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The Third Evil ✓

Many people would agree that Tim O'Brien's ~~book entitled~~ *If I Die in a Combat Zone*, illustrates his dislike and loathing for the Vietnam War. O'Brien writes about the hardships of the war from the viewpoint of a foot soldier. He discusses his encounters with Viet Cong men, women, nurses, children, and other American soldiers of all ages. In many situations, he writes his observations of the atrocities, violence, and discomforts extended upon these people. O'Brien is so against these acts of violence, which are usually fatal, ^{that} he tells a chaplain that taking the communists out of Northern Vietnam is not worth the sacrifice of life (60). He goes on to state that North and South Vietnam are both evil: "But the third evil, death and pain, must also be counted in" (60). Therefore, throughout his memoir, Tim O'Brien illustrates his distaste for the Vietnam War by calling attention to the various circumstances he witnesses with "death" and "pain." He does this by reliving many uncomfortable events so the reader can have a real idea of what happened in Vietnam. (as opposed to what we see on tv, etc?)

✓
nice way to bring in the quote

One group of people who suffer from O'Brien's "third evil" are the Viet Cong people. He shares an array of events which involve this group, but a few extreme occurrences stand out ^{or "to the readers"?} in my mind. For example, when Alpha Company searches a village, they do not find anything but are nervous that Charlie will attack them while they are sleeping. To prevent this, the American Lieutenants bind three elderly men to separate trees and gag them. The men remain tied there all night and when morning comes, the elderly Viet Cong men are whipped for

information (132). Another incident that O'Brien writes about occurs shortly after Alpha Company arrives in Pinkville. A woman who is suspected to be a nurse for the Viet Cong forces is mistaken for a male Viet Cong soldier, and she is shot. The American soldier who accidentally shoots her is distraught and states, "I wish I could help her" (113). Last, in July of Alpha Company's term, they are throwing grenades into bomb shelters and bunkers when a 70-year-old woman runs out of one of the bomb shelters. The innocent and elderly lady is bleeding and screaming. The medics do what they can for her, but as they carry her to the helicopter, the author writes that she had blood in her hair and eyes (150). The three old men tied to trees and beaten, the Viet Cong nurse who is mistakenly shot, and the woman in the bomb shelter who is hit by a grenade are all O'Brien's examples of the atrocities that are forced upon the Viet Cong people during the war.

O'Brien also demonstrates several examples of American soldiers suffering from the violence or "third evil," of the war. Perhaps one of his most graphic scenes takes place soon after Alpha Company enters My Kai. The soldiers are riding on the sides of tracks when rocket grenades start launching at them. The men jump off the tracks and into thick mud that barely allows them to move. This causes the American soldiers to be extremely vulnerable and exposed to Viet Cong forces. In addition, the tracks start automatically reversing in response to the fire they are encountering, and thus begin running over the immobile men (152). Another incident that causes at least one American soldier distress takes place in My Lai. When one soldier is hit and badly wounded by a landmine, another soldier is commanded to shoot the injured soldier and kill him. The American soldier who has to shoot his friend is described as "sweating, and crying, and hollering" due to the guilt and sadness he feels (124). This "third evil" is so pertinent to the American soldiers that their desire of being assigned to a rear job is described as a "gnawing,

Quoting directly would make this more effective

(and now connect this to the "third evil" → your main point)

tantalizing, hope” (172). The soldiers want these positions so bad that they will injure themselves in order to attain them (172). For the men to feel this strongly about their exodus as foot soldiers is indicative of the dreadful conditions they encounter. The disaster with the tracks, the soldier having to shoot his friend, and the excessive amount of passion the men have for leaving their foot-soldiering positions are all demonstrations of how the American soldiers are also affected by all of the “death” and “pain” that O’Brien speaks of with the chaplain.

You don't need this kind of summary sentence at the end of the ch-
move generally remind us how this fits in with your thesis

Additionally, it is evident that the author feels the children of the Viet Cong people are being unfairly involved in the war. In fact, just before he tells the chaplain that he feels “death” and “pain” are a “third evil” of the war, he directly states that with “the children being napalmed and everything- there is no good evidence that all this horror is worth preventing a change” (60). One example of the children being affected takes place during a nightly round at LZ Minuteman. The coordinates reported by a buck sergeant and the coordinates recorded by the gun crew do not match up, causing the American soldiers to fire on a small village. Thirteen villagers are killed that night, but 9 of those villagers are children between the ages two and 15 (168). The author describes another scene when a village is napalmed. He states that “There were Viet Cong in that hamlet. And there were babies and children” (120). Another appalling fact is how coldly some officers address the situation of children and civilians being killed during the war. Major Callicles states that “civilians just suffer through it [war]. They’re like unarmed soldiers-they’re dumb and they die” (194). It is my belief that O’Brien uses this statement and the other examples to show how children are mercilessly forced to be part the third evil of the war.

and this is an anti-war statement? push this!

Tim O’Brien uses his memoir to show how different groups of people are negatively affected by the Vietnam War. He includes examples of Viet Cong men and women, American soldiers, and children. The author uses these examples to demonstrate his dislike for the war,

which he also discusses with a chaplain during his training. When talking to this chaplain he states his feelings that the North and South Vietnam are both evil and goes on to describe the "third evil" of the war (60). This "third evil" is what the main part of the memoir illustrates.

this feels repetitive

Perhaps O'Brien wrote the memoir so readers will learn the atrocities of the Vietnam War and begin to side with him by disliking war.

so, he wants readers to be anti-war, too?
Works Cited You could go into this...

O'Brien, Tim. *If I Die in a Combat Zone*. New York: Broadway Books, 1975.

Kristen -

Your essay is organized and clear, and I like you focus on the "third evil." You trace this idea for the most part throughout each #, but you could do more to remind us that this is O'Brien's anti-war message creeping in. With each example of torture and women dying, he wants us to think the war is wrong, right?

On a more specific level, try for less repetition in your writing - you don't need to directly summarize your thoughts at the end of #s (or do as much in your conclusion). Instead, work to remind us of the overarching anti-war message and to push us into the next #.

Don't give away your main points early on - push us to want to keep reading and learn the full impact of the quote you focus on.

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