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Kate Kendrick

Assignment 1

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Joe Escobar

The story in Part One of the Patriots book that captured my attention was that of the female Vietnamese soldier, Tran Thi Gung. Since I am an American, it is always interesting to me to hear the opinions of citizens of countries that we were once at war with because their understanding of the war is usually much different than mine. Gung's recollection of her time spent fighting in the Vietnam War is completely different than any story I've heard, mostly because she had no remorse for the massive amounts of killing she did. Gung states, "if I went to America and killed people there, I would feel very sorry and guilty. Since the Americans came to my country, I don't feel guilty." It was shocking to me at first to read her tales of ruthless bombings and bloodshed of our American soldiers. Gung described these acts like they were simply part of a job, and as if the soldiers were not people at all, but objects to destroy and conquer. The idea she had of Americans made me pass judgment on Gung at first, but after I thought about what I had read of her childhood, I was able to sympathize more with her. She was taught her entire life that the Viet Cong was fighting to free the Vietnamese people, and she was a first hand witness to the pain and starvation that the French and Americans caused. After her father was killed, Gung devoted her life to fighting for the same cause her father fought for, and that is exactly what she did. Gung describes, "I believed my mission in life was to continue my father's cause, so in 1963 when I was seventeen, I joined the guerillas." It is intriguing to me, being able to put myself in the mind set of someone on the opposing side of my country, because it helps to understand that Americans are not always the "good guys". Sometimes we are misinformed as a whole, and people like Gung were simply trying to defend their lifestyle, culture and freedom. Gung's story of her time in the war seems completely factual and believable to me, because she was part of a fighting side during the war that I have heard nothing about. During my lifetime I have only heard about the American's point of view of the war in which the Vietnamese were "wrong", and to hear the tales of the other side is

eye-opening. I don't feel that there is any amount of time that could make someone who fought in a war, especially someone who killed many people, forget any of the important details. Even though Gung is now an older woman and decades have passed since the Vietnam War, I believe **everything** she recounts to be factual. Even if she doesn't feel much remorse for the killing of all those men, killing is still such a life changing experience to have that I don't think she could ever forget any of it. Gung also witnessed her friends and comrades murdered by American, French and other Vietnamese soldiers which is an experience that one never forgets. She said that when asked about the suffering she witnessed during the war she has nightmares in which she relives the many deaths that occurred. This does not sound like someone to me who has let time get in the way of their memories.

In Part two of the Patriots book, the story told by Ngo Vinh Long disappointed me the most. My disappointed did not stem from anything that Long did, but instead came from the things that he admits the Americans did, or didn't do, during the war. By now after reading the material I have about the Vietnam War, I know that America did not need to be involved. It was not crucial to our people or our government, and it only did harm. We lost the war and were ill prepared for the fight the Vietnamese were willing to give. Knowing this information, it infuriates me that the Americans supported Diem, just so that we could gain control of resources that we would lose if the Communists were in charge. The Americans practically forced the hands of the Vietnam to put Diem in charge when he was not the right man for the job. Long was an extremely intelligent, hopeful Vietnamese man who grew up trusting and respecting Diem for "saving" his country. As Long grew older, he learned that the Americans and Diem were not the saviors of his country that he had been misinformed. Lots of unsatisfactory things happened under Diem's regime, including herding thousands of villagers out of their homes, and letting these people ultimately starve to death. These were innocent citizens of Vietnam who had no political part in the war games, yet their lives were altered for the worse. Long recalled that he came across a village named Ka Rom where "two hundred people had starved to death in the past month." He described their appearance as far less than healthy, and the Diem government was creating this suffering. When Long attempted to help these villagers by alerting the U.S. Embassy and Diem's government about it, they told him they would do nothing. It is extremely heartbreaking to me that my country was willing to risk thousands of American lives, thousands of Vietnam lives so that they could maintain their resource connections, but was unwilling to send food out to a dying village. Human lives mean more than political strategy and it is more than

disappointing that America chose not to believe this way.

John Singlaub was involved in a much different experience than Long did, and said that it was a shame that more people didn't realize all that the Americans did in fact do to help the native Vietnamese. This is an expected and welcomed story for me to read, because I assumed I would be reading about many points of view in the Patriots book. Singlaub described the American's actions in Vietnam, "All of the great work American advisors were doing out in the countryside to benefit these people--agricultural work, building bridges, digging wells--all that was totally ignored." Even though the Americans during the war might not have sent out all their soldiers to help the Vietnamese survive life after attacks, it is comforting to know that we did other things to help them thrive. No one wants to be a part of a nation that shows no compassion towards others and only focuses on their potential benefits, so I was pleased to read Singlaub's story. He also remembered Americans engaging in such tasks as, "teaching their villages sanitation and helping them. We'd have our medics rotate through the various villages and do civic action types of things." Although Long's story makes me very sad, Singlaub's story shows that not all aspects of the America's intentions were tainted by greed and pride. Though most of our finances and resources were spent on the strategic and killing part of the war, we did in fact use some men to improve the Vietnamese civilians quality of life.

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This last paragraph was very strange for me to read after your last paragraph. It certainly contradicts many of your claims which were so sweepingly made. With your conclusion, I'm left thinking that you ARE aware of the complexity of the war and have not come to weaker, one-sided conclusions about the US role in it.