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The Turning Point: Wayne Smith

"I was very naïve. . . I volunteered. I believed in it" (Appy 362). Wayne Smith was assigned to infantry and very deeply believed that he was going to help the Vietnamese people. He was a black man in a mixed race war and as far as he was concerned there were no clear lines or sides when it came to fighting a common enemy. In a time when America was still very segregated and biased against black people, he had found somewhere that saw no color. Dr. Martin Luther King was fighting the equality battle here in the states, and Smith went overseas to fight a battle against a different type of oppression. Smith originally has passion about going to war and saving the weaker part of a country from its Communist neighbor, "there was also still a belief that we should go into the military to show the nation that African Americans could make an equal contribution" (Appy 362). PT

Smith speaks about the horrors of combat but also the camaraderie or "brotherhood" that kept them all together. They were all fighting together, for a cause, against the same enemy, and to stay alive. He thought he was closer to them than his own family and had not imagined that he would have forged these bonds with other men, let alone in a time of war. He agreed that there were racial problems and disagreements but it seems that he was fairly open-minded as he had grown up in an integrated community. In his own words he could see both sides when the lines were drawn. He was only 18 years old, but was a medic so men's lives were dependent on trusting him. A key point in earning that trust seems to have come when he ran through an area that had been booby trapped in order to tend to injured soldiers. He doesn't say it, but it would seem that an immense amount of faith would be bestowed upon his peers when they saw him risk his life for the sake of others.

The turning point doesn't have to do with race or camaraderie however; it comes when Smith realizes the true meaning of war and loses his faith in what he believed he was doing. He talks about body counts and the men taking four separate parts from the same body to seem as if they had 4 confirmed kills. This was what America's part in the war had become, body count. The higher it was then the better we were doing in the war and it was clear that's not what Smith thought he had signed up for, "I hated my association with all the lies" (Appy 365). In his final 6 months Smith achieves what he wanted to and goes to different villages providing medical aid and treatment. He returns home to his family celebrating him and flaunting him socially for his bravery and successes in battle. His own community recognizing him as a war hero, but did not know or seem to care what actually he had been through, "I hated America" (Appy 366).

abrupt ending here
Develop this more as a legitimate
conclusion to the turning point
he experienced in Vietnam.

Endings: Steve Sherlock

For many Veterans of the Vietnam War, the war never ended. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, night terrors, flashbacks and other endless symptoms are still very much experienced by those who got to return home. A lucky few may have experienced a sense of closure at least, but even they will never forget. The war technically ended in 1975 with the fall of Saigon but many soldiers still carried it with them as though they had never left. A good example of the possibility of closure is the story from Steve Sherlock.

Sherlock went to Vietnam 7 years before the "end" and had felt mostly neutral, upon his arrival though his thoughts changed and he decided we had no business being there. He signed what was considered to be an antiwar petition and intelligence told him he was betraying his duty. This act got him reassigned to an infantry platoon and he was quickly on the front line of battle. After an ambush he received a bronze star with valor, and shortly after went on patrol with his captain. The patrol resulted in a fight and Sherlock's spoken conclusion that the Vietnamese were in fact people too.

After being relieved of his combat duties and working on the "Kit Carson" scout program (Appy 427) he returned to Purdue and opened a local chapter of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. During this time the war still an incredibly passionate topic in the states so they called themselves Veterans for Peace, probably to diminish any pro war protesters from harassing them. *nicer part*

The ending for Sherlock comes as closure when he travels to Washington D.C. in 1971 to participate with other veterans in a demonstration. He felt strongly that this peaceful assembly would bring the media exposure that Americans needed to see to accept the returning Veterans rather than protest them so fiercely. He wants *see* citizens to know, "the purpose was to focus public attention on the fact that veterans who actually fought in Vietnam, and had been decorated for it, were opposed to the war and that it wasn't unpatriotic to be fighting against a wrong and harmful policy" (Appy 428). The Veterans assembled in front of the Capitol and recited their name, units, medals and some words about the war. After they had spoken they threw their medals over a barricade. This symbolized that they took the medals of war to be generic and meaningless, meant to make them feel decorated and honored about *what they participated in*. The loss of the medal may not have brought on closure or an ending for *Sherman*, but the demonstration could have. To be gathered among brothers fighting a cause that he truly believed in, to attempt to end a war and bring others home *that* could have been the greatest thing he ever participated in. Finally he believed in something that was good and true, he had peace and companionship during this trip to D.C., something he did not claim to experience while in Vietnam. *proof? guess? —*

"There was an incredible camaraderie and exhilaration. We were all together again but this time it was a peace army. It really did seem like a noble cause" (Appy 428).

REFERENCES

The theme seems to be how Sherlock got the "victory" that alluded him in Vietnam ... rather than the "ending" theme. But overall, well written paper.