

Due date:	Sunday, October 7, 2012, 11:55 PM
Last edited:	Sunday, October 7, 2012, 11:24 PM (384 words)

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Assignment One

Part 1

I was most affected by the story of George Watkins. What stood out to me was his lack of enmity towards the Vietnamese even after being maimed during the war. His detailed descriptions of the booby trap that crippled him and of the injuries he suffered contrast sharply with his respect for the Vietnamese people and understanding that the opposing sides were put in their positions through politics, not moral conflict. It would be easy for a person that experienced what he did to come out bitter and spiteful.

This interviewee is reliable. What he describes is his own experience; life as a soldier, the tactics used against Viet Cong, and his own reactions to the Vietnamese people. He's not reporting an "expert" opinion on the war, only events that he personally witnessed. He has no apparent motivation to fabricate or omit information; he's not in a situation where he's required to represent any official position. He's also able to joke about the war and feel sympathy towards former enemy combatants; he's moved on from his experience and is less likely to falsify information out of shame or remorse.

Part 2

The interview with Le Lieu Browne contains multiple references to the oppressiveness of Diem's government. What disappoints me is the U.S. would have supported a government like this. The government practiced shameless censorship, banning any material related to communism, and restricting journalistic freedoms. Even worse is Diem's willingness to impose his beliefs on South Vietnamese citizens; non-Catholics were harassed and prevented from career advancement. These seem more like the actions of an authoritarian regime than a democratic government.

In the same interview, I appreciated Browne's discussion of Madame Nhu. When I first learned about her, I immediately formed an impression of a callous and sarcastic woman, too aloof and privileged to appreciate the injustices in her country. This is an easy conclusion to arrive at, especially when reflecting on comments such as the infamous "barbequed monk." But Browne explains her behavior as being more the result of ignorance and a language barrier than any real malice, and is able to overcome her own early impressions to appreciate what Madame Nhu did for empowering the women of Vietnam.

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