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My theme for this journal assignment comes from one of the title quotes that stood out to me above the others. This quote can be found in one of the poems of Nguyen Duy, a famous Vietnamese poet who cleaned rifles for the Northern Vietnamese soldiers during the Vietnam War. It states: *"In the end, in every war, whoever won, the people always lost."*

To me this concept takes on many different meanings, no matter what side of a war you look at. It can relate to an entire country losing a war, an army losing a battle, or a single soldier losing his life. At the same time it can relate to a country winning a war, yet suffering an immense number of casualties. There is so much to lose apart from the war itself, there are always the personal things such as losing your homeland, your friends and your family. When it comes to war, every sense of victory earned is at the price of a heavy loss.

The Vietnam War is no exception to this, and is perhaps one of the best illustrations of how much negativity and damage can be inflicted on a country during a period of war. With war, no matter what the rate of success is, losing is inevitable. In the end of the Vietnam War, the North Vietnamese won, yet the people, both north and south, American and Vietnamese, individually lost.

Jim Soular served in Vietnam as a flight engineer on a Chinook helicopter and he recounts how as a kid he loved the war. He loved the high adrenaline rush of each assault and sense of responsibility he had being in control of a one-and-a-half-million dollar helicopter. But now, as a man in his late fifties he hates the war, because now he understands it. He describes how they would move Vietnamese villagers from their homes because they believed the areas to be in control of the Viet Cong; however, he was not aware of the great loss they were handing these villagers. He exclaims, "We didn't understand that their ancestors were buried there, that it was very important to their culture and religion to be with their ancestors." The vast majority of the villagers who were airlifted from their homelands never made it back and lost their connections with their ancestors, connections that meant everything to them.

Soular not only witnessed the losses of others, he experienced a great personal defeat himself when his best friend David was shot and killed by another GI in a drunken argument. Regarding the same issue he goes on to explain that the loss of a helicopter to the military was worth more than the loss of a human being. A man charged with crashing a helicopter was sentenced to fifteen years of hard labor while the man who killed David was sentenced to five. The loss of an expensive piece of military equipment might have an effect on future operations during the war, but the loss of a life will forever affect family and friends regardless of how many years have passed since the war's conclusion.

The aspect of losing is not limited to the past tense. Many wartime decisions are made as preemptive actions for the fear of losing something, such as in this case, the government's fear of losing its reputation. Lyndon B. Johnson and the United States government did not want to appear soft on communism so to keep their powerful, hardnosed reputation in the eyes of the rest of the world, Johnson used the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution to become fully engaged in the Vietnam War.

Seth Tillman's anecdote follows these decisions through the eyes of Senator J. William Fulbright who was the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Fullbright initially supported the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution but as the war progressed he privately tried to influence Johnson against escalating the war, stating that the government ought to disengage from Vietnam. Johnson ridiculed this proposal and fueled by his high approval rating he pursued with repeated air strikes over North Vietnam. Tillman says, "Congress could have stopped the war. As Fullbright himself said on a number of occasions, 'If we were willing to take the responsibility, we could stop this war tomorrow.'" Congress was more concerned about maintaining their stance against communism than taking any sort of responsibility, and they were not about to lose their credibility. Little did they know, their decisions would end up costing them so much more than reputation alone.

During a war, the loss of lives is unavoidable and all it takes is one dead soldier to cause extreme sorrow for the countless people around him. Wars are often measured by death, and in the big picture that one dead soldier becomes merely a statistic. But one thing that doesn't show up in the statistics is the loss of freedom; an immeasurable consequence of the unforgiving conditions of war. Freedom is lost when American soldiers constantly have to follow orders and obey commanders. It is lost when Vietnamese peasants are forcibly removed from their homes in large masses at a time. Freedom is especially lost when an innocent country to the west of Vietnam is repeatedly bombed, and its residents are the victims of an overwhelming number of air strikes.

For four years Fred Brenfman lived in Laos, aiding the Third World country educationally and economically for an organization called the International Voluntary Services. He tells about how he would talk with the Laotian peasants who would tell stories of spending half of their lives in dug-out bomb shelters, and watching family members die before their eyes. Brenfman describes his frustration and anger with the fact that the American executive branch had been secretly bombing this country, and not to destroy equipment, but to kill people. The air strikes dropped what they called "pineapple bombs" – bombs specifically designed to increase the number of casualties. Brenfman writes, "You have the United States, the most powerful people in the world, bombing the weakest people in the world." The Laotians had a minimal amount of defense; America had them completely on their heels. The people of Laos were unwillingly dragged into the Vietnam War, and the freedom to carry on their everyday lives was entirely shattered.

No matter what the circumstances are, war will always have a negative side to it, and the number of losses will outweigh the number of victories, whether it is in the big picture or at the personal level. But the wounds at the personal level will be scarred much deeper and much longer; it is the people who take the biggest hits and the individuals who have to endure the biggest sacrifices. Because when it comes to war, the people will always lose.

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