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Assignment 1

The story which caught my attention was in the section War Heroes. The story is the account of a woman named Tran Thi Gung (Appy, 15) who fought as a guerrilla soldier for the Viet Cong in the southern part of Vietnam. I think what caught my attention was the fact that she was Vietnamese. As an American everything that I have heard about the Vietnam conflict comes from Americans, thought many of them were against the war and tried to give reasons for both sides of the fight it is will never give a totally true depiction of what the opposite side went through. I was also drawn into her story as one of the few females who told stories of fighting as a soldier against the American troops. The way which she talked about the fighting had such intense emotion, not like that of the shell shocked American men, it was pure loyalty to the cause of Ho Chi Minh and his followers. She believed so much in what she was fighting for that she barely seemed to feel very much remorse for the soldiers she was killing, as she said " ...if I went to America and killed people there, I would feel very sorry and guilty. Since the Americans came to my country, I don't feel guilty." (19). I was drawn in by the way that she has reasoned the violent acts she committed, so many of the American soldiers in their account still seem so traumatized and hurt by what happened to them while fighting in Vietnam and she seems to be telling a story which, by its tone, could be about something as mundane and normal as doing her laundry. I felt that her account was reliable, at least as much as it could be years after the event, she seems to be very blunt about the events she participated in and witnessed. She clearly believed in the guerrilla warfare she was a participant in, this made her story biased towards the side of the North Vietnamese. She paints a picture of American soldiers who were not very smart and seemingly unorganized which is, of course, very different from that of the American soldiers accounts. This doesn't make either of them more right I just think that it means that a reader has to take each story as a piece of history. I trust that Tran Thi Gung gave an account that is true, but very subjective. Her story helps to see into the minds of one group who was fighting against America in Vietnam.

I found the account by Richard Olsen (62) to be the most disappointing story in part two. He talks about being a pilot during the war along with his twin brother and begins his story talking about what terribly unsuitable plane he piloted while he was stationed there. I think what I found most disappointing about his account is the fact that I was automatically reminded of 19th century archeologists talking about the cultural groups they studied, the way which they would refer to people and their practices as barbaric and glorify their own travels. His accounts also reminded me of Robert Ripley, whose accounts of all his travels were almost completely fictitious and mostly about making himself sound more impressive and worldly. Richard Olsen is like that, he is telling stories of war and hideous sadness, but he doesn't seem to have any connection to what he saw. He even says "So I'm not one of those veterans who's embittered with a whole host of grievances. I have nostalgia and enormous reverence for my experience." (62) I know that I was not there, which means I obviously have no idea what it was really like, but I feel like looking at the Vietnam conflict through the framework that all of the other accounts in the book have set up, his story seems like a completely unrealistic portrayal. While everyone else was fighting a war and going through intense emotions, he seemed to be on his own romantic holiday.

The story that I thought was the most hopeful was the account by Malcolm Browne (64). It seems strange to me that a story which talks about a man burning himself to death could seem hopeful, but I think that he seemed to be realistic. He was a journalist, so came to Vietnam with the purpose of documenting the events that were happening. Even years later he still has the pictures and articles he wrote in the moment which were brutally honest. He doesn't sugar coats anything that happened to him or anything he witnessed. He does, however, seem to think that people on both sides are good people with potential to grow from these harsh experiences.

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