# The Things They Carried: Analysis Of Jimmy Cross

One of the main characters in this novel is twenty-four-year-old, Lieutenant Jimmy Cross. Jimmy is the assigned leader of the Alpha Company in the Vietnam War. His role is to be a strong leader who instructs his troops to gain measurable advantage over the enemy, but he fails to demonstrate the ability to fulfil his role. Instead, he's always daydreaming and obsessing over Martha, which is a student in Jimmy's home state, New Jersey. Martha shows no interest in Jimmy while he's in love with her. Jimmy's obsession over Martha is Jimmy's way of avoiding his reality to take his mind off of the Vietnam War. Jimmy's troop named Ted Lavender death is what makes Jimmy realize that his actions were harmful to the whole squad. He's in pain about Ted's death and blames himself and believes that if he would have been a better leader Ted would have never been killed. Jimmy is affected physically and emotionally in war which holds him back from accomplishing his duties as the first lieutenant of his squad. Jimmy's inexperience and lack of focus is what makes him lack the qualities to be a good leader. Jimmy was a kid at war who was in love and didn't want to be leader of his squad. Although Jimmy wasn't the best leader his intentions were always pure. Until the end of the novel is when Jimmy shows growth and realizes he is responsible for the lives of these men fighting in the war. Jimmy's main issue throughout the novel is his lack of focus, he is constantly thinking of Martha. As stated by Tim O'Brien, "On occasion he would yell at his men to spread out the column, to keep their eyes open, but then he would slip away into daydreams, just pretending, walking barefoot along the Jersey shore, with Martha, carrying nothing" (487). This clearly proves that Jimmy's lack of focus affects his whole squad. In order to be a successful squad a leader who guides and supports them both physically and emotionally is needed. Jimmy always had good intentions from the beginning of the novel, but he decides to take action and be a responsible leader once squad member Ted Lavender passes away. Tim O'Brien shows Jimmy's new view on his role as leader, "He was now determined to perform his duties firmly and without negligence. It wouldn't help Lavender, he knew that, but from this point on he would comport himself as an officer. … On the march he would impose strict field discipline. He would be careful to send out flank security, to prevent straggling or bunching up, to keep his troops moving at the proper pace" (494). These lines from the end of the story, clearly prove how Jimmy's mindset drastically changed from the beginning of the novel, He decides that he is going to do everything he can in order to provide his men with the appropriate guidance they need. When Lieutenant Jimmy Cross takes responsibility in becoming a better leader, he also realizes Martha was never in love with him. Jimmy was just fantasizing about a girl who never loved or will ever love him. The morning Ted Lavender passed away, Jimmy decides to burn all the letters and photographs to let go and move on from Martha. As stated in the next lines Tim O'Brien shows how Jimmy changes his way of viewing Martha, "Henceforth, when he thought about Martha, it would be only to think that she belonged elsewhere. Would shut down the daydreams. This was not Mount Sebastian, it was another world, here there were no pretty poems or midterm exams, where men died because of carelessness and gross stupidity" (494) This clearly shows how Jimmy's imagination rather than realities lead him and his squad to danger.

Although, Jimmy Cross had many flaws such as his inexperience and lack of focus preventing him from being the leader he needed to be, he turned out to have positive traits, such as taking responsibility which resulted in a better outcome towards the end of the novel. Jimmy never let

go of his life back in New Jersey which prevented him focus on the war and squad whom he was in charge for. His lack of responsibility results in the cause of death of Ted Lavender, which is what wakes Jimmy up and makes him realize that he must set his priorities straight and become the leader his squad was in need of.

In conclusion, Jimmy's character traits changed drastically throughout the novel, starting from bad habits to later on turning into more improved habits. Jimmy learns from his past mistakes and results in taking charge as the first lieutenant and bettered himself and his squad members as well.