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Natasha Haynes

Assignment #1

Part 1:

I never fully understood how unclear communications were in this horrific war, until I read Phan Xuan Sinh story. He recalls his unit opening fire towards what they had believed to be a Viet Cong boat, when in fact it was really a group of fisherman who had taken a late night fishing trip. The amount of lives lost in this war was already evident to me because I had read the dry version of the material. In Herring's book he compares what the Americans had lost versus the Vietnamese. He states, "For the Vietnamese the cost was much, much higher: millions dead..." (XVI). However, when readdressed in a real emotional recollection, it opens up your eyes to just how violent this war truly was. There were so many innocent lives lost. Phan Xuan Sinh should be seen as a reliable and trustworthy source because he does not seem to have a bias opinion and choose a specific side to favor. Yes, he was fighting for the South Vietnamese military, but it is also evident in his stories that he cared about all the people of Vietnam, not just the people of the South. He says, "That's why many of us thought that even living under the other side's authority would be preferable to continuing the war" (Appy 26). He was fighting for the South and along side the Americans, however he wanted the war over. He says, "We just hoped to find a way to live together with our brothers" (Appy 26). Recalling any event completely accurately is by no means an easy task for anyone. Everybody holds different viewpoints. Whether it was Phan Xuan Sinh, one of the innocent fisherman, or somebody who was simply retelling the story, the story is going to be delivered differently each time due to the detail chosen by the storyteller. Whether Phan Xuan Sinh recalled this event completely accurately or not, we still get the main idea. Therefore, I was still strongly impacted by it because it makes you realize how these events affected the lives of so many innocent people.

Part 2:

I really found disappointment in Daniel Redmond's story, but more specifically in a particular sentence that he makes. "We should have just supported the South Vietnamese financially and stayed the hell out of there" (49). Does Redmond really not fully understand that whether supporting the war with any U.S. personal or not, supporting the war financially still results in conflict? Was he also unaware that we had already been assisting the French financially before he was stationed there in 1954? When he talks about how much he dislikes the French and how badly the French treated the people of Vietnam, it suggests otherwise. He states, "They were victims more of the French than the communists. I was as pissed off at the French as I was at the Viet Minh" (48). The strategic reassessment of 1950 that led to heavy financial involvement of the U.S as well as, "established principles that would form the basis for U.S. policy in Vietnam for years to come and would lead to large scale U.S. military involvement" (Herring 21), demonstrates that lending a war financial assistance is by no means solving the problem. Redmond's story is a disappointment because it's evident that Redmond is still misinformed about the war, something that he was involved in first hand.

One positive lesson that I learned in reading Vo Nguyen Giap's story was that Giap himself, who was a military commander for the North Vietnamese Army, was not necessarily in favor of the war, rather it seems as if he would have liked to provoke it from ever happening. I had stereotyped a Vietnamese commander to be ill informed and not well rounded. My perception was changed after reading his story. He states, "History is not made with 'if's', but if American leaders had been wiser I think we could have spared the war"(42). I was not aware of just how much the Vietnamese leaders of the North were informed, intellectual, and well educated in regards to why they were fighting and what they were truly fighting against. They were not just out to kill and harass people that opposed their view, but truly try to fight for their right to be an independent country. I had slipped into a stereotypical American belief, that their mission was a pure takeover of their beliefs around communism. He states, "We won the war because we would rather die than live in slavery" (42). Their mission was focused around independence first and then secondly communism. The positive lesson was being able to see, from a North Vietnamese leaders perspective, what their real goals were.

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