

Due date: Saturday, 30 October 2010, 09:05 PM

Last edited: Saturday, 30 October 2010, 07:14 PM (874 words)

While reading section three of the book *Patriots*, I tried to identify themes. Perhaps the most obvious one was the escalation of Vietnam War and the antiwar movements that were taking place during the mid 1960's. However, I did not want to go with the obvious, so I am highlighting a different theme. Even though the theme I have chosen coincides with the title of book, I think that is was very subtle in the majority of the accounts that I read.

By definition, patriotism is having a love for one's country and a willingness to sacrifice for it. In the accounts that I read, I found patriotism best exemplified in three stories: *Trails to War*, told by Vu Thi Vinh; *Free-Fire Zone* by Jim Soular; and *Air War* by Harlan S. Pinkerton Jr. The reason I decided to use patriotism as a theme is because I wanted to find a more positive message about the Vietnam War than its typical portrayal as an ambiguous and perhaps unnecessary conflict.

In *Trails to War*, Vu Thi Vinh a North Vietnamese girl who volunteered to work on the "Ho Chi Minh Trail," shows patriotism to her homeland, North Vietnam, by committing herself to help build these trails throughout Vietnam. Although Vin Thi Vinh was only fifteen when she started working on the trails in Vietnam, she showed a great deal of patriotism and resolve by offering to help her country despite harsh conditions, lack of food and sleep, and jeopardizing her own life for her country and the cause she believed in. Vu Thi Vinh states "We were so young we didn't know anything, but our patriotism was very high. We went to war willingly." (Appy, 103) The words of this young lady represent patriotism at its finest and the actions of this young woman symbolize patriotism even more, regardless of whether you agree with her choices.

The next account, by Jim Soular from *Free-Fire Zone*, tells the story of how he grew up in a small town working in mines and that how he quit college only to be drafted. He says, "I had no problem with that because I was a patriot. I believed in the flag, I believed in serving my country. And I was good at it." (Appy, 157) This statement by Soular shows that there were patriotic Americans serving in the war despite the fact that many of the soldiers did not even know what they were fighting for. Later in Soular's account, he tells about his duties flying CH-47s and how most of them had crashed. Also, and more pertinent to the theme of patriotism, he

tells about his comrade and friend who was killed during the war by a drunken GI soldier. The GI who killed his friend received a minimal punishment and his friend's family was lied to about how their only son died. Twenty-five years later, he contacted the family of his friend and let them know the truth about what happened to their son and that he was by his side during his death. I think that telling the truth about his friend's death and the comfort he brought to his friend's mother is a very patriotic act. Despite all of the negativity that Jim Soular faced, he remained a good patriot. He states, "I've always considered myself a good soldier, whatever that means. I did what I was told to do. But everything I'd been raised to believe was contrary to what I saw in Vietnam." (Appy, 161) Despite this internal turmoil, he followed orders dutifully out of love and respect for his country.

In the third and final account, *Air War* by Harlan S. Pinkerton Jr., he begins by telling about his experience flying planes and how gratifying that was. He relates that a typical day for a pilot consisted of waking up, carrying out his duties, and then being free to do whatever they wanted. From his account, it appears that many of them chose to drink heavily in the bar. Notwithstanding these excesses, his philosophy about serving in the military demonstrates patriotism: "To me it was my responsibility as an American citizen. I didn't really question it. I had orders. My country had made the decision that we were going to take part in that conflict over there and it was my duty to my country to follow orders." (Appy, 221) While Pinkerton's account does not show as strong a sense of pride and patriotism as the other two, it is still present. I think that many of the soldiers who served had an attitude similar to his, at least initially.

As demonstrated above in the three accounts told patriotism was present in the hearts and minds of many of the soldiers who fought in the Vietnam War. Among the 43 accounts that I read in section three, patriotism was difficult to find at times, but upon careful examination, a hint of it can be found in all of them.

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