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HST 195

Assignment #2

COMMON THEME: People/Government did not want to hear/ignored their accounts of Vietnam.

In section three of Appy, I was having a very difficult time pulling out a common theme from the different subsections of the chapter. The major point that I was able to pull out from the many different stories was that, in many situations, the teller's story was ignored or denied. In two cases, the narrator's stories were ignored by people that could have had a major impact on the way the war played out.

The first interview I read where this theme stood out was the narration by Ward Just on page 135. Ward was a journalist for the Washington Post that was out on a reconnaissance patrol with the "Tiger Force" of the 101st Airborne Division. His patrol was ambushed, taking a lot of casualties. Just was one of the casualties and was fairly badly hurt. In his retelling of the events, Just gives a very poetic narration of what he saw during that battle. It was a story that touched me as he did not appear to be a big supporter of the war and yet he had great respect for the men that he was with. The part of his interview that I saw relating to my recurring theme was that, once he got home, back to the U.S., he was invited to a dinner party at Robert McNamara's house where their primary objective was not to hear Just's story of his time in Vietnam. As Just tells it, he was only invited to "...give him a briefing on what he had failed to see during his year in the war zone".

In the interview of Seth Tillman on page 118, Tillman tells the story of his experiences working for Senator J. William Fulbright. The way Tillman tells it, Fulbright worked to persuade Johnson and Congress that the war in Vietnam was not necessary and that there was a different way to proceed. Unfortunately, Fulbright was not much of a politician and was not great at playing mind games and so many of his messages were brushed off. There was one point where Tillman tells how Fulbright made a stand against President Lynden Johnson and "Johnson was enraged. He struck him

[Fulbright] from the White House invitation list. They never had a personal relationship again.”

Quach Van Phong, who was interviewed on page 186, was an artist for the North Vietnamese Army during the war. He made wartime sketches for the North Vietnamese with anything he had. Sometimes, when a battle would break out, all he had was his spit, dirt, and a piece of paper to create his artwork. As Phong put it, “... a sketch of war must be done on the spot and immediately”. Later, when he took his sketches to the Fine Arts Association in Hanoi, they didn’t appreciate them.

In many accounts I noticed that, people who did not appear to be in full support of the war, were labeled as communists and traitors, most of them having their opinions fully discredited and ignored by people and officials who had some real opportunities to change the outcome of the war. If Johnson had listened to Senator Fulbright in any fashion, he may not have decided to make the U.S. such a large contributor in the war. If McNamara had been open to what Just had seen during his time in Vietnam, maybe the U.S. would have strategized differently before trying to confront the North Vietnamese Army.

What I gather from these accounts is that, this was a war where a lot of extreme and unchanging opinions led many of our leaders from all nations involved, down the wrong path and not enough weight was being given to the testimonies of the people who were actually in touch with what was really happening in the jungles of Vietnam.

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