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A turning point is a decisive moment; the point in which a very significant change occurs, and sends you in a different direction. This type of change took place for Vincent Okamoto when he was stationed in Vietnam. Vincent was a Japanese American, raised in a military family. All six of his older brothers served in the military, and Vincent couldn't wait for his turn. He was brought up with a sense of duty and honor that led him to the ROTC in college, and a regular army commission in the infantry. From there he went to jump school and ranger school, then to recon commando training. In April 1968, he volunteered to go to Vietnam.

Vincent went to war as a 24 year old lieutenant, full of courage and promise, but that soon changed. In most divisions prior to the Tet Offensive, if you were awarded two Purple Hearts for being wounded in battle, you were given a noncombat job in the rear. Vincent was injured twice in June, just one week apart, so he thought he had it made. However, after so many people were getting wounded or killed after Tet, they changed it to three Purple Hearts. Vincent was sent back to his platoon, and was injured again on August 24th by a concussion grenade during a late night mortar and gunfire attack. Again, Vincent thought he was in luck, and that he would be taken off the front lines after being treated for his wounds. But he then found out that not only did you have to have three Purple Hearts, but you also had to have been hospitalized for at least 7 days for each occurrence.

This was Vincent's turning point. He was recommended for a Distinguished Service Cross, which basically guaranteed that he would be able to pick his own assignment, but it had to first be approved. Vincent was sent back to his platoon for three months while he waited, and he was a very unhappy person. He was scared, jumpy, and bitter. He essentially abandoned his status as an officer, and became a war-weary coward. His platoon leaders and soldiers looked to him for leadership and guidance, but he was alright with hiding behind a tree rather than fighting like before. It got to the point where Vincent couldn't function, and was taking drugs to try to maintain his sanity rather than admitting he needed to be relieved of duty. I would guess that those were the longest three months of his life after he was sent back. Combat was terrible, and the soldiers in Vietnam depended on milestones that they had to look forward to. When those milestones were taken away from Vincent, he lost hope and the will to be the type of soldier that he had aspired to be.

Steve Sherlock had a very different experience in Vietnam than Vincent Okamoto. Steve came from a blue collar family, joined the army in 1966 as a "super war supporter," and went to Vietnam in 1968 as a lieutenant in the 101st Airborne.

He believed that the U.S. was fighting Communists in Vietnam so we wouldn't have to fight them on American shores. His view was that the Vietnam War was similar to WWII, except in a contained area, and he likened the Communists to the Nazis. However, Steve began to have doubts about the war shortly before he was sent to Vietnam. After Martin Luther King Jr. was killed, and Steve worked the riot patrol in Washington, D.C., he started to realize that there was something wrong with the problems that were occurring in the U.S., and that they were somehow connected to the Vietnam War. Steve really didn't know about the political details behind the war, but described his stance as somewhat of a "confused neutrality." He had a sense that the United States shouldn't be in Vietnam, and definitely shouldn't be killing people in Vietnam.

While Steve was stationed at Camp Eagle, a large military base near Hue, he decided to sign an antiwar petition. He was questioned by someone from intelligence, who was outraged that an officer would do such a thing. Steve suggested that he be sent somewhere else, and was given an infantry platoon with the 2nd of the 327th at a village called Nguoc Ngot. The first night Steve was there, they were involved in a fire fight with an NVA platoon, for which he was awarded a bronze star. One of the other lieutenants told him he was lucky for having contact so quickly. Later, his captain wanted to go with him on patrol, and they got into a small gunfight that killed two or three people. While they were checking out the bodies, they found a rosary in one man's pocket. This was confusing to the captain, because he couldn't understand how someone could be both a Communist and a Catholic at the same time. Steve didn't think it matter what they were, he just hoped that he didn't encounter them later and have to kill any more people. The captain was incensed because Steve believed these were people just like the two of them, and accused Steve of being the reason why the U.S. was losing the war. Steve was given a chance to retract his statements a few days later, and when he declined, he was relieved of duty.

This was the end of Steve's war. His belief that the Vietnamese people, regardless of whether they were Nationalists, Communists, NVA, Viet Cong, Catholic or Buddhist, they were all *people*- flesh and blood. He still had the sense that he had before he was sent to Vietnam, that we shouldn't have been killing those people. It was his deep-seeded sense of humanity, whether he understood the politics behind the war or not, that got him sent away from his platoon, and ended his combat experience. It absolutely ended any support he may still have felt for the war, just like that. He was eventually reassigned to some civil affairs duty, but when he went back to the U.S., he became an antiwar protestor. Steve felt that the war was totally wrong at a political and moral level, and that it could be argued that all of the symbols of it, including the medals, were meaningless. He actually ended up throwing his bronze star away at a rally in Washington, surrounded by other vets and supporters. It was like that moment in Vietnam, when he was relieved of duty, was the ultimate end of his fight, his support, and his war.

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