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History 195

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The Bloodline of the War

The Ho Chi Minh Trail was considered one of the great achievements of military engineering of the 20th century. It's intricate web of roads, trails, and waterways amount to over 10,000 miles in length carving through Laos and Cambodia to the front lines of battle. During the span of the war over one million North Vietnamese troops traveled down it and a countless amount of supplies and resources. The journey took anywhere from 3 to 6 months to complete, testing the strength and health of ever person who traveled it. Throughout Part 3 (Escalations) I came across stories of the Ho Chi Minh trail that described how it gave the North a key leverage in the war that I was unaware of. This key leverage came with great hardship for the young volunteers who risked their life while maintaining the roads. American strategist saw the importance of the Ho Chi Minh trail and made it a daily bombing target. The Ho Chi Minh trail was a War within a War as I see it. Without it the history of Vietnam wouldn't be the same.

The story of Nguyen Thi Kim Chuy; Part Three, 105-106 is an example of the Ho Chi Minh trail and the graphic images the teen volunteers witnessed. Each paragraph she tells is a moment of hardship with no light on the situation. I was hoping for a happy ending, but it wasn't there. Her story is the type that reminds me how nothing should be taken for granted. At such a young age she experienced things most couldn't imagine. "I saw with my own eyes a bomb drop into a shelter hole. Everyone stopped working and rushed there, screaming and crying...Our arms were smeared with blood. There were five people in the shelter. Four of them just turned to porridge." (105). I want to know what kept her going through the trauma, but she never mentioned what kept her driven. Was it the thought of her boyfriend after the war? Was it her young patriotism? After reading the story I'm left with all grief because how she described her time carving the Ho Chi Minh trail. Her story is a reminder of how the War affected everyone. Vietnamese, American, young, old, soldier, civilian. No light was shining on her

and her experiences and she didn't try to sugarcoat life on the Ho Chi Minh trail because it was a grueling time. Even though she came home after the war the Ho Chi Minh trail took her life.

Walt Whitman Rostow; Part Three 124-127 one of the leading "Hawks" in the Kennedy & Johnson administration and advocate of the American military escalations saw the potential of shutting down the Ho Chi Minh Trail to gain a quick victory. "A rational view would say the North Vietnamese couldn't beat us if we cut the Ho Chi Minh Trail." (126). It sounds like a good move and he proposed the idea to the president and other superiors, but was shut down by the rules of engagement. Rostow understood without the trail the North would lose supplies, without supplies the soldiers would weaken, and without soldiers the war was over. "If we had cut the trail, it wouldn't have taken very long to win the war because all the supplies came from the North. The Viet Cong didn't produce anything by themselves-not even a Saturday Night Special." (125). A version of his plan did happen, but it was by the South Vietnamese that were not equipped or strong enough as Rostow's vision and it ended in a entire division lose. You can't rewrite history, but what if Rostow's full plan went into action. Would it have ended the war? Or would it have drawn China into the war? Possible started nuclear war against China and Soviet Union? It's uncertain what the outcome would have been, but it all revolved around stopping the blood flow of the Ho Chi Minh Trail the lifeline for the North.

The story of Vu Hy Thieu; Part Three 190-194 was a little different than the others. He started from the begging on the Ho Chi Minh Trail and even though it wasn't the main focus of his story many of his life changing events happened while traveling it. His job as an artist brought him down the Ho Chi Minh Trail like the million other Northerners and experienced much of the stealth traveling to avoid bombing. But he witnessed a deadly bombing "I saw one convoy of four hundred people killed." (191). His time on the trail was five months where he lived primitively and packed light like everyone else. His story shows the resilience of the Northerners and their dedication to ending in victory. They used their creativity to survive "we learned to cook without producing smoke...we made necklaces and bracelets from the handles of pots and pans and exchanged them for food." (191-192). The willingness to endure harsh environments and circumstances for the good of the North shows the patriotism Thieu possessed and every other Northerner who traveled the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Reading about the trail and the events of death, sickness, and struggle makes me wonder why they put themselves through such a trek. I see it being for the Northerners a deep devotion to your country and being a spiritual

hike. The Ho Chi Minh Trail was the heart of the War.

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