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Following the Tet Offensive, public opinion began to shift, especially in the media. William Cronkite's summation, "To say that we are closer to victory today is to believe, in the face of the evidence, the optimists who have been wrong in the past. To suggest that we are on the edge of defeat is to yield to unreasonable pessimism. To say that we are mired in stalemate seems the only reasonable, yet unsatisfactory conclusion." (Herring 241-42) Though Tet is considered to be 'the' turning point of the war, many individuals struggled with their own turning points of various degrees throughout their experiences.

After reading the accounts of Clark Dougan and Samuel Huntington, the heart-breaking story of John Douglas Marshall came to life for me. John Douglas Marshall was a young man who was 'going through the motions' so to speak, with the ROTC and a potential military career. His grandfather, S. L. A. Marshall, "was one of the staunchest defenders of American policy in Vietnam" (Appy 328) and John adored him. His 'Poppy' gave the commissioning speech at his ROTC graduation, and rather than be saluted by his grandson, enveloped him into a bear-hug on stage in front of everyone.

After training as an infantry officer at Fort Benning, Marshall felt it harder and harder to repress his feelings towards the Vietnam War, and immersed himself in the writings and teachings of famous non-violent pacifistic authors such as Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Thoreau. It was then that he came to his 'turning point' and concluded that all war was wrong. In spite of his family traditions, he could no longer fight for a cause that he did not believe in. He summoned the courage to apply for a discharge from the army as a conscientious objector. Twenty-seven people wrote letters testifying to the sincerity of his convictions. (Appy 329) Marshall's application was approved and he was given an honorable discharge.

Though Marshall expected his family to disagree with his decision, and possibly be angry with him, he never imagined that his beloved grandfather would disown him over his convictions. In the letter his grandfather wrote him, SLAM accuses John, "We know why you quit. It wasn't conscience. You simply chickened out. You didn't have the guts it takes." (Appy 329) He further belittles his grandson by comparing him to the women of the family and claiming that even they are stronger than his grandson. John Douglas Marshall never saw his grandfather again. Their relationship was referred to as 'another casualty of the Vietnam War'. Many families were torn apart by the war, whether in death, draft dodging, or differing of opinions.

Carl Dougan gives an account for when he feels many of "Middle America" really turned against the war, when the war became personal for them. A story was published in their conservative newspaper that dared to ask the question of how many more lives of our own boys were we willing to sacrifice for this war effort. He writes, "I think a lot of World War II

vets who had been sitting around their kitchen tables saying, “You’ve got to fight for your country,” were starting to say, “Fuck this. It’s not worth Greg Fischer’s life or his buddy’s life.” Or maybe they weren’t saying it, but they were starting to feel it.” (Appy 306) If only this was true for the Marshalls.

Though John did not reconcile with his grandfather before his death, he was able to have another turning point of sorts in the remembrance of his grandfather. When an American Heritage article attacked the integrity of his grandfather’s research and accounts of his own life, John decided to investigate the claims. His book, *Reconciliation Road*, details his investigation, and also allowed for him to get to know his grandfather far better than he had imagined. It also helped him to accept the choices his grandfather made, and he forgave the rejection, eventually naming his daughter after her great-grandfather.

In the Appy book, Truong Tran’s story best accounted for the ‘why’ of the ending in Vietnam. Truong Tran got involved in the military, similarly to John Marshall, not out of personal conviction, but out of a necessity. When he was drafted in 1964, he chose to join the regional forces in an attempt to stay close to home. He was assigned to a unit two districts away, so he rarely saw his family. He talks of survival being his only motivation for his military service, not promotions or glory.

What struck me while reading was the realization he made, that they [South Vietnamese Army] were fighting a war that they could only tie or lose, where the North Vietnamese could either tie or win. The worse the North could do, was tie and end up with half of the country, which was the best possible outcome for the south. Even ending up with half the country, there was no fighting in the North, so they had the upper hand. If the country had remained split, the goal of the Vietnamese was unification, and the communists promised a national unification.

“Having U.S. soldiers in Vietnam not only destroyed our political cause, it also destroyed our economy and social fabric.” (Appy 506) The landing of American forces in Vietnam, though having the best of intentions, ended up a huge political disadvantage for the South Vietnamese. The Americans were viewed as another outside oppressor to the Vietnamese people. The threat of communism was an abstract idea that not all of the people fully understood, but the presence of Americans was a physical reminder of the Japanese, French and Chinese that had come before. This allowed the North Vietnamese to capitalize on the use of propaganda in the battle against the American invaders.

The American presence was not just a political disadvantage, the tactics employed by the Americans when clearing the jungles, killed many crops that the people relied on. Some of the poor and elderly members of society had nothing else to get them through, just as Truong’s grandfather suffered the loss of his coconut plantation. “Ninety percent of the population had relied on the land, but during the war people could not grow crops and had to move to the cities.” (Appy 506)

When Truong got out of the military, he worked for an American nonprofit organization, Save the Children, and then for the U.S. State Department as a community development

specialist for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support [CORDS]. While working for CORDS he got a first-hand view of the corruption present in the government.

Yet, most alarming, were his accounts of the efforts that had to be taken to get his family evacuated. The strings that had to be pulled, to get to the embassy, and then ultimately ending with him outside at the fence with the others chanting for someone to “help us” before the Ambassador would come out to talk with them. The why became clear, but the fact that it was indeed an ending, was painted in a vivid picture for me.

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