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HST 195
Assignment 2

A common theme that I found very interesting between persons on both sides of the war was the theme of that many enemy soldiers appeared to respect each other because there was an understanding that the war was not their doing but it was a causation of being misled by leaders. The soldiers on both sides disagreed with why the other was fighting them. The Viet-Cong were fighting for independence, the Americans were fighting to stop the spread of communism, yet I'm not sure both sides understood each other at the time. What they did understand is that Americans have leaders, and Vietnamese have leaders. Those leaders had them fighting this war and that it was the duty of each soldier on both sides to shoot at the enemy. I chose this theme because I found it interesting that some of the soldiers displayed that level of understanding. It would seem that it would be very easy, even after the war for many of the soldiers to continue hating the other. Dehumanization plays a large role in wars and I was interested to find that there seemed to be a respect soldiers on both sides had for the enemy soldiers. This is important because it shows the possibility of growth. If both sides continue hating each other than the war really solved nothing, even if it didn't it is important that people involved can look back and understand that and seek reconciliation.

The first story I read that I felt followed this theme was Jim Soular's part in "Free-Fire Zone." Throughout the story you realize that this guy was a good solid soldier. He worked hard and really knew how to do what he was supposed to. "I've always considered myself a good soldier." The way he spoke about the war was interesting to me. He didn't seem too affected by it at first. He said "And I loved war. I can't deny that. I loved it." Then as things continued the war started to unravel for him. In response to the court-martial hearing he said, "to the military, a goddamn chopper was worth three times more than David." So here we have a good soldier who does what he is told and the war ends up unraveling for him because of the people in charge. He then goes into saying, "I realized that I don't hate the Vietnamese. All I have is this deep, deep sense of sorrow that this whole thing happened." Vietnamese are no longer the enemy the war itself is. The soldiers look back on

the war and don't feel hate for one another, even though they may have partook in horrible things. They look back in regret that the war happened. "We might have learned so much from them instead of learning nothing and doing so much damage."

The next story I read that followed this theme really put it in more concrete terms. When the pilot Luu Huy Chao in Air War spoke to another American pilot at the end of the story he said, "We were only soldiers, we didn't cause the war." I find it powerful that this understanding was shared. Two people who were once enemies now can look back and realize the war really wasn't about the American soldiers. "American pilots had to obey their commanders. That's a fact." I found it interesting that some of the stories shared the same type of blue print. A soldier first recounts the war, all the horrible things that happened to them and the people around him or her. And then they reflect on the war as a whole. Sometimes they will reflect on the enemy, usually not with hate but with understanding and respect. Luu Huy Chao goes onto saying, "As a fighter pilot I'm not sorry to have shot down American jets, and American pilots shouldn't be sorry if they shot down Vietnamese aircraft." This really shows that he has no lasting anger towards Americans. He only has anger towards the fact that the war took place. Again the enemies aren't the soldiers on both sides of the war, the enemies are what those soldiers represented which was driven and commanded by the United States government, not the people. "Now my only wish is that there be no war."

The last story that applied to this theme was a little different. This is because Fred Branfman from the section "Air War" was not actually a soldier and he speaks about Laos instead of Vietnam. Of course both countries are tied together, Branfman exposed that the United States was bombing northern Laos since 1964. The part of his story that applies to this theme, like the other stories, is towards the end of his part. Being not a military man he shares a perspective that is rooted more in anti war activism than the others. He says "At a very deep level we were betrayed by our elders." Branfman has an understanding that the soldiers involved in the war, even the pilots that dropped the bombs that he fought so hard to stop were not the ones to blame. The fault lies with the commanders that made the decision to carry out this war to the extent they did. He even feels sorry for soldiers "Many vets were the most angry. I think a lot of them know how they were sold out by their leaders who never really cared whether they lived or died."

The theme at a whole portrays a very important picture of war itself. I included three stories from three people who were all completely different. Two were soldiers from either side of the war. They both have very similar views about one another. Both were just soldiers following their commanders. The third perspective is more of an overall perspective of the war. An antiwar activist who

attempted to shed light on what the United States was doing in Laos. There are extremely important lessons that we should take away from this theme. Misguided wars should be prevented at all cost. The people involved should be listened to and learned from. Intelligent people take lessons from the past to make better decisions for the future. Branfman said, "The most disturbing legacy of the war is that we don't teach our children that our country is capable of conducting mass murder of civilians." Lessons like these need to be taught. The problem is war is a terrible thing and people generally don't like to hear about terrible things. Our leaders don't like to shed light on the fact that Branfman brings up. Until the humans of this world face the realities and mistakes of our past wars will continue and new great regrets will develop. "An error doesn't become a mistake until you refuse to correct it" - Orlando A Battista

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