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History 195

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The story told by PHan Xuan Sinh really grabbed my attention the first time I read through it. I actually stopped reading the rest of the assignment for a bit and reread it. It is such a basic illustration of all the problems that both sides faced in the Vietnam War and how truly awful any war can be. Also it showed how dedicated the people of Vietnam are to their heritage and their beliefs.

He spoke first of accidentally killing fishermen coming back into shore. I can't say that I think he or the men he was with did anything wrong, they were fighting a guerilla war after all and I can believe they thought they saw weapons. When I read it I started wondering how a person lives with that, knowing they accidentally killed a person who meant no ill will toward them. I suppose that the only way to deal with it is to know you were doing your job and that hesitating could mean you were the one killed if the circumstances were a little different.

Later in the interview he spoke of the elderly couple that was living in the "free-fire zone". I was a little surprised when he said that he had the pilot land in that dangerous area the move an elderly couple and even more surprised that they took them with them on the helicopter because they could have easily been the enemy for all they knew before they talked with them. A war like Vietnam and you don't really know what the enemy looks like. Even more than that, I had to respect this couple's commitment to their ancestors, to return to such a dangerous area simply to be close to the ones that came before them. In our culture we will move 3000 miles away just to get a better job, not that there is anything wrong with that, but it seems like such incredible dedication to family that they were displaying to live in an area that was probably being shelled on a regular basis. I have to respect anybody that is that committed to family. It especially makes an even bigger impression that he has carried that memory of that couple for all of these years.

I was a little surprised at the end of the interview at how surprised

he was by the hatred the Viet Cong had for him and the people that he served with. I know that he was most likely drafted as were many of the men who fought for the Americans and many had no idea why they were fighting. However the Viet Cong weren't fighting because they got told to, they were fighting for a way of life that they didn't only believe in, but one that another group was trying to steal from them. It seems to me that that is enough to make almost anyone hate another group of people.

As I read on through the assignment I came across the interview with Luyen Nuyen. Although I found parts of his story very inspiring, like his survival for twenty-one years in prison and his refusal to give his captors anything they wanted from him, I was disappointed in the attitude displayed by the US government toward the commandoes and the attitude of the commandoes themselves.

The US government gave up on the commandoes before they even got out of training. He spoke of something called "planned failure". In other words the only reason they spent the money on training them and sending them out was to keep their mouths shut and most likely send them to their deaths with no real benefit to the war effort. Even more they didn't even bother to pretend to give them any sort of discipline. They made these men to be above the law and in doing so made them outlaws who could do as they pleased. The idea that holding a rank or a certain place in any government or organization has always bothered me, I think that's why that part of the story really got to me.

The other part of the story that gets to me is that these men who were supposed to be so well trained and highly regarded were left for dead. This man spent twenty-one years in prison and the government that trained him and sent him out to get information for them. I understand not being able to take any immediate action, but that is way too long to allow them to stay in jail, being tortured.

At least there is the happy ending of him finally making it back to his family. I have to respect the man for sticking to his morals and never giving anything up and never taking one bit of a handout from the captors. The other thing that stands out to me at the end of the interview is that there is no mention of hatred toward the men that hurt him and his family. That is very impressive to me given what he went through. It may be that enough time is past that the hate isn't on his mind as much anymore but I can't imagine that it would be an easy thing to let go of.

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