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In the Patriots book, the story of Tran Thi Gung caught my attention. Partly because she was the only woman of her unit, a sniper even who killed many men. Yet the fact that she was a *woman* fighting *with men* in the *fifties* was only a statement of fact and not one of pride. In addition, it is because in my mind's eye I can see that photograph of her clearly "lying on her stomach in a sun drenched field, perched on an elbow. A braid of waist-length jet-black hair falls across her shoulder. She's aiming a rifle, the butt of the weapon against her cheek, the barrel resting on a decaying log and her right finger on the trigger." Tran reminds me of myself and of my friend who lives in Vietnam; it could have been us there. If the speaker is untrustworthy or forgetful it is only because of her age and even that seems unlikely. Her story, although translated, comes across as straightforward. The fact that she was there gives her a certain degree of credibility. She killed American soldiers, watched her comrades die and was even wounded herself. Still, I do not get the sense that she hates us, which also helps her believability. Hatred can cause lack of judgment and misguided mudslinging. Tran Thi Gung gave the facts as she saw them, just like everyone else in this collection. I do not think there is any real way to be objective about war especially the Vietnam/American war. It is a very difficult thing to do. The people there were too close to see everything that was going on while others were too far away to feel it at all.

In the second part of the Patriots book there is an entry called "Paradise Island", the account is from a man named John Singlaub. In it he tells the reader about an island that was used as a lure to the Northern Vietnamese. Southern Vietnamese troops would kidnap peasants and take them there. On "Paradise Island", the villagers were treated, fed well and lied to. At least to me it seems as if the SOG program was

just out and out lying to those people. Vietnam was supposed to have a free election in 1956 and yet America backed Diem and kept it from happening. Free elections are as much a part of democracy as equal pay to ability and contribution. I am disappointed not because the U.S. wanted to stop the domino effect from starting in Vietnam but because our foreign policy was so hypocritical. Perhaps hypocritical is the wrong word, flippant is more suitable. It is no wonder our forces could not form a resistance in the North. Moreover, what help did those gift packages really do? They were often confiscated and given to the Vietminh or their neighbors probably ousted the individuals who had them to the Communist party as traitors. I was also disappointed that Singlaub did not sound guilty or sorry once. Granted it was war but they were people too.

The positive aspect of this entry was harder to find at first glance. Looking through it again there was a little sign of hope. He had requested that the U.S. drop the SOG program when it became apparent that it was no longer effective. Troops were captured and killed at an alarming rate. The Northern enemy had a source on the inside so there was no hiding any movement made by the program. It was a military decision but it shows that he did not just see the Southern Vietnamese troops as cannon fodder. The Vietnamese were troops no matter their skin color, and no good military man likes to lose them. In addition, his company managed to gain contact with the ethnic minorities that lived in the mountains. They helped the Montagnards (the old French name for these people) with sanitation, putting bathrooms in huts and drinking clean water that type of thing. The medics went around administering aid to those who needed it, all good things that came with the war. At the end of his narration, John Singlaub says that those small good deeds made them feel like missionaries. It made him feel good as a person and sometimes in situations like that it is the best any one can hope for in war. Some help to the people in need and if not a feeling of guilt in bad situations a sense of, "I did something good."

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