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determination

Webster defines determination as "the quality of being resolute or firm in purpose". I chose determination as my theme because it was a common thread among the three stories I chose to write about. I was able to read 40 of the 43 stories and came up with 9 themes to choose from. "Determination" which not only defines my personal view on the Vietnam war, but also relates directly to sheer determination of those involved in the conflict to believe very strongly in what they were fighting for. From central highlands, I chose "*Man, if we are up against this, it's gonna be a long-ass year*" by Dennis Deal. From Air War, I chose Fred Branfman's "*What would it be like to hide in a cave day after day for five years?*" And finally, for the Vietnamese perspective, from prisoners of war, I chose "*They tried to make us say, 'down with president Ho!'*" by Truong My Hoa. My goal is therefore an attempt on my part, to convince my teacher and fellow students why I personally believe this is the most coherent and reasonable theme.

Dennis Deal introduces us to Henry Herricks, platoon leader who when faced with heavy fire power, makes a choice of joining with the sister platoon. His judgment is put to a test when a few North Vietnamese standing up and shaking trees attempt to get his attention. It is sheer determination on Henry's part to go after the North Vietnamese. It is reasonable to assume that Henry knew the odds were stacked against him, because the author describes it this way "there were a thousand bullets coursing through that small area looking for a target-a thousand bullets a second". As determined as the men were to join Henry's platoon, so were the North Vietnamese, who as we have learned in part three of the text, strongly believed they were tactically superior to Americans.

Another man who was determined, and perfectly meets the theme of my story is Calvin Bouknight, the medic. Given the odds of survival in his platoon, anyone might have deemed the situation hopeless. In the heat of battle, we are told of four of the five men that he successfully treated. More important was his determination to protect his patients. He did this by placing his body between the continuous sheets of heavy fire and the man he was treating. He, in every sense of the word was determined to save another person's

life.

Another incident that stood out in my mind as full of determination and heroism, is the time during the heat of battle when Dennis Deal finds himself surrounded by four to six men dressed in mustard khaki. As he says it best,..... " I had this Darwinian type feeling-a survival- of- the -fittest type thing- which said, if you don't turn around this second, you are going to be dead". With determination and some measure of luck, he killed all of them. In this battle, 450 Americans of the 1st cavalry division were surrounded by three North Vietnamese regiments- a force of more than two thousand. It was fought in the Ia Drang Valley of the Central Highlands. It was through determination that the men of the 1st cavalry division prevailed.

The second story opens up with two opposing determination perspectives. On one hand, are the Americans, so determined to crush all outcroppings of communism in the region, that they resorted to secretly bombing northern Laos. President Johnson and his closest allies were so determined to stop the spread of communism in southeast Asia that they were willing to expend everything at their disposal including American lives, and yes, peasant farmers who were considered collateral damage to achieve what eventually turned out to be political ideals than the threat and destabilization and resulting imbalance of power that had been used to lure Americans into supporting the war.

On the other hand, are the peasants determined to survive the secret bombings of their country by digging L- shaped underground tunnels where they hid during the day for periods lasting as long as five years. The target of the bombings was able to elude the enemy by hiding under forest cover determined to not only survive the American bombings and their superior air power, but to tactfully prevail. The Pathet Lao, who were Laotian communists were the primary target of the air campaign. As the author puts it,....."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". The determination of the peasants and the Pathet Lao made them survive the American bombings.

The Truong My Hoa story opens with a very strong ideology and political commitment and determination to communism that, it would rival the commitment of any patriotic American to capitalism. She was committed to communism at an early age of 15 when she strongly started participating in the revolution. Her imprisonment, which lasted eleven years with a variety of torture techniques, didn't break her spirit. Her unwavering support of Ho Chi Minh is a

strong evidence of the communism ideology that she was ready to sacrifice her life for. Most of her fellow prisoners either died from the torture inflicted by the Ngo Dinh Diem regime, or were disabled through torture and punishment. Even though she was broken down with her determination running on the equivalent of an automobile on fumes of gas, they were not able to break her spirit nor, her political will.

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