

Part 1

I have found all of the stories to be interesting so far, but the account from Roger Donlon probably impacted me the most. It was chilling to read of the scenario where a significant number of the Vietnamese army that he was sent to train and support turned out to be enemy infiltrators. I thought of myself in that situation when he described how their first action when the attack began was to slash the throat of the soldier next to them. How terrifying to have prepared your mind for battle, focusing outward toward the enemy, only to find at the outbreak of fighting that the enemy is right next to you. This betrayal is in stark contrast to what he says toward the end of his interview; "What keeps you going at times like that is the love you feel for your fellow teammates. At the time you called it respect, but as the years go on you realize it was really a deep, deep love." The situation seems to summarize my understanding up to this point in my studies of what may have been the primary problem with our involvement in Vietnam. We didn't know who our enemy was. We couldn't distinguish them by physical traits and we didn't understand their mentality, what was driving them. I do find his story to be credible. He does a great job of describing the details of the situation so that you can imagine being there such as the burning buildings that silhouetted their movement, revealing their position, and the casualties that he witnessed. My belief of his account is significantly supported by his receiving the Medal of Honor for his actions during this battle. These Medals are of course rare and require substantial documentation of the true actions of the recipient.

Part 2

I was most disappointed by the story of Ngo Vinh Long. Not because of his behavior or the story itself, but because he had started out as a young man with such affection for the United States, but after seeing what U.S. policy was doing to his country he began to oppose American intervention. My feelings are that we had such a great opportunity to make a positive impression on the people of Vietnam, but we let them down. We were fighting more for our own selfish reasons, than for the good of the Vietnamese. Continuing to treat them the same as the French had done and supporting a South Vietnamese government with its own record of injustices was a recipe for disaster. The approach of the U.S. seemed to turn the

people away and strengthen the position by the Communists. Long put it best when he was told that these policies were how the communists were going to be defeated. He replied, "No, this is not how you defeat Communists, this is how you make more Communists." This is such a simple statement and yet so very true. Our attention was on battling Communism at all cost, but by focusing on the battle we lost sight of the people who would ultimately decide the victor. I am disappointed to think of all the people of Vietnam like Ngo Vinh Long who had such great hope in the U.S, yet found themselves later opposing our forces.

One thing that I have noticed from the stories is that there doesn't seem to be animosity on either side of the conflict toward the other. I'm sure that if the accounts were being told immediately after the war this would be different, but with the decades that have passed since these events, those involved appear to have developed a better understanding of each other. For the Vietnamese it was a confidence-building victory. For the United States it was a humbling defeat. The Americans seem to see now how the Vietnamese were fighting for their independence and freedom to control their own country. As Americans we can respect that struggle although we may disagree with what is done with that freedom. Their view of freedom took the form of Communism which completely contradicted the American view of what freedom meant and yet all these years later we have survived despite all the horrors that a Communist Vietnam would supposedly bring to the world. From the stories I get a sense that the Americans have learned that it is good to question our leaders and that changing one's position on a subject such as Vietnam isn't showing weakness, but wisdom. Our national leaders kept building off one another and throwing more money into Vietnam until they found it too difficult to change the direction. The building momentum carried us into something that so many, even then, knew we could not win. I would like to say that we have learned to admit when we are wrong, but our political climate still does not permit such honesty.