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At the heart of every war is fear. Fear manifests itself differently through every individual. Fear can make one man a coward and another man a hero. In war sometimes one's greatest fear is the fear of failure. When a soldier is getting ready to deploy, a lot of times his/her greatest fear is the fear of the unknown. How people deal with their fear can define them as a person. As I read through part three of "Patriots" it became apparent that fear was one of the biggest elements entwined in the Vietnam War. When I step back and look at the war as a whole I can see how fear played a major role in every facet of the war. The fear of communism was the biggest reason we went to Vietnam in the first place. The fear of losing was the biggest reason we stayed for so long. The fear of more troops dying, and our nation revolting was one reason why we pulled out. The reason I chose fear as my theme for this paper is because fear was at the foundation for almost everything that happened in the Vietnam War. Fear can be positive or negative, depending on how one reacts to it. Franklin Delanore Roosevelt once said, "The only thing to fear is fear itself." As I read these stories I realized how true his statement really was.

Helen Tennant Hegelheimer's story revealed a lot about how fear was at the center of the soldier's mind. She also showed that fear was very much a part of the people's lives it was to support these soldiers. She said that, "Our real job was to distract them at all costs, to get their mind away from where they were going. If that meant flirting with them a little bit, so what?" I enjoyed her perspective because she was some one who saw soldier's fears everyday. She saw how different soldiers would react to their fear of the unknown as she states that, "I saw eyes full of fear, some with real terror. And maybe this sounds crazy, but I saw death in some of those eyes. At that moment, at the top of the ramp, I was their wife, their sister, their

girlfriend, and for those troops who had no one else-and there were many-I was their mother.” The women in her crew dealt with fear by sometimes crying when the soldiers left, or drinking themselves under the table when they got to Japan. “We never showed any emotion in front of the troops but we sure drank a lot when we got back to Japan. We substituted booze for crying.” This substitution she talks about was prevalent in Vietnam as well as back home. Drug use or alcohol use is one way to cope with fear. Her story also showed that a fear of going home was also very common in soldiers. When people think of war they usually assume that a fear of the unknown means going into combat, but one dark truth about war is that sometimes coming home is even harder, and her story did an excellent job of portraying that. The fear of coming home is captured in her story as she claims, “They weren’t just afraid of swearing in front of their mothers; they were afraid their mothers would be able to tell everything they had done in Vietnam. I think this was a big reason why so many veterans just shut down and wouldn’t talk about the war to anyone.” Hegalbeimer’s account was holistic in how it portrayed the face of fear. Her account showed that fear has many faces, and that people react differently when fear comes their way.

In my Psychology class we looked over what is called the “fight or flight response.” It occurs when someone is faced with something that threatens them. As I read Dennis Deal’s account I thought about how fear can turn some men into heroes and others into cowards. He talked about how a leader should react to fear, and why it’s so important. He admits that, “It was terrifying. I was terrified almost to the point of insanity. But what you have to do when you’re a leader and everybody’s looking at you is to figure out a way to pull out that extra millimeter of courage. All you need is one more millimeter than the guys around you and they’re okay. But if you show failure, they’re going to stampede.” As he shared multiple examples of bravery, I noticed that he discussed one element fear I hadn’t thought about, and that’s how fear

can be directed into a persuasive weapon when one shows that he/she can stand up and face it. Displaying fear produces fear. Displaying no fear drowns fear. My point is that the only way fear spreads is if it is displayed, if it is hidden, it will vanish. Dennis Deal's story supports this theory.

A few years back I was at Fort Bragg, and my unit was going over what one should do if they became a P.O.W. I thought about the training I received as I read the last story I will discuss, and that's the story of Truong My Hoa. I remember how I was taught to avoid giving up any information to the enemy at any cost. Truong My Hoa was a perfect example of the dedication a P.O.W. should display while being detained. It's also a perfect example of an individual finding a way to cope with fear. I can't think of anything scarier than being detained by the enemy and tortured during a war. The way she dealt with the situation shows that one can smother fear even in the worst kind of circumstances. "Over the years I underwent a lot of interrogation and torture. I was beaten with a police bludgeon and an electric whip. My hands were put in an electric vise. My hands, legs, and fingertips were hammered with nails." Her story shows the darkest depths of fear. Her story also shows that even in the most extreme circumstances, one can overcome their worst fears and be courageous. Once again, it has a lot to do with how much fear is displayed by the individual. Displaying fear produces fear. Displaying no fear drowns fear. Truong My Hoa showed that even the worst things imaginable don't have to produce fear if you don't let them.

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