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Assignment 2

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 In Christian Appy's book Patriots, the collection of interviews in Part Four, The Turning Point, signify a range of actual turning points in the war people experienced. From soldiers to journalists, civilians to the president, each has their own view on what they see as being the turning point of the Vietnam War. While reading through part four, the massacre at My Lai really hit me as being a major turning point of the war. Not a turning point in terms of getting upper hand in military strategy towards winning the war, but a turning point in the minds of soldiers and Americans back home. Appy summed this up quite well "^{shaking} millions who had believed the war a misguided policy or a tragic mistake began to consider the possibility that it was fundamentally unjust and immoral." A message that has been stated several times through the readings was that the war would be won on the streets of the United States, not in the jungles of Vietnam. The My Lai incident was just another nudge on the minds of the American people that the war was wrong and that we should have never gotten involved in the capacity that we did.

The accounts of Larry Colburn on the incident (massacre) at My Lai seemed to give a very detailed, graphic, and truthful picture of what happened. His role in the war being an aerial recon scout gave him, more so than many others, an accurate window in the events that took place. During his scouting mission on March 16, 1968 he witnessed U.S. soldiers killing unarmed, wounded Vietnamese civilians at point blank range. "Then 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 because we saw a squad not too far away. The smoke was green meaning it's safe to approach. Red would have meant the opposite. We were hovering six feet off the ground not more than twenty feet away when Captain Medina came over, kicked her, stepped back, and finished her off. He did it right in front of us. When we saw Medina do that, it all clicked. It was our guys doing the killing." (Appy 347) What Coburn witnessed that day for by all accounts in his interview was the transformation of U.S. soldiers into cold blooded killers.

nicely done...
just enough narrative with more analysis


The thought process of many of the soldiers involved in the mass killings at My Lai probably varied greatly from as simple as these were my orders and I will carry them out to the best of my ability, to these people have killed so many of my friends and everyone one of them deserves to die. While these thoughts might have been going through the soldiers minds at the time, In the years that followed as the news of what had happened at My Lai began to get out, this event clearly shows a turning point in the way Americans back home viewed the war in Vietnam.

Having data for evidence?

Similar to trying to find the turning point of the Vietnam War, trying to find the ending of the war is just as difficult. This difficulty comes when looking at the ending of the war from many different points of view. While reading through the interviews in Part five which is titled Endings, my understanding of what really represented the ending of the war began to expand. As mentioned in our instructions for this assignment, from a historical and numbers standpoint the end of the Vietnam War was the fall of Saigon in 1975. But when you think about how a war is fought, it is obvious that a war cannot be fought without people, and the support of the people in fighting the war began to wither away long before 1975.

In Judith Coburn's interview she talks about many of her experiences as a journalist during the Vietnam War. However before she ever went into Vietnam she had some idea of just how bad things were. During a conversation she overheard between her father, the secretary of defense, and a U.S. senator, she learned how of just how much control military leaders had lost over their men. Senator Symington recalled a conversation he had with a colonel in Vietnam "I'll tell you, mainly I have the feeling that one day soon if I lead my men into battle I might turn around and they won't be there." This recount of how far the leadership in Vietnam had fallen felt like a sign that the end was near. The end being that the soldiers fighting the war had had about enough. They were tired of being sent into battle with a high probability that they would be killed or severely wounded for a reason they could not comprehend as being just. For this colonel, simply being left behind would have been great compared to some of the other methods enlisted men were using to get rid of their commanding officer. The Henry Rollins case was another example Coburn described as being a situation where enlisted men openly refused orders from a commanding officer and got away with it without penalties. Rollins punched his superior after being given an order to put his uniform hat on. In one of the first court martial hearings ever, Rollins was tried by a jury of his peers and subsequently acquitted of the charges.

Since the Tet offensive in 1968, the morale of the U.S. soldiers in Vietnam was declining at an increasing rate. It was quite amazing to read the history of the war as it progressed and alongside read interviews from people such as Coburn who describe downward spin of operations in Vietnam. While these experiences cannot be said to be the same ^{the US} throughout the entire American military in Vietnam after 1968, it is amazing that ^{we} were able to keep the war going for as long as we did. The will for many soldiers to continue fighting the war ended long before the U.S. finally pulled out of Vietnam ending the war. ^{No 1 P}

As with Part 1, don't hesitate to include historical data that you refer to here, to strengthen your claims.

Overall, very good paper
- well written
- convincing