

The Language of War: Afghanistan and Vietnam

Justin Bridges

The language of a soldier is different than that of a civilian. Anyone who has friends or family in the military can tell you that when veterans get together, they speak a language all their own. This is true of all soldiers, regardless of the amount, if any at all, of combat they saw. However, soldiers that have been involved in combat speak a bit differently. They still use the acronyms and vernacular that all soldiers do, yet they also speak about their experiences differently. Examining Philip Caputo's *A Rumor Of War*, and Sebastian Junger's *War*. Caputo's account is his memoir of his time in Vietnam, while Junger was an embedded journalist. Being embedded means that the journalist relies solely on the company they are assigned to. Junger was shooting a documentary, *Restrepo*, along with his friend Tim Heatherington, and each were writing their own books. Junger penned *War*, and Heatherington *Infidel*. Philip Caputo was an officer in the Marine Corps 9th Expeditionary Brigade, “the first US combat unit sent to Indochina,” (Caputo xiii) in 1965-66. Junger made five trips over a total of fifteen months to the Korengal Valley in Afghanistan in 2007-08. I will compare these two works, along with others, and interviews with the authors in order to show that soldiers use a particular language when speaking about the wartime experience. I will explore the similarities in which the soldiers speak about their service before enlistment and deployment, during deployment, and upon coming home and readjusting to civilian life. I intend to show that soldiers use a particular language in order to cope with what they have experienced.

“Dulce de Decorum est, pro patria mori.” This is a line from a poem by Horace, an ancient Roman poet. It is roughly translated to English as: “It is sweet and dignified to die for your homeland.” This is a common refrain of soldiers, yet as we will discover, soldiers are never fighting or dying for their country, they fight and die for their fellow soldier. But why do young men want to go to war? During the approximately ten years in Vietnam, nearly every male who was either drafted or enlisted would go to Vietnam. The same is true during the ten plus years of the war in Afghanistan. If you go to the military, you go to war. So why do they join? “I joined the Marines in 1960 partly because I got swept up in the patriotic tide of the Kennedy era but mostly I was sick of the safe, suburban existence I

had known most of my life.” (Caputo 4) Caputo hits on the first reason that young men say they want to go to war, change and adventure. A great number of soldiers share this sentiment. They tend to use terms such as “bored”, “challenge”, and “adventure”. Matt Cook writes in *Soldier*, “I had the desire to make my life more adventurous, Hemingway-ish even,” (Cook 1) Like Caputo, Cook was also a college student at the University of Texas at Austin, but Cook did not enlist as an officer. Brendan O'Byrne is featured prominently in *War*. Junger formed a bond with the young man and still keeps in touch with him, among others in Battle Company. “O'Byrne grew up in rural Pennsylvania on a property that had a stream running through it and hundreds of acres of woods out back where he and his friends could play war.”(Junger 12) O'Byrne had a troubled childhood, however, and was involved in many physical altercations with his father, culminating in a fight where “...his father shot him twice with a .22 rifle.” (Junger 12) O'Byrne covered for his father and went to reform school. This took place when he was sixteen. He later returned to high school a changed person, and decided to enlist in the Army. Again, through the various backgrounds of the soldiers, a common thread is the need for change.

So now that we see why the soldiers say about their intention to join, the question arises of what did they want to accomplish by going to war? What did they envision themselves being, or doing? The first word that you will hear is “hero”. “...in my diseased imagination, there was a war hero inside of me.” (Cook 1) You can already see the change in language from a soldier in combat by the way that he refers to his imagination as “diseased”. The disease was believing that war would be somehow glamorous and that he would come home to ticker tape parades and medals on his chest. “This is what I wanted, to find in a commonplace world a chance to live heroically.” (Caputo 5) O'Byrne wanted to be Special Forces. The Special Forces are an elite group of very highly trained soldiers that undertake the most dangerous and important missions, so we can easily see that he also shares the idea of becoming a hero.

Where does this desire to become a hero originate? For soldiers, there are a myriad of reasons

that they want to enlist to become a hero. This is the “dream” as Caputo puts it: “Already I saw myself charging up some distant beachhead, like John Wayne in *Sands of Iwo Jima*, and then coming home a suntanned warrior with medals on my chest.” (6) More on John Wayne later, for now, the reasons they believe becoming a war hero will benefit them. Cook wanted to fulfill his “rite of passage”(1), and he “was madly in love with my ex-girlfriend and was determined to show her a man was hiding behind my indolent shortcomings.”(1) Whether it be for an ex-girlfriend, a father, or themselves, most soldiers will admit that they joined to try and “prove” something. “I needed to prove something- my courage, my toughness, my manhood, call it whatever you like.” (Caputo 6) On military bases, there is a place called a “proving ground”, which is where new weapons and technology are tested. The idea of “proving yourself” is ingrained in the soldiers mind from his first day of boot camp. “Here it doesn't matter who you are or where you are from. Here we are all equally worthless. We are all named Joe.”(Cook 1) The military gives you nothing, and every young man contemplating joining knows that. When you are enlisted, you earn what you get by proving yourself. This is why so many soldiers join for that reason. They will have a chance to prove to whomever they wish that they could do it, time and time again. The idea of proving yourself goes hand in hand with the hero idea as well. The ultimate proof that you have become something great in the military is coming home a war hero, thus fulfilling the dream.

The third idea I wish to discuss is the allure of John Wayne. John Wayne starred in a number of propagandized war films that encouraged generations of young men to want to “charge up some distant beachhead” (Caputo 6). Especially during the Vietnam War, soldiers had aspirations of emulating John Wayne. He became a cultural icon of toughness and grit. He represented the type of man that a soldier would want to be. The problem with Wayne was that he was merely an actor. He never served in the military. His portrayal of war and military life gave millions of young men a false sense of what combat was really like. References to John Wayne in the context of the Vietnam War are ubiquitous. *Full Metal Jacket*, *Apocalypse Now*, *Rambo*, and *Platoon*, among others, all make references to the

man. It may seem trivial to add an actor to the list of influences that cause men to want to go to war, yet his name is repeated and again when soldiers of the Vietnam era discuss their reasons for enlisting. Caputo, as I mentioned earlier, used him as a reference of what he wanted to accomplish upon enlisting. Caputo's vision was that of him in John Wayne's shoes. The theory simply cannot be ignored. The soldiers have a fantasy of what war will be like, and Wayne was able to put a face to that fantasy. As I have said, the idea of Wayne gave the soldiers a false sense of reality, a fantasy world of war where you come home a hero. During boot camp and training, Caputo describes how the military emulates the John Wayne idea: "Our Hollywood fantasies were given some outlet in the field exercises that took up about half of the training schedule....It was easy to do in the bloodless make believe of field problems, in which every operation went according to plan and the only danger was the remote one of falling and breaking an ankle. We took these stage managed exercises seriously, thinking they resembled actual combat. We couldn't know that they bore about as much similarity to the real thing as shadowboxing does to street fighting."(Caputo 15-16) This illustrates that even the military wants to portray combat as John Wayne does, for as long as they can keep the fantasy alive.

Another common term the soldier will hear during his initial training is "kill." The men are trained in the act of killing and are taught that they are killers. "What are you?!? Killers!!! What makes the grass grow?!? Blood, blood red blood!!!" (Cook 2) At this point, when the soldier speaks about killing, it is an abstract idea. They are being trained on how to kill and told that they must and are supposed to kill, yet they are not prepared for the act of killing itself. "I had acquired some expertise in the art of killing, I knew how to face death and how to cause it, with everything on the evolutionary scale of weapons from the knife to the 3.5 inch rocket launcher." (Caputo 3)

In actual combat, the language changes. There are no longer any qualms about what war is really like. The only thing that the soldiers experience is that stark realization that they were not prepared for what they were going to experience. That is not to say that the military does not train the soldiers in the best way possible, that they do have the best equipment, and they are "prepared," in the

military sense, to go to war. What this means is that they know how to follow orders, they have been well trained in their respective job, and they are as ready as any soldier could be to engage in actual combat. The problem lies in that there is only one way to gain experience in combat, no amount of fearless training can do it.

The first words I will discuss are “fear” and “anger.” Junger titles his first chapter “Fear” (Junger 1), which illustrates how important this word is to war. When the soldiers of Battle Company arrived in the Korengal Valley, they were not prepared for what they saw. In the film *Restrepo*, the scene is shown as they fly over the valley in the Chinooks (helicopters), as one soldier laments: “We are not ready for this.” (Restrepo) He could not have been more accurate. Upon arrival to the combat outpost (COP), the men must hike up a mountain with all their gear. Even in peak physical condition, the men struggle with the unforgiving terrain, and experience their first taste of combat while on that initial hike. “The men struggled upward in full view of the Taliban positions across the valley and finally began taking fire halfway up the spur. O’Byrne had never been under fire before, and the first thing he did was stand up and look around...I can’t believe they just *shot* at me!” (Junger 11) This is the precursor to fear. The soldier who is inexperienced will not realize the reality of the situation at first. There are countless stories of new soldiers doing exactly what O’Byrne did and it often results in their being shot. The idea is that the reality of being shot at is so surreal that the soldier does not yet know how to process it into fear. They are trained to shoot and be shot at, therefore they do not know how to process the actual act when it first happens. The fear comes later. However, the fear is not what you would think. The soldier rarely talks about fearing for his own life during combat, instead, he focuses on the fear of failing his brothers and causing their death. A soldier’s worst fear is not dying, it is losing a brother. This may explain why so many soldiers do what O’Byrne did and raise up to see what is happening. They have been trained to watch out for the man next to them and to fear failure throughout their training. The instinct would be to see what the danger was in order to eliminate it and save your team, instead of taking cover to protect yourself. Fear motivates the soldier because it is the

fear that drives them to fight under any circumstances in order to save a comrade. “Forget Queen or country, the mission or belief. It's more about keeping your mates alive...Cos that's what fuels war...love and grief.”(Sheers 3)

“Anger” plays off of fear. When the fear is realized, it causes the soldier to experience a deep anger that most civilians will never will. Caputo writes that “...men who do not expect to receive mercy eventually lose their inclination to grant it.”(xix) In the Spring of 1968, US forces were taking heavy casualties outside of a small village in Vietnam by the name of My Lai. A platoon wanted to exact revenge and massacred hundreds of men, women, and children, as well as burned the village in an attempt to exact revenge for the loss of their men. This is a clear example of the anger overtaking the soldiers and causing the men to commit astounding atrocities. Their fear of losing men had come to realization too many times for the emotion to remain as fear alone. In order to release the fear, they morph it to anger, and are willing to kill anything that does not resemble them. The same sentiment is echoed in *Restrepo*. After heavy fighting in which a man was killed, a soldier expresses to the camera that he was so angry following the death that he “didn't care what came down the mountain...man, woman, child, goat, I would have killed them all” (*Restrepo*). Cook also speaks about how fear can turn into anger. He relates a story in which he and his team were on patrol and approached a car parked on the side of the road. With the amount of casualties caused by Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) and roadside bombs placed in cars, the soldiers are in a constant state of fear. They always fear the worst, which can help keep them alive, but can also cause the anger to release and commit actions that they normally would not. The car begins to advance toward them and Cook fires his weapon into it. They drag the man out and question him. “I'm Kurdish,” the man says. “I don't care,” is Cook's reply. (Cook 4) Even after the soldiers are sure that the people in the car are not a threat, the anger keeps them on edge and less than cordial. Instead of feeling any remorse for almost killing an innocent family, Cook merely tells them that “Allah must have been looking out for them tonight.” (Cook 4) In these examples, it is clear that the soldier uses words like “fear” and “anger” in order to cope with losing

friends, and thus the words begin to shape how they behave. If you do not have the fear, and then the anger, you may not behave as the other soldiers and that will cause you to fail to “prove yourself.”

The next two words that affect soldiers in a combat situation are “death” and “killing.” The second part of *War* is entitled “Killing.” As I have said, the soldier has been trained in killing, that is to say the physical nature of killing, not the mental or emotional way to deal with the actual act of killing. One way that the soldiers are able to cope with killing is to adopt a language that dehumanizes the enemy. If the soldier is able to think of the enemy as a thing rather than a human being, it will be easier to kill them. In Vietnam, the Vietnamese were referred to as “gooks” and “zipperheads.” In Afghanistan, the enemy are referred to as “haji” and “ragheads.” This allows the soldier to speak of the enemy as if he is of another species. When the enemy ceases to be seen as human, the soldier is able to process the act of killing more easily. However, as we will see later, this is only accurate while in a combat situation. The use of the words creates a different language in reference to killing, and the change in language is the first step in being able to kill easily.

“Death” is a word that is prevalent in war literature, since the nature of war is death. Junger uses the word “dead” sixty-four times in *War*, and the word “death” twenty-one additional times. Not only does Junger use “dead” in describing the state of a man's existence, but he also uses it in description of events “dead calm”(52) and “in the dead of the night” (78). This is an example of Junger using his writing to keep the ever present chance of death at the forefront of the mind of the reader. He wants to remind the reader that death is ubiquitous in war. Even on a slow patrol, it is “in the dead of night,” or when describing how a sniper steadies himself as having to be “dead calm.” Caputo writes that “Most of all, we learned about death at an age when it is common to think of oneself as immortal” (xv). We must remember that the soldiers we are talking about are only boys, mostly right out of high school. To experience the first hand death of a close friend is something that most people will never have to endure, and the toll that takes on a young man's psyche is immeasurable. However, since death is so prevalent in combat, the use of the word is going to inevitably find its way into the vernacular of a

soldier's language, whether it be in description of friend, enemy, or the mundane. The use of the word is another coping mechanism. The more they talk about and trivialize death, the easier it is to face it when it happens. They are able to become desensitized to all of the death around them.

Another side effect of combat is the “high” or “rush” that soldiers experience while in direct combat. There are scenes in *Restrepo* that show how the soldiers react to being in combat. Steiner, a huge soldier who had been shot in the head and saved by his helmet, says that there “is no drug on Earth that can give you the high that being shot at does” (*Restrepo*). Many of the soldiers are screaming with seeming delight as they fire on the enemy, and erupt with positive emotion when they make a kill. As with anything that causes the brain to experience great pleasure and excitement, humans tend to try and recreate the feeling. Soldiers will become so bored with the lack of combat that they will attempt to seek it out. The men in the Korengal Valley would play makeshift sports in order to draw the enemy out. The longer they went without the “rush” of combat, the more likely they became to seek it out or provoke it. In Vietnam, soldiers were known to have water skied, played volleyball, and simply stand out in the open in order to draw contact. Once men who are highly trained to kill are placed in a situation where they are able to utilize what they have been training for, coupled with the “high” of combat, are unable to achieve the “high,” they will inevitably seek it in any place they can.

The differences in the language of the soldiers of the Vietnam War compared to the War in Afghanistan are based on their similarities. Soldiers of both wars used racist vernacular to demean and dehumanize their enemy. Both used different terms for the helicopter and bases. The point is that the actual words will change over time, based on the enemy and the technology, yet the meanings will remain consistent. That is to say that soldiers may refer to something differently from one war to another, but the meaning behind the words remains constant. They all speak of death, killing, anger, fear, and the “rush,” no matter what the particular words are to describe them.

The idea that the language of war remains basically static can be exemplified by the use of Native American metaphors in wartime. The use of the Native American metaphor originates before the

revolutionary war, when settlers would go, literally, into “Indian Country,” and would have to fight the natives for land. This practice, of course at this point it was merely description, continued throughout the American expansion to the West, with all new, unsettled territory being referred to as “Indian Country.” As the country grew, and many more military campaigns were undertaken, the practice was adopted by each successive generation of servicemen, and continues to this day. For our purposes, I will focus on how the Native American metaphors were used in Vietnam and Afghanistan.

In the Vietnam War, the Vietnamese were not only compared to the native Americans in name, they began to share a comparison in culture, which results in soldiers being more likely to carry out acts that were also carried out on the Native Americans, such as the case with the aforementioned massacre at My Lai. “In *Fire in the Lake*, Fitzgerald contends that “Indian Country” was more than just a joke or a figure of speech: 'It put the Vietnam War into a definite mythological and historical perspective: the Americans once again embarked on a heroic...conquest of an inferior race'" (Espey 1). We must go back to John Wayne to fully understand how simply identifying the Vietnamese with the Native Americans would allow for similar tactics and atrocities. The men who grew up to fight the Vietnam War were once boys watching westerns, and later, war movies. John Wayne was the bridge between the two, and Hollywood exploited the Vietnamese-Indian parallels. In the John Wayne movie *The Green Berets* (1968), the Vietnamese talk like the Sioux and “whoop like marauding Indians” (Espey 1). So as young boys, the soldiers of Vietnam watched John Wayne as a cowboy in western movies, going into hostile “Indian Country” and dispatching the savages. As teens the men watch him dramatize heroics from the World War II, while subconsciously absorbing the Native American comparisons. This results in the easy association of the Vietnamese with the American Indian, thus creating a predisposition of how a soldier is supposed to fight such an enemy. “This...mentality, intensified by the guerrilla nature of the warfare and the association of the Vietnamese with the treacherous and hostile terrain, helped fuel a fear and anger which often erupted in a kind of counter savagery in which Americans acted out the very roles they associated with their Indian adversaries of

the past” (Espey 2).

Aside from the sheer savagery in cases such as My Lai, the American forces in Vietnam also adopted the tactics of the soldiers who fought the Native Americans in the nineteenth century by “...obliteration of civilian settlements and food supply, relocation, destruction of ecosystems” (Espey 3). The language used in Vietnam directly affected how the soldiers acted, based on the predisposition to the “Indian mythology.” The ideas of fighting the savage Indian was so ingrained in them that the transition to the Vietnamese came much too easily, and at a great consequence to many of the men, as we will examine later.

This trend continues today in the wars in the Middle East. To the military, Afghans and Iraqis are lumped together, as both are referred to in a Native American context, as were the Vietnamese. Stephen Silliman writes in his work *The Old West in the Middle East*: “Perhaps soldiers claim to fight in Indian Country to learn from past successes and mistakes in similar guerrilla fighting situations, but the discourse only works because these metaphors derive from national consciousness and triumphalist visions of military conquest for the greater good in the North American homeland” (242). What Silliman is saying is that it is not merely the words that cause the soldiers to equate the enemy with the Native Americans, it is the subconscious connotations that accompany the words that affect the soldier's behavior. The idea of “Indian Country” is not just a way for the military to trace and study different guerrilla warfare experiences in order to learn from them, it is a way to change the psyche of the soldier in order to allow him to perform in battle. It is already in his mentality to want to eradicate the “savages,” so the use of the metaphor is not merely for tactical reasons. “The use of this US military metaphor indicates a far deeper symbolic connection than simply understanding guerrilla warfare” (Silliman 242). Silliman also raises the question of if we were to engage in a war with a country of people from European descent if we would still adopt the Native American metaphor. However, that is a question for another day.

Moreover, the metaphor of the Native American has implications within the Native American

community, specifically, the idea of “creating the metaphor's inversion” (Silliman 243). If we now refer to the combatants in the Middle East in the same way as we do the Vietnamese, with the Native American metaphor, then we can invert the metaphor to say that since areas in the Middle East are “Indian Country,” then the reverse would mean “that the Indians were (and still are?) terrorists” (Silliman 243). That may be reaching. However, Native American writers worry that the continuation of this metaphor will result in history seeing the Native Americans as terrorists, instead of a Native people fighting to save their land from conquest of a more industrially developed society. If we are actually trying to help the Middle Eastern countries, and are not on an imperial conquest for resources, then the language is in opposition with the intent. Using the terminology of colonialism can only serve as a detriment to the cause, if it happens to be legitimate.

Returning home from combat can be the most complicated part of a soldier's experience, and it is reflected in his language. We have so far discussed what words soldiers tend to use when describing enlistment, training, and combat, and now we will examine what they say upon returning to the civilian world. The transition to civilian life can be more difficult than combat itself. One of the first things that the soldiers experience when leaving combat is an overwhelming sense of emotion. Three months after their time in the Korengal Valley, the soldiers are in Italy, recovering and waiting on their respective futures. However, the emotions pour out. “A soldier from Chosen Company gets taken to the hospital in an ambulance after collapsing in his room, shrieking that people are trying to kill him. The toughest guys in the platoon find themselves crying every day, and the more vulnerable guys skirt the edge of sanity” (Junger 265). During their time in combat, the soldiers have little time to reflect and process what has happened to them. At the time it is happening, it is merely the reality that they live in while in a combat situation. It is only when they are removed from the situation that their minds allow them to begin to understand the gravity of what they endured. The word “fear” is also used prevalently once the soldiers are out of combat. During their time at war, they were constantly on edge, awaiting the next attack, yet in the civilian world the fear remains, while the danger has vanished. “O'Byrne doesn't fare

well...His sister flies in for a visit and when they go walking around town O'Byrne becomes convinced someone is following them and takes defensive action. He was less scared in the Korengal, where people were actually shooting at him, than in Italy, where it's mostly in his head" (Junger 266). Yet it is not only the memories, or the emotion that confront the men, it is also all of the new rules they are forced to adhere to, and the reality that the world has continued while they were out of contact with it. Junger writes that "the men do not react well to getting reprimanded by other men who have never been to war"(265). Beyond that, one of the soldier's mother is close to dying from cancer, and others have their own personal problems to deal with. This sudden thrust back into a world outside of combat is difficult to process. Matt Cook describes coming home as being in a strange land. "I am home. I do not want to be here. My mind is not home, it is not where it should be. I appear alright, but I often fake it. I spend much of my time staring into space waiting for something to happen" (Cook 5). Soldiers repeat words such as "urgency," "scared," "guilt," and "out of place" when they return from war. Their experiences have changed their vocabulary in such a way that everything relates to their experience. A car backfire is a roadside bomb, the feeling that someone is following you all the time, and unreasonable fear in everyday situations are all things that combat veterans have in common. What causes the men to change the way they speak and act so dramatically after leaving a war zone?

The final and most important word to a soldier who has been in combat is "brotherhood." The idea of "brotherhood" is paramount to the military. From your first day at boot camp the soldier is taught that you take care of you brother. "Brotherhood is different than friendship. Friendship happens in society, the more you like somebody, the more you are willing to do for them. Brotherhood has nothing to do about how you feel about another person. It's a mutual agreement in a group that you will put the welfare of the group, you will put the safety of everyone in the group above your own. In effect, you're saying, "I love these other people more than I love myself" (Junger TED). This sentiment is heightened to an extent that civilians whom have never been in a war zone could never comprehend it. When O'Byrne had a man shot in the head, yet survived, he "realized he could not protect his men, and

that was the only time he cried in Afghanistan, was realizing that. That's brotherhood" (Junger TED). In *A Soldier's Language*, Frederick Elkin writes that "the image of solidarity- The soldier from the very beginning of his Army life feels there is a bond between himself and those Fate has placed in a similar situation" (417). This idea is only magnified when the soldier's are forced to place their lives in each other's hands, and the brotherhood and solidarity affect the way that they will speak when they return. One of the first feelings that soldiers say they experience upon returning to the civilian world is a feeling of "disconnect." During deployment, the soldiers are never away from one another. They sleep, eat, fight, and grieve together. They all share a common bond, and they become reliant on that bond. Therefore, when they return home, they come to realize that they no longer share that type of bond with anyone who has not been in combat. Moreover, the soldiers feel an intense loss when they have to leave their mates. "I choke up when I speak to my platoon for the last time. I didn't think it would be so hard. I hope they know that the greatest honor of my life was serving as their section sergeant" (Cook 4).

While the soldiers are in a war zone, the way they talk about their experiences has a sense of excitement. They talk about getting shot or shot at as if it is an everyday thing. However, once home, they find the words hard to come by. Some feel that no one else will understand, and if they try to, it will anger the soldier. Some do not like to talk about their time at all. The reality of what they have endured comes crashing down so quickly that it causes the men to shut themselves off, and often that causes them to act out. When Junger visits O'Byrne in six months after Battle Company's deployment, he quips that O'Byrne "...had a rough time when he got back to Italy; in some ways he was in more danger there than in the Army" (Junger 5). This is a comment on how the soldiers do not know how to deal with being apart from their comrades, and an example of the problem with acting out, your platoon mates no longer have your back in the civilian world. The soldier has an immense lack of trust because of this.

The most fascinating aspect of soldiers coming home from war, however, is the idea that they

“miss” it. How could a man miss war? Well, the war is not what they miss. It is the solidarity, the brotherhood. Every single soldier mentioned in this paper shared the same sentiment, along with both authors. A passage from *War* begins to explain this phenomenon:

“It's a foolish and embarrassing thought but one worth owning up to. Perfectly sane, good men have been drawn back to combat over and over again, and anyone interested in the idea world peace would do well to know what they're looking for. Not killing, necessarily – that couldn't have been clearer in my mind – but the other side of the equation: protecting. The defense of the tribe is an insanely compelling idea, and once you've been exposed to it, there's almost nothing else you'd rather do. The only reason anyone was alive in Restrepo – or at Aranas or, at Ranch House or, later, at Wanat – was because every man up there was willing to die defending it....

Collective defense can be so compelling – so addictive, in fact – that eventually it becomes the rationale for why the group exists in the first place...When we got back to Vicenza (Italy), I asked Bobby Wilson if he missed Restrepo at all. “I'd take a helicopter there tomorrow,” he said. Then, leaning in a little softer: “Most of us would” (Junger 214-15).

The soldiers are there to defend one another, so an effect of that being taken away is a sense of a lack of purpose. There are stories of soldiers in all wars going AWOL in order to return to the battlefield to join their mates. This is an example of the collective defense that Junger is talking about. When the ability to defend his brother is taken away, so is his sense of self. This is how “missing” the war affects their behavior. The fact is that they are no longer serving the only purpose that they want to serve. “It's as if I'm self-destructive, trying to find the hardest thing possible to make me feel accomplished... A lot of people tell me I can be anything I want to be. If that's true, *why can't I be a fucking civilian and lead a normal fucking life?* Probably because I don't want to” (Junger 268). This quote from O'Byrne is telling in two ways. First, it reiterates the idea that he misses the war. He does

not “want” to be a civilian. The desire to defend and protect has overwhelmed him. Second, he does not feel like he is part of society. He believes that he belongs in the war, and society cannot, or will not, accept him, nor does he want to be accepted by them. Soldiers do not seek the approval or recognition of civilians, they only seek it of those whom they fight alongside. Sal Guinta, a soldier from Chosen company, also in the Korengal Valley at the same time as Battle Company, was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for actions during the campaign. He was asked in an interview done by Junger, posted on the *Restrepo* website, what his first thought was upon learning that he was going to receive the Medal of Honor. His response: “Fuck you” (restreptomovie.com). He did not wish to be recognized for what he did, because he only did what “anyone would have.” That is the mentality that the soldier brings back from combat and is supposed to be able to assimilate back into “normal” society. Another example is when Junger was visiting with O'Byrne in New York. A waitress approached them and asked if he missed any part of the war. “Ma'am, I miss almost all of it” (*Restrepo*). The longing to once again be a part of the group defense can overwhelm the soldier, and it results in a great deal of them re-enlisting in order to once again feel that bond. Philp Caputo shares these sentiments. He found trouble adjusting to the reality of civilian life. The military had trained him in many things, but not how to survive in the civilian world. Caputo found his way back to the battlefield through journalism. He returned to Vietnam in 1975 as a newspaper correspondent.

In the TED talk “Why Veterans Miss War,” Sebastian Junger speaks briefly about the issue of soldiers missing war. “If a room full of peace loving people can find something compelling about war, so do twenty year old soldiers, who have been trained in it...That's what we all have to understand” (Junger TED). We have all more than likely enjoyed a good war movie, so it is very easy to see how the real thing, especially to those trained in it, can be an overwhelming force. Furthermore, once they have a taste of what war is, the communal defense of the tribe, they do not want to do anything else, and nothing else is able to fill that void. When in a war zone, as I have said, the soldiers will become so bored from lack of combat that they will go to great lengths in order to find it. Now if we take that

further, we start to understand how returning to civilian life could be mind numbingly boring enough to make you want to go back. Mentally, the soldier is not “back.” He feels the fear once home exceedingly more than he did while in combat. That is where the word “fear” comes back. Before it was the fear of losing your, brother, but back in civilian life, the soldier is finally able to process his own existence, and it is terrifying. They do not miss killing people. They do not miss combat. They miss brotherhood; they miss connection.

In researching the words that soldiers use in war, I have determined that their language does impact their behavior. They grow up wanting to be “heroes,” they feel “fear,” and they miss “brotherhood.” These words are not something that a civilian would regularly use, which shows that the language does have an effect on the person, and the language can also influence them as well.

Works Cited

Junger, Sebastian. *War*. New York: Twelve, 2010. Print.

Caputo, Philip. *A rumor of war*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977. Print.

Restrepo. Dir. Sebastian Junger. Virgil Films, 2010. Blu-Ray.

Espey, David. *America and Vietnam: The Indian Subtext*. *The Journal of American Culture and Literature*. 1994.

Silliman, Stephen W. "The "Old West" in the Middle East: U.S. Military Metaphors in Real and Imagined Indian Country." *American Anthropologist* 110.2 (2008): 237-47. *ProQuest*. Web. 9 June 2014.

"The Language of War." *Kashmir Monitor* Feb 02 2014. *ProQuest*. Web. 9 June 2014 .

Cook, Matt. *Soldier*. *Texas Monthly*. 2007. *Proquest*. Web. 22 May 2014

Suleiman, Yasir. *Awar of Words: Language and Conflict in the Middle East*. *Journal of Popeace Research*. Vol. 43 No. 1. 2006

Elkin, Frederick. *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 51, No. 5, Human Behavior in Military Society (Mar., 1946)