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(1351 words)

Some of them

Part 1 The story "He Was Only 19- Did You Know Him?" represents a turning point for the American people's perception of the Vietnam war. In his story, Clark Dougan opens by explaining the circumstance of his story. As a young man in high school during the Vietnam war, he (and other students) experienced the war through updates of who had died over the school intercom. The principal would interrupt class to notify the students when someone from their town had died. As he puts it "It all seemed like a roll of the dice. Some would go on, some wouldn't, and it depended on accident..." (pg 304). This quote illustrates the position he and others like him were in during the war, as they grew into it as adults from society.

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The war was something foreign, something distant, that made interruption into their lives through a disembodied intercom. It was fundamentally separate from them outside of those brief, random moments would remind them of its existence. He then explains that a fellow student at the time, Greg Fischer, had spoken with him about what the future could be like. Dougan was heading off to college after high school, but Fischer was considering joining the military. He told Dougan "...i'm going to get drafted anyhow, so if i'm going to get drafted, why not the best, you know?" (pg 305). At this point in his story, Dougan explains that they went their separate ways after graduation, he to college and Fischer, presumably, into the military. "So I go off to my first year in college" Dougan says, "and i'm really kind of oblivious to the war. The Tet offensive is raging across South Vietnam and i'm trying figure out what the hell *Paradise Lost* is about". From this quote we can draw the conclusion that Dougan was removed from the war not only physically but emotionally as well. All he was trying to do was get through college; the guy from high school that went over there was not occupying his mind, nor the war updates they received over the intercom during high school. Upon returning home for memorial day, Dougan opened a newspaper to find that Greg Fischer had been killed in Vietnam. It is at this point that his perception of the war changes completely: "It just hit me like a hammer. I remember that conversation in homeroom and it suddenly had this profound significance. I had gone off to this cloistered college while he was going off to die in Vietnam" (pg 305). This statement indicates just how sudden and impactful the realization of Fischer's death was on Dougan's perception of the war. Until now, he had been removed from the events. All of a sudden, the one that died is a guy he knew, a guy he sat and talked with, a guy that used to talk about his future. But there was no future for Fischer; instead of going to college, like Dougan, he died in Vietnam. Dougan concludes by explaining the intent of the article that spoke of Fischer's death. According to Dougan, "the editorial was really asking,

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how many more people like Greg Fischer are we willing to waste". This is just an ordinary kid we're talking about". This is important because , as a typical person, Greg Fischer had a connection to everyone. The whole country is made of normal people. And taking young, ordinary people like Greg Fischer and sending them off to die in another country was too much. So, in this way, Dougan found a turning point for himself with regards to the war. It was brought home to him in a way he hadn't realized before and, according to Dougan, other people felt the same way: " I think this is the moment 'Middle America' really turned against the war", he says, quite plainly, on pg 306. What Dougan is driving at is that an editorial highlighting the commonality of such a young man grabbed the attention of people all over the country that felt like they could relate. All the working class, middle class, not-quite-for college people that made/make up the core of our country. This editorial reached the American people and brought the reality of the war close enough to home that they saw it had faces that looked just like the people they knew, therefore I interpret this story as representative of a turning point in the American people's perception of the war from distant and foreign to uncomfortably harsh and real.

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Part 2 The story "We Could Either Lose Or Tie- Not Win" by Truong Tran represents, to me, and ending of the hope that the U.S. could achieve the goal of preventing the North Vietnamese from eventually conquering the South. While a comparatively short story (only 3 ½ – 4 pages), I feel that it encapsulates the hopelessness that existed on the side of the South Vietnamese. Tran lists a number of reasons why the war was doomed to be lost, specifically the political problems of an American presence, corruption, and the North possessing a much stronger argument to support their cause. Firstly, he explains that Americans being there conflicted with the Vietnamese sense of nationality and their urge to repel foreign invaders from their country. " We could not tell our brothers and sisters that we were fighting for ourselves", Tran states, "as long as American soldiers were in the country fighting for us" (pg 504). So, politically, the United States was fighting uphill from the beginning. This part of Tran's story indicates, to me, that the war was (in a sense) over before it even really began. If the Vietnamese were so resistant to the idea of foreign intervention it only stands to reason that foreign intervention would not have a lot of positive effect. Secondly, Tran discusses the corruption inherent in the system established in South Vietnam. Because the officials were payed so little, and the economy was so wrecked, Tran says, there was a natural tendency for them to embezzle American funding to help feed their families: "Most government officials had a salary of less than twenty dollars a month , while prostitutes made five hundred or a thousand. To support their families many people abused their power to make

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more money". This part of the story demonstrates how aid from the U.S. Was ineffective, and how the situation of caring for these people was exacerbated by the very presence of the United States and the disruption of the normal Vietnamese economy. It indicates that there was little hope for an effective aid system, further straining the notion that the U.S. Could achieve it's goals. Lastly and most damningly, Tran explains how the argument and diplomatic position of the North was much more advantageous. His own words summarize it powerfully: "We lost because we agreed to fight a war we could either lose or tie, but not win. The best we could do is keep half the country.Since we were never able to fight in the North, the worst they could do was keep half the country. And since all Vietnamese hoped for eventual unification of the country, once again the North had a more persuasive goal." This really hits home because, coming from a member of the South Vietnamese military, it carries the full weight of how hopeless the situation was for him. To stop and simply think about the South never even really had a chance to take the fight to the North, and how the North had so much more powerful of an argument, can only lead my mind to conclude that the war was all but over by the time that the events Tran describes were unfolding. To me this story symbolizes the end of the war very effectively from the South Vietnamese point of view, and how the United States never had any real hope of keeping the North from eventually absorbing the South.

Excellent use
of analysis of the
most important parts
of each sp-7.

I wish every student
could do that !!!