

Each of the stories in part one of the assigned book stuck out to me in different ways, serving different meanings and provoking different emotions. However, the one story that seemed to really stick out to me was the chronicle of George Watkins. George Watkins was a grunt soldier in Vietnam, where while serving his Country he lost both of his legs and both of his eyes when he unknowingly stepped on a land mine. Before Vietnam changed his life forever, George was just a good old boy from the Appalachian town of Big Stone Gap, Virginia. Throughout the story his Appalachian roots were strongly evident as he talked, which at the end of his story he admitted he was embarrassed of and asked the author if he could help make him sound a little smarter. I found the way he talked endearing and honest and am glad that the author didn't change George's speech. When talk of a war started in the U.S and young men his age were being drafted, George knew it was only a matter of time before his name was drawn. In his story he talks about how he almost didn't go to Vietnam because of his high blood pressure but after being ordered to lay low for three days his blood pressure returned to normal. When I first read that, I could only imagine the disappointment George must have felt and the horror of being told that he was really going to Vietnam, a place he'd never even heard of. George made it very clear that when he was drafted he didn't know where he was going or why he was even going there and just did what he was told, revealing just how young and oblivious he was. I believed every word George Watkins said in his testimony. The way he talked with such innocence, even now, reflecting as an older man, shows just how young he was when he was thrown into the war and the everlasting stronghold it's had on his life. Out of all the stories in part one I found that George's story had the most credibility. No one will ever know what he went through in Vietnam, except him and his brothers in uniform that fought beside him. He lost his limbs for the war, not even knowing what he was fighting for, only doing what he was told. It would be an injustice to tell a man, who's lost his limbs, that his experience isn't credible. Even after all these years, George still remembers every detail of his journey in Vietnam, as it changed his life in more ways than anyone could ever know or understand.

It's hard to point out one story in this book that is more of a disappointment than the other, as the topic discussed is a disappointment in

general. However, there was one story that was particularly frustrating for me to read, as the testimony seemed to be filled with one disappointment after another. The story I'm pertaining to was the one of Rufus Phillips; the small town football star turned CIA agent. Rufus was ordered to Vietnam to serve on a team of operative as part of the Saigon Military Mission. The disappointment started right from the moment Rufus landed in Vietnam. He was confronted with the task of learning a culture he knew absolutely nothing about. In his testimony, Rufus list's all of the things that were clouding his understanding of the Vietnam culture, such as; Refugees fleeing the North, the French still living in Vietnam, the Foreign Legion, the Vietnamese army, and Binh Xuyen, a gangster sect that ran and controlled the police. As I read this in the book I could feel the frustration Rufus must have felt, not being able to understand a culture and communicate with the people. The frustration continued when his group began their work, he goes on to explain how there were fifteen men in this group, yet only one of them had any previous experience in Vietnam. So not only was Rufus clueless when it came to this country, but so were his members of his CIA team. That can't be a reassuring feeling, and surely isn't settling. The longer Rufus was in Vietnam he started to realize that the Viet Minh wasn't the immediate threat, but it was all the various sects that opposed Diem, making his task at hand just that much more difficult and complex. It seemed to be the never ending quest of understanding and a situation that had many layers to it. I enjoyed learning about Rufus' experience in Vietnam, however, it was just to negative and frustrating to read and quite frankly, kind of stressed me out. Then again, I'm sure that was his point.

Although this book is written on a dark and sad topic, I can gladly say that there were some stories that had a message of hope and were quite inspiring. One of those stories being Ngo Vinh Long. I truly enjoyed reading his passage because it chronicled his journey from being a home schooled boy living in Vietnam to a genius that worked his way to Harvard. While growing up Ngo saw first hand the atrocities the French were inflicting on his nation and even tells of how when he would go to the ponds he would see floating corpses. I can't imagine growing up in a place where, at that time, it was completely normal to see something so horrendous such as that. As discouraging and depressing as it may have

been, Ngo didn't let it oppress him, instead he used it as fuel to get smarter and make a change for his nation. With his father's help, Ngo started to learn the English language, telling the story of how the two of them walked 100 miles to get copies of Charles Dickens novel's and books in English. At age sixteen, Ngo took the high school graduation exam and passed with the highest score in South Vietnam. This incredible accomplishment made Ngo a world wide name, telling of how he was invited to tea at the U.S. Embassy and got to dance with the daughter of Mrs. Ngo Dinh Nhu, the sister-in-law of President Ngo Dinh Diem. Ngo Vinh Long's story was so inspiring because no matter what he went through, whether it was the status of his Country, his father's beating, or being chased by the police, he never gave up on trying to better the world and grow in his knowledge. After every disappointment, Ngo was able to find hope and a way to make things a positive.