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In reading part 4 of the book by Christian Appy, "Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered from All Sides" the Tet Offensive is an obvious turning point in the war. Another turning point that is less easy to define is the My Lai massacre. In Christian Appy's book, he includes the stories of two different people. One is Larry Colburn, an American helicopter door-gunner who stopped some of the killing in the village. Another is of Michael Bernhardt, a member of the company who committed the massacre. The story of Larry Colburn is most illustrative of the turning point in the war that My Lai represents.

Colburn does not represent himself as pro-war or anti-war in his narrative. As he says "We weren't pacifists. We did our job and when we had to kill people we did. But we didn't do it for sport. We didn't randomly shoot people. In our gun company it was very important to capture weapons, not just to legitimize your kill, but psychologically it was easier when you could say 'If I didn't do that, he was going to shoot me.'" The reader is not directly given Colburn's opinion on the war, but it is clear that he felt he had a job to do and was to a degree justified in doing it.

Colburn begins to tell the story of what happened on the day of the My Lai massacre, March 16, 1968. As his company was working the perimeter of the village, they noticed wounded villagers and piles of dead bodies. Colburn was not able to make any sense of this until he saw a young girl killed. "...we saw a young girl about twenty years old lying in the grass. We could see that she was unarmed and wounded in the chest. We marked her with smoke...the smoke was green meaning it's safe to approach...Captain Medina came over, kicked her, stepped back, and finished her off...When we saw Medina do that, it all clicked. It was our guys doing the killing."

With this event, Colburn began to view the war differently. Prior to the My Lai massacre he described the war as a job, and killing was part of that job. After his experience, he describes a different view of the war. My Lai was a personal turning point for him. Colburn saw what the war was doing to soldiers, and that for some killing was revenge. "They'd lost men to booby traps and snipers and they were ready to engage...They didn't capture any weapons. They didn't kill any draft age males...It's something I've struggled with my whole life, how people can do that." At the end of his narrative, there are two brief paragraphs about what happened after the My Lai massacre. Colburn talks about the moment that he realized there would be no justice for the people who died. Clearly, his viewpoint of the war before the My Lai massacre and after it are dramatically different, with the importance of what happened remaining with him his entire life.

The My Lai massacre was not just a turning point for Larry Colburn. It was also a turning point for the American people and their attitudes toward the war. In his introduction to the My Lai stories, Appy says that "... My Lai eventually brought a turning point in American attitudes almost as significant as the Tet Offensive. Millions who had believed the war was a misguided policy or a tragic mistake began to consider the possibility that it was fundamentally unjust and immoral." My Lai demonstrated that some Americans had begun to feel hostile toward all Vietnamese, not just those they were fighting against. (Herring 260) The My Lai massacre may not have been "the" turning point in the war, but for Larry Colburn and millions of Americans it was an important turning point in attitudes toward the war.

The most obvious ending to the war is the fall of Saigon. Morton Halperin's story is representative of an 'ending' to the war, but a different kind of ending. This account demonstrates an ending of policies and beliefs regarding the war. Halperin was the deputy assistant secretary of defense at the end of the Johnson administration. One of his tasks included heading a Vietnam Task Force that reviewed war policy. Halperin says that before the review "...I'd sit in meetings and there were people in the room with profoundly different views about what was going on and what to do about it but we never talked about it. Everybody was very polite and the discussion was all about immediate, operational issues, not fundamental questions." Clark Clifford, the secretary of defense, "...began raising at the highest levels questions that had been avoided for years. He demanded of Wheeler and Westmoreland precise information on how the additional troops might be deployed and what results could be expected. He instructed his civilian advisers to study all the implications of the request and to review possible alternatives." (Herring 236) This was an end to Westmoreland's 'free hand' in Vietnam.

Halperin's account also represents another ending in Vietnam policy. The 'domino theory' had been the basis for US policy in Vietnam since the beginning of the war. Clifford discovered that "...none of the countries in the region shared our view about dominoes...the dominoes didn't believe in the domino effect." The end of the 'domino theory' as US policy raised fundamental questions about American involvement in the war.

According to Appy, the war policy review by the Vietnam Task Force convinced Clifford that the war was unwinnable. Clifford said "I see more and more fighting with more and more casualties on the U.S. side and no end in sight to the action". Halperin's account does not illustrate the end of the Vietnam War. What it does give is 'endings' to US policy. Those endings are representative of an end to the Vietnam War because they fundamentally changed the war and views of it.

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