



The Last Patrol Discussion Guide

Directors: Sebastian Junger

Year: 2014

Time: 88 min

You might know this director from:

Korengal (2014)

Which Way Is the Front Line from Here?

The Life and Time of Tim Hetherington (2013)

Restrepo (2010)

FILM SUMMARY

Sebastian Junger is a man of war. Although never a soldier, his decision to become a war correspondent at the age of 30 was a decisive step he took in his quest to “become a man.” Twenty years later, his battle wounds are so overt that it takes a long trek in his own country to reconnect with the man he became and the home he lost.

The previous two films in Junger’s war trilogy – RESTREPO and KORENGAL – present images associated with war and offer insight into the act of battle and its near aftermath. With the threat of gunfire at every moment, soldiers fight for their lives, partake in extreme violence leaving many injured and killed and become addicted to adrenaline. Many leave traumatized not only by what they have witnessed but by what they have done. THE LAST PATROL presents Junger and three other war-wise men after the dust on the battlefield has settled, and the men have returned to home soil. Here they are battered, lost, and very very lonely.

Junger takes a hands-on approach to recovery and re-assimilation. He recruits three men also affected by combat: photojournalist Guillermo Cervera, who was holding Junger’s former co-director Tim Hetherington’s hand when he died, and combat veterans Brendan O’Byrne and Dave Roels, who were both featured in the earlier films of the trilogy. Along with Sebastian’s dog Daisy, these four men embark on a form of “high-speed vagrancy,” collecting their thoughts as they walk north from D.C. along Amtrak rail lines, living rough in the great outdoors as they search for a way to make sense of what it is to be a man without a war, an individual without a community, and an American in a country in search of its identity.

THE LAST PATROL serves a tribute not only to Tim and all those who have fallen in the line of fire, but also is a strong reminder that what happens to individuals on the battlefield must be rectified as a community.

FILM THEMES

War is tough and coming home allegedly a cakewalk in comparison. Yet with no clear-cut goals at home and no apparent community to embrace a war-troubled soldier, the road back makes for treacherous going.

COMING HOME

The battlefield, with all its violence, terror, and death, also offers focus, purpose, and motivation. Soldiers are needed, and days are filled with well-defined tasks, an obvious enemy bringing definition to a mission. Life back on American soil, with all its fluidity and glorified freedom, is nothing like a disciplined war zone, and soldiers battle themselves and loved ones as they attempt to reenter into civilian society. Having witnessed death in its goriest guise, sanity is a tightrope walk once the threats are removed. How can everyday society understand the suffocating grip of post-traumatic stress disorder? The dream of coming home morphs into a nightmare for many war veterans.

COMMUNITY

A military troop is a tightly-knit unit of soldiers, a community uniting with the same goal in sight. Fighting, surviving, even dying together, there is no such thing as lonely ground. Everyone has everyone else's back on the battlefield. Once the war zone is a continent away and the troop is scattered across American soil, loneliness appears. People need people, especially to heal. No single soul could win a war on foreign turf. Neither can a single soul make sense of the world in isolation.

MANHOOD

In war, a man is a certain entity, a soldier with a mission, an enemy to conquer, and a battle to win. He is a man who is supposed to be strong, directed, and powerful. However, without gun in hand and a clearly defined enemy, what does it mean to be a man living in a peaceful zone? Trained to serve the nation, to stand up and "be a man!", the mixed messages presented to a veteran can be overwhelming. With the focus no longer on the physical, the shift to the psychological threatens the masculine in many, leaving a group of suffering ex-soldiers fighting not only the after-effects of war-induced trauma but also the confusing signals sent by a society that once wanted them to fight but now expects them to make peace with their personal and conflicting internal wars.

AMERICA

As the four men trekked the Northeast Corridor, they came across many Americans from different walks of life. Hiking through beat-down ghettos and seaside resort towns, they spoke with former veterans, drug lords, and ladies who lunch. To all, they asked this: What is the best thing about America? Regardless of circumstance or background, the red thread reply carried a message of a people proud of the freedom and possibility promised by their forefathers, but also discouraged by the present state of play. By championing the individual, America lost its sense of community along the way, fostering a nation of lonely, lost citizens. With all its flag-flying freedom, the strength of banding together for the greater good has been left by the wayside.

“It’s comforting to live in a group and when that’s gone, it can be a very difficult adjustment to make.”

Dave Roels

“My biggest challenge now is to feel like a worthy person without that steroid injection of good feeling that comes from doing something dangerous and somewhat exceptional.”

Sebastian Junger

“War is like an addiction.”

Guillermo Cervera

FURTHER DISCUSSIONS:

1. Have you seen both or either of the other two films (RESTREPO and KORENGAL) in the trilogy? If so, did THE LAST PATROL make a suitable ending? If you have not seen them, are you now interested in seeing them?
2. Do you feel THE LAST PATROL "mission" was a healthy way for the four men in the film to unwind from their individual war experiences? Discuss.
3. Have you ever suffered from PTSD or a traumatic experience that had some sort of lasting effects? What active steps (if any) did you take to heal and recover?
4. Did you feel that THE LAST PATROL came to a natural conclusion, that the men are all "better" now? Which of the men do you think will have the hardest time moving on from his war experiences?
5. How would you respond to the question Sebastian Junger asked throughout the film: What is the best thing about America?
6. Do you believe war is an intrinsically male experience, as suggested by Junger, and that war is a way for a boy to transition into manhood?
7. Is war something that humans will always defer to, the act of battle something in which we are meant to participate? Or have we merely conditioned ourselves to think so?
8. In your experience, is your country a nation of lonely individuals or is there a strong sense of community amongst those who surround you?
9. Have you ever felt like a foreigner in your own home/community? If so, what led to those feelings?
10. How could veterans best be reassimilated into society, once they have witnessed the tragedies of war? How are veterans treated in your community?

NOTES:

FILM FACTS:

- THE LAST PATROL is the third film in Sebastian Junger’s trilogy on the War in Afghanistan. The first - RESTREPO - was released in 2010. He released “Which Way Is the Front Line from Here?” in 2013 about friend and fellow war correspondent Tim Hetherington, who was killed in the Libyan Civil War in 2011. KORENGAL, the second film in the trilogy was released in 2014.
- Photographer Tim Hetherington graduated from Oxford University with a degree in Classics and English, and went on to work for the U.K. press, which led him to cover international issues. In addition to producing countless photographs and a number of documentary films, including co-directing RESTREPO with Sebastian Junger, he is the author of two books: “Long Story Bit by Bit: Liberia Retold” and “Infidel.”
- Born in Spain, photographer Guillermo Cervera is an avid surfer. He studied aerospace engineering in the U.S. before traveling to Bosnia to cover his first conflict, at the age of 23.
- Outward Bound for Veterans - a program of wilderness courses aimed at helping returning veterans adjust to life at home - was established following the Vietnam War, and renewed in 2006 to help Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. Sebastian Junger is a strong supporter of the program.
- The U.S. government’s Global War on Terror is otherwise referred to as Operation Enduring Freedom, and includes the War in Afghanistan.
- A person is diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), an anxiety disorder, when the symptoms resulting from experiencing a traumatic event (one often threatening one’s life) endure more than one month after the event. PTSD is common amongst war veterans.
- As of late 2014, there were 2.7 million American veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, with 20% of those veterans suffering from some form of PTSD. Only half of all veterans with PTSD, however, seeks psychiatric help, and there is a high prevalence of alcoholism and suicide amongst veterans. In times of peace, around 4% of the general population suffers from PTSD.
- PTSD symptoms in veterans include feeling emotionally reactive and having flashbacks.
- In 1970, Congress passed the Rail Passenger Service Act in order to publicize the passenger railroads. With the increasing use of personal cars and air travel, the use of intercity railroads was in decline. In order to attract passengers who preferred air travel, Amtrak designed the Metroliner for use between D.C. and New York, a train with a rounded appearance simulating an airplane. Amtrak began service in May 1971, initially serving 43 states with 21 routes. Nowadays, Amtrak serves 46 states with 33 routes, with the busiest route being the Northeast Corridor between D.C. and Boston.
- THE LAST PATROL was produced for HBO.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. Wounded Wear’s mission is to help combat-wounded veterans, by offering them a safe network of support, and also offering clothing adjusted to their wounds. Find out more, and consider donating.
2. Watch the other two films in Junger’s war trilogy: RESTREPO and KORENGAL, and read his book “War.”
3. The Wounded Warrior Project’s mission is to “foster the most successful, well-adjusted generation of wounded service members in our nation’s history.” They also have a Restore Warriors website, offering anonymous help to soldiers suffering from PTSD. Support their mission.
4. The Tim Hetherington Trust sets out to preserve Tim’s work as a storyteller and human rights advocate, in addition to supporting other artists working in the field. Learn more - consider donating to their cause.

We believe a good documentary is just the beginning...

In a world of sound-bites, documentaries provide an opportunity to think, understand, share, and connect with the world.

They are controversial, divisive, fascinating, unexpected, and surprising. They can be thrillers, dramas, comedies, romance, tear-jerkers, and horror films.

Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.