

Assignment #1

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In Christian G. Appy's *Patriots*, Sinh shared two different examples that pounded him with hopelessness while he served as a platoon leader for the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. After being informed that enemy troops were set to land a boat near a small village, Sinh took his scout company so as to inform his army when the enemy had arrived. Upon seeing multiple boats with what he thought were rifle silhouettes, a commanding officer was notified and fire opened upon the boats. After realizing there was no return fire, Sinh asked for flares to be sent up to light the area. Only after the light from the flares burst through the darkness was their mistake fully illuminated. The boats were not in fact the enemy, but fisherman and their families. The impact of this realization was felt instantaneously; not only by Sinh for having experienced it first hand, but by myself in the power of his words on the page. When I think of war it is hard for me to realize that innocent people get caught in the crossfire. I shared in his hopelessness in the thought of being responsible for causing so much pain and death when it was unnecessary. In regards to Sinh's credibility, it seems like a night like this would be something that is hard to forget. This story feels real and seems to have stood the test of time; however it makes one wonder about the rest of his stories he shared. He intercepted bags of mail from the other side a time or two and recalled how much hate the communists had for them. He even recalled some of what the letters had said such as, "don't worry about us, we'll survive." While letters filled with hate would be memorable, I don't believe that specific words and sentences could stand the test of time. Every time a story is told it changes a little. How much hate did those letters really have when Sinh read them versus how much he told others were in them? I see more credibility in the traumatic event of bearing the responsibility for so many innocent deaths than I do in the amount of hate that was present in a letter.

"The Vietnamese had their own ideas" was a statement that rubbed me the wrong way from the start. While reading the stories assigned for this week I found myself with an array of emotions while jumping from story to story, however no other story had me shutting down from the opening

sentence. I understood that this book would be telling the story from all sides and I was ready for what the Vietnamese had to say about our soldiers, but I found myself with a scowl on my face and asking aloud into the book “Well who asked you anyway?” upon reading what memories Sergei Khrushchev had to offer. He spoke about how Americans don’t think for themselves, accept every lie that the media has to offer, and how we had a moment of awakening only to slip back into our media-induced stupor after 9/11. He said that he felt this awakening with the antiwar movement was an opportunity for Americans to realize that “not everything depended on the will of their government”; but faced in this government shutdown I feel like his statements could not be less true. Perhaps if I had read this book after it was published in 2003 when terror was on everyone’s minds I would not be so miffed to read his claim that we have fallen back into the government’s arms. But in 2013, while not forgotten but not as pertinent and issue as it was in the first few years after 9/11, I feel that the government has done nothing in recent history to redeem itself. Take this ridiculous shutdown for example: in the first few days it was all anyone was talking about; now 2 weeks later everyone (except for those directly affected) not a single person I have talked with has brought anything about the government into our conversation. I feel like the longer it goes on the more fed up we become while realizing that life goes on. Then again I might be coming about this all the wrong way; after all I did receive my financial aid and would have felt massively different if the funds suddenly were not available.

It’s hard to find that diamond in the rough amongst the stories that I read this week, but Richard Olsen’s stories served as that ray of sunshine. The way he spoke about the time he spent in Vietnam and what he had learned about the South army gave the Vietnamese troops a bright humanity. The fact that they took a “siesta” from twelve to three made me feel like these troops were not just a working machine for the good of Vietnam. It was nice to read that even though the people of Vietnam had been fighting for independence for so long that they never lost sight of the small things in life such as naps. The fact that Olsen had nostalgia towards his memories in Vietnam gave a hope that there were troops that had genuinely positive experiences while overseas. So many troops had such bad experiences or terrible stories to tell that it was overwhelmingly

pleasant to be presented with such a positive outlook. Olsen told of the Thunderbird Lounge and the swapping of stories with friends, the way they announced their arrival by flying low, and the temperament of drinking as much as you could; all things that brought a smile to my face while I read them. Sure this war seemed pointless and a waste of American lives, but stories like this make it a little better somehow. Not everything that came out of Vietnam was a cluster of broken men and shattered families; there were those few rays of sunshine if you looked hard enough.