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Joe Klein

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Joe Klein : Payback before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Payback:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. As a Viet Nam veteran, I am saddened by ...By parkmanAs a Viet Nam veteran, I am saddened by how shabbily the combat vets were treated. I was lucky...I came back to a profession and a family. And just as importantly, or more so perhaps, I was not in combat, much less in an ambush where my buddies were killed or maimed. Joe Klein's book highlights the need to welcome our veterans back, and thank them for their service. It is well-written, and forces me to think about things that I would rather not think about. The Veterans Administration is swamped with problems that civilians cannot fully understand, but must honor and join in finding solutions. Thank you, Mr. Klein.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Wonderful bookBy CustomerI thoroughly enjoyed this book. Very entertaining and well written. A very difficult subject, but it was explained very well. I recommend this book.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. good bookBy Woodrow Stargood book

From the author of *Primary Colors*, a remarkably sensitive story of a generation (The New York Times Book Review): The critically acclaimed true story of five Marines who fought together in a bloody battle during the Vietnam War, barely escaping with their lives, and of what happened when they came home.In 1981, while the country was celebrating the end of the Iran hostage crisis, an unemployed Vietnam veteran named Gary Cooper went berserk with a gun, angry over the jubilant welcome the hostages received in contrast to his own homecoming from Vietnam, and

was killed in a fight with police. In what has been called the most eloquent work of nonfiction to emerge from Vietnam since Michael Herr's *Dispatches* (The New York Times), Joe Klein tells Cooper's story, as well as the stories of four of the other vets in Cooper's platoon. The story begins with an ambush and a grisly battle in the Que Son Valley in 1967, but *Payback* is less about remembering the war and more about examining its long-term effects on the grunts who fought it. Klein fills in the next fifteen years of these Marines' lives after they return home, with the sort of fine and private detail one ordinarily finds only in fiction (People). The experiences of these five men capture the struggles of a whole generation of Vietnam veterans and their families. Klein's near-hypnotic account (Daily News, New York) is, to this day, both a remarkable piece of reporting and some of the most vivid, harrowing, and emotionally honest writing to come out of Vietnam (The Washington Post Book World).

Extraordinarily perceptive a remarkably sensitive story of a generation. (Stanley Karnow The New York Times Book) Klein rescues the grunt from anecdote and restores his dignity. *Payback* is, simply, one of the best accounts of how men respond to combat written about Vietnam or any other war. Klein's reporting is remarkable. He brings each man to life, takes us into the battlefields between men and women, lets us see as we so rarely do the agonies and hard-won victories of growing up in working class America. He has overcome the many barriers that divided us, and has healed some of the wounds of the war. (Esquire) The most eloquent work of nonfiction to emerge from Vietnam since Michael Herr's *Dispatches*. Mr. Klein has a brisk, instinctive talent for illuminating American lives. We come to know the five Marines as intimately as characters in a novel. Indeed, *Payback* has that rare quality in a book: the visceral feel of real life, pinned down and clarified through words. (Michiko Kakutani The New York Times) Some of the most vivid, harrowing, and emotionally honest writing to come out of Vietnam. (The Washington Post Book World) It's perhaps good to be reminded just how compassionate the most informed journalism can be. Some of Klein's most interesting reporting concerns the effect on the wives of their husbands' experiences; he shows how supportive some of them could be. Klein's book eloquently demonstrates that what brings these men back into the world is their own efforts: their understanding and their care for one another, their interest in something outside themselves, their brave determination. (Peter S. Prescott Newsweek) It's a grim picture, painted in compelling strokes. Klein gets it all: their troubles with women, with employers, with the world and the book must be a sober look in the mirror for the survivors. For the reader, it's near-hypnotic. (New York Daily News) A rich and important book that explains a great deal about a lot of people. *Payback* is the story of Joe Klein's search for the survivors of Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, vintage 1967. It is a special book because it focuses in depth on the experience of five men who were temporarily thrown together in an unpopular war. (Chicago Sun-Times) "[*Payback*] captures the sort of fine and private detail one ordinarily finds only in fiction." (People) About the Author Joe Klein is an award-winning journalist and the author of seven books, including the #1 bestseller *Primary Colors*. His weekly Time column, *In the Arena*, covers US politics, elections, and foreign policy and has won two National Headliner Awards for best magazine column. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. *Payback* PROLOGUE The Summer of Love In late January 1981, at the peak of the short-lived national euphoria over the return of the American hostages from Iran, I noticed a brief wire service story in one of the New York tabloids about a Vietnam veteran who had been killed by the police in Hammond, Indiana. The headline was something like: Viet Vet Goes Berserk over Hostage Welcome. His name was Gary Cooper and his story was, in its way, as classically American as his name. It was true that he had been angered by the tumultuous welcome the former hostages received; there had been no parades or visits to the White House when he returned from Vietnam. But it wasn't merely anger over the hostages that pushed Gary Cooper to the brink; indeed, that was only a small part of it. He was far more troubled by his inability to find a job since being laid off by the Pullman Standard Company nine months earlier. On January 20, the safe return of the hostages and Ronald Reagan's inauguration shared the front page of the Hammond Times with a story of more immediate interest: Pullman was permanently closing its freight car division, and Cooper's slim hope that he would be called back to work vanished. A week later, he learned that a job he had hoped to get at Calumet Industries also had eluded him. Two days after that, he was dead. He was thirty-four years old. He had been born in Tennessee, but his family moved North in the great migration of poor Southern whites to the factories of the Midwest during World War II, a migration that now seemed to be reversing itself as steel mills and auto plants along the shores of the Great Lakes closed their gates and the children of the original migrants drifted back to the sun belt. Gary Cooper's tragedy seemed a reflection of several troubling problems: the rising anger of Vietnam veterans, the legacy of the war itself, the dislocations caused by the shriveling of basic industries in the Midwest and I decided to write a magazine article about his life and death. I spent two weeks in Hammond interviewing his friends and family. One day Barbara Cooper, Gary's widow, lugged out an old scrapbook filled with photographs and memorabilia from Vietnam. There was a picture of Gary standing proudly at attention in hospital pajamas as he received a Purple Heart for wounds sustained in action on August 16, 1967. There were other pictures rather touching in their innocence of Gary and the men in his unit digging foxholes, clowning around and striking various unconvincing (and obviously staged) warlike poses. They were all so very young... except for one small, grizzled sergeant standing on a paddy dike, slouched, exhausted, unshaven, eyes glowing feverishly from beneath his helmet, a ninety-year-old man. On the back of the photo, Cooper had written: S/Sgt. Malloy. Best

staff NCO in the Marine Corps. KIA: 7/6/67. There were names written on the back of several other photos, and I decided to try to locate some of the men in Coopers unit and find out what had happened to him in Vietnam. It was a decision that led me to write this book. In a musty, cluttered room in the Navy Annex Building in Arlington, Virginia, I found a faded microfilm roster of Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, for August 1967. Listed there were Gary W. Cooper (service number: 2188001) and several of the other names from the photos, including William V. Taylor (2323311). I also found a casualty list (a partial list, I later learned) for August 16, 1967 with Coopers name again, as well as four others. I brought the names and service numbers to Lieutenant Joanne Schilling, a Marine Corps public relations officer. I dont know if well be able to help you much, she said. I might be able to get you their hometownsit was all so long ago, you know. So long ago! It was... well, fourteen years. After several days, Lieutenant Schilling called with the information shed promised and I began to pore over phone books at the New York Public Library, the first of many such excursions. The first name on the list was William V. Taylor. Hometown: Chicago, Illinois. There were, as might be expected, more than a few William Taylors in Chicago, but no William V. Taylor. I decided to check the suburban directories and found a William V. Taylor in Chicago Heights. Jesus Christ, Bill Taylor said when I told him who I was and why I was calling. The guy that got killed over in Hammond was Gary Cooper? Ive been living ten miles from him for fifteen years, and I didnt even know it. I asked if he remembered the day Cooper was wounded. Operation Cochise, he said immediately. I kind of cracked that day. Cracked? Yeah, I started firing my rifle into a haystack because I thought the gooks were in there, and then someone grabbed me and I started crying. You see, we were pinned down... And for the next hour, Taylor described in remarkable detail the events of August 16, 1967. For another hour after that, he reminisced about Vietnam and the men in his unit, giving me several more names and hometowns. Then he talked about what had happened to him since he came home. You know, when I got back to California, they spit at me, he said. Who did? The hippies, in Anaheim. I was walking along a street. I just couldnt believe it. It made me so goddamn angry... and then I couldnt find a decent job for five years. It got so bad I even went down to the welfare office once. But now Ive got my own insurance agency and everythings great. Except... I got these lumps all over my body. I think its Agent Orange. We walked through that stuff in the DMZ all the time. When you talk to the other guys, see if they got lumps... and, listen, let me know how they are. I havent seen those guys in fifteen years. When I talked to the others and over the next few months I managed to locate twenty of them I learned that only one had lumps, but almost all of them seemed to explode over the phone as Bill Taylor had, dying to talk about Vietnam, curious about their old friends, shocked and upset by Coopers death. Several said, Hey, I never talked about this stuff before. When I asked why not, theyd inevitably say, No one ever asked, or I just didnt feel like it, or They wouldnt understand. Why are you talking about it now? Id ask. I dont know, said Wayne Pilgreen of Wetumpka, Alabama, but it feels right. It felt right for me too. After finishing my story about Cooper, I decided to continue interviewing the men of Charlie Companys 2nd Platoon. The treatment of Vietnam veterans the effects of Agent Orange, post-traumatic stress disorder and even the proposed war memorial in Washington was more in the news than ever before, but I wasnt interested in the issues so much as I was intrigued by the men themselves, and what had happened to them since theyd come home. I had been a foot soldier in the antiwar movement in the 1960s, attending rallies and marches but never doing anything drastic. Like almost everyone else I knew in college, I managed to escape the draft my son, Christopher, was born in 1967, and I received a family support deferment. In the years since, I hadnt thought much about the men who fought and died in the war. When I did think about them, two images came to mind: the very moving protest made by Vietnam Veterans Against the War in 1971, when theyd flung their medals on the Capitol steps... and, more recently, a vague, media-induced sense that Vietnam veterans were angry loners, teetering on the edge of sanity, people like Gary Cooper. Id seen some statistics which seemed to bolster that impression: By 1980, more Vietnam veterans had died since they came home than had been killed in the war. They comprised 30 percent of the nations prison population (about 70,000). Time magazine estimated that something like a quarter of those who served may still be suffering from substantial psychological problems. More than two million Americans had served in Vietnam, but they seemed to live in a different part of the world from mine. Id met a few veterans, pressure-group types, during my years as a political reporter in Washington, but none since. It seems incredible to me now, but when my research began, I didnt know a single Vietnam veteran; in fact, Id never spoken at length with anyone whod been there. I wasnt at all prepared for the intense reactions my questions would provoke; nor was I prepared for the cascade of feelings guilt, sadness, anger, fear, envy the men would arouse in me. The image of Vietnam veterans as borderline cases, liable to go berserk at the slightest provocation, was, of course, an exaggeration. Most of the men I visited were leading useful, if not always happy, lives. And yet there was something different about them. They had lived through a horrifying experience, and none was unaffected. Some thought about the war all the time, others only a little and a few had blotted it completely from their minds. Some were repelled now by the notion of killing; others had spent the years since theyd come home trying to recapture the exhilaration, the danger and especially the camaraderie of battle. Some had returned violent, angry, aggressive; others were passive, paralyzed emotionally. Most, though, seemed pretty normal. They were, all of them, quite willing to share their experiences with me. None seemed to mind that Id been on the other side in the 1960s in fact, most thought Id been lucky to avoid the whole business. The odd thing was, as my research progressed, I wasnt so sure that I agreed with them. The more I

learned, the more I wondered about how I might have reacted to the stress of battle... and the more I respected the sacrifices they'd made. After visiting fifteen members of Coopers unit, I decided to concentrate on five of them not the five worst cases, but five who reflected a range of reactions to the war and experiences since. Two would be Cooper and Taylor, the least and the most accessible of the group, mirror images in a way, with similar backgrounds but vastly different fates. Bill Taylor led me to the third: John Steiner, an ecologist working for the Fish and Wildlife Service in California. Steiner was one of the gentlest people I'd ever met. One day, as we sat talking in his backyard, he heard a bird cry. That's a danger signal, he said, leaping up, and found a mother bird nervously protecting her nest against a cat who clearly had mayhem on his mind; Steiner shooed the cat away. He was a small, almost delicate-looking man, with dark hair and a beard, and vivid blue-green eyes. You know, he said one day as we drove in his pickup truck to his job at the San Francisco Bay Wildlife Refuge, I sometimes wonder how I can get so excited about protecting the salt marshes when I was so nonchalant about burning down villages fifteen years ago. You burned villages? Well, I didn't set any hooches on fire, but I was there. One time, an old mamasan grabbed me by the sleeve, begging me to help her, patting her hooch, caressing it it was her home, goddamnit and I just smiled and reassured her, Don't worry, you know, knowing full well that the whole ville was going to be torched. I continued on down the road and I remember looking back, seeing it all in flames... I wonder how I could have done that. Steiner led me to John Wakefield, who had been his squad leader for a time in Vietnam. When I called Wakefield, he sounded tentative, but agreed to let me visit him in Indianapolis. I arrived at his home a week later and found him shaking, nervous, on the brink of tears. Since you called, I've been very depressed... or pensive, he said. Very pensive and withdrawn, offered his wife, Elizabeth. Trying to deny what you're thinking. Yeah, he said. I haven't really talked to anybody about what happened in the service. Some of the fun things, yeah. But the bad experiences I've just completely shut them out. I told Wakefield that he didn't have to talk about them now either. If you say, Nice meeting you, good luck, there's the door, Ill say, Fine, I said, upset with myself for triggering what appeared to be a crisis, and fearful of the consequences. On the one hand, I want to do that, he said. Ill be honest with you. On the other hand, maybe it's time to get it all out. It'll come out anyway, Elizabeth said. Yeah, he agreed. He was a tall man, with dark hair, trifocals and a recent paunch, who worked in quality control for a huge General Motors subsidiary nearby, and seemed much older than any of the other men I'd visited; he was, however, only thirty-seven. He suggested that he go along with me to see Bill Taylor in Chicago, which was my next stop. I want someone else who went through it to be there when I talk about it, because I'm scared to death. There's a physical bond... when you go through something that was hell, as that day was, he said, referring to August 16, 1967 Operation Cochise, the day Cooper was wounded and Taylor cracked. I've been through a few of them days. Bill Taylor too... I realize I'm putting you in a bad spot... No, I said, I'm putting you in a bad spot. No, it's just... You're doing me a favor. You may be doing me a favor, he said, and we began a journey that would prove surprising and painful for John Wakefield, but also as of this writing worthwhile. The fifth man was Dale Szuminski, whose name I found on the casualty list for August 16, 1967. He was easy enough to locate there weren't nearly so many Dale Szuminskis in Erie, Pennsylvania, as there'd been Bill Taylors in Chicago. Szuminski was a postman, but said over the phone, I spent the first ten years after I got back doing nothing. I don't know why. When I visited Szuminski in Erie, we immediately went to the Frontier Lounge, where his friend Joey Bruno It seems like all my friends were in the Marines, Szuminski said was tending bar and insisted on pouring shot after shot of Jack Daniels for the visitor from New York. I drove home that night with one eye squinting at three sets of white dashes dividing the highway. You ready to crash? Szuminski had said when I dragged him from the Frontier Lounge. Jeez, I was just getting started. It's two in the morning, I said. So what? I don't have to be at work till seven. As inevitable a choice as the five of them Cooper, Taylor, Steiner, Wakefield and Szuminski seemed for my purposes, a fairly serious question remained: What were my purposes? It was obvious that the five could in no way be construed as a cross section of Vietnam veterans. For one thing, they were all white. There hadn't been many blacks or Hispanics in the 2nd Platoon of Charlie Company in 1967 mostly the luck of the draw, but partly because it was early in the war and the Marines were composed primarily of enlistees, who tended to be white in those days, before the increased pay and perquisites of the all-volunteer armed forces made military life a more attractive path of upward mobility for minorities. That all five had enlisted was, in itself, untypical of most Vietnam veterans. Nor did they represent the geographic, social or intellectual diversity I'd come to expect among American fighting men from the World War II novels and movies. They were except for Steiner, who came from California and was a bit more affluent distinctly Midwestern, blue collar, high school graduates. Taylor, Szuminski and Wakefield were Catholic; Steiner and Cooper, Protestant. Although several became sergeants in the field, none was an officer. They were grunts, pure and simple. This is not a book about the plight of Vietnam veterans. Steiner, for one, didn't feel at all mistreated. He'd taken full advantage of the veterans benefits available to him after the war and, he said, made out like a fat rat. Nor did any of the others want sympathy, although several tended to overstate their woes and attribute all their troubles to Vietnam, figuring (at first, at least) that I was interested in them only because I wanted to write a book about their problems, which wasn't my purpose at all. My intention was simply to write about five men who had fought together in Vietnam, and what had happened to them when they came home. They had been through a remarkable experience: not just the war, but returning to a country where all the ground rules had changed, from what a girl might do on a first date to basic attitudes about work, family

and authority. It would have been a difficult transition even if they hadn't been reviled when they came home, even if they hadn't lost. Dale Szuminski was the first of the five to join Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, in July 1966; he was nineteen years old. Gary Cooper, also nineteen, arrived in December. Throughout late 1966 and early 1967, they guarded the airstrip being constructed at Khe Sanh, in the far north of South Vietnam. It was cold, rainy and uncomfortable in that mountainous region, but not particularly dangerous. In fact, their unit was distinguished by its complete inability to make contact with the enemy; it was called Chickenshit Charlie by the rest of the battalion. Their only fire fight occurred when a patrol was attacked by a bear one day; the bear was blown away, and just about everyone present took credit for the kill. In late February 1967, the 1st Battalion was sent to Okinawa for resupply; the men were given the new M-16 rifles and retraining as a Special Landing Force. In the future, Charlie Company would be based on an aircraft carrier off the coast and helicoptered into hot spots. They were joined in Okinawa by Bill Taylor, who was nineteen years old and green as green could be, and John Wakefield, who was by far the most experienced of the group. He was also the oldest, twenty-two at the time. Wakefield had been a member of an elite Force Reconnaissance unit whose job it often had been to penetrate North Vietnam in small patrols, monitoring the traffic on the Ho Chi Minh Trail and performing interrogations of local officials. He had been a sergeant, but was busted to corporal for borrowing a truck and stealing bananas from a private girls school during a drunken spree in Hue. In December 1966, he wrecked his knee diving from a helicopter into a hot landing zone in Laos, and spent the next few months recuperating on Okinawa. When he recovered, he was told there were no openings in Force Reconnaissance, and was assigned to the 2nd Platoon of Charlie Company, which he considered a more serious demotion than losing a stripe. He wore camouflage fatigues, had an imposing handlebar moustache and carried a K-Bar knife, which distinguished him from everyone else, who wore green fatigues, weren't allowed moustaches and didn't carry knives; less apparent was his quiet but overwhelming arrogance. Wakefield considered himself the best Marine he'd ever met. To the others, though, he was just another new guy. Wakefield was greeted by Staff Sergeant John J. Malloy, also a newcomer to Charlie Company, but a longtime Marine (it was said that he'd fought in Korea) who had quickly established himself as the most respected man in the unit. Malloy took a look at Wakefield's service record and told him that he could expect a much different war now. We got a bunch of green kids here, Malloy said. But we'll get them through. Wakefield, pleased to be included in the unit, said, You bet we will. It was a much different war not only for Wakefield but also for the others. They were in almost daily contact with the enemy now. Most of the time it was frustrating, fleeting contact; Viet Cong snipers picking away at them, mines being tripped. Szuminski was wounded slightly in the arm by shrapnel from a mine in June; the wound wasn't nearly so bad as the sight of the man who'd been walking in front of him, whose stomach had been ripped open. They were based on the USS Okinawa but didn't spend much time there. They would be out in the bush for weeks on end, then return to the ship for a day or two, only to be sent out on another operation. There were hot meals on the ship, fresh clothes (their uniforms tended to rot off them after several weeks in the bush) and showers. It was the only place in Vietnam that they felt completely safe. John Steiner joined them in the field in June. He was the youngest of the five, still just eighteen years old. He had arrived in Vietnam the previous November, but had spent the past five months recuperating on Okinawa after breaking his foot in a rope-climbing drill during retraining exercises. Cooper, Taylor, Steiner, Wakefield and Szuminski served together in the 2nd Platoon for the next two months, mid-June to mid-August 1967, a time that was being celebrated by certain of their contemporaries back home as the Summer of Love. In early July, Charlie Company took part in its first major battle, against North Vietnamese regulars at Con Thien in the Demilitarized Zone. The battle lasted several days, the men endured a horrendous mortar barrage, but there were surprisingly few casualties... and only one that would be remembered years later. Staff Sergeant John J. Malloy was killed early in the battle by a recoilless-rifle shell, an anti-tank weapon, while trying to reinforce a squad pinned down by enemy fire. The shell hit him on the left side of his chest. He was knocked six feet in the air, and flipped over. Everyone knew, immediately, that he was dead, but they could not retrieve his body until the North Vietnamese were forced to retreat several days later. A small party of men were sent out to get the body. Wakefield, Steiner, Cooper and Szuminski were among them. Wakefield remembered someone reaching down to brush the flies from Malloy's face, then pulling his hand back in horror at the touch. No one said anything. No one cried. They wrapped him in a poncho liner and carried him to a medevac helicopter. Years later, some of the men would be moved to tears by the memory of the little staff sergeant who'd shepherded them through their first months in the bush. They would remember his fairness above all else, which even extended to the way he opened cases of C rations. A case contained twelve meals, each labeled on the top. Most platoon sergeants opened the top of the box and gave the officers first choice. Malloy opened the box upside down, so no one knew which meal they were choosing and a private had as much chance of getting something good, like beef slices, as a lieutenant; when people began to figure out where the best meals were positioned in each case, Malloy went so far as to switch them around. He was replaced by Staff Sergeant Theodore Kochmaruk, who was considered competent enough by the men, but opened cases of C rations from the top and always gave the officers first choice. There was no memorial service for Sergeant Malloy. There was little discussion afterward, but many had the same thought: If Malloy, who knew what he was doing, could get himself blown away so easily, what chance did they have? The effect on morale was shattering, but the only acknowledgment that they had

suffered a grievous loss was initiated by Robert Smith, the platoons best photographer. He asked his parents to make seventeen copies of a picture hed taken of Malloy several weeks before his death. It was the photo of the sergeant, hunched beneath his pack, that Id first seen in Coopers album and would later find, time and again, in musty albums pulled from the top shelves of closets across the country. Malloys death was one of two vivid memories that Cooper, Taylor, Steiner, Wakefield and Szuminski would share. The other was the ambush that took place on August 16, 1967, during Operation Cochise... and since it was the last day the five would spend together in Vietnam, it is probably where the story of their return from the war should begin. I. My arrival in their lives did cause some disruptions and, in Wakefields case, a major changewhich Ill deal with in the final section of this book. Obviously, allexcept Cooperwere willing subjects, which raised the question of showboating. I tried, wherever possible, to check their stories with other sources, but often had to depend on their version of the events of their lives and my own ability to separate what was likely from what was not.