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HST 195

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Assignment #2

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no 1 p

I'll accept this fact

While the Tet offensive is widely considered the turning point of the Vietnam war, Michael Bernhardt ran into his own during the Mai Lai Massacre. I feel that his account has the same tone that we had been seeing all the way back to 1966. The US soldiers having a harder and harder time convincing themselves what exactly they are fighting for. All the while the north Vietnamese have only been strengthening their resolve to carry the fight to fruition and a unified Vietnam. While this paper must only be on one story from Appy's Patriots, I must reference another for its stark comparison. While Bernhardt talks of the complete lawlessness of his unit prior to the Mai Lai massacre and the confusion regarding what was expected of them, Huynh Phuong Dong sheds light on the north's struggle in the same time frame. Dong explains that "uncle Ho taught us to make a clear distinction between peace-loving Americans and warmongers" and that "we also made a distinction between the ordinary soldiers who carried out orders and the policy makers who initiated the war" (Appy p.330-331). The north was in the war for the long haul. To be completely candid, I believe "the" turning point in the war was when the United States continued to back Diem's corrupt government beyond salvage, as well as committing combat troops to Vietnam and allowing the French to take a back seat. It was a no win situation against an enemy that was fighting for their homeland, as well as their independence from foreign leaders in lands thousands of miles away. - ns

that were "out" in 1954

Bernhardt's turning point came unfortunately much later, and under even more unfortunate circumstances. For a man who "was the designated pain-in-the-ass of the company" and who had "spent a lot of time up until that point getting between American soldiers and Vietnamese civilians" (Appy p.352) the Mai Lai massacre must have been emotionally traumatizing beyond measure. Bernhardt speaks of walking into the village and seeing bodies everywhere, and not combatants, villagers, old men women and children mixed in with the dead livestock. Before this he showed concern when speaking of his unit, Charlie Company, and their apparent "lawlessness". He comments in the story that "I think something like My Lai probably had happened many times before. It was just a matter of scale" (Appy p.350). This brings me to the turning point. At this point, Michael Bernhardt ceased caring about the objectives of the war. In a bigger sense, this general theme throughout many of the interviews with vets in Vietnam: a Television history, shows an overall turning point in the whole war. One where one side has no will and the other has more than enough. After My Lai, it was over for Bernhardt. All that mattered was to make it home, alive, and after twelve and a half months he was finally choppered out of his combat posting. PT

While Bernhardt's story may have been a turning point, Truong Tran's on page 504 of

Appy clearly delineates an end, at least in his eyes, (as well as mine for the record). I know I have already touched on this point above, however I really think it transitions well into the "ending" point of the war. US combat troops being landed in 1965 was in my mind the end. Well to be fair, the beginning of the end. The way I see the Vietnam conflict is this; the beginning involved mainly the French, as the United States gets more and more involved we reach the middle, then (only about half way through the conflict) we see the beginning of the end. (Landing of US troops.) From here, it was a losing battle. The south was ruined by the introduction of US troops. Tran goes on to say "Having U.S. soldiers in Vietnam not only destroyed our political cause, it also destroyed our economy and social fabric. 90% of the people relied on the land, but during the war people could not grow crops and had to move to cities" (Appy p.506). I saw no feasible way to win the war when the Southern society was in ruins and "prostitutes lived better than high-ranking southern officials" (Appy p.506). In part five, to me this represents the end. the war had to be dragged out as to save face and show a strong hand to communism, as well as to slow the catastrophic collapse of the southern government the U.S. had so freely supported.

circle

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very unclear

- proof read
 - remove first person references
 - keep writing academic, rather than conversational
- Part 1 better than Part 2