

If i die in a combat zone review

[War](#), [Cold War](#)



If I Die in a Combat Zone Review The 1960s was a series of ongoing changes. It was the height of the counter culture revolution, the civil rights movement the drive for higher education, middle class advancement, the " Great Society", the industrial community servicing the military, and most notably, the Vietnam war and conscription into service. The time frame of O'Briens If I Die in a Combat Zone is majorly in 1968 and O'Brien was feeling the heat from everything that was going on at this time From the very beginning Tim O'Brien stressed his opposition to the war in Vietnam. He even comes out and states at the beginning that, " The war, I though, was wrongfully conceived and poorly justified". At this time there was a massive movement against the war. This the upcoming election and Eugene McCarthy openly opposed to Vietnam it was no surprise to learn that O'Brien supported him. But supporting the antiwar movement was not enough to avoid the draft, especially for O'Brien. With protests rising and the Yippies leading major protests against the war and draft, conscription was still a major worry among the public. It was known that if you were of age and not in college then Vietnam was your next stop. Unless of course individuals could gain deferment through specific issues as did some of O'Briens friends at the time. But even with strong opposition, both morally and emotionally to the war, O'Brien still knew he had a duty and obligation to serve. In one instance when O'Brien is speaking to a chaplain regarding the war, the chaplain uses a strong example of American Exceptionalism by saying, " If you accept, as I do, that America is one helluva great country, well then, you do as she tells you". He the. Goes on to say that, " i did not wan to be a soldier, not even an observer to war. But neither did i was to upset a particular balance of the

order I knew, the people I knew, and my own private world." This again reinforced O'Brien that his duty and obligation was more important than his personal belief. This was a common bond that was found between O'Brien and other soldiers while in Vietnam. This was the bond of the citizen-soldier. The citizen-soldiers were just that. Normal citizens that were turned soldier due to conscription. Because of the similar circumstances the soldiers could relate together. There wasn't a common bond between the unsympathetic soldiers to the Vietnamese however. Mistreatment of the Vietnamese was very common. Especially with O'Brien's tour of duty being after the Tet Offensive, distrust of the Vietnamese was rampant. By the beginning of 1968, 90% of south Vietnam was under communist influence and 1/3 of the population was under communist control. This meant that the soldiers did not know who they could and couldn't trust. The mistreatment of the local population was consistent. Even on one of O'Brien's missions of a raid on a village that turned up one communist weapon, no one in the village spoke up of who's it was. So the orders were handed down and O'Brien's squad interrogated the villagers, burned the village down and took prisoners to basically act as a human shield to ensure they were not attacked for the that night. This was a common occurrence that occurred repeatedly before, during and after O'Brien's time of service. The benefits of such actions provided security for the soldiers but costs outweighed the benefits. Because of this treatment, the Vietnamese population was also distrusting of the American troops. Distrust among the locals led to decreased support for actions and the communists offers and proposals became more appealing to the local population than the American goals did, based on their actions.

Though not mentioned much in O'Brien's *If I Die in a Combat Zone* book, racial tensions were still high because of the civil rights movements going on back in the United States. During one instance a majority of the black soldiers felt disgraced and mistreated by a fellow lieutenant. The soldiers kept saying that the lieutenant's time was coming and he was "going to get it". Then it had finally happened. An explosion that erupted beneath the lieutenant that tore his lower body apart and killed him was not confirmed but rumored as a grenade fired for. One of the black soldiers that did its intended purpose of taking him out. Besides that, and even with the civil rights movement back home, there did not seem to be much more racial tensions between the soldiers themselves. They were in a common situation that bonded them together and they looked past their differences for the most part. These common words; similar situation and bond, are again what pieces together this idea of the conscripted citizen-soldier that O'Brien indeed was. The conscripted citizen-soldier was different in a way as the volunteer was. A volunteer signed up willingly for the military. This was a common thing for some because they wanted some form of control over their experience in the military. The major difference of the conscripted citizen-soldier is that there was no volunteering. O'Brien like many others who opposed involvement, hoped to not be drafted but was. Control of the situation was relinquished and failure to report was punishable. This played the major role in O'Brien's thoughts of going AWOL but overall, his pride, family and duty spoke louder than his fear and open opposition to the war. This was what O'Brien saw in the other conscripted citizen-soldiers then lead to such a strong attachment with him and the men in his unit. Others had

normal lives like O'Brien and they too were torn away from it and drafted to come to a war that as opposed by so many. There is one quote by Tim O'Brien that I feel sums this all up. He states, " Courage is nothing to laugh at, not if it is proper courage and exercised by right men who know what they do is proper. Proper courage is wise courage. It's acting wisely, acting wisely when fear would have a man act otherwise. It is the endurance of the soul in spite of fear." In a time that was going through so many changes and problems as the 1960s, I believe that this is a quote that speaks the truth above all else. Not just about the Vietnam war but also the courage of all those who sought for equal rights, opposed the war and stood up for what they believed was right even though there were fearful consequences for them taking such a stand and actions. In a world where so much wrong was happening, the citizens, soldiers and activists stood for change, exemplified courage and banded together to do what was right.