

Due date: Saturday, 20 November 2010, 09:05 PM

Last edited: Saturday, 20 November 2010, 11:38 AM (860 words)

Molly Graham

HST195: Vietnam

Assignment 3

The Turning Point and Endings

Part 1

For many involved in Vietnam, they went in with a strong belief that they were doing the right thing. However, most of these men had a very different opinion by the time that they left. There was a period of time or a specific moment in between these juxtaposing views that acted to shift their emotions surrounding the war; a personal turning point. For Vincent Okamoto, this turning point occurred during the night of August 24, 1968 (Appy 357-362). Prior to this night, Okamoto had believed that fighting the war led to honor, something extremely important to him considering he was Japanese American and wanted to be treated with respect by his fellow countrymen. He would have never believed that he would think of fighting in a war to be dishonorable or shameful.

Having already been wounded in combat during two earlier occasions, August 24 marked his third injury; an event which he believed would relieve him of combat duty as it did in past cases. However, through both the recent changing of policies and minor technicalities, Okamoto was sent back to the field. The shift in his attitude is apparent as he tells of events occurring after his return to combat. At one point, during a battle, he says that he was handed the radio to call in backup for his men but refused because he did not want to be a target for the enemy (Appy 360). During another battle, when radioed for help, he responded with: "I don't know about you, you son-of-a-bitch, but I'm hiding behind this tree" (Appy 360). He also stated that it got to the point after August 24 that he "couldn't function" and turned to drugs to get through staying awake during the days and going to sleep at night (Appy 360).

It was not only the fear that he had during the night of August 24, 1968 when he was under attack that led to this dramatic shift in personal perspective. It was also the fact that he had done what

had been expected of him, with honor, and expected that he would in turn be able to step down from previous responsibilities. The ideas that he had come to Vietnam with that a man in uniform is a man with dignity and whom people respect was shattered when he realized he was being thrown to the dogs and almost expected to die. It was because of being forced back into the field that Okamoto began to not care about being a hero and developed the sole aim of personal survival. From then on he hid out when the enemy came and drugged himself in order to just get through the rest of his time.

Part 2

After the United States had pulled out of Vietnam, after the Northern Communists had taken over the South, after all was said and done, was that the end of the war? Maybe this marked the end for some. However, for Tran Ngoc Chau, a man decorated with the highest military Medal of Honor for the South Vietnamese government, the end did not arrive until years later (Appy 475-480). After spending three years in a reeducation center ~~ran~~ by the Communists and then time in which they attempted to reintegrate him into the new government, Chau found that he must escape unless he was willing to give up information on his friends from the former South Vietnamese government.

Chau and his family escaped with a large group of the ethnic Chinese who were being "chased out of the country" by the government (Appy 480). What is incredibly ironic about this is that Chau was only able to disguise himself as a Chinese man and get by the Communists because he spoke Chinese so well, a subject he had mastered while imprisoned by Thieu.

In his description, this ending is one of sorrow. However, it was as if Chau had done all that he could but at some point had to face the inevitable fact that he would not be able to survive forever in his homeland now that the change had occurred and he was seen as a traitor. His story is one of survival, staying there as long as he possibly could. For Chau, he had realized that this moment, his decision to escape, was the end. It was his personal end to the resistance movement against the Communists which he had personally fought against for decades. He had held his own past the Tet Offensive and past the Communist occupation of Saigon. He had stayed loyal to himself and his cause through reeducation camp. He had not betrayed his former comrades after his release when he was asked to investigate the former leaders of the South. He bowed out gracefully, sorrowfully, and finally let his life's fight come to an end through fleeing.



Close this window

 [Moodle Docs for this page](#)