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Remembering the Experience of War: A Sensory Study of the Vietnam War and Collective Memory

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REMEMBERING THE EXPERIENCE OF WAR: A SENSORY STUDY OF THE VIETNAM WAR AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY

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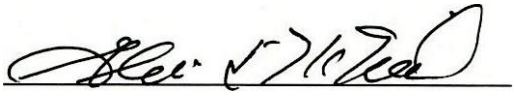
Approved 

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ABSTRACT

The Vietnam War is remembered in a variety of ways. It is remembered as a war against communism, yet one that was also against American ideals of freedom. It is remembered as a war of patriotism, yet one that was also against the numerous military members who fought in it. It is remembered as a war for integration and unity among black and white, yet many African-Americans remember the time period as a war being fought abroad and at home. Memory of the war is obviously contradicting, but then again the 1960s and 1970s oftentimes were.

This thesis examines how the Vietnam War has been remembered in the American collective memory. The Korean War, a war similar in many ways, is used as a reference for comparison. Despite shared characteristics, people have alternative memories of each, with the Korean War being remembered as a forgotten war. Much of these differences can be explained through sensory history, which is a fairly new field of historical analysis.

By examining how soldiers and citizens were sensing the wars (through sight, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching), it becomes evident that the memory of the Vietnam War diverges due to different cultural interpretations. Media, especially through the television, acted both as a preserver of memory as well as a stimulator of the senses. Contradictions arose within these memories and senses based off of cultural characteristics. The counter-memory from the minority populations spread to the dominant memory of the whites. This split the overall memory of the war, resulting in no clear dominant collective memory. This analysis of the Vietnam War provides a new perspective on the war not previously done before.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Introduction

"I looked up and there were two jets aiming directly at our command post. He's dropped two cans of napalm, and it's coming toward us, loblolly, end over end. These kids… had dug a hole or two over on the edge. I looked as the thing exploded, and two of them were dancing in that fire. There was a rush, a roar from the air that's being consumed and drawn in as this hell come to earth is burning there. As that dies back a little, then you can hear the screams. Someone yells 'get this man's feet!' I reached down and the boots crumble and the flesh is cooked off of his ankles. I feel those bones in the palms of my hands. I can feel it now."[1] This is how Joey Galloway, a journalist/photographer described one of his most memorable experiences in Vietnam. This memory is rooted in an overload of sensory stimulation, between the sights and sounds of men burning to the smell and feel of cooked flesh that ran through his fingers. Sensory experiences at the time transcended individual memory and shaped the collective memory of the war; however, due to the conflicting translations of these memories and senses, American collective memory of the Vietnam War remains unclear because the typically forgotten counter-memory is still remembered today.

Few people have forgotten the Vietnam War. This war marked a time period in American history characterized by conflict and disunity. Contradictions within American society emerged, creating a unique blend of support and disdain. Many of these differences were rooted in the alternative sensory stimuli that soldiers and the public experienced. The senses of the Vietnam War fashioned a particular collective memory, creating a desire to ignore a war that could not be forgotten. In the aftermath, veterans suffered mental and emotional disabilities thanks to the blend of traumatic memories and sensory experiences they endured. However, the

[1] Ken Burns and Lynn Novak, *The Vietnam War*, directed by Ken Burns and Lynn Novak, 2017 (Walpole, NH: Florentine Films, 2017, on PBS), Web.

contradictions that were so prominent during this time period led to different collective memories. These alternate memories originate from major events like the Korean War and the My Lai Massacre.

The collective memory of the Korean War is one of a forgotten war, leading to a unique effect on the memory of the Vietnam War because lessons were seemingly elapsed, in the sense that many of the mistakes made in the former conflict were repeated in the latter one. Comparing the Korean War in relation to the senses and memory demonstrates how there was a fragmentation in the collective memory of the Vietnam War. The collective memory of the Korean War remained primarily intact because most simply wanted to forget it. They were relatively successful in doing so since the national narrative does not emphasize the Korean War. The same cannot be said of the Vietnam War.

Within the Vietnam conflict, the My Lai Massacre marks a transition within the collective memory of the war turning to an unjust war. Different demographics, particularly among Anglo-Americans and African-Americans, maintain divided memories as a result of different racial experiences. In simple terms, contradictions and alternative sensory experiences have created a split in the shared memory of the Vietnam War. This divergence is apparent in various letters, memoirs, and oral histories by the soldiers themselves. The scholarship created by various historians concerning this topic also reveals the same kind of occurrence among the public. All of these factors contribute to a collective memory of the Vietnam veteran plagued more by mental handicaps than previous veterans, which is not true. Nonetheless, the perception remains.

Structure

This thesis is divided into four chapters: 1) Korea and the Forgotten War, 2) Vietnam Remembered, 3) Imagery and the Media, and 4) Split Senses. The first chapter relates to the memory of the Korean War and how it connects to the Vietnam War. While labeled the Forgotten War, this is a misleading name because the Korean War ironically lives on in the American collective memory. This memory has greatly affected how the Vietnam War is remembered. Despite its similarities, the Korean War does not have diverging collective memories like the Vietnam War. The second chapter focuses mainly on how the Vietnam War is remembered. Key events in memory include the Tet Offensive and the My Lai Massacre. These events caused the American public (especially white citizens) to question their own perspectives of the war, leading to conflict within their memories. Out of this conflict, the collective memory of the war has split. Chapter three details the various imagery that has affected how Vietnam has been remembered during and after the war. Media outlets created much of this imagery, which has stuck in the American collective memory for decades. Entertainment modalities, especially television, initiated this imagery. The final chapter focuses more on senses and how they affect memory. An argument is made that African-Americans sensed the Vietnam War and homelife differently thanks to a political discussion of race in the Civil Rights Movement. This alternate interpretation of senses has led to yet another divergence in the collective memory of the Vietnam War. The conclusion makes a connection between the Vietnam War and the memory of the modern-day conflict in the Middle East. Soldiers in particular share similar memories, suggesting that the conflict in the Middle East will be remembered in a similar fashion to that of the Vietnam War: split. By examining how the Korean War has collectively been forgotten, the American population (both citizens and soldiers) interpreted and remembered Vietnam, the media influenced memory during the Vietnam era and has preserved memory into today, and

how different demographics interpreted their senses, it is clear that the collective memory of Vietnam is warped due to alternative memories. The rest of the introduction focuses on collective memory, sensory history, mental trauma, the warrior image, and the Korean and Vietnam Wars in a broad sense, thus providing necessary background information concerning these topics.

Framework for Collective Memory and History

Collective memory is a common theme mentioned throughout; therefore, an intellectual framework should be briefly established before more is discussed. Peter Burke referred to collective memory as social memory. He noted, "Given the fact that social memory, like the individual memory, is selective, we need to identify the principles of selection and to note how they vary from place to place or from one group to another and how they change over time."[2] Burke acknowledged the importance of figuring out who alters memories and what were their motives for doing so. Furthermore, cultures have contrasting memories of historical events due to how they view the past. In many ways, this phenomenon can be attributed to the idea that the victors write history, but they also choose what to forget. In this way, the victors shape the remembrance and forgetting of history. The losers, on the other hand, maintain their version of events because they are unwilling to accept the narrative that the victors portray. Clearly, this can lead to contrasting memories of the past, sparked by censorship of potentially embarrassing actions taken by the victors. It is no secret that minority groups such as African-Americans, Asian-Americans, and women fit into the category of people who maintain counter-memories.[3]

[2] Peter Burke, *The Collective Memory Reader*, Edited by Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011), 189.
[3] Burke, 189-191.

Another scholar, Allan Megill, argues that memory is closely associated with identity. When a group's identity is firmly established, memory loses importance. Naturally, when a group's identity is unclear, memory becomes vital to defining that group. When identity is already established, the group creates the past to match that identity; however, when identity is insecure, memory and identity must be created to align with each other, which essentially means the group creates an imagined identity and memory. It should be noted that every group has at least some elements of imagined identity. Megill noted that memory of the past is connected to experiences of the present. In other words, a group's present influences how they connect with and remember their past. Groups of people attempt to define their identity by remembering the past from a present viewpoint. They may ask themselves, "what past events led to who I am today?" History acts as a tool to demand truth, occasionally contradicting memory because it asks for proof. Unfortunately, this proof sometimes no longer exists, meaning people of the present struggle remembering and interpreting history as it really was. Some of history must be left to interpretation due to the obscurity of memory.[4]

Framework for Sensory History

Much like how collective memory is a key element of this thesis, sensory history is another. Mark M. Smith provides excellent background information in his book *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History*. Sensory history is a relatively new area of historical thinking and research. It is not a clearly developed category of historical thinking like postmodernism or feminism; however, that does not mean there is no framework to base research around it. With it being in the early stages of intellectual development, sensory history has the potential to be applicable to all facets of history, whether

[4] Allan Megill, *The Collective Memory Reader*, Edited by Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011), 194-196.

that be political, economic, and/or social. For now, it remains largely focused on cultural history.

Smith details how the senses were perceived from antiquity to the modern age and argues that senses and how they are perceived is relative to both the time period and the culture. In this way, senses are truly a historical topic, in and of themselves. People understand the world around them through their senses, which affects how they interact with their environment and others whom they interact with. Smith asserts, "… the senses are not universal, are not transhistorical, and can only be understood in their specific social and historical contexts."[5] This is vital information when considering the Korean and Vietnam Wars.

People interpret senses in a plethora of ways, thus allowing sensory history to typically be written broadly; however, it can occasionally be used to explain history as well. In general, the emphasis of sight is considered the turning point in history to the modern age. Sensory historians usually reject this notion by emphasizing *all* senses can be characterized by the modern age. Still, historically senses have been neglected, especially compared to political and economic history; therefore, development still needs to occur so it does not continue to be neglected. Fortunately, a select few number of historians changed this trend quite recently. In the past and still somewhat in the present, sensory historians accepted that the invention of the printing press spurred on the age of reason, thus making vision the most important sense. This argument was used to explain cultural differences in which societies with more emphasis on reason and reading became more individualistic, whereas societies that relied on communicating information more orally became more communal. While sensory historians accept this to be

[5] Mark M. Smith, *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 3.

partially true, some challenge that notion. It is unclear where these historical arguments will lead, which further proves that more sensory research is needed.[6]

Despite a need to further develop sensory history, many historians of this category argue certain points in history experience particular senses being more valued than others based on survival needs and available technology. For example, the inventions of the radio and television increased the value of hearing and touch. The inventions combined the need of multiple senses, which affected how societies interacted with the world. Still, by emphasizing some senses over others, people (especially elites) created distinctions between themselves and others, seemingly justifying their superiority. This is just one of many reasons why understanding senses must be done in relation to culture and time.[7]

As Smith acknowledges, since sensory history is still developing, it is difficult to understand it and what it means in a larger context of history.[8] While the information given in this thesis does involve sensory history to a certain degree, much more research is needed due to the infancy of sensory history. Hopefully, the information provided acts as a foundation for further research regarding the topic concerned. The difficulty with sensory history (and history in general) is that people in the present tend struggle comprehending how people in the past viewed their world. People in the present rely on the gift of hindsight and fall into the trap of bias towards their own understanding of their present world. Historians must cast aside this bias to better understand the ways of the past. To do this perfectly is impossible, but historians must still make the attempt.

Mental Trauma

[6] Smith, 4-5, 8-9.
[7] Smith, 10, 17-18.
[8] Smith, 117.

John Musgrave commented concerning fighting in the dark, "That's real scary stuff. I'm scared of the dark still. I still got a nightlight. When my kids were growing up, that's the first time they really found out that Daddy had been in a war, when they said, 'Why do we need to outgrow our night lights? Daddy still got one.'"[9] The absence of the visual sense plagued Musgrave's mind even after he has returned from the war. These fears remain in the collective memory because the image of a traumatized veteran is still remembered, all thanks to the loss of using one's visual sense.

Vietnam veterans face many mental scars, which highlights the intense sensory experiences they lived through. Most people remember mentally disturbed veterans when they think about the Vietnam War. While this paper does not focus as much on this topic since much of the information connects to psychology, a brief overview is necessary in the introduction to portray a more complete picture of sensory experiences that connect to collective memory. Before these disorders are more thoroughly examined, information concerning mental trauma in general must first be acknowledged. Mental disorders occur due to a combination of biological and sociocultural conditions. In other words, a person's increased biological likelihood as well as the social and cultural elements of the society he/she lives in will determine the odds of someone developing a mental disorder.[10]

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is the most commonly referred to mental disorder when discussing mental trauma, particularly among Vietnam veterans. While not all mentally traumatized Vietnam veterans have PTSD, understanding the components of the condition is beneficial to comprehending how mental disorders can be obtained. People develop PTSD through four factors: 1) external trauma occurs that is too much for a person to mentally cope, 2)

[9] Ken Burns and Lynn Novak, *The Vietnam War*.
[10] Allan V. Horwitz, *PTSD: A Short History*, (Johns Hopkins Biographies of Disease, 2018), xiii.

present events trigger the past event to make it seem like the event is happening in the present, 3) symptoms of stress become related to the person's active memory of the event, and 4) the term "disorder" indicates the condition does not dissipate quickly over time. It should be noted that PTSD is difficult to distinguish from other conditions since people with PTSD suffer with other mental stressors as well. For example, up to 80% of people with PTSD also experience anxiety and depression. For this reason, the author explores mental disorders in general instead of focusing solely on PTSD. Oftentimes, the mind represses and forgets memories from stressful, traumatic events. It is not until the memory is triggered by a similar sensory experience that the memory is recalled. Repression partially explains why the Korean War is considered forgotten. It is also possible that earlier events in life can cause an increased likelihood of obtaining a mental disorder like PTSD. As Christian G. Appy suggests and will later be described in more detail, most Vietnam soldiers came from the working class, and they lived more likely in poverty and alcohol-abusive homes. Nonetheless, the rate of mental disorders among Vietnam veterans is similar to previous wars due to mutual support amongst themselves and their willingness to talk about their experiences.[11]

Prisoners of War (POWs) developed PTSD and other mental disorders more often than non-POW's during the Vietnam War. POW's exemplify the impossibility of measuring stress because people handle events differently within their own mental capacity. Two people with alternate means of handling stress most likely will react in completely different ways despite experiencing similar events. James F.T. Corcoran conducted a psychological study among Air Force POW's, which showed the effect incarceration can have on the mental status of an individual. Corcoran suggests a correlation between mortality rates and the average length of

[11] Horwitz, 4-9.

time spent as a POW and PTSD. The mortality rate of Korean POW's was 38% compared to 5% in North Vietnam. The average length of time spent as a POW in Korea was 2.02 years compared to 6.0 years in North Vietnam prior to 1969 and only 0.6 years after. He used the term "North Vietnam" because during the Vietnam War, the United States allied with southern Vietnam, so naturally the South Vietnamese army lacked American POW's. Among Vietnam veterans, soldiers who fought before 1969 experienced a higher risk of psychiatric diagnosis than those who served after. Corcoran also argues mental instability in general among POW's increased significantly compared to soldiers who successfully avoided imprisonment. On the other hand, formal education may prevent PTSD from occurring due to observations of less instances in Air Force Repatriated Prisoner's of War (RPW's). These men were mostly officers who had higher levels of formal education than the typical Vietnam soldier. Despite these findings, Corcoran concludes that predicting how someone reacts mentally to extreme stress is nearly impossible.[12]

Corcoran's findings suggest extreme sensory stimulation can affect the likelihood of PTSD and other mental disorders because POW's tend to experience higher levels of sensory stimulation compared to soldiers who avoid capture. For example, POW's experience torture, headaches, disease including dysentery, hunger, and dehydration at an increased rate compared to non-POW's, which applies to the sense of touch. Again, the argument that formal education may prevent PTSD connects to Appy's argument that Vietnam soldiers were mostly working-class citizens. This indicates that most Vietnam soldiers experienced a higher risk of PTSD based on their class since working-class citizens typically lack a higher formal education

[12] James F.T. Corcoran, "The Concentration Camp Syndrome and USAF Vietnam Prisoners of War", Nursing & Allied Health Database, *Psychiatric Annals*; Nov. 1982, 991-994.

compared to middle and upper class citizens. The fact Vietnam veterans coped just as well if not better than Korean War veterans is shown by examining the experience of Korean War POW's after they returned home and the collective memory of the Korean War.

The Warrior Image

A reoccurring theme throughout this study concerns the warrior image, which Andrew J. Huebner exquisitely details in his book *The Warrior Image: Soldiers in American Culture from the Second World War to the Vietnam Era*. Huebner argues that people challenged the warrior image of an American soldier depicted as a glorified and hardened individual in World War II, the Korean War, and most prominently in the Vietnam War. He notes that the warrior image has been around since ancient times; however, in American history, the masses widely accepted this glorified image. It was not until World War II, when censoring the media lessened, that this image changed. With less censorship, the media reached a mass audience, which ultimately altered that image. Undoubtedly, this changing image is one of the lead causes for the splits in collective memory of the Vietnam War. Huebner argues all three wars impacted this change of the warrior image. World War II started the questioning, the Korean War acted as a transition event, and the Vietnam War officially changed the warrior image to a less romanticized and sentimental one. This paper somewhat challenges that notion by arguing some still romanticized the warrior while others did not. This argument is based on the split in collective memory. However, Huebner adequately shows how the warrior image changes from a romantic one in World War II to one of victimization in Vietnam. This victimized warrior image helped the public better understand the travesty of war. In fact, the ultimate cost of war is now firmly associated in the warrior image as a result of the gradual change from 1940-1970.[13]

[13] Andrew J. Huebner, *The Warrior Image: Soldiers in American Culture from the Second World War to the Vietnam Era*, (Chapel Hill, NC: North Carolina Press, 2008), 7-10, 282.

While this thesis does not cover the collective memory or sensory experience of World War II for the sake of brevity, the effect from World War II on the warrior image should be briefly described to better comprehend the warrior image in the Korean and Vietnam Wars. World War II did not accomplish the change of the warrior image to one of pity. However, it created a desire by the masses to know more about the "raw experience" of war. The media portrayed the valiant soldier who overcomes adversity. Nonetheless, some images contradicted this view, peaking the public's curiosity. After the war in the late 1940's, more images were given to the public that contradicted with their idea of a World War II soldier. After the war, World War II veterans vocalized the way the government and media portrayed the war (as a patriotic, justified war) compared to how the soldiers actually experienced it (as one of suffering and death). Despite the growth of a negative portrayal of the World War II soldier's experience, most people perceived the warrior image in a positive light. Still, this marked the beginning of the transitioning warrior image. This transformation will be more thoroughly examined throughout the rest of this paper.[14]

Overview of the Korean and Vietnam Wars

Now that the collective memory related to mental disorders and the connecting theme of a warrior image has been described, the collective memory of the war in general must be explored. A description of the Korean War must be examined in order to better understand the memory of the Vietnam War. In order to do so, brief histories of the wars themselves also need to be acknowledged.

Initially to enforce their foreign policy of containment, the United States began interacting with Korea and Vietnam. The government attempted to contain communism through

[14] Huebner, 49-51, 69.

this policy, especially after China became communistic in 1949. This reasoning stuck within the American collective memory and helped the American public and soldiers justify their actions in Korea and Vietnam. Containment, developed by George Kennan, in Korea and Vietnam was a result of the larger international picture of communism as a whole. The United States population and government feared communism, which explains why the United States involved itself militarily in both countries. This begs the question of the worth of involvement in Korea and Vietnam. According to many soldiers and public polls, they viewed the conflict as unworthy of their resources, time, and soldiers.[15] Americans also grew fearful from the domino theory. Originating during the Korean War, the domino theory stated that after one country fell to communism, the rest would follow. Americans viewed Vietnam as the key domino following the Korean War to prevent the rest of East Asia from falling. People feared the fall of Vietnam even more after France lost its hold as a colonizer. Southeast Asia seemingly overflowed with resources, so the theory argued western countries would fall to communism as a result of dependence on those resources.[16]

At first, the American public in general supported the decision to wage war in Korea because people saw it as the right step to fight for democracy and freedom against communism. Policy makers also supported the decision at first because they still remembered the failed policy of appeasement from World War II. They wanted to show the world that the U.S. would lead the fight against communism. Most of the population recalled the reasons to fight in WWII and viewed Korea in a similar way. New outlets heavily influenced the popular opinion of the war The news outlets typically agreed with President Harry Truman's narrative: North Korea was

[15] Steven Hugh Lee, *Outposts of Empire: Korea, Vietnam, and the Origins of the Cold War in Asia, 1949-1954*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 4-10.
[16] Lee, 116-118, 199.

evil. The agreement between the president and the media is a key difference between Korea and Vietnam.[17]

President Truman wanted to only fight a limited war while his top general in Korea, General Douglas MacArthur, wanted to fight total warfare. Most felt similarly as Truman, but the memory of appeasement remained in the forefront of people's memory who opposed him. The last two years of the war saw no major attacks. Any advancements made on either side were to benefit negotiation purposes. Unfortunately, negotiations rarely succeeded due to superiority complexes on both sides that caused negotiations to stalemate and fighting to continue. Limited war meant the impossibility of total war, which upset Americans later in the war since the war seemed to drag on. No clear victories and the deaths of soldiers resulted in less support for the war and President Truman.[18]

Many Korean and Vietnam soldiers believed the native allies were inferior to the native enemies. In Korea, this can be explained due to class. The South Korean army's consisted of organization based on class, not skill. The officers came from the higher class, and the common soldiers consisted of mostly peasants with minimal military training. The North, however, organized based on skill. A similar situation occurred in Vietnam. In both wars, the difference of skills on both sides confounded American soldiers. Typically, stronger communist forces, such as the Soviet Union and China, trained and supplied their counterparts in Korea and Vietnam. This support explains the vast military differences between the communist and democratic forces in the two countries. The U.S. forces saw the democratic forces as an ally, yet also dependent on U.S. aid. Without the military training and more constant supply of war

[17] Donaldson, 1, 19, 25-26.
[18] Donaldson, 44, 49-51.

resources that their opponents enjoyed, the democratic forces in Korea and Vietnam were severely outgunned and outmaneuvered. [19]

An important element of the Korean War was that it was the first to have desegregated military divisions. This did not fully occur until the end of the war, and at the beginning segregation still existed. Truman needed more black votes, and he believed integration was needed for the military to be at full strength. African-American soldiers in Vietnam faced a different narrative because the military implemented integration during the entire war. Segregation and the abolishment thereof played a key role in the visual sense of the war. Based on the color of one's skin, racism impacted the relationships between soldiers and the civilian populations.[20]

[19] Donaldson, 52-53.
[20] Donaldson, 51-52.

Chapter 1: Korea and the Forgotten War

The "Forgotten" Korean War

Forgetting is the key connection between the Korean and Vietnam War. With so many similarities and the ultimate distaste of the Korean War amongst the public, people truly consider the war forgotten, but not in its entirety. Otherwise, the American public, politicians, and presidents likely would not have engaged in another similar war in Vietnam. To highlight this point, a similar event in the Korean War to the My Lai Massacre should be explained. In the summer of 1950, the South Korean leader and U.S. ally, Syngman Rhee, committed acts of terror on his own people, killing approximately fifty thousand Koreans in the process. The U.S. news outlets never reported on this, exemplifying the contrasting role the media played in Korea and Vietnam. For example, the My Lai Massacre media coverage acted against the U.S. government. The differing media coverage greatly impacted the collective memory of both wars.[21]

Historians label the Korean War as "forgotten" since so many in the U.S. preferred to forget it ever happened. Why? The U.S. failed to obtain victory, despite facing a militarily inferior North Korea. This disremembering is why an almost identical war followed in Vietnam. Both saw villages burned, the U.S. struggled against guerilla warfare, unpopularity among citizens and soldiers, the belief that the military failed in its performance due to politicians holding it back, and the difficulty for American forces to distinguish between enemies and civilians. However, many historians consider the failure of the U.S. to use its military advantages and translate them into victory as the most resounding similarity between Korea and Vietnam.[22] As Keene acknowledges, the Korean War evolved in the collective memory of

[21] Donaldson, 27.
[22] Engelhardt, 62.

"'being unnoticed' to that of a 'troubling absence' finally to become a 'significant omission'".[23] The fact the creation of the Vietnam War Memorial (1982) occurred before the Korean War Memorial (1995) furthers this point.

Others historians further explain why the U.S. failed in Korea. Ernst K. Isensee argues some of the blame falls on poorly trained U.S. ground forces not ready for combat in 1950. This unpreparedness stemmed from the post-WWII belief that the U.S. could deter Soviet and Communist influence by threatening nuclear attack. Through this belief, the army received less funding, and social and economic programs benefitted more. With less money, troops demobilized and returned to civilian life. To make matters worse, trainers neglected adequate giving adequate training to new soldiers. Isensee defines these neglected soldiers as civilian soldiers because they were "mentally, morally, and physically unfit for combat…"[24] This physical unreadiness gave the Chinese and Korean communists an advantage. For example, U.S. soldiers relied on transportation via truck to reach their destinations (as opposed to marching). However, mountainous terrain riddles the country of Korea meaning few roads existed. The roads were usually located in the low ground, giving an advantage to the enemy because they maintained the high ground in almost every scenario. A similar situation arose with Vietnam soldiers who struggled adapting to the unconventional environment that they fought in. A major difference between the two in this case is a lock of political conversation over this issue for Korean War veterans.[25]

The collective memory of Americans generally accepts that the U.S. failed in Korea due to unpreparedness. Since most accept this idea, the Korean War collective memory lacks a

[23] Keene, 1107.
[24] Ernst K. Isensee, "Lessons Learned in the Korean Conflict," 3.
[25] Isensee, 2-4.

significant division. With no serious political/social conversations like those that occurred during the Vietnam War in the form of the Civil Rights Movement and the large-scale protests made by the veterans themselves, the dominant white memory of the Korean War remains intact. Also, the lack of visual sensory stimuli through television did not stir up the population enough. All of these factors were present in the Vietnam War, creating splits in memory due to the varying narratives originating at the same time. It is important to note that Isensee compared Korean soldiers to World War II soldiers throughout his report.[26]

Keene indicates three reasons on why the collective memory forgot the Korean War: 1) clear timelines of the beginning and end of the war fail to be acknowledge, 2) no glorified battlefields presently exist where memory can be attributed (like Gettysburg in the U.S.), and 3) people fail to recognize definitive imagery of the soldier who fought in it (like the connection of trench warfare with the WWI soldier). The first two reasons can adequately explain the forgetting of the Korean War; however, the Korean soldier as a POW is present within the American mindset, thus making the third reason inapplicable. The American collective memory remembers the image of a soldier who was defeated and brainwashed by communism. Some veterans forget because remembering may be too painful for those who fought in it due to feelings of shame and humiliation. This encouraged many to desire to forget the war, which the U.S. government embraced.[27]

Other remnants in the collective memory of the Korean War remain, despite a desire to forget. Again, most people remember the Korean soldier typically labeled as soft. News reports of soldiers fleeing from battle and the lack of a quick victory reinforced this idea. Memories of WWII and the defeat of Japan and Germany seemed to contrast with the inability to defeat North

[26] Isensee, 2-4
[27] Keene, 1098.

Korea, a much weaker and less advanced country. People applied these same thoughts to Vietnam soldiers.[28]

In addition to the Korean soldier remaining in memory, the memory of the Korean War as a police action remains. People share the memory of the U.S. acting to benefit freedom globally and to suppress the evils of communism. This explains the memory of the war as a police action because people believed the U.S. fought against an illegal force of communism due to its evil ways of totalitarianism. This undoubtedly carried over to Vietnam, which attributed to the contradictions people experienced mentally when they found out the reality of the war.[29]

Mental Trauma Among Korean War Soldiers

Perhaps the most prominent image maintained in the collective memory of the Korean War is that of Prisoners of War (POW). When it comes to collective memory, people only remember the POW in many cases. POW's in Korea had the highest death rate of any U.S. war, and none escaped prison. Back home, people believed POW's in Korea were weaker (compared to WWI and WWII POW's), seeing this as a sign of diminished U.S. soldier integrity. The same line of thinking occurred towards Vietnam soldiers. This did not occur due to less integrity, as sociologists in the 1950's, 1960's, and 1970's proved, rather the image remained due to the failure of the U.S. to win.[30] Of the 7,140 Americans who were POW's of the Korean War, half died while being prisoners. Judith Keene writes in an article concerning the Korean War that the POW was the "antithesis of the fighting man".[31] This image of a weak, dependent soldier contradicts with what the public expected a soldier to be. Soldiers could escape this image only

[28] Donaldson, 51.
[29] Lee, 103.
[30] Gary A. Donaldson, *America at War Since 1945: Politics and Diplomacy in Korea, Vietnam, and the Gulf War*, (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1996), 51.
[31] Judith Keene, "Lost to Public Commemoration: American Veterans of the "Forgotten" Korean War," Journal of Social History 44, no. 4 (2011): 1095-1113, 1099.

by escaping. Escaping became a key image of POW's in popular culture like literature and movies. However, the Korean POW faced nearly impossible circumstances to fulfill this image of escapee. Korean POW's faced another false image of a traitor and communist sympathizer. While many collaborated for various reasons (possibly as much as 70%), most did so against their will. The public saw it as a weakness of the U.S. Korean veterans in general. This was a stereotype since only twenty-one soldiers chose not to return to the U.S. after the war. They decided to live in communist China. Those who defected made up an extreme minority, still, the image stuck.[32]

Since some suspected Korean POW's as Communist sympathizers and collaborators, the FBI interviewed the Korean War veterans about personal experiences in their encampment. Most resented the questioning because it forced them to remember what they would rather forget. The FBI even looked into their families, causing those families to feel uneasy because severe consequences awaited those who helped the enemy. FBI investigations even affected veterans not suspected of collaboration, sometimes for years. One such veteran was Richard Bassett. Since the general suspicion towards Korean POW's was so prominent, he refrained from talking about experiences and repressed his memories. This led to him developing PTSD in 1978 after having a nervous breakdown. Clearly, doctors and psychiatrists did not adequately treat him well after the war, so he could cope with his actions in Korea. Bassett's story indicates a desire and willingness to forget the Korean War as a whole by society. This ultimately led to more severe cases of mental disorders among Korean veterans compared to Vietnam veterans due to their inability to talk about their traumatic experiences.[33]

[32] Keene, 1102-1103.
[33] Keene, 1105.

The collective memory of the Korean War can be found in the explanations given for Korean POW's actions: 1) they were brainwashed by Communistic countries and 2) the national will was weakening, which meant society failed to train the youth as Americans. These ideas and memories transferred themselves to the Vietnam War, implanting in the collective memory of that conflict instead of the Korean War itself. After all, the American collective memory forgot the Korean War, even though individuals still retain memories of the event.[34] Even though the memory is no longer remembered collectively, it has impacted Vietnam veteran's sensory experiences as well as the collective memory of the Vietnam War.

Warrior Image During the Korean War

The Korean War marked the transition of the warrior image between World War II and the Vietnam War. General MacArthur's advocation for as free of a press as possible changed the warrior image during the Korean War. The responsibility of censorship fell on the journalists (as opposed to the government). MacArthur believed a thriving democracy needed a free press. At first, the free press painted the war in a positive light. This changed as the journalists began to witness more negative experiences of the combat soldier. The journalists visibly saw the soldiers suffering from fatigue and sorrow. Pictures of Korean War soldiers sleeping started popping up in many American news outlets. These images showed U.S. soldiers as susceptible to weakness and incapable of invincibility. Soldiers grew weary during the first stage of the conflict because they frequently retreated with little to no sleep.[35]

Journalists created an image of sorrow as an early negative theme of the Korean War warrior image. Many journalists wrote about the sad conditions that soldiers faced. At the start

[34] Tom Engelhardt, *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation*, (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 65.
[35] Huebner, 100-101.

of the war, the Korean force greatly outnumbered and outmaneuvered American forces, resulting in heavy casualties. One notable story of sorrow mentioned in Huebner's book includes a lieutenant who reluctantly abandoned wounded soldiers unable to walk. He gave them grenades because it was seemingly the only thing he could do for them. The Lieutenant meant for the wounded men to use the grenades on themselves, so they could commit suicide and avoid becoming a prisoner of war. Another story involves a soldier who angrily questioned a journalist if they (the media) told the truth back home about the overwhelming amount of death that they faced. The soldier asked, "Are you telling them that we have nothing to fight with, and that it is an utterly useless war?"[36] Obviously sorrowful stories like these contradicted the positive view Americans back home envisioned of the soldier's experience. An increased free press acted as the tipping off point for stronger opposition to the war. Interestingly, when MacArthur launched his successful counter-attack, these negative images and concerns faded, but the concerns returned eventually.[37]

The media outlets often portrayed the warrior image in contradicting ways during the Korean War. For example, one could easily experience a news reel depicting images of wounded and dying soldiers while awkwardly upbeat music played alongside the pictures. This contradiction epitomizes how the Korean War was a transitional event for the warrior image. The image of the war maintained neither a positive nor negative memory. Obviously, this portrayal would be confusing to the American collective memory, which may explain why people tend to forget the Korean War more easily. People typically forget what they do not understand, instead of trying to comprehend information that seemingly makes little sense. Korean veterans struggled with the forgetfulness of the American population. The failure to

[36] Huebner, 101.
[37] Huebner, 101, 107.

remember the Korean War veterans' tribulations meant veterans felt like their experiences and sufferings lacked validation.[38]

Journalists' portrayals of a suffering Korean War soldier made the U.S. populace view the Korean War veterans as victims of the U.S. government, something that never occurred before (at least on a large scale). This similar victimization reoccurred in the public's response to the My Lai Massacre during the Vietnam War, which is described later. Still, this victimization failed to change the hero status of the soldiers. That would not change until Vietnam. In contrast to victimization, U.S. citizens supported the war more often if constantly reminded of the Communist threat. For those who failed to be reminded, they more likely viewed U.S. involvement in Korea negatively. Again, this shows a split in memory. Those reminded of communistic threats typically viewed the war more positively and vice versa.[39]

African-American Warrior Image in Korea

At the start of the Korean War, the military still segregated blacks and whites. Eventually, President Truman signed an executive order to desegregate the military; however, the military slowly implemented this order. As a result, the Army maintained segregation. At first the American public, including whites, viewed the African-American warrior image in a positive way since media outlets praised the all-black regiments. This made the NAACP suspicious because positive portrayals of African-Americans in the media in the 1950's rarely occurred. In response, the NAACP argued the media outlets supported the idea of continued segregation abroad and at home through this positive portrayal. After the NAACP revealed this to be true, the media outlets portrayed African-American regiments more negatively, and blamed them for losses. Interestingly, this encouraged desegregation because people back home began

[38] Huebner, 107-108.
[39] Huebner, 128-131.

to believe African-Americans performed better alongside whites, who led better by example. With integration more commonplace, African-American soldiers integrated themselves into the warrior image because photographers pictured them alongside whites. Unfortunately, this increased media attention of African-Americans in combat can be attributed to more African-Americans being sent to the frontlines, where death occurred more often.[40]

Military personnel and many of the public viewed integration in the army in Korea as a military necessity, rather than a social one. White people saw segregation as detrimental to the *military*, not necessarily society. One African-American captain said, "The trouble is, you take a man who in his own country has always been treated as a second-class citizen, and you call upon him to fight as a first-class soldier. You talk to him about democracy, and liberty, and how these things are worth fighting for. But the words don't mean the same to him as they mean to a white soldier who has always been free."[41] This contradiction occurred in both Korea and Vietnam. In both wars, the contradiction angered African-American soldiers; however, African-Americans became more active in the fight back home during the Vietnam War, not the Korean. African-Americans collectively remember the Vietnam War more than the Korean War because it coincided with the Civil Rights Movement. African-Americans and whites alike associate equality and civil rights with the Vietnam War, which are things African-Americans struggled to attain for centuries. The Korean War lacked this connection. African-Americans rarely challenged racism in the Korean War era (with the exception of Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP). The lack of challenge against racism explains why the split in African-American memory occurred in the Vietnam War, since it coincided with the Civil Rights Movement.[42]

[40] Huebner, 110-113.
[41] Huebner, 118.
[42] Huebner, 118.

Propaganda and Psychological Warfare in the Korean War Era

In a report created by various members of the Eighth Army, they explained how they created and implemented psychological warfare during the Korean War. Unfortunately, the names of those who wrote the report were blacked out, so they cannot be attributed for their writings. The purpose for analyzing the psychological warfare used is to point out that despite similar circumstances between Korea and Vietnam, the collective memory remembers the wars in much different terms. Also, psychological warfare demonstrates a clear connection to the senses. The members of the Eighth Army made the report to inform future generations of the practices used. The stated reason of the psychological warfare itself was to be, "A. Against the enemy, to lower his fighting ability and cause surrender. B. Against the populace in enemy-held areas, to cause the people to turn on the enemy troops."[43] This indicates psyops (the people conducting psychological warfare) targeted both soldiers and civilians in their operations. Psyops also did not automatically assume citizens to be on either the American's or North Korean's side in the war, which means they did not see the U.S. as a savior. In other words, Korean civilians did not see the U.S. as a country to save them from communism.[44]

The Eighth Army used printed leaflets that they airdropped on the enemy and civilians in enemy territory as their means of conducting psychological warfare. They also installed loudspeakers so messages could be relayed to those populations. In this way, they clearly targeted the sensory experiences of the enemy. They initially used Chinese linguists to help translate their messages. This reveals a clear disconnect between cultures because they lacked anyone in their whole ranks to accomplish the task of translation. They found it even harder to

[43] "Report on the Psychological Warfare Conducted By the Eighth Army Units in Korea, 25 June 1950 thru 27 July 1953," BACM Research, Paperlessarchives.com, 2.
[44] "Report on the Psychological Warfare…" 1-2.

find Korean linguists. Since there were less to choose from, they paid Korean linguists higher wages and better benefits. The psyops trained the linguists to interrogate POW's to gain information necessary to improve the messages delivered via leaflets and loudspeakers. In most cases, the POW's cooperated, and the interviews took about 1-1 ½ days to complete. To create a friendly environment to encourage the POW's to speak, the interviewers gave the POW's small gifts, such as cigarettes and candy. The use of taste played an important role in extracting information used in psychological warfare. The interrogators questioned (through a questionnaire) POW's on their exposure to leaflets and loudspeakers to determine if psychological warfare influenced their opinions. They were even asked to criticize the leaflets, in terms of size, color, text, and artwork. Clearly, psyops heavily appealed to the sense to conduct their mission.[45]

Psyops also collected and interpreted enemy messages and leaflets that the enemy used for the same purposes as U.S. leaflets. However, enemy leaflet messages occurred so infrequently that psyops did not view the leaflets as worthy of investigation. They obtained an abundance of enemy loudspeaker messages though. A report of enemy loudspeaker messages in May 1953 indicated 66% were in Korean, 22% in English, and 12% were musical. Out of these messages, 56% of the understood messages included taunts/threats and 44% advocated for a U.S. surrender. Surprisingly, only about 16% displayed anti-U.S. or anti-U.N. messages. Soldiers from every corner of the war heard these messages frequently. The messages occurred so often, the soldiers likely learned to ignore them.[46]

At first, psychological warfare failed due to a misunderstanding of the culture. The sensory stimuli of wrong images, colors, and symbols failed to resonate among the Korean

[45] "Report on the Psychological Warfare…" 4, 7-8.
[46] "Report on the Psychological Warfare…" 9.

citizens. American forces clearly misunderstood Korean culture. Eventually, a recommendation was made to improve psychological warfare by studying the culture itself to make the messages more culturally relevant. Theoretically, psyops could use the information to better the propaganda effort. These studies likely played an important role in leaflet design. By utilizing cultural information, psyops and American forces made the leaflets more appealing to the intended targets visually, contextually, and culturally due to the cultural relevance and identifiable symbols. Another suggestion for improvement was to provide funds for cigarettes and candy used during interrogation processes since the interrogators themselves often used their own money to purchase these products. This idea appealed to the sense of taste (and possibly smell) to improve interrogation effectiveness. Psyops appeased to the culture by connecting with the senses of sight, taste, and smell. Psyops created a collective memory that the Americans misunderstood Korean culture based off of their failure to initially connect to the population via sensory experiences concerning loudspeakers and leaflets.[47]

A problem the psyops experienced involved their translators because they used too formal of language since most earned a college education. This made the average Korean citizen and soldier (who was not college-educated) incapable of understanding the messages transferred to them, effectively making the messages worthless. They eventually decided to simplify the messages. Simplified messages meant more effectiveness and a better connection to the culture. Still, the psyops original disconnect of connecting through the senses reinforced the memory that the two cultures misunderstood each other.[48]

For loudspeakers, music was used to grab the listener's attention before the actual message was given. Between July 1951-July 1952, psyops recorded 184 messages. The report

[47] "Report on the Psychological Warfare…" 13-14.
[48] "Report on the Psychological Warfare…" 16.

claimed that 2,943 POW surrenders resulted from loudspeaker messages. It also claimed that psychological warfare affected 74% of POW's. For leaflets, psyops created about 711 leaflet designs throughout the entirety of the war. At first, these leaflets were ineffective, but they improved as the war went on and psyops gathered more information. Through the POW questionnaire, POW's critiqued and improved the leaflets. The information gave the psyops a better representation of "enemy weapons, uniforms, life, and customs. Much use of color was essential as it increased the appeal of leaflets to the Oriental."[49]

They also discovered that Koreans hardly ever recognized western accepted symbols. The Korean population in general failed to recognize the hammer and sickle symbol commonly associated with the Soviet Union and communism. Most Koreans did not understand communism as the U.S. did: a threat spreading from the Soviet Union. This indicates Americans based their fear on the spread of communism inaccurately by not relying on observable truth from a cultural standpoint. The U.S. masses failed to recognized this discrepancy, which is a key reason why the dominant memory remained intact during the Korean War. There was no definitive division during the Korean War.[50]

Outside of psychological warfare, the report revealed a similar problem faced by those in Vietnam: American soldier struggled distinguishing Korean soldiers from the citizens. The report acknowledged the need to change its message to the South Koreans to move more south when the U.S. was being pushed back. The new message was a warning not to cross the Hen River. Anyone crossing the river would be shot due to previous infiltrations by the enemy. The enemy would dress up in civilian clothing and attack the United States in the rear. The failure of

[49] "Report on the Psychological Warfare…" 17, 32, 35.
[50] "Report on the Psychological Warfare…" 18.

the American soldiers to use their visual sense adequately to identify the enemy contributed to the collective memory of the enemy being unidentifiable. [51]

Overall, this report reveals that the war was highly influenced by the senses; however, this alone does not mean that the memory was split. Psychological warfare played an important role in the Korean War when it comes to how people sensed it. The opposing sensory experiences between Koreans and Americans reveals a cultural disconnection between the two, which was also seen in Vietnam. Despite this similarity, the dominant white memory remained relatively whole since no counter-memory adequately managed to challenge it.

In Their Own Words: Korean War Veterans

Besides the collective memory of the Korean War, the recollections of the soldiers show that they experienced similar sensory experiences of Vietnam soldiers, proving Vietnam Soldier's experiences were not necessarily "worse" leading to more instances of mental trauma. Ernesto F. De Leon fought on the front lines in Korea. His sensory experience highlights the survival instinct of war. When describing temperatures in Korea and how they could drop to -30 degrees Fahrenheit, he mentioned eating corned beef hash. He absolutely hated that food. He was once given a moldy, frozen C-ration of corned beef hash. In the trial of war, he ate the moldy food like a popsicle. While it is easy to understand doing this in war, the experience reveals the survival mode soldiers must embrace and their willingness to do actions that they normally would not do. The sensory experience involving taste aligns with the noble and sacrificing image the dominant white memory held of the American soldier[52]

[51] "Report on the Psychological Warfare…" 26.
[52] Gary Long, "Front-Line Soldier: De Leon Recalls Korean War Combat Duty, Letters Home," *TCA Regional News* (Chicago), 2019.

Another testimony by William Y. Smith (an air pilot) indicates the obscurity of war. Korean enemy fire shot down Smith's plane during his 97th mission. As a result, he received an injury, soldiers rescued him, and doctors amputated his foot. Smith experienced the difficulty to see while bombing due to weather and smoke. Sometimes, he dropped bombs, not knowing what he hit. Obviously, the loss of a visual target may have resulted in the death of many innocent lives. Smith failed acknowledge this possibility and seemed to show no regret. Perhaps the detachment of close combat prevented him from developing guilt. From his perspective, the only visual sense he had was that of a bomb leaving his plane and creating an explosion. He missed the sensory experiences that soldiers on the ground likely experienced. Soldiers on the ground could smell burning flesh and fire, see the mangled bodies caused by Smith's bombs, and hear the desperate cries of those blasted to pieces. For these reasons, soldiers on the ground refrained from speaking about their experiences, while soldiers like Smith, who did not have nearly as many similar sensory experiences like them, could more easily write about their actions. For Vietnam veterans, detachment did not seem to have the same effect. The fact an air pilot is more open to recording his memories and experiences shows the general unwillingness of Korean War veterans to write about their memories. It also highlights the difficulty in finding sources written by Korean War veterans who fought on the ground. The writing of memories often preserves the collective memory. The lack of writing due to sensory experiences means the war can more easily be forgotten.[53]

While writing home to his mother, Donald Luedtke complained about the war and argued the men in power should fight in the war, not people like him. However, hesitated in fully criticizing the war because it implied a critique of the U.S., a taboo action during a time of war.

[53] William Y. Smith, "Korean War Diary," *Air Power History* 55, no. 2 (2008): 28-43.

This differs from some Vietnam veterans who openly criticized the war with little to no hesitation. Luedtke still showed optimism, believing the war would get better. Luedtke's attitude, though not universal, demonstrates the beginnings of skepticism towards the U.S. involvement in East Asia, which will theoretically explode during the Vietnam War.[54]

Gordon Madson was a POW of the Korean War, and he wrote a letter to his friend's father, detailing what life was like as a POW and the fate of his friend, John Wheeler. He explained that as POW's their captors fed them twice a day (usually a small ball of rice), and they only drank water if they marched near a stream. He also explained that they lived in filthy conditions, with lice and other parasites being a commonality. These conditions got so bad that Wheeler developed a skin disease. Shortly after falling ill, their captors sent Wheeler to a hospital; however, Madson later revealed that he found out this hospital was actually a death house, so he concluded Wheeler probably died there. At the end of the letter, Madson admitted to a deep hatred towards the Chinese and Koreans, claiming they were all murderers.[55] This hatred is reminiscent of the hatred felt by Vietnam soldiers towards the Vietnamese. Madson demonstrates many of the sensory elements Korean POW's experienced. For taste, their captors only gave them bland meals of grain. This food was limited, so they also felt the gnawing pain of hunger. The filthy conditions obviously prevented any feeling of cleanliness. The lice tore into their skin with microscopic bites causing pain and itchiness. In addition to these conditions, Madson revealed a racist attitude towards Chinese and Koreans that represents many Korean War veterans attitudes, not just POW's. This stemmed from an overload of negative sensory experiences that he endured. The dramatic sensory experiences Madson endured created racist

[54] Donald Luedtke to his mother, August 20, 1950, in *War Letters: Extraordinary Correspondence from American Wars*, ed. Andrew Carroll, (New York: Scribner, 2001), 327.
[55] Gordon Madson to John Wheeler's father, May 18, 1951, in *War Letters: Extraordinary Correspondence from American Wars*, ed. Andrew Carroll, (New York: Scribner, 2001), 331-334.

tendencies towards the captors he saw day-in and day-out. Connecting these experiences to racism, Korean War veterans who experienced similar negative sensory situations blamed them on the enemy. These sensory experiences created a collective memory that Koreans and other Asian populations are less human due to the sensory treatment they gave American POW's

Korea Remembered

While Americans consider the Korean War as the Forgotten War, one should take this label only a metaphor instead of as literal truth. The collective memory certainly maintains memories associated with the Korean War, but no counter-memories stand out above the others. The Korean War Memorial exemplifies this. While it was in the process of being made, it faced nearly ten years of politicians arguing about how they should represent it. Blacks and whites integrated for the first time during the Korean War, so they grappled with that concept. It was also the first U.S. war in modern times that was not clearly won. The politicians making the memorial had to figure out if they would recognize women and the United Nation's roles in the war. Their arguing reveals people interpreted the war in a variety of ways after the fact. Clearly, people remembered. The fact a memorial exists at all suggests that to be true. However, the memory is not split like Vietnam because the American collective memory clearly defined the Korean War narrative as being unimportant. Conversely, the Vietnam War had different memories as its origins, which explains for the split memory.[56]

Ironically, by labeling the Korean War as "forgotten," Americans remembered it. A major reason for viewing it as forgotten attributes to it largely being out of the public sphere. When the war settled around the 38th parallel, with little change occurring, the public somewhat

[56] Jonathan C. Merritt, "The Remembered War: The Korean War in American Culture, 1953-1995," (Order No. 10287308, The University of Alabama, 2017), https://search.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/remembered-war-korean-american-culture-1953-1995/docview/1986271369/se-2?accountid=27424, 1

lost interest and resumed their everyday livelihoods and modes of thinking. Korean War veterans spoke up over the years about feeling overlooked by the U.S. government and population for their war efforts. They argued the American public's attention focuses on World War II and Vietnam veterans. Considering the Vietnam War Memorial was constructed before the Korean War Memorial, even though American involvement in the Vietnam War occurred more than a decade after the Korean War ended, Korean War veterans argument justifies their feelings. Still, The public's disinterest in the war made the Korean War veterans try to forget too.[57]

The reader should find it clear now that American society remembers the Korean War, but they consider it forgotten because most people wanted to forget it. It is also clear that there are connections between the Korean and Vietnam War. Due to the eerily similar characteristics of both wars, historians, politicians, and the general public consistently compare the Vietnam War to the Korean War. In this way, politicians making American policies for Vietnam linked their reasoning behind them to the Korean War. The Korean War acted as a guide on how to conduct the Vietnam War. The problem with that scenario, as many recognize, is that a large number of people view the Korean War as unsuccessful. It seemed counterintuitive to model the Vietnam War after a war that many wanted to forget. Politicians (including Presidents Johnson and Nixon) evidently did not desire to forget the Korean War since they kept America in Vietnam despite widespread opposition. In fact, they saw the Korean War as a success. This can partially explain why the government oftentimes miscommunicated with the American public, sparking the distrust that encapsulated the Vietnam War era. The American public largely saw

[57] Merritt, 5-6, 10.

the Korean War as a mistake, but a valuable lesson learned. By getting involved in Vietnam, government evidently disregarded the lesson entirely.[58]

[58] Merritt, 110-111.

Chapter 2: Vietnam Remembered

A General Connection Between the Korean and Vietnam Wars

The Korean War clearly influenced the Vietnam War in multiple ways. While what has already been described was more in-depth, a broader explanation of the connections between the Korean and Vietnam Wars is needed to fully comprehend the collective memory of both wars. The U.S. resisted communism even more as a result from the Korean War, which culminated into a mindset that advocated for more prevention of communism spreading. This led to harsher policies and actions in the Vietnam War. In general, the U.S. public saw the Korean War as an attempt by the Soviet Union to obtain world domination. This explains why the government viewed military action as necessary. Additionally, the South Korean government saw communism similarly to how the U.S. did, which made cooperation much easier. This explains why the Vietnamese did not greet the American soldiers as heroes. Instead the lack of a warm welcome disappointed the American soldiers. Also, the South Koreans fully depended on U.S. aid in the war for survival, furthering the idea that it was a just war. The same reasoning applied to Vietnam.[59] In Korea, the war stalemated, resulting in losses, but a clear stop of the spread of communism into South Korea, a victory in some American's eyes. Conversely, in Vietnam the North Vietnamese overpowered the South and unified as a single state under communism two years after the U.S. left, a clear loss in most American's eyes.[60]

The Korean War convinced most Americans that the Soviet Union controlled communism worldwide. This led to the belief that the real enemy was not in Korea (or later in Vietnam), but in Moscow, so fighting anyone else was pointless. This mode of thinking gives

[59] Lee, 71-76, 93.
[60] Donaldson, 70.

one explanation for why the public opposed Vietnam more than Korea. Ultimately, the memory of the Korean War led to the disapproval of Vietnam.[61]

The Major Differences Between the Two Wars

Despite the impact on Vietnam, the Korean War did have some differences that should be mentioned. In Korea, the public and soldiers always saw the enemy as evil. This contrasts with Vietnam, where many perceived the U.S. as the evil side. This made people tolerant towards the Korean War and the opposite towards the Vietnam War. Another key difference is international countries and organizations (like the United Nations) supported the Korean War but not Vietnam, so blame for the failure in Vietnam fell solely on the U.S. Despite the Korean War stalemating with no clear victory, many Americans convinced themselves that the U.S. won the war since South Korea successfully resisted communism. As far as collective memory of politicians and policy makers is concerned, it seems they forgot the Korean War since they failed to learn the lessons by replicating the Korean War in the almost identical war in Vietnam. [62]

The U.S. struggled to contain communism in Vietnam more than in Korea due to the early support of allowing French colonialism to remain in Vietnam. This prevented any natural pro-western revolution from happening, unlike in Korea. French colonialism in Vietnam meant the people did not have access to politics and the military. On the other hand, Korea already implemented a system capable of fighting communism. This prevented Vietnamese supporters of western governments to create nationalism, making it difficult to unite the people. Additionally, French colonialism discouraged anti-communist leaders to accept U.S. support because they viewed it as swapping one colonial power for another. They wanted full independence, which the Viet-Minh (and eventually Viet Cong) offered them. The U.S. tried to

[61] Donaldson, 61.
[62] Donaldson, 62-69.

set up a self-sustaining government that could combat the influence of communism on its own through their policy of containment. After they hypothetically accomplished this goal, the U.S. would withdraw, leaving Korea and Vietnam independent. This idea exemplifies the American mindset and their perceived justification for their actions in these wars. Another difference between the wars was Vietnam's pro-communist population was too strong compared to the weak anti-communist population, which was not the case in Korea. All of this information is necessary to understand the collective memory of Vietnam and the sensory experience of the soldiers.[63]

The relationships between the presidents and the public of this time period typifies part of the collective memory of the Vietnam War. The American people wanted moderation when it came to the Vietnam War. The 1964 presidential election, in which Lyndon B. Johnson won by a landslide, supports this claim. At that point, Johnson resisted aggression in Vietnam compared to his later years, which plagued his presidency. In fact, shortly after winning the election he started bombing North Vietnam. Once the war started to negatively affect the economy in the U.S., the people quickly began to disapprove of the war. Combined with the ongoing Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War created a massive counterculture that prominently impacted American memory, in both good and bad ways.[64]

Like Korea, negotiating while fighting characterized the later part of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. President Nixon, who wanted to end the war, spearheaded these actions, but he did not want to stop fighting due to his hatred of communism. Nixon also tried to censor the pentagon papers, which revealed the Kennedy and Johnson administrations constantly lied to the American

[63] Lee, 29-31, 45, 120, 238.
[64] Donaldson, 99-105

people about the war. By doing so, Nixon ensured a higher readership of the papers, creating even more disdain toward the war.[65]

Finally, the Orthodox Theory indicates a key difference concerning both memory and the senses. Harry Spiller explains the Orthodox Theory states that people view the world and its population as split up into diametrically opposed good and bad guys. The majority of the United States population accepted this theory in the Cold War era. Naturally, the public viewed foreign powers who contrasted with American ideals as the foes. The Soviet Union made the top of the list with its threat of communism. The Cuban Missile Crisis further indurated this accepted memory. This idea slowly began to deteriorate due to the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement. The combination of these two events forced people to reconsider who the foes really were. Some even changed their minds and thought of themselves (America) as the bad guys. Still, some viewed "the other" as the bad guy, accepting the narrative of the Orthodox Theory.[66]

The increased accessibility of the television attributed to people seeing the U.S. as in the wrong. Americans in the 1960's (and even more so in the 1970's) accessed television and its programs on a wider scale. While the television was certainly in American homes in the 1950's during the Korean War, mostly only upper- and middle-class citizens owned one. Conversely, working-class citizens (who, as Appy pointed out, were the majority of people who fought in the Vietnam War), managed to obtain television sets by the time the Vietnam War began. Plus, for those who owned a television, TV networks and news stations displayed their information much differently in the early 1950's than during the Vietnam era. TV networks typically resisted showing combat and dying soldiers/citizens during the Korean War, but that occurred during the

[65] Donaldson, 126-127.
[66] Harry Spiller, *Scars of Vietnam: Personal Accounts by Veterans and Their Families*, (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1994), 1.

Vietnam War. The majority of the population still used radios to access the media in the 1950's. This meant people during the Korean War received their news primarily through auditory means. The more widespread accessibility of the television during the Vietnam era added the visual sense to media on a massive scale. This is a significant change between the Korean and Vietnam War. As noted in Smith's *Sensing the Past*, many sensory historians argue the visual sense is the most important in today's society due to our reliance on our eyes to obtain information. While Smith disagrees with this notion, American society certainly seems to obtain information in this way most often. If this is true, then the television with its added sensory stimuli attributes as one of the main reasons for the split of memory in the Vietnam era. For some, seeing the war in a visual sense altered their thought processes enough to convince themselves that the U.S. approached world affairs incorrectly. As far as the Orthodox Theory is concerned, the television switched people's perspectives into viewing the American's as the bad guys.[67]

In addition to the new visual sense that the American population experienced during the Vietnam War, another reason for some people seeing the U.S. as the bad guys came from an influx of misleading information by the U.S. government. The government/military gave families false information concerning their loved ones who fought in the war. The family of Sergeant Stephen M. Malley experienced this. The government informed them that Malley received injuries in combat, but they reassured the family that his condition was stable. Shortly after, they received a picture of Malley bandaged from head-to-toe. In reality, Malley received "multiple shrapnel wounds to the chest wall, left flank, back, buttock, abdomen, and lower extremities."[68] Shrapnel even found its way into his stomach and liver. After this incident, a priest gave him his last rites and told him he would shortly die. From his family's perspective,

[67] Spiller, 1.
[68] Spiller, 11.

the photograph initiated the doubt of his safety, but his voice from a phone call confirmed their fears of his perilous situation. In this case, it seems that the picture and the visual sense was not enough to make his family realize the Vietnam War was unjustified. They likely resisted changing their mind about the war despite television and experiencing the war through that modality. However, the added sensory stimulus of hearing their son's weak voice over the phone finally made them flip the switch and view the war as unjust, realize the government lied to them, and their son was not safe. They viewed the government as the enemy, even though their son ultimately fought in the war. They shifted the blame onto the government for their façade of a justified war.[69]

Doctors failed to fully remove the shrapnel from Malley's body. As a result, he lived the rest of his life in constant pain. Unfortunately, the doctors' responded by prescribing him various painkillers. The painkillers helped very little, but he grew addicted to them nonetheless. He also suffered with anxiety and nervousness, undoubtedly a side effect of the physical and mental trauma he experienced in the war. His mind deteriorated as well, leading to delusions and seizures. Doctors and psychiatrists failed to explain if these occurrences resulted from mental trauma or the drugs. He eventually died due to cardio-pulmonary failure, leaving his pregnant wife alone. She fought for over a year to receive benefits from the Veteran's Administration. Clearly, the American system failed to adequately treat Malley and his family for his service. Many Vietnam veterans share Malley's addiction to painkillers, which explains why many remember them as drug addicts after the war. However, Malley's story shows how it was not his fault. Who the blame resides in (the doctors, government, war commanders, a combination of all three) is ultimately not clear.[70]

[69] Spiller, 9-11.
[70] Spiller, 18-21.

Mental Trauma Among Vietnam War Soldiers

The Vietnam War was a unique experience for soldiers: there were no clear battle lines, the enemy often used surprise tactics, soldiers commonly feared deadly devices like booby traps and mines, and soldiers struggled distinguishing between the enemy and the citizens. They also struggled finding purpose in the war, resulting in their solitary goal to stay alive. Also, the average age of a Vietnam soldier was nineteen (compared to twenty-six in WWII), meaning more of these soldiers were mentally less mature. Soldiers easily accessed hard drugs like heroin to help them cope with their actions. Finally, soldiers rotated into battle based on a predetermined time span of service, as opposed to previous wars where troops rotated based on their units. This caused soldiers to act independently, instead of focusing more on the team effort.[71]

Surprisingly, the number of psychological casualties, or casualties caused by mental trauma, in Vietnam was only 12 per 1,000. This is low compared to Korea (37 per 1,000) and World War II (120 per 1,000). On-the-sight psychiatrists helped contributed to these low numbers among Vietnam soldiers. In many cases, Vietnam veterans did not experience increased mental disorders compared to the general U.S. population. For example, while Vietnam veterans suffered a relatively high suicide rate, this rate differed little from the general population in the U.S. Nonetheless, cultural images of Vietnam veterans as a mentally disturbed population prevailed. Movies like *Taxi Driver* and *Deer Hunter* showed Vietnam veterans as suicidal and homicidal. These images demonstrate the split in society over the war. This split was not presented as strongly in popular culture after World War II and Korea. The split highlights how veteran's experiences and problems became overemphasized to show people's

[71] Horwitz, 85.

moral disdain towards the war. This was certainly not the only contradiction in the collective memory of the Vietnam War, however.[72]

Another contradiction in the collective memory of the Vietnam War involves how the populace treated veterans who managed to return home. People not in support of the war believed they treated veterans humanely, while people who did support it believed others treated them like scum and spat on them when they returned. In many cases, both are correct. They did not return home as heroes like veterans in the past (and like Korean veterans), but polls taken at the time indicate most Vietnam veterans felt they received a positive welcome home. The polls recorded no instances of people spitting on veterans.[73]

In addition to the conflicting memory of the treatment of veterans, the group called the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) created disruptions in the collective memory. The group formed to protest against the war. They argued the government forced veterans to experience trauma because the government made them go to war through the draft. Additionally, they believed doctors, psychiatrists, and the government inadequately treated veterans for their mental traumas. The VVAW compared their experience and mental state to Holocaust survivors who felt guilty for living while many of their companions died. Besides protesting, the VVAW formed rap groups where veterans congregated and discussed the problems they faced. These groups opposed the mainstream belief of soldiers needing to be emotionless by encouraging each other to express their feelings. A psychiatrist who worked closely with VVAW, Robert Jay Lifton, argued that if no mental disorders presented itself shortly after the war, then it did not automatically veterans could not develop them later. When veterans realized the repulsiveness of their wartime misdeeds, then guilt formed, which psychiatrists almost always associated with

[72] Horwitz, 86-87.
[73] Horwitz, 87-88.

Vietnam veteran's trauma. The VVAW contributed one last aspect to the image of Vietnam veterans. They advocated for the recognition of a disorder where trauma does not appear until a longer period after the event. By doing so, they helped initiate the concept of PTSD, which undoubtedly caused many to associate Vietnam veterans to the disorder. For this reason, people associate PTSD more with Vietnam veterans than other war veterans, even though Vietnam veterans suffer with PTSD somewhat less.[74]

Studies conducted after the recognition of PTSD in 1980 showed that Vietnam veterans did not experience the disorder much more than Korean and WWII veterans. All three wars saw cases of PTSD in about 1-2% of the veteran populations. However, since the VVAW helped create the concept of PTSD, the public associated them with it more than other veterans. By the 1980's, this caused people to remember Vietnam veterans as people with mental impairments instead of the "politically active, anti-war veteran in the American memory" prior.[75] This information is not meant to negate the impact the war had on the mental abilities of Vietnam veterans. Fifty-eight thousand American soldiers died in Vietnam, yet scholars estimate an additional sixty thousand killed themselves in the years that followed. Considering how more killed themselves after the war than the amount that actually died during the war demonstrates the severe mental damage the war caused.[76]

Vietnam veterans struggled to find a sense of purpose, leading to mental damage. The government and military recruiters misinformed them about their duties. The government stated they wanted to help the Vietnamese people, stop communism, and maintain worldwide respect. The real goal, according to the Vietnam veterans that Christian G. Appy interviewed, was to kill

[74] Horwitz, 88-93.
[75] Horwitz, 105-106.
[76] Engelhardt, 254-255.

as many Vietnamese as possible. Compared to World War II, in which most soldiers felt a sense of purpose for fighting, Vietnam soldiers built relationships in the belief that they fought a purposeless war and nobody cared about them except other soldiers. They based these feelings on their visual sense. Many soldiers killed Vietnamese civilians (children, women, and the elderly), which questioned their concept of an honorable fight. The poverty of the Vietnamese also forced American soldiers to question their purpose in Vietnam. Back home, society viewed the soldiers themselves as poor, but in Vietnam the soldiers considered themselves wealthy compared to the Vietnamese peasants, They faced a difficult dilemma in this regard, especially when they returned home.[77]

For the soldiers that developed PTSD, they failed to show symptoms until five to ten years after returning home. The Reagan era occurred at this time: a time period where people supported anti-war veterans much less. In general, most war veterans felt outsiders cannot understand what they went through, but civilians typically supported the veterans' actions. Vietnam veterans developed paranoias due to less support from the public.[78]

Despite Corcoran indicating POW's had more likely of a chance to develop PTSD, this does not mean other soldiers were immune to the condition. In fact, Henry Barber, a casualty reporter whose wrote letters of sympathy to the families of dead soldiers, experienced trauma even though he never engaged in battle. If soldier failed to recognize a fallen comrade, Barber retrieved dental records and fingerprints, so he saw their mangled bodies. He coped with these experiences by using drugs and alcohol. Nonetheless, Henry still dreams of the experiences. His story demonstrates how PTSD can affect anyone, regardless of their role in Vietnam. [79]

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[77] Chritian G. Appy, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam*, (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 207-208, 227, 242, 296-297.
[78] Appy, 310, 316-317.
[79] Appy, 257.

There is a dynamic relationship between the collective memory of the U.S. population and the mental health of the Vietnam veteran. Estimates of Vietnam soldiers who suffered from Delayed Stress Syndrome ranges from 500,000-800,000. In many cases, American culture denies Vietnam veteran's experiences. It the 1980's, the public began to recognize the soldiers' trauma. The collective memory remembers PTSD in Vietnam veterans resulting from there not being enough time for them to decompress and return to society. Society believed that the time of Vietnam veterans being in combat then returning home was shorter than previous wars. As a result, the American public thought Vietnam veterans suffered more from PTSD, but that was simply not the case. Psychiatrists and the public in general simply understood PTSD better in the Vietnam era compared to the 1940s and 1950s. The collective memory also remembers them not being treated and supported by society adequately. While this may be true, it is too simple of an explanation. Vietnam soldiers' moral contradictions and their inability to justify their actions caused much of their mental stress. Appy argues society as a whole failed to help the veterans the way they needed. The antiwar movement certainly hindered the help, but the movement should not receive full blame like the collective memory often suggests. Appy also argues an inability to connect with others and disapproval from people back home led to an increased level of paranoia among Vietnam veterans compared to other war veterans. With less soldiers participating in the war compared to the World Wars, Vietnam veterans struggled to connect with others who served in the war. More people served in World War II, meaning when they returned home, more people connected and talked about their experiences. This was not the case for many Vietnam veterans since there was not as much of the population that served, making people who shared their experiences more sparsely spread out. For those who formed groups and talked about their experiences, they felt hope for their future identity, unlike many who

missed that opportunity. More people possessed the will to forget at this time as well. The My Lai Massacre, described later, is an example of forgetting when it comes to collective memory because many do not remember it, even though it was one of the most notorious and publicized atrocities of the war.[80]

The Tet Offensive and Collective Memory

The Tet Offensive influenced the collective memory of the Vietnam War. While most see the Tet Offensive as a failure (the North Vietnamese tried to obtain power in the cities, but they failed to hold any city for longer than three weeks, all while losing 58,000 troops), it succeeded in causing public opinion of the war in the U.S. to drop dramatically. As a result, the military requested more American troops, which meant more casualties, higher taxes, and an increase in the draft. The Defense Department and the American public disapproved of such actions. The government denied the request. After Tet, a Gallup poll revealed 49% of Americans believed the U.S. should never have gotten involved in Vietnam. It also showed only 33% believed the U.S. was making progress in the war (a drop from 50% before Tet). The media increasingly opposed the war, with Walter Cronkite (the CBS anchorman) declaring his opposition to the war. When this happened, Johnson said, "If I've lost Walter then it's over. I've lost Mr. Average Citizen."[81] The shift to disapproving of the war negatively impacted the collective memory. A Harris poll conducted in 1971 concluded that 71% of the U.S. population believed the U.S. should never have gotten involved in Vietnam. This poll also revealed that 58% of Americans believed the war to be immoral. The longer the war went on, the more people disapproved of it.[82]

[80] Appy, 277, 320-321.
[81] Donaldson, 116-117.
[82] Donaldson, 127.

The Tet Offensive impacted the media significantly. Prior to this event, the media revealed the narrative that the military wanted the public to know. The military encouraged media companies to do this because the companies increased their chances of receiving military reports before those who did not go along with the narrative. Also, the journalists dismisses most atrocities until they brought the stories back into focus later in the war, when the public largely no longer supported the war. This means the American public may not have learned about atrocities until years after they happened. The Tet Offensive made this status quo change because it media outlets heavily broadcasted it, revealing the brutality of the war. Images of civilian casualties occurred 3.9 times a week during the Tet Offensive, which was four times as much of the average occurrences throughout the entire war.[83]

In Their Own Words: The Tet Offensive

A letter by Gerald W. Massy III to his daughter illustrates the sensory experience of the Tet Offensive among U.S. soldiers. Massy notified his daughter of his move to some unfinished barracks. This building had no bedding for mattresses, no lighting (other than emergency lights), no windows or doors, and no latrine. These are obviously not ideal conditions, considering he would likely be exposed to the outdoors due to no windows. He was blind in the darkness due to the absence of lights, and there were unsanitary bathroom conditions due to no latrines. He also explained much of the light came from flares, while much of what he heard echoed from a constant barrage of gunfire. Massy shared feelings with many veterans from previous wars back home: he worried the men lacked the courage to fight like the men in WWII did. He attributed this to Vietnam soldier's willingness to express their feelings. He even claimed people like this

[83] Kendrick Oliver, *The My Lai Massacre in American History and Memory*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 15-18, 27.

are more dangerous than communists or Nazis.[84] Massy reveals an instance where a Vietnam soldier opposed the counterculture found on college campuses. His ideas support the claim that people viewed Vietnam soldiers as being less brave than soldiers in the past. His experiences exemplify the sensory experience many likely had during the Tet Offensive. By having to find safety in unfinished barracks, he survived despite enduring a discomforting situation. For many who shared similar scenarios, their new sensory experience caused by the Tet Offensive led to feelings of displacement, peril, and fear.

Opposition to the War

Some groups within the counterculture held more prominence than others. Student protestors fit into this distinction. Despite feelings of purposelessness in the war, Vietnam veterans generally resented the student protestors because they viewed the protests as the middle class flaunting their superiority (remember, according to Appy most Vietnam soldiers were working-class citizens). This opposition stemmed from class differences, not ideological disputes, unlike how the collective memory remembers it today. Middle class college students contrasted clearly with working-class veterans, which made the protests seem like an attack on veterans as opposed to the war itself. Veterans envied those who did not endure the war, while simultaneously trying to justify their actions in Vietnam.[85]

Veterans themselves opposed the war as well. In the summer of 1971, the same summer Daniel Ellsberg leaked the Pentagon Papers, an organization called the Vietnam Veterans Against the War formed. This group, consisting of mostly honorably discharged veterans who received medals, famously met in Washington D.C. and threw their medals away before a crowd

[84] Gerald W. Massy III to Lynn Massy, February 2, 1968, in *War Letters: Extraordinary Correspondence from American Wars*, ed. Andrew Carroll, (New York: Scribner, 2001), 409-411.
[85] Appy, 220-221, 302.

of thousands. This convinced the American people even more of a seemingly unjust war occurring in Vietnam. This group represented the veteran's disdain towards the war by rejecting their honor of medals. They rejected this honor due to their sensory experiences they encountered in Vietnam. They shaped the collective memory of Vietnam as an unjust war by their actions.[86]

Warrior Image in Vietnam

At the start of the Vietnam War, people viewed the warrior image as one similar to the image during the Korean War: one that stirred disturbing, somewhat contradictory, yet also sympathetic feelings. This can be attributed partially to the television news networks initially seeing themselves as allies with the president; therefore, the networks portrayed the war in a positive way. When it came to atrocities, the media revealed they occurred more from South Vietnamese against North Vietnamese. First of all, the North committed atrocities too, but they covered them up better considering they lacked as free of a press, which allowed journalists to witness the combat. Secondly, media painted the American soldier as a witness to these atrocities, rather than an instigator. This eventually changed.[87]

Like in World War II and Korea, the press and the public hungered to learn what the war was *really* like. In this case, they asked for more than they bargained for. CBS's Robert Schakne said it perfectly: "It's nothing like a John Wayne movie."[88] Wayne conjured up a similar image on the big screen. Schakne's contradiction of this image highlights the discrepancy between the public's warrior to the actual fighter in Vietnam. This discrepancy is one reason for the split in memory. The Tet Offensive altered the warrior image to more of a

[86] Donaldson, 127.
[87] Huebner, 174-175, 180-181.
[88] Huebner, 198.

negative one due to all the media coverage it had back in the United States. While the experiences during the Tet Offensive happened throughout the years prior, the American public saw it for the first time on a massive scale. From there, the warrior image deteriorated.[89]

After the Tet Offensive, the media transitioned from ally of the White House to nemesis. It is important to note that this was not a complete turnaround. The media prior to the Tet Offensive certainly did not romanticize the war or paint it in a glorified way. It simply went along with how the president wanted the war to be seen. The Tet Offensive saw a break in this relationship, thus a break with the government as a whole as well. Journalists at the time have been criticized for showing too much *and* showing too little of the war. This is yet another example of a split memory.[90]

After 1968, the warrior image of American soldiers altered. While still seen as victims, it was in a new way. By 1970, the public saw them as drug abusers, officer killers, and accomplices to atrocities. Still, people viewed them as victims because it they believed the military molded them like that. William Calley, the officer blamed for the My Lai Massacre, exemplifies this victimization of the soldiers from both left and right political spectrums.[91]

The warrior image during the Vietnam War reflected that of a baby killer. Antiwar protests back home by Vietnam veterans [particularly by the group Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW)] actually helped strengthen the warrior image as one of a baby killer. These veterans admitted to killing children, but they argued there was no other option. Still, this reinforced the baby killer image because veterans admitted to literally killing babies. Veterans

[89] Huebner, 199-200.
[90] Huebner, 202-206.
[91] Huebner, 209-210, 214-217.

resisted this version of the image for obvious reasons. The VVAW demonstrations showed the public of the lost innocence as a result of the war.[92]

African-American Warrior Image in Vietnam

American citizens from all backgrounds considered African-American soldiers equal in warrior abilities compared to their white counterparts (at least prior to 1968 and the Civil Rights Act). This differed from the African-American warrior image in the Korean War. In the military during the Vietnam War, African-Americans saw equality like they never had before, even though officers disproportionately sent them to the front lines more often than whites at the beginning of the war. This image contradicted with how whites viewed African-Americans within U.S. borders. In Vietnam, many felt they earned the status of a man, both in a masculine sense, but also in a human sense. This feeling of equality gave them encouragement back home to fight for it, culminating in the Civil Rights Movement.[93]

To the African-American, they viewed warrior image as one who fought two wars – one in Vietnam against communism and the other in the United States against racism and discrimination. Equality in Vietnam encouraged the other side of the two-front war to fight back home. Interestingly, many Vietnam-era African-American soldiers critiqued the rioting of the Civil Right Movement, but they supported the protests.[94]

Another distinction between the African-American soldier abroad and their counterparts back home in the United States is that the former typically disagreed with Martin Luther King Jr.'s calls to not fight in Vietnam. This was one of the few (and in some cases the only) philosophical ideas African-American soldiers disagreed with Dr. King. The soldiers saw their

[92] Huebner, 222, 225-226.
[93] Huebner, 184-185.
[94] Huebner, 191-192.

own personal plight reflected in the Vietnamese people who yearned for freedom. To many, they supported the war for this reason. By fighting for the Vietnamese and their freedom, they symbolically fought for their own freedom back home. They clearly differed on their perspective of the war compared to their white counterparts. This alternate viewpoint explains why a split in memory between African-Americans and whites occurred.[95]

The My Lai Massacre

Robert Rheault, a Vietnam veteran once said regarding fear and combat, "You don't have the luxury to indulge in fear because other people's lives depend upon you keeping your head cold. You know, when something goes wrong, they call it emotional numbing. It's not very good in civilian life, but it's pretty useful in combat – to be able to get absolutely very cold about what needs to be done and to stick with it. To me, it's a little bit distressing to realize that I was at my best doing something as terrible as war."[96] Rheault's allegory of emotional coldness relates to the sense of touch. By relating his emotions to the feelings of coldness and numbness, he exposes the collective memory of a cold-hearted soldier absent of a conscience. Many people remember the soldiers who participated in the My Lai Massacre as cold-hearted due to war. This event is the root of this memory.

An event arguably as important, if not more so, than the Korean War on the collective memory of the Vietnam War was the My Lai Massacre. On March 16, 1968, the mass slaughter of mostly women, children, and old men incapable of defending themselves occurred. American soldiers raped many of the women before killing and torturing others. U.S. soldiers killed approximately four hundred Vietnamese citizens that day in the My Lai village. The soldiers reporting the event considered the deaths accidental. The military attributed rumors of what

[95] Huebner, 190-191.
[96] Ken Burns and Lynn Novak, *The Vietnam War*.

actually happened to enemy propaganda. For an entire year, the small amount of people within the public aware of the event accepted this version of the story until an investigation finally started after stories of what actually happened circulated to Ronald Ridenhour, who wrote multiple letters asking for an investigation. Through the investigation, a military council charged William Calley (the Lieutenant in charge of American forces during the incident) with murder and the shooting of 109 Vietnamese civilians. His trial brought the massacre to the American public through the media. Twenty-four officers and soldiers were charged with crimes, but all achieved an acquittal except Calley. Even then, the jury originally sentenced Calley to life imprisonment with hard labor, but by 1976, he was pardoned. The media, however, acknowledged the significance of this event even if the government failed to. This event marked a major turning point of Americans seeing the war as necessary to pointless. It made Americans question the morality of not only the war, but the U.S. itself. Despite its importance, American memory forgot the event. If people remember it, they likely see it as an unfortunate circumstance that occurred during the war. The underlying question here is "why?"[97]

The overall attempt to forget the war in its entirety (much like the Korean War) partially explains why the American collective memory forgot the My Lai Massacre. This forgetting is attributed to the fact the Vietnam War does not align with the American narrative of winning an honorable war. After all, the U.S. lost, and it was certainly not honorable. Political rhetoric and portrayals of the war by popular culture through mediums such as film aids this forgetfulness. These modes of forgetting portrayed the soldier's themselves as the victims, which has been what the collective memory now remembers, as opposed to alternate victims such as the Vietnamese citizens. Vietnam veterans challenge this victimized idea. Largely out of guilt, their

[97] Oliver, 1-3.

writings reveal who they saw as the true victims: the Vietnamese citizens. At the time, the public focused on who was to blame when this massacre occurred instead of on the victims. Many blamed the government and the people on top like the president. Because of the blame placed on the government instead of the soldiers themselves, people viewed William Calley as the victim who acted against his will. Calley represented all Vietnam soldiers in the collective memory, which explains why the collective memory forgot the My Lai Massacre. The public incorrectly labeled the victim in this case.[98] This event caused more conflicting images because the public never heard of an American soldier committing an atrocity.[99]

With the question of who is to blame aside, the question of how and why this happened needs to be answered to better comprehend the Vietnam soldier's mindset and sensory experience. Ethics confused many during the war. Since the military used the body count to determine success, they normalized the killing of anyone to create a higher body count. Additionally, the widespread use of bombing/air attacks did not discriminate between civilian and enemy, resulting in a high civilian casualty rate. They normalized atrocities as well, creating an acceptable military culture of rape and mutilation. Nonetheless, there is no clear consensus on the soldier's view of My Lai. A survey indicated a variety of responses. Some said they experienced similar mentalities, others could understand the mentality due to the stress of combat, yet others said they never heard or experienced the mindset that went into My Lai. This indicates a more conflicting narrative that alters the collective memory.[100]

The media played a significant role in fashioning the memory and narrative of My Lai. Prior to the Tet Offensive, the media watered down atrocities to appeal more to advertisers who

[98] Oliver, 3-9.
[99] Donaldson, 126.
[100] Oliver, 11-13.

did not want their ads associated with the atrocities. Telling the stories in full detail also pushed people away from their media outlet because the atrocities disgusted people. However, even after Tet, the media excessively censored their stories. It was not until twenty-one months after My Lai that the event finally made the news, although initially on a small scale due to other media-excessive news stories (like the moon landing). Once journalists discovered pictures of the incident, the story grabbed national attention. This demonstrates the importance of the visual sense on collective memory. Without seeing the pictures, the American public ignored the possibility of atrocities committed by U.S. soldiers. The pictures revealed desolation and destruction implemented by American boys. By seeing the destruction of My Lai, the American public struggled to deny the immoral actions taken by the United States. Without the pictures, the public likely would have never known about My Lai.[101]

My Lai became front page news because soldiers testified. They provided a source outside of the military officials who routinely provided the information of the war. My Lai also initiated the massive use of pictures to portray the war. This created an entirely new visual sense of the war for the public. Despite this coverage, a large amount of U.S. citizens did not believe the story was true. To combat this unbelief, the media decided to focus on an individual to minimize the complexity of the event. They focused of course on William Calley and his trial. This led to a poll where 96% of respondents said they had heard of Calley and the My Lai Massacre. The frequent use of Calley's image in relation to My Lai caused the American public to feel badly for him. This created an image of not only Calley, but the Vietnam soldier as a victim. The use of soldier's accounts in the media gave credibility to the story because the soldiers themselves who experienced shaped the narrative. Despite these reports, most of the

[101] Oliver, 29-31, 44, 49.

public believed this type of event was natural to war (65%) while only 22% felt repulsed. Another 55% believed the government used Calley as a scapegoat for the government's immoral actions. This indicates the American public was vastly immune to the violence that characterized the war; therefore, a majority of Americans still supported the war and soldiers, even after learning of atrocities.[102]

This event completely changed how many Americans viewed the U.S. involvement in the war, yet some believed the media presented fake pictures of the massacre, thus furthering the argument that there was a split in the collective memory of the Vietnam War. While some whites believed in the dominant white memory of heroic, valiant soldiers, others changed their beliefs to align more with the African-American counter-memory of an unjust and immoral American system. Also, most protestors attributed this event to the government, not the actual soldiers who participated in the massacre because they argued the government trained the men. In some cases, protestors compared the My Lai Massacre and the war trials that proceeded to Nazi Germany and the Nuremberg Trials. The letters by Ridenhour that sparked the media attention of the massacre showed a conflict of American ideals and the Vietnam War. He writes, "As far as I was concerned, it was a reflection on me, on every American, on the ideals that supposedly represent. It completely castrated the whole picture of America."[103] This quote represents many Vietnam veteran's thoughts. It shows a struggle of acceptance of what they did and what America represented. Eventually, when the media discovered the event, television helped alert the whole nation to the massacre.[104]

[102] Oliver, 52-61, 80.
[103] Engelhardt, 218.
[104] Engelhardt, 218, 224-227.

Calley defended himself inconsistently, which turned the public against him. Still, once the jury convicted Calley, most of the public believed others should receive some of the blame, instead of an individual. Calley accepted the punishment seemingly with a sense of duty. This regained him sympathy from the public, who saw his conviction as martyr-like. The media viewed the sympathy given to Calley as a clear sign of moral degeneration of the American public. Another reason people supported Calley after his conviction was they believed he simply followed orders. A Harris poll in 1971 revealed 76% believed this to be true. It seems people always blamed someone higher. A Gallup poll supported this by concluding 69% believed the higher orders in government are to blame.[105]

Other veterans started to speak out, claiming they committed similar actions as Calley. This not only indicated the magnitude of atrocities committed in Vietnam, but it also created even more confusion and difficulty in distinguishing one action (My Lai) to the entirety of the war. Veterans saw Calley's case as an opportunity to alert the public to what really happened in Vietnam. Positive public attitude shifted almost completely towards deterioration at this time. They accepted the truth of American atrocities more willingly and listened to veterans who made those claims. Veterans increasingly started calling for an end to the war. Many shared the belief that the whole country should be on trial for the crimes committed. People from all walks of life connected these atrocities to the cause of veteran's mental health issues, which people now seemingly blamed the U.S. as a whole. Most of the public denied this, but the fact that the whole nation could be blamed for the atrocities left a negative memory collectively, which people inevitably desired to forget. Oliver convincingly argues, "A memory of collective indifference to the consequences of war, therefore, contributed to assertions that the American nation itself

[105] Oliver, 87-91, 106-107.

bore responsibility for the massacre…"[106] Some Americans felt this way because they saw themselves in William Calley, and they did not like the reflection. However, they likely did not feel guilty for the actions committed. With this type of thinking, a number of Americans likely saw the images of My Lai and saw them as their own crimes. Since responsibility was not clear for events like My Lai and the war in general, people managed to forget the atrocities more easily and see the war as an abstract event. With new writings detailing the atrocities of the U.S. in the Philippines and against the Native Americans emerging at this time, people accepted more willingly that Vietnam was just another chapter in American history. This profoundly impacted the collective memory of the war.[107]

When it came to African-Americans, My Lai also contributed to their collective memory. A larger portion of the South (50%) supported the events of My Lai compared to the East (25%) and West (36%). A cultural collective memory of the Civil War contributed to this, one in which southern populations viewed total destruction as necessary to win in war (like what General Sherman did to the South). This created even more conflict among African-Americans since they lived mostly in the South.[108]

It has been proven that the American public possessed little empathy or sympathy for the Vietnamese and the victims in My Lai. This indicates a lack of guilt by the American public. Without guilt, the American public collectively forgot the event and the memory deteriorated, much like most of the events of Vietnam. However, Oliver acknowledges some forgetting must occur in order for a society to progress. When PTSD became an accepted disorder in 1980, the most common denominator of PTSD among Vietnam veterans were admittances to committing

[106] Oliver, 118.
[107] Oliver, 108-111, 127, 132, 147-148.
[108] Oliver, 160-161.

atrocities. The association of Vietnam veterans to PTSD created an image of victimhood, again ignoring the countless Vietnamese who died in this event.[109]

In Their Own Words: The My Lai Massacre

Much like the Korean War and the Tet Offensive, accounts of soldiers demonstrate a general soldier's viewpoint on the My Lai Massacre. A letter written by Bob Leahy to his family regarding My Lai exemplifies a soldier's viewpoint. He argued the media incorrectly interpreted the situations in Vietnam because the media portrayed combat in much too simplistic terms. Most of the time, soldiers make assumptions to ensure safety. With this reasoning, Leahy expressed little surprise that a massacre like My Lai occurred. He did not condone the events, but he thought people who blamed those soldiers for their actions did not fully comprehend human nature. He argued the casualties of war shaped soldiers to feel hatred towards the Vietnamese. Also, he wrote that a soldier cannot be blamed for killing an unarmed citizen while he wanted to make it home in one piece. Essentially, he argued that soldiers faced dilemmas all the time in which clear answers cease to exist.[110] Leahy's letter is an example of the conflicting emotions and beliefs about My Lai. While My Lai sparked outrage back in the U.S., soldiers in Vietnam viewed the incident as wrong, but not valid for condemnation. Events like My Lai happened due to complex circumstances that people back home struggled to understand. Whether the media or Leahy (and other Vietnam soldiers) are correct is open to interpretation. Both acknowledge the unnecessary actions of the massacre, but they disagree on the consequences. Perhaps, they were both right and wrong in their own regards, yet there may not necessarily be a right and wrong as well.

[109] Oliver, 233, 253-256.
[110] Bob Leahy to family, February 2, 1970, in *War Letters: Extraordinary Correspondence from American Wars*, ed. Andrew Carroll, (New York: Scribner, 2001), 422-423.

Another account concerning My Lai comes from Charles Strong, an African-American soldier who provided an oral history for Wallace Terry in his book titled *Bloods*. In Strong's testimony, he defended Calley and My Lai. He explained the impossibility of Calley carrying out the entire massacre on his own and most likely someone instructed him to do the massacre. He also explained, "We killed a whole lot of innocent gooks by mistake, because they were not supposed to be there."[111] He explained their religion prevented them from permanently leaving the areas the soldiers told them to leave. Strong's oral history shows African-American's willingness to understand the culture of the Vietnamese more than the Anglo-Americans. Nonetheless, his argument in favor of Calley's actions exemplifies the soldier's tendency to support atrocities. Soldiers likely cope with their actions in this way.[112] My Lai clearly represented a shift in American thought and memory. Of course, soldiers experienced other sensory elements outside of My Lai.

Though this does not directly connect with the My Lai Massacre, Petty Officer Third Class George I. Ellis had a relevant perspective on what it was like while fighting in Vietnam. In an interview with Harry Spiller, he said, "That little girl getting her arm shot off, those kids out there getting hurt, that old man getting shot, at the time you don't think about that stuff. You put it in the back of your mind. But when you have kids, you're in civilian life, you have a family, things like that start bothering you because that could be your kids… The kids belonged to somebody, but at the time you don't think like that because at the time you're young… It starts bothering you later on in life. Those memories start coming forward."[113] Ellis' account suggests he (and likely others) slowly realized what they did and witnessed in the war. Nonetheless, those

[111] Charles Strong in *Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans*, ed. Wallace Terry, (New York: Random House, 1984), 56.
[112] Strong, 56-58.
[113] Spiller, 92.

memories resurfaced *after* the war ended. This creates two different narratives from the *same* person, which adds to the confusing memory of the Vietnam War. This perspective should act as a reminder that most struggle conceptualizing fighting in a war first-hand. Many cannot comprehend switching from "civilian mode" to "soldier mode". They both require different kinds of behavior to function properly in their respective settings (and in some cases survive). This perspective is important when trying to analyze not only the My Lai Massacre, but any war in general.

Chapter 3: Imagery and the Media

Propaganda and Psychological Warfare in the Vietnam War Era

Various propaganda media demonstrates how the collective memory of the Vietnam War split due to sensory stimuli. Propaganda appealed to the senses, which affected the public's memory. Psychological warfare from both sides in the form of propaganda created a negative view of Vietnam in the collective remembrance of the war. For example, North Vietnam propagandists made radio announcements that appealed to American women to resist the war due to U.S. terrorism. While not every woman fell under the spell of this propaganda, it still impacted some, contributing to the counter-memory that Vietnam was an unjust war. Additionally, until 1967, both Americans and the Vietnamese falsified records to convince people of vast support. This likely contributed to the illusion perceived by U.S. soldiers that the Vietnamese wanted them there. When soldiers discovered that the Vietnamese rejected them, a dilemma occurred for the veterans who intended to help. This shattered the reality of the war, leading to negative memories as well.[114]

Propaganda from the North also affected the soldiers themselves. After the deaths of soldiers, the propagandists claimed over the radio that they died for the warmongers of the U.S., alluding to their purposeless deaths. This resonated and amplified soldier's beliefs that they fought in a purposeless war. They also claimed the U.S. practiced chemical warfare. The U.S. Army cleared roadways by burning foliage to prevent ambushes. These acts falsely supported those claims. This caused the public (especially those under the belief of the counter-memory) back home to lose support for the war and the soldiers. Despite the North's success, the U.S. propaganda to its own people almost always reported good news and indications of progress.

[114] Mervyn Edwin Roberts III, *The Psychological War for Vietnam, 1960-1968*, (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2018), 73-74.

This contradicted with what many heard and experienced about the war, leading to even less trust and support for the government.[115]

Both sides had advantages when it came to psychological warfare. The South Vietnamese, aided by the U.S., used better technology to spread propaganda, such as more advanced speakers, radio equipment, and use of paper propaganda like leaflets. They also had the advantage logistically, while the North Vietnamese had the advantage ideologically. The North's ideas appealed to more Vietnamese and other communist countries, resulting in more international support from communists. Soldiers sending letters home and contradicting with the propaganda created a disadvantage of the U.S. government's efforts to control how the public viewed the war. These soldiers challenged the national narrative is so important when it comes to creating collective memories. In some cases, media outlets published these letters, which revealed a low morale and bewilderment in U.S. involvement. This propaganda proved the pointlessness of the war by the soldier's themselves, dealing a crushing blow to U.S. efforts. Northern propagandists successfully targeted U.S. college populations through magazines. In fact, over one hundred college libraries subscribed to magazines with northern propaganda within its pages (including universities like the University of California at Berkeley and North Texas State University). The Soviet Union and China supported this propaganda, seemingly making the information credible. This information echoed in student protests.[116]

For the United States and North Vietnam, they utilized radio as the most common form to communicate propaganda throughout Vietnam. The U.S. also helped created a TV network, named Vietnam Television, to allow soldiers to obtain news and entertainment. This acted as a way to generate propaganda to the general population. Increased bombing also worked as

[115] Roberts III, 77-80, 89.
[116] Roberts III, 95, 118-120.

propaganda because it decimated North Vietnamese morale due to increased psychological fear of being killed. Despite student protests and the North's propaganda, the American public still supported the war in 1966. The antiwar movement failed to gain any success with legislation, but they succeeded in keeping the war in the public's eye. While northern propaganda failed to affect the mass population in the U.S., it managed to attract college students, which ultimately affected many politicians since their children went to college. There is no clear indication, however, if this affected American policy. The propaganda described created much of American's distaste for Vietnam. In some ways, this propaganda actually proved President Johnson's lies about the war. Through the use of radio and television, propaganda impacted populations and their collective memories by targeting their visual and hearing senses. The words and images that the public sensed through these modalities conflicted with their memory of a noble soldier[117]

TV: The Revolutionary Gateway to Experiencing War

Propaganda leads directly to the impact TV had on the collective memory of the war. In broad terms, this form of communication created conflicting images, contributing to the split in collective memory. TV brought the war directly in sight of the average U.S. citizen. It created a conflicting image of the war due to simultaneously showing U.S. soldiers dying in combat, who clearly needed U.S. support, while also showing scenes of protest. What was one to believe? These images caused many to start asking questions about the war, such as "Why are we there?" TV also created a credibility gap that made the government lose face with the information provided on the screen. In other words, the press showed the reality of the war, which caused people to disapprove of it.[118]

[117] Roberts III, 140-141, 172-173, 249, 335-337.
[118] Donaldson, 110-111.

Images aired on the news of American soldiers burning down villages, which contrasted with what the American people back home thought was going on. This changed the view of Americans as victims to the savage aggressors in some citizen's eyes. News outlets televised Vietnam more than Korea, which is another explanation to why people reacted to Vietnam more negatively; the visual and auditory stimuli upset them. One popular TV show, *MASH* (aired in 1972), depicted the Korean War. Despite the location in the show, the creators meant for it to represent Vietnam as an analogy, while humanizing the tragedy of war. Once again, this is an example of how TV and the visual/auditory senses affected collective memory.[119]

Two Films, Two Memories

When media creates a sensory artifact that millions can access again and again, the creators preserve (or alter) collective memory. Movies act as such artifacts, since they appeal to both sight and hearing. For the Vietnam War, Hollywood abundantly supplies cinematography. Even then, some movies depict the war in alternate ways. For example, *Platoon* (1986), starring Charlie Sheen, portrays Vietnam as a tragedy, one in which the United States was morally wrong. Conversely, *We Were Soldiers* (2002), starring Mel Gibson, paints the war in more of a patriotic way. While the reasons for involvement may not have been right, the movie depicts the problem being in the government, not in the military. These movies exemplify a split in memory and the many ways that people have remembered the war.

Each movie possesses some accurate and inaccurate descriptions of the war. Hollywood and the entertainment factor attributes to these inaccuracies, but blame resides elsewhere as well. Curiously, neither one hardly mentioned the Korean War, even though the war acted as a model on how to conduct war in Vietnam. *Platoon* showed the inhumaneness of the war and how the

[119] Engelhardt, 187-193, 238.

United States demonstrated immoral qualities, but it failed to illustrate that these absences of morality were not as common as some believed (at least, according to the numerous Vietnam soldier's writings already mentioned, who stated the belief that massacres did or could happen, but not often). Granted, one may argue that one massacre is too many, even in a heightened state of frustrations that the Vietnam War caused. Still, another may argue that one should not judge a person's situation or their choices if we ourselves have not lived through the same or similar experience.

Platoon also highlighted integration and the use of drugs much more accurately than *We Were Soldiers*. In *We Were Soldiers*, the concept of integration and drug use barely exists. This movie also showed a clear distinction between right and wrong. In reality, soldiers faced a gray area of uncertainty when it came to morality. Neither of the movies show the reason for fighting, other than the implication of an evil enemy. In *Platoon*, the director portrayed evil from within the American soldiers, whereas *We Were Soldiers* placed evil in the Viet-Cong and the ideals that threatened the United States.

Both of these movies highlight a clear divide in memory. *We Were Soldiers* glorifies the war, while *Platoon* denigrates it. The divide on how the two movies portrayed the Vietnam War represents the divide in American memory. On one hand, *Platoon* correlates with people who remember the war as unjustified and Americans as immoral. On the other hand, *We Were Soldiers* justifies the war because Americans fought evil; therefore, Americans need to admire and glorify the soldiers. There is really no correct or incorrect way to show this war because of this split memory. Neither correctly or incorrectly describes the war, which emphasizes why the Vietnam War cannot permeates with obscurity. The alternative memories (in a cultural, racial, and political sense) make it this way. To distinguish between the two movies (and memories)

Platoon showed the inhumane (pessimistic) side of the war while *We Were Soldiers* showed the humane (optimistic) side of it. In other words, *Platoon* criticized the war while *We Were Soldiers* idolized it.

Platoon and a Critique of Vietnam

Platoon opens to soldiers marching through dense jungle, with many struggling to navigate through the foliage. The main character, Chris Taylor (played by Charlie Sheen), merges with veteran soldiers as a new combatant. His fellow soldiers do not respect him due to his lack of experience. Various hazards, such as snakes, ants, mosquitoes, and heavy rain (all of which were legitimate dangers) appear in the opening scenes.[120]

The movie depicts integration, with both white and black soldiers fighting together. Still, a closer connection exists within the races instead of between the two. *Platoon* excellently highlights this concept, considering integration occurred for the first time throughout the entire Vietnam War. The military implemented integration in the Korean War first, but they did not allow it until the end of the war. Of course, these soldiers played a pivotal role on film, much like the people they represented played a significant role in the war as well. Hostility existed between some of the white and black soldiers in the film. For example, after being insulted by a white soldier, one black soldier says, "Goddamn man, you break your ass for the white man. No justice, right?" This quote demonstrates how African-Americans had different perspectives and experiences during the war, thus creating divergent memories.[121]

Taylor makes a quote in the beginning of the movie, saying, "Somebody once wrote 'Hell is the impossibility of reason.' That's what this feels like, Hell." In other words, the Vietnam War bred irrationality. The quote sets the stage for depicting the Vietnam War in this way. This

[120] Oliver Stone (Director), *Platoon*, (Beverly Hills, CA: Metro Goldwyn Mayer, 1986), Netflix.
[121] Stone (Director), *Platoon*.

contrasts with *We Were Soldiers*, which depicts the war as fighting a clearly defined enemy, one who soldiers logically identified as the opposition.[122]

An idea that both movies blame politicians and the government for involvement and atrocities in Vietnam. This aligns with the memory that many people actually believed. This memory allowed for the release of William Calley (the only person convicted for the My Lai Massacre) from prison a few years after a jury sentenced him to life imprisonment. It is important to remember that while politicians certainly can hold some of the blame for the events of the Vietnam War, all of the blame does not reside with them. After all, it is the American people who elect the politicians. Also, people expect other to hold themselves responsible for their own actions, including soldiers. In other words, blame applies to all of American society (and Vietnamese) society for the events of the Vietnam War.[123]

Taylor acknowledges he wanted to serve because his grandfather and his father served in World War I and World War II respectively. He also says the men fighting mostly came from small towns, and no one cared about them. This aligns with Appy's description of the soldiers being mostly from the working class, yet they fought for the entirety of American society.[124]

In another scene, fellow soldiers surround Taylor, and they all smoke marijuana. Taylor also partakes, and it makes him feel better from the pain caused by a minor injury. All of the soldiers in this scene appear more relaxed and happier, since the drugs provide an escape from their dim reality. This scene highlights the memory some have of Vietnam veterans as drug addicts after returning from the war, which in some cases was true.[125]

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[122] Stone (Director), *Platoon*.
[123] Stone (Director), *Platoon*.
[124] Stone (Director), *Platoon*.
[125] Stone (Director), *Platoon*.

A pivoting point in the movie is when the soldiers come across a village inhabited by farmers. They find weapons and large amounts of rice. Upon questioning, the farmers tell them that the Viet-Cong forced the villagers to store the supplies. Out of frustration caused by the death of fellow soldiers earlier in the film, several of the soldiers kill a portion of the unarmed villagers: one being a handicapped man with one leg and another being a woman who was yelling about the soldiers killing their pigs. When soldiers kill them, other soldiers chose not to intervene. Instead, they either cheered the murderers on or stood by silently. This included the commanding officer. The scene compares to the real-life My Lai Massacre, and it depicts how situations with the Vietnamese citizens could easily escalate out of mistrust and anger. At the end of the scene, the soldiers burn down the entire village. Meanwhile, Taylor intervened on some of the American soldiers who tried to rape some of the women. This event ultimately divides the platoon between two sergeants who see the event through different morality perspectives.[126]

The final fight scene also creates images that are important when looking at memory of the Vietnam War. To emphasize the difficulty of distinguishing who the enemy was, the scene consists of Viet-Cong soldiers dressing up as U.S. soldiers. They infiltrate the U.S. line and kill many of the officers. Aircraft bombers thwart their plans, however. In the end, Taylor shoots the sergeant who took an active role in the previously mentioned massacre. This allegory represents how the U.S. fought itself. In fact, one of the closing lines was, "I think now, looking back, we did not fight the enemy. We fought ourselves. And the enemy was in us. The war is over for me now, but it will always be there the rest of my days… fighting for my soul." This

[126] Stone (Director), *Platoon*.

quote epitomizes the inner struggle numerous soldiers felt concerning the blurred morality lines they faced in the war.[127]

We Were Soldiers and the Idolization of Vietnam

We Were Soldiers recreates the events surrounding the first major battle in Vietnam between the Vietnamese and American forces. The director and produces based the movie off of a book written by the main character, Hal Moore (played by Mel Gibson), who commanded the troops in this initial fight. This indicates the movie may depict how many of the Vietnam soldiers want to remember the war (one of glory and morally correct actions), as opposed to how they actually remember it (one of shame and immorality).

Before heading off to Vietnam, Moore explains to his daughter that war is something when people from other countries are killing people, so people like himself go over and stop them. This alludes to the idea that Americans viewed the Viet-Cong as the bad guys and the Americans as the good guys in accordance with the Orthodox Theory. This concept erases the fact the United States government states they tried to prevent the spread of communism, not to stop mass killings. This depiction justifies the war in the collective memory because it makes greater sense. Moore appears nervous before going to Vietnam because he fears leading his troops into a massacre. The movie depicts the war as if the U.S. entered a war where they lacked a military and technology advantage, which was false.[128]

Interestingly, Moore mentions the Korean War. In a conversation with another high-ranking officer, Moore remarks, "Korea didn't teach them [politicians] anything." The other officer sarcastically replies, "Politicians?" This brief conversation (the only time the Korean War is mentioned in either *Platoon* or *We Were Soldiers*) shows that the collective memory

[127] Stone (Director), *Platoon*.
[128] Randall Wallace (Director), *We Were Soldiers* (Los Angeles, CA: Paramount, 2002), Amazon Prime Video.

remembered the war despite ironically being labeled as forgotten, but the lessons that America evidently neglected could be blamed on the government. This highlights the dominant memory which believed blamed resided in the government and politicians, not the soldiers themselves. As mentioned in the section concerning *Platoon*, this full blame is not justified. Still, the memory remains.[129]

The film does not highlight racial integration. Only one African-American soldier appears to impact the movie and event. Even then, the soldier lacks any lines, but his wife back home makes his death significant because she speaks occasionally in the film. In this regard, *We Were Soldiers* poorly represents African-American's role in the war, indicating an inaccurate white perspective and memory in which black soldiers play a minor role in the hardship of the Vietnam War. In this way, *We Were Soldiers* represents the dominant white memory. Viewers who watch this movie witness the glorified soldier and hear patriotic speeches that resonate with this memory. Mel Gibson, the main actor in *The Patriot*, resonates with a white audience who view his concept and memory of America as correct. Despite a lack of African-American soldiers, Moore makes a speech in the film in which he acknowledges diversity and how they must accept each other to survive. They must rely on the person next to them, regardless of race, religion, or creed to preserve their chances of survival. Still, this does not excuse the fact that the director and producers reserve African-Americans almost exclusively in the role of background characters. Obviously, this adaptation of the war, though not representative of the war in its entirety like *Platoon*, creates and strengthens a memory that does not align with how the counter-memory remembers it, especially amongst African-Americans. This type of media creates a

[129] Wallace (Director), *We Were Soldiers*.

wider split in the memory of the Vietnam War, one in which African-Americans arbitrarily played a significant role.[130]

When the battle occurs, it takes place much like a John Wayne movie in which the protagonists face overwhelming odds, but due to superior technology and willpower, they capably kill much more of the enemy. This seemingly justifies the killing of a massive amount of Viet-Cong. Granted, in this battle, they actually faced overwhelming numbers; nonetheless, it supports the memory that the Viet-Cong outnumbered Americans throughout the whole war. It is interesting that this movie came out in 2002, a year after the events of 9/11. One may speculate that the seemingly justification for killing massive amounts of the enemy was meant to translate into the conflict in the Middle East as well, much like how MASH was set during the Korean War, yet it acted as a critique on the Vietnam War. In other words, perhaps the mass killing of Vietnamese in this movie really represented what the U.S. should do in the Middle East. Of course, this is mere speculation, and it very well could just be a coincidence.[131]

As far as depicting what life was like back home, the movie shows how the wives of the soldiers handled the loss of their husbands. It fails to show any resistance back home of the war, which implies no conflict occurred. Of course, this is a false notion. Protestors conducted a vast amount of protests to the war, but by not showing resistance from within the United States, the movie refashions a memory that Americans viewed the Vietnam War positively, or in the very least justified. This is part of the split in memory as well. One side sees the war in more of a positive light, while the other does not.[132]

[130] Wallace (Director), *We Were Soldiers*.
[131] Wallace (Director), *We Were Soldiers*.
[132] Wallace (Director), *We Were Soldiers*.

Another character, Joey Galloway, joins the battle to take pictures. He explains that he tried to help himself and others back home understand the war. This accurately depicts the hunger the U.S. population historically has had to know what wars are really like. The director interestingly represented Galloway as someone who viewed the war in a positive way as opposed to rejecting the actions the soldiers partake in. This certainly was representative of the media in the early stages of the war (which is when this movie takes place), but it misrepresents how the media reacted to the war later on, when they portrayed the war in a negative way to the public.[133]

How Vietnamese soldiers are shown in the movie is somewhat contradictory. For the most part, the director portrays them as a formidable enemy, capable of besting the United States. They oppose American ideals and require elimination. Nonetheless, the director refrains from completely dehumanizing them. For example, the movie highlights one soldier who almost kills Moore, but Moore kills him first. Moore discovers the soldier kept a picture of a woman (presumably his wife). This information reflects the duality of war, one in which the enemy shares much in common with the Americans. Unfortunately, the director severely under develops this concept, and it comes off as more of an afterthought. In addition to this soldier, the director emphasizes the Viet-Cong commander. In one of the final scenes, the commander walks amongst the dead bodies of his soldiers after the Americans won the battle and left. Amongst this dead, he said, "Such a tragedy. They will think this was their victory. So, this will become an American war. And the end will be the same except for the number who will die before we get there." This quote emphasizes that war in general wastes human life.

Even though the movie glorifies the Vietnam War, the director still manages to critique it. The Americans never question the morality of the war, yet Moore shows guilt for his men that

[133] Wallace (Director), *We Were Soldiers*.

died while he survived the battle. The killing of the Vietnamese is never critiqued though. Also, the director highlights the memory of soldiers fighting the war with one arm tied behind their backs. The director demonstrates this by the abandonment of the mountain after successfully winning the battle, thus giving it back to the enemy. Finally, at the end of the movie, the narrator indicates that the soldiers who returned home had "no bands, no flags, and no honor guards to welcome them home. They went to war because their country ordered them to, but in the end, they fought for neither their country nor their flag. They fought for each other." This quote highlights how the dominant white memory remembers the counter-culture mistreating Vietnam veterans after they returned home, and any wrongdoing on the soldier's part falls on the government and politicians.[134]

Further Contradictions in Memory

Philip Caputo explained about his first experience in Vietnam, "What struck me was how beautiful Vietnam was to look at. There were just endless acres of these jade-green rice paddies and these lovely villages inside these groves of bamboo and palm trees. And way off in the distance, these bluish, jungled mountains… and I remember seeing this line of Vietnamese women, or schoolgirls… They actually looked like angels came to earth or something like that. It was really quite striking, but a little unsettling. How can a place like this, so beautiful and so enchanting, be at war?"[135] This contradiction of expectations and reality based in his sensory experience played into multiple aspects of the Vietnam War. Out of these sensory conflicts, the collective memory of Vietnam diverged. One may interpret their senses and memories in more of a patriotic way, full of pride, despite witnessing the hell of war. Others may interpret the war

[134] Wallace (Director), *We Were Soldiers.*
[135] Ken Burns and Lynn Novak, *The Vietnam War*.

as a representation of the contradictions in American society, demonstrating changes must occur at home as well.

Contradictions frequently erupted in the collective memory of the Vietnam War. U.S. policy did not align because politicians originally advocated for self-containment in Vietnam before the war ever started, but the U.S. needed to intervene to do so. This contradiction sprang more contrasting elements of the war that formed the counter-collective memory.[136] The military further created contradictions by recording false body counts to create an illusion of victory. Oftentimes, officers determined body counts by the MGR or "Mere Gook Rule," which essentially meant any Vietnamese killed, citizen or soldier, would be considered Viet Cong. They even sometimes included livestock in the body count. This racist and ultimately devastating method stemmed from the difficulty to locate the Viet Cong. In this way, the absence of the sense of sight contributed to this memory. Imagine trudging through dense jungle foliage when suddenly bullets miraculously appear out of thin air. The sight and sound of gunfire, combined with the smell of gunpowder and blood overwhelms the senses. By the time you prepare to fight back, the bullets stop and all that can be heard are the natural sounds of the jungle. All you know is a Viet-Cong soldier (potentially only a few or much more) just tried to kill you and your fellow soldiers. Many soldiers fell under the illusion that the enemy was everywhere, almost omnipresent. After all, most engagements were ambushes that took American troops by surprise. This thought led them to believe every Vietnamese person was the enemy. With sensory elements that confused them, the memory developed that the Vietnamese were inherently evil. The illusive Viet-Cong became the infamous white whale, and the American GI's lustily hungered to rid themselves of the beast.[137]

[136] Lee, 115.
[137] Engelhardt, 209-210, 220-221.

An additional contradicting element of the war for the soldiers was that to win, they had to destroy what they "won". This conflicted in their minds on why they fought so hard to protect something that they destroyed. Back home, the western movie genre rapidly declined in popularity. Western movies typically justified the mass slaughter of Indian peoples due to their undeniable enemy qualities. The Vietnam War reversed this role because Americans began to see themselves as the ambushers. This idea conflicted with American soldier's thoughts because the Viet Cong ambushed the U.S. troops frequently. To top it all off, the news outlets and president's contrasting images of the war caused the average citizen to lose faith in the government, the media, and the war, which shaped one side of the conflicting collective memory.[138]

Captain Paul Ebaugh, Jr. argued from his perspective that the media created bias against Vietnam soldiers. He said the soldiers were not "the killers, rapists, and murderers that the media profiled of troops…"[139] Despite being warned of terrorist tactics used by the Viet Cong in which Vietnamese children approached American soldiers with hidden bombs, the soldiers could not be kept, "…from giving, taking care of, hugging, and squeezing the children."[140] Clearly, Ebaugh, Jr. remembered the troops that surrounded him as the opposite of how the media portrayed them as. There is no evidence to discredit his personal claims. He admitted to burning some villages where people committed "bad things" to them. He failed to explain any further on what these "bad things" were or how they conducted burning the villages. He argued the media only informed the public of the worst things that happened, which rarely happened from his point of view. Ebaugh, Jr. demonstrates how both personal and collective memories may not be true.

[138] Engelhardt, 206, 241-244.
[139] Spiller, 115.
[140] Spiller, 115.

He blames the media and Hollywood for this misrepresentation. In reference to the troops he commanded over, he mentions: "The concept of these guys is that they were politically astute, but they weren't. They had no real concept of politics. Their discussions were about sports and sex. They didn't talk about what was going on in the Senate or what the Kennedys were doing. I didn't either."[141] This certainly seems to be true in Ebaugh, Jr.'s case and represents others as well; therefore, the counter-memory of Vietnam veterans as killers, rapists, etc. may be based off of outlying events and overgeneralizations. Nonetheless, the *memory* remains, which means some view the memory as true, even they base the memory off of false or dramatized events and people.

Popular Symbols of the War

Popular culture also contributed to the collective memory of the Vietnam War. Multiple images stimulated the American public's visual sense that has developed their memory of the war. According to Katherine Kinney, the image of Americans killing Americans permeates in all stories of Vietnam. This image alludes to "what really happened" in Vietnam. The image stems from actual accounts of friendly fire in Vietnam due to bullets, napalm, and artillery. The Vietnam War depicted this image more so than any other before it, despite the actual occurrence of friendly fire in previous wars.[142]

The popular western actor John Wayne emerged as one of many images that affected collective memory. Vietnam soldiers and young men viewed John Wayne as the epitome of patriotism and service to one's country. Left-wing and the counter-culture however, criticize his image as fake. The consistency of these criticisms has led to the image of John Wayne as a

[141] Spiller, 119.
[142] Katherine Kinney, *Friendly Fire: American Images of the Vietnam War*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 4.

representation of the credibility gap between the facts and the falsehoods given by the U.S. government. John Wayne characterized the "innocence" of the 1950's, but the Vietnam War showed how a veil misconstrued this innocent image. John Wayne himself possessed strong convictions against communism, coinciding with his image both on and off the screen. His image has been attacked by the left, much like Jane Fonda's has been by the right.[143]

Historians cite the John Wayne movie *The Green Berets* as the key connection between the image of John Wayne and the Vietnam War. It made the war seem like a western. In the movie, Viet-Cong intend to overrun Fort Dodge, so the American forces' justify the mass slaughter of Vietnamese (representing the Indians in westerns) that occurs later in the film. The visual and auditory effect this had on moviegoers contributed to the conflict of the war being seen as a just or unjust war in collective memory. Some viewed this depictions as accurate, while others did not.[144] Director's used Wayne's physical size to represent the power of the U.S. His image reminded viewers of WWII and the time when American power naturally won. This image originates from his previous work in WWII themed movies. These images affected how young men viewed themselves going to Vietnam, particularly from the movie *Sands of Iwo Jima* where Wayne is seen raising the U.S. flag. Wayne's western movies also impacted the image of Vietnam. Vietnam is sometimes referred to as an "Indian War". This indicates a correlation between the frontier wars where Americans viewed the mass slaughter of Native Americans as acceptable and the Vietnam War where soldiers saw the Vietnamese as Indians.[145]

Many Vietnam soldiers went to Vietnam thinking of themselves as John Wayne and his triumphs in Indian country. They saw themselves as brave cowboys and the Vietnamese as

[143] Kinney, 12-16.
[144] Engelhardt, 234-235.
[145] Kinney, 16-20, 41.

conquerable people. However, the Vietnamese rarely retreated in the face of a slaughter, which contradicted the role of the American from the "cowboy" to the "Indian" because in these cases the Americans (cowboys) overwhelmed the Viet-Cong (Indians).[146]

One soldier, Corporal Gordon W. Huckstep, admitted that he enlisted because of the John Wayne movies that he admired. He flew in a helicopter and fired at a single "gook" for his first experience in Vietnam. The next day, they did the same thing at the same location. The experience excited him because it felt just like the movies. However, on the third day, they returned to the same spot, and the "gooks" unleashed a .50 caliber machine gun. They shot down the helicopter, injuring all but himself and a fellow soldier. He then realized Vietnam did not compare to the movies. Huckstep provides an example of the media falsely portraying the war to encourage young men to enlist. That false portrayal lingers in the collective memory of American society.[147]

In addition to the image of John Wayne, the image of imperialism also emerged. In most cases throughout history, the U.S. exempted itself from being seen as imperialist from their own point of view. This changed during the Vietnam War, and maps symbolized the change. Examinations of maps throughout the years indicated a changing border of influence, which hinted at imperialist actions taken by the U.S. The visual sense of seeing U.S. expansion through maps impacted the collective memory of Vietnam because it contradicted how Americans remembered themselves. They previously thought of themselves as helpful to others, but the maps showed the U.S. consumed most people it encountered into its expanding empire. This idea became more widely accepted during the Vietnam War, when people were questioning American actions. Prior to this skepticism, the U.S. seemingly immunized itself to critiques of

[146] Engelhardt, 214-215.
[147] Spiller, 193-194.

imperialism because of its narratives of duty to the world, manifest destiny, and innocence. Also, its defeat of more apparent imperialist regimes in Nazi Germany and Japan in WWII furthered the illusion of an anti-imperialist United States. Vietnam and the study of maps shattered this illusion.[148]

An interesting image that appeared from this time concerned unfaithful women to U.S. soldiers back home. Since women still represented a domestic life, men connected them with the lack of support veterans received on the home front. This circumstance stems from people seeing war as masculine and home life as feminine. The phrase used by Vietnam soldiers ("Humping the boonies") characterizes this dynamic relationship. Soldiers used the term to describe when soldiers patrolled the land. The use of the word "humping", a predominantly masculine act, demonstrates the negative connection of women to the war.[149]

The image of destruction arose within the collective memory of the Vietnam War as well. A young, naked girl running and crying down a road symbolized the image of destruction. American air forces hit her village with napalm, which caused her clothes to burn off her body and damage her flesh. This image represented the destruction of the war on the country of Vietnam. It also reinforced pointlessness of the war, which engrossed much of the collective memory. This image opened the American people up further to the idea that the U.S. represented the "bad guy" in Vietnam, which completely contradicted the American mindset and memory throughout its entire history.[150]

A vast division among black and white citizens emerged as another symbol from Vietnam. African-Americans historically fought in U.S. wars to earn a place in American

[148] Kinney, 44-45.
[149] Kinney, 149.
[150] Kinney, 187-188.

society and to avoid the label of "other". When the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement developed in the 1960's, the exclusion of African-Americans from the "American table" became more prominent. The obvious unequal treatment of black soldiers in Vietnam helped spark the movement. The contradiction of fighting for a country that historically oppressed African-Americans also played a role. These reasons contributed to the belief that blacks were "separate" and "at war". The image of a black man with a gun symbolized the hypocrisy of America. At home, this image unsettled whites who saw this symbol as a threat, despite blacks supposedly maintaining the same rights. Meanwhile, whites in Vietnam viewed blacks with guns in Vietnam as natural. With the widespread distrust of the government, people turned to the veterans to figure out what the war was really like, particularly the black foot soldiers. Whites perceived blacks as naturally more in tune with the body (a correlation with slavery), so white valued their testimonies to discover the "truth". The idea that the black man is more in-tune with the body implied that he was less in-tune with intellect, and it reinforced the separate status of blacks in society.[151] Whites feared that African-American veterans were returning from the war and planned to use their newfound guerilla skills to violently fight in the Civil Rights Movement. As will be noted later, the implication of racism directed towards African-Americans created a different memory of the war.[152]

[151] Kinney, 82-86, 103-108.
[152] Engelhardt, 207.

Chapter 4: Split Senses

The Working-Class Soldier

Understanding the background of the average Vietnam soldier will provide a more in-depth analysis of their sensory experiences. Christian G. Appy asserts that, "Class, not geography, was the crucial factor in determining which Americans fought in Vietnam."[153] He supports this argument by showing working-class areas experienced a higher percentage of deaths, even if an upper-class area sent the same number of soldiers. In some cases, the death rate was four times as high in working-class areas. Also, small towns suffered more deaths from the war relative to total population. There was an 8% casualty rate from small towns compared to only 2% of the total population. Race also played a factor. African-Americans at the start of the war disproportionately died compared to their total population because officers put them in more dangerous situations. By the end of the war, however, the casualty rate became more proportionate. African-Americans grew up in the working-class more often than whites. Another argument Appy posed is draft requirements were reduced to allow more working-class citizens to be accepted. These requirements were specifically related to education.[154]

General Sensory Experiences

Most of what has been described up to this point has concerned collective memory. The sensory component has not been detailed as much; however, the remainder will alleviate that gap. Understanding the sensory experiences of Vietnam soldiers provides clarity on why soldiers reacted to situations in certain ways. These experiences also explain the mental trauma that many endured. The senses are the root of collective memory, since memory is connected to

[153] Appy, 15.
[154] Appy, 12-14, 22, 32-33.

the senses. After all, people obtain memories according to how they sense the world around them.

Upon arriving in Vietnam, John Musgrave explained, "The first thing that assaulted my nose was the foreign smells, and watching people relieve themselves by the side of the road. Seeing animals I'd never seen before – the big water buffaloes. It was like being on Mars because it was totally foreign to me, but I thought… 'Look at all those foreigners!' and it didn't dawn on me for a little while that the only foreigner in that area was me."[155] Musgrave related being in a foreign world to his senses. To him, odd smells and sights made him feel discomfort. He felt trapped in a world of uncertainties. These strange sensory experiences made him remember he was no longer in the United States, but instead was in a foreign land surrounded by people who he thought wanted him dead.

In some ways, nearly all Vietnam soldiers shared certain sensory experiences. First of all, soldiers walked everywhere, which led to constantly sore feet and an increased risk of infection. Since Vietnam has such a wet climate, many developed trench foot, an infection of the foot that results in bits of flesh falling off. Nearly all soldiers constantly heard the roar of helicopters. Unfortunately, the Viet Cong also sensed the loudness of these machines, alerting them to American presence, which allowed them to run away before the foot soldiers reached them. Helicopters contributed to frustrations among the soldiers because soldiers struggled finding the enemy. This fueled the racism toward the Vietnamese, which led to numerous massacres and atrocities. Yet, it seems people in general struggle to distinguish between atrocities and acts of war. Nonetheless, these actions led to shame, guilt, and a reluctance to talk about their experiences.[156]

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[155] Ken Burns and Lynn Novak, *The Vietnam War*.
[156] Appy, 183.

Furthermore, many soldiers remember the smell of Vietnam as one of their first and most memorable sensory experiences in Vietnam. To understand this, one must remember the climate of Vietnam differs greatly from any climate in the U.S. It is a wet, tropical area where temperatures easily reach into the triple digits. Combine the heat with high humidity, and the aromas that permeated in Vietnam caused smells that the soldiers rarely encountered. For many, soldiers found the smells associated with Vietnam as noxious and comparable to the smell of excrement. In some cases, the soldiers connected this smell to the land and war itself, alluding to the whole situation as detrimental. While some connected the smell to the land, others related it to the Vietnamese people. Cultural differences and racism explain why soldiers related the smell of excrement to the Vietnamese people. A fish sauce made with decaying fish that the Vietnamese use exemplifies a cultural difference that most American olfactory glands disagreed with. Despite cultural differences, many applied this smell to the people because the Americans thought of themselves as racially superior. One soldier, W.D. Ehrhart wrote in his memoir about the smell, "… It was awful. It permeated everything. I kept thinking 'Jesus Christ, these people don't even smell like human beings.'"[157] Soldiers who connected the smell of excrement with the Vietnamese typically saw them as primitive people. This smell inherently led to the dehumanizing of the Vietnamese in some American soldier's eyes. Dehumanization seemingly justified the ability to commit massacres and atrocities.[158]

Another soldier described his initial reaction to being in Vietnam: "When I got to Nam, it was like black had turned into white because I was totally unprepared… You're so scared, that you'll shoot at anything."[159] The way this veteran describes his fear as a visual element by

[157] Appy, 128.
[158] Appy, 128-130.
[159] Engelhardt, 195.

saying black turned into white indicates his reality of the war completely changed once he realized what the war really meant. Most soldiers faced ambushes consistently, which justifies his fears. Out of all the larger-scale firefights, the enemy started 90% of them, while 80% had the element of surprise. This means the soldiers needed to maintain a constant vigilance while trekking the jungles. The fear accumulated by the guerilla tactics of the Viet Cong likely contributed to mental health problems in some of the veterans later in life.[160]

Philip Caputo: An Ideal Example of the Typical Vietnam Soldier

Philip Caputo wrote one of the most valuable primary sources that demonstrates the sensory elements of the war as well as the mental trauma that stemmed from it. Caputo, a former marine who fought in Vietnam, wrote a book about his experiences titled *A Rumor of War*. In the opening pages, he admitted to having mental trauma after returning from Vietnam. He acknowledged that most combat veterans shared similar experiences like himself after returning home: "an inability to concentrate, a child-like fear of darkness, a tendency to tire easily, chronic nightmares, an intolerance to loud noises – especially doors slamming and cars backfiring – and alternating moods of depression and rage that came over me for no apparent reason."[161] He indicated these symptoms of war had not completely subsided. This quote adequately summarizes what many veterans likely experienced when they returned from war. The sensory elements are clear (fear of the dark and agitation over loud noises) as well, which characterizes the connection of senses to mental trauma. The fear of the dark likely comes from the inability to see the enemy as well as shots fired at night. Loud noises caused him to reminisce on shots fired and loud explosions, which he associated with danger.

[160] Engelhardt, 195.
[161] Philip Caputo, *A Rumor of War*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996), 4.

Prior to going to the war, Caputo described seeing propaganda posters, which encouraged him to enlist. This visual experience of seeing a heroic soldier convinced him that to cure his "dull" suburban life, he needed to enlist. Caputo envisioned himself as the soldier on the poster, and he knew he wanted to save the day like that man. Propaganda clearly played an important role in initiating the early stages of soldiery. It allowed Caputo and others like him to visualize themselves as the heroic soldier. As the scholarship indicates, Caputo imagined himself as John Wayne. The image of John Wayne stuck in Caputo's mind, much like most Vietnam soldiers. The propaganda phrase, "The Marine corps Builds Men" also convinced Caputo to fight because at the age of nineteen, he felt like he need to prove his manhood. This indicates a collective memory that war is manly and admirable. His initial sensory experience involving the propaganda poster reflects the white dominant memory of America. This memory changed for Caputo and embraced more of the counter-memory after he realized this image strayed from the truth.[162]

Caputo realized shortly after arriving in Vietnam that the war occurred mostly at night. Soldiers oftentimes fought in nocturnal situations. He recalled enemy snipers firing regularly about every thirty minutes on their camps, although quite inaccurately. He explained the random shots fired made the men nervous to where they started mistaking bushes for men. Night also caused an increased chance allies shooting fellow soldiers. Caputo indicated the soldiers he fought with almost shot him on multiple occasions. This explains his and many other soldier's fears of the dark after the war. The absence of light (and therefore a limited visual sense) combined with the constant threat and fear of an enemy attack created the mental disturbance of fearing the dark.[163]

[162] Caputo, 6-7.
[163] Caputo, 56-57.

Within Caputo's first few nights, he realized another sensory aspect that prominently impacted his time in Vietnam: insect bites. Mosquito netting and insect spray worked poorly, causing insects to easily bite Caputo and others. He experienced insect bites so much that "my face and hands were masses of welts."[164] Insect bites certainly played a role in the tactile sense in the form of pain and irritation. Along with insect bites came disease. Malaria was present, but the military dispersed pills to ward off the disease. These bitter-tasting pills caused everyone's skin to turn into yellowish hue. Filth also contributed to disease. Unsanitary conditions made diarrhea and dysentery an almost universal constant. Coupled with few bathing opportunities and unclean water which also caused diarrhea, the stench of excrement characterized soldier life regarding smell. In fact, Caputo ranked the smell of feces as the most prominent smell he associated with Vietnam.[165]

An aspect not normally recognized regarding the sensory experience of Vietnam involves dust. Since Vietnam is tropical, one typically disregards dust as an elemental threat; however, during the dry season, dust can be extremely prominent. Once again, Caputo provided an intuitive account of dust and climate in Vietnam through the senses. Wind picked up dust from roads and already harvested fields of rice paddies. At times, the dust became so dense that clouds formed. After it settled, the dust entrenched everything. In extreme cases, soldiers failed to escape eating and drinking dust because it infiltrated their food and water supplies. Dust caked their lungs since they breathed so much of it in. After the wind settled and the sun rose, the heat of Vietnam caused excessive sweating, making the dust that settled on the soldier's skin turn into a grimy coating. Heat played another role as well. Soldiers commonly experienced heat exhaustion and dehydration, and men sometimes died from it. Couple all of this with the

[164] Caputo, 57.
[165] Caputo, 64-65.

unpleasant experiences at night and one realizes the typical Vietnam soldier's constant misery.[166] This misery contributed to the anti-war movement that some veterans returned home and participated in. They remembered their negative sensory experiences and used it to fuel their rhetoric denouncing the war. These denouncements, rooted in their sensory experiences in Vietnam, contributed to a stronger counter collective memory.

Swamps riddle some areas of Vietnam. In cases where Caputo traversed this kind of landscape, he recalled many sensory elements. First of all, the swamps contained large amounts of mud that tugged at his boots; therefore, the suction from the mud made it more difficult to walk. Breaking the surface of the mud and rotting vegetation allowed putrid gases to escape, overwhelming his sense of smell. To top it all off, leeches would often attach themselves to the soldier's bodies, sucking their blood for nutrition. He compares walking through this landscape to a sewer.[167]

Caputo ranked when he witnessed his platoon turn from a disciplined group of men to borderline arsonists as his worst sight. This occurred when they stormed a village. After air craft dropped napalm, and some Vietnamese lay dead, the men lost control, burning everything in sight. Caputo attributed this loss of control and humanity to built-up fear, frustration, and tension. After the event, they humanized again, a process resulting in shame and guilt for their actions. He estimated they burned down the homes of two hundred people.[168]

Caputo spent some time as a casualty reporter. This experience also reveals interesting sensory elements that many soldiers shared. While describing this experience, he noted the repugnant smell of death. He acknowledged that regardless of race, the dead smelled the same.

[166] Caputo, 59-60.
[167] Caputo, 121.
[168] Caputo, 304-306.

He compared human death to animal death and concluded human death smells worse. He described the difficulty in acclimating oneself to the smell of death as nearly impossible. He found the potent smell of death to be unbearable, unlike the sight of death. Caputo's account implies that the sense of smell impacts memory more than the sense of sight, at least concerning death. Caputo's mental health also deteriorated as a casualty reporter. He started visualizing the people around him as dead, including himself. It got so intense that he hallucinated two living men as walking dead men. These hallucinations caused him to fear insanity. Having time to think about the war and his situation caused him to react this way. Fearing insanity, he requested to go back into the field.[169]

Caputo, like many others, expected the Vietnamese citizens to admire him and celebrate their own liberation by America. Instead, the Vietnamese gave him apathetic stares. He recalled it seemed like the citizens showed no emotion towards the Americans, even if the soldiers burned their houses down. For this apathy, Caputo began to hate them. He struggled caring for people who he seemingly saw as indifferent to their own plight. He later realized the Vietnamese adapted to war in this way to survive. After all, they experienced foreign invasion and military presence throughout most of their living memory. Caputo's feelings toward the enemy aligns with what historians say about soldier's feelings towards the Vietnamese. He felt conflicted. He wanted to dehumanize them to justify his actions, but when finding pictures of the Viet Cong's families, that made it difficult to not see them like himself. He also felt admiration for their willingness to fight and live in an area he basically saw as hell, yet he viewed them as the undeniable enemy who seemingly lacked the right to live.[170]

[169] Caputo, 170, 230-231.
[170] Caputo, 124, 134.

The last of Caputo's experiences to be described is one in which he was on a three day leave of R & R. In these three days, he found reason to continue living. He found this in the senses of Saigon, a place still mostly civilized compared to the jungles where death lurked around the next tree. He rediscovered the desire in the relaxing and liberating feel of a shower. He found it in a menu where he chose what he tasted. He found it in hearing the laughter of a man nearby, which gave him a feeling of normalcy. He found it in a bottle of wine, where the feel and look of the condensation on the bottle made him feel happy. This demonstrates that while the senses of war stripped him of humanity, the senses of civilization revived his humanity again.[171] War and the senses impacted soldiers' actions, but civilization revitalized their sense of humanity. When this occurred, soldiers faced the daunting task of coping with their unspeakable actions.

In Their Own Words: Vietnam in General

While much attention has been focused on Philip Caputo because he provided a great base of sensory experiences, others provide sensory accounts valuable in the analysis of sensory experiences. In a letter by Richard Elliott to his family, he wrote about the hatred he felt towards the Vietnamese after finding out they killed two men. He wrote, "Dad, now more than ever I am determined to do everything possible to wipe these rotten bastards off the face of the earth… heaven help anyone of them, man, woman, or child, that crosses my path. Total and complete destruction is the only way to treat these animals. I never thought I could hate as much as I do now."[172] These words symbolize the racist hatred many soldiers felt. Specifically addressing his father in this part of the letter indicates a desire to impress him and make him proud. Elliott tries

[171] Caputo, 246-247.
[172] Richard Elliott to his family, March 31, 1966, in *Letters from Vietnam*, ed. Bill Adler, (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1967), 22.

to prove his bravery that the older generations rejected. This feeling of hatred based off dead comrades partially explains the atrocities that occurred.

Contradicting the letter written by Richard Elliott, William P. Twiggs wrote a letter to his family acknowledging sympathy towards the Vietnamese people. He explained the Vietnamese people actually admired the American soldiers because they viewed them as liberators. An interesting sentence from the letter contradicts most of the scholarship about Vietnam. Twiggs wrote, "… we take our freedom for granted, and we have never had our homes and cities and states bombed or invaded by unfriendly forces who take anything they want and then kill just for the sake of it."[173] This quote is intriguing because the scholarship supports the idea that the U.S. did not see themselves as invaders, but Twiggs clearly did. Incidents like My Lai exemplify Americans killing "just for the sake of it." This letter represents the conflicting ideas that encompassed the Vietnam War. It also exemplifies how these conflicting ideas, perceptions, viewpoints, and experiences led to a complex collective memory of Vietnam that fragmented due to the various sensory stimuli that the American population experienced.

Two letters, one written by an anonymous soldier that a senator censored to the keep the writer's identity private and the other by Carl D. Rodgers to his church back home, reveal a contrast in the way the media portrayed the war prior to 1967. In the anonymous letter addressed to a person named Chris, the writer claimed the media inaccurately portrayed the events in Vietnam. The writer indicated media photographers staged the combat photos and others. The writer advised Chris to not believe what the journalists and pictures conveyed.[174] Rodgers supported these claims in a living letter, which is a tape-recorded message. Rodgers asked a

[173] William P. Twiggs to his family, May 17, 1966, in *Letters from Vietnam*, ed. Bill Adler, (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1967), 107.
[174] Anonymous to Chris, in *Letters from Vietnam*, ed. Bill Adler, (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1967), 145-149.

reporter if he thought the American people were misinformed. The reporter responded he did not think so, but journalists had to "add originality" to their story to appear different from their competing networks, thus implying some of the information could stray from the original. The reporter acknowledged that leaders in media placed journalists under strict regulations to portray the war in a positive light because their bosses threatened to revoke their license.[175] Rodger's letter shows the contrast of the media at the start of U.S. involvement to the end in which the media gained more critical freedom. Soldiers who wrote letters like these and sent them back home conflicted with the media's portrayal. Who was to be believed? These letters exemplify further the contradictions that split the collective memory between those who supported the war and those who protested it.

In letters written to his parents, PFC Clifford P. Combs desired his family to send him various items. As expected, he requested that numerous members of his family send him letters. In addition to letters, he asked his parents to send him cookies and candy. This reveals his attempts to reconnect with home and his own culture. Through the desire to taste, Combs demonstrated a clear difference between American and Vietnamese culture by showing American's well-known palate for sweet, sugary food. While this difference may seem insignificant, it undoubtedly reminded soldiers that they fought in a foreign land far from home, removed from the society and culture that they cherished. For those lucky enough to return home, the foreignness of the Vietnam War sometimes overwhelmed them, leading to their public demonstrations, which as already mentioned impacted the collective memory.[176]

[175] Carl D. Rodgers to Central Presbyterian Church in New York City, in *Letters from Vietnam*, ed. Bill Adler, (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1967), 160-166.
[176] Spiller, 58.

Combs continued throughout his brief letters and frequently informed his parents of the weather conditions in Vietnam. He noted that he experienced more heat an rain in Vietnam. He said it was not unbearable, "just enough to make you mad."[177] Combs further acknowledged his lack of cleanliness. He joked that he could bathe in a month after he wrote one of his letters. He acknowledged that his family could see his filth by the apparent condition of his letter, explaining dirt settled on the page. Couple this with having to sleep on the ground every night, and it becomes apparent that he certainly no longer lived as comfortably as he used to at home. While this may be obvious and expected, it hints at an increased irritability among the soldiers due to their uncomfortable sensory experiences.[178]

One notices Combs' feelings of loneliness most often in his letters. Throughout his writings, he constantly requested his family to write to him because the letters helped him not be so bored and lonely. In his last letter he wrote, "We are sitting up on a great big hill overlooking a valley and it sure is pretty. It is as green as the day is long. Just like summer at home. But it sure is not home."[179] Despite the similar imagery of home, Combs failed to escape the thought that he currently lived in a different culture and an alternate sensory world. Unfortunately, Combs died two days after he wrote this letter after bleeding to death from a gunshot wound to his legs.[180]

Captain Paul Ebaugh, Jr., mentioned in chapter three, also remembered a sensory experience that helped him connect with home. His experience happened on Christmas Eve where he found himself in a hole with four other men. They all whispered the song "Silent Night," despite their perilous situation. Ebaugh, Jr. stated he still could not sing that song due to

[177] Spiller, 59.
[178] Spiller, 61
[179] Spiller, 62-63.
[180] Spiller, 55-63.

that memory because none of the other men survived the war. This sensory experience of the auditory song helped bring the men back home, at least metaphorically. The song served as a passage back to their Christian roots and memories of Christmas in the United States.[181]

In Their Own Words: African-American Soldiers

African-American soldiers fit into both categories of supporters and non-supporters of the war in a unique way as a result of the ongoing Civil Rights Movement back home; therefore, much of their experiences have much to do with racial differences. The majority of sources for this demographic come from oral histories in Wallace Terry's book titled *Bloods*. Terry notes in the introduction that by 1969, a different type of black fought in Vietnam compared to the beginning, in which most were professional soldiers who proudly fought in the military. However, in 1969, the new blacks were draftees, many of whom participated in the Civil Rights Movement and were proud of their black background. Advocating for black soldiers to fight together on the battlefield, they called themselves "bloods". By this time, black and white American soldiers had conflicts amongst each other, causing disunity and a different experience for each race. Bloods went to the war anticipating a better life when they returned home for providing services to their country, but whites actually treated them even worse. The majority of the testimonies by African-American Vietnam veterans revealed a focus on racism towards them while serving. This racism caused their narratives of the war to differ than those of whites. For example, many resisted showing racist thoughts towards the Vietnamese because they knew racism negatively impacts relationships. Differences like this created alternate memories, which led African-Americans to have conflicting memories compared to their white counterparts. Nonetheless, they shared similar experiences, which resulted in similar mental traumas. This

[181] Spiller, 117.

dynamic of different memory, but similar experiences and mental struggles connects to the complex and contradictory elements that has created a conflicting collective memory.[182]

Before these men's stories are told, Lieutenant Ray Fulkerson's perspective brings forth an interesting possibility. As an officer, Fulkerson worried more about morale, giving him a different perspective than most of his fellow soldiers. It should be noted that Fulkerson was a white man. His company originally fought in the northern part of allied territory in Vietnam, where booby traps and sniper fire commonly threatened their lives. In other words, they constantly relied on each other to survive, regardless of racial differences. Eventually, his company moved more south, further from the front. South of the front, they found themselves with more luxuries like air conditioning, hot meals, and dry sleeping environments. Despite these wartime luxuries, morale worsened because the Viet Cong constantly attacked then retreated into the villages, where higher officers restricted the U.S. soldiers ability to call in a fire mission. This meant high casualties with no opportunity for retribution. As a result, Fulkerson noted that relationships between white and black soldiers deteriorated out of this frustration. Since they could not take out their frustrations on the Viet Cong and no longer fully depended on each other, they resorted to taking out their frustrations on one another. Fulkerson recalled when black troops met each other on truck convoys, they raised their fist, symbolizing black power. Also, some black soldiers refused to go out on patrol. He said that kind of division between white and black soldiers never occurred further north. This indicates that morale may have had an effect on race relations. This could explain why some black soldiers perceived the war

[182] Wallace Terry, *Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans*, ed. Wallace Terry, (New York: Random House, 1984), xvi-xvii.

differently than others. Those in higher morale situations likely developed better relationships with their white counterparts. Conversely, those in lower morale situations likely did not.[183]

Interestingly, Fulkerson remembered going to Washington D.C. and people spat at him and shouted verbal abuse. This turned him away from pursuing a career in the military. He noted racial tension expanded at the time of his return from Vietnam. He even recalled a lynching of a white man. His account indicates that racial violence occurred from both races back home, which most fail to remember today. Nonetheless, Fulkerson did not indicate in his interview with Harry Spiller any ill will or prejudice towards African-Americans. Still, memories like this contribute to the split memory among races.[184]

An oral history by Reginald "Malik" Edwards highlighted the racism inherent in the Vietnam War. He explained how he experienced racism in boot camp. He provides the examples of being called a "chocolate bunny", "brillo head", and a "nigger". Despite the prejudice toward blacks in America, Edwards still saw himself as an American, so he still proudly fought for the U.S. He also explained that black men died first in each battalion of the 9th Marines due to friendly fire. After Edwards made his first kill, the smell and feel of the rain made him realize he killed an actual human being who had a family; he no longer saw him just as a "gook". The sensory experience of rain seemingly gave him clarity of his actions, which made him feel guilty. Edwards eventually got in trouble for being involved in a riot on base, which began over a fight between white men using profanity around black women. Edwards went to jail, at which he punched a duty warden, resulting in his dishonorable discharge from the Marines. As a result, he joined the Black Panthers. By doing this organization, he felt he "had

[183] Spiller, 103.
[184] Spiller, 106-107.

left one war and came back and got into another one."[185] He viewed Vietnam as the white man's war, due to all of the Confederate flags he saw amongst white soldiers. He also revealed sympathy for the Vietnamese, especially concerning My Lai. Edwards' account reveals two aspects of his experience that most white Vietnam soldiers rarely talked about: racism and regret. White people clearly discriminated against Edwards based on the visual sense: the sight of his black skin. He also showed sympathy towards the Vietnamese because he related to their plight due to the racism he experienced within his own country.[186]

Emmanuel J. Holloman shared similar views with Edwards. He stated, "I think blacks got along better with the Vietnamese people because they knew the hardships the Vietnamese went through."[187] He noted that he understood the poverty of the Vietnamese because he came from a background of poverty. Most of the white people did not, so they struggled connecting with the Vietnamese. He also said blacks tried to comprehend their culture, language, and customs more than the whites. They did this to better understand the people to avoid offending them. Holloman's oral history explains why many blacks had a different mindset and memory of Vietnam: they understood the plight of the Vietnamese because they shared similar experiences back in the U.S. Whites struggled wrapping their minds around this concept, granted many did not try to.[188]

Harold "Light Bulb" Bryant also provided valuable information on the African-American experience. In his testimony, he acknowledged the symbol of John Wayne. He described a young white soldier who came over to Vietnam for the sole purpose of killing Vietnamese as "a

[185] Reginald "Malik" Edwards, in *Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans*, ed. Wallace Terry, (New York: Random House, 1984), 13-14.
[186] Edwards, 7-14.
[187] Emmanuel J. Holloman, in *Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans*, ed. Wallace Terry, (New York: Random House, 1984), 87.
[188] Holloman, 87.

typical John Wayne complex."[189] This soldier died trying to do an act of heroism like John Wayne. This reveals how the John Wayne image resulted in some men dying, and it shows that the imaged affected African-Americans much less. Vietnam also helped Bryant realize that whites put off a false perception back home: as the best, toughest, and humane race. In fact, he viewed whites as more cowardly and animalistic than any blacks he knew. Bryant's account highlighted a stronger emphasis on race relations. When describing animalistic and brutal actions, Bryant always indicated white men performed these acts. For example, he explained the mutilation of dead Viet Cong (such as cutting off ears and in one case a penis) as always being done by white men. He explained these types of actions occurred frequently. He also described the stench of the ears that white men cut off because some kept them as trophies. Bryant expressed disgust to these actions.[190]

According to Bryant, Vietnamese treated blacks better than whites. He explained the Vietnamese held Buddha, a central figure in Vietnamese life, as a black person. This, along with their own experiences, explains why blacks expressed less racism towards the Vietnamese. Despite a different mindset, Bryant failed to escape the detrimental mental effects caused by the war from his sensory experiences. After returning home, he dreamed nightmares and hallucinated imagined events. In Bryant's case, race did not matter when it came to the mental impact of the war. His account shows that while differences exist between white and black experiences, similarities remain as well, especially regarding mental trauma.[191]

Richard J. Ford provided more information regarding the mental trauma he endured from Vietnam. Initially, he struggled sleeping. He would wake up halfway through the night and see

[189] Harold "Light Bulb" Bryant, in *Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans*, ed. Wallace Terry, (New York: Random House, 1984), 25.
[190] Bryant, 25-27.
[191] Bryant, 27-30.

trees outside his parent's house. He envisioned these trees transported him back to Vietnam. In this illusion, Ford searched for his weapon and fellow soldiers, but he obviously failed to do so. This experience highlights mental trauma. In this case, Ford traced this trauma to losing his friend, Davis. Ford acknowledged his struggle to disconnect from Vietnam. On the Fourth of July, fire crackers triggered this illusion again, and he fired a warning shot at kids with his .22 pistol. Furthermore, four white, drunk men cut him off while driving and honked their horn at him. With his mother and wife in the car, he forgot about them and imagined himself back in Vietnam. He chased the white men, firing gunshots at their car. Ford exemplifies a Vietnam veteran who experienced flashbacks through noise. On the Fourth of July, firecrackers triggered his break from reality. When he chased the men who cut him off in traffic, the car horn sent him into the illusion. Clearly the sense of hearing ties into memory and mental trauma.[192]

Charles Strong, already mentioned earlier when describing the Tet Offensive, also experienced flashbacks. For him, heavy rain triggered this kind of experience. The smell, sight, sound, and feel of it initiated the flashback. When this happened, he put his combat boots on and wandered around his town like he was in combat. He broke out street lamps during these flashbacks. In Strong's case, the sensation of rain sparked his mental trauma, indicating alternative memories and senses not related to combat triggers mental episodes.[193]

The testimony of Norman Alexander McDaniel, a POW in the Vietnam War, described many his sensory experiences while imprisoned as a POW. When it came to taste, he ate little amounts of often spoiled food. For example, the bread grew mold and the thumb-sized amount of pig fat usually contained bits of hair. McDaniel ate it anyway, knowing his survival depended

[192] Richard J. Ford, in *Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans*, ed. Wallace Terry, (New York: Random House, 1984), 34.
[193] Strong, 62.

on it. He still slept hungry every night and lost about thirty-five pounds. Some who refused to eat became "like skeletons" because some dropped ninety pounds in weight. For touch, he explained the winter months blasted him with cold, and his captors provided little clothing to keep warm. Their captors limited their movements too, so McDaniel's legs swelled, causing pain and itching. Prisoners were not allowed to communicate with each other, so they formed a way of communication by using a series of taps. Talking oftentimes led to torture. When it came to sanitation, the Viet-Cong gave them homemade bars of soap and a tube of toothpaste that had to last for at least four months. When bathing or washing clothes, they had ten minutes in ice-cold water to do so. For excretory purposes, they relied on a bucket that could be emptied once a day. If a prisoner was uncooperative, they waited until the next day to empty their bucket. Needless to say, McDaniel lived in unsanitary conditions, meaning the smells he experienced would not be pleasant. Although, that was not the worst of his problems by any means (after all, the enemy held him as prisoner). McDaniel interestingly never indicated suffering any mental trauma from the experience in his story, unlike many POW's mentioned earlier during the Korean War. He attributed his resiliency to his faith in God and his increased religious conviction from his experience.[194]

[194] Norman Alexander McDaniel, in *Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans*, ed. Wallace Terry, (New York: Random House, 1984), 140-142, 147.

Conclusion

Connection to Today

While there are still plenty of Vietnam veterans alive today in the United States, perhaps more people today connect more with the recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. In fact, the Vietnam War shares many similarities to the wars in those two respective countries, both from a sensory and collective memory perspective. Granted, it must be acknowledged that it might be far too early to establish this connection. Future historians must research the topic to discover if any sense of truth lies in the connection.

C.J. Chivers notes in the preface of his book *The Fighters: Americans in Combat in Afghanistan and Iraq* that the men he studied eagerly looked forward to war, but they resorted to searching for answers for the needless casualties of women and children. He explains, "Many of them wanted then, and still want now, to connect their battlefield service to something greater than a memory reel of gunfights, explosions, and grievous wounds. They wanted to understand accidental killings as isolated mistakes in a campaign characterized by sound strategy, moral authority, and lasting success."[195] This description sounds eerily similar to Vietnam soldiers' experiences that have been highlighted throughout this paper. Soldiers of the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars after 9/11 faced similar moral dilemmas that American soldiers experienced in the Vietnam War. Unfortunately, it is too early to tell what effects this will have. It is unclear if the course of events in Iraq and Afghanistan will or has followed a similar trajectory, but the information currently available suggests that it has.

Similarities Between Vietnam and the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq

[195] C.J. Chivers, *The Fighters: Americans in Combat in Afghanistan and Iraq*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018), xvii.

Chivers details various accounts of Afghanistan/Iraq soldiers in his book already mentioned in the paragraph above. He provides their own personal experiences and interpretations of the war. These accounts share a similar narrative to those of Vietnam soldiers: immoral actions, an initial intense motivation to fight (only to be disappointed in unnecessary violence), and above all *a struggle to find purpose in the war*. These are just some general similarities, but there are more specific ones as well.

Another shared characteristic of the two wars a large amount of Americans view both wars as failures to "correct" foreign affairs. Similar to the Vietnam War, the government stated they wanted to defend the United States from terrorism (in Vietnam it was to defend against communism), yet these stated purposes contradicted with the actual actions taken. In addition to misconstrued purposes, the public saw the enemy of both wars as a radical group. In Vietnam, it was the communistic Viet-Cong, while in Afghanistan and Iraq Muslim groups such as al-Qaeda and more recently ISIS are seen as radical. Despite these distinguished groups labeled as the enemy, the soldiers target people in general in those areas. Soldiers target Muslims in the Middle East and some citizens target them for harassment at home. The government also state the intention to spread democracy and set up self-sustaining governments. The enemy in the Middle East used guerilla warfare, which made it difficult to identify them because they blended in with non-combatants. In both scenarios, this caused some soldiers to develop racist attitudes towards Vietnamese and people in the Middle East. Some of the veterans of both eras feel betrayed by their government due to misleading intentions, which left some with a bitter resentment to the United States and its leaders. [196]

[196] Chivers, xix, xxii-xxiii.

A bug continually pestered Afghanistan/Iraq War soldiers similarly to Vietnam soldiers who struggled against mosquitoes. In Afghanistan and Iraq, soldiers resist sand flies. Sand flies sucked blood from their victims, which Vietnam veterans certainly knew the struggle that a bug like that caused. Additionally, soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq dealt with an intense amount of mud and dust, making the touch of their skin feel grimy and chalky, while also occasionally causing a difficulty to see, thus affecting their visual sense.[197]

An example of disapproval of the Iraq War within the United States, similarly to the Vietnam era, came from Natalie Maines, the lead singer of the country band Dixie Chicks. Granted, she aimed her disapproval more at President Bush, the band clearly did not support the war either. The Dixie Chicks band met disapproval by certain segments of the American public, which caused them to stop producing music.[198] Their recent resurgence and popularity suggests that a split has in fact occurred in the collective memory of the Iraq War.

The Dixie Chicks' stance on the war contradicted with how Alan Jackson, a fellow country music singer-songwriter, felt about it. His song "Where Were You (When the World Stopped Turning)" played to the emotional aspects of 9/11. Its apolitical stance resonated with audiences and critics alike, earning him his first Grammy Award for Best Country Song in 2002.[199] The success of this song and the absence of a political statement indicates most people felt the same way. This stance meant the collective memory could either develop into a positive one or a negative one. The reemergence of the Dixie Chicks hints that it is emerging to be more of a negative one, but there certainly seems to be many who still believe nationalities from where

[197] Chivers, 89.
[198] Chivers, 117.
[199] "MUSIC: Listen to this Song "Where Were You (When the World Stopped Turning)" by Alan Jackson," September 11, 2017, https://www.iprore.com/news/music-listen-to-this-song-where-were-you-when-the-world-stopped-turning-by-alan-jackson.

the terrorists came from need to be punished for their actions (which is typically and falsely lumped together into "the Middle East"), as evidenced by America's long-term involvement in the area. This support for a continued presence in the Middle East remained even after a Navy team killed Osama Bin Ladin, the lead orchestrator of the 9/11 attack, in 2011. The split in this form of media correlates with how media affected the split in memory of the Vietnam War, meaning war that resulted from 9/11 resulted in a similarly split remembrance.

Americans initially collectively thought of the war in the Middle East as justified due to the 9/11 attack. People later remembered the war as unjustified because they saw it as a way for the United States to extract oil from the abundant deposits in the Middle East. The two memories still remain in the collective memory. However, one side may eventually be forgotten. The reemergence of the Dixie Chicks suggests the memory of the Iraq War as unjustified will be remembered, but a possibility still remains that both may continue similarly to the collective memory of the Vietnam War. In many ways, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are identical to the wars in Korea and Vietnam, but with more modern elements. By now, it should be clear that these wars have much in common when it comes to the general purposes and contradictions noticed by the soldiers. More detailed accounts of individual soldiers who fought in Afghanistan or Iraq will further strengthen this connection.

Individual Soldier Experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq

Lieutenant Layne McDowell thought war in the Middle East would end quickly due to the effectiveness of air raids. This was only one of many misconceptions that McDowell would have throughout his service. McDowell worked as a pilot and viewed aircraft fighting as moral because everyone involved willingly participated. This view started to change when he started conducting bombing assignments near residential buildings. In one case, McDowell missed his

target and hit a civilian house. This caused him great distress because he struggled with the thought of killing innocent people. He reflected on his possible killing of innocents and later thought the U.S. failed to place value on the potential loss of those innocent lives because no one attempted to find out what happened with that poorly aimed bomb. McDowell further solidified this thought in his mind because he never experienced any attempts to prevent similar occurrences from happening again. McDowell dreamed he found his own son with the back of his skull missing in the house he blew up. This suggests the event caused McDowell mental trauma. McDowell's story provides an example of a moral dilemma faced by an American soldier in the Middle East as a result of contradicting government intentions, which many Vietnam soldiers felt as well.[200]

The story of Sergeant First Class Leo Kryszewski also sheds light on some similarities between the wars in the Middle East and Vietnam. Kryszewski remembered watching video from the Gulf War on television and thinking he should partake in that glory. This encouraged him to fight in the Iraq War. This part of his story relates to Vietnam veterans who were drawn to fight in Vietnam after being encouraged by the glory depicted in movies that World War II veterans enjoyed. This also shows similar roles of television and the sense of sight in the recruitment process of American soldiers.[201]

Kryszewski had additional similar experiences like Vietnam soldiers. Kryszewski remembered that he frequently experienced the threat of incoming missiles and the sounds of them exploding. Rarely would they actually harm people, but it still caused many in the base to feel paranoid. This connects to Vietnam soldiers who experienced the sound of enemy sniper fire on their camps, which also caused them to feel paranoid. Eventually, a rocket injured

[200] Chivers, 6, 9-14, 120-121.
[201] Chivers, 32.

Kryszewski. He later recollected an interesting sensory experience: "Hearing a whistling shell, a screaming rocket, or a snapping bullet means that you have been missed."[202] In this way, the sense of hearing often indicated one's personal safety in some regards. He noted how the lethal projectile does not announce itself until it is too late because one does not hear it after it hits them. Finally, Kryszewski also had an experience where he returned home and encountered disapproval from people in the United States once they found out he fought in the war. Similar experiences by Vietnam (and Korean) veterans made them feel like the American public and government did not validate their experiences. If the U.S. populace is not careful, Afghanistan/Iraq war veterans may feel that way too.[203]

Hospital Corpsman Dustin E. Kirby had images of Marvel superheroes (Captain America being one of them) in his head, which inspired him to be a hero himself. His grandfather, who served in World War II, inspired him to fight. This inspiration shows media (in the form of comic book heroes) and World War II glory also affected some soldiers' desires to fight in the Middle East, much like how John Wayne inspired Vietnam soldiers. After all, Vietnam soldiers' saw John Wayne and the characters he portrayed as their superhero. In this way, an argument could be made that victory culture has not ended like Tom Engelhardt suggests, rather it has evolved into a different form that has not yet been adequately identified. Instead of the Native American or the Communist, Americans view Muslims as the demographic to defeat.[204]

In addition to superhero influences, Kirby encountered citizens who resisted American protection, much like many of the Vietnamese. This of course contradicted with the U.S. goal to protect the citizens. Citizens, including children, seemingly betrayed the American soldiers and

[202] Chivers, 65.
[203] Chivers, 55-56, 65-67.
[204] Chivers, 71.

tricked them into danger, which caused the soldiers to not trust the citizens. Vietnam soldiers reflected this mistrust, which partially contributed to atrocities like the My Lai Massacre. It is important to remember that the public did not learn of the My Lai Massacre until much later in the Vietnam War, which indicates soldiers may not report atrocities concerning the Afghanistan/Iraq Wars. Only time will tell if this comparison is accurate.[205]

Kirby, like the other individuals already mentioned, experienced contradictions in his time fighting in the Middle East. He always dreamed of saving someone's life. He ended up helping one of his best friends stay alive long enough for a helicopter to race him to a hospital; however, he felt contradicting emotions because the enemy shot his friend through the head. Upon examining the blood and bits of brain his friend left behind, Kirby's "saving" actions felt selfish because he thought his friend's life would lose worth if he survived. This contradictory experience spurred on by the sensory experience of seeing blood and bits of his friend's brain is similar to sensory experiences that Vietnam soldiers had, which caused mental trauma.[206]

Perhaps the most negative response can be found in Specialist Robert Soto's sections of Chivers' book. Soto, like many soldiers involved in the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars, was encouraged to join the military after 9/11. Soto acknowledged that his experiences did not align with how both President Bush and President Obama and how their respective administrations portrayed the war. He detested the wars for all of the unnecessary violence and how soldiers suspected the citizens in Afghanistan and Iraq of helping the enemy. He envisioned the Taliban as ghosts due to their practice of guerilla warfare because he could not see them (a similar viewpoint shared by Vietnam soldiers of the elusive Viet-Cong). Soto fought in the mountainous region of Afghanistan, which is somewhat unique compared to the typical soldier's experience in

[205] Chivers, 131, 138.
[206] Chivers, 144.

Afghanistan because soldiers fought in the mountainous regions much more than other soldiers since guerilla fighters hid in the mountains. Like many Vietnam soldiers, Soto felt the government restricted his platoon to carry out their objectives. Also, when he went back home on emergency leave due to his half-sister's death, he noticed the contrasting state of other soldiers compared to himself. The soldiers were clean, well-fed, and relatively content, unlike himself. This similarly contrasts with Vietnam soldiers who viewed new recruits in a similar way. Eventually, Soto's wanted only to ensure his comrades' safety.[207]

Lieutenant Jarrod Neff, who actually witnessed an atrocity first-hand, provides the final story. He and his squad were told to check out a house that rockets destroyed. When he and another soldier examined the ruins, they discovered mostly women and children resided in the house. Due to their military ranks, they lacked authority to call in the rockets or investigate further. The elderly man who owned the house and survived the rocket explosions blamed Neff and his men for the death of his family. Neff and his troops had no answer for the man. Unfortunately, Neff could only carry on with his mission. Neff's story begs the question: how many more events like this have occurred and gone unreported?[208]

The similar sensory experiences of these soldiers in comparison to Vietnam soldiers points to the possibility that they will have relatable experiences moving forward in their lives (mental and physical trauma, rejection by people back home, drug problems, and a struggle to cope with the actions that they have done). From a collective memory perspective, the conflicts in the Middle East are shaping memories in a similar fashion to the conflict in Vietnam: split. A major repercussion for split memory seems to be a break in cultural identity due to alternate perspectives of the society's past. This creates conflict amongst the citizens and scholars who try

[207] Chivers, 188-192, 202, 211-214.
[208] Chivers, 268-271.

to remember the events. For Vietnam, the split memory caused an identity crisis, particularly among white citizens because they started to question their "good guy" identity (whereas African-Americans have never accepted this viewpoint due to racism that many experienced). The split memory that may develop out of the conflict in the Middle East may further disrupt the WASP identity, particularly when it comes to Christian identity (considering the conflict can be considered one between a Christian society and a Muslim one). Historians need to determine if similar splits in memory have occurred in America's past.

Closing Remarks

A North Vietnamese soldier by the name of Bao Ninh said in Ken Burns' Vietnam War documentary, "It has been forty years. Even the Vietnamese veterans, we avoid talking about the war. People sing about victory, about liberation. They're wrong. Who won and who lost is not a question. In war, no one wins or loses. There is only destruction. Only those who have never fought like to argue about who won and who lost."[209] Ninh's perspective highlights the complexity of the Vietnam War and why it is impossible to simplify it. The dominant and counter-memory both attempt to do this, with neither completely succeeding to do so. For this reason, both versions of the memories of the war hold truths and falsehoods.

The author recognizes that missing pieces exist in this narrative and still much more work remains. Further research can be done in multiple areas by future historians who wish to take up the mantle of sensory history and collective memory concerning the Korean and Vietnam Wars. What has been provided here should act as a foundation for others to improve and expand on. Areas that could be explored further include the effects of sensory history from World War II and its effects in relation to collective memory of Vietnam, other minority demographic sensory

[209] Ken Burns and Lynn Novak, *The Vietnam War*.

experiences and memories (such as Asian-American, Latin American, and women), and more analysis of cinematography (especially television shows and documentaries). For any future researcher, these are the author's suggestions for furthering this work and adding to what is already established here. The purpose of this work was to create a foundation for others to absorb and make their own contributions to the sensory history and collective memory of the Vietnam War. The hope of the author is that what is provided establishes an adequate foundation, one in which improvement is always possible.

In conclusion, the collective memory of the Vietnam War has been split in multiple ways. The counter-memory remembers it as an unjust war that displayed the worst in America. This memory spread from minority groups (especially African-Americans) to white Americans. The dominant white memory remembers the war as an unnecessary war, but once the U.S. committed to it, the government held the soldiers back, and the public treated veterans poorly. This split is still too simplified, as showcased by the experiences of African-American soldiers, who fell somewhere in between both of these portions of collective memory due to the conflict of racism and fighting in support of a country that inherently advocated for that racism. Regardless, the collective memories in every portion stemmed from previous wars, especially the "forgotten" Korean War. Soldiers in Korea had similar sensory experiences, but the U.S. failed to learn the lessons from that war, turning Vietnam into an even stronger sensory experience. This made the Vietnam War unforgettable, unlike the Korean War. The events of the Vietnam War also altered the collective memory of it. Spurred by mediums in the media like TV and radio, events like the Tet Offensive and the My Lai Massacre resulted in more definite splits in collective memory. Soldiers' sensory experiences initiated these memories, which shaped the collective memory. However, the soldiers processed their senses in alternate ways, leading to the split in collective

memory. Since they shared similar sensory experiences, mental trauma also varied among both whites and blacks. All in all, the Vietnam War was an explosion of sensory elements, which has shaped the collective memory of the United States then and today.

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