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Brian Hein

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### A Difference

While reading through the *Patriots* text there was one thing that first stuck me as strange. Several of the accounts dealt with the inclusion of non-soldiers into the combat troops of the North Vietnamese Army. These non-soldiers were artists, writers, poets and photographers. As I thought about why there would be the need to include such persons in with the regular fighting troops it occurred to me this represented a profound difference between the approach to the war by the United States and the North Vietnamese. The United States saw the war as if it was a job separate from their real life. For the North Vietnamese the war was approached from the perspective it was an integral part of their life.

This is not to diminish the sacrifices the United States troops made in Vietnam. They were not any less committed to the winning of the war. But there was a difference in how each side approached the war. For most of the U.S. service personal it was a war to be fought and then return home, for the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong it was a war to win back their country no matter how long it took or the sacrifices made. It was reading about including these non-soldiers with combat troops which exposed the total commitment of North Vietnam to me. These non-soldiers represented an insight of how the North Vietnamese viewed the war. Knowing it may continue for a long time there was still the need to continue on with life even within the limitations of the war.

In *We didn't need a darkroom*, told by Duong Thanh Phong we learn of his account about the use of his pictures to boost morale of the troops of the Viet Cong "When people saw themselves in the pictures they were so excited, it was no longer just political." Even though he came close to being killed several times with his photographic team having "fifteen members and seven were killed" he used his belief that "the noble cause of the revolution and American cruelty" to continue fighting at the front lines. There were two things in his account that struck me as particularly telling of his personal willingness for sacrifice. First, was the statement "once you accepted your own self-sacrifice, your own death, you didn't feel fear anymore." Also, even with this attitude toward his own fate he still managed to marry in the jungle, having to wait an extra two days to find a safe spot away from enemy commandos. He was able to see his new wife sometimes only once a year. Doung Thanh Phong had accepted the war into his life and was willing to see it through to the end. Running away from the draft for the South Vietnamese army to join the Vietcong he spent ten years fighting in the jungle.

Even through the objections of her parents and having to lie about her age to join the Volunteer Youth Corps, Vu Thi Vinh "went to war willingly" to help work on the trails and roads of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. In her story, *The Truong Son jungle gave us life*, she tells of the difficulties they encountered, such as having to eat crabs found in the streams and having "to scrape fungus and moss off rocks" to eat and being so hungry it tasted good. A remarkable part of her story related to the need of detonating an unexploded bomb that could have been set off by one of the trucks traveling on a bridge next to it. There were so many volunteers to be a part of the "dare to die" team they were required to "write a short essay to apply."

Staying in the southern battlefield for eight years, and having to move the jungle "hospital" every few months to avoid detection was no small endeavor. With a "staff of four hundred routinely cared for more than a thousand patients" for each group of four or five patients a bomb shelter was dug for protection each time the hospital was moved. Dr. Le Cao Dai in his chronicle, *Sometimes I operated all night*

while the staff took turns pedaling the bicycle, tells of the problems faced with having to deal with shortages of equipment and food. Using shrapnel from exploded bombs and downed U.S. aircraft they crafted equipment to use for the treatment of his patients. And as the title of his story tells, Dr. Dai used the power generated by a bicycle as his lighting to operate with. Performing in terrible conditions he tells his story with pride and no regrets.

The perspective presented here purposely dealt with only one side of the war. I know from these few accounts I may not have a full representational view, but even from these few narratives it can be seen the extent those fighting for the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong were willing to go. Willing to fight until they were killed or unable to continue, I had the feeling many of the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong never considered losing the war, it was truly a battle to the end.

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