

Sem-pi-ter-nal

Eternal and unchanging; Everlasting.

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Major Work

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The forgotten heritage that clung to the existence of my long-lost great uncle remained a mystery. He was a missing link in my family's history that needed to be found. Through months of questioning I finally discovered the name of the soldier he had fought beside. Tom Palmer had fled from a previous life and no one back home in Australia had heard from him since. Determined to discover the lost memories of a man I never knew, I asked my mother, Sophie, where I could find him. She gave me a British mailing address and told me to catch a flight to Bristol. This is where my search began.

As the taxi pulled into the old, shale brick driveway I remember contemplating whether this trip would be worth all of the trouble. Looking through the windscreen and out across the green pastures that littered the British countryside, gave me the reassurance that even if I hadn't found what I was looking for, at least the scenery would suffice. After handing over a small sum of coins to the driver, I stepped out of the taxi and began to ascend the driveway that led towards a cottage that sat on the top of a small hill.

The grey sky was filled with a column of thick black smoke that bellowed from the cottage chimney. With two brisk knocks, I returned my hands to the warmth of my pockets. The wooden door in front of me creaked open and revealed the ghastly face of an old man who seemed displeased by my presence. After explaining to him that I had travelled from Australia to find out more about my great uncle, Jack Sawyer, his expression turned to one of sorrow. I introduced myself as John Sawyer and he gestured me into the cottage towards an old bench that rested against the far wall.

The inside of the cottage was far more welcoming than its exterior. The fire seemed to heat the entire room as the old man placed several more logs into the flames. While he brewed a pot of tea I wandered around the room and examined everything of interest. Rusted farming tools and leather coats hung above the mantelpiece. Photographs of young war heroes were

framed and scattered around the walls. One in particular aroused my interest and I stared at it until the man came over to me and rested his hand on my shoulder. The two men in the photograph were wearing Australian army uniforms typical of the Vietnam War, and they were holding rifles in their right hands. After gazing at the photograph with the old man, he pointed to the figure on the left and introduced himself as Tod Palmer. Pointing at the photo a second time, he explained that the man on the right was my great uncle.

With the cups of tea sitting on the bench between us, Tod began to describe his childhood. Growing up in Australia was challenging for his family, with his mother's death occurring when he was only three years old. The derelict Brisbane apartment they resided in was always subject to change, whether it was from the departure and arrival of occupants or the constant sound of repair work. He and his sister were raised by their father, who worked on the railroad that ran past their apartment building. He was always working and this meant that Tod was often forced to stay at home safeguarding his sister. The only time he was allowed to leave the apartment was to attend school, which is where he met my great uncle.



As young boys, Jack and Tod had spent as much time together as possible. On occasion they would truant from school and use the time to explore the bustling streets of Brisbane. Neither of them had any money, so they were forced to find other ways to entertain themselves. The local park offered the perfect place for them to escape and talk about their dreams. Tod could tell, even in his youth, that Jack was unique. He thought differently than any of the other children and was always willing to help anyone who needed it. While his approachable nature made him popular with others, he always expressed the desire to be alone. During the time he spent alone he filled journals with his thoughts and dreams. Nobody ever read them, but I

knew that they were a gateway hiding who he really was. He was often quiet as he thought of problems far beyond his scope of reason. He seemed superior to all around him.

As the years passed the two of them grew even closer. Life seemed easier with the mateship they shared as they overcame the problems of adolescent experience. As love plagued the school yard, Tod sought out the pleasures that were quickly becoming a crucial part of any teenagers' life. The only person who seemed to miss out on this marvellous experience was Jack. No matter how many times Tod tried to include Jack in the discovery of romantic and fantastic new ways of exploring ones sexuality, Jack would always disengage himself from any such notion. He wasn't interested in love for the sake of love. He wanted true love with someone who felt and expressed the same emotions as him. This distinct exclusion from the opposite sex left Jack an outcast, but at the same time girls knew that he was beyond them. Jack's emotions were more pure, more refined and had specific purpose.



With one pot of tea and several hours drained from the clock, Tod began to tire. The sun was setting over the green British pastures and the sky released an exhausted orange and red haze. I thanked Tod for the tea and asked him if it would be suitable for me to return the next day to continue our conversation. Tod's face lit up with the prospect of having company for two consecutive days, and I needed no response.

Early the next morning, when the remnants of frost and thick fog still lingered, I set out from the small hotel that I was staying in. The cold air had turned my hands a pale pink once more as I hurried to flag down a taxi. After realising that taxis were uncommon in such a small

village, I walked several blocks until a kind gentleman offered me a lift in his lorry, and I was once more beginning my trip back to the cottage on top of the hill. My mind was a maelstrom of thoughts with discoveries from the previous day still lingering in the back of my mind.

The lorry stopped at the bottom of the hill and I began my ascent on foot. In every direction I could see plumes of black smoke spearing through the chilling fog. The most noticeable of all was the one I was heading towards. When Tod answered the door, my first reaction to the sight that confronted me was shock, but this soon turned to excitement as I realised what I was looking at. Tod had covered the floor of his cottage with hundreds of letters and photos that seemed to breathe the warm air within the room, as if it were their first in decades, and they were brought to life once more. The pleasant aroma of aged ink and decaying parchment flooded the room.

With some effort Tod and I cleared a space between the stacks of letters and began our conversation once more. Tod began to explain how he and Jack became enlisted in the Australian army. They both wanted to escape their lives and achieve their full potential as men. At the mere age of 17, they both enlisted in the army and in what was soon to be the Vietnam War.



For three months they were trained in a military camp near Melbourne. It was clear to Tod from the very beginning that Jack did not have the strength to kill another man. During training Jack would frequently appear to be distant and removed. Everything around him seemed to pass by in a blur of green and grey. The other troops would laugh at him behind his

back, and Jack knew it. The fact that Jack was the greatest marksman they had ever seen, and the most athletic of them all, was enough reason for them to hate him. He didn't care if they laughed at him or sniggered rude remarks. He would always be better than them and they all knew it.



Tod began to rummage through the stacks of letters surrounding him and placed several in front of me. They were addressed to Jack and were sent from my mother, Sophie. The earliest dated letter was written on faded parchment that was delicate to touch. After carefully unfolding it I sat the letter in front of me and began reading tentatively.

Dear Jack,

I miss you so much, Jack. Dad and I have been worried about how your training is going down in Victoria. Isn't it cold there around this time of year? I turned 11 the other day. I wished that you would come home to us the next, day but you didn't so I guess that you'll be home soon. I hope this letter reaches you before they send you away. Tell Toddy that we miss him too.

Lots of love, from your little sister, Sophie xoxo

The next letter was written a few months after the first. My mother had once again written a letter to Jack wishing that he would be able to return home soon and, more specifically, that

he return home unharmed. The other letters had been too badly damaged to read and appeared to be torn from a notebook. Jack would have been unable to protect the fragile parchment in the harsh environments within the jungle. The last letter was written many years later and was sent from the government to my mother. The words that were written on the piece of paper echoed within my mind from that day onward. “*Sgt. Jack Sawyer, KIA.*”

“How was my great uncle killed?”

From the expression on Tod’s face I could tell he knew that the question would eventually surface. He began to talk about the war once again.



By this stage the two of them had graduated from military training and had been given a rank and battalion. Although Jack was offered a commission as an officer, he declined it and requested that he remained the same rank as Tod. Jack and Tod were deployed to a large military camp in Vietnam with the knowledge that they may never return home.

The constant burring of helicopters and crackling of distant gunshots became bearable after a while. The substandard living conditions of the military camp meant that everyone was always covered in mud. The clearing in which their tents were positioned was protected on all sides by the jungle. Hundreds of four-man canvas tents were littered across the clearing with barely any sense of order. The largest tents were positioned in the centre of the clearing and sheltered the supplies that had been air-lifted in by the constant stream of helicopters entering and leaving the camp. Weapons and ammunition were more plentiful than food and water. Shipments of munitions would come twice a day, but food only came on alternate days. Men

were rationed a packet of biscuits, three packets of powdered potato and onion, two packets of rice and eight litres of water per week. They were by no means living lavishly, but it was just enough to ensure that they were able to do their job and fight.

Tod and Jack's first encounter with the enemy took place two weeks after their arrival. While they were on expedition to a local village with a large convoy of military supplies they needed to store, one of the trucks ignited a roadside landmine that sent pieces of the truck in every direction. For the remainder of the trip, Jack and Tod marched in front of the convoy and inspected every inch of the road in an attempt to locate and disarm any remaining explosives. Every few hundred metres one of the troops would spot some freshly disturbed soil and command the entire convoy to stop. Tripwires and pressure plates were buried beneath the soil and meant that approaching the landmines was incredibly hazardous. The most talented of all the troops at disarming the explosives was Jack. He was able to nimbly avoid the traps using his agility, and defuse the explosives within a few minutes using his intellect.

The hours passed as they marched along the road and it began to grow dark. The setting sun had long since vanished behind the thick canopy and mountain ranges that surrounded the valley. The distant sound of running water indicated that they were getting closer to the river that separated the village from their camp. On approach to the river they noticed that the water was an unnatural grey in colour, suggesting that somewhere upstream the Viet Cong were constructing something that was most likely made from cement. The thick water had begun to tear away the banks of the river, but fortunately the makeshift bridge built by the locals remained standing. One truck after the other crossed the bridge in single file. It swayed and bowed beneath the weight and held fantastically. The skill of the locals was certainly a marvel to behold. Using only bamboo and jungle wood they had constructed a bridge that would last the entirety of the war.



Tod gazed at the clock that hung on the wall of his cottage. His gaze implied that he thought it was time for me to leave. It was 9 o'clock already and we had only just begun to delve into their experience during the war. I asked Tod if I could return the next day to continue my path of discovery, but he replied that he had a doctor's appointment and that it would need to wait until the following day. Disappointed by this I left the cottage and returned back to the hotel.

That night as I lay in bed, my mind filled with the new found knowledge that Tod had bestowed upon me. My eyes closed and I began to dream about the sunset that Tod had described. The sky turned a brilliant shade of orange as streams of white pierced through the clouds and traced the rocky surface of the mountains. The clouds slowly churned at the light and swallowed the sun within their cold cushioned bodies.

When the sun rose I gazed out the window and noticed that snow had fallen overnight. The white blanket covered everything it touched. Cars were buried up to their windows and shopfront doors were barricaded shut by the overwhelming whiteness. It seemed as if everyone in the village would be trapped in front of their fireplaces until the local plough operator could clear the roads. This didn't affect my plans for that day at all because I had only intended on writing in my journal everything that Tod had told me thus far. After boiling the kettle on a small gas stove that rested against the wall in the kitchen of the hotel room, I brewed a pot of tea and arranged a makeshift desk on the bed. With my pen in hand I began writing everything Tod had told me in as much detail as my mind would allow. Every few lines I would treat myself to a sip of tea as an incentive to write as much as I could. Pages and

pages were covered in the memories Tod had shared with me, in all their glory and splendour. Every now and then I gazed out the window and wondered if Tod had managed to attend his doctor's appointment. The weather had begun to clear by that stage but the ground was still blanketed by nearly a metre of snow. Surely Tod was stuck in his cottage, anxiously awaiting the plough to reach him so he could walk to his appointment without risk of losing a foot beneath the snow. With this thought at the back of my mind I threw away the third inkless pen and continued writing.

The sweltering, humid climate that plagued Tod during his time in Vietnam must have been enough for the old man to consider moving to such a cold place as this. The thick air of Vietnam allowed chaos to flourish around. While the chilled air of Britain provided Tod with a reason to stay in one place and rest his heavy heart after so many years of torment. The small cottage that sat in peaceful isolation provided him with the perfect hiding place, a place for him to escape his past, a place for him to slowly drift from existence.

Again, many hours had drained from the clock and I was left considering if the past few days had been worth all of the trouble. The cold weather tormented my warm blood and had forced me to buy more snow jackets than necessary. However, the knowledge I had gained was substantially more valuable to me than anything else at the time. The life of my great uncle had remained a mystery to me and I wanted to discover more and more as quickly as I could, but it would have to wait until the next morning.

The snow was still thick but the snow plough had been working overtime to ensure that traffic could pass through the village. The road to Tod's cottage had been roughly ploughed which meant that the taxi struggled as the driver veered from left to right to avoid patches of ice. I approached the front door and noticed a faint trail of footprints leading from Tod's cottage. Did this mean that he was able to attend his appointment after all? Three brisk

knocks provided me with the answer as the door swung open and revealed Tod. He appeared much paler than he had the last few times I had seen him. When I asked him how his appointment had gone, he replied with a wheezing cough that echoed around the room. It seemed as if the trek through the snow had given him a terrible cold, or maybe it was merely a common cold which had been intensified by his age. Either way, I shifted the lounge closer to the fire and sat him upon it. Tod coughed and spluttered as I rummaged through the cupboards and prepared the quickest soup I knew how to make. With a fresh pot of tea and a bowl of steaming soup to soothe Tod's throat, I wrapped him in all of the blankets I could find and began the process of listening intently. Despite the continuous interruptions caused by Tod's ailment, I pieced together the story from where he had left it the last time we spoke.



With the sun setting behind them, Tod and Jack split from the group and began to climb the nearby hill. It was covered in thick, patchy jungle that was just worn enough for them to climb through. They could hear the other troops in the town searching the houses for suitable places to hide their supplies. Caches of explosives and rations, alongside rifles and canisters of ammunition, were stored beneath the floorboards. The locals remained completely unaware of what was in the crates but this didn't matter. They were given treatment by the military's doctors as payment for their cooperation. As Jack and Tod reached a substantial distance up the hill they stopped and looked out across the valley. The lush green canopy lay just beneath them. It didn't reach this far up the hill because of its steep ascent. Birds and other tropical animals could be heard in every direction but were interrupted by the constant clanging and crashing of crates below. Everything seemed natural as far as the eye could see

until Jack spotted a narrow plume of grey smoke on the horizon. It was at the furthestmost point of the valley which lay upstream from the village. It couldn't be their campsite because it lay in the opposite direction and was sheltered by mountains on three sides. Tod knew that this must have been a Viet Cong camp and the source of whatever was causing the pollution of the river.

They knew something had to be done. Tod suggested that they return to the village and report to their superior, but Jack disagreed. Instead, he proposed that they gather enough supplies to conduct a short scouting expedition. If they discovered that it was a Viet Cong camp, they could return and report their discovery while also receiving recognition for their efforts. This seemed the more promising of the two options and Jack persuaded Tod to agree. They would begin by sneaking back into the village after sundown and would gather enough supplies to last them a few days, after which they would retreat into the jungle.

On descending the hill the sky became dark, not only because of the setting sun, but also because of the thick clouds that had been slowly drifting towards them. The air had become heavy as they clambered through the overgrowth. The village was surrounded by small patrols while the other troops began piling the supplies into the houses. Tod and Jack were forced to sneak past the patrols and managed to find a house with some basic supplies already stashed within it. The occupants sat and watched the two of them as they rummaged through the crates. One contained several rifles and enough magazines to sustain the two of them if they were attacked by a small group of Viet Cong scouts. Another was filled with ration packs and a small canister of grenades. Jack filled his pack with ammunition and ration packs while Tod carefully filled his with the canister of grenades and some 9mm magazines. After Jack had torn a page from his journal to leave as a note, they began to sneak out of the village. During their time in the house it had begun to rain. The air was saturated and so was the earth. The ground had turned from a solid surface into a moving sea of mud. This made

moving stealthily difficult as they couldn't dart from one house to another at any great speed. The patrols were now using their spotlights to periodically scan the outer village which meant that Jack and Tod had to time their escape perfectly. A group of three troops had managed to work their way behind them without detection due to the severity of the rain. Only the sound of the roaring downfall could be heard. Jack and Tod had timed their escape and made for the jungle, but were spotted by the patrol.

The three troops swarmed them and threw them to the ground. When the troops realised that it wasn't the enemy, they were confused and asked them what they were doing heading into the jungle. Jack explained that they were on a reconnaissance mission through the valley to discover the location of a Viet Cong camp, and that they had planned on doing so without asking for permission. This made the troops curious and they began questioning what they could do to help. Jack offered that they accompany them and they quickly seized the opportunity. They returned to the village and gathered enough supplies to sustain themselves and then regrouped in the jungle.

The rain had stopped by morning. The troops had walked several kilometres through the night and were exhausted. They needed to stop for a few hours to regain their strength but couldn't find a suitable location to do so. In the distance a small clearing with lush grass that was high enough for them to take shelter in could be seen. The jungle was still damp from the rain the night before which made any distance seem much longer than it really was. Their clothes were covered in caked mud as they hollowed out a small area beneath the tall grass. Jack opened his pack and withdrew a handful of ration sachets that contained powdered onion and potatoes. He gave each of the troops one and they mixed it with water to create a brown paste that would need to last them until the end of the day. They had settled down beneath the grass for almost an hour when one of the troops began leading the group further along the valley. Jack remained at the back of the group as they trekked through the jungle in single

file. He was cautiously ensuring that the group would leave as little trace as possible so that trackers couldn't follow them. Both enemy and allies had to be unaware of their presence within the jungle.

The remainder of that day and the night that followed was a continuation of the gruelling conditions they had experienced so far. The next morning welcomed them with a spectacular downfall that spontaneously created rivers wherever they went. Everything around them was a constant blur as they crawled through the mud. The jungle seemed to be fighting back while they hacked their way through the thick vines and shrubbery. Thorns pierced their clothes and tore at their skin. The mud helped to ease the pain, but the fear of infection made them uneasy. The rain eventually ceased and the plants began to absorb the remaining water. Their roots sucked the water inside themselves like pneumatic tubes. The ground was soon made bare of any surface water, leaving behind a thick layer of black mud. The soldier who was leading the group suddenly stopped. The mud had covered a tripwire that ran between two trees that he was now standing between. With his foot firmly planted on top of it and slowly sinking into the mud, the other troops followed the wire to both ends. One end was fastened tightly to a spindly tree. The other end was tied around the pin of a grenade that had now been exposed. It was wedged between the mud and the trunk of a nearby tree concealed, from view. If the soldier was to remove his foot from the tripwire it would detonate the grenade. Jack walked to the front of the group and quickly came to realise what needed to be done. He remembered reading about the crude Viet Cong traps that had claimed the limbs of other soldiers. He explained that the tripwire was pressure sensitive and that the only way to safely remove the soldier's foot would be to find something that matched his weight and place it on the tripwire. Luckily there were plenty of logs nearby and they soon found one large enough to compensate for the soldier's weight. The other troops gently placed the log over the tripwire and braced themselves as the soldier removed his foot. He dived into the closest

thicket with his arms protecting his head and landed face down. The deafening silence was enough to commend Jack for his quick thinking.

They continued for another few hundred metres until they found another tripwire. The mud created the perfect camouflage for them, and once they were aware of the danger they managed to avoid several more throughout the day. Tripwires were not the only thing they had to watch out for as they soon discovered. Caltraps, fashioned from reinforced steel, had been laid across any clearing large enough for any form of vehicle to travel across. The weapons were constructed so that no matter which side faced up, there would always be an exposed barb. They were buried beneath the mud and decaying vegetation which made standing on them a threat.

The men cautiously scanned the ground before every step for the remainder of the day. As the sun began to set they searched for a place to set up camp. The river that ran through the valley was their only source of fresh water. They headed towards the sound of the river and eventually found it. Standing at its banks, they looked for a suitable place to camp. Tod could see a cave that had been carved into a small cliff face slightly upstream. This was decidedly the best place for them to conceal themselves from the enemy overnight.



The fire had almost burnt out when Tod finally stopped talking. The sun had set outside and it was once again snowing. I went outside and gathered more wood for the fire and stacked it neatly inside, hoping that it would be enough to fuel Tod through the night. He had fallen asleep on the lounge, huddled in blankets, by the time I returned. Their soft velvet exterior

swathed his aged body. With Tod asleep and no means for me to return to my hotel room, the floor beside the fireplace became my bed.

The early morning sunlight pierced through the icy window and cast a shadow across the smoking fire as it smouldered in front of me. With dreary eyes I clambered to my feet and stoked the ashes before I began to rummage through the cupboards. They were filled with ancient jars of jams and assorted pickled vegetables. Claspng a jar of raspberry jam, I spread it across two pieces of homemade bread and gave one to Tod. He had only just managed to sit up beneath the blankets and was amazed to see that I was still there. He glanced around the room as if to inspect it. Satisfied, he took the toast and began slowly eating. He only managed a few bites until he couldn't swallow any more. His ailment had struck him harder than I originally thought. With breakfast out of the way and several fresh logs on the fire, I asked Tod to continue the story. It took him a considerable amount of time to finally find his voice, which had been stolen from him by the chilled air within the room.



The next morning they resumed wading through the jungle. They knew that they must be getting close to the camp by now. Several more gruelling hours passed until they were stopped by, what appeared to be, a distant muzzle flash. It was high up in the canopy and seemed to be moving periodically from side to side. This could only mean one thing; snipers were hiding in the trees surrounding the enemy camp. Tod, Jack, and the others, sat there watching the snipers as they scanned the landscape in front of them. They had to plan their next move carefully. Waiting for nightfall was decidedly their best option.

Hours passed as the sun crept across the sky, hidden by the dense canopy above. Their current position made it difficult to see very far. A narrow gully was carved into the base of a dry creek bed which provided them with enough cover if they were spotted. If they attempted to run, the sniper would have a clear shot. All that they could do was hope that the snipers would be relieved. At this moment they would attempt to silently kill the two enemy soldiers and venture further towards the camp.

With the sun beginning to reside behind the line of trees, the soldiers grew tired. The constant fear of death and lack of nutrition had struck each of them. The sniper would surely be relieved soon but their patience was growing thin. After one last sweep of the terrain, the sniper clambered down a rope ladder that hung out of view. Soon after, another rifle-wielding enemy soldier emerged from the tree line and signalled the sniper. This was the opening they had been waiting for.

Poised at the ready, they found their footing and sprinted for the enemy. They burst from cover in spectacular silence and charged at the tree line. The enemy still had not heard them but they would surely have seen them. Knives were thrust deep into their chests before the snipers could raise their weapons. Nothing could be heard but the crunching of ribs and the gargling of blood. It only took several seconds until it was, once again, completely silent.

Jack stood at the rear of the group witnessing the carnage. He closed his eyes as the soldiers ripped their blades from the carcasses of the enemy. He never saw the bullet that killed him.

The thunderous clap of gunfire echoed in Tod's ears. The pale orange sky pierced through the canopy with warming ribbons. The beams scanned the ground for Jack's body as he floated to the ground. The bullet had whipped through his body in an instant. Everything seemed to happen so quickly, but took forever to end. Tod watched as Jack struck the ground.



With a tear running down his cheek, Tod struggled to catch his breath. He had re-enacted this memory in his mind countless times before. It remained just as vivid now as the moment that he had witnessed it. The strain of telling me what had happened was clearly taking its toll on him. With an anxious plea I begged Tod to continue. He nodded gently then gestured to the cabinet in which he had previously found all of the old photographs and letters. As I opened the cabinet my eyes were drawn to a tattered journal with the name “Jack” crudely inscribed on the binding. Its soft, brown leather exterior housed mysteries that I yearned to know. Returning to the lounge with the journal, I sat down and stoked the fire once more. Tod continued as I carefully opened the first few pages.



Tod ran towards Jack and held his limp body in his arms. The bullet had entered through Jack’s shoulder and had narrowly missed his heart. Blood spilled from the open wound and flowed over Jack’s clothes. The light that shone upon them warmed Jack’s cold body. His eyes wide-open, scared, and his fist clenched around Tod’s arm were enough to burn this memory into Tod’s mind forever. As Jack lay in Tod’s arms he pulled himself closer. With little time to say goodbye, all Jack managed to do was hand Tod his journal. Jack’s soul slipped away from Tod’s grasp and rolled into the arms of death. Like a raindrop falling on an ocean, he became one with the world.



By now everything made sense. The journal contained every thought, every memory, every dream Jack had ever had. His love of life was nothing compared to his love for Tod. Pages and pages were covered in the same recurring truth. Jack loved Tod and had lived his whole life ensuring that he could be with him. Everything from how he felt when Tod experimented with women in their youth to why he had enlisted in the army was because he had feelings for Tod. He never got the chance to tell anyone how he felt, not even the one person he truly cared about, Tod. The pages within this journal were all that remained of Jack's true feelings.

Tod sat staring into the flames as I asked him if he felt the same about Jack. He could not muster the courage to answer, and I realised that it was likely due to the fact that he himself still did not know. He proceeded to tell me that he never married nor loved another woman after that day. For the remainder of his life he would never be able to love anyone. He smiled, and then asked me if that was all I wanted to know from him. Not knowing what to say I simply nodded and said thank you. The knowledge he had given me was more than I had hoped for. This was surely enough to re-construct the missing link in our family tree.



The journal that belonged to my great uncle, Jack Sawyer, remains a family heirloom to this day. Its tattered heart reminds us of a man who was unique in a world of turbulent uncertainty. His feelings were concealed from everyone that knew him, even the man who he once loved. The fear and violence of the world he was born into only aided in proving what a great man he truly was.

Sem-pi-ter-nal

Eternal and unchanging; Everlasting.

Reflection Statement

The major work I have chosen to undertake has allowed me to present my own personal writing form and convey meaning through a structured and sophisticated response. The title of my major work, “Sem-pi-ter-nal”, reflects the emotions felt by those within the story and those who lived during the time of the Vietnam War. The world was in a state of turbulence with which people were forced to live out their lives in a state of “*Eternal and unchanging*” fear and threat of cruelty. This sense of lingering fear prompted me to create my major work.

The intended purpose of my major work is to promote the thought of the lives of those who lived during the period of the Vietnam War, and for the paradigms that existed within their time to be questioned. The use of a changing time perspective allows the reader to compare the worlds of the past and the present to clearly demonstrate the contrasts within the two. The use of significantly different settings and characters has allowed me to create a story that builds around the fundamentals of my own perspectives on the worlds within the story. The cruelty and violence that existed during the Vietnam War clashes with the tender and calming setting of a British winter.

My major work is aimed at an audience with an interest in the period of the Vietnam War and the ideals that surround that period of history and those of the present. My work aims to persuade the reader to view the life of a man who lived during a time when deviation from the norm was considered unnatural. With the romance between two men an underlying theme, I have intended to present an aspect of society that was considered immoral which has since been questioned and has now come to light as an area of thorough debate in modern society. Current generations have become more susceptible to the vast majority of diverse personal perspectives on what is considered morally correct. The reader must be able to set their own beliefs aside in order to receive the full extent of what is being expressed through my major work.

Through my independent investigation I have discovered that creating an original piece of work, with settings based during the Vietnam War period and modern day Britain, rely upon extensive research to ensure realism. Personally, I have not lived through the Vietnam War and I also have not visited Britain, therefore creating detailed and meaningful descriptions of the two settings relied upon my background knowledge and the knowledge I gained from my research. The contextual significance of the Vietnam War required me to investigate the history associated with its origins and how it shaped the world. This particular war, when contrasted to the many wars before it, was different in many ways. Propaganda was the intended lure I wanted to use that allowed me to justify the reasons for the characters within the story to enlist during the Vietnam War. My original interpretations of the propaganda of the period were clouded by my previous research into other significant wars. The Vietnam War, being the exception to spirit stirring propaganda, prohibited me from using it as the lure within the story. My further study of weaponry and environment aided in my portrayal of the harsh living conditions that soldiers were exposed to. The two settings have always been of interest to me personally and through my major work I have been able to express my inner adventurer and portray my perspectives on the two settings.

My original inspiration arose from the desire to pay tribute to my two grandfathers who passed away over recent years. Throughout their lives they had lived through the many culturally rich mutations that effected society. With the expectations placed on them to become family sustaining father figures, rather than the more diverse range of options presented to males of my own generation, they succeeded in being what was considered part of the norm. By integrating an abnormality into the lives of those who consider them tainted, I have attempted to convey how varied interpretations of what is essentially the same abnormality in today's society. Through using homosexuality as the deviant, I am hoping that a larger audience may be able to connect personally through their own perspective.

Most of my major work is based on the theme of “*Eternal and unchanging*” fear. This fear presents itself in many different forms such as the fear of death, the fear of being considered abnormal, and the fear associated with the unknown. These three forms of fear all relate to the study I have undertaken during the Extension One course and more specifically, the “After the Bomb” unit. With the Vietnam War taking place during the Cold War period, a large section of my work relates directly to the social, political, philosophical and scientific paradigms associated with that era in history.

Also present in my work is the aspect of belonging. The characters within my story are subject to different interpretations of where they belong, such as those experienced by the two main characters who both question their allegiance to one another and to their superiors during their time spent at war. This belonging extends far beyond the war and continues until the very end of the story when it is revealed that the bond between the two was powerful enough to prevent the survivor from marriage. This continuation of the emotions expressed between the two conveys their eternal sense of belonging.

My chosen medium of a written narrative has allowed me to express these many themes through the creative use of techniques such as the changing time perspective and contrasting scenery. Language features evident within the work present themselves when necessary, such as the letter that is included which allows the reader to create a larger picture of the family that is being explored within the story. After completing my drafts I came to the conclusion that perhaps writing each instance as a whole then splicing them together to create one overall text would have allowed me to continue each instance scene by scene more efficiently. The constant changing of perspective had begun to corrupt my view of the instances as a whole, and with the integrity of the whole work under scrutiny, in hindsight it would have been much easier and simpler to write each separately. The final structure of the

work has allowed me to clearly and seamlessly blend the two worlds, both past and present, into one story that forges a whole.

Overall I believe that my major work has been able to successfully demonstrate my skills of composition and ability to deliver a well structured and intellectual response to the themes of fear and social turbulence that are made evident within the story. My aim to convey the different perspectives of social normality has enabled me to complete my major work and to the extent that I am proud to call it my own. The Extension Two course has allowed me to pursue my passion of writing and discover my own voice through my extensive independent investigation and delivery of my major work.