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Assignment 1

PART 1: Interview of George Watkins

When asked to pick a story from part one of the book that caught my attention, it was somewhat easy for me. After about a week having passed since I've read it, the story George Watkins tells is still stuck in my mind. With his simplistic Virginian speech he tells the story of how he lost his legs and eyes to a pressure-detonated mine. He describes how forty people had walked by this mine before he stepped on it. The visualization of him looking down at his watch and remembering the time is stuck with me. His general mentality is that he doesn't hold a grudge, except "for that one that set the booby trap". How can someone who has lost so much not be bitter? His story seems a lot more factual than some of the others in that it is told through the point of view of a blind man. The last things that he saw have been etched in his mind. Without having his vision, he could easily go back and 'see' the story as he tells it, no visual obstructions. It must be like having a nightmare that you can't wake from.

After he is done telling his story he says that he does not think he is bitter, he just wishes "none of it ever happened, for everybody's sake". He solemnly describes his visit to the Vietnam Memorial wall in '85 as "the worst I've felt since I've been home". I went to the

'Wall' this last summer and I can't imagine sitting there in a wheel chair, blind and feeling the names of friends lost in that war. The man has a mental strength that is inspiring. Myself being 32, growing up in an age of violent movies and video games, I am not easily shaken by violence but George's story will stick with me in vision and memory.

PART 2: Story of Ngo Vinh Long

There were many negative and disappointing accounts from part 2, but one of the stories that stuck out to me was that of Ngo Vinh Long. After reading of dysfunctional, ego maniacal leaders it was refreshing to read about Ngo. He was a smart young man who was chosen to make maps of South Vietnam because of his nationality and commonality with the people of the south. What was disappointing to me was that Ngo showed so much promise intellectually and genuinely cared for the people of Vietnam only to be in turn disregarded and because he voiced his negative opinion of the South Vietnamese government, ultimately he was forced into exile in the United States. I see his story, in some aspects, similar to those of our past Presidents like FDR and Abraham Lincoln. If you think about it, where would our country be if instead of Lincoln we had someone like Ngo Dinh Diem? To have someone who cared more of himself than of his country would have been devastating to the U.S. I guess what I'm getting at is it is disappointing to know that with a different circumstance, Vietnam could've had a leader that was centered in the well-being of his country. I'm not suggesting that Ngo Vinh Long was at any point during the turmoil qualified to lead the Vietnamese, all I'm saying is that there were

people who could've led Vietnam that would have done better than Diem. The true tragedy is that people like Long were never given a chance to excel within their own country.

PART 2: A positive story of Richard Olsen

I immediately related to the story of Richard Olsen who saw the beauty in a hostile land. Olsen, in 1962, was a 27 year-old lieutenant "adviser" who flew the South Vietnamese army into and out of combat. It was inspiring to read about his "romantic" view on his situation. He saw Vietnam as a similar concept to an old African hunting trip with Teddy Roosevelt. Under his command were veterans of World War 2 and the Korean War. He felt lucky to fly with such men. It seems to me that he would have fought shoulder to shoulder with the South Vietnamese if they were given the opportunity to fight. But he saw the negative side of the troops also. When he was called to fly in to pick up a dead body ten soldiers would want to get on the chopper to "get the hell out of there". He thought that they should stay out there and fight their own war. He also thought that "we needed Americans in there to show them how to do it".

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