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"The light at the end of the tunnel"

In hindsight, there are so many aspects to the Vietnam War that could be labeled a "turning point" or a sign of an "ending". From 'Patriots', choosing from the "turning point" stories of individuals rather than a perspective of the troops, I chose to write about Charley Trujillo. For a good example of an "ending", I decided to write on Steve Sherlock. Both Trujillo and Sherlock are microcosms of the whole thing. If you read their stories as truthful and factual then you will see a fair sample of the mentality of the masses.

Charley Trujillo Pgs. 366-70

Early on in his life, Trujillo had problems with race. He saw firsthand the racial inequality of America. He joined the Army because he thought, "I was gunna get drafted so I went ahead and volunteered". He felt the camaraderie of all races only in battle. When they would return from patrols, everyone would break off in to their groups. The social problems that existed in the United States transferred itself over to Vietnam. The Latino and Black soldiers could see that they were treated differently than the white soldiers. It was after Tet and after Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated that Trujillo started to reassess his stance on the war. There was a transition he could see, that was turning the soldiers away from authority to more of a stance of dissent. Part of this was seeing the South Vietnamese soldier's mentality on the war. After a firefight they returned to their base/village and saw the SV forces "playing volleyball and having a grand old time and drinking cokes". "They were supposed to be on our side and helping to fight," he continues, "some of the black soldiers started saying 'this aint our war, our war is at home. This is the white man's war'. It made me start to think". The following morning they were going to go back out and some of them said they weren't going to do it. They brought in a new company commander to give them a "pep" talk. "You would never think that you would see that in the military," he says, "This guy was trying to talk the men into going into battle. You'd think he'd just have to give an order right?" It was scenarios just like this throughout Vietnam that were turning soldiers away from the war and not wanting to fight it. "At that point we practiced search-and-avoid. They'd tell us the enemy was coming from one direction and we'd say 'Roger that' and go in the other direction".

He could see the tide turning. "I was very naïve", he says, "I got my idea of war from movies where the good guys don't get killed. We were taking a lot of casualties and then I started thinking, are we really the good guys?" Of course there were larger things at play when it comes to the "turning point" of the war, like Tet or My Lai, those were a finger hold for the American dissident to hold on to through the media, but when it comes to the soldiers in the field, their "finger hold" was being there and seeing the hypocrisy first hand. With the U.S. soldiers not wanting to fight a war that the South Vietnamese don't deem important enough to fight themselves, how could we have ever won? It started a chain reaction of events that lasted several more years until our eventual withdrawal.



Steve Sherlock Pgs. 425-9

"When I joined the Army in 1966 I was a super war supporter", begins Steve, "I believed we were fighting Communists in Vietnam so we wouldn't have to fight them on the shores of the United States". As he states, his mentality at the beginning of the war was a very patriotic one. He is a metaphor for the mass of Americans who believed Vietnam was the equivalent to "fighting the Nazis" and that it was a "noble cause similar to World War 2". His doubts started in 1968, before going to Vietnam when he was sent to DC to defend against rioters in the wake of the Martin Luther King Jr. assassination. He felt that he was already in a warzone while looking at the chaos the streets of DC. By the time he actually made it to Vietnam in October 1968, he was in a "state of confused neutrality". Within a few months he says, "Without understanding the political details of the war, I had a sense that we didn't have any business being in Vietnam and it was wrong for us to be there". This was not an atypical view of the war; it was instead a view that was growing in strength among the soldiers. The people who were against the war were already gone and following them were the people who deemed themselves patriots. A major problem for the military strength in Vietnam wasn't that troop levels were dissipating, (it was said earlier in the war that possibly a more lean military might be more effective than a larger more lethargic version), the problem was the quality of the soldiers. Whether it was drafted troops or reserves but the number of troops that didn't want to fight was growing. Upon his return stateside to his Indiana home, he wanted to support his anti-war views so he wanted to start a chapter of the VVAW. A year later he traveled to Washington DC to demonstrate with the VVAW with the intention to "turn in" their medals symbolically showing that the government couldn't "buy our silence with decorations". "I felt the war was wrong at a political and moral level", says Sherlock, "and in that sense you

was there

could argue that all symbols of it, including the medals, were meaningless". Soldiers like Sherlock were the blood of the American **metaphoric** heart and without the heart the body is defeated. So in this sense the war was over a long time before the eventual withdrawal of the American troops from Vietnam.



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