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**American Soldier Perspectives on War**

by Joe Escobar - Saturday, November 3, 2012, 09:57 PM

Imagine that you are Christian Appy, the author of your Patriots textbook. Imagine these letters are portions of interviews that you conducted with individuals who actually participated in the Vietnam War. These people live in our community, our very midst, today. What can this mini book of stories tell us, if anything, about the truth of even the smallest historical occurrences of the Vietnam War era?

On a larger scale, what are the major issues concerning historical accuracy that you the student, must be concerned with when studying the events of this war from the perspective of our own soldiers?

Be sure to incorporate and cite any of the relevant materials you've been exposed to in this course as you address these issues.

Sum of ratings: -

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**not everyone had the same experience**

by Michael Sitterley - Monday, November 5, 2012, 08:38 PM

The stories of the individual people give us a window into their account. These stories cannot be used as historical markers; however they give us insight into the more personal side of the events of this period of history and what the people went through. Every soldier personal stories are going to differ based on location and experience. The truth in all of this is that the stories that are unique to each person actually happened, and we can learn from personal experiences as well as the overall historical facts. In the Register Guard you have a letter to the editor that states that there was no spitting on the returning soldiers, but there were many more accounts stating that the spitting in fact did happen. Whether or not people were spit on is not the issue, rather, taking into consideration that what happens to some does not happen to all. Whether or not this happened does not change the fact that some people said they were spit on, this does not speak for the collective. This makes the experience personal.

The problem regarding the personal stories as fact is that they are just personal accounts. Many accounts change from person to person, when they have actually been in the same place. Each story can be extremely personal and emotional. This can cause a distortion of the factual information because people get wrapped up in the overwhelming emotion. In the P.O.W. video, many of the prisoners spoke about being tortured and traumatic situations. Things can be exaggerated based on human emotion, perspective, and experience. This does not mean that it is not factual; however, we need to be sure to evaluate things from a historically accurate standpoint to best understand the truth of what happened. Human accounts are what make history tangible, and we must take that into our view as well.

Sum of ratings:3 (1) 3

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**Re: not everyone had the same experience**

by Breanna Ross - Wednesday, November 7, 2012, 01:09 PM

Michael-

In your second paragraph you said "In the P.O.W. video, many of the prisoners spoke about being tortured and traumatic situations. Things can be exaggerated based on human emotion, perspective, and experience. This does not mean that it is not factual; however, we need to be sure to evaluate things from a historically accurate standpoint to best understand the truth of what happened." Can you elaborate more on that? To me, the way you worded it, makes it sound like the P.O.W's exaggerated on being tortured.

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Sum of ratings:1 (1) **Re: not everyone had the same experience**

by Michael Sitterley - Thursday, November 8, 2012, 08:25 PM

My post was not trying to say that people make things up, rather I was trying to point out that two people can experience the same situation and the two stories can greatly differ. This is based upon each person and how they deal with stress and situations. Two people who are in the exact same scenario, their stories are going to differ. Not because of what has happened, but rather due to who they are. It is human nature to recount events that have taken place, but our accounts of the same event will differ. It is all about perspective.

Sum of ratings:1 (1) [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**Re: not everyone had the same experience**

by Michelle Srstka - Friday, November 9, 2012, 09:30 PM

To elaborate on your point, there are many different things that can have an effect on a persons recollection of an event. Culture is a large part of that. I am not talking about just American vs Vietnamese, but there are many different cultures present within the United States, and within the soldiers who fought in Vietnam. Someone who is deeply religious might experience something differently than an atheist; a person who grew up poor might have a different experience, and therefore recollection, than someone with a privileged background.

Sum of ratings:2 (1) [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**Re: not everyone had the same experience**

by Evelyn Deutscher - Sunday, November 11, 2012, 07:33 PM

Michael,

In general I agree with your post. I think that you found a good middle ground between personal stories being highly individual and may not be accurate for learning historical facts, but that does not mean that they aren't factual. However as you said it doesn't mean that they can be highly reliable, since personal stories are individual and will vary from person to person. As pointed out with the Register Guard letters I think that the problem is if people use personal accounts to make assumptions for a whole group of people or as in general what happened during the war. For different stories may present differing information and I think that each story needs to be taken with both a grain of salt and the notion that this is an individual case and therefore does not reflect the whole of the situation. I also agree with your point that emotions can influence a personal account.

Sum of ratings:2 (1) [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**Re: American Soldier Perspectives on War**

by Sierra Lavoie - Wednesday, November 7, 2012, 01:37 PM

The accounts we heard in letters to the Register Guard varied dramatically. From just the few letters it is easy to see that people have very different memories of the Vietnam War. Many of the letters were from veterans that had served in the war and they did say that they had been spit on once or twice. Although this wasn't a common occurrence they did say it had happened at least once. I thought the last letter written by Shaw was really interesting. He rebukes the other veteran's accounts of being spit on, instead he says that due to him being a veteran in the war in Vietnam potential employers would show him disrespect and nobody would hire him. In his letter he notes, "On re-entering society and applying for an entry-level position, I was slandered, degraded, cursed, trivialized and shown the door whenever I mentioned being a veteran." All these different letters to the Register Guard testify to the fact that no one person's experience in Vietnam was the same. We will never know the complete truth about all the occurrences in Vietnam historical or otherwise.

There is no way that the history of the Vietnam War will ever be completely accurate. Everyone has a slight bias this will always affect the way they decide retell what happened. The major issues that could occur concerning historical accuracy when it comes to the perspective of our soldiers is that they may have been too close to be accurate. They are telling about events that personally affected them and those they were close to. Many men lost close friends, saw horrific scenes, and had to kill other men. All these things may make the soldier perspective a little hazy. From the letters to the Register Guard we can see that not only were veteran's experiences in Vietnam different their experiences coming home were mightily different as well. It's important to hear the soldier's perspective on the war, but I think it is equally important to balance what we hear by reading historical textbooks as well.

Sum of ratings:3 (1) [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**Re: American Soldier Perspectives on War**

by Michael Sitterley - Friday, November 9, 2012, 09:11 PM

I agree with your post. Everyone did have their own perspective due to what they personally encountered in the war. In regards to Shaw, in the Register Guard article, the trouble he had with employment post war may not have been due to the fact that he was a Vet, but rather due to the hate that one person had towards the whole War. We may not know the exact reason the guy had difficulty finding a position.

In present times, people returning from war with mental issues are labeled "PTSD". When soldiers were returning from Vietnam and were trying to hold down a job, their difficulty may have derived from having a disorder such as PTSD. We cannot fully determine the reason from one article. I do agree with the fact that stories tend to vary in our search for exact truth of what really happened in Vietnam.

Sum of ratings:2 (1) [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**Re: American Soldier Perspectives on War**

by Sierra Lavoie - Sunday, November 11, 2012, 07:42 AM

Michael,

You make a really good point that I failed to mention. The letter sent in to Register Guard about the man having a hard time finding a job because he was a Vietnam Vet may not be completely accurate. All the soldiers that came back didn't come back home all in one piece. He may have had PTSD or perhaps he was just difficult to get along with so no one wanted to hire him. Its hard to think of people being so discriminatory toward a vet but maybe what he said was true. We will never really know if he didn't get all those jobs just because he was a Vietnam vet. This is a good opportunity to realize that all the stories we hear firsthand may not be entirely objective or truthful.

Sum of ratings:1 (1) [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**Re: American Soldier Perspectives on War**

by Evelyn Deutscher - Sunday, November 11, 2012, 07:45 PM

Sierra -

I also agree with your thoughts that you posted. I think it is important to balance historical textbook information about the war with personal accounts by those who fought in Vietnam. It is also important because these personal accounts provide a variability in information which adds to the layers of information about the war. However I do find your point about a complete truth in Vietnam a little hazy. For in general I don't think there can be a complete truth. The only time that I think there can be a complete truth is when you are speaking of a complete historical fact, such as the year we invaded Vietnam. However the fact that there is a lack of complete truth isn't a bad thing. I think each individual story shows some truth and another story will show another truth. It doesn't mean that either are untruthful because they did happen. I think it's easier to view the personal accounts as pockets of truth. No one story can be generalized to be an absolute truth for everybody because everybody's experience is different.

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by Breanna Ross - Wednesday, November 7, 2012, 01:39 PM

I don't even know where to start.. I know the war was not a popular choice among Americans, but after reading the stories from the Register Guard, it makes me sick how people can treat others so badly. Especially our vets. They shouldn't have to worry about being treated like that when returning home. Herman Isaacs returning home was called a "baby killer" and was told "I'd like to buy you a beer if you will take that stinking uniform off." He also says he was literally spat on. Veterans returning home from war are already suffering psychological issues. People telling them that as their getting off the plane doesn't help their state of mind.

Another Man, Robert Shaw aid he couldn't find a job if he told people that he was a Vietnam Veteran. He would have to lie about it and then if the boss found out he was let go from his job. I don't understand. Maybe it was the generation of that time but I know that the Veterans of today's generation are treated with a lot more respect than Vietnam Vets.

As far as major issues concerning historical accuracy that we must be concerned with when studying the events of this war from the perspective of our own soldiers.. Like Michael said "Not every one had the same experience" But when I'm learning something I would rather hear or read from someone who has had first hand experience. I'm more apt to believe a Veteran talking about his experience versus social media which can be a bit biased.

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Re: Disappointed

by Sierra Lavoie - Sunday, November 11, 2012, 07:42 AM

Breanna,
It was hard for me to read the Register Guard articles, as well. Its sad to think that the men who sacrificed so much for their country were badly mistreated by the men and women who stayed at home. Our soldiers fight for the freedoms we enjoy daily. The war in Vietnam may have been unpopular but that doesn't give our citizens a right to mistreat our soldiers. I really believe the media had a huge role in turning the war around. Once the American people were disenchanted with Vietnam they just wanted the soldiers out. Being a Vietnam Veteran must be especially hard because of all the controversy surrounding that war in particular and the fact that it wasn't won. Today is Veteran's Day and I think its important to pay a little bit extra respect to the Vietnam vets because they had it rather rough.

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Re: Disappointed

by Michael Sitterley - Sunday, November 11, 2012, 07:48 PM

Yes, I agree that social media and news outlets can be bias in what they present to the general public. Also in reading the stories of people who experienced the war first hand are quite inciteful, but we still must take into account that each person may harbor their own bias. They can still portray the events that happened to reflect their own beliefs or to convey their own agenda. The bottom line is that we must take their stories in to the overall account while making sure that it lines up with the known factual historical events.

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Re: Disappointed

by Evelyn Deutscher - Sunday, November 11, 2012, 07:59 PM

Breanna -

Concerning you historical accuracy point, I do think it is useful to study the events of the war from a soldiers view, but it may not always be the most accurate. It is accurate if you want to get a first hand experience of the war, but not if you want to learn the whole factors of the war. I do agree that with your point about trusting a Veteran over social media, since social media can be much more biased. Social media is fickle and I often don't entirely trust it unless I know the people producing it are more interested in fact, than in attention. On your other points I do think the mistreatment of returning soldiers was atrocious and I think that people blamed the soldiers for fighting when a lot of times it wasn't their choice, or blamed them for the actions of the politicians. None of it is justifiable and I think Vets from any other war get more respect.

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Re:Spitting may have only happenedon the west coast

by Richard Atwood - Wednesday, November 7, 2012, 03:16 PM

AlsoThe articles from the Register Guard in the class handouts have three accounts of which spitting occurred. Herman Isaacs, Rodney Gordon And Thomas Pastille's also found an account where a person named "D Duck" also claimed he was spat on .All of these accounts where centered around Sanfrancisco and Oakland area in California, It is the same as in College Sports,"if it didn't happen on the east coast it didn't happen" theme to me. In May of 2012 Present Obama himself said it was a disgrace and should have never happened at a service at the Vietnam Memorial.

In 1973 My Brother joined the He told me that when he flew into sanfransisco on his way home from basic training he was told that wearing your uniform was not a good idea going into sanfransisco he was kind of thrown back to hear or see this. he also told me of stories of men going home to major parties and parades on the east coast in small towns in the heartland of America, He did not witness spitting but he was told that it did happen.

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Re: American Soldier Perspectives on War

by Michelle Srstka - Wednesday, November 7, 2012, 08:28 PM

I think that what the Appy book tells us is that there is a huge variety of experiences. Two people could have vastly different stories about the same event depending on what side of the war they were on. To me, that is the most important thing the Appy book tells us- that there might be more than one truth, depending on your perspective and experiences. The letters to the editor that we read this week illustrate that- several people wrote in about their experiences as soldiers; some gave an account of hostility and being spit on while others did not.

As a student, I think that the major issue in studying events from this perspective is remembering that is is just that- one perspective. It is easy to get caught up in these personal experiences, especially when they are as emotional as the POW stories from the video this week. The emotions of the soldier telling the story can also result in exaggerations, even though they are not intentional. There are inherent biases in personal stories, and that is important to keep in mind. As a student, you have to be able to use other sources to reach a conclusion about what is the truth.

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Re: American Soldier Perspectives on War

by Natasha Haynes - Wednesday, November 7, 2012, 11:29 PM

Yes, i also agree that one of the most important things that the Appy Book illustrates is that there is more than one truth. This is such an important realization in studying history. I think that coming to terms with this, will lead you to being able to understand history clearer. I will say that i do not think that coming to a solid conclusion when there is conflicting matters is important, even when we do look to different sources for answers. I think that overall it is just important to know all sides of the story and try to have a well rounded perspective on the matter.

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Re: American Soldier Perspectives on War

by Michelle Srstka - Friday, November 9, 2012, 09:23 PM

Hi Natasha,

I think you make a good point when you talk about having a well rounded perspective. I think this class has exposed us to many different points of view and experiences of the same event, and to have a true understanding you have to take in all of them. I also think that is part of what makes the war so controversial- there are so many different truths, and not everyone makes an attempt to learn all the perspectives before coming to some kind of judgement.

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Re: Personal Stories Are The Heart, But Not Neccessarily Accurate

by Evelyn Deutscher - Wednesday, November 7, 2012, 09:02 PM

I think personal accounts of history can tell us the more human side of what history is. It may not be accurate when you are wanting to learn what truly happen, but I think its the part that makes people want to learn history and the part that allows people to emphasize or care about what happened. When it comes to personal accounts being truthful I think that they are, but they not be entirely truthful of the situation as a whole. People carry biases, experiences and emotions that influence how they experience

something, which will undoubtedly color the information. Therefore I think that while the stories in of themselves are truthful if you are looking to them for historical fact or absolute truth, they may not be the best.

The major issue concerning historical accuracy and personal accounts is the same things that I touched on in my first paragraph. I think because personal accounts are personal experiences or stories they don't entirely reflect on history as a whole. At least not when it comes to simply learning the facts. Personal accounts are like the heart of history, but facts are details or outline that the heart experienced. Personal accounts aren't always accurate for history in the whole because for one, others could debate the one story with their story and two because personal biases or feelings may color the information. For example we see the disadvantages of personal accounts in the Spitting on Returning Vietnam Vets. Robert L. Shaw says he was never spat on, however Isaacs, Gordon and Postelle all say they were. Now each person's experience probably did happen and I'm not refuting that, but when as an outsider you are trying to determine the truth these personal accounts make it complicated because there is no consensus. There is another issue that personal stories can do that reflect on historical accuracy and that is a personal story can influence the person researching it and skew the way they are viewing the information. I mainly think this is a problem if you have not learned about the topic before hearing personal stories, but I think it can come up several times while learning. This is an issue because personal stories have the emotional power to make a person care about that story and what happened. But if a person fully embraces that story it can color information they view in the future, to agree with what falls in line with the story. This situation is very much like what makes up a personal story for in personal stories their emotions are influencing how they see the environment. For example a protester of the vietnam war, a vet of the vietnam war, the family of members of those who fought and the politicians who orchestrated the war will all see the vietnam war differently. Their experiences and beliefs shaped how they see the war both in the past and the present and hearing a personal story to at least a small degree can do this as well.

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Perspectives are different

by Emerald Jones - Wednesday, November 7, 2012, 10:03 PM

One of the things that Appy's book underlines is that even the smallest historical event could be inaccurate and important. Even the smallest things can also be perceived differently by different people. As we saw with the AIM and PBS videos we can be presented with two very compelling sides to the same story. As students we have to be able to take into consideration all the factors that can affect historical accuracy in the retelling of events. Perspectives can be affected and even skewed by life experiences and personal opinions and beliefs. In the letters it seemed that people were quick to make judgments of all based on the experiences of some. I am sure that some soldiers were treated terribly and I am just as sure there were many who were honored.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Perspectives are different

by Sierra Lavoie - Thursday, November 8, 2012, 10:17 AM

Emerald,

I also found that in the letters people were quick to make judgments on the experiences of some. Spitting did happen to some soldiers who returned home from a very unpopular war. I am sure that even today some soldiers who return aren't greeted with smiles but with harsh words. For most of our wars America's people have supported our soldiers, but there are always a few people that will disrespect the people who are fighting for their freedom. Many soldiers were treated badly when they returned home but many more were treated with respect.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Perspectives are different

by Emerald Jones - Sunday, November 11, 2012, 09:30 AM

I agree with that most definitely Sierra. People cannot make a sweeping judgement of all experiences based on just theirs or just what they have heard. I know someone who has been overseas and he said he was spit on before. He said the treatment in some places is bad enough to where a soldier won't wear his uniform when he is out in public because of the treatment they (he) receive. However, I do know that he does not base all of his experiences off of his negative ones. There will always be multiple sides to a story, especially in regards to war.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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**Re: Perspectives are different**

by Natasha Haynes - Sunday, November 11, 2012, 10:48 PM

Emerald,

i think that you said this perfectly. Why do people insist that their only be one truth? When it comes to history we have to be able to not just put ourselves in one person's shoes, but all of them. Perspectives play a massive role on history. Understanding or at least trying to understand how these stories are told, and why they are told that way, may be even more important then the actual history itself.

Sum of ratings:1 (1) [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**Individual experience would change perspective.**

by Jacob Pusey - Wednesday, November 7, 2012, 10:57 PM

It is important to realize that each individual soldier had a different perspective and experience throughout the war. While reading the Register Guard letters, I noticed that the returning soldiers who said that they had been spit on or at, mentioned California which was a hotbed for war protesters. I have a feeling that if they had been returning to other parts of the country during the same time period, they might have been welcomed very differently. A similar argument can be made about the letters in the Appy book. Because each returning soldier will have a very unique perspective apart from other soldiers, it is difficult to amass an overall outlook of what it was actually like for a majority of them. Each could have come back from the war as a POW, an amputee or a cook who never actually saw any fighting. While studying the effect that the Vietnam war had on American soldiers, individual interpretations are crucial, but vary dramatically from one to another. The time period would skew this even further. For example, before the war became increasingly unpopular, they probably would have been greeted quite differently then after the media and a significant portion of the population had read about the My Lai massacre.

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by Emerald Jones - Thursday, November 8, 2012, 08:57 AM

I think that it is a good point to bring up where the soldiers were returning to. Most of us are aware of how different the political climate can be in different parts of the country. I also agree that individual experience changes perspective, how could it not. You could take 20 people and subject them to the same thing and their previous experiences would change their interpretation of the event. This is why studying history is an ongoing challenge to separate feelings about what was experience to what was actually experienced.

Sum of ratings:1 (1) [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**So many different accounts**

by Natasha Haynes - Wednesday, November 7, 2012, 11:02 PM

If i experienced Appy's research first hand I think that i would be telling people that there was such a huge spectrum of experiences, which makes it hard to say that something did or didn't happen. In an event as big and emotional as the Vietnam War, you can be sure to find any experience you heard about or read about somewhere if you dig long and hard enough for it. Appy's book is the perfect illustration for this because we hear from all sides, and in turn see an array of experiences. I

When studying the war today as a student, it is important to understand that any material gathered, can be disagreed upon, altered, or ignored completely because of how people choose to record history and interpret it. We have to at all times remember to keep an open mind and not to take the first accounts we read as completely credible.

The POW video is another great thing to watch because it is talking clearly experiences here. When Tom Mcnish, who was a captured air force pilot, says things like, "My country was not going to forget me", we get a better understanding of how he was feeling at the time. Another captured veteran states, "all we had were our reputation". These recollections shed light on JUST THIER feelings when they were held captured. However you also have Bob Shumaker, who recalls trying to commit suicide well captured. He sheds light on a whole other frame of mind completely.

We have to be aware that many different experiences could have, and/or did take place, and be accepting of that.

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by Evelyn Deutscher - Sunday, November 11, 2012, 08:09 PM

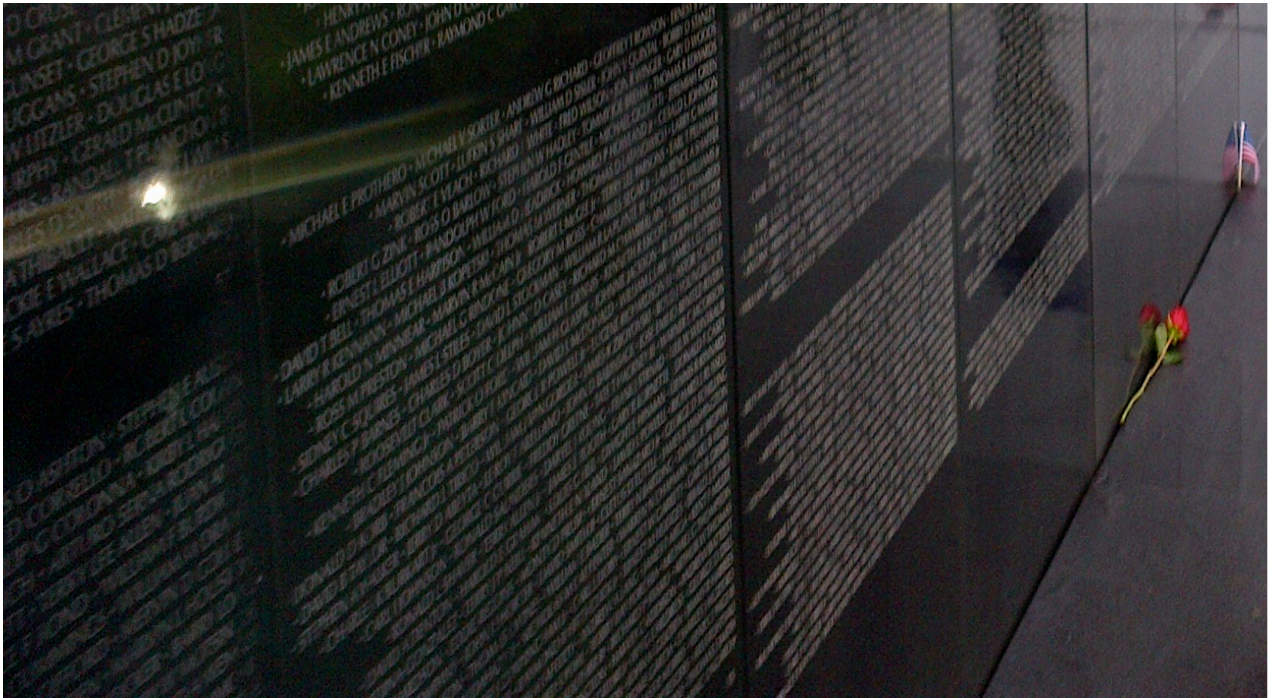
Natasha -

I completely agree with your post. I think that personal accounts are just that personal accounts, they will tell an individual's story. That does not mean it has to reflect on the situation as a whole and it would be inaccurate to do so. I think there are many truths when it comes to personal accounts, there will never be one overlaying truth because as shown with our Register Guard letters that if you happened to be a different place something different may of happened to you. I think personal accounts are good for hearing the heart of the story or what the experiences are like, but if you are studying the subject their are explaining a student must remember stories that these are individual stories and only show a fraction of the experiences to be had. A experience in one story does not reflect for the whole of experiences nor does it reflect on all the general policies done during the war.

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by Natasha Haynes - Sunday, November 11, 2012, 09:27 PM





I am currently in Portland, and happened to be watching the news last night and was able to hear about a traveling replica of the Vietnam Wall memorial being displayed at a near by cemetery. I thought I would take advantage of the opportunity and go and see what it was all about (especially since we have been covering the vets right now). I was literally taking back by how big it was. It makes things so much more realistic. Seeing all of the names, and all of the family members and even veterans themselves out there giving tribute to these men was emotional. I could not imagine what this is experience would have been like if it hit closer to home for me.

It also made me realize (even further) that because war and its aftermath are so emotional, covering them and recording them correctly and precisely is not an easy job, even if it is just retelling a personal experience.

It made me think of one of the vets in the POW video, the one who talked about hearing the other soldiers being tortured and not being able to do anything about it. Seeing this wall, and all of the lives lost, and all of the local families that were affected and are still hurting emotionally made me get a slight glance at that pain. Its a hopelessness. There is no going back in time to make this right.

Why should these soldiers want to recall what happened to them in depth? It was obvious today that the veterans there were still emotionally struck by this experience. For history's sake we do count on these accounts to make things more accurate, but how cruel of us to expect them to. I would find it hard to challenge a man's credibility after seeing what I had today.





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