

65/100

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One story that is particularly striking is that of George Watkins. His story of growing up working-class only to be drafted is probably a common story. What is so striking is his account of not knowing anything about the country he was being sent to fight in, nor any specifics of the war he was expected to fight.

What are the deciding factors of credibility in historical accounts? "Is this story credible?" is a vitally important question to ask. However, how can it be answered, especially in the context of war? On the other hand, this story doesn't seem not-credible. Yes, that is a double negative, however, it can still be a useful question to ask. On a related note, are the Vietnamese accounts more or less credible than the American accounts? In the situation of war, is any side more or less guilty of propaganda and misinformation than any other?

What I found most disappointing was Richard Olsen's account of his experiences. I was disappointed that his perspective was the same as it had been at the time; that nation building with a very different culture was a good and noble thing. It seems much of the argument then and now consists of individualism versus collectivism. At its essence, this is a cultural disagreement. For one country or culture to "build" another country on the other side of the planet seems presumptuous and arrogant. There is also the observation that many agrarian cultures are, at their core, collectivist as a means of survival. Families, villages, and regions must work and think co-operatively in order to achieve prosperity. Especially when under constant threat from foreign invaders. For a foreign culture to come in and say this behavior is wrong and needs to be flipped on its head seems to be incredibly disrespectful. It is important to consider other perspectives, which cannot be done without accepting the possibility that one's own perspective could be in-accurate, or wrong. Richard Olsen's account seemed to lack any consideration of other perspectives. Olsen said that the H-21 "was a romantic aircraft." He then proceeds to show a certain romanticism of his own memories. He said he "wanted Communism and totalitarianism to be ruled over by a Free World spirit." Does he not consider Ngo Dinh Diem's policies to be totalitarian? If Ngo Vinh Long's account is accurate -that the South Vietnamese constitution required civilians to quarter soldiers and yield property-rights during war-time as well as public executions without judicial process- does Olsen consider this to be the anti-totalitarian "Free World spirit"?

On the other hand, Olsen also spoke of his experience going back to Vietnam in 1994. His story of feeling an instantaneous connection with his rescuer after his initial reaction brings a certain hopefulness to the human experience. That after all of this pain and suffering, it is possible for those who have seen war to see the "enemy's" humanity. On that same note, Ngo Vinh Long's story of being helped by his American General friend and wife to get out of the country after being black-listed for being a dissident is heartening as well. Again, if his story is accurate and credible, to see U.S. leadership being able to discriminate between enemy combatants and friendly dissidents is a heartening thing. It shows a true desire to help the people of Vietnam, rather than simply obtaining the glory of building a nation.

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Pt 2 is better than Pt 1

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