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Assignment One

Part One: Bernard Trainor

The personal account from Part One that stood out to me most was that of Bernard Trainor, the 70 year-old retired lieutenant governor from the United States Marine Corps. Initially, before even getting to the story, I was intrigued by the quote “It turned out the Mayor of Danang was a double agent” because of a film I watched in Intercultural Communications, Daughter from Danang. As I got into his story though, I found myself drawing many parallels to our current “war on terror”. As he made comparisons to the Revolutionaries fighting against Britain for independence, I was able to see the similarities in Iraq and Afghanistan. The optimism towards the war that is prevalent in the beginning begins to fade as time drags on, casualties accumulate and no discernable benefits are found. The lack of drive and personal connection of British troops to the fight, as they bide their time until being pulled out; the same can be said of Americans, both in Vietnam and the Middle East. Kennedy’s philosophy of the U.S. bearing any burden and paying the price for liberty, has an eerily familiar tone to Bush’s commitment against terrorists. I found Trainor to be a reliable, trustworthy and believable speaker. Not only was he well-educated, he was in a position of power. Though some may argue that his authority would be a reason to doubt his reliability, his accounts were not only objective, but also constructively critical. He was not blindly in support or opposition to the events of the war. He was able to take a step back and see what tactics were beneficial, and which were hindering the objective. In addition to his education and experience as a military analyst, I found that his story had merit. From my own personal experience with Vietnam Veterans and what I have read or seen, his sentiment seems to be shared. Although quite a bit of time has passed, thirty two years to be precise, he seems to recall events at though they happened only yesterday. The fact that he was there, first hand, gives him a sense of credibility, as does his post military career as an analyst and military strategist. Most strikingly, though, his account of Father Joe Curran, the Jesuit professor from Holy Cross, questioning his answers and requiring

him to justify his thinking; that is what allows me to put into perspective his accounts. Not only was he there, but he dared to ask “why?”

Part Two: Richard Olsen and Evelyn Colbert

In Part Two of the Appy book, I found myself most disappointed with the accounts of Richard Olsen and Evelyn Colbert. As Olsen described the differences between the North Vietnam and South Vietnam cultures, I was not only astonished, but also angered. The notion that South Vietnamese soldiers took siestas from 12-3 everyday, and didn't really seem to want to be there, upset me for the Americans who were over there to help them. Flying in to pick up a fallen soldier and to have the rest of the troop jump on the plane under the false pretense of going to the funeral, it is a very different military motivation than that of our United States Armed Forces. As one of the other stories mentioned, the philosophy of the South Vietnamese often included leaving room for the enemy to escape, where Americans want to kick butt and take names. Colbert's accounts seemed to sum up many of the frustrations in part two for me. As in the Herring book, regarding the Franco-American Partnership, there seemed to be intentional ignorance concerning the progress in Vietnam. People chosen to go to Vietnam had little in qualifications beside being single and speaking French. It was said to get information about Vietnam you would need to speak to the French. Many had never been to Asia and could not even point out Vietnam on a map. The facts favoring the Viet Minh or Viet Cong were swept under the rug. The people in charge did not want to be told that they weren't succeeding, or that they needed to change their plan of attack. Our own government was willing to turn a blind eye, and McNamara even went so far as to threaten those who did not produce facts favoring his actions. Then he tries to play dumb afterwards as though our failure was a total surprise and there was no way that anybody could've seen it coming. The heavy club of Westmoreland was ineffective, but nobody was allowed to point that out. Besides being ignored, people who spoke out against the war were labeled communist sympathizers.

Although, I found some of the policies and procedures to be frustrating to say the least, I feel that we can learn from them. Olsen's comparison of the cultural differences between North Vietnam and South Vietnam are key to understanding the situation. In current and

future endeavors, it is crucial that we attempt to understand the cultures that we are implanting ourselves into expecting change. We cannot simply go to a place and expect the entire world to think like Americans, when most of the population of the world is NOT American. I was especially hopeful of the accounts in the Appy book by Henry Prunier, when the Vietnamese General recalled being taught how to throw hand grenades shortly after World War II. Another story recalls being saved from a riptide by a former member of the Viet Minh. When Ho Chi Minh was asked if he was a Communist and he replied, "Yes, I'm a Communist, but there's no reason why we can't be friends. Why we can't live together" that is the hope I will cling to. We are not going to be able to get everyone to agree, but if we are willing to learn from each other, there is a chance we can get most people to co-exist.

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