### Thesis

Uncertainty is a difficult concept to understand. This unknown is capable of taxing a human physically, psychologically, or spiritually. *If I Die in a Combat Zone Box Me Up and Ship Me Home*, written by Tim O’Brien, illustrates the power of uncertainty in war, and explores different avenues of the unknown in the shoes of a recent college graduate drafted by the U.S. Army.

"He said I was a pansy. It’s hard to argue, I suppose. I’m not just intellectually opposed to violence, I’m absolutely frightened by it. It’s impossible to separate in my mind the gut fear from pure reason. I’m really afraid that all the hard, sober arguments I have against this war are nothing but an intellectual adjustment to my horror at the thought of bleeding to death in some rice paddy" (O’Brien 36).

Imagine graduating from college and discovering that your education will be put to use by the United States Army. In 1968, Tim O’Brien learned that he had been drafted to fight in the Vietnam War. The young college graduate was on the cusp of entering a very different, unknown time in his life. While others prepared to begin new jobs and careers, Tim O’Brien prepared himself to leave for a war that he didn’t support in the first place.

"Most of my college friends found easy paths away from the problem, all to their credit. Deferments for this and that. Letters from doctors or chaplains. It was hard to find people who had to think much about the problem" (O’Brien 21).

### Secondary Sources

"To be a man, as everyone knows, is to be something other than a pussy, a gendered insult not for women, exactly, but, more accurately, for a male coward" (Kang).

"They carried the soldier’s greatest fear, which was the fear of blushing. Men killed, and died, because they were embarrassed not to... They died so as not to die of embarrassment" (O’Brien).

This secondary sources offers an informed perspective on the influence of masculinity in the Vietnam memoirs written by Tim O’Brien.

### References


"O’Brien is writing of more than Vietnam.... What O’Brien is writing about is the military, and the feel of war, and the cold fear, and madmen. O’Brien does it with a narrative that often is haunting, and as clear as the electric-red path of an M-16 round slicing through the Vietnam dark." -Philadelphia Inquirer