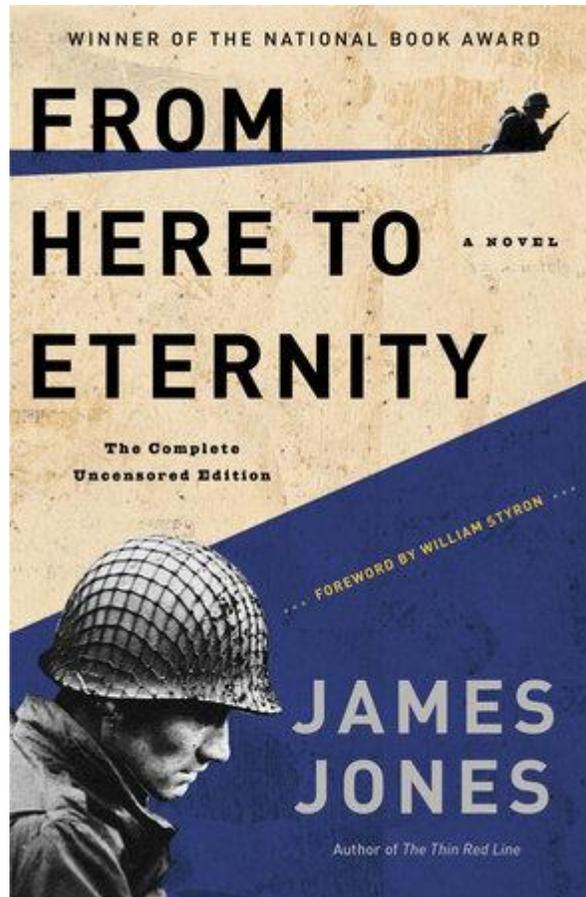


Evolution of a Soldier in James Jones's *From Here to Eternity*

M. Kumaran and Dr. C. Santhosh Kumar



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Abstract

James Jones, one of the famous novelists of his generation, was well known for his War Fiction. Jones portrays the courage, violence and passion of men who lived army life. He highlights the male narrative appearance and the discourses of masculinity in 1950's. In *From Here to Eternity*, he discusses how a civilian persuades into army life. He describes the evolution of soldier in three stages; civilian to soldier, soldier to combat soldier, combat soldier to civilian. The characters of his novel find difficult to express their feelings and emotions aloud in army

life. Inside each of them, they strive for more knowledge and more spiritual connection to the world.

War don't ennoble men,
it turns'em into dogs.
It poisons the soul. - James Jones

Evolution of a Soldier

James Jones discusses the concept of evolution of a soldier representing that evolution has been one of the chief aims of his fictional trilogy. Jones sets forth his view from the process by which a civilian becomes persuaded into army life through recruitment training. The evolution that Jones describes can be broken down into three stages, or transitions: the transition from civilian to soldier, from soldier to combat soldier, and from combat soldier to civilian.

Jones implies that the three books of the trilogy correspond to these three stages, and while *The Thin Red Line* and *Whistle* track the evolution of the soldier into the combat soldier and the combat soldiers into civilian life respectively.

From Here to Eternity

From Here to Eternity does not portrait a single soldier transitioning from civilian to soldier. The one character who relates to that description is Maggio. He is frequently referred to as a civilian, but he worked as a soldier in Gimbel's basement later he was sent out of training because of his misbehaviour. The text clearly shows that Jones sees only three possibilities for any soldier sent into combat.

“He will either be killed, be wounded enough to be removed from combat, or be ‘fortunate’ enough to survive an extended tour of frontline duty without suffering a wound serious enough to necessitate his removal” (Jones 46)

Prewitt and Maggio

While Prewitt is transferred into G Company Maggio has been sent out of the recruitment training and his character is not fit enough to transform into a soldier. Even though he is sent out of recruitment training Maggio is considered as a representative of a civilian who associates with the army, it would be difficult to ignore the fact that he is only one supporting character. All three protagonists (Prewitt, Warden, and Stark), along with every other soldier portrayed, are seasoned soldiers who comfortably devoted their life to the Army as a career.

Purpose of *From Here to Eternity*

The main purpose of *From Here to Eternity* is not to show the literal transition of a civilian into a soldier. It is to introduce the civilian reader to the army world and habituate them to a soldier's mindset. *From Here to Eternity* began with the remark to Maxwell Perkins that, Jones had “always wanted to do a novel on the peacetime army...something I don't remember having seen” (MacShane 82).

From Here to Eternity does not show the initiation and introduction of a civilian into the army world. Jones gradually introduces the reader to the world of the Old Army through a newly-enlisted civilian character. Jones introduces the reader to the army world by throwing him in the metaphorical deep end. The perception of tracing gradual transformation of the civilians into a soldier came much later and a theme is related to an exploration of the peacetime army.

In the novel Jones does not introduce any single soldier character as a civilian. His decision is to focus on soldiers who have been in the army establishments for years and the atmosphere and tone of the biased world of the Old Army. Characters who have been in the army are intimately familiar with their distinct ways. He allows the reader to see the Army from an insider's perspective. Jones even proves that, it is not necessary to include an outsider civilian character to explain the more obscure shade of Army life by using the newly minted soldier like Maggio. The reference to Maggio being out of recruit drill only a month is followed by Chief Choate's comment that "he messes up and catches all the extra details, but he's a good boy" (Jones 75).

Maggio as a Soldier

Maggio as a soldier is more than sufficient to contrast with the men who have more experiences around him. Maggio is unquestionably a soldier, and there is an important difference between showing an ex-civilian becoming an inexperienced soldier and showing an inexperienced soldier being put through a training process by his veteran troop mates. Jones's aim is to give his readers a complete view of how the Old Army really is.

Post-Pearl Harbor Army vs. Pineapple Army

From Here to Eternity is a separate entity from the Post-Pearl Harbor Army, which is now thought of fighting the Second World War. The Post-Pearl Harbor Army derived majority of its strength from enlistees and draftees who already knew that they would be soldiers only for the duration and plus six months. Forty-eight men who had every intention of returning to civilian life. Once the war was won and their term of service was completed honourably, their intention was returning to civilian life. Jones was a part of, the 'Pineapple Army' that is his subject in *From Here to Eternity*. It was an Army of professionals. Prior to Pearl Harbor, many would have called them men taken from the worthless part of society; they were men who had lived as labourers.

Civilians joined the Army because they can live better life on the inside than they could on the outside and stayed in it, that does not matter how much they bitched, because army provides them two commodities they could not find on the outside of civilian life; they are, self-worth and security. The soldiers of the Old Army, with few exceptions, had no intentions to return to civilian life until they retired from the army after thirty years of service with a modest pension. Though the soldiers of the Old Army would honourably serve in the Post-Pearl Harbor Army, the arrival of draftees and other non-professional soldiers destroys the Old Army as it had once existed. The Post-Pearl Harbor Army brought many improvements, most notably an expanded and more socially diverse officer corps which was more of a meritocracy and less of an aristocracy. But it also brought an end to the world of the professional soldiers of the Old Army.

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Rules of the Old Army

The rules of the Old Army that are codified in *From Here to Eternity* also allow us to construct a basic outline of what we might term the Jones Code Hero. Jones's Code Heroes are men of lower (and very occasionally middle) class backgrounds who have found a home within the Army. Their socio-economic conditions are very low; they are not tempted to fall into a comfortable zone. The army provides them with food, clothing and shelter. Though they are not expressive, they are the men who seek to improve themselves spiritually and become self-factualised. According to Maslow "to become more and more what [he] is, to become everything that [he] is capable of becoming" (8).

Expect Neither Justice Nor Consistency from the Official Rules

Jones's characters in the novel have learned to expect neither justice nor consistency from the official rules written down in the ARs and have been taught by experience to be an alert of an authority in general and officers in particular. They have seen that the majority of their officers are aristocrats who are more comfortable around the cunning Colonel's Officers. The Jones Code Hero needs to find justice and order in a chaotic universe which naturally leads them to take the perception of unwritten rules and adopt to the personal code. If he cannot find justice through official channels, he can make the idea of providing his own unofficial form of justice, and Jones portrays his rejection of the arbitrary army regulations in approval of a self-imposed form of order as a sign of his high character. This character helps the hero to protect from the ill-treatment of his officers and also from the NCOs and the other pretty tyrants. According to Paul Fussell, "notable how much of the writing of the Second World War tends not so much to convey news from the battlefield as to expose the chickenshit lurking behind it," (43)

Preserving the Memory of the Army World

From Here to Eternity preserves the memory of the army world, it also establishes the rules of Jones's protagonists, who had been brought up and struggled in the world of army. The novel is a mixture of undying love and hate of an army life. Jones carefully differentiates draftees and enlistees who are later true soldiers. While reading *From Here to Eternity* in the back of the reader's mind place the knowledge that the happiest nature of G Company's life at Schofield Barracks are destroyed by the attack on Pearl Harbor. Similarly, it also captures the world of the Old Army. This novel has shown us a hidden side of veteran's life. Jones develops a theory; he called it as "Evolution of a Soldier" in 1975 in the novel WWII. This theory helps to analyze the life of the soldier in the world of army. *From Here to Eternity* demonstrates his firm belief in how a man develops into an effective combat infantryman.

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