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For me, the theme that I found running through all the stories we read in Part Three: Escalations was the tenacity of humans to seek out life even in the worst situations. I'm not talking about simply the condition of existing. I'm talking about actively pursuing activities, relationships and situations that appeal to their idea of a good life. The accounts of Harlan S. Pinkerton Jr., Bobbie Keith, and Nguyen Thi Kim Chuy painted an especially vivid picture of what it looks like to pursue what you find to be the most fulfilling despite the circumstances. In these stories, it's like war isn't real life. War is an overriding mode that one adopts in order to achieve an air pocket of satisfactory circumstances in which real life is lived, if only for a moment. If people have to go to war to protect that air pocket, they might as well attempt to live how they normally would when they can. Just because they're at war doesn't mean that those base desires go away. In a lot of cases, those base desires turn into a relief system.

Harlan S. Pinkerton Jr.'s account was the first account that I read that turned me on to this theme. In the beginning of his interview, he describes the joy he finds in takeoff, and then describes the bombing procedures. After that, the next half of the printed interview talks almost entirely about life on-base after flights. "On most days, you'd get up, go fly, come back, get debriefed, go back to the squadron to see if there was anything else you had to do, and then you were free to do whatever you wanted." From the interview, you get the feeling that Harlan spent quite a bit of time drinking and basically doing whatever he felt like doing. But he never shirked his duties as a pilot. "You may have felt bad [from a hangover] but you never canceled a flight unless you were sick from something other than alcohol." I think that if he were in the United States he would probably be living much the same life. This is most exemplified in this quote: "My country had made the decision that we were going to take part in that conflict over there and it was my duty to my country to follow the orders. And if I was going to serve, I wanted to serve in a way I considered first-class. I wasn't gonna dig ditches. I wasn't gonna polish the brass on my uniform. And I can't complain about my orders. What more can you ask for? One, you're an officer and, two, you're a fighter pilot. You're a walking god. That was it." What he considered first-class in life was the party life. Chasing girls, drinking all night and having fun while juggling his duties was the way he wanted to do things at

that point in his life. And he did.

The second account that struck me as representing this theme was Bobby Keith's interview and her stories about R and R. These guys coming from the war would get their hotel room complete with their own girl for \$16 a day. "They fall in love, taste a little freedom, have a good time, pick up their souvenirs and then, dammit, they have to go back to the war. How fair is that?" These soldiers would get this taste of life that the U. S. wants them to have to increase their morale. I'm sure that those few days that they had off from the fighting emulated something close to the lives they would be living back at home if they could. This R and R taste of life became a relief for them. It was meant to encourage those soldiers to keep on fighting for the life they want to live, and help make that life secure for their fellow Americans as well.

And finally, the third account that represented this theme was that of Nguyen Thi Kim Chuy. In one part she says, "We saw many soldiers traveling down the Truong Son. They loved us because we were courageous girls and worked so hard. When the Americans came to bomb us our boyfriends were very eager to protect us, but it was just innocent romance. No babies were born. Even if we wanted to do more, how could we? We lived apart from the boy volunteers and most of the soldiers moved on so quickly to the South. We didn't have much time together." This small section of her interview reveals a deep desire in the Vietnamese to find love with someone to marry and have a family with. This reveals that the Vietnamese want much the same things we as Americans do. We want safety and security for our families, and most importantly, love. Even in those impossibly hard times where Nguyen and her friends were doing what they had to do to help the war effort, they still found ways to express and deal with their emotions and desires.

In the long run, two entities that are in an ideological conflict generally want the same things, but idealize them in different ways. In this way, we can see that Americans and the Vietnamese are very much the same. We all want a good life. Nobody wants to suffer. But conflict becomes a contest of endurance. Who can withstand as much suffering as the other can inflict to prove their ideals of a good life are better? That's what war is about. In their own ways, Harlan S. Pinkerton Jr., Bobbie Keith, and Nguyen Thi Kim Chuy and their friends all chose their paths to what they thought was a good life even though their lives were engulfed by chaos. This is the human struggle.

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