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History 195, Assignment 1

The story that caught my attention most was Tran Thi Gung's story "*I was stuck in a tunnel for seven days.*" The story instantly had my attention at the line "...I killed an American. After he fell some of his friends came rushing to his aid." Honestly I was mortified at the reality of that line. I felt sorry for the GIs that had been drafted into the war, more than anything. The next line where she talks about how she could shoot one GI and another few would try to save the fallen one struck me at how hard it would have been for an 18 year old to watch his friends die. I think that she doesn't know or doesn't accept that some Americans were drafted into the war and didn't want to be there. I have no reason to doubt that her story is true, I can't see anything she would gain from outright changing the telling of her experiences, her story is already very revealing, and paints her as a ruthless warrior. The only skewing, and unintentional at that would be of her disdain for the U.S. and Southern Vietnamese soldiers. It's mentioned by another speaker, from South Vietnam how much disdain was displayed by Northern soldiers. For Tran Thi Gung the war was extremely personal, both in the people she lost and the feeling of being invaded by a foreign power.

I saw two stories that disappointed me, they also relate to each other. The first is Daniel Redmond's story "*The doctor who won the war in Indochina.*", and Paul Hare and his story "*My cock lost the fight.*" They are both about two lower level military men who were confused by their own country's decision to be

directly involved in the Vietnam conflict. Both also interacted directly with the Vietnamese people, which I think gives more credibility to their opinions on direct U.S. intervention. Throughout these two specific stories and a lot of the American stories there is a sense of a series of mistakes being made by the Americans in handling the Vietnamese people. It's disappointing to see that there were people who saw the folly of the intervention policies early on, but were not heard. Although Redmond says he thought what he was doing was correct by helping Catholics flee the north, he also felt like a war criminal. There is a sense of conflict that what is happening isn't quite right. Daniel Redmond says "The situation was such a debacle for the French, I couldn't believe the United States would get involved in a similar thing."

I was happy with the fact that the two story tellers where able to connect with the Vietnamese in some way and maybe even understand them. It's impossible to tell from these two stories how the majority of people that made connections with the Vietnamese felt about the U.S. involvement but it does make me wonder. If the leaders in the U.S. had a better understanding of the Vietnamese culture and what the people wanted, and not just what Diem wanted, how would that have affected our involvement in Vietnam?

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