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Assignment 1

HST 195 – Escobar

Part One:

The story of Bernard Trainor was most interesting. The story was interesting because Trainor had a different perspective on how the war should be fought as compared to General William C. Westmoreland. My main interest, however, was that Trainor had two tours in Vietnam which provided him with a broader perspective of the events. He was able to see the effects of the war in the beginning when there was more enthusiasm for, and trust in, the activities of the South Vietnamese and American soldiers. When he returned a few years later, he witnessed the distrust of the Southern Vietnamese and the exhaustion of the American soldiers. Most of the people that Trainor encountered after his first tour were certain that Westmoreland's strategy was not the answer to Vietnam's problems and that a strategy of collaboration would be far more affective. However, in Bernard Trainor's conclusion it seems that ultimately America entered into a war misunderstanding, or entirely ignorant of, the ultimate goals of the Southern Vietnam government.

Because of Bernard Trainor's multiple tours and his time spent teaching at the Command and Staff College, as well as his position within the Marines, his account bears a greater level of reliability. Trainor was fighting alongside his men, but he was in charge of men's activities and bore responsibility for their lives. His position gave him a middle-ground perspective as he was high enough on the totem pole to understand the objectives of the Americans, but not so far removed from the battle as to not see and hear the reaction of those within the battle. Also, Trainor interacted with men returning from service in Vietnam to the United States. He listened to the experiences of these men to further formulate his perspective on the activities of the war. "You could see the disillusionment and unhappiness that officers returning from Vietnam had toward

Westmoreland's strategy of search-and-destroy" (Appy, 5). Finally, upon his return to Vietnam in 1970, he was able to compare the present to the past on the issues of trust and method-effectiveness. Trainor does an excellent job of recounting both positive and negative moments during his service. He tells of America's "holy crusade to stop the spread of godless Communism and to give the budding democracy in South Vietnam an opportunity to take root" (Appy, 4). But he also mentions the devastating blow to the faith of the Vietnamese after they returned from an ill-advised mission. It "really did a great deal of damage to our credibility. These people were going up north based on their trust in the accuracy and dependability of American intelligence" (Appy, 5).

Part Two:

The story that Paul Kattenburg told was the most disappointing. Kattenburg's tone was, from the beginning, very negative and critical. It portrayed our country's leaders as ignorant and uncaring. "It was robot-thinking about Communism and no distinctions were being made. It was technocratic talk" (Appy, 82). It creates within the reader a sense of severe disappointment, disapproval, and distrust in our country's leadership. Kattenburg portrays our leaders as arrogant and desensitized. Many of the people making the major decisions for the war in Vietnam were entirely ignorant of the history, customs, and culture of the area and disregarded anyone who challenged their theories for development in Vietnam. This is disappointing because it makes it harder to trust in our leaders, or at least trust that they will listen to outside, educated opinions on major issues. The only good that seems to be present in Paul Kattenburg's story is the presence of someone who was unwavering in his beliefs and willing to put his career on the line to voice his concerns. He possessed conviction and determination in regard to his cause.

In the story told by Luyen Nguyen a man's perseverance is inspiring. He lived by, and suffered because of, his convictions. Also, he had a deep sense of love and respect for his wife and family. Knowing that his wife acknowledged the anniversary of his death each year, he refused to write from prison because: "All of them believe I'm dead and their tears are dry. I don't want to make them cry again" (Appy, 97). Nguyen's story, though

sad, also lends a more human side to the war. It creates a more personal connection to the war and thereby invokes another level of interest. The emotional and physical suffering of Luyen Nguyen also invokes a level of compassion that is more difficult to assume from a story about a man who was merely removed from one lofty government position to a less lofty position. The dedication Nguyen displays toward the Vietnamese soldiers is inspiring. For him the war was about more than political advances. The war was about earning the freedom and independence of the Vietnamese people.