*The Things They Carried* Quote Analysis

For each chapter, there will be a selection of quotes to pick (you pick one). For the quote, analyze:

1. Speaker:
2. Context:
3. Style/Lit Devices:
4. Related Themes:

* Morality and Death
* Social Obligation
* Morality
* Storytelling and Memory
* Shame and Guilt

Chapter 1: The Things They Carried

1. This was not Mount Sebastian, it was another world, where there were no pretty poems or midterm exams, a place where men died because of carelessness and gross stupidity. Kiowa was right. Boom-down, and you were dead. Never partly dead. (24)
2. They marched for the sake of the march. They plodded along slowly, dumbly, leaning forward against the heat, unthinking, all blood and bone, simple grunts, soldiering with their legs, toiling up the hills and down into the paddies and across the river and up again and down, just humping, one step and then the next and then another, but no volition, no will, because it was automatic, it was anatomy, and the war was entirely a matter of posture and carriage, the hump was everything, a kind of inertia, a kind of emptiness, a dullness of desire and intellect and conscience and hope and human sensibility. Their principles were in their feet. (15)
3. For the most part they carried themselves with poise, a kind of dignity. Now and then, however, there were times of panic, when they squealed or wanted to squeal but couldn't, when they twitched and made moaning sounds and covered their heads and said Dear Jesus and flopped around on the earth and fired their weapons blindly and cringed and sobbed and begged for the noise to stop and went wild and made stupid promises to themselves and to God and to their mothers and fathers, hoping not to die. In different ways, it happened to all of them. (19)
4. Lavender was dead. You couldn't burn the blame. (23)
5. They burned everything. They shot chickens and dogs, they trashed the village well, they called in artillery and watched the wreckage, then they marched for several hours through the hot afternoon, and then at dusk, while Kiowa explained how Lavender died, Lieutenant Cross found himself trembling. (16)
6. And they dreamed of freedom birds.
7. At night, on guard, staring into the dark, they were carried away by jumbo jets. They felt the rush of takeoff. Gone! they yelled. And then velocity—wings and engines—a smiling stewardess but it was more than a plane, it was a real bird, a big sleek silver bird with feathers and talons and high screeching. They were flying. The weights fell off; there was nothing to bear. They laughed and held on tight, feeling the cold slap of wind and altitude, soaring, thinking It's over, I'm gone!—they were naked, they were light and free—it was all lightness, bright and fast and buoyant, ... (22 )
8. Taking turns, they carried the big PRC-77 scrambler radio, which weighted 30 pounds with its batter. They shared the weight of memory. (14 )
9. They carried the common secret of cowardice barely restrained...They carried the soldier’s greatest fear, which was the fear of blushing. Men killed, and died, because they were embarrassed not to. It was what had brought them to the war in the first place, nothing positive, no dreams of glory or honor, just to avoid the blush of dishonor. They dies so as not to die of embarrassment (20).
10. “Moral? You know. *Moral.* Sander wrapped the thumb…Henry Dobbins thought about it. Yeah, well, he finally said. I don’t see no moral. There it *is,*man (13).

Chapter 4:

1. I felt myself blush. I couldn't tolerate it. I couldn't endure the mockery, or the disgrace, or the patriotic ridicule. Even in my imagination, the shore just twenty yards away, I couldn't make myself be brave. It had nothing to do with morality. Embarrassment, that's all it was. And right then I submitted. I would go to the war—I would kill and maybe die—because I was embarrassed not to.
2. The day was cloudy. I passed through towns with familiar names, through the pine forests and down to the prairie, and then to Vietnam, where I was a soldier, and then home again. I survived, but it's not a happy ending. I was a coward. I went to the war.

Chapter 7:

1. War is hell, but that's not the half of it, because war is also mystery and terror and adventure and courage and discovery and holiness and pity and despair and longing and love. War is nasty; war is fun. War is thrilling; war is drudgery. War makes you a man; war makes you dead (76).
2. ...and I still remember that trail junction and those giant trees and a **soft dripping sound** somewhere beyond the trees. I remember the **smell of moss**. Up in the canopy there were **tiny white blossoms**, but no sunlight at all and I remember the **shadows** spreading out under the trees where Curt Lemon and Rat Kiley  were playing catch…I glanced and watched Lemon step from the shade into bright sunlight. His face was suddenly brown and shining. **A handsome kid, really.** Sharp grey eyes, lean and narrow-waisted, and when he died it was almost beautiful, the way the sunlight came around him and lifted him up and sucked him high into a tree full of moss and vines and white blossoms (67).
3. You're never more alive than when you're almost dead (78).
4. When a guy dies, like Curt Lemon, you look away and then look back for a moment and then look away again. The pictures get jumbled; you tend to miss a lot. And then afterward, when you go to tell about it, there is always that surreal seemingness, which makes the story seem untrue, but which in fact represents the hard and exact truth as it seemed (68).
5. A true war story is never moral. It does not instruct, nor encourage virtue, nor suggest models of proper human behavior, nor restrain men from doing the things men have always done. If a story seems moral, do not believe it. If at the end of a war story you feel uplifted, or if you feel that some small bit of rectitude has been salvaged from the larger waste, then you have been made the victim of a very old and terrible lie (65).
6. In many cases a true war story cannot be believed. If you believe it, be skeptical. It's a question of credibility. Often the crazy stuff is true and the normal stuff isn't, because the normal stuff is necessary to make you believe the truly incredible craziness (68).
7. In a true war story, if there's a moral at all, it's like the thread that makes the cloth. You can't tease it out. You can't extract the meaning without unraveling the deeper meaning. And in the end, really, there's nothing much to say about a true war story, except maybe "Oh." (74).
8. It comes down to gut instinct. A true war story, if truly told, makes the stomach believe (74).

Chapter 13:

1. "You keep writing these war stories," she said, "so I guess you must've killed somebody." It was a difficult moment, but I did what seemed right, which was to say, "Of course not," and then to take her onto my lap and hold her for a while.
2. I did not hate the young man; I did not see him as the enemy; I did not ponder issues of morality or politics or military duty.
3. It was not a matter of live or die. There was no real peril. Almost certainly the young man would have passed by. And it will always be that way.
4. It occurred to me then that he was about to die. I wanted to warn him.
5. Later, I remember, Kiowa tried to tell me that the man would've died anyway. He told me that it was a good kill, that I was a soldier and this was a war, that I should shape up and stop staring and ask myself what the dead man would' ve done if things were reversed.
6. Sometimes I forgive myself, other times I don't.