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Joe Escobar – HST 195

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Assignment 1

Each of the interviews in part one of the Appy book had a powerful story to tell. However, there was one story that grabbed my attention more than the others. The actions that are detailed in the interview of Roger Donlon paint a clear picture of what a true American hero is. During the interview Appy describes Donlon as a man “with broad shoulders and a firm jaw, he looks like he could be an aging star of movie westerns.” There are many ways one can define a soldier, but one of the truest definitions is someone who fights for the man next to them. This definition is described several times throughout the interview. Donlon’s continual fight for the man next to him was what earned him the Medal of Honor. The way in which he describes his experiences in Vietnam is captivating; visuals of the reading begin to flow through the mind. “Early in the attack, George Tuan, one of our Vietnamese interpreters, was running like mad to his assigned mortar pit. Part way there a 57-millimeter round caught him right at the knees and took his legs off. He just kept running on the stumps. Within about thirty seconds he was dead.” This quote is just one of the several examples that has powerful imagery associated with it. Donlon went into Vietnam with the look of a great American soldier and left a great American Hero. Throughout the reading, the creditability of the information was never in question. The fact that he was surrounded by his fellow soldiers throughout his story, as well as the fact that he received the Medal of Honor, adds an extreme amount of creditability to his story. His account of what happened seems to be factual and does not seem to favor any side other than the truth.

Paul Kattenburg’s story was one of the most disappointing stories in part two. This did not have anything to do with Kattenburg himself, but in the way he talks about the clear and blatant arrogance policy makers and leaders of the United States when dealing with Vietnam. “But what struck me more than anything else was just the abysmal ignorance around the table

of the particular facts of Vietnam, their ignorance of the actual place.” It is frustrating to read about all of the atrocities that took place during the Vietnam War era, and to then to read a story about a individual who tried to pass along information that could have helped to avoid some of these atrocities, but was instead ignored or ostracized from his position all together. In his story there is a quote by President Kennedy, “When it’s too hot in the kitchen, get out of the kitchen.” In his situation it was applied that if you don’t believe that the war is going the way you believe it should, quit. However this quote could and should have been applied to the overall war. There were far too many people being killed and the United States should have gotten out of there much sooner. In reality we should have never been involved in the capacity we were, but during the time Kattenburg is talking about we were already there.

The story of Ngo Vihn Long was an inspirational one. It was surprising and refreshing to read a story where something good had came out of a time and place filled with so much bad. Through the teachings of his father, Long became an enlightened person who didn’t seem to hold any preconceived notions about the world around him. While most Vietnamese might have hated the French, he understood that all of the atrocities that were committed in his country were done by French Policy and not by the French people as a whole. His view of the world and openness to seek out the truth seemed to guide him throughout his travels. The readings thus far have shown that while it took only a handful of people to wreak utter havoc and destruction upon Vietnam, it was the combined effort of thousands of people like Long that helped get the Vietnamese people through the war. These people were not the ones who were fighting with guns, but rather with their voices. There is a difference. It seems as if every person starts off wanting to do what is best for their people, but somewhere along the road they often change. They find that to attain their own achievements they have to sacrifice their individual beliefs of what is right and wrong.