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The turning point of the war wasn't just the Tet offensive it was when Vietnam changed people. I chose Vincent Okamoto's story because he told a compelling story of how the war could completely drain someone, causing them to completely change how they reacted.

Vincent had six brothers and each of them had served in the military, so he eagerly awaited his chance to do the same. After attending UCLA and participating in ROTC he accepted a commission in the US Army and volunteered for Vietnam. "My parents often used the Japanese term shi kata ga nai, meaning, it can't be helped. If something is shi kata ga nai, it's inevitable so you just accept it and go on with your life." This philosophy was a great help to him while serving in Vietnam.

In June 1968 he was wounded in an ambush near the Cambodian border. He spent several days in the hospital and received some light duty. On June 16th he was sent back to his platoon; however on June 17th he again was wounded and sent back to the hospital. Before the Tet offensive in January of 1968 when soldiers were wounded twice they were placed in noncombat jobs for the remainder of their tour in Vietnam. Unfortunately so many men had been wounded he was sent back to his platoon. The third time he was wounded would be his turning point in the war.

On August 24th Vincent was wounded again when his company was attacked by a reinforced battalion of the 9th NVA Division. Vincent attempted to stop an enemy mortar team that was devastating his men. "I figured if I crawled along the flank I might be able to get close to that mortar team. And I did. I threw three frags and turned them into long division problems. But I wasn't quite as slick as I thought because a concussion grenade landed in the depression I was in. I tried to jump out, but I wasn't quick enough so I got injured from the waist down." He lost most of his platoon and about 30 percent of his company.

Vincent was recommended for the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions during the battle. Since he received his third Purple Heart award, Vincent assumed that he would be sent to the rear. However once again the policy had changed so he would have had to of been hospitalized for 7 days each time he was wounded in

order to be sent to a rear echelon unit. He spent three more months in the field before receiving his award.

When he was sent back to the field this was his turning point. After the third wound Vincent was suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder which caused him to be very gun-shy. "On one occasion during this period I remember a platoon leader calling me up on the radio saying, "Bravo Six, Bravo Six, we're taking fire, what do we do?" I said, "I don't know about you, you son-of-a-bitch, but I'm hiding behind this tree." I wasn't a very good Officer after August 24." He was taking medications so he could continue to function.

The story that has the best ending is Charles Cooper's. While serving in Vietnam during 1970 he realized that the war wasn't going well and saw how the Vietnamization was affecting his Marines. Since President Johnson had started project 100,000 the quality of people in both the Army and Marine Corps had really deteriorated causing problems for the war effort. According to Cooper the project 100,000 were morons and imbeciles that had difficulty learning which frustrated them and made some become aggressive.

Another problem that Cooper faced was race relations. At one point a fight broke out at the enlisted club and the blacks and whites went back to the barracks and grabbed their weapons. Another Officer stopped the fight before anyone got shot. He had to wedge himself between them, and fire a few rounds from his 45 caliber pistol before he obtained control of the participants.

A major difficulty that Cooper faced was with the replacements he received from the 3rd Marine Division. They had been stationed near the DMZ where the rules of engagement allowed them to shoot anyone they saw. This was because all of the civilians were supposed to have been moved out of the area. Where the 1st Marine Division was located the rules of engagement were different. The replacements had a hard time not distinguishing enemy combatants from civilians.

Charles Cooper wasn't overseeing the end of Vietnam as in the fall of Saigon but he had to command a demoralized battalion that wasn't as professional as the Marines had been earlier in the war. I think he had a difficult assignment that was compounded by President Nixon's decision to pull out of the war even though he escalated the war. The troops didn't want to be the last American killed in Vietnam if they weren't going to be allowed to win.

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