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Barry Zorthian is a communications specialist who worked as a program manager with the Voice of America from 1948-61, and a public affairs officer from 1961-64. He served as a counselor for Information Vietnam from 1964-68. He became a vice president for Time, Inc., from 1969 - 1979, and now works as an executive with a communications firm in Washington, D.C.

Interview with Barry Zorthian, November 25, 1987

CK: (I introduce myself and tell him I'm looking for an expert in propaganda during World War II.) I noticed in reading about your background that you were in the Marines during World War II.

BZ: Yeah, World War II I am hardly the expert. I was in the Marines, a young second lieutenant in field artilleries. We had nothing to do with any of the propaganda aspects of World War II.

CK: Did you hear Tokyo Rose?

BZ: Oh, yeah, but so did a million other people.

CK: Can you tell me, as propaganda, is that type of transmission with music and patter, or chatter, is that an effective method of propaganda?

BZ: Well, it certainly got an audience to a certain extent, simply because of the content. But I don't know that it had any great effect. People listened to it for the music and not much more.

CK: That's what I found when I interviewed - I've interviewed a couple of dozen veterans who did hear it, and all of them said they laughed at it, they didn't take it--

BZ: The substance, sure. You know it may have hit one or two individuals here or there, but as a general thing--I don't think it had any effect.

CK: Did they use the same kind of propaganda in Vietnam?

BZ: We used very often, there were all forms of it in Vietnam, but we used very often the Vietnamese equivalent of it, in other words messages from Vietnam to the other side emphasizing home and family and the harm in fighting, etc. etc. So in a different sense we used the same technique...the basic technique of appealing to the desire for home, the desire to be with family, the desire to be in familiar surroundings and therefore to be less than committed to fighting, is standard operating procedure if you will.

CK: Do you think it has an effect to make soldiers less committed?

BZ: To some extent less committed, less aggressive if you will. In Vietnam we put a great deal of emphasis and with some success on getting people to surrender, our so-called Chu Lai program. And a lot of that was based on the appeal of wanting to leave the harsh conditions of combat or front line duty and return to your home. By raising questions as to the validity of the effort, the futility of fighting etc. etc.

CK: Do you think--isn't that the same as what the Japanese were trying to do?

BZ: Oh sure. Sure, in a very real sense.

CK: Why do you think the Japanese (propaganda) didn't work, then?

BZ: Well I think for one thing the impact, the reason

for the Americans fighting was much more clear. And that the countereffect on American promotion, if you will, of the war, is a very profound one. There'd been an awful lot of material put out in the U.S. to these troops up to, leading to the war, and beyond it, after the war started. So that there was a very ingrained resistance to anything from the Japanese. Furthermore the Japanese communicating with the Americans, the whole culture, the means of communications, the methods of communication, were very alien. Whereas in a place like Vietnam we tried to use Vietnamese to talk to the Vietnamese.

CK: I see. Did any of the North Vietnamese do the same to our men?

BZ: They certainly tried to do it to the South Vietnamese. They had very little or no effect on the Americans I think. Hold on please a minute.

CK: Certainly.

BZ: I have a call on the other line. As I say, the man who knows most about World War II that I'm aware of, who served in the European side is a fellow named Max Kraus, (spells it) and he should be in the Washington phone book.

CK: Do you know what office he works--

BZ: Well, no, he's retired now, he's writing a book about that APSE, that Unity Europe that undertook propaganda.

CK: OK. Well, thanks for the reference. And thanks for your time.

BZ: You're very welcome.