to the prototype of Marine perfection, bringing the novel to a logical and well-developed close.

The larger structure of The Short-Timers is, as are all revelatory fictions, based on the gradual exposure of a principal character whose revelation in stages constitutes the plot--though in this case the character being revealed is an ideal type. The novel is also a closed fiction which must begin and end at the same point to guarantee the author total control over the form of the novel as well as over all its fictional elements--the protagonist, the theme, the setting, and so forth. To this end, all the elements of the broad structure must work to reveal the character while at the same time remaining faithful to the author's control of the text and his dominance over the material. To keep the plot moving while holding complete artistic control over the text, therefore, Hasford chooses to organize his novel in a series of threes, as was stated above: three sections of the novel corresponding to the three recorded sections of Joker's life; three recorded successful

promotions for Joker; three murders of American commanders by their own men; and three deaths of subordinate Americans because of inherent weakness--as defined by the United States Marine Corps.

This principle of threes provides a convenient and simple way to organize any novel, and specifically The Short-Timers, which must present both order and control, stasis and progress. The number is appropriate for a closed text because three is symbolic of perfection, which, having neither beginning nor end, is complete in itself and wholly self-contained. At the same time, through, the number three symbolically allows for the progressive movement of the text which is necessary to reveal the character, as it also represents a unity created by a beginning, middle, and end. These developmental periods roughly correspond to Joker's experience with the Marine Corps as presented by the three sections of the novel: the beginning--Basic Training, the middle--his time as a correspondent, and the end--his time as a combat infantryman. The suggested completeness of experience implies that Joker is a complete character as he has been shaped by the Marine Corps and is therefore a suitable representative agent for the Corps.

Further, the number three is ironically able to encompass the theme of the novel through its added signification of intellectual and spiritual order. To present the protagonist, whose dehumanization is a complete spiritual and imaginative depletion caused by the war, in terms of the symbol of intellectual and spiritual order and wholeness is one of the great ironies of the novel. However, this presentation is also a reasonable symbolic measure given the intensity, brutality, and violence which The Short-Timers must convey. In this novel, the greater severity of the chaos being represented brings with it a greater need on the part

of the controlling artistic presence for a strict form of control and containment if the war is to be expressed at all. As a result, the irony occasioned by organizing the story of the war into a structural series of threes is actually a vital part of the expression of the war--or at least Hasford's particular vision of it. So severe is his vision, that without an equally extreme form to contain it, the entire story of the war as well as the gradual revelation of Joker would deteriorate into chaos.

The most obvious set of controlling threes in The Short-Timers is the large section divisions in the novel--"The Spirit of the Bayonet,""Body Count," and "Grunts." Each of these contains one significant part of Joker's fictional history, progressively revealing in increasingly obvious ways what Joker truly is. The first section of the novel--"The Spirit of the Bayonet"--begins the process of revelation and sets the standards by which Joker is judged and which he must live up to throughout the rest of the novel. The second section--"Body Count"--recounts many of Joker's efforts to avoid the truth about himself, but more importantly it reveals what he has become since Basic Training during his ten months in Vietnam. Because Joker as an individual character is less important than he is as a representative of the Marine Corps, the growth or development which occurs as fictional time passes is prefigured by Joker's character at the beginning of both the novel and his experience as a Marine. What is vital, therefore, is how this apparent development truly displays the qualities of the quintessential Marine which Joker manifested in embryo in "The Spirit of the Bayonet." Therefore, "Body Count" and "Grunts" are significant for how they bring Joker's early potential to full expression--basically, for how well they provide a suitable middle and ending for the novel. By

bringing Joker full circle so that he becomes, in effect, a second generation Sergeant Gerheim, these two sections admirably fulfill their tasks, with the last section, "Grunts," making a particularly poignant case for the fundamental truth of section one: "Marines die--that's what [they]'re here for--but the Marine Corps will live forever." (p. 9).

This sense of corporate identity is fundamental to The Short-Timers and explains why Joker, as he is molded to fit that identity, can actually appear to change in the course of the novel, though such change is more apparent than real. Since the corporate identity is what is significant in this novel, the individual character has merit primarily in so far as he epitomizes the corporate ideal--anything else may be regarded as excess and must be trimmed away to get at the essentially Marine-like qualities contained within. Thus, when The Short-Timers opens with Gerheim as the ideal Marine totally dedicated to the "beloved Corps" (p. 17) and all of its traditions and virtues, his character provides a foundation for the novel which is expanded and continues through Joker, who later is shown to personify the same characteristics. What is revealed about both Gerheim and Joker in "The Spirit of the Bayonet," then, is essential to what Joker eventually becomes and finally accepts himself as--the personification of the Marine ideal.

The relationship of the two Marines--Joker and Gerheim--is not difficult to understand. By enlisting in the Marine Corps, Joker expressed a desire to be a Marine. By Gerheim's assessment of him, it is obvious that Joker is more than qualified to be not only a Marine, but a leader as well (p. 9). As Gerheim is Joker's mentor and a highly regarded example of a Marine as evidenced by his Navy Cross (p. 20), it is completely reasonable that Joker would strive to emulate him. Indeed,

so strong is the bond that develops between them that even long after Gerheim's death, his voice and words return to Joker as a guiding force, leading him on to his fulfillment as a Marine. As Gerheim urged Leonard to take it "one step at a time," so also is Joker revealed to be like Gerheim one step at a time (p. 51).

From the beginning of section one, it is obvious that Joker is targeted by Gerheim to be his successor. Gerheim's immediate approval of Joker (p. 4), his premature promotion of him (p. 9) and then demotion (p. 12), his lading of Joker with the burden of Leonard (p. 10), and Joker's permanent promotion to Private First Class on Gerheim's recommendation (p. 24) are all precursors of the symbolic passing of the Marine torch of command from the Sergeant to Joker. This transfer of spirit, as it may be considered, is brought to most blatant expression when "Sergeant Gerheim presents [Joker] with two red and green chevrons and explains that they're his old PFC stripes" (p.24). This identification between the two characters is essential since Joker becomes what Gerheim is, and without some formal cause for relating the two, the detailing of Gerheim's character could be easily ignored. Once he is recognized as the key to Joker's later development, though, both Gerheim and the first section take on an added significance as the sergeant becomes the model for Joker's development as well as for his eventual revelation as a second generation generic Marine.

Within this first section of the novel, three major events are indicative of what Joker fundamentally is--his promotion to Private First Class at the end of Basic Training (p. 24), Leonard's murder of Sergeant Gerheim (p. 30), and Joker's reaction to Leonard's suicide (pp. 32-33). Most of his other actions in "The Spirit of the Bayonet" reveal what he

is, was, or has potential to be outside of the United States Marine Corps. But, as he has chosen the Corps as the principal field for his life's activity, all non-relevant actions, attitudes, and behaviors are superfluous and must be stripped away. Because this single-minded focus among its recruits is the goal of the Marine Corps, the process of Basic Training is designed to do away with all non-military identity. Therefore, the following methods of indoctrination are essential to the Marine Corps: the verbal abuse--"you are pukes, you are scumbags, you are the lowest form of life on Earth. You are not even human" (p. 4); the physical abuse--"brutal beatings to faces, chests, stomachs, and backs. With fists. Or boots . . . " (p. 17); and the re-creation of individuals in the corporate ideal--"you will be a weapon, you will be a minister of death praying for war." (p. 4). His "meritorious promotion on Parris Island" (p.59) simply confirms the potential which Gerheim recognizes immediately upon Joker's arrival and affirms it to Joker, starting him on the rise in rank which will eventually lead him to become sergeant.

His "meritorious promotion" is, in many ways, a hinge event in the novel, for it identifies him as a very promising recruit from Platoon 30-92, and it suggests that he has what it takes to be a career Marine: the capacity for brutality and a latent, but very powerful, killer instinct. By definition in The Short-Timers, Marines are many things: weapons, ministers of death (p. 4), "grunts" (p. 5), leaders (p. 9), "government property" (p. 13) and "animals" (p. 14). Most of all, however, they are "killers . . . indestructible men, men without fear." (p. 19). To become such men, the Marines must have hard hearts, for "it is a hard heart that kills" (p. 13). Anyone who lacks this hard heart is

"a defective instrument" (p. 31), as is seen in Leonard and even in Cowboy who, even after encountering a similar ambush situation twice, prefers to sacrifice himself rather than to leave his men to die or to kill them from a distance (pp. 110, 177). From early in the novel, though, Joker recognizes this truth, and comes to understand himself and his heart in terms of cold black machinery:

> . . . it is important for us to understand that it is our killer instinct which must be harnessed if we expect to survive in combat . . . Our will to kill must be focused the way our rifle focuses a firing pressure of fifty thousand pounds per square inch to propel a piece of lead. If our rifles are not properly cleaned the explosion will be improperly focused and our rifles will shatter. If our killer instincts are not clean and strong, we will hesitate at the moment of truth. We will not kill. We will become dead Marines. (p. 13)

The fact that he tries to avoid this truth for much of the novel in no way lessens his potential or the inevitability of his necessary fulfillment of that potential--though Joker does seem to delay it until the final section of the novel.

It is this will to kill which Joker must confront when Leonard goes on his rampage. Fully understanding the essential truth of the killer instinct, Joker is able to confront Leonard and stare him down even when Leonard's rifle is aimed at his face, for he knows

> that Leonard is too weak to control his instrument of death. It is a hard heart that kills, not the weapon. Leonard is a defective instrument . . . like a glass rifle which would shatter when fired. Leonard is not hard enough to harness the power of an interior explosion to propel the cold black bullet of his will. (p. 31)

By confronting death and emerging victorious, Joker demonstrates that he at least is able to harness his will to kill. While he does not get to know "the terrible grin of the skull" (p. 31) personally until his last

recorded combat scene (p. 175), he is well able at this point of his training to bear the "dark side" (p. 176) of himself as well as his Marine identity though he prefers to resist the truth of the matter for much of the novel.

Joker realizes fairly early in the novel what he is and what his task in life is--to become like his Drill Sergeant and mentor. This realization comes to him when, watching Gerheim face death, he sees him become "suddenly calm. His eyes, his manner . . . those of a wanderer who has found his home . . . a man in complete control of himself and of the world he lives in. His face . . . cold and beautiful as the dark side surfaces" (p. 29). This dark side attracts Joker and drives him to act on his "menial position of authority" (p. 30) as he attempts to defuse the situation and return order to the squad bay. For all practical purposes, he appropriates Gerheim's authority when he turns off the lights and orders the men to their bunks, even using the same words as Gerheim: "'Prepare to mount.' Then: 'MOUNT!'" (pp. 31-32, 21). By complying with his orders, the men sanction his new authority and show that Joker is both an acceptable replacement for Gerheim and an embodiment of Marine Corps perfection which ensures that "the Marine Corps will live forever, because every Marine is a leader when he has to be--even a prive" (p. 9). Though the shock of his automatic behavior proves too much for Joker's emotional being, which has not yet been wholly purged, and he tries to escape his new self, "hid[ing] in [a] dark dream for as long as [he] can" (p. 32), it does not take him long to act positively as a Marine leader even if he does not truly believe himself to be that at this point. So, after the two deaths, Joker has a mystical experience, an esoteric bonding with his rifle (p. 32) which verifies his

induction into the Marine Corps as he and his rifle "become part of each other" (p. 23). In keeping with his new role, therefore, Joker leads the platoon in the Rifleman's Creed as "The Spirit of the Bayonet" closes.

With the conclusion of this first section of the novel, the foundations for the rest of the text have been established. Joker is revealed in the next two sections as a Gerheim-type of figure, though his full exposure and final acceptance of this reality is delayed until section three because of his resistance to his new identity. However, in each of the other sections, the process of his exposure converges on the various scenes of his promotions and on those of others' deaths. However reluctantly, in each of these situations, Joker does act as a hardened Marine leader and killer when the circumstances require it, becoming increasingly exposed as the quintessential Marine with each death or killing. As well, with each promotion, Joker is revealed as closer to Sergeant Gerheim in rank and nature and therefore closer also to the personified ideal of Marine perfection.

Much of the second section of the novel, "Body Count," has to do with Joker's evasion of the essential truth of his nature, as he frequently retreats to the "dark dream" through his jokes, cliches, and self-created realities. However, on several occasions, military situations arise which further Joker's exposure as a hardened killer such as his encounter with the Military Police Sergeant when Joker threatens to kill the M.P. because he tries to detail Rafter Man to fill sandbags (p. 54). His hardness is especially evident in his cold-blooded killing of the wounded, female, Vietnamese sniper. This scene above most others shows just how hard he has become in his progress towards complete fulfillment of the Gerheim ideal--a hardness recognized even by his own

comrades. Recognizing "a blood intimacy" with her, he executes her for the common good--hers, his, and the squad's in general--earning him the appellation of "one hard dude" (p.120).

By this point in his fictional history, Joker has been in Vietnam for more than ten months and has seen many corpses, as he recalls on pages 129 to 134. Each one has made him a little harder and gradually inured him to death as all the corpses blur "together, a mountain of faceless dead" (p. 131). With this progressive toughening, he becomes more like Gerheim, seeing the world as a series of physical actions which have value only in so far as they further the goals of the Marine Corps--these goals being to kill and eventually to die for "the beloved Corps." Thus, Joker, sitting over Rafter Man's flattened corpse in "Body Count," begins "to understand that it [is] not necessary to understand. What you do, you become. The insights of one moment are blotted out by the events of the next . . ." (p.133). This realization comes as a minor shock to him, and he realizes that from his earliest contact with the Marine Corps and with Vietnam he has been defined by his actions--a thought which had also struck him, though in a much vaguer form, on Parris Island after the deaths of Gerheim and Leonard. Consistent with his earlier twinges of awareness, he leaves the "place of fear" (p.134)--this time making a bodily rather than mental departure--though he cannot deny what is fast becoming an overwhelming sense of his character as a hard, professional killer.

In this section, Joker observes many deaths and participates in a few, but, because he is still in a flight mode, refusing to accept what he is, the structural implications of his revelation are predominantly limited to the larger frame of the novel. As a result, when he sees Mr.

Shortround's corpse--the product of Animal Mother's fragmentation grenade--the significance of the scene for the larger structure is not in the joke he makes, but in his new acceptance of the absurdity of his situation. Joker knows "that making a bad pun was a stupid thing to do," but realizes also that "anything you could say to a dead officer who was killed by one of his own men would have to be pretty ridiculous" (p. 108). The failure of his joke is inevitable since it is designed to help him evade the realities of death and war and, because of his conscious acceptance of the insanity of his circumstances, such evasion is no longer possible. Joker must begin to face that reality which he has been denying, and he must deal with it. Thus, the significance of this killing is that Joker at least confronts the situation, showing that he has become somewhat hardened to death, which is a major change for him from his first response to such an encounter in which he simply ignored the incident. Even the joke itself which Joker makes about Mr. Shortround's being "short" (p. 108) is indicative of the changes occurring within him, as his joke bears an uncanny resemblance to Gerheim's response to Perkins' attempted suicide (p. 18). Both incidents, though very real and dangerous situations, are mockingly dismissed in an effort to minimize the harsh and uncompromising reality they represent. Almost in spite of himself, Joker is consistently becoming more like Gerheim--or rather is being revealed as more like Gerheim--with each passing stage of his history.

Finally, in "Grunts"--the last section of this novel--Joker comes to fullest expression as Gerheim's successor. He is at last fully a Marine in that he serves now as a combat infantryman rather than as a combat correspondent. He learns to live with "No slack" (p. 145). He comes

intimately in contact with the endlessness of the birth and death processes, seeing "new life feeding on the decaying remains of the old" (p. 149), knowing that that is what he is doing by replacing Gerheim. Moreover, finally living out the combat situations he had been prepared for in Basic Training, Joker hears Gerheim's voice and understands the truth of what he had said about one step at a time (p. 151). However, in this final section, warnings, orders, and instruction which had been just soulless words in section one take on a powerful vitality for Joker as he lives out what Gerheim had only spoken about. He learns practically how to cover great distance as a Marine, "hump[ing], one foot after the other, one step at a time, for as long as necessary" (p. 11): "Beneath mountains like the black teeth of dragons [they] hump. [They] hump up a wood cutter's trail, up slopes of peanut butter, over moss-blemished boulders, into God's green furnace, into the hostile terrain of Indian country" (p. 150). He learns to restrain his imagination as an infantryman (p. 21), shutting off his mind as he lets it "sink into [his] feet" (p. 148). Further, he holds back his imagination to focus on

> things that aren't important so that [he] won't think about fear--about the fear of pain, of being maimed, or that half-expected thud of an antipersonnel mine or the punch of a sniper's bullet, or about loneliness, which is, in the long run, more dangerous, and in some ways, hurts more. [He] lock[s] [his] mind onto yesterday, where the pain and loneliness have been censored, and on tomorrow, from which pain and loneliness have been conveniently deleted, and most of all, [he] lock[s] [his] mind into [his] feet, which have developed a life and a mind of their own. (pp. 151-152).

All of this Joker had learned on Parris Island from Sergeant Gerheim, but does not fully comprehend it until he experiences it in "Grunts."

Most importantly, though, Joker finally and fully learns what "The Spirit of the Bayonet" truly is in the central scene of "Grunts" which

focuses on several related things: his long-delayed understanding of the death grin; his ultimate acceptance of both his rank as a sergeant and his essential role as Gerheim's successor to incarnate Marinehood; and his mercy killing of Cowboy. In one fell swoop, his awareness--and his actions taken on the basis of it--makes him the hated leader of the squad, the epitome of hardness, and the savior of his men--albeit an invisible one (p. 178). In each of these new roles, he mirrors what Gerheim was, and even intensifies the definition of a Marine to make it more compatible with the type of war that Vietnam was. For example, whereas Gerheim was commended "for teaching young Marines how to bleed . . . in tidy little pools because Marines are disciplined" (p. 20), Joker actually causes a young Marine to bleed when he shoots not only another American, but his best and oldest friend in the Corps (p. 178). Since "the spirit of the bayonet is to kill" (p. 15), Joker has obviously learned that lesson well. Moreover, since the will to kill comes from a hard heart and he is able to extinguish his friend's life for wholly utilitarian purposes and not only feel no remorse but a new vitality instead (p.179), Joker has evidently mastered the lesson of the hard heart as well. Having learned all of Gerheim's lessons so well, and having even bettered him in several areas, Joker truly does become the quintessential Marine of the Vietnam War by the third section of the novel. By doing so, he replaces Gerheim and completes the cycle of the larger structure, so that the novel begins and ends not only with a generic Marine figure, but also with one figure making a futile effort at humor--Gerheim's "Gomer Pyle" (p. 3) and Joker's "some of my best friends are dead" (p. 179)--and then submerging himself in the practical details of his assigned task within the Corps.

Within this larger structure which is designed to control the text and Hasford's presentation of the war, there exists a complex sub-structure which attempts to reveal Vietnam's chaos indirectly by illustrating the extreme lengths to which the war's participants go to shield themselves from its harsh realities. In The Short-Timers, most of these efforts are connected with the linguistic containment of the war intended to distance the protagonist from the experience of Vietnam so that he can accurately and objectively comment on it even while he is in the very midst of its chaos. Such efforts are seen in the creation of a new, language-based world for the Marines to inhabit from which they can coldly view the war as something other than the horror it was; in the many jokes, cliches, truisms, and platitudes offered by Joker concerning the Marine Corps and the war; and in Joker's role as a correspondent from which he fires "paper bullets . . . into the fat black heart of Communism" (p. 59). Consistent with the theory of this thesis that the sub-structure in these novels must ultimately implode in on itself to expose the chaos of the war and its defiance of forms, each of these linguistic devices fails as the chaos they are attempting to contain proves too intractable. The result of this is that the final effect of these forms is paradoxically a testament to the war's chaos and a reinforcement of the necessity of strict literary forms to contain even a small part of the Vietnam experience. In this way, the sub-structure incorporates and represents the chaos of Vietnam through the destruction by the war's reality of both these linguistic forms and the character who creates them.

Even though these linguistic elements of the sub-structure are, in the end, exposed as inadequate and collapse when they are confronted by

the realities of the war, they do sustain the protagonist for much of the novel, allowing him first to resist and then to deny his true nature as it is consistently revealed by the larger structure. The tension which is thus created by the larger form's insistence on the systematic revelation of Joker as a generic Marine as against the conflicting linguistic avoidance of this reality characteristic of the sub-structure constitutes the essence of this work as it represents order and chaos in opposition--a conflict which was also the essence of the Vietnam War. Unlike the war, however, where chaos reigned supreme, in this fiction, order governs the telling of the war's stories. Though there is ostensibly a victory for chaos in the sub-structure as the war and Marine reality consumes Joker, breaks down his linguistic defences, and strips him to his essential and brutal core of Marine perfection, chaos does not truly triumph at this level. Rather, it serves the larger end of the novel by returning the character to his starting point as Joker's resistance and denial come to naught and he is forced to accept what he is--a quintessential Marine, "a weapon [and]...a minister of death" (p. 4).

Organized around Joker and the particular language structures by which he attempts to protect himself from the war, the substructure is a series of independent jokes, clichés, and other linguistic forms which erect a barrier between the character and his war. Some of these forms--such as the peculiar language used by the soldiers in Vietnam--are not Joker's personal creations, but are simply larger language barriers which he is free to hide behind and use because of his role as a Marine. Other defenses based on language, such as his role as correspondent and his various jokes, are unique to him and are used to fulfill two goals

which are often at cross-purposes. On the one hand, for instance, he uses the linguistic forms to defend himself from the chaos of Vietnam by shaping the war through language. In this war, "Correspondents are more effective than grunts. Grunts merely kill the enemy. All that matters is what [the correspondents] write, what [they] photograph. History may be written with blood and iron but it's printed with ink" (pp. 61-62). Though his role as correspondent, then, he can at least appear to order his war and thus avoid its chaos.

However, Joker also uses his role as a correspondent to avoid the excessive order of the Marine Corps, an order which thrives when it must confront the chaos of an external enemy. By accepting the position as a combat correspondent, Joker temporarily escapes this true essence of the Corps which is that "All Marines are grunts" (p. 26) under orders and becomes, in Gerheim's words, "a poge, an office pinky" (p. 25). For much of the novel, therefore, he is able to avoid the chain of command and defy military customs and rules with impunity: he eats in the Army mess hall, which is against regulations (p. 62); he refuses to assume the responsibility of his new rank (p. 60); and he impersonates an officer to get on a flight back to his base (p. 49). By refusing to bend to the artificial order of the military, Joker in some ways becomes a personification of the war's chaos as well, expressing it through his jokes and his linguistic aberrations.

The medium which Joker uses for his jokes, for his role as corespondent, and even for his role as narrator is not in itself unique to him. Rather, it is the common property of all Marines in Vietnam, an artificial world of language through which they seek protection from the reality of war and from the reality of themselves as well. The creation

of this world begins immediately as the novel opens with the ground being identified in Marine terminology as the "deck" (p. 3). This change of nomenclature for even the most familiar of objects is symptomatic of the change which is being initiated in the recruits by the Marine Corps. Fully aware that the recruits are being trained to fight and live in a world which is almost completely without order, stability, or continuity--the world of the Vietnam War--the drill instructors, Sergeant Gerheim, and the Corps as a whole recognize the necessity of indoctrinating their charges with some artificial form of stability whereby the soldiers can standardize their environment both in Boot Camp and in the war. By teaching the recruits a new language and by thus reorienting them to the new reality of the Marine Corps, the drill instructors hope to minimize the culture shock which could occur when the men encounter the chaos of war. The fact that the process begins with re-naming the ground "the deck" indicates that the process is complete, beginning from the ground up. Moreover, the process works, as is seen in the ambush scene outside of Khe Sanh. Having been trained from their first encounter with the Corps to consider the ground--any ground--as a "deck" with its connotations of solidity, flatness, and security, Joker views it the same way. Even in the confusion of the ambush, with his friends being cut to pieces by a sniper, and Doc trying desperately to save the New Guy, Joker views the jungle-floor as a "deck" (p. 174). His process of transformation and the detachment and automatic functioning intended by the Marine Corps is thereby shown to be complete.

This process of re-naming even the most common features of everyday life continues throughout "The Spirit of the Bayonet" as bathrooms are re-named "heads" (p. 8), hats are re-named "covers" (p. 9), and beds are

This surrender of linguistic worlds comes gradually throughout the later parts of the novel, though it does seem to begin in earnest after Rafter Man's death when Joker finally realizes the futility of his efforts to avoid the war as well as those aspects of himself which are fundamental to his existence as a Marine. He describes the feeling in terms of "a machine gunner who has come to the end of his last belt" (p. 134), suggesting the intensity of the loneliness and emptiness experienced by Joker when he can no longer avoid the war, his rank's responsibilities, and, ultimately, himself. It is immediately following this realization that he encounters the colonel, is stripped of his safe assignment as a correspondent, and is forced to re-assume the status of combat soldier for which he had been trained at Parris Island.

The final section of the novel, "Grunts," is full of his failures to avoid the war, as well as of the various collapses of his internal fictions. His dreams, his unconscious escapes, become "dreams of blood [in which he] make[s] love to a skeleton" (p. 144). Even when he tries to "dream something beautiful" it does not work. He dreams, instead, that

> [His] grandmother sits in a rocking chair on her front porch shooting Viet Cong who have stepped on her roses. She drinks the blood of a dragon from a black Coca-Cola bottle while Göring [his] mother with fat white breasts nurses [him] and drives Germany on and on, his words cut from the armour plate of a tank . . . . (p. 144)

Once he has lost control of the war, the Marine Corps, and his own mind, the horrors of war rush in upon him, making his mental life--which had been a safe haven from which he could manipulate the war and his perceptions of it--just another battle ground for order and chaos. Sadly, for Joker, the chaos dominates his imaginative faculties and

reduces him to nothing more than a coldly professional soldier.

Joker does make certain linguistic efforts to resist this process of being stripped to his essential Marine core, but after he becomes an infantryman, his defences are at best feeble and are undermined more quickly than he can re-build them as the joint forces working against his defenses include: his own mind (p. 141, 146); the attitudes of the other Marines (p. 160); and the very acts which he is forced into by the war (p. 178). The net result of his defenseless exposure and the changing attitudes towards him of the other characters in the novel is that "Everyone hates [his] guts, but they know [he's] right. [He is] their Sergeant; they are [his] men" (p. 178). Like Gerheim before him, Joker is hated but respected when his defences and his facades collapse and are stripped from him, for he truly is the quintessential Marine. Thus, with the collapse of these forms in the sub-structure, the subordinate structure is linked with the larger form in thematic intent and the novel ends where it began--with a single personification of the Marine ideal.

Unlike One Very Hot Day, in which cinematic narrative techniques could be clearly separated into those specifically applicable to the larger structure and those used in the sub-structure, in The Short-Timers such a distinction is not possible because the narrator and the protagonist are one and the same. That is, Joker is simultaneously the narrator who ostensibly provides the narration which establishes the larger structure and the principal character whose internal fictions, linguistic evasions, and other forms of escape make up the substance of the sub-structure. By thus consolidating his narrator and protagonist into the character of Joker, Hasford accomplishes several dramatic

purposes at once. Consistent with his distinctive vision of the war's chaos in which he wholly immerses his protagonist in the horrors of Vietnam, Hasford dispenses with one source of artistic distance to bring the war closer to himself and to the reader. By doing so, he furnishes his particular presentation of Vietnam with an intense emotional immediacy. He thus makes more vivid and horrifying the obvious debasement of the various characters sketched by the first person narrator, the "I" with whom the reader identifies (pp. 39, 133). There is no screen between the reader and the "I" who experiences horrible nightmares (p. 144) and who struggles to keep his Mind, Body, and Spirit together as a functional unit (pp. 103-104).

These events are to a great extent relayed through internal monologue, and as such would seem to be part of the sub-structure which by definition is under the control of the protagonist and deals primarily with aspects of his mind. However, in The Short-Timers, these events also have significance for the larger structure. Since they are ultimately narrated by Joker as narrator, they also have a place in the broader form of the novel as it details Joker's progressive revelation.

A similar overlap of structure occurs with Hasford's use of certain cinematic techniques adapted to fiction by which Joker provides vivid and powerful descriptions of his physical experiences in Vietnam--both as a narrator telling about the war and as the protagonist experiencing it. However, unlike the use of Hasford's first person narrator, which gives greater intimacy with the emotional aspects of the war, the specific narrative techniques adapted from cinema serve a double function. Not only do they provide extremely detailed descriptions of scenes and events to convey the horrible immediacy of the war, but, because they are

artificially created mediating structures, they also provide Hasford--and, in turn, Joker--with an additional form of detachment and control. As such, these techniques allow Hasford to manipulate his narrator-protagonist, moving him very near to appalling situations or back from them through a series of close-ups, long shots, and pans.

Even when a terrible scene is described in a close-up, though, there does not have to be a sense of absolute presence and proximity, for the camera may also act as a filter for reality, placing an artificial viewing mechanism between the narrator and the action which he narrates. An excellent example of this is the description of Leonard after he has shot himself: "Leonard is dead on the deck. His head is now an awful lump of blood and facial bones and sinus fluids and uprooted teeth and jagged, torn flesh. The skin looks plastic and unreal" (p. 31). The physical details provided are undeniably real and precise. Yet, the overall effect of the scene is of something viewed from a long way off, obviously awful, but somehow removed from Joker's actual experience and comprehension.

Such cinematic techniques also have other functions in The Short-Timers as Hasford expands his application of them by using the narrator-protagonist as a camera-eye from time to time, not only to detail the horrors of Basic Training and the war, but also to establish the setting, to highlight particularly telling traits of characters, and to create a context for certain occurrences. The result is a clarification of detail which is significant to the two levels of structure. For example, early in the novel, a pan establishes the basic lay-out of the camp, as the narrator's point of view is swung in an arc across Parris Island: "Red brick buildings. Willow trees hung thick

with Spanish moss. Long irregular lines of sweating civilians standing tall on yellow footprints in a pattern on the concrete deck" (p. 3). This sketch establishes the starting point of both the novel's larger structure as well as Joker's private nightmare world of evasion. The structural status of scenes such as this is usually ambiguous because of the dual role fulfilled by Joker.

Within the physical setting of Parris Island, the characters are quickly sketched through fast close-ups, though any description of Joker--the camera-eye--is intentionally withheld. Cowboy is depicted as a "wiry little Texan in horn-rimmed glasses . . . [with a] pearl-gray Stetson and . . . [a] sweaty face"; Gerheim is described as "an obscene little ogre in immaculate khaki" (p. 4), a description which is later fleshed out with details of his "hairy legs and tattooed forearms and a beer gut and a face the color of raw beef, and on his bald head, the green and brown Smokey the Bear campaign cover" (p. 29); and Leonard is described through an even tighter close-up which focuses on the "hillbilly's face [which] is frozen into a permanent expression of oat-fed innocence" (p. 5). Though descriptions in fiction necessarily rely more heavily on the connotations and denotations of the specific terms, figures of speech, and words selected, the emphasis on purely physical description focused on limited features or overall impressions of single characters is quite similar to cinematic close-ups.

Such cinematic descriptions become especially significant in the later sections of the novel which take Joker to Vietnam and provide a plethora of vividly visual scenes in which mutilated bodies, heavily armed soldiers, combat scenes, and pleasure activities peculiar to the Vietnam War are presented in great detail. Where such techniques are

re-named "racks" (p. 10). This new linguistically re-created world is further complicated by Marine slang such as "hump" (p. 11), "salty" (p. 19), "scuttlebutt" (p. 20), and "pogey bait" (p. 26); by military jargon such as "ITR--the Infantry Training regiment" (p. 25) and "Section Eight" (p. 21); and by the overly precise language of machines, such as "M-14 semi-automatic shoulder weapon" (p. 11) for "rifle" and "One 7.62 millimeter high-velocity copper-jacketed bullet" (p. 13) for "a bullet." Because these language constructions are forms by which the military--in the real world--and the characters in fiction attempt to contain the experience of war while at the some time removing themselves from it, in The Short-Timers their language not only provides a medium for expressing such containment but is, in fact, a facet of the very containment itself. That is, it functions as a framing and distancing tool as surely as do the cliches and stories told by Joker and the other characters.

When Joker arrives in Vietnam, this carefully re-created linguistic reality is further bolstered by a new influx of military and technical slang as well as by the various Vietnamese terms incorporated into the markedly distinct tongue of Vietnam-era soldiers. In the words of one soldier serving in that war, "Vietnam offered a new language--a marriage of colloquialisms, military terminology, and bastardized Vietnamese: hooch and Huey, body bag and boom boom, medevac and track, gook and dink, didi mow and dinky dow."[4] By electing to use such radical departures from conventional English, Hasford attempts to give his characters a sense of authenticity, in effect countering their fictional existence through the verisimilitude of their language. Because Joker is a fictional character, his war reality is already compromised before he even begins to tell his jokes, to mouth cliches, or to write articles. From the

start, he is a character contained within a fictional portrayal of the war, which in turn is contained within the strict linguistic structures of an artificial Marine language. It is from within this internal frame, this broad form of the sub-structure, that Joker begins to weave his own fictional realities, extending the levels of the fiction to the most minute aspects of his war.

Unfortunately for Joker, the linguistic forms prove inadequate. His jokes cease to be funny, irritating even Cowboy (p. 165); all the clichés--those provided by Gerheim as well as those mouthed by Joker--prove to be useless and unable to contain any truth about the war; and his role as correspondent is stripped from him because of a too blatant flaunting of picayune military rules. Ironically, it is a "poge colonel" (p. 135) who re-assigns him to the field as an infantryman. Since he had chosen a "poge" assignment as a correspondent to avoid the real war (p. 25), it is a significant reversal for him to be re-assigned by one like himself. Immediately prior to his re-assignment, moreover, Joker recognizes the essence of the colonel as something which he has experienced at first hand: "Poges try to kill you on the inside. Poges leave your body intact because your muscles are all they want from you anyway" (p. 135). By taking the post which was recognized by his mentor as a "poge" job, Joker initiated his own internal destruction, and caused his carefully created linguistic world to collapse in on itself. He himself was responsible for the loss of his position as a correspondent, the position which enabled him to protect himself from the horrors of war by its distancing effect of language and journalistic fictions. Consequently, at the end of the novel, his focus is almost wholly on physical things, the "muscle" that the "poges" allow to remain (p. 135).

particularly useful is in the depiction of scenes which are almost too horrible to be assimilated, such as the description of the Marine with his head blown off. For a detached and protected point of view, cinematic techniques which distance the implied author from the scene are vital. Through them, much of the horror of the scene can be filtered out so that the dead Marine can be depicted dispassionately, as follows:

> On the ground . . . is a Marine without a head. Exhibit A, formerly a person, now two hundred pounds of fractured meat. The Marine without a head is on his back. His face has been knocked off. The top of his skull has been torn back, with the soft brain inside. The jawbone and the bottom teeth are intact. In the hands of the Marine without a head is an M-60 machine gun, locked there forever by rigor mortis. His finger is on the trigger. His canvas jungle boots are muddy. (p. 102).

In scenes like these, therefore, cinematic techniques are vital, for they allow the reader a narrative proximity while at the same time maintaining an emotional buffer between the description and the experience so that the final effect is one of a distanced and intellectually interesting horror rather than of inescapably immediate mutilation.

Long shots function similarly in the larger structure except that they allow a two-fold distance from the scene being described both by the objective distance possible through such narrative devices and through the more inclusive framing of the scene so that one particular element is not inordinately forced to the forefront of the scene. Such is the case in the descriptions of the ambush scene in "Grunts" in which a sniper pins down and plays with the Americans, cutting them to pieces shot by shot. In these descriptions, the individual sections of the scene are described in great detail, but the sense of the details as part of a larger scene encompassing several suffering Marines is never lost.

Perhaps the most poignant example of this combination of details and the inclusive sense of a long shot is in the scene in which Doc Jay, himself wounded, tries to save the New Guy while they are both being shot at:

> Doc Jay has the New Guy across his lap. The New Guy's face is purple. Doc Jay is kissing the New Guy's purple lips in an attempt to breathe life back into the limp body. The New Guy squirms, claws for air. Doc Jay holds the New Guy down, zips out his K-bar, cuts the New Guy's throat. Air whistles in through the crude incision, blows pink bubbles in the New Guy's blood. The New Guy bucks, wheezes, coughs. Doc Jay spills his Unit One, paws through splints, compress bandages, white tape. Then, frantic, he empties his pockets. The Doc throws everything away until he finds a ball-point pen, draws his hand back to throw the pen away, stops, looks again, unscrews the pen, inserts the biggest piece into the hole in the New Guy's throat. The New Guy sucks in air, breathes irregularly through the small plastic tube. Doc Jay puts the New Guy down on the deck, gently. (pp. 173-174).

In the strictest sense this scene could be considered a middle shot in that it includes only two soldiers, but the effect is the same as in a pure long shot though it is on a more limited scale. Thus, the distance from the situation which is provided by the long shot causes even such a detailed and disturbing scene as this to be read fairly objectively and with a significant degree of emotional detachment. Paradoxically, though, and consistent with the dual function of cinematic techniques to both distance and reveal, certain details of the scene--such as Doc's valiant effort to save the New Guy's life and words such as "frantic" and "gently"--actually elicit emotional responses which involve the reader with the scene even as the narrative techniques draw him back from it.

While these specific narrative techniques detail much of the content of the text, the cinematic principle of montage is used as a major form of ordering the material in the novel, both that provided by cinematic techniques as well as that provided by through interior monologue. As

used in the novel, montage involves the juxtaposition of two contrary or conflicting scenes hard against each other with little or no transition to explain their relationship. Such an organization reveals the chaotic nature of the Vietnam War with its persistent incoherence and disunity. Not only are the physical scenes arranged in a disjointed manner, but their presentation is further complicated by a continual switching from the physical world to the mental world and back again--a further testimony to the meshing of the two levels of structure which occurs when the narrator and protagonist are one.

A particularly dynamic extended example of montage is found in the second section of the novel, "Body Count," in which Joker and Rafter Man as part of the Lusthog Squad enter Hue and move on the Citadel (pp. 96-106). Even before the battle begins, the scene is set up by a series of unassociated or contrary details: the Citadel is described as "an ancient castle from a fairy tale about dragons who guard treasure and knights on white horses and princesses in need of assistance"; a factual and historical account of the Citadel is then given, describing the building as "the home of Gia Long" and the product of "French engineers" (p. 97). The scene then cuts to a description of the American soldiers, makes a brief note on the history of the "One Five,"[5] and then cuts to the F-4 Phantom jets, their bombs, the men's approach to the Citadel, and their preparations for combat (p. 97).

Once the battle actually begins, the pace of the scenes accelerates as does the process of montage. The battle, the bullets, the sniper, the attack, someone singing "M.I.C...K.E.Y....M.O.U.S.E." are alternately mixed with Joker's benign assessments of the war ("machine guns . . . like old friends having a conversation"); with his personal

contemplations of death and truth; with his intense awareness of his body; and with the efforts of the squad to re-create the war in their minds as a John Wayne movie with Joker as Paul Newman, Cowboy as a horse, Crazy Earl as Gabby Hayes, Alice as Ann-Margret, and Animal Mother as a rabid buffalo (pp. 98-99). As the battle progresses, Joker's perceptions of the war become increasingly cinematic as he comes to understand the attack as a series of disconnected sounds and pictures:

> Sounds. Cardboard being torn. Head-on collisions. Trains derailing. Walls falling into the sea.
> Metal hornets swarm overhead.
> Pictures: The dark eyes of guns; the cold eyes of guns. Pictures blink and blur, a wall, tiny men, shattered blocks of stone. (p. 100)

Finally, when Joker is hit by the concussion of a B-40, a rocket-propelled grenade, he loses touch with the continuity of his perceptions so fully that he slips completely into a cinematic mode of perception, embracing montage as a normal method of perception. "The pictures blinking before [his] eyes slow down like a silent film on a defective reel" (p. 102), and his first person narration becomes second person, as if he were a director directing a film. From that point until the battle is over, the entire narration is a series of disconnected shots, lacking any coherent organization other than that of montage as Joker's form of comprehension: people walk on him; he experiences various false bodily sensations (p. 101); he observes a dead Marine (p. 102); his Body, Mind, and Spirit argue (pp. 103-104); and he dreams of Chaplain Charlie (pp. 104-105).

Because montage provides a method of ordering and containing even that which is wholly intractable, it is essential for an accurate portrayal of the Vietnam War--especially one attempting to present the

shambles that was Tet--as it gives the author some artistic grasp on that elusive experience. Further, because of the way in which it incorporates a variety of fragmentary experiences without attempting to re-make them into more complete forms or to re-shape them into more coherent patterns, montage can approximate the actual experience of Vietnam, which "was near anarchy,"[6] with "extended periods of boredom interspersed with periods of utter mayhem."[7] Due to the two-fold function of montage, then, and the paradoxical organization which it encourages in this literature, montage is admirably suited to simultaneously contain and reveal Vietnam, rendering it accessible to the narrator-protagonist, the author, and, ultimately, the reader as well.

Providing many of the specific narrative techniques used in The Short-Timers as well as a major organizing principle for the novel, the use of cinematic techniques is in keeping with the purpose of the work as a whole, which is to order and contain the experience of Vietnam while at the same time vividly revealing the true nature of the war as honestly as is possible within the confines of literature. In effect, then, these cinematic techniques create an additional level of form within the novel by which the author may order his particular vision of the war. However, this level of form is not independent of the larger structure and the sub-structure. Rather, it is an integral part of both and is an instrument of their elaboration as it works to control the experience and to distance the reader and the implied author from the events, while at the same time rendering the circumstances of the war with a violent immediacy that is true to its horrible reality.

Because this novel is built on the concept of containment at various levels, the novel's very structure is typical of a closed fiction. Not

only is the larger structure constructed wholly on the inclusive symbol of threes, but even the sub-structure is designed around different methods of verbal containment. The specific narrative techniques adapted from cinema, which are featured in both of these structural levels, complement the two structural forms and aid in their portrayal of the war's intractable nature by paradoxically concentrating the reader's attention on both the forms of the novel and the chaos of the war. Within the novel, these narrative techniques provide the realistic details which so vividly present the horror of the war; yet, they paradoxically also supply the necessary emotional distance from the horrible scenes so that the scenes can be viewed objectively. Further, they act as an emotional metaphor for Joker's personal conflict with the war and his ultimate surrender to the demands of the Marine Corps ideal. On both levels, though, the cinematic techniques work for the larger purpose of the novel, containing the chaos of the war and presenting it within the fictional forms. Thus, the two structural levels and the cinematic techniques work together to indicate the true nature of the war by revealing the quintessential Marine as he is first personified in Gerheim and then fulfilled in Joker.

## Notes

1 John Newman, Vietnam War Literature: An Annotated Bibliography of Imaginative Works About Americans Fighting in Vietnam (Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1982), p. 24.

2 Stanley Karnow, Vietnam: A History (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 523.

3 Steven Olderr, Symbolism: A Comprehensive Dictionary (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1986), p. 137.

4 Bernard Edelman, ed., Dear America: Letters Home From Vietnam (New York: Pocket Books, 1985), p. 24.

5 "One Five" is the abbreviated form of "Delta Company, 1st Battalion, Fifth Marine Regiment, First Marine Division" (p. 123).

6 Peter Goldman and Tony Fuller, Charlie Company: What Vietnam Did To Us (New York: Ballantine Books, 1983), p. 153.

7 Edelman, p. 46.

# Chapter IV

# Stephen Wright's

# Meditations in Green

Meditations in Green is distinct from both One Very Hot Day and The Short-Timers in that its protagonist is not an infantryman who daily encounters the horrors of war on a first hand basis. Rather, Griffin as an "image interpreter" (p. 39) for a Military Intelligence Unit is distanced from the verities of war so that he does not experience Vietnam with the vivid immediacy of a foot soldier. Instead, he observes only the effects of the war from a position which is safely removed from actual danger and even actual contact with the war. Hence, because of this distinctive focus on Vietnam, Wright's novel concentrates on the more esoteric and inscrutable aspects of the war as he examines both the operations of a Military Intelligence Unit in Vietnam and the effects of the war on selected drug-addicted veterans back in the United States. Meditations in Green is also a far more complicated novel structurally than the others in that it includes three distinctive narrative strands which occur at different times and which are narrated from different points of view: the "Meditation" sequences being narrated in the first person, present tense; the veteran sections being narrated in the first person, past tense; and the parts of the novel which actually take place in the war being narrated in the third person, past tense. Each of these narrative strands is intended to represent one aspect of the protagonist's reality, and together they account for what the war has made him before the novel opens--a docile partaker of "vegetable consciousness" (p. 81) whose identity and humanity have been reduced to the "I" of the plant in the "Meditations."

However, though the narrative strands are three in number, they are, in fact, part of a broader double-layered structure similar to that which appears in One Very Hot Day and The Short-Timers. That is, there exists

a single, large structure in Meditations in Green which, encompassing the text as a whole, provides a very strict and very formal order for the novel through which the author may control all fictional aspects of his work. Through this larger structure, Wright can govern the different narrative strands, the particular aspect of Vietnam being presented, as well as the many characters and many sub-plots. Most importantly, though, the larger structure allows Wright to control the exposure to the reader of Griffin, his narrator-protagonist. This control gives Wright complete dominance over the text as well, for by controlling Griffin he controls both the paramount image of the novel which Griffin personifies--the "Green" of the title--and the three narrative strands which are united in Griffin's character by his participation in each.

As Wright's only spokesman within Meditations in Green, Griffin is ostensibly in control of all aspects of the novel through his role as narrator-protagonist. Because this position makes him the essential storyteller, Griffin is able to control the larger structure of Meditations in Green much as Joker does in The Short-Timers. However, unlike Joker, Griffin is a self-conscious narrator, fully aware that he is telling a story as he relates his experience both in Vietnam and afterwards. This awareness of his role as narrator-protagonist brings with it an artistic ambiguity. Knowing that the story he relates in the broad structure of the novel is but an artificial construction designed to contain the war, Griffin makes little differentiation between the larger form of the novel and the sub-structure within which his minor fictional constructions provide his character with artificial escapes from the war. The result of Griffin's lack of differentiation is an overlap of structures as each structural level attempts to come to terms

with the war by using similar material and methods based on Griffin's life, actions, and mental maneuvers. Consequently, it is impossible to neatly distinguish between the two levels of structure, or rather, between what the narrator-protagonist creates in his own life as part of the sub-structure and what he creates in the larger structure of the novel as the author's proxy.

An example of this overlap is seen in the role of the narration in the novel. On the one hand, the narration is part of the larger structure as Wright uses it to organize and contain his particular representation of the war. On the other, though, the narration may also be considered as part of the sub-structure in that, through it, the protagonist hopes to control the chaos of the war by performing a facsimile of the author's activities. Both of these interpretations are valid, for the narration does fulfill the two narrative functions equally. The result of such a double function, though, is inevitable ambiguity of structural levels.

However, because some basic differentiation of these two levels is necessary to this discussion of Meditations in Green, the novel is considered first for its effect as a whole. That is, the larger structure of Meditations in Green is considered for its artistic value as it frames the experience of the war and allows some comprehensible expression of what is, after all, a completely intractable event. Following this explication of the novel's artistic frame, the sub-structure, as a composite of Griffin's inadequate efforts to avoid the war, is examined to reveal the chaos and corrupting influence of the war which is contained within the larger frame.

Though this distinction may at times seem arbitrary, the point which

must be kept in mind is that the differentiation of the two narrative levels is a matter of perspective. The overall perspective, that of the larger structure, is that of the author and artist who, from his safer and more detached position, uses the efforts of the narrator-protagonist to shape and distance the war successfully. Contained within the larger structure, yet paradoxically as part of this frame as well, there exists the more immediate and less artistic perspective of the protagonist, who fails to control his war mentally and who lives in the world of Vietnam which is devoid of external control. This world which Griffin inhabits, his own carefully created world of drugs and internal fictions, is flawed in that it does not prevent the protagonist from being a mess. In other words, the distinction is between the perspective of Wright's art and that of the protagonist's life as a supposedly real person. The effects are the same, but the contexts differ since art and life constitute the two structural levels of Meditations in Green as they are defined for present consideration.

The confusion of narrative levels and narrative strands also creates an additional difficulty for the reader which must be clarified before this analysis may progress, and that is the problem of time in Meditations in Green. Though the novel opens with a plant sequence narrated in the first person, present tense, it becomes apparent by page two that the slum-dwelling plant-like, first person narrator is only a surrogate for the actual first person narrator in the novel, who is Griffin as veteran. It is actually the human character who experiences the loneliness, isolation, and despair related by the plant. However, these emotions are largely sublimated and given expression through his alternate form both to deaden his mind to life and thereby to distance

his character from the pain of emotion. Further, this directed sublimation also provides an artistic device by which to frame the novel. Again, the double function of Griffin as narrator-protagonist within the overlapping structural forms may be seen through this.

This substitution by Griffin of a plant for his actual post-war human status does not, however, affect the managing of time in the novel. The plant sequences, though told in the present tense, remain delusional and therefore do not constitute the true fictional present of Meditations in Green. This position is filled rather by the veteran sequences which, though narrated in the past tense, do make up the present of the novel. The relationship of the three narrative strands, then, is that the sequence in which Griffin is a veteran is the base narrative strand, the fictional present, and the "now" (if you will) of Meditations in Green. Contained within this "now" are flashes of delusion in which Griffin perceives himself as a plant, as well as flashbacks through which Griffin recalls his time in Vietnam. Each narrative strand adds something to both the text as a whole and to the delineation of the character within it, but always within the context of the fictional present of the veteran sequences. The interplay of these narrative strands constitutes much of the frame of the novel and is considered for present purposes as part of the larger, artistic level of the text.

By opening his novel with a first person, present tense vegetable narrator who is later shown to be one with Griffin, Wright dynamically prefigures what his protagonist will become; indeed, this particular narrator indicates what Griffin has already become because of the war before the novel opens. Griffin's final state is even more strongly predicted in this first "Meditation" in that the plant is located in a

slum apartment similar to Griffin's post-war home. Because of the conditions surrounding the plant, the reader is given the sense that the outcome of the novel and the status of the character are already determined when the novel opens. Even before the reader is introduced to the human aspects of the protagonist, before he learns of Griffin's war-time experiences, and before he sees Griffin's particularly hellish flat, it is apparent that the protagonist is destined to end up as a vegetable since this early figure of plant-life shares not only Griffin's narrative function--that of narrator-protagonist--but also his physical environment, his sense of displacement, and his mental attitudes. Such an introduction, in which the end is foretold from the beginning, also immediately establishes authorial dominance over the fictional material to be presented, indicating to the reader (though it is recognizable primarily in retrospect) that the author is completely aware of the process occurring within his protagonist and that nothing in the text is beyond Wright's control--regardless of how chaotic certain incidents may strike the reader.

Because the end is known from the beginning in this novel, and because the beginning and end are one in that the text returns the protagonist to his point of origin at the work's conclusion, Meditations in Green is certainly a closed text as the term has been defined for this thesis. This provides Wright with a self-contained pattern in which to reveal his principal character. Also, the concept of a closed text suggests that extraneous material is kept to a minimum, if not disallowed completely, so that the control of form over content may be demonstrated. Recalling the concept of a closed text as outlined in Chapter One of this thesis, the reader can see that such a form ensures, in

Tomashevsky's words, that "Not a single property [will] remain unused in the telling."[1] Because everything in Meditations in Green must be and is relevant to both form and content, Wright has created a closed text.

Using the closed text as the basic unit for his larger structure, Wright develops the substance of his broad form--the gradual exposure of Griffin's true nature--according to the principles of revelatory fiction. That is, he bases his plot on the process of revelation and not on the process of growth, change, or resolution. Instead, using the particular characteristics of the Vietnam War as catalysts, Wright records Griffin's reactions to various war-related stimuli and by doing so allows his protagonist's responses to reveal Griffin's true nature so that the character is allowed to reveal himself in a "displaying" of sorts.[2] And, of course, because of the complete control which the author holds over the text, nothing untoward is revealed, but only those details which are conducive to the overall plan of the novel.

As the function of the novel is to reveal or display, certain cinematic techniques--when adapted to fiction--are particularly relevant to the depiction of characters, events, and scenes in Meditations in Green. As with The Short-Timers, and the structure of Meditations in Green as a whole, there is not a clear separation of the two structural levels in regard to their use of these techniques--they appear frequently in both levels. In the larger structure, these techniques are significant in establishing what the protagonist is, what he observes, and what he becomes. Further, they also take the form of fast cuts from one narrative sequence to the other as well as of the often montage-like juxtapositions of fact, fantasy, and memory which constitute the three areas of Griffin's experience which are therefore presented as formative

factors in what he becomes because of the war. Such cinematic methods are also utilized extensively in the sub-structure as Griffin creates his preferred world through internal fictions and through carefully recounted internal monologues--most of which are depicted in decidedly visual terms as close-ups, long shots, and pans, and which are connected through montage. Even the many episodes which occur wholly in Griffin's mind as a result of hallucinogenic drugs benefit from such narrative techniques in that the scenes which he witnesses while in his drugged stupors are usually visual extravaganzas, with sights, sounds, and special effects worthy of the most avant-garde film maker.

Moreover, the techniques of cinema are incorporated into the very content of the novel as a metaphor for the entire war, as a distancing mechanism for Griffin, and as evidence of the protagonist's degeneration as he loses control of his perceptions and sees his world increasingly as something far removed from him. The metaphor is provided by Wendell and his film project (p. 151); the detachment is evidenced as Griffin consciously frames his experience in terms adapted from film, seeing his world in "super slow motion" (p. 9) and considering his time in Vietnam as a "B-war movie" (p. 23); and his distorted perceptions are suggested by his occasional view of the world in "the chilly black and white of a film negative" (p. 69), his sense of being "close, then . . . far away" (p. 82), and his willingness to settle for "some distant kin, a second cousin of a great uncle to authenticity" (p. 84). In these ways, cinematic techniques are not simply formal narrative devices externally applied to the content. Rather, they are integral to the novel as a whole, growing out of Wright's particular vision of the war and playing an active role in the gradual revelation of Griffin. As well, these

narrative methods adapted from cinema are ultimately connected with the character of Griffin and his self-created illusions of himself and his world. Thus, the cinematic techniques provide an additional layer of coherence in the text, further uniting the larger structure of the novel with the sub-structure on a technical level, as similar techniques are used in the two to illuminate both Griffin's true nature as it has been formed by the war and his personal attempts to evade that truth through drugs and internal fictions.

Because Meditations in Green is a closed text and an example of revelatory fiction, there must necessarily be some overall plan to the novel as well as a system of progressive revelation of the work's main character. To reveal what his protagonist has become because of the war, therefore, Wright chooses plants and vegetation as a central metaphor for his work. This focus is initiated by the title and is most blatantly continued in most of the "Meditations" as they take the reader through the life-cycle of a plant. The first "Meditation" presents a plant held captive in a slum apartment (p. 1) with a special emphasis on its lack of freedom. Others present "What can go wrong" (p. 12), evil fantasies and escapist dreams of the plant (pp. 79, 92), the history of man in botanical terms (p. 104), the merits of a plastic flower (p. 192), and the process of "The Conversion" (p. 130) whereby the plant is rendered useful to humans as opium (pp. 269, 292, 321). In each case, these "Meditations" are not arbitrary but provide germane commentary on the events presented by the other narrative strands.

For example, the apparently simple description of a plant on the

window sill in the first "Meditation" is actually a cabalistic key to the entire novel generally and to the first section of the text specifically. Through its parallels with the initial descriptions of Griffin as a veteran and Griffin as a soldier, this introduction to Griffin as a plant sketches the protagonist's character as it is to be revealed in the remainder of the novel. Through the passive response of the plant to its captivity, Griffin's lack of a will to action is revealed. As well, the first "Meditation" establishes his habitual methods of coping which eventually cause his complete personality disintegration--inert acceptance of his depressed state as well as verbose analysis designed to avoid rather than resolve his dilemma.

The description of both the plant and Griffin begins in a reasonable enough manner as the former is presented as an "indistinguishable head . . . listing toward the sun" (p. 1) and the latter as a "spook . . . [who] mingled anonymously with the residents of the day world" (p. 2). In both cases, anonymity is stressed--there is little about either to mark them as distinctive. As a further similarity, they both occupy the same desolate part of the city, though Griffin-as-veteran is at least free to experience "the delirium of locomotion" (p. 1). Indeed, he is under doctor's orders to do so. However, his locomotion does not put him in any greater contact with the mass of humanity. Rather, he is separated by glass from much of the vitality and pleasure of life as surely as the plant is separated by glass from its source of photosynthetic life, the light: he "ogle[s] the goodies in the big windows" and sees "receptionists . . . behind bulletproof glass" (p. 2). This unbridgeable gap between the two Griffins and their respective sources of life reveals what Griffin, the human, has become because of Vietnam: an unsettled

personality unable to be alone (if sober), who needs "the relief of cacophony and throng," and yet who is unable to interact truly with those around him. He understands humanity only as a mass and experiences "the glow of animate heat, of blood in motion, regular doses of herdlike solidarity, curses, jostles, tears, life" (p. 2). He generally abides by the "rules of metropolitan intimacy" (p. 1) which do not allow for meaningful, personal contact between individuals. Even the one human contact which both plant and veteran do have--the "human hands" and Huey--is not reliable: the plant's keeper, the human hands, are "clumsy, irresponsible hands, hands that pinch and prune, hands that go on vacation, abandon their ferns to northern exposure, cracked beds, stale air, enervations, apathy, loneliness" (p. 1). The veteran's friend, Huey, lies--"her history was a series of true-false propositions" (p. 3). She comes and goes as she pleases and refuses to tell Griffin where she lives (p. 93), yet occasionally she brings Griffin a special treat of "fine white powder" (p. 5) which is as significant to him as rain is to the plant.

The common perception of the universe as a completely haphazard and unconsciously malicious place where the active agents (the human hands and Huey) may be randomly kind, cruel or indifferent develops as a result of long experience with apparently arbitrary treatment. For Griffin, this consciousness of the random and malicious element is initiated by his first contact with the Army and the war. In Griffin's experience as it is recorded in Meditations in Green, the army introduces the sense of randomness by effectively eliminating any comprehensible set of standards other than that of the military by which to consider the soldiers. By first dehumanizing the men by reducing them to the status of

anti-bacterial "penicillin" (p. 8), and by then designating them as a labelled commodity rather than as individuals (p. 9), this process diminishes the men to their labels. In Griffin's case, he becomes the easily catalogued "GRIFFIN, JAMES I. 451 550 366 SP4 P96D2T USARV TRANS DET APO SF96384" (p. 9).

With his existence reduced to a data card, Griffin finds his fate in the hands of a computer. He can only wait for the machine to finish "its shuffle, marked cards, shaved deck, jokers all around" (p. 10). With no design or meaning to his war, even at this early stage of his exposure to it, Griffin reacts with two apparently contrary responses: he placidly waits for his random assignment--a response which becomes characteristic of him and which makes his process of revelation fairly straight forward; and he chooses to withdraw mentally from the war, "pass[ing]" on its card game (p. 10). This second response is the substance of the sub-structure as Griffin tries not so much to deny the reality of the war and its influence on him as to simply ignore it as he either literally, or figuratively, or pharmaceutically retreats from reality as both a soldier and a veteran.

The parallels between Griffin-the-plant and Griffin-the-veteran are many as the two share the same environment, the same sense of isolation, and the same status as passive victims of actions done to them. The parallels with the plant become even more obvious, though, when they are applied to Griffin-as-soldier, who is in effect "torn from [his] native soil, [and] exiled" to Vietnam as surely as the plant is "exiled in a clay pot five stories vertical, a mile and a half horizontal from the nearest uncemented ground" (p. 1). In fact, the shock for Griffin-the-soldier is even greater as when he first arrives in Vietnam

he still retains some capacity for very human thoughts and feelings which are obviously lacking in any form of plant life. Indeed, because Griffin is so fully attuned to his environment mentally when he first arrives in Vietnam, even a simple event like being awakened strikes him as actual physical violence, far exceeding the pains of the plant's "pinch[es] and pruning[s]" (p. 1). The violence is made all the more terrible because of its psychological implications:

> Planetary-sized spots bloomed on his retina, slid back and forth, black holes in his vision. He hated being awakened like this. It was too sudden, too brutal, it was like being hit on the head from behind. It made him uneasy, subject to disturbing, revelatory thoughts. This is how you will die, said such an interruption, not in the comfortable tranquillity you have always imagined as a natural right, but violently, in shock and confusion, far from home, without preparation or kindness, rudely extinguished by an unexpected light much bigger than your own. (p. 9)

The associations connecting Griffin as veteran, Griffin as soldier, and Griffin as plant, then, mediate the horror and intensity of the war as the Griffin on each level experiences different degrees of life: the veteran who lives out a marginal form of existence as a social drop-out; the soldier, who, though he begins his tour in a fairly normal state, quickly deteriorates to an almost catatonic stage of drug-addiction; and, the plant who, bound by both the city and its very nature, stagnates in a slum apartment. The intensity of each's experience reveals the distance, or lack thereof, which Griffin has achieved from the horrors of the war, and life thereafter, in each of his stages of degeneration.

These parallel introductions to the three aspects of Griffin establish his basic character as a verbose analyst of his own plight who seems unable to motivate himself to any definite action. Demonstrating his fundamental inefficacy in each of the three narrative strands,

Griffin, at best, makes ineffectual efforts to save himself or escape from his present conditions. As a plant, he emits a feeble cry (p. 1); as a veteran he escapes from his unsettled world by retreating into fantasies (pp. 2, 3, 5); and as a soldier he simply refuses to accept his assignment to Vietnam as a reality, choosing rather to withdraw both physically and mentally from it (pp. 9-11): "Griffin pulled the sheet up over his head. He lay quite still and soon felt himself sinking into an immense bowl of vanilla pudding. It was peaceful and quiet on the bottom, submerged and fetal" (p. 11).

When read properly in the context of the novel as a whole, this first "Meditation," then, can provide a deeper understanding of the narrative sequences which follow it, identifying their significance to the larger structure as it focuses on Griffin. Such a function is not restricted to the first of the "Meditations," though this is in many ways a particularly significant one because it provides a synopsis of Griffin's character as the novel reveals it. Many of the "Meditations" which follows also perform such a function, framing a particular set of narrative sequences and epitomizing the emotion and the significance of what follows each "Meditation."

In their artistic functions, then, the "Meditations" provide an effective frame for the material which follows them and thus for the text as a whole. Periodically inserted at selected points, they work to summarize minor narrative units and reveal the connection between the veteran sequences and the Vietnam passages to indicate the total control of the author over the various narrative strands as well as the complete subjection of the smaller narrative units to the design of the novel as a whole. Though it is possible that the novel could hold together without

this most detached of the three narrative strands, its presence does increase the coherence of the work. In addition, it brings the implied author and the narrator-protagonist into close proximity to heighten the verisimilitude of the text as Griffin's experiences are described as actual occurrences rather than offered as mere artificial and artistic devices. At the same time, this "Meditations" strand of narrative maintains a sufficient number of narrative levels between the controlling persona and the traumatic subject of the war so that the implied author as well as the narrator may be protected from the chaos of Vietnam.

Within this "Meditations" frame, but still as part of the larger structure of the novel as a whole, there exist two narrative strands which appear to be telling separate stories because of their alternating arrangement in the novel, but which actually tell but one story--that of Griffin, from his tour in Vietnam to his time in the United States as a veteran. Only one of the two, though, is told in the first person, and that is the chronologically later, veteran sequence. Because of the intensity of the Vietnam experience, even these passages which are removed from the war by time are told in the past tense, to establish a narrative distance between the narrator-protagonist and his unpleasant reality as a person, scarred by his memories of Vietnam. The use of a detached, third person narrator establishes a basic immunity for Griffin from the scenes he describes as it protects him from the immediacy of the events. This is particularly apparent in those passages in which Griffin is omniscient and even god-like in his understanding and awareness of the other characters.

Ultimately, the veteran sequences, while significant in their own right, function as a mediating ground to separate the first person,

present tense narrator of the vegetable narrative from the third person, past tense narrator of the war, protecting the protagonist from and preparing the reader for the horrors which are to follow. Griffin, commenting on his meditation and the fact that he recognizes it to be a fraud but enjoys it anyway, may well have been commenting on this narrative structure when he says:

> Your consciousness can't be that full of the gritty day-to-day without an appreciation of the delights of deceit. It's a fun head, knowing and pretending not to know or not knowing and pretending to know or not knowing and not pretending. Wheels within wheels . . . It can get pretty elaborate but once you work your way in, shake off those qualms, there's all these cozy layers between you and the outer chill. Delusion is a national pasttime. (p. 133)

This protection also extends to the reader as the mediating narrative strand builds even further layers between him and the horrifying experience of Vietnam. Understanding the narrative strand in which Griffin is a veteran as a hybrid of fact and fantasy, of the reality of Griffin, Trips, Huey, Eugene and Chandu as against the drug-induced hallucinations and the corresponding and detached retreats into the past, the reader is mentally prepared to enter into the third narrative strand--that of the war itself.

The final level of narrative makes up approximately two thirds of the novel and expresses the chaos of Vietnam by showing its effects on many different characters, most of whom are related by only the vaguest and most tenuous connections of location, assignment, or chance. Indeed, many never meet, and it would be absolutely impossible for any one character--Griffin included--to be intimately familiar with the details of all their lives, thoughts, and assignments. However, Griffin does act

as narrator for these war passages, a role he casts himself in since he controls the flashbacks completely. This is possible because the entire war sequence--the one narrative level which appears as predominantly fact--is itself a huge internal fiction created by Griffin-as-veteran while in a drug-induced stupor. It is, in fact, simply a series of "strange tales from the war back in the long ago time" told by a "genial story teller, wreathed in a beard of smoke" (p. 6). Within such a fictional frame, Griffin can even include himself in the strange tales and have someone else play him (p. 14) as he re-creates himself as a fictional character who retains Griffin's name and Griffin's experiences but who is under the control of Griffin as narrator. Further, as part of these "strange tales," Griffin grants himself omniscience so that he may maintain an additional level of control, or more accurately the illusion of control, over the war. Ironically, because it is so obviously an illusion, the control created by his "tales" and his position as an omniscient narrator heightens the disparity between his attempts at control and the obviously uncontrollable nature of the war.

The revelation of Griffin as it is presented in the narrative of Vietnam is essentially a progressive move towards withdrawal, isolation, and dehumanization. From his first exposure to the Army and the war, these forces begin to work on his character, gradually eroding the pitiful defences which he erects against them. By the time the actual Vietnam sequence begins in the section following the second "Meditation," Griffin has been in Vietnam for quite some time and has advanced his techniques of withdrawal to almost the level of an art form. As the war tale opens, Griffin is indulging in marijuana with his friends Trips, Simon, and Vegetable, and the newly arrived Claypool, allowing his mind

to detach "itself from whatever it is minds cling to " (p. 19). Through drug-use, this group has so completely withdrawn from the war and its terrible realities that they consider their actual reality to be a "hoax" (p. 27) or as somehow not "quite real" (p. 114).

This sense of illusion is fostered by the military assignments of the men in the Intelligence Unit, which diminish the horror of the war through numbers and images on film. Effectively, these jobs reduce the war to a senseless, absurd game of numbers which no one can really win but which no one really loses either, at least not in the early stages of the novel when the men are able to withdraw happily through drugs. Perhaps the best example of the military's role in sustaining the illusion is that of the Numbers Conference in which the General always has his own preferred answers (p. 126). It seems to be a real part of the war in that it is "ostensibly a meeting to coordinate hard data on enemy activity in I Corps." However, upon closer examination, the Numbers Conference is revealed as:

> a complicated game in which all participants attempt to guess the number already written on a piece of paper concealed in The General's pocket. The first person to guess correctly and prove his own figures matched The General's won the game and The General's grace until the following month when the competition started all over again. (p. 126)

Like all else in the war, the reality is exposed as an illusion, or at best a game which has only tenuous connections with the harsh reality of Vietnam.

The withdrawal stage of the novel lasts the longest of the three as Griffin-the-veteran narrates the story of the war, presenting many characters and their preferred forms of escaping the war: Captain Hewitt and Major Brand escape into the bar and through bourbon (p. 44);

Lieutenant Mueller escapes into his historical research on the origins of the Vietnam War (pp. 46-48); Simon escapes by writing pathetic letters home (p. 54); Wendell escapes first through his "sonic doodling" then through his movie making (p. 151); Kraft paradoxically escapes the horrors of the war by immersing himself in them, hoping to outlast it through his professionalism (p. 71); Holly dedicates himself to external perfection (p. 85); and others use a host of coping mechanisms, all of which are designed to remove them from emotional proximity to the war. This conglomeration of characters, each of whom has his own functional method of coping with the war, does in a sense impose some bizarre order on the experience of Vietnam. Though the cumulative effect is not one of recognizable order, there is an underlying pattern to the group's experiences which, viewed passively, creates a collage-like effect similar to that of "The Board" which was

> a monstrous collage of news clippings, paperback book covers, army manual pages, C-ration boxes, record albums, letters, photographs, and food labels from cans and boxes sent from home . . . The cutting and pasting had been in progress for years now and though rain and humidity had managed to bleach out most of the earlier contributions or caused them to peel off limp and faded as dead skin, fresh clippings went up often enough so that the board continued to renew itself like some exotic snake. (p. 112)

Having been in the process of evolution for years, The Board, in effect symbolizes the Vietnam War as a whole, with each piece of it being representative of some human element that came to the war, participated in it, and then was shipped home at the end of his tour or when he was either dead or wounded.

However, just as the collage breaks down when it is examined closely for a logical, ordering principle, so also do the evasive coping

mechanisms break down when the characters are confronted with the true chaos of the war. Reduced to the disparate elements that make it up, The Board thus symbolizes the lack of an effective organizing structure in the war and the mess Vietnam has made of the men. In fact, it sums up the plight of the men who exist in Vietnam as a series of unrelated elements and who are shown to lack any form of coherence among themselves or even within themselves when they are confronted by the reality of Vietnam. Unable any longer to organize their war by private withdrawals, the men therefore find themselves increasingly isolated in the midst of its horrors. Thus, though the delight of withdrawal endures for much of the novel, for many of the characters the war gradually begins to intrude. Ultimately, the war's intrusions on his illusions prompt Griffin towards the next stage of his progress in becoming a plant--that of isolation.

Once the war begins to surface, it is very difficult to contain it again, and other aspects of its ugliness also begin to manifest themselves, stripping away both Griffin's shield of withdrawal and his sense of belonging to the group of addicts. For example, the war seems to reach in visibly and snatch Claypool from their grouping, forcing him to go on patrol (p. 137), and then depriving him of his voice (p. 176) and sanity (p. 224). Griffin's illusions concerning the indigenous personnel are shattered by his discovering first that the "oldest, most trusted Vietnamese employed in the compound" is a thief (p. 158) and then by his discovering that she is also a pimp for her own daughter (p. 163). This incident leads to a further alienation for him as his friends listen outside the door when he encounters the two Vietnamese women. After his friends turn his sexual encounters into a topic for their own amusement,

Griffin feels contempt for them, and a distance is established between him and them even though they continue to indulge in drugs together (p. 164).

Following this Missy Lee incident, the war which Griffin and the other addicts have been coolly observing, becomes, for Griffin, "one of those shows in which the audience [is] . . . required to participate" (p. 177) as the violence of the Vietnam War begins to intrude on his private world with a vengeance. In an early mortar attack, Spatz and Kline are killed (pp. 187, 189) as the war claims its first combat deaths from Griffin's world. This event causes Griffin to slow his escape from the war and to contemplate the destruction of the war in living color for once (p. 189). His behaviour continues to become increasingly unusual after this event such as when he goes flying with Mueller, telling him, "Show me the war" (p. 199). Then, when Mueller is killed by friendly fire when "a high explosive artillery shell scheduled to leave a steel tube at Fire Base Ringgold for coordinates 619238 detonate[s] instead in the air above 238619" (p. 252), Griffin begins to manifest some of the violence of the war himself, engaging in senseless destruction on a small scale (p. 253) even as he turns increasingly inward.

Of the many out-of-character things which Griffin does after his friend is killed, the most significant is that he chooses to go on a search and rescue mission and volunteers because

> He wanted to experience some portion of this madness as his own, not as accident or bad luck or whim of his superiors but as choice, freely made, the consequences freely accepted; he wanted a purge, a flushing out of the corners, primitive sacrament if necessary. (p. 259)

For the first time, Griffin confronts the war, and he does so alone. His friends from the drug culture are back on the base and Mueller, his

thoughtful, intelligent friend, is dead, leaving him emotionally alone to face the war and the jungle which, until this time, he had known only through "the interdiction of a lens" (p. 260). His time in the jungle paradoxically marks the height of isolation and also the end of his withdrawal as he sees himself not only as part of the war, but as part of the American effort against the jungle--an effort which he now recognizes as futile (pp. 261-262).

Through his sojourn in the jungle and through his identification with the other American soldiers, Griffin comes to the startling revelation "that despite his intentions he truly was a soldier" (p. 263). However, this revelation, coupled with his "vegetable overdose [and] . . . chlorophyll freakout" (p. 262), leads him to the final stage of his development in Vietnam--that of detachment. Having finally escaped the state of withdrawal in which he was still part of the war but had limited his involvement with it to a very minimal participation and having confronted the fact of his isolation, Griffin goes to the opposite extreme and becomes detached from even his very self, wholly separate from his war. No longer is he on the fringes of the Vietnam experience with the option to participate, but now he is completely separated mentally from the war and from himself. He sees his very being as not just distanced from himself by choice, but by conditions which are beyond his control:

> For a moment he saw himself through other eyes, the thin fatigued body in a wet, wrinkled uniform, scarred rifle clutched in grimy hand, flushed baby face staring dully beneath battered helmet. Yes, all the details were correct. He had become a photograph, a new image to interpret. (p. 263)

Though the patrol is not yet over and there remains the horrific

tasks of lowering the mutilated corpses, bagging the bodies, and carrying them out (pp. 263-266), the patrol's effect on Griffin is complete. Despite his best efforts, Griffin can no longer "remain insulated" (p. 265). He feels "totally dull, dirty, and dazed" and experiences the detachment of "the photograph again" (p. 266).

After this patrol, Griffin's detachment from the war, life, and humanity is complete. Having switched from marijuana to opium, his days now pass exceedingly quickly in a drug-induced stupor. As Griffin, from his stance as veteran and narrator, puts it, "Once the days had gone squeeeak, now they went zip" (p. 273). In this new state of detachment--as opposed to his early state of withdrawal--nothing can bother him. "The particulars of his environment no longer oppressed him since particulars were irrelevant" (p.277). Therefore, he openly defies regulation about using drugs, even "releasing a cloud of smoke into the chief's ripe leer" (p. 278); he loses track of his days left in Vietnam because "He was zipping too fast to be plotted and charted" (p. 278); and he passes out at work, letting several frames of film melt against his face (p. 279). Absolutely nothing bothers him at this point.

It is no coincidence that Wright cuts back to the second narrative strand at this point, showing Griffin-the-veteran engaged in gardening, for if the balance and the closed nature of the novel are to be maintained, there has to be a process within Griffin's post-war experience parallel to his involvement with opium in Vietnam. Therefore, Griffin-as-veteran decides to become one with the earth and one with the plants: "[He] had to feel [his] way into understanding. [He] could see [him]self stripped to the skin, lying in a box of [his] own, swollen root burrowing into the ground. Blossoming all over" (p. 293). When this

second detachment is thus complete, that from his existence as a human veteran of Vietnam, Griffin begins the processes of closing the distance between the various narrative strands and of completing his own isolation. By preventing Trips from killing a man believed to be Sergeant Anstin even though he must almost kill Trips in the process (p.299), Griffin effectively finalizes his own detachment and isolation in that he terminates his relationship with Trips--the one constant reminder of Vietnam in his post-war life. However, this scene also does more than that. By forcing Griffin into an act of brutal violence whereby he must almost destroy his own friend, the fight scene graphically describes the inherent violence within Griffin and the brutal dehumanization of his character which has occurred because of Vietnam and which is triggered by the remnants of the war as personified in Trips and the Sergeant Anstin figure. In this way, Griffin, the narrator, reveals the essential truth of Vietnam as represented by Griffin, the protagonist: there is no avoiding the reality of the war or its influence. The paradox of this novel is that Griffin has become what he was trying to avoid all along--a part of the war with all its violence and chaos. He becomes what he tries to avoid, a truth brought to terrible expression when Griffin perpetuates the violence of the war even as he is trying to save his friend from the delusions caused by it. This scene brings the horror of Vietnam into the fictional present in a very immediate manner as the war consumes Griffin and leaves little more than a lifeless, mindless shell in its wake.

For Griffin, the war is over at this point. Even the Tet attack described in the last sections of the novel has little impact on Griffin. He simply does what is required of him; he gets a weapon (p. 307), he

disposes of all intelligence documents (p. 310), he shoots the last few feet of Wendell's film (p. 314), and he is wounded in action (p. 318). The attack just affirms to him the correctness of his detachment and gives him a hint as to what his renewed form must be: "Particle by particle, the smoke of a plant grown in this violated land would rearrange his elements, render him finally invisible, ready for reconstitution in a more permanent spacetime" (p. 317).

Having come full circle from an initial meditation narrated by an opium plant to the final personification of it, Griffin's revelation is complete. He has transcended, in turn, withdrawal, isolation, and detachment to assume mentally a preternatural existence beyond time--a transformation which can be seen on the last page of the novel in which the tense of the narration shifts from past to present to future as Griffin identifies his life's work: "I'll wander national highways, leather breeches around my legs, pot on my head, sowing seeds from the burlap bag across my shoulder, resting in the afternoon shade of a laurel tree" (p. 322). Though in actual fact such an intention is not at all realistic, it is possible in his mind as he seems to engage in yet another evasive maneuver of flight and delusion. Preferring this new fantasy to his past ones, Griffin seems to become psychopathological to the point of insanity as he sets out on his new, Johnny Appleseed fantasy of vegetative propagation.

This larger structure is designed to reveal Griffin by systematically tracing his development from withdrawal, to isolation, and back to the detachment of the first "Meditation," and by containing his experience of Vietnam in the novel. Because of the order created by the

author through the use of closed texts and revelatory fiction, this level of structure is an overwhelming success--Griffin's development is sketched in a completely controlled manner, and the artistic form of the work is not compromised in its presentation of Vietnam. Within this larger form, however, there exists a sub-structure which is far less successful in that it leads Griffin to chaos and deterioration instead of to an effective control of his war as is achieved in the larger, artistic structure. Ostensibly under the control of Griffin in his various manifestations, this sub-structure is apparently designed to serve the same purpose as the larger form--that being to contain the war. However, the motivation for this sub-structure is not artistic but psychological. That is, the character, unlike the author, does not merely want to find a form by which he can express the war; instead, he wants to find a way to control it so that he can avoid both the war and its effects on him.

The most significant method of control imposed upon Vietnam by Griffin is his inversion of fact and fantasy as he reduces the war to the level of fiction--the "strange tales from the war back in the long ago time" (p. 6)--and separates himself from it not only by the tense of the telling, but by the person of the narrative as well. This narrative strand is the only third-person sequence in the novel as well as the only one in which the narrator is omniscient and therefore in apparent control of everything and everyone while at the same time remaining wholly detached emotionally from the entire sequence. In turn, he elevates his life as a plant--which is clearly the acting out of one long delusion--to the level of apparent fact in that he narrates it in the first person, present tense, thereby giving it an immediacy of experience which is not present in his war stories. In the sub-structure, this narrative device

of person and tense acts as an orienting key for both the reader and the narrator as it establishes how close the narrator wants to come to any given aspect of his story. As for the second narrative strand--that of his time at home as a veteran--Griffin's use of the first person, past tense to narrate it indicates that this narrative strand occupies a middle ground between escapist fantasy and a reality which, while largely unacceptable, is at least bearable and which therefore does not require quite the levels of narrative containment as do the stories of the war.

The efforts made by Griffin to avoid his reality are also present on this narrative level of him as a veteran, but they take on less extreme forms than in the other narrative levels and are more readily recognized as fraudulent--even by Griffin himself. A perfect illustration of this is his flower meditation. He knows that Arden is a fraud but willingly goes along with him and his meditation swindle anyway, considering it as a good joke and a harmless way to pass the time. Besides, as Griffin says, "What's more American than good honest fraud?" (p. 133). It does not trouble him in this narrative strand that the mental world which he tries to escape into has no basis in reality, for being removed from the war by time in these sequences, his need to isolate himself believably and effectively from his environment is also less intense. Though some evasion is still necessary--he does take his meditation seriously, hoping against hope for some positive results--the escape of meditation and even of his drug use in this narrative strand lacks the urgency of his efforts to control the war which appear in his war stories.

Occupying the third narrative level, that of the war, there exists a series of internal fictions and interior monologues by which Griffin tries to manipulate his reality to make it more congenial. Though many

of his small, escapist scenarios are the result of drug-induced hallucinations, others reveal carefully thought out, sober alternative methods of viewing reality. Even before he is introduced to drugs, for example, he tries to come to terms with the reality of the war and its potential for causing his personal destruction by imagining his death through a series of "rehearsals" for the real thing.

> Real death was a phenomenon at once so sober and so silly his imagination tended to go flat attempting comprehension. . . . Meanwhile, he would learn how to handle these terrible rehearsals that rushed in on him from nowhere. (p. 10)

His efforts to control the war's reality take many forms, including that of the following poem:

> a flap of skin and a torn nail
> a left ear, a right hoof
> a hambone and the yoke of an eye. (p. 10)

In this case, he attempts to minimize the immediacy of the threat to his life through familiarity. By "pictur[ing] possibilities," he hopes that "layers of protective hide were being sewn on to his character . . . [and that] when the time came he would be brave when bravery was required, calm when there was an excess of panic, [but] he really didn't know" (p. 10). The best that he can hope for is that some portion of his psychological buffers will remain when they are required. The problem is that as

> he sat . . . and meditated on the worst . . . these mental drills seemed to be directed by a strong and separate will more perverse than his own. Once admitted to consciousness each scenario surged effortlessly out of control up into the wide terrors of terminal escalation. (p. 254)

His very efforts to protect himself become a source of terror to him.

Another not completely successful method of distancing and containment frequently used by Griffin to protect himself from his war is that of considering the entire experience as part of a B-grade war movie (p. 23) in which Griffin can manipulate the plot as well as the fate of each of the characters through elaborate planning. In a very real sense, that is the substance of his whole war narrative as Griffin-as-narrator creates an entire world for his soldier persona to inhabit. This created world is complete with CIA characters, command personnel, and other intelligence men whom Griffin-as-soldier may never encounter. Even if he does know certain of the characters who people his world, Griffin-as-soldier is not able to know the intimate details of their thoughts and lives, their actions off the base, or even their actions in the high security areas of the base. However, because Griffin-as-veteran is creating each of these characters as part of his movie--or rather, his extended internal fiction--he is privy to all these details and provides them to flesh out his persona's world and to account for some of his created self's attitudes and actions--such as his feeling anger at Major Holly and his going on the search and rescue mission for Kraft. Further, in many ways each of these other characters reflects or reveals something about Griffin's own experience in Vietnam, as he recounts it. For example, we see his potential for violence as it is acted out by his friends Noll (p. 296) and Trips (p. 312); and we see his ultimate fascination with vegetation in Kraft's final state (p. 302) and in the insights gleaned by Vegetable through his use of drugs (p.22).

The second narrative strand, then, is the ultimate form of containment in the sub-structure, as it allows Griffin-as-veteran to re-create his war. Complementary to this broad form of containment is

Wendell's movie, which attempts to "embrace the complete complexity of the American experience in Southeast Asia" (p. 153). Any such vast plan would have to be doomed to failure, but Wendell seems to succeed for much of the novel in that--like the Griffin who functions as the narrator--he does not try to convey the real world and the real war, but settles for a mock-up, a carefully staged production in which he orchestrates many of the scenes, such as his "Chinese fire drill" (p. 150) and the murder of Major Holly (pp. 249-250). In the end, though, Wendell's film is a failure both in that it fails to contain the war--it has "no beginning, no middle, no end" (p.251)--and in that it costs Wendell his life as it leads him out into the compound during the VC attack (p. 309) where he is killed (p. 315).

In a way, both Griffin's and Wendell's frames for the war are bound to fail. By attempting to contain the uncontainable, both Griffin-as-veteran telling a war story and Wendell as director making a movie cannot succeed as they lack the objectivity necessary to frame such an intractable event as the Vietnam War. Wendell's failure is, of course, more total than that of Griffin, for being in the midst of Vietnam as he creates his particular frame for it, Wendell has no control over the actual events of the war such as the premature departure of the Colonel's plane (p. 56), the Tet Offensive, and his own death (p. 315). The best that he can hope for is a day by day editing of the war's "incoherency into harmonious design" (p. 150). Griffin, on the other hand, has the benefit of chronological distance from the events as he re-creates them post facto and not as they happen, as Wendell must do. Therefore, Griffin's effort is somewhat more organized, and he has a little more control over how the events will be formed in his

recollections. Thus, in a way, Griffin's frame for the war is attained in an easier manner than that of Wendell's film. Unfortunately, in the end, Griffin's effort is equally as unsuccessful as Wendell's in that both fail to contain the war. Vietnam simply cannot be contained without at least some artistic distance from the war--time and a camera lens simply are not adequate mediators of Vietnam's harsh reality. Further, both attempts appear to be capturing the truth of the war when what they are actually working with is an artificial creation of the war, not its reality. Therefore, once again, these forms of containment have to fail.

Perhaps the most obvious form of manipulating the war which Griffin engages in is his use of drugs--first marijuana and then opium. Actually, though, this method of coping is not truly intended to affect the nature of the war, but simply to protect Griffin from it by altering his perceptions of the chaos. For a while, the drugs seem to be effective in that they help Griffin's time pass faster and keep him largely uninvolved with the war. However, in the end, the drugs undermine his defenses, causing spontaneous retreats from reality which he has little to do with or control over (p. 257). On these occasions, the drug-reality becomes, not a useful method of avoiding the horrors of the war, but a source of horror on its own. Paradoxically, Griffin then counters this drug-induced horror by volunteering for the search and rescue mission and thereby immersing himself in the horror of the war (p. 257)--the aspect of life he had originally been trying to avoid. The two extremes--the total fantasy of the drug delusions and the total reality of a jungle patrol complete with mutilated bodies, physical pain, and an overwhelming sense of "the claustrophobic botany" (p. 262)--are used by Griffin to balance each other and to demonstrate that there is no

real way of manipulating the war. What is is, and he must simply reconcile himself to it as best as he can. For Griffin, after the patrol, this reconciliation is attained through the surrender of his efforts to control and through a final catatonic retreat from the war, from his environment, and from himself--a withdrawal which may, in some ways, be paradoxically considered one final effort at control.

Throughout the novel, other forms of containment are also attempted by Griffin, such as the use of slang to keep "the demon contained" (p. 276); the creation of elaborate and apparently rational explanations for his war, his job, and his inner self (pp. 53, 273); and trips into nostalgic memory (p. 281). Each in turn proves inadequate, though, as the chaos of the war pervades every aspect of Griffin's existence, and finally results in his detachment--as a plant--from the world, leaving him with the sole function of propagating his new-found species as a drug-age Johnny Appleseed.

The double-layered structure of the novel, then, provides a method of satisfying two of the chief goals of this literature. It creates a form capable of expressing something of the experience of Vietnam through the larger structures of a closed text and revelatory fictions. As well, it simulates the chaos of Vietnam through the presentation of a character who is literally engulfed by the war's confusion and disorder. However, both levels of structure are incompletely understood if we ignore one last aspect of their forms--the specific narrative devices which allow each level to present its particular vision of Griffin. In keeping with the need which exists on both structural levels to present the war as truly and as honestly as possible, cinematic techniques adapted to fiction are used by both the implied author and Griffin to realistically

portray the war, the drugged delusions, and Griffin's various realities in all their graphic detail. Further, to convey some sense of the multifaceted nature of the war and of the corresponding sense of fragmentation which is experienced by the characters in the war, Wright relies heavily on the principle of montage to organize his novel. As a result, most of the visual scenes in the novel and the organization of the work as a whole are primarily the product of narrative techniques adapted from cinema and applied to this fiction.

In accordance with the extreme distance which the implied narrator and Griffin try to maintain from the war and the immediate fictional environment, the most common narrative technique adapted from cinema which is used in Meditations in Green is the long shot, which frames scenes at a distance, encompassing a variety of elements of which the major character is only one. The novel opens with such a shot as it situates the plant in the window sill within a much broader background which includes the five story building, the mile and a half of cemented ground, the "colorless sky, lusterless sun, [and the] sooty field of rusted television antennas" (p. 1). Moreover, the sense of the long shot is heightened by the plant's suggestion that "a pair of strong field glasses" would be necessary to see its details. This initial sense of distance is significant in that it removes both the implied author and the reader from immediate emotional proximity with the plant and therefore from the narrator it represents. For the implied author, this provides a further level of authorial control in that being distanced from the work, he should ostensibly be more objective in his presentation of what follows. For the reader, such a distance subtly suggests that what follows will be all too immediate and horrific, and that the

emotional detachment offered in this first passage should be accepted as a necessary protection from what follows. In a sense, then, the distance and detachment implied by the long shot which opens the novel establishes both the reader's and the implied author's stance in relation to the text.

Similar long shots are also used for the initial presentation of Griffin-as-veteran and Griffin-as-soldier as the first is seen as just one figure on the streets of urban America (p. 2) and the second is presented as an insignificant "warp in the symmetry" in the line of bunks in the barracks (p. 9). Each long shot is meant to distance the reader from the events which are to be narrated in that particular narrative strand while at the same time providing enough details through its inclusive form to lure the reader on into the story. Thus, the first presentation of Griffin-as-veteran includes several bizarre examples of his customary conduct which stimulate the interest of the reader about this character--though the examples are not so strange that they would deter the reader from continuing. The actions recorded are harmless enough, as Griffin "burst[s] into violent sidewalk imprecations on the government" and sits on a garbage can in the street "watching the heads bob up and down the avenue like poppies in a spring meadow until the constant nodding movement turned unreal, the slow agitation of pink marine life swaying in tempo to oceanic tunes" (p. 2). The particular behavior recorded is, however, probably sufficiently idiosyncratic to cause the reader to continue in the novel.

Close-ups are also used in Meditations in Green, most frequently to establish either an incident of chaos which epitomizes the war or an incident of extreme order which is antithetical to the war's true nature.

These close-ups, even the latter variety, paradoxically, are meant to reveal the chaos of the war through explicit detail. This may be done directly through such scenes of horror as when the search and rescue unit arrives at the crash site and finds that

> The crew and passengers of the downed helicopter were hanging at spaced intervals from the rotor blades, strung up by the necks with twisted lengths of bicycle wire . . . Their unbuttoned unzipped pants drooped in folds about their ankles. Groins and thighs were black with stale blood, alive with insect movement. Protruding between the lips of each mouth was a small grey mushroom, the severed remains of each man's penis. Swollen faces had begun to turn colors. Body fluids dripped off boot soles like leaking motor oil, staining the grass and providing puddles of nourishment for thirsty ants and centipedes. In the stillness the sun buzzed like a fluorescent lamp. One of Major Quimby's boots was missing and revealed, dangling in midair, a long bony foot whose green sock, heavy with blood, had begun slipping off. (p. 263)

This nauseating account of mutilation is meant to convey several aspects of the war's chaos--the destruction wrought on machinery, the intense inhumanity of man to man, and the inevitable victory over man exercised by Vietnam and symbolized the "thirsty ants and centipedes" who feed on the dead men's "body fluids."

Close-ups, though, are not limited in their function to merely detailing graphic or horrifying events. They can be just as effective, in both their descriptive and structural functions, by focusing on a paragon of external order. Perhaps the epitome of this is Major Holly who is "blessed with The Look:"

> Blue eyes protected by the thick lenses of gold aviator frames. The hair, short as putting-green grass, too short to reflect any definite color. Firm jaw. Cleft chin. A sea captain's wrinkles. Just one minor flaw, tiny, hardly noticeable. High on the left cheek rested a brown velvety mole . . . Hair proliferated there . . . It was as if one minuscule but prominent spot had deliberately seceded from the austere well-tended country of his face, had gone soft, mushy, fertile. (p. 87)

As the camera comes close up onto Holly's face, the reader is shown a paradigm of American command level personnel--and the corresponding facade which, while it looks good, contains a soft spot similar to Holly's mole. The presentation of such ordered, near-perfection in the midst of the chaos of the war, however, does not endue the war with any more form. Instead, it rather intensifies the chaos in counterpoint. The order suggested by Holly's appearance is just as ineffectual in countering the chaos of the war as his effort to clean up the 1069th Military Intelligence base is. Just as his efforts to bring order to the compound cause superficial order and an outburst of real chaos and violence, so his classic appearance is paradoxically not a symbol of order but of chaos simply waiting for free expression.

Pans are the last of the significant cinematic techniques which appear in Meditations in Green. Their principal narrative function is to trace the panoramic visions which Griffin is subject to when he is on drugs. One such instance occurs when Griffin is inebriated in the city and sees Indians everywhere. The pan is provided through his eyes as he is also the first-person narrator in this passage. Consequently, as the scene is presented, Griffin's camera-like vision sweeps the area, seeing Indians on the sidewalks, on brownstone steps, at the bus stop, outside a movie house, and in the unemployment lines as his focus pans across his immediate environment (p. 69). Experiencing his delusions primarily in visual terms, Griffin provides the reader access to his hallucinations by showing a series of quite choppy scenes in a fluid pan across an entire episode. As a result, in the above example, as in other passages from his hallucinations, pans add an aspect of verisimilitude to Griffin's very fertile mental life. The scenes that occur only in his mind are

also a part of what he has become and, through pans, they are made available to the reader as a measure of his development.

Similar to the pan in that it allows the exposure of a variety of scenes in quick succession, the principle of montage encompasses broader stretches of text and makes no effort to make the progression of scenes seem fluid. Rather, it intentionally increases the fragmentation of the text as Wright juxtaposes scenes of the past, scenes of the present, and scenes from a variety of settings against each other to convey the experience of the Vietnam War. That is, by presenting an artistic clash of scenes--their pace and contents--Wright hopes to approximate in the mind of the reader what the war was like with its many unconnected incidents occurring simultaneously--some of domestic life, some of destruction, and some of distraction. This process is further heightened in Meditations in Green because of the presence of the three narrative strands which provide an even wider variety of material to be juxtaposed. And, since Meditations in Green is one of the few Vietnam War novels to cover both the war and the veterans' return home as part of the same story, montage has the added value of simulating flashbacks--in the psychological sense as well as in the obvious literary sense.

One section of the novel which represents all of these aspects in quick succession is that which follows the third "Meditation." In the space of thirty-one pages, there are thirty-three breaks in the text which cut from one scene to the next with no transition other than some vague sense of relationship between the scenes. In these pages, the focus shifts rapidly, including such scenes as a plant and his family undergoing an air strike (p. 33), Trips visiting in Griffin's apartment in the United States (pp. 34-37), Griffin at work in Vietnam inside a

Quonset hut (p. 39), an interrogation occurring in the adjacent Quonset hut (pp. 40-42), a pile of coffins (p. 46), Mueller's hut (p. 46), Wurlizter nauseated in his plane (pp.49-52), Simon's letter home (p.54) Joe the barber pacing (pp. 36), and Wendell working on his film (pp. 56-57)--to name just a few of the scenes contained in this section. To close the chapter, and as if to emphasize the fragmented nature of the section, Wright wraps up his passage with a twenty-six line, two hundred and seventy-five word sentence summarizing what many characters are doing in Vietnam. The result of this grand endeavor is a reinforcement of the sense of fragmentation created through Wright's use of juxtaposition and montage. A further result, though, is a sense of control over the entire narrative creation as Wright carefully manipulates each aspect of The Board and of his novel as he exercises his godlike spatial and psychological omniscience. Therefore, when the passage is taken as an entirety, a lasting impression of unity emerges which demonstrates that the end product most truly can be greater than the sum of its parts.

As with that of One Very Hot Day and The Short-Timers, the structure of Meditations in Green has a distinctive style which is significantly influenced by and complementary to that particular aspect of the Vietnam War which the novel presents. Meditations in Green is focused on a unit that specialized in Military Intelligence--that particularly elusive commodity in which "A wish became a guess, a guess an estimate, an estimate the reality" (p. 206). Because of this elusive subject matter, the novel deals with a variety of artistic, psychological, and pharmaceutical methods by which the experience of Vietnam may be contained. Most often, of course, the war only appears to be contained as the characters, the narrator-protagonist, and the implied author

search for functional means, which are in fact "guesses," by which the chaos of Vietnam may be expressed in an honest, but also a coherent manner. In accordance with the dual function of the novel to both contain and reveal the war, therefore, every aspect of the novel has immediate structural and thematic relevance as it works concurrently with all others to maintain the larger unity of the text. That is, the two structural levels operate in harmony, together containing Wright's particular vision of the war while simultaneously revealing a very real sense of Vietnam's essential chaos through the use of montage as an organizing principle, through the use of narrative techniques adapted from cinema, and through the dehumanization of Griffin as it is narrated in the sub-structure. Beginning the novel as a plant held captive in a slum apartment, and ending the novel as an agent of propagation, Griffin is offered as Wright's final assessment of the Vietnam War and its dismal impact on at least part of America.

# Notes

1 William Luhr and Peter Lehman, Authorship and Narrative in the Cinema: Issues in Contemporary Aesthetics and Criticism (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1977), p. 181.

2 Seymour Chatman, Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 48.

# Conclusion

Because the Vietnam War was a completely intractable event, those who attempt to capture the experience of the war within the confines of fiction are faced with a nearly insurmountable problem. If they try to deal with Vietnam within the straightforward forms of conventional war literature which simply tell stories of heroism, cowardice, or wartime existence, the authors of this most recent war's fiction may fail to convey the true nature of Vietnam in all of its complexity and horror. If they do not retain a comprehensible form for their war fiction, however, the authors may also fail to convey anything at all about Vietnam in that their tales of the war would collapse in on themselves, reduced by the very chaos of the war to a senseless morass of meaningless words and phrases. Therefore, the challenge which exists for the authors of this literature is to find some form by which something of the Vietnam experience may be expressed while not compromising the war's essentially chaotic nature.

For David Halberstam, Gustav Hasford, and Stephen Wright, the functional method by which they can balance the chaos of the war and the form of art is found in a double-layered fictional structure. By creating a larger structure for the text as a whole by which they can control all aspects of the fictions, these authors are able to contain effectively their particular visions of the war. Within this larger frame of total control, the authors each create a single character who, functioning as the narrator-protagonist, experiences and manifests the total chaos of Vietnam. Then, attempting to simulate the convoluted nature of the war, the authors heighten the paradox of chaos and control which is presented in their fictions by having their protagonists mimic the author's methods of containment. Though the characters' efforts are

doomed to fail because of their immediate involvement with Vietnam, their futile attempts at control intensify the reader's sense of the chaos as Vietnam succeeds in corrupting and dehumanizing the protagonists. Further, it also increases the reader's awareness of the artistic control over the material as well as that over some small part of the war which is achieved through the larger structure. This constant interplay of form and chaos, of illusion and reality, of fiction and the war, creates the paradox which allows an honest expression of the Vietnam War and which is at the heart of One Very Hot Day, The Short-Timers, and Meditations in Green.

Working with paradox and incorporating it into both the form and content of their novels, Halberstam, Hasford, and Wright convey some truth about the Vietnam War not only in what they present, but also in how they present it. Such a concentrated and comprehensive approach to the Vietnam War is a functional and highly effective means of relating at least some limited truth about the Vietnam War through fiction. Though the authors choose different specifics for their protagonists, placing them in diverse times, locations, and assignments in Vietnam, each comes to the same basic conclusion about Vietnam and about its influence on those who participated in the war: the war dehumanizes and corrupts the humanity of those in it and nothing attempted by its participants can truly counter this effect.

All that can be done, even after the fact, is simply to retell what the war has made the men, for as O'Brien says, all that is left after the war are "simple unprofound scraps of truth."[1] As O'Brien summarizes it, there can be no profound truth of the war, no great message literature of Vietnam. He sees the entire occurrence only in terms of basic facts:

> Men die. Fear hurts and humiliates. It is hard to be brave. It is hard to know what bravery is. Dead human beings are heavy and awkward to carry, things smell different in Vietnam, soldiers are dreamers, drill sergeants are boors, some men thought the war was proper and others didn't and most didn't care. Is that the stuff for a morality lesson, even for a theme?
>
> Do dreams offer lessons? Do nightmares have themes, do we awaken and analyze them and live our lives and advise others as a result? Can the foot soldier teach anything important about war, merely for having been there? I think not. He can tell war stories. 2

Since Hasford, Wright, and Halberstam (after a fashion) are all veterans of the Vietnam War, they offer their own "war stories" in their particular double-layered structures as their efforts to purge themselves of the experience, as their attempt to wrest some sense of order and meaning from their time in Vietnam, and finally as indictments of their war and of its influence on many of the men involved with it. Given the peculiar nature of the Vietnam War, this is enough.

## Notes

1 Tim O'Brien, *If I Die in a Combat Zone, Box Me Up and Ship Me Home* (New York: Dell Publishing, Co., 1969), p. 31.

2 O'Brien, pp. 31-32.

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Appendix:

Glossary

AA: an anti-aircraft weapon

AC: an aircraft commander; the pilot in charge of the aircraft

"Acting Jack": the acting NCO

"Actual": the unit commander; used to distinguish the commander from the radioman when the call sign was used

ADSID: an air-delivered seismic intruder device; microphone and transmitter dropped into suspect areas

Advance Guard Youth: a Vietnamese student social and sports organization that evolved into a non-Communist nationalistic movement by 1945

AFVN: the American Forces Vietnam Network

AGL: above ground level

"A-gunner": an assistant gunner

AHB: an assault helicopter battalion

AID: the (United States) Agency for International Development

Airborne: refers to soldiers who are qualified as parachutists

"Air Cav": air cavalry; helicopter-borne infantry; helicopter gunship assault teams

Airmobile: refers to soldiers who are transported to battle in helicopters

AIT: Advanced Infantry Training; usually followed Basic Training for enlisted personnel

AJ: the "Acting Jack"

AK: an AK-47

AK-47: the Russian-made Kalashnikov semi-automatic or automatic 7.62mm assault rifle; characterized by an explosive popping sound; standard infantry piece of the NVA and the VC

"Ammo dump": a safe location where live or expended ammunition is stored

Amtrack/Amphtrac: an amphibious armored vehicle used to transport troops and supplies

AO/A-O: the area of operations; in rear areas may connote a sleeping area or bunk as in " My AO is . . . ."

ao-dais: a type of female dress; a long dress-like garment, split up the sides and worn over pants

APC: an armored personnel carrier, a track vehicle used to transport troops or supplies, usually armed with a .50-caliber machine gun

APH-5: the helmet worn by gunship pilots

APO: the Army Post Office located in San Francisco for overseas mail to Vietnam

AP Rounds: armor-piercing ammunition

ARA: an aerial rocket artillery; a Cobra AG-1H helicopter with four XM-159C 19-rocket (2.75 inch rocket) pods

Arc light: a B-52 bomber strike, shaking earth for ten miles away from the target area

ArCOM: the Army Commendation Medal

Article 15: a section of the Uniform Code of Military Justice; a form of nonjudicial punishment meted out by an officer to enlisted personnel

"Arty": artillery

ARVN ("Arvin"): the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (or a member thereof); the South Vietnamese Regular Army

AWOL: Absent Without Leave; leaving a post or a position without permission

Azimuth: a compass bearing from North

B-40: a Communist bloc, shoulder-fired, rocket-propelled grenade launcher; also, the rounds fired as in B-40 rockets

B-52: a strategic high-altitude American bomber converted for conventional bombing over Vietnam; also, a can opener (church key type)

bac bac: to shoot; to engage in battle; from the Vietnamese ban ban

bac se: a medical corpsman; Vietnamese for "doctor"

"Bad paper": a dishonorable discharge

"Ballgame": an operation or contact

ba muoi ba: a type of Vietnamese beer

"Band-aid": a medic

Banana clip: an ammunition magazine holding 30 bullets

bao chi: Vietnamese for "correspondent," "press," or "news media"

BAR: a Browning Automatic Rifle; a .30-caliber magazine-fed automatic rifle used by U.S. troops during World War II and Korea

Base camp: a permanent base; brigade or division size headquarters; also known as the rear area; a resupply base for field units and a location for headquarters units, artillery batteries, and air fields

"Basic": Basic Training or Boot Camp

"Basketball ship": an illumination-dropping (flare) helicopter; capable of lighting approximately a square mile of terrain

Battalion: a military unit composed of a headquarters and two or more companies, batteries, or similar units

Battery: an artillery unit the equivalent of a company; six 105mm or 155mm howitzers or two 8-inch or 175 mm self-propelled howitzers

Battle-sight zeroing: the process of adjusting a weapon's sights and windage to an individual soldier so that the weapon, when fired, will hit the object of aim

BCD: a Bad Conduct Discharge

BCT: Basic Combat Training or Boot Camp

BDA: a bomb damage assessment

"Beans and mothers": a C-ration delicacy composed of lima beans and ham

beaucoup: French for "much"; used in Vietnam as an intensifier meaning "very"; often pronounced "boo coo"; many thought it was Vietnamese

beaucoup dien cai dau: roughly translated--"very crazy" or "insane"

Beehive round: an explosive artillery shell which delivered thousands of small projectiles instead of shrapnel

Berm: the perimeter line of a fortification; usually raised above surrounding area

bic: Vietnamese for "understand?"

"Big Red One": the nickname for the 1st Infantry Division

"Big Twenty": an Army career of 20 years

"Bird": any aircraft, but usually a helicopter

"Bird dog": a FAC usually in a small, maneuverable single-engined prop airplane

"Biscuit": a C-ration

BLA: the Black Liberation Army

Blood trail: a trail of blood left on the ground by a fleeing man who had been wounded

"Bloods": Black soldiers

"Blooper": the nickname for the M-79 grenade launcher, a 40-millimeter, shotgunlike weapon that shoots spin-armed "balls," or small grenades

"Blown away": slang for "killed"

Blue feature: any water feature, so called because of the color used to designate water on topographic maps

Body bag: a plastic bag used for the retrieval of dead bodies on the battlefield

"Boom-boom": slang for "sex"; term used by the Vietnamese prostitutes in selling their product

"Boondoggle": any military operation that has not been completely thought out; an operation that is ridiculous

"Boonie hat": the soft hat worn by infantrymen in the field

"Boonierat": an infantryman or "grunt"

"Boonies": the field, the bush, the jungle; any place the infantry operates that is not a fire base, base camp, or ville; derived from "boondock"

"Boot": a soldier just out of boot camp, inexperienced, untested

BOQ: the bachelor officers' quarters; living quarters for officers

"Bouncing Betty": a mine that flies up out of the ground and explodes about waist high; designed to kill and disable

"Bought the farm": died and life insurance policy paid for the mortgage

Bowl: a pipe used for smoking drugs

"Brass monkey": the interagency radio call for help

Breaking squelch: the process of disrupting the natural static of a radio by depressing the transmit bar on another radio set on the same frequency

"Brew": usually coffee, but sometimes beer

Brigade: a tactical and administrative military unit composed of a headquarters and one or more battalions of infantry or armor, with other supporting units

"Bring smoke": to shoot someone

"Broken-down": a weapon or machine which is disassembled

"Bronco": a twin-engine observation aircraft equipped with rockets and miniguns

Bronze Star: the U.S. military decoration awarded for heroic or meritorious service not involving aerial flights

"Buckle": to fight; "Buckle for your dust": to fight furiously

"Buddha Zone": death

"Bummer": a bad occurrence

"Bush": the outer field areas where only infantry units operated in non-permanent positions

"Busting caps": the process of firing a weapon; probably derived from the paper percussion caps used in toy guns

C-4: a powerful plastic explosive which burns like Sterno when lit; used for cooking as well as detonating; carried in one-pound bars

C-123: a small cargo airplane; "The Caribou"

C-130: a medium cargo airplane; "The Hercules"

C-141: a large cargo airplane; "The Starlifter"

CA: a combat assault

Cache: hidden supplies

cam on: Vietnamese for "thank you"

can cuoc: Vietnamese for "identification card"

CAP: Civil Action Program; Americans working with Vietnamese civilians to improve their lives

"Capping": the process of shooting at someone or something

Carbine: a short-barreled, lightweight automatic or semiautomatic rifle

CAR-15: a carbine rifle; short-barreled, lightweight, semi/automatic

Cartridge: the shell casing for a bullet

"Caught his lunch": slang for "killed"

"Cav": Cavalry; short form term for 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile)

CC: the Company Commander

C and C: the Command and Control aircraft (usually a helicopter) that circled overhead to direct the combined air and ground operations

CG: the Commanding General

CH-47: a Chinook

CH-54: the largest of all American helicopters, strictly for cargo; also called "The Flying Crane" or "Skycrane"

"Charlie": the enemy; from the military phonetic alphabet designation of the Viet Cong (VC) as "Victor Charlie"

"Cherry": a new soldier; denotes youth, inexperience and virginity

"Chi-Com"/"Chicom": a Chinese communist; used in conjunction with an object, it denoted manufactured in Red China; used alone usually meant a Chinese manufactured hand grenade

chieu hoi: Vietnamese for "open arms"; an amnesty program to encourage enemy soldiers to surrender and rally to the Army of South Vietnam

"Chinook": a large, twin-rotor cargo helicopter, shaped like a bread box; a CH-47 cargo helicopter often referred to as a "Shit-hook" because of the discomfort caused by the rotor wash to anyone in the vicinity of its landing

Chogi stick: a pole used for carrying baskets

chop-chop: Vietnamese slang for "food"

"Chopper": a generic slang term for "helicopter"

CIA: the Central Intelligence Agency

CIB: the Combat Infantrymen's Badge; an Army award for being under fire in a combat zone

CID: the Criminal Investigation Division of the Army

CIDG: the Civilian Irregular Defense Groups; ethnic minorities trained by U.S. Special Forces for village defense or commando operations

CINCPAC: Commander in Chief of all American Forces in the Pacific Region

Claymore mine: a fragmentation, anti-personnel mine with a one-pound charge of C-4 behind 600 small steel balls; propels shrapnel in a 60-degree fan-shaped pattern to a maximum distance of 100 meters; its lethal range is approximately fifty meters

Clearance: the permission from both military and politicians to engage enemy in a particular area

"Clip": an ammunition magazine

Close Air Support: the use of airplanes and helicopters to fire on enemy units near allied personnel

CMH/CMOH: the Congressional Medal of Honor; the highest U.S. military decoration awarded for conspicuous gallantry at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty

CO: Commanding Officer or Conscientious Objector depending on context

"Cobra": an assault helicopter armed with rockets and machine guns

co cong: the Vietnamese term for the female Viet Cong; from the word co meaning "girl" or "young woman"

Code of Conduct: the military rules for U.S. soldiers taken prisoner

"Comics"/"funny papers": topographic maps

"Commo": short hand for "communications"

"Commo wire": a communications wire

Company: a military unit usually consisting of a headquarters and two or more platoons

Company Uniform: a UHF radio frequency on which the team or the company communicates; frequencies were changed periodically in an attempt to confuse the enemy

Compound: a fortified military installation

Concertina wire: the barbed wire that is rolled out along the ground to impede the progress of ground troops

Connex: a large corrugated metal packing crate, approximately six feet in length; often used as shelter atop fire bases

Contact: firing on or being fired upon by the enemy

CONUS: the Continental United States

Coordinates: the numbers that indicate specific place in the field when a unit needs to identify its exact location over the radio; used when calling in artillery, helicopters, and mortars; see YD

CORDS: Civilan Operations and Revolutionary Development Support; created by civilian administration, MACV, and CIA to coordinate American pacification efforts

COSVN: the Central Office for South Vietnam; Communist headquarters in the South; thought to be located in Cambodia, but was never found

Counterinsurgency: anti-guerilla warfare

"Cowboys": Saigon street toughs, often ARVN deserters or draft evaders; from the Vietnamese term for these people, cao boi

CP: a command post; units which were platoon-sized or larger established command posts in order to coordinate the activities of the unit from a central point

CQ: Charge of Quarters; the officer who was officially in charge of a unit headquarters at night

"C-rats"/"rations": combat rations; the standard meals eaten in the bush; provided in cartons containing twelve different meals, complete with such extras as instant coffee and cigarettes; [Del Vecchio: "After two weeks they all taste the same." The 13th Valley, p. 650]

"Crispy critters": burn victims; often from napalm or white phosphorus

CS: a riot-control gas; teargas

Cyclo: a motorized three-wheel rickshaw

DA: the Department of the Army

dac cong: the Viet Cong Special Forces

"Daily-daily": the anti-malarial pills which were taken daily

dai-uy ("dai-wee"): the Vietnamese Army rank which was the equivalent of Captain; other ARVN officer ranks include chung-uy--Aspirant (equivalent to 3rd Lieutenant), tieu-uy--2nd Lieutenant, trung-uy--1st Lieutenant, tieu-ta--Major, trung-ta--Lieutenant Colonel, dai-ta--Colonel

"Dap": a soul handshake and greeting which may last up to ten minutes, which is characterized by the use of both hands, which is and often comprised of slaps and snaps of the fingers; highly ritualized and unit specific

dau: Vietnamese for "pain"

DCI: Director, Central Intelligence; the director of the CIA

"Deadlined": a machine or weapon which was down for repairs

DEROS: Date of Estimated Return from Overseas; date a soldier is scheduled to go home or the act of going home

"Deuce-and-a-half": a two-and-a half-ton truck

DFC: the Distinguished Flying Cross

DI: a Drill Instructor (Sgt.)

DIA: the Defense Information Agency

"Diddy-bopping": carelessly walking

"didi": slang from the Vietnamese word di, meaning "to leave" or "to go"

"didi mau": from the Vietnamese didi mau lieu/len meaning "to run quickly"

"Dime": the number ten

"Dime-nickel": a 105mm howitzer

"Dink": a derogatory term for the Vietnamese people

"dinky dau": to be crazy; from the Vietnamese "dien cau dau" meaning literally, "off the wall"

"Disneyland": the Pentagon

"Disneyland East": the MACV complex including annex

DMZ/"the Z": the De-Militarized Zone; the seventeenth parallel area that divided North and South Vietnam, running from Laos to the South China Sea; was "de-militarized" by the 1954 Geneva Accords; also, the scene of the major set battles with the NVA

"Doc": a medic or corpsman

Dogtags: the small, aluminum, identification tags worn by soldiers; the tags were imprinted with a man's name, serial number, religion, and blood type

"Door gunner": soldier who mans M-60 machine gun mounted in side hatch of Huey gunship

DP: a displaced person

D-ring: a D-shaped metal snap link used to hold gear together

"Drops": the reduction in length of tour caused by overall reduction and withdrawal of American forces in Vietnam

DRV/DRVN: the Democratic Republic of (North) Vietnam

DSC: the Distinguished Service Cross, the second-highest award (next to CMH)

DTs: defensive targets

dung lai: Vietnamese for "stop!"

"Dust-off": medical evacuation by helicopter

DX: Direct Exchange; also, to discard or dispose of; therefore, by extension, to kill someone

E-1: Private One; the lowest army pay grade (E stands for enlisted; pay grades run from E-1 to E-11)

E-2: Private Two

E-3: Lance Corporal

E-4: Corporal

E-5: Sergeant; lowest ranking NCO

E-6: Staff Sergeant; second lowest NCO rank

E-7: Sergeant First Class

E and E: Escape and Evasion

Eagle flights: a large air assault of helicopters

"Early-Outs": a drop or reduction in time in service; a soldier with 150 days or less remaining on his active duty commitment when he DEROSed from Vietnam also ETSed from the army under the Early Out program; for some, this was an incentive to serve more than the required year in Vietnam so they would not have a military commitment left when they returned to the United States

ECM: electronic counter measures

Elephant grass: the tall, razor-edged tropical plant indigenous to certain parts of Vietnam

"Eleven Bravo"/"11-B": the job title code of an infantryman

EM: Enlisted Men

EM club: an Enlisted Men's club

EOD: explosive ordnance disposal; a team that disarms explosive devices

"E-tool"/"E-T": an entrenching tool; a small collapsible shovel, pick and mattock combined in one instrument

ETS: the Estimated Termination of Service; the scheduled date for getting out of the army or the process of doing so

"Evac": an evacuation hospital; "evac'd": evacuated

F-4s: Phantom Jet fighter-bombers; range-1000 miles, speed--1400mph, payload--16,000 lbs; the workhorse of the tactical air support fleet

F-105: a jet fighter-bomber used by the U.S. Air Force

FAC: a Forward Air Controller; a person who coordinates air strikes

Fatigues: the standard combat uniform which was green in color

FDC: Fire Direction Control (Artillery)

Field phone: hand-generated portable phones used in bunkers

Finger charge: an explosive booby-trapping device; the name refers to its size and shape which is about that of a man's finger

Fire base: a temporary combat base set up in hostile territory from which patrols are sent out to search for the enemy; usually on a hill or ridge, it would be secured by the infantry and supplied by helicopter (also referred to as FB)

Fire-fight: the exchange of small-arms fire with the enemy

"First Louie": a First Lieutenant

"Five": the radio call signal for the executive officer of a unit

Flak jacket: the heavy fiberglass-filled vest worn for protection from shrapnel

"Flaky": to be in a state of mental disarray characterized by spaciness and various forms of unreasoning fear

Flare: an illumination projectile; hand-fired or shot from artillery, mortars, or air

Fleshette: anti-personnel rounds which burst after travelling a certain distance, saturating the immediate area with dart-shaped nails; a small dart-shaped projectile clustered in an explosive warhead

FM: a field manual

FNG: a Fucking New Guy

FO: a Forward Observer; a person attached to a field unit to coordinate the placement of direct or indirect fire from ground, air, and naval forces

Foo gas: a mixture of explosives and napalm which was usually set in a fifty-gallon drum

4-F: draft classification given those deemed unfit for military service

"Frag": a fragmentation hand grenade

"Fragging": the murder of officers or NCOs by enlisted men; name derived from the frequent use of fragmentation grenades for this purpose

"Freak": a radio frequency; also, a drug user, a "junkie" or "pothead"

"Freedom Bird": the plane that took soldiers from Vietnam back to the U.S.

Free fire zone: an area in which a soldier is free to fire at anything

French fort: a distinctive triangular structure built by the hundreds by the French

Friendly fire: accidental attacks on U.S. or allied soldiers by other U.S. or allied forces

FWMAF: the Free World Military Assistance Forces; the Allies

G-3: a division level tactical advisor; a staff officer

G-5: civil affairs; staff section of a military division responsible for relations with the civilian population

Garand: the M-1 rifle that was replaced by the M-14; issued to the Vietnamese early in the war

"Get some!": a common exhortation to kill the enemy

GI: Government Issue; also, slang for "American soldier"

"Glad bag": a slang term for the bag which was used to wrap a dead body

"Gook": a generic derogatory term for any Oriental person; Korean slang for "person," passed down by Korean War veterans and others who had served in Korea

"Greased": slang for "killed"

Green Berets: the U.S. Army Special Forces; identified by their distinctive head gear

"Greens": the Army Class A uniform

GR Point: the Graves Registration Point; that place on a military base where identification, embalming, and processing of dead soldiers takes place as part of the operations of the quartermaster

"Grunt": an American infantryman

"Gung ho": enthusiastic; enthusiasm; Chinese for "working together"

Gunship: early in the war, it meant any extra heavily armed helicopter used primarily to support infantry troops; later, it referred to a Cobra AH-1H equipped with a particular configuration of rockets, 40mm cannons, and mini-guns

Gurney: a stretcher with wheels

GVN: the Government of (South) Vietnam

H and I: Harassment and Interdiction; random artillery fire at general targets; designed to deny the enemy terrain which he might find beneficial to his campaign

Hamlet: a small rural village

HE: High Explosives, usually with reference to artillery and mortar shells

"Heads": men who used marijuana

"Heart": a Purple Heart; a wound; "Three Heart Rule": any Marine who was wounded three times during one combat tour was immediately removed from the combat zone

Heat tabs: an inflammable tablet used to heat C-rations

HHC: Headquarters and Headquarters Company

"Higher-higher": the command or commanders; the "honchos"

Ho Chi Minh slippers: sandals made from tires--soles made from the tread and straps made from the inner tubes

hoi chanh: a defector under the chieu hoi program

"Honcho": slang for a "unit leader"

"Hook": a radio; a radio handset

"Hootch": any dwelling, whether temporary, as in a Marine poncho hootch, or reasonably permanent, as in a Vietnamese villager's home

"Hootch girl": a young Vietnamese woman employed by the American military as a maid or a laundress

"Horn": a radio handset

"Hot": an area under fire

Howitzer: a short cannon used to fire shells at medium velocity and with relatively high trajectories

HQ: Headquarters

"Hueys": UH-1 helicopters of various series; a Utility helicopter used for troop insertion/extraction, medical evacuations, and observation of the field of battle by command personnel; also called "slicks"

"Hump": to march with a heavy load; to patrol carrying a rucksack; to walk; to perform any arduous task

IC: an Installation Commander

ICEX: the Intelligence Coordination and Exploitation Program

ICP: the Indochinese Communist Party

I Corps ("eye"-Corps): the northernmost military region of South Vietnam

II Corps: the Central Highlands military region in South Vietnam

III Corps: the densely populated, fertile military region between Saigon and the highlands

IV Corps: the marshy Mekong Delta southernmost military region

IG: the Inspector General

Immersion foot: a condition resulting from feet being submerged in water for a prolonged period of time causing cracking and bleeding

"Incoming": any enemy artillery, mortars, rockets, or grenades coming into a troop location; also, used as a shouted warning to take cover

"In-Country": term used to refer to American troops operating in Vietnam

Increments: removable propellant charges attached to mortar fins; if they become wet, the mortar round would misfire and fall short

Insert: to be deployed into a tactical area by helicopter

Intelligence: any information about enemy operations; can include troop movements, weapons capabilities, biographies of enemy commanders and general information about terrain features; essentially, any information that would be useful in planning a mission

IP: that point in a mission where descent toward target begins

"J": a joint, marijuana cigarette

JAG: Judge Advocate General; the legal department of the armed services

JCS: the Joint Chiefs of Staff

"Jesus Nut": the bolt that holds the rotor blade to the helicopter; the bolt was nicknamed "Jesus nut" because a helicopter without it was as aerodynamically viable as a falling safe; the assumption, therefore, was that if the "Jesus nut" was shot off, only Jesus could help the men inside the helicopter

"Jet Jockey": an Air Force fighter pilot

"Jody": the person who wins your lover while you are in Viet Nam; from the cadence count or marching song, "Ain't no use in going home/ Jody's got your girl and gone/Sound of . . . ." [Del Vecchio]

"Juicers": alcohol drinkers as opposed to "dopers" or "heads" who used marijuana or opium as the preferred form of escape

Jungle boots: footwear that looks like a combination of combat boot and canvas sneaker used by U.S. military in tropical climates where leather rots because of the dampness; had vent holds to let water out and metal plates in the soles to resist punji sticks; canvas structure also speeds drying after crossing streams or rice paddies

Jungle utilities: lightweight, tropical fatigues

"Junk": drugs or dope; often opium

"k" ("kay"): a kilometer

KBA: killed by artillery

K-bar: a military knife

KBH: killed by helicopter

KCS: a Kit Carson Scout; a former Viet Cong who defected and actively aided Americans units; worked as a guide, an interpreter and a scout under the Luc Long 66 Program

khong biet: Vietnamese for "I don't know"

KIA: killed in action

Killing zone: the area within an ambush where everyone is killed or wounded

"Klick": a kilometer

"Kool-aid": killed in action

KP: the kitchen police (usually in reference to a kitchen detail); mess hall duty

LAAW: Light Anti-tank Weapon; a 66mm rocket in a collapsible, disposable firing tube made of Fiberglas; effective against bunkers

lai dai: Vietnamese for "come here!"

LBJ: Long Binh Jail; the main military stockade which was located on Long Binh post

LCM: a medium-sized landing craft; a boat used to transport troops from ship to shore

"Legs": a derogatory term used by airborne-qualified troops in talking about regular infantry

"Lifeline": the straps holding gunny aboard chopper while he fires M-60 out the hatch

"Lifers": a derogatory term for career military personnel

"Lima lima": a "land line"; refers to telephone communication between two points on the ground

Litters: stretchers to carry the wounded and dead

"Little people": the enemy

LLDB: Luc Luong Dac Biet; an intelligence gathering operation carried out by the Special Forces against the VCI and the NLF

LMG: a light machine gun; the Russian made RPD; a bi-pod mounted, belt fed weapon similar to the American M-60 machine gun; fires the same cartridge as the AK-47 and the SKS carbine

LOC: lines of communication

"Log Bird": a logistical (resupply) helicopter

LOH ("loach"): light observation helicopter

LP: a listening post, where a fire team went outside the perimeter in order to give advance warning of any probe or attack; also, an amphibious landing platform used by infantry for storming beaches from the sea

LRRP ("lurp"): a Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol (or a member thereof); an elite team usually comprised of five to seven men who would go deep into the jungle to observe enemy activity without initiating contact

LSA: gun oil

LST: a troop landing ship

LT: a lieutenant

LZ: a landing zone where helicopters land to take on or discharge troops or supplies; usually a clearing in a rural area

M-1: a World War II-vintage American rifle

M-3: a .45 caliber submachine gun; the slow rate of fire meant the barrel did not rise and that the user did not burn through his ammunition as quickly as he did with some of his other weapons; it was also known as a "Grease Gun";

M-14: a wood stock rifle used in early portion of Vietnam conflict (until 1966); fires the standard NATO 7.62mm round

M-16: the standard American assault rifle in Vietnam; gas-operated, air cooled automatic/semi-automatic 5.56mm rifle weighing 7.6 lbs. with a 20-round magazine; fires 5.56mm ammunition; successor to the M-14; called "The Mattel"

M-26: a fragmentation grenade

M-60: the standard American light machine gun in Vietnam; 7.62mm barrel; often called "The Gun"

M-79: an American hand-held, single-shot 40mm grenade launcher; grenades fired may be high explosive, white phosphorus, or canister; called "The Thumper"

MA: a mechanical ambush; euphemism for American-set booby trap

MAAG: Military Aid and Assistance Group

MACV ("Mac-vee"): Military Assistance Command, Vietnam; replaced MAAG in 1964 as the main American military command unit that had responsibility for and authority over all U.S. military activities in Vietnam; based at Tan Son Nhut

"Mad minute": a weapons free fire practice and test session

Magazine: the metal container that feeds bullets into weapon; holds 20 or 30 rounds per unit

mama-san: the pidgin term used by American soldiers for any older Vietnamese woman

Marker round: the first round fired by mortars or artillery used to adjust the following rounds onto the target

MARS: Military Affiliate Radio Station; used by soldiers to call home via Signal Corps and ham radio equipment

MASH: Mobile Army Surgical Hospital

mau than: Year of the Monkey

Mechanized platoon: a platoon operating with tanks and/or armored personnel carriers

MEDCAP: Medical Civilian Assistance Program/Medical Civic Action Program; free medical treatment for villagers by U.S. and ARVN medics

MEDEVAC: medical evacuation by helicopter; "Emergency" medevacs were those near death; "Priority" evacs were those seriously wounded and unable to ambulate; "Routines" were ambulatory or dead; all Vietnamese causalities were routine

Mermite: large insulated food containers

Mess Hall: a military cafeteria

MG: a machine gun

MIA: Missing In Action

Mike Forces: ethnic minority troops trained by U.S. Special Forces for rescue operations and reinforcement

"Mike-mike": a millimeter (from phonetic alphabet designation of M as "mike")

Mini-gun: an electric 7.62mm Gatling gun; capable of firing 6000 rounds/minute

"Mighty mite": commercial air blower used for injecting gas into tunnels

"Million-dollar wound": a noncrippling wound serious enough to warrant return to the United States

"Mister Zippo": a flame-thrower operator

MI team: a Military Intelligence team

"Monday Pills": the anti-malarial pills which were taken once a week on Mondays

Montagnards: an indigenous hill-dwelling people of central and northern Vietnam near the Cambodian border

Mortar: a muzzle-loading cannon with a short tube in relation to its caliber that throws projectiles with low muzzle velocity at high angles

MOS: a military occupational specialty; job title code

"Most ricky-tick": immediately, if not sooner

MP: Military Police(man)

MPC: military payment currency; the scrip issued to soldiers in war zones instead of American money to discourage blackmarketeering

Mule: a small, motorized platform originally designed to carry a 106-mm recoilless rifle, but most often used for transporting supplies and personnel

Muster: a quick assembly of soldiers with little or no warning

my: Vietnamese for "American"

Napalm: a jellied petroleum substance used as a weapon against personnel; sticks to the surfaces it burns; used in bombs and flamethrowers; name is derived from naphthenic and palmitic acids

NCO: Non-Commissioned Officer; was usually a squad leader or platoon sergeant

NDB: a non-directional beacon; a radio beacon that can be used for homing

NDP: a night defensive position

"Net": a radio frequency setting; derived from network

"Next": the man who said he was next to be rotated home

"Nickle": the number five

NLF: the National Liberation Front--the Viet Cong

"No sweat": easy; can do

nouc-mam: a foulsmelling (to the Americans at least) fermented fish sauce used by the Vietnamese as a condiment

NSA: the National Security Agency

NSC: the National Security Council

"Number one": the very best

"Number ten": the very worst

"Number ten thousand": an exaggeration of how bad things can be

Nung: tribespeople of Chinese origin found in the highlands of North Vietnam; some moved south to work with the U.S. Special Forces

NVA: North Vietnamese Army (or a member thereof)

"O club": Officers club

OCS: Officer Candidate School

OD: Officer of the Day; also, Olive Drab, a camouflage color

o dau: Vietnamese for "where?"

"OJ": an opium joint

OP: an observation post, manned during daylight hours to watch for the enemy

Opcon: operational control

Open sheaf: a term used in calling in artillery, whereby the artillery rounds were spread along an axis rather than concentrated on a single point (as when it was desired to cover a treeline)

Opposition: the enemy

OR: an operating room

OSS: Office of Strategic Services; World War II forerunner of the CIA

P (piaster): Vietnamese money; one piaster was worth one cent or less

P-38: a tiny, collapsible, one-piece can opener supplied with C-rations

papa-san: the pidgin term for any older Vietnamese man

Pathet Lao: the Laotian Communists, who from their inception have been under the control of the Vietnamese Communist Party

PBR: a river patrol boat

PCS: a permanent change of (duty) station; a transfer out of Vietnam

"Peanuts": wounded in action

Perimeter: the outer limits of a military position; the area beyond this belongs to the enemy

PF: the Popular Forces

PFC: a Private First Class

PGM: a precision guided munitions

Phantom: a jet fighter plane

Phoenix Program: an American program aimed at Communist subversion

Phonetic alphabet: the words used to represent letters in military radio-telphone procedures; the Americans adopted the new NATO system after World War II and Korea

| | Old | New | | Old | New |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | Able | Alpha | N | Nan | November |
| B | Baker | Bravo | O | Oboe | Oscar |
| C | Charlie | Charlie | P | Peter | Papa |
| D | Dog | Delta | Q | Queen | Quebec |
| E | Easy | Echo | R | Roger | Romeo |
| F | Fox | Foxtrot | S | Sugar | Sierra |
| G | George | Golf | T | Tare | Tango |
| H | How | Hotel | U | Uncle | Uniform |
| I | Item | India | V | Victor | Victor |
| J | Jig | Juliett | W | William | Whiskey |
| K | King | Kilo | X | X-ray | X-ray |
| L | Love | Lima | Y | Yoke | Yankee |
| M | Mike | Mike | Z | Zebra | Zulu |

PIO: Public Information Office or Officer

PJ: a photojournalist

Platoon: a subdivision of a company-sized military unit, normally consisting of two or more squads or sections; approximately forty-five men

"Poge": a derogatory term for military personnel employed in rear echelon support capacities

"Point"/"point man": the first man in line as a squad or platoon of men walk along a trail or through the jungle; the most exposed position, especially to booby traps

Poncho liner: the nylon insert to the military rain poncho; used as a blanket

"Pop smoke": to ignite a smoke grenade to signal an aircraft or to mark one's position

POW: a Prisoner of War

PR: personal recognizance

PRC-10: a portable radio

PRC-25/"Prick-25": standard infantry radio in Vietnam; replaced PRC-10

PRC-77: a radio similar to the PRC-25 but with a kryptographic scrambling/descrambling unit attached; transmission frequencies on the PRC-77 were called the secure net; called "the Monster" because of its extra weight

"Prive": Marine slang for a man having the rank of Private

Profile: a prohibition from certain types of military duty due to injury or disability

Province chief: a governor of a state-sized administrative territory in South Vietnam, usually a high-ranking military officer

PRP: the People's Revolutionary Party

PsyOps: Psychological Operations

PT: physical training

PTSD: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder; stress that continues after the traumatic event, such as combat or harsh treatment of returning Vietnam veterans; characteristic symptoms involve reexperiencing the traumatic event, numbing of responsiveness to, or involvement with, the external world, exaggerated startle response, difficulty in concentrating, memory impairment, guilt feelings, sleep difficulties

"Puff the Magic Dragon": a CH-47 with vulcan machine guns set up in the cargo doors; provided intensive ground fire

"Pull pitch": the term used by helicopter pilots to indicate that they are going to take off

Punji pit: a ground trap; a pit with sharpened stakes in the bottom or sides; often the stakes were dipped in feces to cause serious infections

Purple Heart: an American military decoration awarded to any member of the armed forces wounded by enemy action

"Purple-out zone": an emergency evacuation

"Puzzle Palace": the Pentagon

"Puzzle Palace East": the MACV HQ building

PX: a Post Exchange (Army post store)

PZ: a pick-up zone

QC: the Vietnamese Military Police

Quad 50s: a four-barrelled assembly of .50 caliber machine guns

Quad-60: four .60 caliber machine guns mounted as one unit

Quantico: the Marine training base in Virginia

que lam: Vietnamese for "backward person" or a peasant; used derogatorily

R and A: Research and Analysis

R and R: Rest and Relaxation/Recreation leave; a three- to seven-day vacation from the war; one week was guaranteed once during a tour of duty

"Rabbits": white American soldiers, according to black vernacular

rach: a river

"Rack": a bed or a cot

Rangers: elite infantry and commandos; soldiers specially trained for reconnaissance and combat missions

RBF: recon by fire

"The React": a unit assigned to aid another unit which had become incapacitated

"Recon": reconnaissance; going out into the jungle to observe for the purpose of identifying enemy activity

"Redball": an enemy high speed trail or road

"Red bird": a Cobra helicopter

Regiment: a military unit consisting of a number of battalions

"REMF": a Rear Echelon Mother Fucker

"Re-up": to re-enlist

RF/PF ("ruff-puff"): Regional and Popular Forces; the South Vietnamese National Guard-type units; Regional Forces were company-sized and protected district areas; Popular Forces were platoon-size and guarded their home villages

RIF: reconnaissance in force; a heavy reconnaissance patrol; also, later, Reduction in Force, an administrative mechanism for retiring career soldiers prior to the end of their 20 year term

"Ringknocker": a graduate of a military academy; refers to the ring worn by all graduates

"Rock'n'roll": to fire a weapon on full automatic

"Roger": affirmative; "I understand and/or agree" (not to be confused with "Wilco" which means "I understand, agree, and will comply")

ROK: Republic of Korea and the soldiers from there committed to fight in Vietnam as part of the SEATO treaty

Rome plow: a specifically designed bulldozer for land-clearing

RON: a remain-overnight operation

ROTC: the Reserve Officers' Training Corps

Rotor: an overhead helicopter blade

"Round": a bullet

RPD: a light machine gun (see LMG)

RPG: a rocket-propelled grenade; Russian-made, portable ground fire rocket (see B-40)

RTO: a radio telephone operator; the man who carries his unit's radio on his back in the field

Ruck/rucksack: a backpack issued to infantry in Vietnam

Rules of Engagement: the political and military restrictions that dominated military tactics in Vietnam; the specific regulations for the conduct of air and surface battles by U.S. and allied forces; "Full suppression" meant the men could fire all the way in on a landing; "Normal rules" meant they could return fire for fire received; "Negative suppression" meant they were not to shoot back at all

"Rumor control": the most accurate source of information prior to the actual occurrence of an event

RVN: the Republic of Vietnam (South)

S and S: Supply and Service; designation of a support unit

S-1: Personnel

S-2: Intelligence

S-3: Operations

S-4: Supply

S-5: Civil Affairs

saddle: a low area between two hills

"Saddle up!": an order meaning to put on one's pack and prepare to march

SAF: small arms fire

SAFE Area: a Selected Area For Evasion; the designated area was not necessarily safe from the enemy; the term simply meant the area was a good place for escape and evasion as far as the terrain, location, or local population were concerned

Saigon: the capital of South Vietnam

Saigon Tea: a high-priced non-alcoholic drink served in bars catering to U.S soldiers; when a GI bought a bargirl a drink, the bartender would serve the woman Saigon Tea rather than alcohol

SAM: a Soviet-made surface-to-air missile

Sappers: VC or NVA soldiers specially trained to infiltrate heavily defended installations at night; usually armed with explosives

SAR: Search and Rescue; engaged in rescue missions, often for downed helicopters

Satchel charge: a pack used by the enemy containing explosives that is dropped or thrown; generally more powerful than a grenade

Scramble: an alert reaction to call for help, CA, or rescue operation

Scrip: see MCP

SeaBeas: Navy construction engineers

SEALs: highly trained Navy special warfare team members (Sea, Air, Land)

Search and destroy: an operation in which Americans searched an area and destroyed anything which the enemy might use; designed to destroy enemy forces without maintaining holding actions

SEATO: South East Asia Treaty Organization

Secure net: see PRC-77

SERTS: the Screaming Eagle Replacement Training School

"Set": a party

"Shake'n'Bake": a sergeant who attended NCO school and earned rank after only a very short time in uniform

"Shamming": goofing off or getting by with as little effort as possible

Shaped charge: an explosive charge, the energy of which is focused in one direction

"Short-timer": a soldier who had been in Vietnam for nearly a year and whose tour of duty was approaching its end; generally when he had two months or less left in Vietnam

"Short-timer's stick": a stick on which a soldier would count off his remaining time in Vietnam as his tour approached an end

Shrapnel: pieces of metal sent flying by an explosion

SIGINT: Signal Intelligence

Silver Star: a U.S. military decoration awarded for gallantry in action

Simonov: a SKS

"Single-Digit Fidget": a nervous single-digit midget

"Single-Digit Midget": a soldier with fewer than ten days remaining in Vietnam

"Sit-rep": Situation Report

The "Six": any Unit Commander, from the Company Commander up; term preceded by a codified term for a particular unit--e.g. Bravo Six

Six-by: a large, flat-bed truck usually with wooden slat sides enclosing the bed and sometimes a canvas top covering it; used for carrying men or anything else that would fit on it

"Skate": a task or accomplishment that required little effort or pain

SKS: a Soviet Simonov 7.62mm semi-automatic carbine

"Sky": to leave

"Sky out"/"sky up": to leave; to flee or to leave suddenly

"Sky Six": the slang designation for God; from the use of "six" to designate a unit commander--in this case, the ultimate Unit Commander

"Slackman": the second man back on patrol directly behind the point

"Slick": a helicopter used for transporting troops; a Huey

"Slope": a derogatory term for an Oriental

Smoke grenade: a grenade that released brightly colored smoke; used for signaling

"Snake": an assault helicopter; a Cobra

SOI: signal operating instructions; the booklet that contained the call signs and radio frequencies of the units in Vietnam

SOP: standard operating procedure

Sp/4 (or Spec 4): Specialist Fourth Class; Army rank equivalent to a corporal

Sp/5 (or Spec 5): Specialist Fifth Class; equivalent to sergeant

Spider hole: a camouflaged, one-man enemy foxhole; a VC firing position at a tunnel opening

"Spooks": covert intelligence men, often CIA

"Spooky": a c-47 cargo plan mounted with Gatling guns; also called "Puff the Magic Dragon"

SP pack: a supply pack in which toilet articles and candy were supplied to troops in the field

Squad: a small military unit consisting of fewer than ten men

Stand-down: an infantry unit's return from the field to base camp for refitting and training; period of rest for a military unit when all operations other than security are curtailed; later, a unit being withdrawn from Vietnam and redeployed to the U.S.

Starlight scope: a night observation device that uses reflected light from the stars and moon; infra-red device for enhancing night vision

Steel pot: the standard U.S. helmet; the steel pot was the outer metal cover

"Strack": squared away, straightened out, shipshape, well-prepared; adhering to the letter of military rules and regulations; derived from Strategic Air Command

Strategic Hamlet Program: a controversial pacification and village-defense program implemented by the Diem government that attempted to turn all sixteen thousand South Vietnamese hamlets into fortified compounds

Strobe: a hand-held strobe light for marking landing zones at night

"Tac Air": Tactical air (Air Force) support; fighter-bombers

Tai: a Vietnamese ethnic group living in the mountainous regions

"Tail-end Charlie": the last unit in a long column on the move

TC: the tactical commander

TDY: a temporary duty assignment

"33": a local Vietnamese beer

"Tight": good friends were close to ("tight" with) each other

titi: pidgin for very small or little

Tet: short for Tet Nguyen Dan, the Chinese and Vietnamese lunar new year and the Vietnamese New Year Holiday; Buddha's birthday; took on a special military significance after the NVA/VC Tet Offensive in 1968

Tet Offensive: a major uprising of Viet Cong, VC sympathizers, and NVA characterized by a series of coordinated attacks against military installations and provincial capitals throughout Vietnam; occurred during Tet at the end of January 1968

"Three": the radio call sign of the operations officer

Three-quarter: a three-quarter ton truck

TM: a technical manual

TO: a tactical officer

TOC: the tactical operations center

TO and E: the Table of Organization and Equipment

"Top": a top sergeant

TOT: time on target; a prearranged mortar or artillery barrage, set to occur at a specific time in order to coordinate with an infantry assault

TOW: a tube-launched, optically-tracked, wire-guided; a newly developed anti-tank missile

Tracer: a bullet that has phosphorus at the base of the shell that burns and provides a visual track of the bullet's flight; usually spaced every fifth shot

"Track": any vehicle equipped with a continuous roller belt over cogged wheels

Triage: the method by which medics determine which victims are most seriously hurt and must therefore be treated first

Triple canopy: dense jungle cover of trees and vines preventing visibility from airplanes or helicopters

Trip flare: a ground flare triggered by a trip wire used to signal and illuminate the approach of an enemy at night

Trip wires: fine wires stretched across trails and designed to set off booby traps

"Two": the radio call sign of the intelligence officer

201 File: a U.S. Army personnel file

UCMJ: the Uniformed Code of Military Justice

"UMZ": the Ultramilitarized Zone; the sarcastic name given by soldiers to the DMZ

USAF: the United States Air Force

USAID: the United States Agency for International Development

USARV: the United States Army, Republic of Vietnam; command of operations unit for all U.S. military forces in Vietnam, based in Long Binh

USO: the United Service Organizations

USOM: the United States Operations Mission, which funded U.S. programs during the early American involvement in Vietnam

VA: the Veterans Administration

VC: the Viet Cong (also known as "Victor Charlie")

VCI: the Viet Cong Infrastructure

VFW: a Veteran of Foreign Wars

Viet Cong: the Communist-led forces fighting the South Vietnamese government; "Cong" is short for cong-san, which means "Communist"; the political wing was known as the National Liberation Front, and the military was called the People's Liberation Armed Forces; both the NLF and the PLAF were directed by the People's Revolutionary Party (PRP), the southern branch of the Vietnamese Communist Party, which received direction from Hanoi through COSVN, which was thought to be located in III Corps on the Cambodian border

Viet Minh: a political and resistance organization established by Ho Chi Minh before the end of World War II, dominated by the Communist Party; though at first smaller and less famous than the non-Communist nationalist movements, the Viet Minh seized power through superior organizational skill, ruthless tactics, and foreign support

Vietnamese Popular Forces: the South Vietnamese local military forces

Vietnamization: the U.S. policy initiated by President Richard Nixon late in the war to turn over the fighting to the South Vietnamese Army during the phased withdrawal of American troops

Ville: the short form for "village"; indicates any location, from a small town of several hundred inhabitants to a few thatched huts in a clearing

VNAF: the South Vietnamese Air Force

"Wake-up": the last day of a soldier's tour in Vietnam as in "Thirteen days and a wake-up"

"Wasted": slang for "killed"

Web gear: the suspenders and belt used to carry the infantryman's ammunition, canteen, first-aid pack, grenades, and other essential items needed for immediate battle

"Weed": marijuana; also called "dew"

"White bird": a LOH

"White Mice": the South Vietnamese police; name derived from their white uniform helmets and gloves

WIA: Wounded In Action

"Widow maker": a mechanical ambush

"Wilco": the radio short form for "will comply"

"Willie Peter"/"WP": white phosphorus; an element used in grenades or shells for incendiary purposes and for smoke screens

Wood line: a row of trees at the edge of a field or rice paddy

"the World": the United States, where supposedly, sanity reigned (or anyplace other than Vietnam)

WSO: Weapons Systems Officer; the name given to the man who rode in the back seat of a Phantom; he was responsible for the weapons system

xin loi: roughly translates from the Vietnamese as "sorry about that"

XO: Executive Officer; second in command

"'Yarde": a Montagnard

YD: the grid 100,000 meters x 100,000 meters square from the Universal Transmercator (UTM) Grid Zone 48Q; the UTM map of the world dispenses with latitude and longitude in favor of a system of metric coordinates (usually six digits) which enable the user of the map to specify a location within 100 meters

"Zapped": slang for "killed"

"Zippo Raids": military operations which involved burning down Vietnamese villages; often Zippo cigarette lighters were used to ignite the hooches

"Zips"/"Zipperheads": a derogatory term for the Vietnamese

"Zoomie": a pilot

"Zulu": a casualty report