Jimmy Cross carried them, as did Ted Lavender, Henry Dobbins, Dave Jensen, and the many other soldiers in the war. These soldiers all carried war items such as guns, grenades, knives, bayonets and anything else that would keep them alive while fighting the enemy. Besides these physical items, they all carried something more, emotional baggage. Each of these soldiers carried terror, love, longing, and memories. Although the weight of all the guns and ammunition was great, the weight of the pain, guilt and hate that these men also carried was tremendous because, while the soldiers could easily get rid of the physical items, the emotions were there to stay.

Lieutenant Jimmy Cross always carried letters from Martha, a college girl from back home that he was in love with. Although he knew that the letters were not love letters and that Martha didnít love him the way he loved her, that didnít stop him from dreaming of Martha. He was so protective of the letters that he had them wrapped in plastic to keep them from getting wet or dirty. Cross would read them every night for some comfort and connection to the outside world. These letters weighed only about ten ounces, but they brought about emotions that weighed far greater because he was constantly thinking about Martha rather than focusing on his men and what was really important at that time. As Cross would read them, he would fall in love all over again with Martha, and dream of her and what she was doing. Besides being in love with
Martha, Cross would begin to hate the fact that he was stuck in this war and that it seemed that the only way to get out was to get killed. Since Cross was the lieutenant, he would feel guilty when he would start to daydream, because he knew that he should be paying more attention to his soldiers.

Almost all of the soldiers carried photographs. Each soldier had photos of their family members, friends, significant others, and of the world back home where they live. Just as the letters from Martha weighed hardly anything, so did these photos. But the pain accompanied with these photos was much more than the weight of the photos themselves. Cross carried two photographs of Martha. One was an ordinary snapshot and the other was an action shot of Martha playing volleyball. "Cross wondered who had taken the picture, because he knew she had boyfriends, because he loved her so much, and because he could see the shadow of the picture taker spreading out against the brick wall." While looking at these photos, Cross would daydream of Martha and before long, he was focusing his thoughts more on Martha than on the men in his platoon. When Cross and the other soldiers would look at the photos, they would remember back to when they were home, causing pain and grief would overcome them. Their hearts would ache to be home with their families and friends and to be able to live a life where fear of being killed wasn't a recurring thought.

Old memories were also something these soldiers carried. Some of these memories were shameful, while others were good memories. "As a hedge against bad times, Kiowa carried his grandmother's distrust of the white man, his grandfather's old hunting hatchet." Kiowa remembered learning from his grandmother not to trust white men so he had brought the hunting hatchet along just in case. Just like anyone else, these
men had memories of events and situations that were unpleasant and that they weren't very proud of. The weight of these memories was tremendous, and if the memories were something big, the soldiers would constantly be thinking about it as they walked along. Along with the memories, the soldiers have secrets that they haven't told anyone. These secrets were also things that these men weren't very proud of, and probably things they wish they hadn't done. Memories and secrets can weigh as much as a physical item because of the constant thoughts they bring about.

Pain and hardship was something that all of the soldiers had to endure. But not only were there physical pains from the strenuous walking, running, hiking and trying to hide from the enemy, there was pain from having to keep track of one another. They were in constant fear of losing each other, and when Ted Lavender was shot, they all felt responsible in some way for the fact that they should have been more careful. "Kiowa, who saw it happen, said it was like watching a rock fall, or a big sandbag or something--just boom, then down." All the soldiers knew that they were supposed to be watching their surroundings and keeping track of one another. They were bound together like a family, always looking out for one another and when Lee Strunk crawled out of the tunnel after his dangerous search, they all felt relieved that he was still alive.

In their feeling responsible for one another, Lieutenant Jimmy Cross felt most of that responsibility. He had led a laid back platoon, but as soon as Ted Lavender was killed, all that changed. Cross felt that he was responsible for Lavender's death because of how he spent his time daydreaming of Martha while reading her letters and looking at her pictures instead of running a stricter, tighter platoon. After Lavender was killed, Cross realized that things needed to change. The soldiers had been able to toss out extra
grenades, ammunition, and other materials because the choppers would be bringing new supplies the next day. But Cross no longer allowed them to do that. Once the chopper had taken Lavender's body away, Cross began to grieve. "He was grieving for Ted Lavender, but mostly for Martha, and for himself, because she belonged to another world...and because he realized she didn't love him and never would." Cross began to enforce strict field discipline and insisted that the men have clean weapons. He was planning on taking away all of Lavender's dope, and then he would give them a strict talk about how he was responsible for Lavender's death and how things were going to change.

Jimmy Cross had reached a point in his life where he was ready to make a big change. Maybe he had resolved some conflict, but his inner world and the physical world around him would never have resolution. Although he was able to tuck away some feelings for Martha, he was left still carrying his gear and the emotional weight of caring for his men. It seems that this is what Tim O'Brien is trying to represent for us. While it's Jimmy Cross' story, he has made it Lavender's, Dobbin's, and a story of all the other men. In fact, he has made this story a story of all men who served in Vietnam. And Mr. O'Brien has done this by carefully constructing a quiet story rather than an action-packed, Hollywood war movie. He seems to tell us that the hardest hours of the war were the quietest hours. And, Mr. O'Brien tells us that even though the physical baggage weighed a considerable amount, the emotions that surrounded the men weighed more. Physical items could be dropped off and left behind; choppers could come in and pick up mounds of gear. But even when these men had nothing to carry, the emotional burden was nearly unbearable.